

A world in mutation

Nick Ervinck

The works that Nick Ervinck presents in this magnificent archaeological museum in Rodez will certainly not go unnoticed. Although they clearly start from a conversation with the past, they mainly problematise the present and the future as aspects of our lives that have lost their natural character. While the museum has always been a place where a consensus was created about our Western tradition and history, this artist questions what is happening today, right before our eyes, in the whole world under the form of profound processes of mutation and transformation. Or to put it more succinctly, all the artistic potential that this artist holds is shaking up essential features of traditional humanity.

On level 3, where the guided tour starts, Nick Ervinck presents ESAVOBOR, a sculpture full of museum and historical references. At first sight, this extraordinary composition refers to broken fragments of a Roman vase that can be put back together again. One wonders, of course, if the vase will ever be seen in a fully restored state, knowing very well that the archaeologist in us feels it is his sacred duty to stage and interpret the past as accurately as possible. Such a situation warns us in any case that for many moments of our lives we are doomed to live with worlds of incompleteness in a state of constant reconstruction, a world that the artist immediately recognises as his own. But at the same time it is clear that behind the shards a robot or a transformer can appear, waiting for the right moment to metamorphose and strike unexpectedly. What we are confronted with here is a phase of liminal consciousness, of a possible and therefore always threatening transition, i.e. an uninterrupted presence and tension of the new and the unexpected. Does a transformer like this simply represent the eternal transitions that we as humans are experiencing, or should we rather ask ourselves how many unknown worlds and undiscovered energy fields we as upgraded hominids will one day travel to?

A consequence of such a contradiction can be seen further on in EDHOLP, a skull that might as well be part of a cabinet of curiosities. This ambiguous skull is illuminated by an internal fire, but is heavily damaged on the underside. Here too, the question arises as to the possible origin of this relic: is EDHOLP an archaeological find, the result of an archaic ritual murder, a form from a parallel world or the remains of a mutant? In any case, EDHOLP is a radical challenge to our desire to understand everything and yet be able to place this disorienting artefact in a taxonomically ordered world. We can now think of this bizarre head as a hybrid, demonic or grotesque outgrowth, but these designations do not really solve the problem. The infinite possibilities of 3D printing in the new bioprinting technology already show that organ printing can work as a means of improving the species, making the human condition less vulnerable and thus surviving the kind of life we did not ask for. The question, of course, is to what extent Eros will ever allow us to disrupt our old desire for fusion with others and to what extent Thanatos will continue to be kind to the autonomous individual in his new isolation. How long will we even continue to think and philosophise in such terms, concepts that have shaped our thinking itself? In the near future, will our bio-printed bodies make our old status as human beings happier or more depressed, emotionless or, on the contrary, always cheerful and boosted? And how soon will we be able to go through life with a techno-version of the amygdala, temporal lobe or prefrontal cortex?

One floor down, the viewer will find the triptych ANONIVES, ANONOVES and ANONAVES, a refined brickwork that is experienced as an architecture of moving lines, framed here as if they were paintings. They are reminiscent of the imagination that the artist fed in the early 2000s with building games such as Simcity, with the puzzle pieces of the Tetris game and the games with pixels. These dynamic lines show how the old Roman mosaic tiles in Room 6 are pulled into a new exchange of building blocks, as smooth as the waves of the sea. While bricks are normally seen as part of a rigid, robust and reliable world, here you experience an alienating form of life that completely changes our view of the world. A brick sculpture sets itself in motion, what has always been experienced as solid takes on a dynamic impulse, what has always been a 'box' now becomes a 'blob'.

The delicate drawing processes from LINE MUTATION, an artistic project close to the artist's heart, are now also evoked in all their finesse in order to form a flowing landscape. However, these experiments with the dynamic line in this kind of brick drawing should not make us forget that the mosaic stones of classical antiquity were also the subject of a long artistic research into innovative materials and techniques.

The dynamic triptych has also found its place between two more anthropomorphic figures, RACHT and LAPIRSUB, a reference to the delicate bust of Julius Caesar in room 6 and the fascinating iron helmet in room 10.

The sight of RACHT is an enigma, for it is not clear whether this is a new god, hero or knight. Does this character fit particularly well into a Gallo-Roman context, or is it rather reminiscent of Viking culture? Distortion of the past in the hands of the artist who manipulates time and place at will, a tradition in full mutation? Maybe RACHT is also the guardian of an ineffable religious experience or the guardian of forbidden rituals? Certainly he falls prey to emptiness and silence, because essential parts of the image remain unfinished. So, a dream image, or a transitional figure guarding thresholds, between past and present, body and mind, artist and scientist?

LAPIRSUB, a sculpture a few metres away, further heightens this ambiguity. Like one of the many cyborg warriors created by Ervinck, this sculpture assumes the imposing and problematic character of many of his new busts. Often inspired by the imagination of science fiction and modern manga, these cyborgs still emanate aspects of robots, aliens and monsters, a sweet reminder and also homage to an artist like H.R. Giger. But also forms borrowed from Inca and Mayan masks and jewels can be found on the hundred or so fragments that make up this sculpture, each of which has been printed and sanded by hand. LAPIRSUB consists of a mutated mechanical skeleton held together by rusty steel veins, protected by a shiny yellow armour, one of many complex compositions resulting from the use of the latest computer software and 3D printing techniques. Again, a confused and alienating human image that casts deep doubt on our everyday experiences?

Finally, you will also meet the artist in the museum courtyard, where GARZGRIOLEJIF, a large relief (120 x 240 cm) plays a stunning game with the ornamental lines of the many stone artefacts that adorn the beautiful Jouéry courtyard. Abstract as this work is, one can certainly recognise a drawing in it, a visualisation that exudes movement and reminds one of the Big Bang. Lines emerge and decay, in search of a path that, no matter what, leads to our earthly existence. Thus, they draw attention to the absolute changeability of the line as a geometric and epistemological process, and thus also to absolute uncertainty and indeterminacy as an existential trajectory. Such lines undeniably belong to an artist who from the beginning of his career has wanted to create intermediate worlds, interfaces between craft and technology, between digital design and physical presence. Lines mutate, just like the smallest cell structures and man's greatest dreams and desires.

What remains to be discovered and revealed are the principles at work, here and elsewhere, in all these energy fields, in all these nano- and macro-dimensions!

Does the art of Nick Ervinck therefore speak of the birth of a new type of human being who wants to become transhuman and live the mutation to the full? In any case, the current pandemic has made it clear that the old man will have a hard time surviving on his own, as disaster after disaster comes upon him. EDHOLP shows that Nick Ervinck's sculptures on the themes SKIN MUTATION, PLANT MUTATION and HUMAN MUTATION do not exclude a scientific future.