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**PARA SHOOTING:
A RELATIVE RECORD
TRAVEL: PERSONAL
VIEW OF PARIS
DUTCH ENERGY:
OVER TO OIL
POETRY: A PAGE
OF PAPER WORK**



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ARTBEAT

CRAFT AND ART

In our series on Dutch artists, Hansmaarten Tromp interviews craftsman Erno Tromp. Portrait: Eddy Posthuma de Boer

The painter Erno Tromp says he is a typical craftsman; you won't often catch him using the word artist. Not because he has an inferiority complex, but because he soon realized that art is not always financially rewarding. To him the practice of his profession is craftsmanship, and in this sense he views art as the 17th-century painters did: as a craft, usually performed at the request of a wealthy individual or institution. Erno Tromp's favourite example is Dutch painter Jacob van Ruysdael, one of the finest 17th-century landscape painters, who painted nature in a style that he knew to be strongly appealing. 'Ruysdael was actually very commercial,' Tromp explains, 'and the fact that his work is now considered to be art is due to his personal merit, his feeling for composition, his craftsmanship.' We are in Tromp's Amsterdam canal house, where he also has his studio. During the conversation we talk a great deal about the differences between craftsmanship and art, as well as the similarities. After all, it has always been natural for Erno Tromp, with his desire for financial security, to divide his time and talent between working for himself and working for publishers and advertising agencies. 'I wouldn't be able to live from the sale of my paintings,' he says, 'something I discovered when I was still at art school. A classmate of mine was enormously successful and earned a great deal of money selling his paintings at his first exhibition. But what is a great deal of money? I sold everything at my first exhibition a few years ago. Three years of work went into it but in the end I was left with barely enough to live on for three months. In fact I earn so little from my non-commissioned work that I prefer selling everything a little cheaper to putting a higher value on it. I like it best when people want to buy something they can't afford, like the man who bought a painting from me and then couldn't afford to go on vacation. It was very flattering, because I knew he liked my work so much that he simply had to

have it.'

Enno Tromp was born in 1948 in Ilpendam, a village north of Amsterdam. His musician grandfather gave up his profession and went to work for the council to support his wife and ten children. But he continued to love music and founded the Ilpendam Brass Band to which five of his sons belonged. One of them, Tromp's father, was supposed to become a house painter. However, his first day as an apprentice was spent sanding down a wooden fence and it soon made him decide to take an evening course in advertising. It suited him better and at the end of the course he set up an advertising agency.

'That's where I get my talent for drawing and painting,' Tromp says, 'and he always gave me tremendous encouragement. After secondary school it was quite natural for me to go on to art school in Amsterdam where I had a fantastic training. That was when I really began to develop. I tried everything, surrealism, naturalism, you name it. At night I worked for my teaching diploma in drawing. I've never had to use it, but it gave me something to fall back on if my paintings didn't sell. There's the need for security again, it's my upbringing.'

Shortly after completing his training Erno Tromp was commissioned to draw 17th-century houses for an atlas. This fascinated him so much that he started making his own watercolours of houses in Dutch landscapes. 'I've always been interested in the Dutch landscape, especially in the aspects you can accentuate in your painting by your choice of composition; I think a dyke with the point of a roof just showing is marvellous, for instance. I've illustrated many topographical atlases, it really helps you to get to know the landscape. Commissions like that remind me of my days at art school when I used to cycle off with my paper and watercolours and sit painting under a tree.'

Erno Tromp is best known for his paintings of Dutch cows, which were a

natural sequel to his landscapes.

'Actually there's really something strange about those cows. They appear to be a natural part of their surroundings, but in fact they're carefully bred; they are the epitome of inbreeding, entire generations are bred from the sperm of a single breeding bull. But they fascinate me. A couple of years ago I illustrated a book for a dairy firm and that inspired me to paint cows. That's the nice thing about my work as a craftsman. The commissions I get inspire my own work, whereas if I were only a painter I would just keep doing the same thing all the time. I live off my commissions which are all commercial. I am not financially dependent on my painting. If you are, it can become such an obsession that you start to paint mechanically.'

