Tulpen 01-99

screenprint

1999

98 x 75 cm

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Jan Cremer

Jan Cremer was born on 20 April 1940 in Enschede, just before the Netherlands became engulfed in World War II. Father Jan Cremer senior was an adventurer, frequently switching jobs and working variously as a travel writer, photographer and journalist. From him Jan inherited the urge to write; his love of drawing and reading came from his Hungarian mother.

After the difficult war years in Enschede, Cremer became a ward of the state and was sent to work in a factory when he was just fourteen. At sixteen he briefly served in the navy before going on to crew on tramp ships, mainly to Russian ports. Following his time at sea he travelled around Germany, Italy and France, finally ending up in Paris in 1958. Between jobs he studied for several months at art academies in Arnhem and The Hague, where, just as later in Paris, he took lessons in free painting. He later went on to specialise in printmaking techniques.

From the first Cremer was an original, obsessive artist who lived for his work. Recalling the fracas at CoBrA's Amsterdam exhibition, critics at his first solo show in The Hague's De Posthoorn gallery in 1958 spoke of a 'wild animal'. The following year Cremer exhibited at The Hague's Gemeentemuseum and then at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

In the period that followed, Cremer lived in Ibiza for three years, where he linked up with the 'Grupo Ibiza'. At the same time he worked on his first book I, Jan Cremer. Published in The Netherlands in 1964 it was a literary sensation and went on to sell millions of copies worldwide. In subsequent years he staged more than a hundred exhibitions of his work in museums and galleries at home and abroad. More books followed, but Cremer also continued to paint, abandoning the abstract style of peinture barbarisme in favour of paintings of tulip fields and other aspects of the Dutch landscape.

There followed many years of travelling and painting, during which Cremer also contributed to leading newspapers and magazines as a travel writer. Jan Cremer still manages to combine his work with his wanderlust.

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