

Leuven, 11th of March 2015

PETER BUGGENHOUT

12.03.2015 >< 31.05.2015



INTRODUCTION

Nothing is what it seems in the universe of Peter Buggenhout (1963, Ghent). At first sight, his works appear to be random piles of materials, but are in fact carefully composed chaos. They give you the impression that Buggenhout has turned his sculptures inside out. They are raw and dilapidated, both attractive and repulsive. The result is a delicate and disquieting beauty.

Buggenhout makes colossal installations and sculptures on plinths. He uses construction waste, packaging materials, house dust, sheets of plastic, frayed textiles, entrails, horsehair and blood. This makes his works anonymous and indefinable. The installations by Peter Buggenhout are a mirror of the complex world around us. His rough sculptures sometimes look like the ruins left after devastations or archaeological remains.

“This is what I aim to do: I want to tread on the world’s tail”

After touring international exhibitions, M is presenting the first large-scale introduction to Peter Buggenhout in his homeland. The exhibition comprises a retrospective of his work from the 1990s until the present day. M is bringing together his three series – Mont Ventoux, Gorgo & The Blind Leading The Blind – with a total selection of about thirty works. The exhibition featured both smaller works on plinths and room-filling dust formations, as well as recent work with coloured elements.

This exhibition is being organised at M in the context of a series of large-scale monograph exhibitions that offer a platform to important Belgian artists, such as Jan Vercruyse, Philippe Van Snick, Dirk Braeckman, Geert Goiris and Patrick Van Caekenbergh.

Curator: Eva Wittocx

PETER BUGGENHOUT: BIOGRAPY

Peter Buggenhout (°1963, Dendermonde) lives and works in Ghent. About fifteen years ago, he stopped painting and divested himself of the limitations of canvas. Since then, he has been creating installations made of abject materials. His work is detached from every form of representation. This approach makes his sculptures autonomous.

Buggenhout has exhibited at internationally renowned art platforms such as MoMA/PS1 (New York), the Taipei Biennial, Maison Rouge (Paris), Palais de Tokyo (Paris), Barbara Gladstone (New York), Frankfurter Kunstverein, Kunstverein Hannover, Art Unlimited Basel, De Pont Tilburg, Herzliya Biennial Israel, the Saatchi Gallery (London). In Belgium, his work has been featured at Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens Deurle, Be-Part Waregem, TRACK in Ghent, Bruges and De Centrale in Brussels. He is represented by gallery Konrad Fischer Düsseldorf-Berlin and Laurent Godin Paris.

ARTISTIC PROJECT

Peter Buggenhout transforms waste, dust and entrails into installations of various sizes – from colossal to smaller-scale works. He is greedy and pulls out all the stops in order to squeeze all the richness of the world around us into his works. He abandons all simplicity and decisively opts for complexity and detail. In this sense, he might be considered a late Romantic. As a reaction to 18th-century rationalism, Romanticism emphasised that it is impossible to grasp the whole world with the human spirit.

“I am ambitious and greedy. I want to encompass the whole world with my work. Not just to cover one or two facets, but everything. I actually try to take everything around me – from the leaves on the trees in the garden around my studio to the monumental cranes in Ghent harbour nearby – and squeeze it into my work somehow, to produce the same wealth of impressions, feelings and possible reflections you have when you walk around somewhere, musing or lounging on the couch at home. I try to fit all the possible impressions that might occur simultaneously into my work.”

Peter Buggenhout strives to make the object completely autonomous and to strip it of all reference to other things. For example, he effaces any symbolism in his works by covering them with dust. He shares this pursuit of distilled formal language with the Minimal Art artists of the mid-1960s. He considers his work to be an offshoot of this tradition, but instead of resulting in geometrical formal language, his works are complex, ungraspable constructions.

“In their own turn, Minimal Art artists minimized themselves to such an extent that they started producing a predictable, manageable language of lines and points. In a certain sense, what I do might be considered an offshoot or continuation of that project. I aim to abandon the symbol and produce analogue work.”

