

Nick Ervinck

Archaeologist of the imagination

Nick Ervinck (°1981, Roeselare) gives body to his own universe while simultaneously referencing both classical sculpture and contemporary pop culture. His is a transboundary world that deploys forgotten disciplines and innovative tools. This cross-pollination process effectively pulls up by its roots the various media and fields so that they pool together and become indistinguishable. Architecture becomes painting, virtuality becomes sculpture and stasis becomes movement.

The art of Ervinck is the result of an active search for the means to depict his personal world. While the reality we know is not ignored, there is still the dream of another one.

Ervinck's body of work represents a futuristic, innovative vision that is at once seductive and capricious. Past, present and future collide in a complexity of materiality that drives a battle between the virtual and the physical.

I

There is the potential these days to simply drown in the flood of media images. We have become transfixed by image manipulation. Ervinck converts this incessant flow of visuals into a mythological language of his own. He digs into the past to then use distinguishing characteristics of certain periods in his work. By composing a parallel universe, Ervinck redefines archaeological forms and historical paintings as pictorial elements.

There are stark disparities in terms of form and scale in his work. Alongside monumental, shiny blob sculptures are small, more complex biomorphic shapes. Yet there is a clear correlation: the artist's determination to depict an unknowable notion of the future. We encounter strange, armoured forms, unfamiliar weirdness, a cyborg style reminiscent of science fiction films. Monsters from our nightmares threaten to break into our waking lives.

For his cross-boundary and futuristic vision, Ervinck plunders numerous sources for both the substantive and physical aspects. He transforms these finds into a kingdom of his own, inhabited by yellow knights and blue princesses. ¹

II

As a child of his time, Ervinck approaches the digital age without trepidation. He is fascinated by the latest developments. But this is not a source of inspiration for him, merely a tool to help him to manifest his world.

Ervinck deliberately chooses not to programme his designs using code. He draws his sculptures in the classic manner by hand, although this is done straight on to the computer. The major advantage in this method is that he is able to design instantly in three dimensions.

Ervinck manages time and again to transcend the digital roots of his creations, whether they are small figures or monumental sculptures. The final forms – organic, geometric, liquid, solid – demonstrate continual flux, visual hybrids.

The 3D design process creates a different perspective on the evolution of a sculpture than is provided by the classic process of sculpting. Ervinck repeatedly pushes the boundaries of both sculpture and digital media. Where Michelangelo created space for his sculptures by cutting, chiselling and carving away the excess material, the digital sculptor does the opposite. Since his designs are drawn directly in 3D, Ervinck builds his sculptures in virtual building blocks. The form is not “liberated” from the material but created in a digital drawing process.

Ervinck seeks to push this to the extreme. He is obsessive in his desire to advance his designs, sketching and re-sketching them until he arrives at forms that he no longer feels capable of perfecting. This visionary distillation process can mean over a thousand hours of drawing for one sculpture. But it is precisely this search for the essence and simplicity of an object that drives Ervinck to new heights.

By means of this artistic practice, the artist wishes to be part of the debate about what is possible, plausible or likely.

III

To Ervinck, art history represents the constant dynamic between action and reaction from within to without and vice versa. His work is a response to a diverse and illustrious sculpture legacy. There are clear references to Henry Moore and hints of Barbara Hepworth, Hans Arp and Georges Vantongerloo. Ervinck also draws inspiration from the famous sculpting techniques of Michelangelo. Furthermore, his work shows unequivocal influences from science fiction, architecture, oriental Zen gardens and pop culture. The artist moves seamlessly between “high” and “low” art. He demonstrates that the different art forms no longer need be compartmentalised. His entire oeuvre is the result of a synergy between disparate materials and media.

Ervinck is not a slave to art history. He manipulates and isolates elements in order to create his own visual language; filters information from the work of predecessors to then develop his own principles. His work reflects futurism through its search for constant movement. At the same time, he includes aspects of gothic, baroque, romantic and surrealist art.

Henry Moore’s discovery of the hole in sculpture is for Ervinck one of the most significant turning points in the history of sculpture. By deliberately forming a cavity, the backdrop, the surrounding landscape, suddenly plays an active role. This created a new code of conduct that entailed a new visual idiom. Ervinck employs this idiom in his blob sculptures. They play tricks on the eye. The viewer feels the need to approach the sculptures, disappear into the cavities and to touch them in order to “see” them.

Making art signifies integrating oneself into the world of concrete action, of doing what others cannot. For Ervinck, it is not enough to sketch and develop concepts. As an artist, he feels the need to lift sculpture to a new level by employing the processes he invented himself.

IV

Ervinck’s abstract, alien-like creations are the result of an amalgamation of the substantive roots with new technologies and the continual investigation and purification of line and form. The artist draws in elements from a huge visual arsenal and blends them together to concoct new forms.

The sculptures possess aesthetic values within their own dynamic and freedom. They offer an amusing look at who we are.

It is not necessary to attribute a unique meaning to Ervinck's work. The artist constantly breaks down the barriers of reality with his structures and with the colours he uses. He challenges the viewer to question and to reinterpret his or her own perceptions. His poetic designs transport us to another dimension, where the imagination is given free rein. The actuality and the implausibility of Ervinck's fantasy world – with its links to computer games and futuristic tropes – merge together. Viewers become sunk in thought; feel alienated from themselves and their surroundings. The experience is an emotional one, dominated by a sense of wonder.

V

With regard to interdisciplinarity, Ervinck unites art and science in his work. The importance he places on this crossover results in innovative practices and spectacular designs. For example, Ervinck worked in partnership with scientists to develop his two series *human mutations* and *plant mutations*, in order to add an extra dimension to both content and form.

Although the role of the artist may seem to be diametrically opposed to that of the scientist, the two disciplines can challenge each other. When such a confrontation occurs, reality is hit by the dazzling power of possibility. For the realisation of *AGRIEBORZ*, for example, Ervinck immersed himself in drawings from medical textbooks and in discussions with Dr Delaere, NTE doctor and face and neck surgeon. A “screaming” larynx emerges from a chaotic tangle of veins, nerves and muscles. Ervinck depicts the minutest details of both the interior and exterior of this piece. Since this organic tissue can never be part of a functioning body, it does not seem to fully exist and remains hovering in the domain of the virtual.

VI

Ervinck stands at the helm of his universe but is not interested in the outward theatre of it. He is constantly moving forward, expanding his oeuvre and reframing his concepts.

He is an open-minded artist for whom technology cannot evolve fast enough. The continuous search for the unknown and the inaccessible is simultaneously intriguing and terrifying. These elements constitute the challenge within his artistic creative process, which consists of tirelessly developing new techniques to explore and depict the future.

The clash between the apocalyptic and the mundane is what makes Ervinck's fantastic hybrid creatures so powerful and dynamic. He balances the energies of “the beauty and the beast” in each of his works so that the two are inseparable and all the more compelling for it.

ⁱ Freddy Decreus, ‘Van Kafka's *Gedaanteverwisseling* (1915) tot Nick Ervincks *EROMPRI* (2015)’ in: *GNI-RI nov 2015*, Cassochrome, 2015, p. 6-9.