

Aesthetic Investigations

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DESKTOP graffiti

Author

THIBAUT VERHOEVEN

Affiliation

S.M.A.K. GENT, BELGIUM

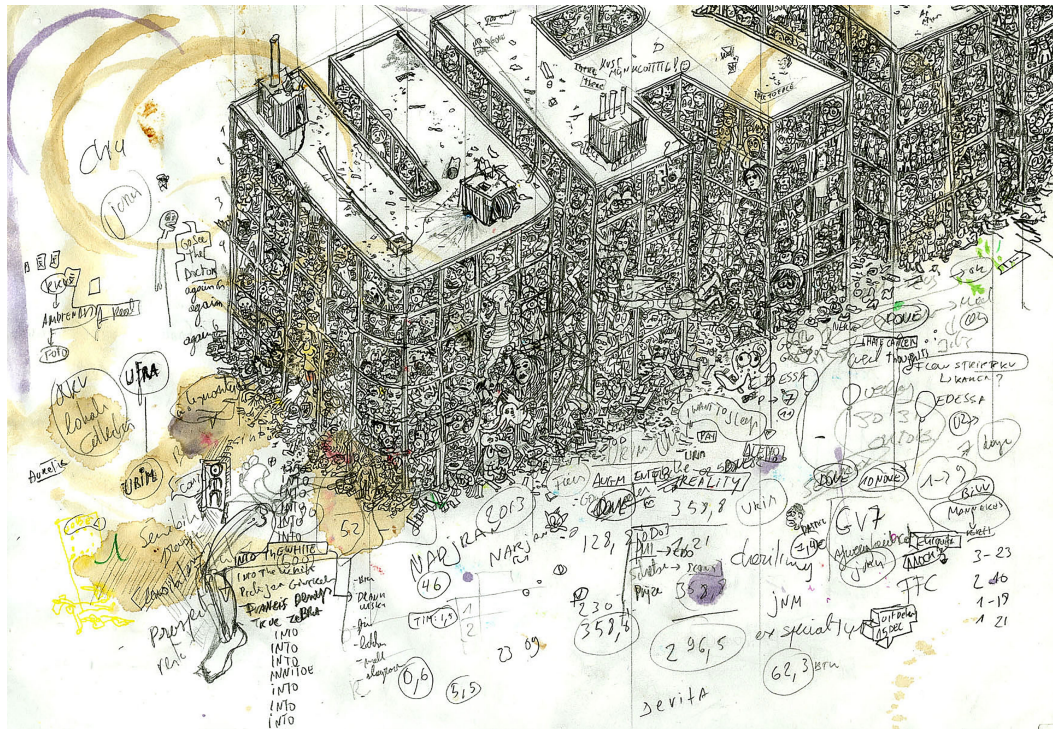


Figure 1: Stored memory (Andy has augmented reality)

At first, when I met him, Christophe Floré (b. 1972) seemed like an ambiguous character, to say the least. After hearing him talk for less than five minutes about art in general, and his own work in particular, I wondered several

times whether this was an artist or a slick marketing fellow capable of selling his artistic work in whatever context to whomever—whether spectator or curator. He always evaded my questions and objections, with an unimpressed expression of “Okay, let us have it, I’ll make you get what I mean”. Of course, art historians or spectators are not used to such an attitude. We still retain the assuring and easy-going prejudice that young artists will put themselves before theoreticians or curators in a careful, doubting and insecure manner. As if they are the ones asking for feedback, or for confirmation that their work is of sufficient quality to be exhibited.

But here I am, sitting in the cafe, opposite the marketing fellow in his casual sweater, armed with neat portfolios full of drawings. Astonishingly, at the end of the evening he took out his wallet and payed for the meal. Slightly nostalgic, it reminded me of the nineteenth century *artiste maudit*, the lonely artist crushed by his own existential issues, who would express his predicament in a most individual-romantic manner in his art. Those were the

