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BERLINDE DE BRUYCKERE

Chiesa di Santa Venera sulle Mura della Pace, Palermo

16 June - 4 November 2018

Galleria Continua is pleased to be presenting the latest project of the artist Berlinde De Bruyckere, as part of the 5x5x5 Programme at Manifesta 12.

The exhibition will take place in the heart of the city of Palermo, within the ancient walls of the Chiesa di Santa Venera.

Over the course of her extraordinary career, Berlinde De Bruyckere has succeeded in drawing a fine line throughout her body of work, reinterpreting and sometimes revolutionising certain elements that for her have become key.

The two works that will be presented in Palermo, *Mantel I* and *Mantel II*, are the result of a new exploration on the part of the artist, that began in 2016 with the series *It almost seemed a lily* and which combines references to Christian symbolism and compelling antinomic pairings associated with the core of human existence: masculine - feminine, eros - thanatos, life - death. The main inspiration stems from seven *Horti Conclusi* which belonged to a convent of Augustinian nuns in Mechelen, Belgium. These diminutive wooden altarpieces, made in the sixteenth century, are each unique and extremely rare; they house reconstructions of the Garden of Eden and contain miniatures of saints and patrons, textiles, glass, precious metals, wax and even bone. De Bruyckere, on the other hand, shows a blanket, an object-symbol which has been a feature of her works since the mid-90s, the time of the tragic genocide in Ruanda. In these early sculptures she created bodies covered with woollen blankets in the search for warmth and protection, or attempting to counter fear. In *Mantel I* and *II* however, the artist completes her revolution, leaving the fabric exposed to poor weather for months, allowing it to deteriorate and decompose, and in so doing forming a new existential pairing: that which once protected is now torn and worn thin.

Again, we find a point of reference in art history: in *Mantel* (literally, 'mantle' in Dutch), the threadbare brown draperies allude to the habit worn by San Francesco, as painted by the Spanish master, Francisco de Zurbaran (1598-1664). The Saint of Assisi greatly interested the Spanish painter, who portrayed him in meditative pose with the traditional iconography of habit and skull, contemplating mortality and the death which will reunite him with the Divine.

The opening of the show, hosted within the evocative walls of the Chiesa di Santa Venera on the Mura della Pace, is a wonderful opportunity to appreciate the restauration of the church, as the building had been condemned and thus closed for some time. Conservation work began in 2016, commissioned by the Worshipful Company of Santa Maria della Consolazione sotto il titolo della Pace. The inside of the church was restored in its entirety.

The church itself was built in 1493 to give thanks to Saint Venera on behalf of the citizens of Palermo for her intercession during the plague epidemic of the same year. Restored for the first time in 1580 at the wish of the viceroy Marcantonio Colonna, the church underwent its final structural modifications at the end of the 1700s, to bring it in line with the prevailing neoclassical style. For the last century the church has been abandoned and unfit for use, and so its reopening is particularly felicitous.

Berlinde De Bruyckere was born in 1964 in Ghent, Belgium, where she lives and works. In her sculptures, she uses wax, wood, wool, lead, iron, leather and horsehair to create figures of great intensity which recall deformities in human and animal bodies. These figures are often fragmented and anonymous. The universe laden with pain and suffering which some of the artists' works convey has captured the attention of the modern art world since the early nineties. In her early career, De Bruyckere created shelters: precarious structures made by stacking metal beds and draping them with covers and woollen blankets. They invite reflection on the desperate circumstances experienced by those who seek shelter and protection.

The artist has participated in international events such as the 50th Venice Biennale, Padiglione Italia (2003), as the artist representing the Belgium Pavilion for the 55th Venice Biennale (2013) and the 15th Istanbul Biennale (2017). Her work has recently been exhibited in prestigious international museums, such as the Leopold Museum in Vienna (2016), the National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavik (2016) and the Kunsthau Bregenz, Austria (2015). Many of his works have also entered private collections such as the Gori Collection, Fattoria di Celle, Pistoia; Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation, Turin; La Maison Rouge, Foundation Antoine de Galbert, Paris and De Pont Foundation, the Netherlands.



For further information about the show and for photos:
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