

S.M.A.K., the Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent, opens its doors on 18 October 2014 to a first mid-career retrospective of the work of Belgian artist Berlinde De Bruyckere (° 1964). In close collaboration with the artist the museum presents a combination of drawings, sculptures and installations illustrating the evolution and many nuances in her oeuvre. This exhibition is a prime event for Belgium as no other solo-projects by Berlinde De Bruyckere have taken place in this country since the large exhibitions at the Middelheimmuseum (Antwerp, 1996), the MuHKA (Museum of Modern Art, Antwerp,

2011) and the Provincial Cultural Centre Caermersklooster (Ghent, 2002). The artist continued to work from her studio in Gent but in the meantime exhibited in the most important international museums and institutions.

Over the past twenty-five years, Berlinde De Bruyckere created a significant oeuvre of drawings and sculptures in which the artist's thought, feeling and artistic output all revolve around the body. Without exception, all of these works display powerful emotions intent on perturbing our world grown immune to excessive imagery.

Through the years, Berlinde De Bruyckere acquired a profound insight into the iconographic world of passion. With an infinite curiosity for the scope and depth of man's emotional powers, she explores how the body experiences and expresses passion. Excess, horror and the hypersensitive are not shunned, as the artist distills this sweltering torrent of emotions and bodily sensations into 'new' bodies; 'new' - because they possess a disconcerting emotional truth of their own rather than being a mere reconstruction of the artist's analysis. De Bruyckere's drawings and sculptures start as true to life anatomical studies that are ultimately shaped by the tension between rich Western cultural historical references and personal imagination. Although the artist's many choices throughout the creative process are highly intuitive, they are preceded by erudition, thorough study, a slow aesthetic process and a love for the materials used.

Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculptures go well beyond the personal. They address both the world and the individual facing them. Even though they turn away their own faces or hide themselves under blankets and hair, despite their desolate, curled up and entwined shapeless bodies, they reach out and firmly hold the viewer's eye.

The artist achieves this total captivation by focusing on the highly sensitive, bristling skin: the sleek hide of a horse; the pale waxen epidermis faintly showing the red and blue of vein and blood, the bulging wounds, stringy tendons, leather straps and swathes of cloth that fasten and tighten. She

hides the furthest reaches of the human condition, suffering beyond words, in caverns, wounds and holes or under growths and bulges that irresistibly draw all attention. By raising the sculptures on pedestals and platforms, displaying them in large glass cases and cupboards, suspending them from hooks and beams, the artist addresses the public and confronts it with its darkest depths. Not for the sake of provocation, but to share the anguish, show compassion and, if possible, alleviate the pain.

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