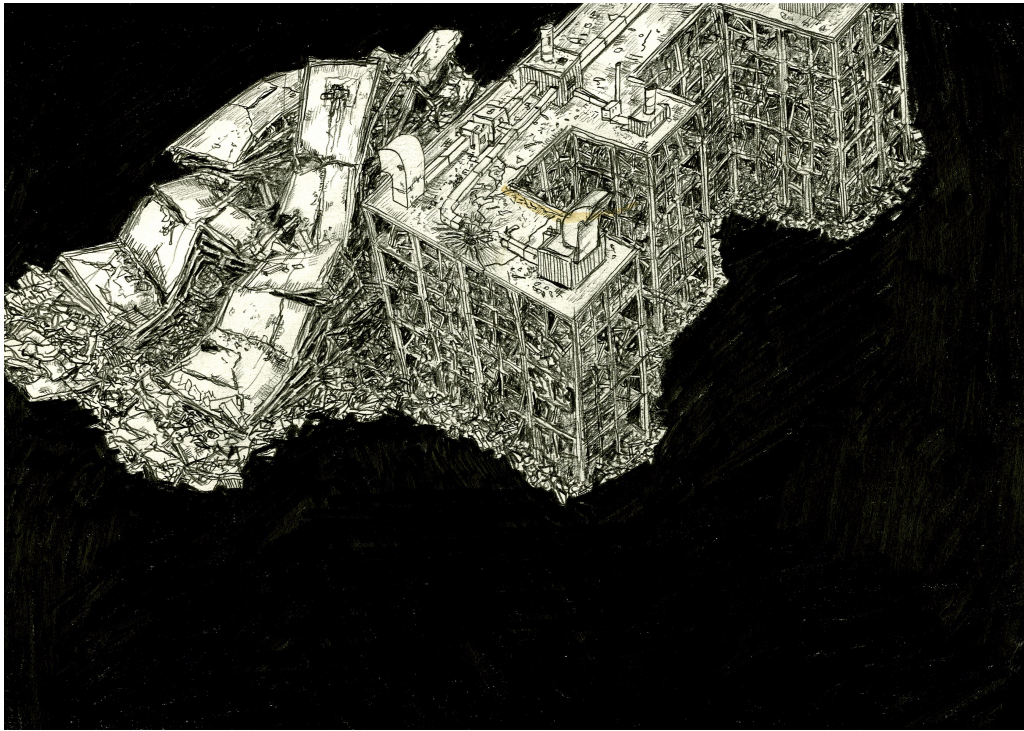


Figure 2: Andy, How dare you assume I want to *parlez-vous* with you?

days! No conceptual bullshitting, no explications, just art straight from the guts, jotted onto paper under the influence of sweet absinth smells. Yeah!

And then Christophe showed me his nicely tailored folders. He still accompanied it with the *parlé* people nowadays treat young managers during their Powerpoint presentations. When the first folder was opened, though,

something changed drastically, in a flash. Suddenly the need for explications dropped away. Without a doubt, these were scribbles straight from the gut, vomited onto the paper when the urge was highest. Without *parlé* or excuse. Surprising!

That is when we really started talking, Christophe and I. About how he graduated from Sint-Lucas Brussels, as a painter, and how, after much ado, he got work with a small advertisement agency. It was there, sitting at his desk, that his drawings arose, the ones with the revealing title of *desktop graffiti*. Those two words say it all. They uncover the slick marketing context in which the drawings came about, as much as the existential gut feeling they emerged from.

