

Berlinde De Bruyckere

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Galleria Continua is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition in China by the well-known Belgian artist Berlinde De Bruyckere.

An internationally acclaimed artist, since the 1990s Berlinde De Bruyckere (Ghent, Belgium, 1964) has used organic materials such as wax, horse hair and skin, wood and fabrics to produce disturbing, alienated and solitary images. The focus of her work is a profound meditation on the nature of sculpture, conducted by means of a careful observation of art history. She draws on a variety of artistic influences, ranging from North European Renaissance masters like Roger Van der Weiden, Van Eyck, Robert Campin and Lucas Cranach through to Luca Giordano and the magnificent art of the Italian Seicento, from which are borrowed sudden flares of light and looming shadows.

All the artist's work stages the dualism between life and death, suffering and love. In her sculptures, De Bruyckere observes the precariousness of human existence; her works appear to be images of a widespread archetypal pain, offering themselves up in their vulnerable existence to the viewer's gaze. The human body, represented in highly realistic postures, is articulated in all its different forms: the skin is furrowed by folds which, together with a lattice of veins and arteries, weave an intricate pattern; the muscles are rendered with a keen anatomical eye; while the pallor of the flesh is a reminder of the transience of life. The bodies are explored by way of subtraction: the figures, always incomplete and faceless, are the portrait of a fragmentary existence.

The group of works on display in the show have been chosen to provide an intense and fully representative sample of the work of an artist who, in the course of her career, has composed a gallery of works charged with sensuality and force, realized in wax or horse hide, which describe a world of emotions, fragile tenderness and love.

A central work in the exhibition is *We Are All Flesh (Istanbul)*, made by slowly and carefully sewing together pieces of horse hide. Suspended and with essential features, the posture exalts the vigorous and powerful traits of the animal, in which human qualities and the dualism between life and death come together.

Actaeon, inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, centres on the unfortunate fate of Actaeon, who was turned into a stag by the goddess Diana and then devoured by his own hounds. Scattered across a table, a simple plinth, is a tangle of branch-like stag antlers mixed up with strips of cloth, like an abandoned memory of the young hunter, an image of broken youth. The sculpture combines raw and delicate images, and of strength and power, sensuality and suffering.

Stag antlers, this time as an image of nature rather than as a metaphor of suffering, also feature in *Rodt*, interlaced branches in a precious wunderkammer.

009-, 2011-2012 is a large old glass display cabinet housing tree branches and trunks modelled in wax. The trees appear to be memories of the past, with knots and veining emerging from the texture of the wax. Wood, as an organic changeable element, is a powerful symbol associated with life.

Berlinde de Bruyckere was born in 1964, in Ghent, where she lives and works. She has shown extensively in recent years, with solo shows including *We Are All Flesh*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia (2012); *The Wound, Arter*, Istanbul, Turkey (2012); *Mysterium Leib*. Berlinde De Bruyckere im Dialog mit Cranach und Pasolini, which opened at the Kunstmuseum Moritzburg, Halle, Germany, and then travelled to the Kunstmuseum Bern, Switzerland (2011); DHC / ART Foundation for Contemporary Art, Montreal, Canada (2011); Hauser & Wirth Zürich, Switzerland (2010); *Schmerzensmann*, Hauser & Wirth London, Piccadilly (2006); *Eén*, De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art, Tilburg, Netherlands (2005).

The artist is going to represent Belgium at the 55. Venice Biennale in 2013.

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