ALMINE RECH

Eric Croes
Comme un vieux tatouage

Jan 11 — Feb 24, 2024 | Paris

From January 11 to February 24, 2024, Belgian sculptor Eric Croes will be presenting his latest creations in the Turenne gallery space at Almine Rech Paris. A deep-dive into the intimate world and peculiar work of a most inspired artist.

Eric Croes never returns from his travels empty-handed. The artist has developed a habit of collecting and keeping everything he has spotted, seen and loved while on the road. Not in the digital depths of his cell phone, but in passport-sized notebooks that never leave his pockets. He covers the pages with all sorts of notes, sketches, reproductions. His notebooks serve as his memory, traces and evidence of all his discoveries and experiences. Once back in his Brussels studio, he recomposes it all with his hands: he returns to clay everything he has collected along the way.

In that sense, Croes' work is always composite, hybrid. When he crafts his powerful shapes, deep vases, golems or totems stemming from his roving imagination, he invites us to follow in his footsteps, to wander with him. His creations bear and express his intimate legends, skin-deep. Intertwined, tangled memories, experiences and fantasies. You may on occasion identify the origin of these visions: there are escapades, true or dreamed up, to Italy or Japan. There are the many museums Croes has explored since his teens, from the Louvre to the Met, not to mention his favourite displays in Brussels. There is fauna and flora, actual or mythical animals and plants – from the poppy to the monkey, from the centaur to citrus fruits – which constantly return to bloom and grow in his work. You will also find dates, numbers, enigmatic secret words.

Every image conveys a memory – and hence a feeling, and thus reflects an emotion. Good or bad, bright or murky, they tell the story of Croes. From his passions to his obsessions, from his childhood to his daily life. Everything that inspires and fuels, everything that obsesses and illuminates. The smallest monuments can give rise to great memories. Some symbols end up changed, transformed. The figures Eric Croes designs are covered in tattoos, fully dressed for the winter. It's a nod to the show's title – "Like an old tattoo", lyrics borrowed from a gentle, melancholy track by Belgian singer Arno – that shines a light on these marks of a buried past still present on the surface of our lives.

Here, for the first time, the artist has chosen to showcase the sources of his creation: his notebooks are presented in an ancient wooden display case reminiscent of classic Brussels museums. The matrix of his substance, in a sense, through which he unveils multiple origins and infinite foundations. Without betraying the mysterious nature of his assembled pieces, this insight into his artistic practice allows us to identify with and find ourselves even more in his work.

Eric Croes' sculptures are intimately linked to his life and discoveries, but they also reflect a more universal resolve - a quest for ever-multiple beauties, a passionate pursuit of love and humour, a mix of materials and colours reminiscent of life's polyphony, of our fantasies, of our impulses. With his strong technical acumen and ever-expanding inventiveness, Eric Croes revives and blends everything that passes through him and everywhere he passes through. To better share it all with us , and to better dazzle us.

– Boris Bergmann, writer and critic

MONOLOGUE OF THE OLD TATTOO

I am the guardian of your emotions.

I do not leave your skin.

I may fade a little at times, but I always endure.

I preserve your doubts, your dreams, your encounters, your hopes.

I am the loved ones' first names, your mum's nickname.

I preside over your shoulder, at the back of your head, in your veins.

I sing of wanderings and reunions.

I am the still life of your memories.

I am the body's memory.

I've been through the eyes, crushed by the brain, breathed in by the heart.

I am the secrets that cannot be covered up.

I am the truth that cannot be hidden.

I break the masks.

I am the make-up that remains, the words that cannot be forgotten.

I am the dates and the arithmetic of the soul.

I am the scar from a trauma.

I am the proof of a huge success.

I am fearless, ruthless, boundless.

I dance inside your heads.

I blow tempests under your skin, tides in your bellies.

I am of many hues, but I prefer by far the ink of an inner sea.

I am indelible and protean.

I am the postcard that was never sent.

I am what competes with birth marks.

I am the liquid that runs, and what follows.

I am the lover who never left.

I describe the inner and dreamt landscape.

I am the intimately connected and the immensely small.

I am the past in the present.

I am not alone, quite often.

I am what best tells your story.

I am what kisses you deeply.

I am awfully faithful.

I am the ally and the traitor.

I am a mistake of your youth.

I am a spark of old age.

I always remember for you.

I anticipate all caresses.

I show up each time you are drunk.

I am your vices and your sins.

I am your best qualities.

I am what observes you without judging you.

I am the first and the last.

I am hideous and sublime, of good and bad taste.
I am you.

– Boris Bergman, writer and critic