
Kunsthhaus Graz

English

Berlinde De Bruyckere In the Flesh

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Space01

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Berlinde De Bruyckere

In the Flesh

Kunsthhaus Graz

Universalmuseum Joanneum

February 15 until May 12, 2013

Berlinde De Bruyckere's works confront us with profound human emotions. *In the Flesh* is the title of her exhibition which transforms Space01 into a contemplative place of change and brings the sublime into the biomorph structure of the room, exacerbating the sensations provoked by her works. With its high walls, the Travelator bisects Space01 at its highest point, dividing it into two parts, which determine Berlinde De Bruyckere's world with their richly contrasting duality.

In the Flesh

With her works, Berlinde De Bruyckere evokes emotions and topples the firmly established. Whether consciously or subconsciously, we believe to recognise the sources from which she draws her inspiration. Sometimes they can be clearly traced to mythology, art history or the media, yet they are frequently interwoven such that it is difficult to express their ambiguity in words.

The central theme of her work deals with the mortality of the body and the visualisation of human physicality in its suffering. Bodiliness is also the product of watchful experience and intuitive understanding, released by unconditional compassion.

What is it, then, that gives our life form and moves us inwardly and outwardly – what are body, soul and image made of?

Les Deux, the bodies of two horses are laid out between two metal poles, lifeless and in apparent isolation, as if discarded. Walking around them, a feeling of trepidation arises. The real hide of the animals shifts their death to unspoken proximity, their injured

bodies point to the death they have suffered, and their position to an order. During her lengthy research, De Bruyckere stumbled upon pictures of fallen soldiers and their horses, which she realised were a timeless memorial and should be displayed to the general public.

While it was the horse itself that had initially fascinated her, in the course of her creative work, the equine body gradually developed into a symbol for human relations.

my deer, the fragmented body of a young deer, alludes to the pun *my deer / my dear*. Faced with the dead creature, it is immediately evident what she means, and the impression goes literally under the skin.

The flayed body is, and always was, a symbol of sacrificial death. In her **Jelle Luipaard** series, in which mutilated, decapitated and disfigured, yet delicate and reserved, male bodies twist around poles in eleven different positions, she presents brutal images of defiled bodies from the Iraqi war. Pictures of the Crucifixion inevitably come to mind. Yet instead of chronological stations, we perceive sensitive images as

respectful studies of a macabre, omnipresent cycle of suffering.

The Wound is the title of a comprehensive series inspired by a photo album from 19th century Istanbul. Women in national costumes open up their clothes above the waist, revealing a large scar on the abdomen. They are scars resulting from caesarean sections or tumour surgery. Hermaphrodites with detailed images of their genitalia are also included, as well as circumcisions. Hanging in its own secluded, very protected room, *The Wound I* sets the train of thought into motion. The coital beginning of life, at the mercy of human sexuality, in need of protection and highly vulnerable, is the basis of every existence.

In her **Actaeon** series, Berlinde De Bruyckere focuses on a mythological theme and popular subject of various paintings in the past, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is the story of Actaeon, the fallen hero of Greek mythology, who once came across the goddess Diana taking a bath in the woods together with her nymphs. Realising that Actaeon had seen her

naked, she was so angry that she turned him into a stag, so that he was chased, torn to pieces and devoured by his own hounds.

While most of the masterpieces of art history focus on the moment of Diana's shock upon discovering Actaeon spying on her and her companions (in an act of voyeurism), Berlinde De Bruyckere depicts the remains of the forbidden pleasure: the antlers of the transformed man. The stag's antlers are full of various differing and reciprocal implications: on the one hand, male deer need their antlers to impress their female counterparts and as a weapon to fight for them in the mating season; on the other hand, antlers are a much sought-after trophy amongst hunters.

Covered with blood, injured and bedded in linen, they lack all signs of male dignity and become an icon of unnecessary violence instead.

