

torenza pignatti

LP: Your entire body of work is connected with the concept of traveling. Are your books the registration of events otherwise destined to be forgotten, or do these events fundamentally inspire your work?

Cees Nooteboom: In my life, traveling and writing are entwined in such a way that is impossible to separate them. My very first trips to Scandinavia and Italy inspired my first novel, *Philip and the Others*, written in 1954 when I was just 20 years old. Its success enabled me to follow my nomadic instincts: I went to South America, where I worked on a ship and wrote stories about the places I visited. This has remained a pattern throughout my life. Writing has enabled me to travel, and my travel experiences have ended up in my fictional works as well as my travel books. I have always wanted to travel, to be somewhere else, and have always wanted to write. I've written books and essays on places all over the world. Some of my novels are set in Spain, while others in France, Germany, Bulgaria, and Italy.

LP: You talk about the meaning of history in several of your

books. You even consider a work of art to be a record of a transient image or situation.

CN: I have always been very interested in the remote and not-so-remote past, in the signs of human life—be it in Kyoto, Salamanca, Berlin, Oaxaca, Persepolis, Marrakech, or Venice—because it tells you in a myriad of ways about the human condition. The past is the common book of all humanity. It shows itself in documents and books, but also in monasteries, monuments, and art.

LP: Which writers have been most important to you and do you most identify with?

CN: There are many. Of course, I have read Chatwin and Bouvier, both of whom I have met, but my inspiration comes not so much from travel books as from literature, philosophy, and most certainly poetry. My heroes, if I may call them that, are writers like Calvino, Proust, Kafka, Kawabata, Nabokov, Borges, and Slauerhoff and poets like Leopardi, Montale, Wallace Stevens, Hugo Claus, Gottfried Benn, Pessoa, and Cesar Vallejo. It's a rich, and maybe even contradictory, variety and of course there are many others. As for philosophy, I am not a systematic reader and often I like to read about it in an indirect way, for example through biographies, such as those of my friend Safranski on Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer—who is my favorite. I have also a great admiration for people like

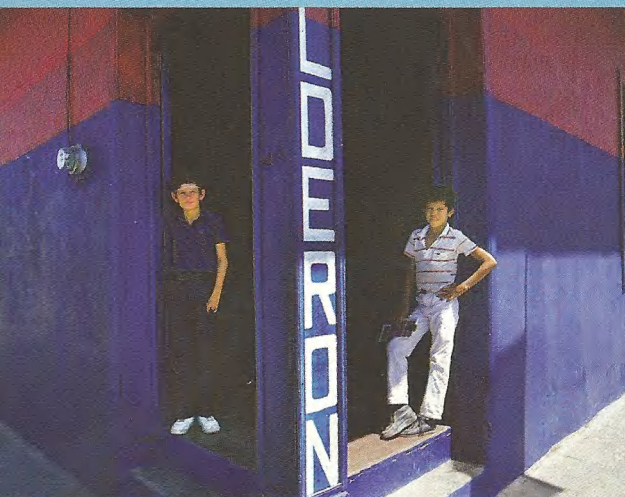
Roberto Calasso:

The Ruin of Kasch was a great inspiration. I am certainly forgetting many... Thomas Mann, Flaubert... I could spend all my life reading. You know that Borges once said that reading is much more civilized than writing—that is its great seduction!

LP: Which artists are you currently most fascinated by?

CN: Well, then, that's a whole other telephone book! I love photography; my own wife is a very gifted photographer, and I have always traveled with great photographers, like Eddy Posthuma de Boer with whom I have collaborated. Of the modern painters, I love the range and depth of somebody as prolific as Picasso; before him, of course, Cézanne, and again later painters like Francis Bacon and Max Neumann with whom I have made several books. In *Verso Santiago* I wrote an essay on De Chirico and Antonio Saura. Then, in a book I wrote on the US, there is a chapter on Hopper and Vermeer, as I think there are very striking similarities between the two.

Born in 1933 in The Hague, Gees Nooteboom has translated Spanish, Catalan, French, and German poetry as well as plays, and is considered one of Europe's most highly regarded writers. He has written travel books, novels, poetry, and essays. His books include *Rituals*, *In the Dutch Mountains*, *Road to Santiago*, *AH Souls Day*, and *The Nomad Hotel*. His forthcoming book, *El Enigma de la Luz*, will be published in Spanish and will contain essays on art and photography.



◀ **Eddy Posthuma de Boer** from the book / dal libro *De Atlas van Nooteboom*, 2003. Courtesy Eddy Posthuma de Boer, Amsterdam.

▶ **Francis Bacon** *Three Portraits: Posthumous Portrait of George Dyer, Self-Portrait, Portrait of Lucian Freud*, 1973, triptych/trittico, oil on canvas/olio su tela, 198x 147,5 cm each panel / ogni pannello. Private Collection, Switzerland / Collezione Privata, Svizzera. © 2004 The Estate of Francis Bacon-ProLitteris, Zurich / Zurigo. From the exhibition/ dalla mostra *Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art*, Fondation Beyeler, Basel / Basilea.