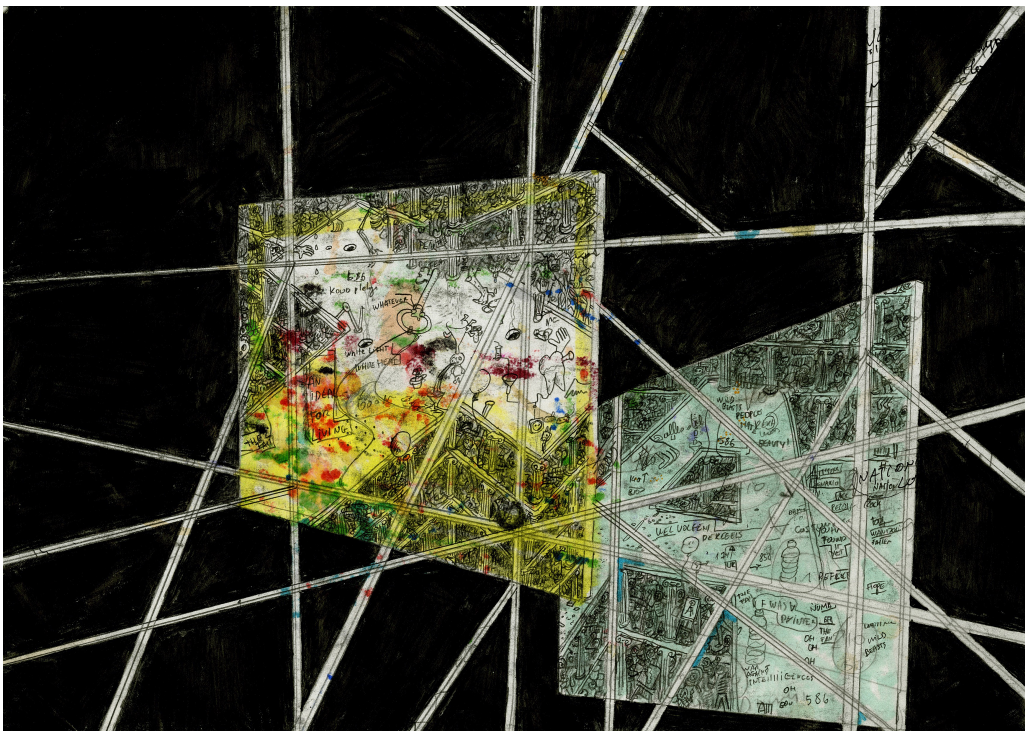


Figure 3: Andy is still wondering if a happy thought is a pure rational thought

The first thing that jumps to mind in connection with this context is the paper's format, and the material with which it is scribbled. Each drawing was clearly made with the A4-paper lying flat on the desk. It is as though Christophe found no space to put his paper in vertical manner—between the advertising stuff and the edge of the table. The materials with which he sketches are typical, even cliché for the degraded culture of the company employing him: marker pens, Tippex and pencils. Every now and then charming company accidents occur in the drawings, such as filthy coffee rings, stuck clip-pings and smeared Tippex stains. Moreover, the obsessive set up of the series

and the uniform style of these desktop doodles, give a marketing impression. Of themselves, they seem to suggest an underlying, well worked out advertising strategy. Long before the world got wind of them, Christophe copiously produced them whilst adding a catchy, stylistic brand name for them.

So Christophe Floré buttered his bread on both sides—sides which always seemed to be incompatible within the visual arts. Swiftly, he unites one of the most intimate forms of his art production—his drawings—with the smooth superficiality of contemporary “product placement”. And this, without compromise to either the profound or the superficial side of both. Art as well as product placement, they say this combination still tastes dirty in artistic mouths.

With Christophe, the ‘romantic’ frustrations insulate in drawings to be viewed on their own—they seem straightforward. One after the other, these leaflets splash existentialism, over and over; loaded with impulses in such a manner that the modest A4-format of the paper acquires a monumentality seldom viewed, and completely sovereign.

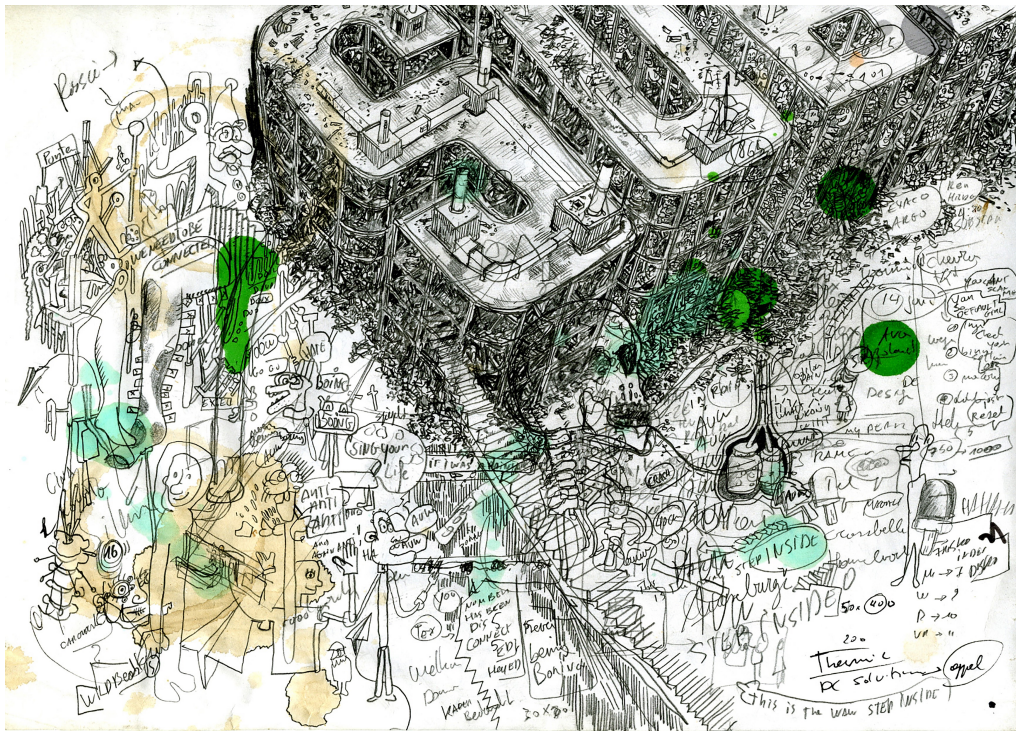


Figure 4: Andy’s comfort is becoming a ghost on your isle

The nice thing about Christophe Floré’s drawings is that, inherently, they carry this ‘classical’ frustrated romanticism, even though they are not produced from the maudit-ish backroom mentality those romantic artists shared amongst themselves. Even less so: Floré cannot possibly be characterized as

