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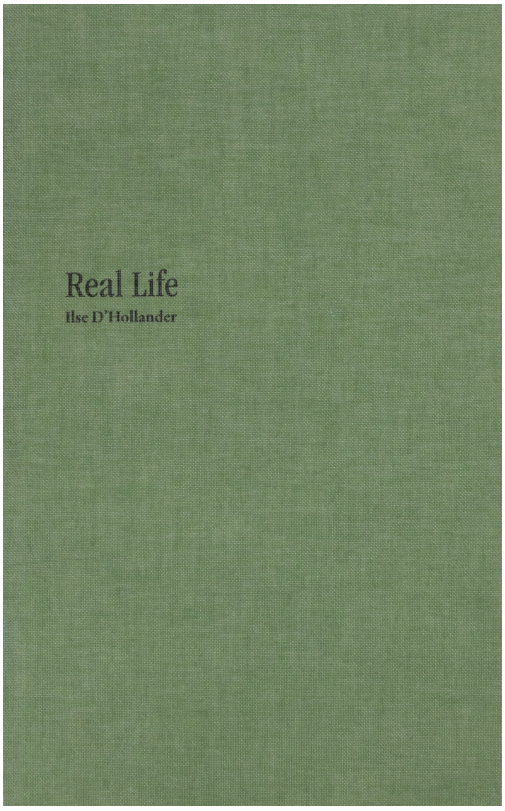

Real Life - Ilse D'Hollander

Introduction by Wells Fray-Smith

By (artist) Christopher Colm Morrin

By (artist) Jesse Murry

By (artist) Frank Walter

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- The most recent publication devoted to Ilse D'Hollander's oeuvre, highlighting new insights and key works
- Features high-quality reproductions of D'Hollander's paintings and drawings
- Includes critical texts reflecting on her legacy within Belgian and international abstraction

Real Life is introduced and curated by Wells Fray-Smith. It is published in collaboration with Gallery Sofie Van de Velde on the occasion of the group exhibition *Real Life*. The publication gathers works by Ilse D'Hollander, Lois Dodd, Christopher Colm Morrin, Jesse Murry, Heidrun Rathgeb, Peter Shear, Trevor Shimizu, and Frank Walter, presenting a dialog across generations and geographies around painting's enduring engagement with lived experience. The book explores how these artists, much like Ilse D'Hollander herself, use paint to address reality in its most porous, poetic, and capacious sense. Whether working through figuration or abstraction, their practices blur the boundaries between pigment and picture, illusion and observation, the tangible and the transcendental. At its heart Ilse D'Hollander's quiet yet profound vision. Through sketchbooks and paintings from 1988 onward, she offered intimate glimpses of her daily surroundings — a window frame, a stairway, a cat — each rendered with the same precision and restraint that define her painting. These drawings were not preparatory studies but complete reflections on perception itself, acts of seeing that transformed the ordinary into the contemplative.

Wells Fray-Smith is a London-based curator currently working at the Barbican Centre. She is a co-curator of *Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art*, an exhibition exploring textiles in relation to themes such as imperialism, exclusion, resilience, love, and hope. The exhibition features works by fifty international and intergenerational artists, ranging from hand-crafted objects to large-scale installations, reflecting the broad scope of the project she co-curated. In March 2024, she led a public curator tour of *Unravel* at the Barbican. Fray-Smith has also written curatorial texts for exhibitions, including Christopher Colm Morrin's solo show notes (January–February 2024) at Gallery Sofie Van de Velde in Antwerp. Her writing also appears in material related to Morrin's exhibition *Witnessing Change*. Her contributions to international exhibitions highlight her active presence within contemporary curatorial practice. **Ilse D'Hollander** (1968–1997) was a Belgian painter whose concise yet profound body of work continues to captivate audiences for its quiet emotional intensity and refined formal language. Educated at the Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Antwerp, D'Hollander developed a deeply personal vocabulary that bridges abstraction and representation. Her palette — muted yet luminous — reflects the atmospheric subtleties of the Flemish landscape and the psychological depth of solitude. Though her career was tragically brief, her paintings have gained significant posthumous recognition, exhibited internationally at venues such as Sean Kelly Gallery (New York), and Gallery Sofie Van de Velde (Antwerp). Today, D'Hollander is regarded as one of Belgium's most distinctive voices in contemporary abstraction.

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