ALMINE RECH

Johan Creten
La Traversée

Oct 22, 2016 — Apr 17, 2017 | CRAC, Sète, France

Johan Creten's exhibition La Traversée / The Crossing at the CRAC on view from October 22, 2016 offers an initiatory journey through works of art illustrating the mystery of nature in a juxtaposition between flowers and algae and a strange and fascinating bestiary, ranking beauty as a saving grace. The exhibition will feature exceptional artworks some of which were produced with the Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres, a testament to the artist's proclivity and passion for ceramics and bronze.

Following his artist residency at the Villa Saint Clair in Sète in the summer of 1991, Johan Creten, a young Belgian sculptor, was invited to present the artworks he produced during his stay in Sète across two separate exhibitions: the first, a group exhibition at the Espace Paul Boyé and the second, a solo exhibition based on a specific project in a venue chosen by the artist: the "quarantine" in the harbour of Sète where a series of sculptures are arranged in abandoned cells. There was only one way to go and see the works of art: via a boat crossing to reach this place located between the land and the huge expanse of the Mediterranean Sea. A crossing full of symbolism, a sort of voyage on the Styx straddling life and death, towards an unknown place where the diseased and misfits had once been condemned.

25 years later, The Crossing acquires an even stronger allegorical meaning in light of the world changes and the 350th anniversary of the harbour of Sète. These developments are reflected in Creten's oeuvre as the artist has since travelled extensively, from Miami to Mexico and from The Hague to Hong Kong, with historical exhibitions such as at the Bass Museum in Miami in 2003, in the Renaissance Rooms at the Louvre Museum alongside Bernard Palissy in 2005 and more recently, at Galerie Perrotin, New York in 2015.

This exhibition encompasses the power of ceramic works alongside monumental bronzes, another dimension of Johan Creten's work, brilliantly asserted at The Storm exhibition at the Middelheim Museum sculpture park in Antwerp in 2014.

Like ceramics, this technique suffered rejection for a long time and is currently forging a new place. Johan Creten displays its tremendous potential thanks to innovative vision combined with indisputable command of traditional techniques. "Creten's work speaks to the storm within us all, as individuals and as a society, and deals with his usual themes: nature, the female form, power, politics and spirituality," Gay Gassmann comments in T Magazine – The New York Times about his exhibition in Antwerp.

Several monumental sculptures such as Pliny's Sorrow will also be presented in this exhibition.

The artist's fundamental conceptual praxis, present in the summer of 1991, is woven into his new works as the basis for a continuing evolution in Creten's oeuvre.

First of all there is the relationship between mother and sea implied in the Odore di Femmina series for which Creten gained international attention: women torsos covered in flowers, like relics from the seabed that have survived but have been corroded over time by water.

Creten simultaneously evokes our discord in light of existentialist questions such as the place and responsibility of man in our society, an essential question perfectly embodied by the sculpture De Gier. "His sculptures inhabit a space between worlds, an intercept of surreal and expressionist, erotic dream and brutal physicality," Claudia Barbieri writes in the New York Times.

Today, Johan Creten is considered a forerunner in the revival of clay in contemporary art alongside Thomas Schütte and in the footsteps of Lucio Fontana. Recently he played a central role in the exhibition CERAMIX: from Rodin to Schütte at La Maison Rouge, in Paris, and previously at the Maastricht Bonnefantenmuseum, where a whole room was dedicated to his work.

(Press Release LA TRAVERSÉE / THE CROSSING, JOHAN CRETEN at the CRAC, France)