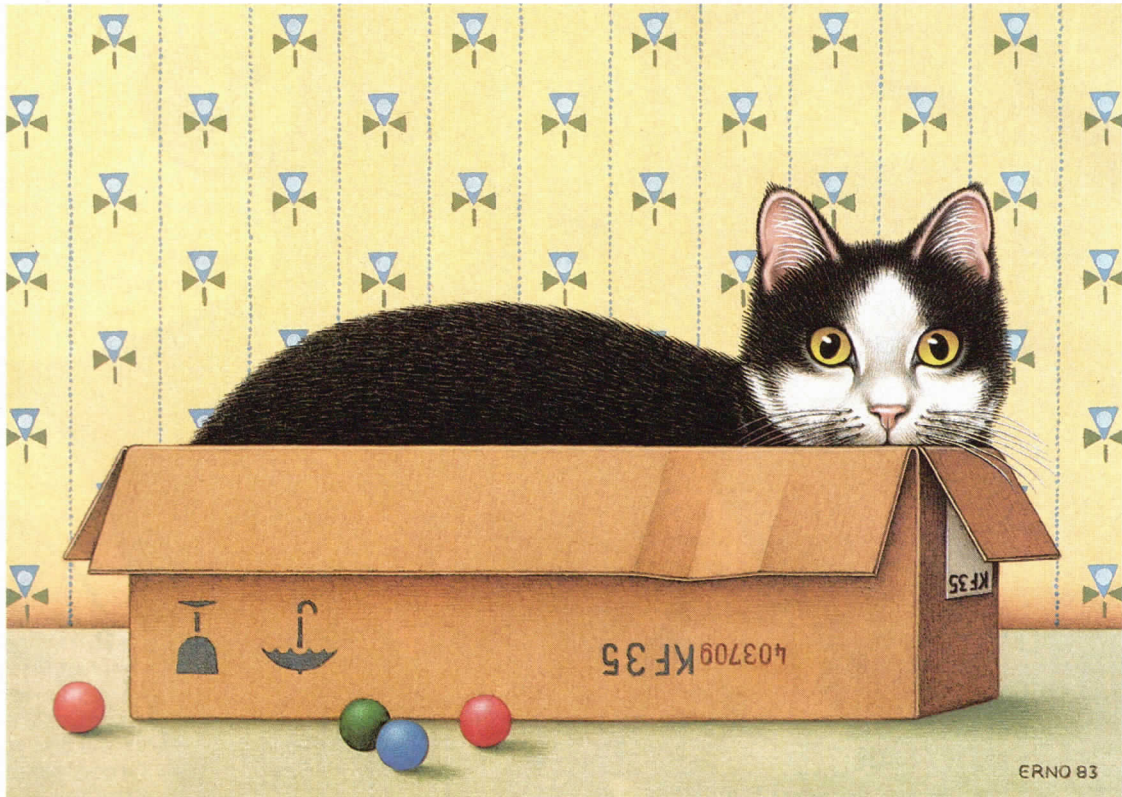
Tromp's small paintings are done with a very special watercolour technique, unrecognizable as such at first sight. 'You can often see when something is painted in watercolours; the English especially have a great tradition. Watercolour paint is made of finely ground pigments in gum arabic. The gum dissolves easily in water and the resultant mixture sticks to the paper. But at a certain point I add gouache, which is also a watercolour paint but with extra white in it. I do this to make it cover better. The technique is a recent development and people often don't realize that my paintings are watercolours. My latest paintings of cats also look more like oil paintings.'

To Erno Tromp it is typically Dutch to make very small paintings.