TEXTURE AND MATERIALS

Peter Buggenhout imposes no limitations on his choice of materials. This freedom allows him to shape the form exactly as he wants. Construction waste, packaging materials, house dust, sheets of plastic, frayed textiles, entrails, horsehair or blood are the glue that hold his works together. These are things that have no meaning. He succeeds in making these unrecognisable and formless materials communicate with one another. He often works on ten or fifteen pieces at the same time. Elements from one work are sometimes used in another until the work exists independently of the others.

"I have no idea what the inherent meaning of a particular material or object is supposed to be. Things mean nothing. We imbue them with meaning because we are incapable of dealing with them otherwise. Nevertheless, every object is empty. I make sculptures without direct references and pursue the total autonomy of the object... This is an immense challenge that is becoming increasingly difficult. When I make the hundredth 'The Blind Leading The Blind' piece, it will unavoidably refer to the 99 works that preceded it. I try to eschew these references by making each piece as different as possible."

The artist gradually develops a multi-layered approach as a result of which you cannot grasp or remember the works. What you see will only remain the same momentarily, and will always change over time.

PERSPECTIVE

The freedom that Peter Buggenhout takes in his creative process is also granted entirely to the viewer. It is thus impossible to remember his sculptures. As a viewer, you feel as though you are unable to contextualise the work. The only remaining impression is a vague memory, such as for example, an amorphous thing covered with dust.

Scale is also relative to him. He makes no distinction between big or small, the inside or the outside. The perspective does change, however. Consequently, the smaller sculptures affect your eyes, while the larger works have a more physical effect, on the body.

"I do not express anything fundamentally different in the smaller works than in the larger ones. The only difference is that the larger works have a more physical impact and that the smaller works are processed more mentally. A sculpture that you can walk around offers the viewer a different perspective than a monumental sculpture that you just have to stand in front of."

Buggenhout also extends the autonomy of the object and the titles into the exhibition rooms at M. Each room is an exhibition-within-the-exhibition. Moreover, he blends the three series in one single room. The labyrinthine form and the display cases invite the viewer to move between the works and engage in a relationship with them.

“All things are empty, but there is nothing without content... If this particular work is displayed beside other artworks, it will evoke different content than when it is in my studio.”

THREE SERIES

Peter Buggenhout divides his work into three series with the overarching titles *Mont Ventoux*, *Gorgo* and *The Blind Leading The Blind*. These titles balance between mythology, art history and biblical and literary references. They appear to contain a deeper meaning, but every association between the title and work is completely open. Rather than clarifications, they are each little portions of Buggenhout's philosophy. They tell you what the artist was thinking at a certain point, but they do not anticipate the works in each series.

‘The series and their titles refer to the impossibility of ever really understanding anything, and to the immense complexity of our surroundings. These are not explanatory titles: they allude to a kind of practical philosophical approach to my perspective on things.’

The irony of surveyability: Mont Ventoux

In the mid-1990s, Buggenhout made his first sculptures with cows' stomachs and horse intestines. Entrails determine our bodies from the inside out, but Buggenhout switches this around. He drapes the stomachs and intestines over objects and assemblages. The sculptures have clefts and holes, outsides and backsides that do not contain anything. He named the series *Mont Ventoux*, a reference to the letter 'Ascent of Mont Ventoux' by Petrarch. Petrarch thought that he could survey and control the whole world from atop the mountain. According to Buggenhout, this domination is a deception: it is impossible to survey anything when you are in the midst of it.

Petrified reality: Gorgo

The title of the second series, the *Gorgo* sculptures, refers to the mythological Gorgon or Medusa who turns people to stone with her terrible and pitiless appearance. Buggenhout drenches a variety of materials in pigs' blood and constructs multi-layered works. The result is an amorphous lump in which you cannot identify any of the separate elements. This method is inspired by his fascination with the Nboli statues from Mali and Togo. During rituals and ceremonies, new layers are added to these statues. Consequently, the original meaning is lost, while their form and the meanings associated with them expand.

