**Attachment**

**Interview Athos Burez**

**Your first solo exhibition in the MAS in Antwerp. How do you feel about the fact of being able to do this?**

It is a great honour for me. My first solo exhibition in Antwerp, with carte blanche about a theme, and then on such a great scale? That is a bit of dream for every photographer I would think. Mostly I have exhibited on a smaller scale, because on the one hand I truly love that intimacy, but on the other hand, I was now ready for going big with great attention to small details.

It also took a few months for it to sink into me about just how big this actually was becoming. At the start, I had proposed some 30 images, but ultimately it has become 80 works or so. It is not only that I wanted to flesh out and test as many ideas as possible, but also because the entire promenade of the MAS is an enormous surface to fill in of course. Thus I have lots of space to go very broad with the 'Baroque' theme, through which there is indeed hopefully now something that speaks to everyone in the show. The idea that more than a half of a million people per year pass through there and to go see it 'out of necessity' is indeed quite exciting.

**Are you pleased with the result?**

The exhibition has caused me quite a bit of stress, to be honest. The exhibition is almost entirely built up around new images that were especially created for it. With so many shoots in the planning, it was also thrilling how all of it would evolve.

I have also really taken the time for it. I have scarcely accepted any other projects during the six months before the opening. It was important for me that I could focus on it completely without many distractions. In this way I could experiment as much as possible with techniques or set-ups. That appears to have been a good choice, because I have tested an enormous amount, and there were many images scrapped. However, because I freed up the time for it, I could keep working on failed still lifes and try out other variations of that until it ultimately was good. Just in the last few months, when all images were combined, did I see that it had come together well. And now that it is actually hanging on the walls, I am also very pleased with the result.

**It has been said sometimes that your photos feel 'Baroque'. Does it then feel like a logical request for you to do this exhibition?**

I understand the association well, however, I still also find it funny that I am compared with it so much. I think that the Baroque is also such a very rich period of style with a startling number of facets that you can indeed find a link there nearly everywhere. It was the period that was totally invested in art and in which the style also transcended the pure 'art' and strongly influenced daily life. It was also clearly present in the architecture on the streets, it was everywhere. Such an explosion of colour, form and drama, no? That is simply the ideal source of inspiration to go create things yourself.

**How have you approached translating the 'Baroque' into images? What can people expect?**

First of all, I have subdivided 'Baroque' into a few clearly defined categories, such as portraits, still lifes, landscape, animals and interiors in order to be able to do some real research there. I didn't want to focus on a single, determined theme so as not to limit myself too much and to be able to change it up as much as possible.

Within each theme I then begin to pin down ideas that are related to well-known paintings or themes that frequently return. I have given my own artistic touch there through searching for a contemporary complement to this. That often resulted in a classic-looking image with subtle contemporary details or a surrealistic effect. At one point it is already much more explicitly contemporary than others, and I did not enjoy playing too much with the boundaries.

**Which photos are your personal favourites?**

I am very pleased with a few of the still lifes, such as the hanging wild hare where mushrooms and flowers are growing out of its belly, which are then being eaten up by birds. Primarily I enjoy the still lifes because there was less pressure on time than with the portraits on location with a model.

With the still lifes, you can really work through it until everything is just as you have imagined. Namely, you can let them be if it also does not work and later adjust with new ideas or inspirations. For the image of the hare, I worked with a very pleasant taxidermist, Viktor Leestmans. That was very fine collaboration. I really like it when I have an idea that I would not be able to puzzle together myself, but for which I find someone such as Viktor who has just as much passion for the tinkering around with and the installing of the objects. An additional partner also helps against tunnel vision for your work, which is where you sometimes end up if you work alone.

I also really enjoyed making the female Bacchus. With that image I had less control because you are working with so many figures simultaneously. Then you must also dare to allow the whole thing to play along and hope that everyone finds himself in his character. If that works and everyone makes a true effort, that is wonderful to see.

That is also the reason why I like working with performance artists, actors or dancers. It is not self-evident that as a model, it also always demands combining some acting talent and the graceful postures along with the other characters. And, believability is naturally one of the most important elements in order obtain an image that works.