



GALLERIA CONTINUA

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HANS OP DE BEECK

The Boatman and Other Stories

Opening: Saturday 24th July 2021, via del Castello 11, 3pm-9pm
Until 6th January 2022, Monday to Sunday, 10am-1pm, 2-7pm, by appointment only

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Galleria Continua is pleased to present the Belgian artist Hans Op de Beeck's solo show entitled *The Boatman and Other Stories*. The exhibition brings together previously unseen and recent sculptures that explore the still-life genre in a contemporary and anachronistic key. The exhibition mainly deals with human figures through which the artist wishes to offer a departure point for many possible stories: men and women of different social extractions and ages, and portraits with an abundance of details in relaxed positions or while they're completing simple everyday actions.

Visual artist, but also a theatrical director, playwright, scenographer and composer, Hans Op de Beeck moves between different languages and materials. For some years, aside from painting, sculpture, large installations, art films, and photography, he has developed a series of sculptures that depict human figures. Even though many women, men and children have posed in the artist's studio over the last few years, these sculptures are not only portraits but imaginary figures and characters that, alone or in dialogue with a second person, tell a universal story in which eternity and actuality come together.

The exhibition *The Boatman and Other Stories* is populated by many of these figures, *The Boatman* (2020) is a life-sized sculpture of a man on a small rowing boat, pushing away from the river bank. Like *The Horseman* (2020) – a sculpture currently installed in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg – it represents a solitary nomad who's constantly moving, a middle-aged man half-way through his life who has loaded, in a precarious and improvised way, each of his possessions onto a small boat: his dog, a hen, personal items and other essentials for survival that could be then sold or exchanged. *The Cliff* (2019) presents a couple of teenagers sat on a rock on the edge of a precipice. The open gaze of the girl is lost in the distance as if she were worried about something, while the attention of the boy is completely concentrated on her. "It's a bittersweet image of the whims of young love intertwined with the marked innocence that comes from an impetuous perception of a world not yet lived, to which we are invited to return", the artist explains. It captures the recurring concern Op de Beeck has for change, in which different phases of our lives are marked by the weight of waiting, before moving forward into a new phase; here, the coming of first love marks the passage to adulthood and the loss of innocence.

In the exhibition we also find the work *Dancer* (2019-2021), a bronze sculpture that transmits the melancholic yet light happiness of a Brazilian dancer in a moment of rest with her eyes closed, sat on an old seat while she smokes a cigarette; *Mum and Dad* depicts an old couple in their dressing gowns, tight in an embrace on the threshold of their home while they look outwards as if something was happening in the street; *The Conversation* (2019), depicts two men who chat, seeming surprisingly comfortable while they stand on a small, unstable, foldable ladder. Their briefcases are positioned on the floor, suggesting that both have either just returned from work or are about to go there.

In 2015, Op de Beeck made a film with puppets, animated in real life by puppet masters dressed in black. With *Celeste (Smoking)* (2020), he takes up the concept of the representation of the human

being as a doll. The doll is sculpted with its limbs connected by the typical doll joints. For the artist, the human doll contains a feeling of defencelessness and silent tragedy. In *Celeste (smoking)* we see a female character with the human, simple act of smoking a cigarette. The highly realistic and subjective details of Celeste's face, hands, and feet contrast with the rest of the body that has a mechanical and more impersonal appearance of a manipulable puppet. *Girl asleep* (2021) is a life-size sculpture of the resting head of a sleeping girl. Dragonflies float above her, as if they represent the fairy-tale mood of a sweet dream. Sleep is a recurring subject in the artist's work. He is intrigued by sleep as a zone of surrender and release, an unfathomable, enigmatic world.

Vanitas XL (2021) and *Vanitas Table (the coral piece)* (2021) represent our present environment, simultaneously reminding us of the transitory nature of human existence. Compared to the more classic variations formerly realised by the artist, these new monochromatic still-lives are enriched by more playful and celebratory elements.

