ALMINE RECH

I Peccati

Oct 15, 2020 — May 23, 2021 | Villa Medici: The French Academy, Rome

Forerunner, unclassifiable and against the current, Johan Creten (born in 1963) is an artist that has distinguished himself as a strong, enigmatic and intriguing figure in the artistic landscape of recent decades, occupying a singular place on the international scene of contemporary creation.

Johan Creten made his mark in the 1980s with his innovative use of ceramics. Today he is considered a leading figure in his renewal in the field of contemporary art.

Another side of his work, he uses bronze with virtuosity for the realization of monumental sculptures, including a major example: “De Vleermuis - The Bat”, that is presented in the gardens of the Villa Medici.

The exhibition “I Peccati” brings together, for the first time and with such breadth in Italy, a collection of fifty-five works by the artist, in bronze, ceramic and resin. They will be reunited and juxtaposed to some historical works by Lucas Van Leyden (1494-1533), Hans Baldung (1484-1545), Jacques Callot (1592-1635), Barthel Beham (1502-1540) and Paul van Vianen (1570–1614), milestones underlying Johan Creten’s thinking.

The first room opens onto a series of creations and re-creations of conceptual works from 1986. Placed alongside “The Garden” (produced in 1996-97 during the artist’s residence at the Villa Medici) and of more seminal works like “Orange Display” (1989-2017) and “Plantstok” (1989-2012), this room questions our relationship to introspection and self-awareness, invoking the notion of lost paradise and temptation.

In the second room, a new monumental resin work “Muses and Medusa”, started in 2005 and completed in 2019, dialogues with pieces from the famous metonymic series “Odore di Femmina” (started in 1998) on seduction, the ambiguity of human feelings and relationships.

A third section brings together highly political works including the bronze “The Price of Freedom” (2015), “Couch Potatoes” (1997) and a new series of ceramics “Wargames” (2019).

In the climb of the stairs, a set of enigmatic bronzes overhangs and poses the

question of moral conscience in a society caught in a continuous movement, in deep mutation. The monumental sculpture “The Herring” towers 5 meters high in the last section. A unique sculpture produced in collaboration with the historic workshops of the Porzellanmanufaktur Augarten is revisiting a porcelain from Doccia and is unveiled for the first time to the public.

Disseminated in space, a new series “Bolders” in glazed stoneware, invites the public to sit down, take the time, observe the works to discover their hidden connections and dive into breathtaking details. Shimmering glass surfaces, textured patinas, metaphors and hidden mea- nings taking from urban culture’s “secret handshakes”.

Johan Creten mentions “Slow art” and the need for a return to introspection. A movement, ranging from miniature to monumental figures, which allows you to take time and immerse yourself in an exploration of the world with its individual and societal torments, for a journey filled with surprises and emotions.

The sculptures of Johan Creten made between 2019 and 2020 especially for this exhibition, added to the pieces that punctuate his journey from the 80s to the present day, are associated here with 16th and 17th century prints, tapestries and bas-reliefs from his personal collection. These historical works summoned by the artist are a real reference in his creative process. They reveal his concerns, be they artistic, historical, political or philosophical. The intersection of these works in the exhibition upsets our perception through multiple reading points of view which, from the past, question the future of our humanity.

'With Johan Creten, the sins are not seven in number. Seven, this implacable number, the same as the Bible’s sacraments and Rome’s hills. Here, the sins are infinite and unlimited, inexhaustible. They are not numerable, but just designatable.

Sins are not all capital, they can be imperial, imperious, peripherical, insidious, insignificant, invisible. They are always below calculation and language.

The seven capital sins are little when compared with silliness, barbary, boredom, mutilation, regret, melancholy and terror, in short, with life. Thus, Johan Creten’s sculptures have nothing to do with moral or sanction, guillotine or censorship. They speak of sins, of life that merges desire and pain, hope and misery, luxury and anger, love and death, Eros and Thanatos.

They speak of amphibian life, between the Styx and Paradise. They speak of instinctive life, when hearts beat, when sneaks coil, when wings deploy, when vulvas gape, when the curtain moves and the naked truth emerges from it, at last, that hypnotic Medusa.

May sin not be, after all, the tired form of purity? Does it not point» to our condition of extremely fallible men? Is sin not, to quote Victor Hugo, a beautiful “gravitation”?'

- Colin Lemoine