

The Collector

Recently, Belgian artist Tom Herck was commissioned for a very special job; to paint a Lockheed F-104 Starfighter that belonged to a collector.

"It was a megalomaniac idea to paint a F-104. However, as I inquired more about the sometimes tragic story behind this particular fighter jet and the collector, the painting as well as the activity of collecting took on more depth and meaning. The Lockheed F-104 was eventually painted with a Death's Head Moth and punctured with a life sized needle, referring to taxidermy as an example of the collecting activity. The Death's Head Moth owes its name to the stains on his chest piece which have the shape of a skull. This moth is attracted to light and heat, scorching its wings as flying too close to the sun, the association with death seems obvious. And a similar image applies for the rise and decline of the plane. The very short and thin wings are typical characteristics of the plane and is therefore often described as 'the missile with a man in it'.

It broke all height and speed records but at the same time demonstrated the worst safety record ever. Many horrible and fatal accidents got the F-104 its second nickname: 'the Widow Maker'. Despite that, the jet was a success and many countries signed a contract with the producer Lockheed, including Belgium. In April 1964 the first F-104 was delivered to the 10JB Wing. One Belgian pilot who died in an air crash with the Starfighter was a family member of the collector of the exhibited aircraft. Cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker describes collecting as a form of death denial, the ultimate fallback but completely helpless attempt to find our immortality in something outside ourselves."

text: Tom Simons

> www.tomherck.com
instagram @tom.herck