Delicate dust formations: The Blind Leading the Blind

Buggenhout has been working on the series *The Blind Leading The Blind* since 2000. He piles up a variety of different materials and then covers them with house dust. These assemblages grow from the inside out in a sequence of materials and dust. At first sight, the works appear to be very chaotic, but you gradually descry details and structures. And yet there is no direction to these works because the more you look, the less you understand. Just like the blind men in the painting *The Blind Leading the Blind* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525/1530-1569), according to Buggenhout no-one knows where they came from or where they are going.

Detachment is impossible in the last room of the exhibition. This room-filling installation absorbs you and contrasts with the stark, white museum space. It is like architecture within the architecture of the museum. The work looks like an abandoned float made of discarded industrial materials under a thick layer of house dust. The work unfolds in the space, but the viewer is unable to grasp its form.

COLOURFUL EVOLUTION

"My method is relatively consistent. On the other hand, each work has to be different from the many others than preceded it, and has to disengage from them. To this end, I strive to use all expressive means. For example, over the past few years I have started using colour. At first, my works were more organic, but I have since added more linear and industrial elements."

Peter Buggenhout explores new avenues and presents them at M. For example, Room 26 features a recent work from the *On Hold*-series (2014). To make this piece, he used old and unusable bouncy castles. He incorporates the colourful pieces into the structures of discarded material and produces a new kind of menacing vulnerability.

PUBLICATION

The book *"We did it before, we will do it again"* is being published in conjunction with the exhibition (Jnf Editions/Éditions de l'amateur Publishers). This publication juxtaposes Buggenhout's work with sources of inspiration that were of great importance to his work. In addition to essays by Selen Ansen and William L. Rathje, the book contains an extended interview with curator Eva Wittocx and passages of text by Peter Buggenhout.

We did it before, we will do it again.

Uitg. Jnf Editions/Éditions de l'amateur

200 illustrations, 349 p., 48 euro

Texts: French/English

LIST OF EXPOSED WORKS

ROOM 21

Eskimo Blues II, 1999
Opeten, 2000
Mont Ventoux #3, 2009
Mont Ventoux #4, 2009
Mont Ventoux #8, 2013

ROOM 23

The Blind Leading The Blind #68, 2015
The Blind Leading The Blind #67, 2014

ROOM 24

The Blind Leading The Blind #31, 2009
The Blind Leading The Blind #28, 2009
Gorgo #26, 2012
Gorgo #25, 2012
Gorgo #27, 2012

ROOM 25

The Blind Leading The Blind #39, 2010
Gorgo #32, 2013
The Blind Leading The Blind #64
Gorgo #2, 2005
Mont Ventoux #10
Mont Ventoux #6.1, 2010-2014
Gorgo #17, 2009
The Blind Leading The Blind #7, 2005
Mont Ventoux #14
Mont Ventoux #11, 2014
Gorgo #29, 2013

ROOM 26

On Hold #1, 2014

ROOM 27

The Blind Leading The Blind #65, 2014

EXPOSITION AT BONNEFANTENMUSEUM

Starting on 03.14.2015, Peter Buggenhout shows two large scale installations from 'The Blind Leading The Blind' series at the [Bonrefantenmuseum](#) in Maastricht. These works were previously at Gladstone Gallery New York (2014) and at the Taipei Biennale (2014).

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

OPEN

Monday > Sunday 11:00 >< 18:00

Thursday 11:00 >< 22:00

Wednesday closed

TICKETS

	Tickets reception desk	Online tickets (°)
+ 26 year	€12*	€9*
+ 26 year & concessions	€10*	€7*
13-25 year	€5	€3
0 - 12 year	free	free

*audio tour included | (°) + € 1,50 per reservation

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PRESS IMAGES

Can be downloaded from the online press room of M – Museum Leuven

<http://mleuven.prezly.com>

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