

What else is new?

Those who have followed Anton Cotteleer's work closely – or from a distance – will have noticed a break with his work from the past. His recent collection of sculptures is – surprising or not – more focused on the *'image'* of the human figure than on the human being itself.

This is not a step without risk: the image of the human figure in art has been for at least one and a half centuries a tricky minefield where man (sic!) cannot venture any longer inoffensively. Those who have the courage to do so are, anyway, by definition aware and conscious about the effort they have to put into making such a decision.

An important nuance we have to make: Cotteleer wasn't inspired in his recent work by the human figure as such but rather on 'images' of the human figure, 3-dimensional ones as well.

His sculptures are formal interpretations of other anthropomorphic ones, of 'objects' and 'forms', mainly drawn out of domestic life.

I will come back later to this *'domesticity'*.

For Anton Cotteleer, this decision mentioned above, is related to a certain thematic 'departure' from this era of innocence mainly suggested by the use of *animals*.

– but maybe this is a bit over-dramatized –

Taxidermized or not, real or imitated, devoutly and true to nature, the use of animals in art is often a symbol of innocence.

– this refers a fortiori to Cotteleer's bizarre fascination for squirrels –

It is exactly this illusion of innocence which Anton Cotteleer is about to dismantle in his recent work.

There is, after all, only one animal present in his current exhibition : a terrifying cat on a sloping roof.

For this sculpture, the artist was inspired by a newspaper image of Audrey Hepburn. Of all 'classic' Hollywood actresses, she is probably the one embodying more than anyone else the ideal of a child - or animal-like innocence.

Didn't we quite often compare her legendary eyes to those of a baby deer?

However, the gilded whippet, supporting a mannequin-look-alike sculpture, a one-legged woman, kneeling and mouth wide open, is used as a prothesis and cannot be considered as an animal anymore.

Cotteleer's sculptures obviously appeal a great deal to the tradition of the grotesque body that was associated last decennia mainly to the so called *abject art*. Whilst looking at the morbid constellations where these different bodies are pressed in, historical references emerge (Gober, Kelley Mc Carthy and Sherman).

It is hard for the author not to see the link between Cotteleer's work and the anal phase where a lot of body art seemed to have arrived in the nineties (Matthew Barney, Gilbert & George, Kiki Smith and our own Wim Delvoye) - especially when looking at Cotteleer's outspoken obscene female sculptures: their eyes shut devoutly, their mouths perverse wide open gaps.

However, his apparent indifference to *'trauma'* is what distinguishes Cotteleer's work irrevocably from this tradition. This is a qualification we could relate to a thematic leitmotiv reappearing quite often in his recent work: *domesticity*, disciplined although recognizable (What to think about the buxus cut in such a bizarre way e.g.?)

One typical *Gestalt* of this domesticity is for example *the table* - a side table or a user-friendly

dining table. It is an element that can play different roles in Cotteleer's world of images (although the roles do not necessarily correspond to one another).

There is the one that can symbolize, for example, socialization (the table seen as the core of the family, the proverbial main-stay of society) or the one of an echoing well where rather analytical, sculptural affairs re-echo (the table functioning as a socle, as a requisite in a theatrical experience of '*specific*' objects).

And here Cotteleer's oeuvre is skimming along a completely different artistic tradition. This is where the loud and visceral shouts of the abject are silenced short and sweet by a functional elegance - the taut, formal lines of minimalistic furniture-.

And it is exactly this fruitful tension between transgression and discipline, between hybrid corporality and mechanical homogeneity, which ensures me (you) that this man in front of me (you) is an artist thinking in plastic paradoxes.

Dieter Roelstraete, curator M HKA
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