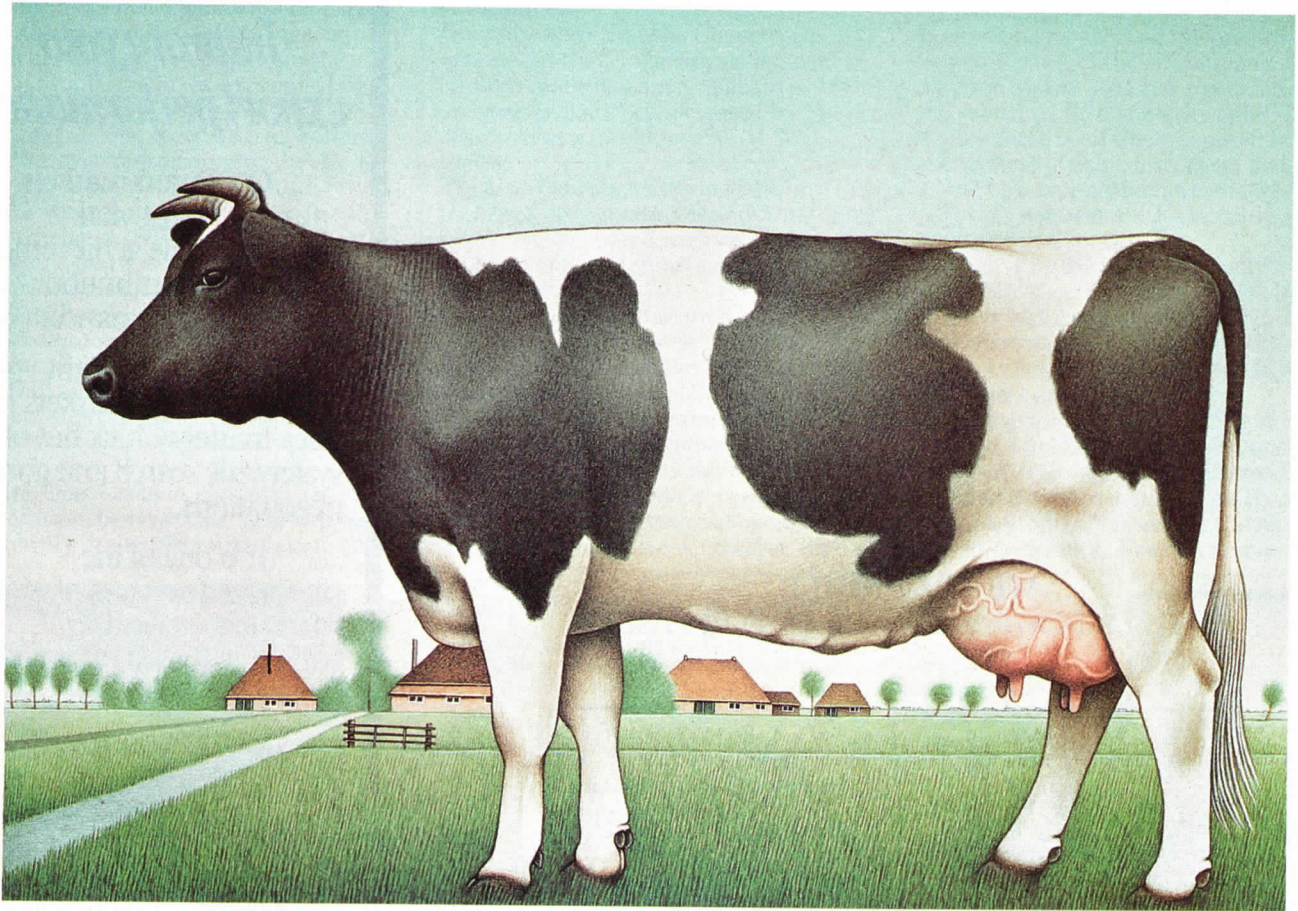
'Vermeer, a great painter, in whose work colour, the cool light and tranquility were important elements, always painted small. Like me, he was a craftsman who was not dependent on art. He painted in his spare time and supported himself by running a café. So you see, you don't have to live off your painting to be a fantastic artist.'

You can see Erno Tromp's work at Amsterdam's Galerie Lieve Hemel from October 23 to December 6.





Cat in a box, by Erno Tromp



Cow in a field, by Erno Tromp