

Thin Places

Coen Vunderink

With *Thin Places*, Coen Vunderink presents a new series of paintings in which landscape, painting, and perception become intertwined. The works move within a space where visibility and withdrawal, presence and projection, matter and suggestion continuously exchange places.

The title refers to the Celtic notion of “thin places”: locations where the boundary between the earthly and the unseen seems to become porous. Not as a religious illustration, but as an indication of a space of experience — a condition in which the world cannot be fully reduced to what it shows. This idea forms an undercurrent throughout the series: the painting as a place where something emerges without ever fully disclosing itself.

Within Vunderink’s practice, this is not a new point of departure, but rather a continuation of a longer investigation into the painting as window, filter, screen, and membrane. The window is not merely an art-historical motif here, but also an operational model: a structure that simultaneously opens and limits, reveals and conceals. In *Thin Places*, this model is not thematically illustrated, but activated through painterly means.

The paintings are built around elements of landscape — trees, branches, water, sky, horizon — yet landscape does not appear here as a singular place or topographical space. Rather, it functions as a carrier of mood, memory, mental projection, and painterly tension. Branches and tree forms often enter the image from the sides, operating like stage wings: they open the space while simultaneously closing it off. This creates a pictorial order in which the gaze is both invited and held back.

This ambiguity is essential. The paintings do not provide transparent access to an “elsewhere,” but instead keep the viewer in a state of proximity without possession. What becomes visible always remains partially filtered — by paint, by composition, by previous image layers, by the painting itself as a constructed threshold.

In this sense, Vunderink positions himself within a painterly tradition in which landscape does not function solely as a representation of outer space, but as a site where inner, symbolic, and formal registers converge. In the distance, one can sense various genealogies resonating here: from Edvard Munch and Paul Gauguin, for whom landscape could also carry a psychological or spiritual charge, to Paul Cézanne and Piet Mondriaan, for whom space, rhythm, plane, and structure became fundamental building blocks of the painting. The autonomy of color — as both a constructive and affective force — also evokes affinities with Henri Matisse and Jan Sluijters, without ever lapsing into stylistic quotation.

What connects these references is not a shared appearance, but a shared conviction: that painting does not simply depict, but organizes a reality of its own. In Vunderink’s work, that reality is never stable. It emerges in the tension between figuration and abstraction, atmosphere and construction, improvisation and order.

This field of tension has long been characteristic of his oeuvre, in which painting, sculpture, photography, and works on paper continuously inform one another. Sculptural forms return as

motifs within paintings; photographic and material sources are translated into pictorial structures; patterns, stencils, and textures function both as image and as disruption of image. Painting here is not an isolated medium, but a site where different visual regimes intersect.

This layering is also visible in Vunderink's longstanding fascination with textiles, window dressings, filters, and patterned structures — from net curtains and drapes to mesh, floral prints, doormats, and camouflage-like surfaces. In earlier series, such elements functioned as stencil, grid, skin, or screen: means of regulating vision, breaking light, and destabilizing space. In *Thin Places*, that visual language has not disappeared, but has been sublimated. Here too, the painting remains a surface that does not fully transmit, but rather modulates, delays, and shifts.

In this respect, there is also an affinity with Sigmar Polke, for whom the painting was an unstable zone in which different realities, materials, and image logics could circulate simultaneously. Not because of a direct formal resemblance, but because of a comparable distrust of singularity. In Vunderink's work too, the image remains open, porous, internally divided. The painting does not need to fix anything definitively; it may tremble, slide, hesitate.

There is also a more contemporary sensitivity at work here for images that hover between recognizability and estrangement. In that sense, the works also resonate with artists such as Peter Doig, Ryan Mosley, and, in another way, Edward Hopper: painters for whom space is never merely décor, but psychologically, atmospherically, and temporally charged. It is not narrative closure, but rather the suspension of meaning, that gains weight there. In *Thin Places* too, the image seems to exist in a state of becoming — as if it has not yet entirely settled into itself.

This openness is sustained not only conceptually, but above all materially. Many of the works are painted in a sparse and relatively thin application of oil paint, allowing the ground, the tension of the canvas, and earlier painterly movements to remain visible. Elsewhere, the surface condenses into more impasto-like accents, where light, color, or form assert themselves more emphatically. This alternation between thin and thick, between breath and mass, between dissolution and fixation, generates a pictorial dynamism that gives the works their particular vibration.

Characteristic of this series is also the fact that some of the paintings are built over older abstract works. Earlier images remain present as residue, resistance, or mnemonic layer in the ground and along the edges of the canvas. These visible remnants do not function merely as background, but as active components within the final image. They introduce a temporal complexity: the painting does not present one decisive moment, but rather an accumulation of shifts, overwritings, and recurring motifs.

The edges play a crucial role in this. Where older paint structures, abstract motifs, or fragmentary frames remain visible, the canvas becomes both window and object. The fictive space is opened up and interrupted at once. It is precisely there, at the boundary between representation and support, that it becomes clear these paintings are not only about landscape, but also about the very conditions of looking itself.

Ultimately, what is at stake in *Thin Places* is not the question of what exactly is being depicted, but how an image can open up a space of experience. How painting can become a

place in which the visible is not exhausted, but instead charged with that which withdraws from it. How a landscape can not only be read, but also undergone.

In that sense, these paintings are not windows onto an elsewhere, but threshold spaces: images in which different realities briefly slide across one another. They do not invite identification or interpretive closure, but rather a mode of looking that lingers longer — alert to nuance, residue, displacement, to what only appears obliquely.

Thin Places shows that painting can still be a place where perception becomes unstable and meaning is not fixed, but held open. It is precisely in that openness that its capacity lies to return something of the world that is not fully visible, yet all the more intensely present.