an artist *tout court*. He scribbles and produces like a full blooded contemporary marketer, absolutely conforming with our day where bench marking, productplacement, and even—my god—cultural management are the fashion, also in the world of the arts. The funny thing is that many artists, young or otherwise, seem clearly to be aware of this: they try to adopt this marketing mentality, especially in regard to the ‘distribution’ of their works. The fact that most of them fail grossly in this, clearly testifies to the fact that it simply is not part of their genome. In that area the consistency or sincerity is lacking that, hopefully, can still be found in their work.

Not with Floré, though. With him, these two poles melt together into a singular, personal, and artistic whole. And exactly for this reason he is a great artist, notwithstanding the fact that he will contradict this—not even due to a false modesty. Exactly because of this consistent sincerity his smooth marketing lingo, rational product placements and keen marketing strategies disappear, like snow in the sun. What remains is a full blooded draughtsman

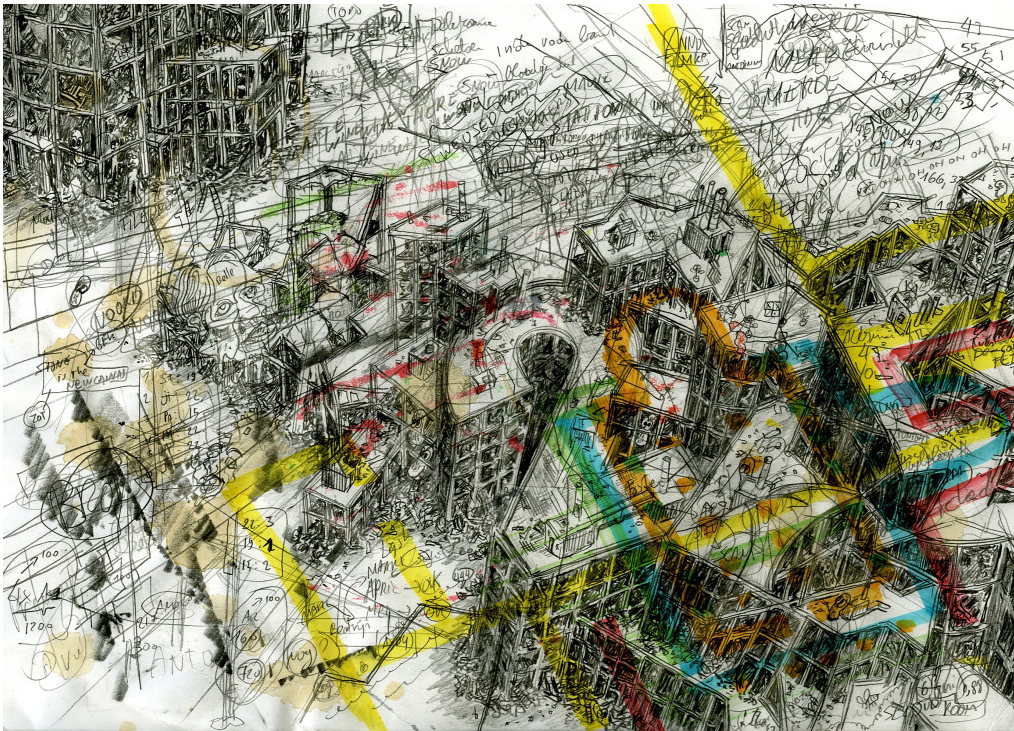


Figure 5: Andy's memory is in trouble

and his drawings in a back-to-basics romanticist style—involving obsessive cursing, doubting, searching but no finding. So it still exists: romantic art from the lonely backroom—luckily. Apparently the backroom is passé. With Christophe it made room for another island with a desktop and a computer, allowing him to spit out his inner ruminations whilst branding and marking them in marketing-like manner.

And why not? From his double professional background this is not only efficient, but also—especially—artistically honest.¹

<http://www.rektoverso.be/auteurs/thibaut-verhoeven>

¹This text was published in Dutch, in *Rekto Verso. Tijdschrift voor cultuur en kritiek*, volume 12, 2005. <http://www.rektoverso.be/artikel/love-it-or-leave-it>. Translation by Rob van Gerwen.