The 'Reclining Figure' is a popular and quite old subject of art, mostly featuring a female person showing off her physical charms in a relaxed posture. Berlinde De Bruyckere plays with the title (**Liggende**), showing a completely

different subject of Christian art history. She lays out the fragmented body just as Holbein, in 1521, painted Christ lying in his tomb, drastically real and in life-size. A male body is laid out on a blanket as a torso, his past being faceless without the head, his translucent body bearing traces of blood, which allude to suffering. The body is flanked by antlers symbolising discarded male energy; their branches are meant to represent life, yet life's fragility is perceptible through the translucent wax. The impression of life laid out on the death-bed is not only real, it is also disturbing in its sensitivity, and accusing at the same time. Who has the right to threaten life? *But what is life?* This is, above all, a question that is often posed for the first time in the face of the dead.

Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculptures not only create an almost real, even existential proximity by way of their cast and exactly reproduced details, but also in their setting—iron tables, worn wooden benches, discarded museum showcases or used textiles stitched together visibly, just like badly-healed wounds.

Aanéén-genaaid, a roughly stitched figure, sags on a stool that is much too high for it; limp and exhausted, its deeply down-cast, faceless head rests on pale arms.

Z.T. is made of textile body fragments too, with female leg stubs thrown over a pole, just like old rags that are no longer needed. The materials, the seams, the real hides, even the boards of the pedestals contain the past, suggesting that experience should be stored.

In the Flesh permits Berlinde De Bruyckere to cast the idea of human existence into a material form that tells us of solitude, love, unification, fragility, fragmentation, or even elementary solidarity in our defenseless vulnerability.

Berlinde De Bruyckere

Born 1964 in Ghent, Berlinde De Bruyckere, whose parents owned a flourishing butcher's shop at the time, spent most of her childhood in a boarding school. There she became interested in art history, reading literature from the school library on the great masters and their world-famous works which often focused on Christian or mythological subjects. These stories and paintings fascinated and accompanied her throughout her, sometimes solitary, childhood days, which she regards today as an important basis for her artistic creativity.

In her initial artistic phase—after finishing her art studies in Ghent—Berlinde De Bruyckere looked to Arte Povera and concrete art, but was also inspired by Louise Bourgeois, whose works are similarly able to stir profound emotions. Her first big success was in 2003, when she aroused international attention at the Venice Biennale.

The artist, who meanwhile exhibits all over the world, is due to show her work in the Belgian pavilion in Venice this year. Berlinde De Bruyckere lives with

her family in Ghent. Her atelier is in close proximity to the world-famous Ghent altarpiece by Jan van Eyck, who fascinates her just as does Lucas Cranach with his portrayals of the suffering, pain-filled body.

Works on show

Aanéén-genaaid

2002

Blankets, wax, Jesmonite, wood

Actaeon

2011/12

Wax, wood, fabric,
epoxy, iron armature

Actaeon III (London)

2012

Wax, wood, epoxy, iron armature,
fabric

Actaeon IV (Miami)

2012

Wax, wood, epoxy, iron armature,
fabric

Doornenkroon III

2009

Wax, epoxy, metal, glass, table,
plastic foil

Jelle Luipaard

2004

Pencil and water colour on paper,
10 sheets

Les Deux

2001

Horse skin, polyester, iron trestles

Liggende I

2011/12

Wax, epoxy, iron armature, wood,
cotton, wool

Liggende II

2011/12

Wax, epoxy, iron armature, wood,
cotton

my deer

2011-2013

Cast iron

The Wound I

2011/12

Wax, epoxy, iron armature, leather,
wood, horse hair, fabric

Z.T.

2003

Wood, blankets, wool

Other events

Guided tours through the St. Dominikus Chapel

On display in the Chapel of St. Dominikus in the Lesliehof, 10 Raubergasse, the work **Doornenkroon III** permits a concentrated dialogue on physicality and its temporality. The chapel is only accessible for guided tours.

Sundays, 11 am

Special guided tour: *Berlinde De Bruyckere. In the Flesh* at the Kunsthaus Graz and in the Chapel of St. Dominikus in the Raubergasse.

€ 2.50 excl. admission fee

Meeting point: Foyer

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