

Christie's : 'One to watch : Johan Creten', by Amelia Manderscheid, January 20th, 2015



POST-WAR & CONTEMPORARY ART | MASTERS & MAKERS | JANUARY 28, 2015

One To Watch: Johan Creten

Post-War & Contemporary Art specialist Amelia Manderscheid profiles a Flemish sculptor who is revolutionising ceramics

For Christie's specialist Amelia Manderscheid, Johan Creten's description of 'what it means to work in clay' provides a 'sense of continuity' — a stable constant in a practice otherwise characterised by its remarkable diversity.



Johan Creten, *Odore di Femmina - Princesse - Kleine torsos (4)*, 2013.
Glazed stoneware. 65 x 37 x 33 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Almine Rech Gallery © Sven Laurent

Spanning a wide range of styles and formats, works by the Flemish sculptor are united in their visceral, bodily approach to loaded themes — including death, sexuality and social injustice. Manderscheid summarises: 'Creten employs multimedia to challenge paradoxes or taboos.'

'Clay is excremental, it's the ashes of the dead. At the same time it's mother earth, it links the sacred and the profane'.

Johan Creten, speaking from his Paris studio in an interview with *The New York Times*.

Yet Creten is quick to resist political associations: 'I am not an Ai Weiwei,' he insists. 'Politically, I am an observer, not an activist. I have been changing studios, homes and countries for years and love that feeling of being an outside — *'un étranger'* — the distance that that position gives.'



Johan Creten, *I'm a Good Horse on a Soft Brick*, 2001. Glazed terra cotta with luster glaze and a low fired ceramic brick. 84 x 74 x 46 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Almine Rech Gallery © Sven Laurent

Born in Belgium in 1963, Creten turned to art as a means of escaping the narrowness of life in his provincial hometown. His sculptures have been credited with legitimising clay, raising the status of the practice from craft to fine art. For Manderscheid, he is an artist 'challenging ceramics as an art form'.

The recipient of the 1996 Prix de Rome, Creten has been the subject of exhibitions at institutions including the Louvre (2005) and the Bass Museum of Art (2003).



Works by Johan Creten are currently being exhibited at Brussels' Maison Particulière, as part of the group exhibition Obsession, on display until 29 March.

Main image: Johan Creten, Installation view of 'The storm' at Middelheim Museum, Ancers
Courtesy of the artist and Middelheim Museum.