Since 2018, Hans Op de Beeck has steadily been working on an ongoing series of *Wunderkammer* sculptural display cases, crafted at his studio. Within these works, the most diverse sculptural interpretations of keepsake objects are brought together by a fictitious collector. In the tradition of the 'Wunderkammer' of the European Renaissance (cabinet of curiosities), the collections of curiosities in each cabinet seem anachronistic and of the most diverse origin. The display cases bridge the thin line between valuable and worthless, between specialness and banality and the importance of stories to bring a still object to life. They are display cases that seem to have been stripped of all their lustre and left behind as silent units.

The works that conclude the exhibition are: *Lily* (2020), *Sleeping Dog* (2019), *The Three Sisters* (2020), and *After work* (2021) where two happy and chattering skeletons, a recurring subject in the artist's latest works, are a light-hearted way to talk about our mortality.

The Boatman and Other Stories speaks about our growing pains, the search for identity, the difficulties, awkwardness and silences inherent to our existence, but also about our dreams and hopes for a better future and the search for inner peace and wonder.

Hans Op de Beeck was born in Turnhout (B) in 1969. He lives and works in Brussels, Belgium. Op de Beeck has shown his work extensively in solo and group exhibitions around the world.

He had substantial institutional solo shows at the GEM Museum of Contemporary Art of The Hague, The Hague, NL (2004); MUHKA Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, B (2006); Centraal Museum, Utrecht, NL (2007); the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC, US (2010); Kunstmuseum Thun, CH (2010); Centro de Arte Caja de Burgos, Burgos, ES (2010); Butler Gallery, Kilkenny, IRL (2012); Kunstverein Hannover, D (2012); Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, USA (2013); the Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, FL, USA (2013); FRAC Paca, Marseille, F (2013); MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Boston MA, US (2014); MOCA Cleveland, OH, US (2014); Sammlung Goetz, Munich, DE (2014); Screen Space, Melbourne, AU (2015); Château de Chimay, Chimay BE (2015); Espace 104, Paris, FR (2016); Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg, DE (2017); Fondazione Pino Pascali, Polignano a Mare, IT (2017); Kunstraum Dornbirn, DE (2017); Museum Morsbroich, DE (2017); Les Moulins, Boissy-le-Châtel, FR (2018); Scheepvaartmuseum Amsterdam, Amsterdam, NL (2018); Kunsthalle Krems, Krems an der Donau, AT (2019); The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg RU (2021)...

Op de Beeck has participated in numerous group shows at institutions such as The Reina Sofia, Madrid, ES; the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, AZ, US; the Towada Art Center, Towada, JP; ZKM, Karlsruhe, DE; MACRO, Rome, IT; the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, GB; PS1, New York, NY, US; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR; Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Köln, DE; Hangar Bicocca, Milano, IT; the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, JP; 21C Museum, Louisville, Kentucky, US; The Drawing Center, New York, NY, US; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, AT; Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, CN; MAMBA, Buenos Aires, AR; Haus der Kunst, Munich, DE; Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, Bologna, IT; Kunstmuseum Bonn, Bonn, DE; Musée des Beaux Arts de Caen, Caen, FR; Kunstraum Dornbirn, Dornbirn, AU; Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, DE; Den Frie Center of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, DK; Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels, BE; Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt, DE; Museum Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, DE; The National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, TW; the Ocean Flower Island Museum, Hainan, CN; the Museum of Contemporary Art Krakow, Krakow, PL; Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, NL; BOZAR, Brussels, BE; Iwaki City Art Museum, Iwaki, JP ...

His work has been invited to the Venice Biennale, Venice, IT; the Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai, CN; the Aichi Triennale, Aichi, JP; the Singapore Biennale, Singapore, SG; Art Summer University, Tate Modern, London, GB; the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, IN; the Setouchi Triennale, Shodoshima, JP; the Bruges Triennale, Bruges, BE and many other art events.

For further information about the show and for photos:

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