

Text: Linda Noordhuis

Photography: Klaas Huizenga

Watch my Work of Art
The Fourth Egg

Painting reminds Metta and Wytse of their beautiful little boy

Peeking in at the neighbors': we all love it. *Boeskoolnijs*, our local magazine, takes it just one step further. We even want to know what's on the wall above your sofa. We 'd love to hear your story about the work that impresses, irritates, moves and/or comforts you. Metta and Wytse Brandsma kick off with *The Four Eggs*, painted by Evert Dijkstra, their brother-in-law.

Feeding her chickens, Metta Brandsma says, "It should be possible to have them only during the summer ". Could she be interviewed about something sensitive for *Boeskoolnijs*, our local magazine? "But what about?" "Your painting with the four eggs." "But of course, do come in! The only thing left to do is to cleaning the henhouse."

In the kitchen and living room, she has several paintings made by her brother, Evert Dijkstra. A colorful painting depicting old children's toys with an ancient postcard. In a display cabinet you see (porcelain) china in various colors. It looks rural, a little Danish. It seems so attractive and tidy that you'd expect a visitor to come by any minute. "This is partly because my father-in-law is here," says Metta. "Wytse is driving him around. He suffers from a mild, yet almost sweet, form of dementia. I love that man with all my soul."

A very beautiful boy

Metta, visibly shocked: "You see.... only now do I realize it must have been 30 years ago. I was five months pregnant and my class

knew. I was a teacher at the time. The children felt my belly. I 'd seen the midwife for a check-up. As she could not hear the heart-beat she said: "I think it's a little rascal, he may be hiding, crawling away somewhere..... If you're worried, you should go to the hospital, but bring your husband."

"Nervously I called Wytse. We agreed to meet at the church at the Paterswoldseweg. I remember very well. Liquid on my belly, the nurse asking for the gynecologist. The gynecologist was doctor... if only Wytse were here now, he would remember his name. The gynecologist said, "It is no longer alive. You have two options: you can keep the baby and wait for it to be stillborn or we can get it now.'

"First we went home to come to terms with it. The next day - it was a Saturday – the childbirth was initiated and when he was born they laid him down on a rug and it was a very beautiful boy. We had to say goodbye. Wytse's words moved me so: "We are going to read from the bible and eat '*Beschuit-met-muisjes*'/ 'Rusk-with-a-Comfit' (= candy coated aniseed, Dutch birth tradition), because we got a baby just the same. "Psalm 23, *The Lord is my Shepherd*. You know, that 'deep darkness'. In hospital they dealt really well with the situation, too. "

Metta: "At first, I did not know if we wanted to have a post-mortem done. We did agree after all, because it was our first child. We did not take a picture of the boy. Later, you think sometimes... This is why Evert's painting is very dear to us. Nothing came out of the post-mortem. The body might not have been ready for a pregnancy, the gynecologist said, there's no harm in trying again."

Four eggs

Years later, Metta and Wytse having three children in the meantime, their brother Evert had an exhibition in Appingedam. Metta's eye fell on a painting with three eggs. Metta told Wytse there should have been four. He answered: I understand what you mean. "You know, from a painter's point of view three seems

better for the composition. Evert said: "I'll make another one with four eggs, especially for you."

Wytse comes in with his dad. They sit down on the sofa. Wytse completes the story of the beautiful little boy. They also talk about the children born afterwards. Lobke, she is warm, sensitive and caring, character - traits important in her work as a nursing scientist. Gijs, the backpacker and IT expert - a very sweet boy - and the youngest, Job: he has style. He has yet to finish his Real Estate Management studies, but finds it much more fun to be the "store manager at Ikea's".

Wytse says they lived in Beijum at the time, had no car, on purpose, they cycled a lot. They always talked about the baby as "the boy". After Lobke had been born they often biked along the Oosterhamrikkade where they spotted a ship called *The Boy*. "

Every year on *the boy's* birthday, in early spring, Wytse brought a rose for Metta. They talked about the boy with the children. Job once asked whether he would have been born if everything had gone well with the little boy. Metta: "We have certainly often told Job how happy we are with him, that he should be careful when riding the scooter because there is no Job-shop to get the same Job back in case of an accident. When people ask how many children I have, I say three but always I think four, because it feels as a betrayal of the boy."

One day the tradition with the rose stopped; they realized they'd forgotten little boy's birthday. Together they decided it was all right, because it must have been a sign that they had gradually come to terms with it.

Metta describes what the baby looked like, " Very pretty, his little hand was lying like this. Look, like this. He was definitely a very nice boy, a complete boy. Very light-weight, he was. As a miniature he was fully-grown."

Evert, brother and painter

Metta says that they all mourned for a long time after Evert had died in 2008, but it was worse for Jannie, his wife, our sister(-in-law), for whom it was difficult to cope. One day she said, " This belongs to you." She gave us the bowl with the four eggs Evert had painted. We now have the painting, the bowl and the story; it feels good." Metta takes the bowl from a display case and says, "This is very precious to us. These are eggs of a wild duck. Beautiful, aren't they?"

It is a very simple wooden bowl; the paint had come off a bit. The eggs are empty. In the painting the egg on the right seems slightly smaller. Whether Evert had done this deliberately Metta does not know. Your eye is drawn towards that egg. A little shade of blue accentuates it. The bowl Metta showed, seen through Evert's eyes, looks precious and more colorful in the painting than the real bowl. The eggs come alive on the painting, farm-fresh, they have become a symbol of new life, but also of its loss. It's a painting that cherishes a memory and provides comfort.

Wytse's father's face shows compassion all along the story that his son and daughter-in-law tell, even though he occasionally dozes off. It's time to say goodbye, Metta goes back to the henhouse. Thanks, Metta and Wytse for sharing the story of the painting of *The Four Eggs*. Wytse's father begins to applaud.

Evert Dijkstra (1948-2008)

Evert Dijkstra was born in Veendam in 1948. He married Metta's eldest sister Jannie, who worked for years at the *Hammer Tap* crèche that Metta started in Zuidwolde in 2000. Evert and Jannie got three children: Linze-Jaap, Maartje and Thijs.

Evert started his artistic career as a graphic designer and sculptor. In the eighties he became acquainted with the work of contemporary still life painters. This inspired him to paint his own still lives. Evert had learned the craft of painting. He wanted to paint in the tradition of the seventeenth century. The following statement he made about his still lives also clearly applies to *The Fourth Egg*.

"Actually, anything is possible, you can even have a landscape, portrait or a seascape in a still life painting. You can choose objects in which you, regardless of form, experience something through certain associations, emotions or memories."

In his paintings lifeless objects are combined with natural objects such as flowers and fruit, but also with images of landscapes and figures. The selected motifs are often placed in a more abstract background. It is this combination of the realistic and abstract world that makes Dijkstra's still lives so fascinating. The unity is retained by fine tuning light and darkness and explicit paint skin. This creates what Dijkstra wants to achieve: a world of silence, meditation and light.

Literature:

<http://home.wanadoo.nl/smelik-stokking/SMST-011901/EXPO-AD.html>

Evert Dijkstra Paintings, Edition Smelik Stokking Galleries.