

**Erik Thys**

**“Characters in Search of an Author. Roles in Art and Psychiatry”**

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**<...> The Patient as Artist**

Florian Bijloos was born in 1978 and up until now his journey through life both as a person and an artist has been anything but smooth. His uncertain mental health has caused him to be hospitalized several times, which when added up means that he has spent quite a few years of his life in institutions. Moreover, at the end of yet another such stay he has often had to start again from scratch: once again he's had to find a job and a place to live, establish contacts, organize the care he needs. Very few things have survived intact throughout his many lives. (...) Yet in spite of all these setbacks and accidents and the changes of direction that have been forced upon him, still, after every fall, Florian gets back on his feet with the stamina and resilience of an experienced boxer. What's more, he does so with conviction, with style. And thus there is, in spite of everything, a continuity in the life and work of this young survivor-artist; an appetite and a taste for life in all its shapes and colours.

Florian Bijloos takes photographs. He took a course in photography but, like so many things in his chaotic life, that came to a premature stop. He uses the camera to record his life as it is. With a meticulous eye, pithy, playful, poetic, a complex context sometimes encapsulated in just a few details, with a great sense of composition yet never constructed, with great flair but always authentic. This authenticity doesn't prevent his photographs from being subjective or incorporating a gloss on their topic.

The irony of the packet of 'Sportlife' chewing gum in the mouth of his sister, who, like him, had a difficult life and who died in 2007 at the age of 19; that same sister cocooned in a blanket and plonked down amidst refuse bags; the worried gaze of a girlfriend through a night-black café window; the triptych of dozing youths; a confused and searching generation dreaming of a better life. Here, 'Sportlife' is life on the lowest rung of the social ladder. In their sometimes 'trashy' sensibility Florian Bijloos's photographs display an affinity with the works of Wolfgang Tillmans and Richard Billingham, for example. But he's without the contrived nonchalance of the former and has a more light-hearted seriousness than the latter, whose early work also possessed the persuasive power of authenticity.

This is outsider art, but only in the most literal sense of the word: the work of a young man who necessarily moves on the edge of society, recording a photographic testimony to survival – of himself and of his companions. But it's by no means outsider art if that term is taken to suggest that no fully aware artistic act is involved, or that the maker doesn't know exactly what he's doing. On the contrary, this is the work of a lucid artist who formulates his commentary clearly, confidently and with tremendous talent. <...>