



ABBAZIA DI
SAN GIORGIO
MAGGIORE
BENEDICTI
CLAUSTRA
ONLUS



La Biennale di Venezia

60. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Eventi Collaterali

BERLINDE DE BRUYCKERE

CITY OF REFUGE III



Press Release

Abbazia di San Giorgio Maggiore
20 April – 24 November 2024

Collateral Event of the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia
Curatorial Team: Carmelo A. Grasso, Ory Dessau, Peter Buggenhout

Opening 20 April 2024, an exhibition of new works by Belgian artist Berlinde De Bruyckere has been specifically conceived for the sacred spaces of the Abbazia di San Giorgio Maggiore, the 16th-century Benedictine church located on the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice and one of the city's foremost examples of Palladian architecture. Titled 'City of Refuge III', the presentation has been realized in collaboration with the Benedicti Claustra Onlus—the non-profit branch of the Benedictine Community—and its Director, Carmelo A. Grasso, who alongside Ory Dessau and Peter Buggenhout, forms the curatorial team.

Oscillating between transcendence and material immanence, 'City of Refuge III' is based on three new groups of works by De Bruyckere which uniquely respond to the church's monumental architecture, function, symbolism and history. On view will be an installation of Arcangeli sculptures in the nave and side aisles, a large-scale installation in the church's Sacristy and sculptural wall-vitrine works in the hallway of the Monastery's Gallery. Taking its title from a Nick Cave song of the same name, 'City of Refuge III' is the third in a series of exhibitions by the artist thematizing art as a place of sanctuary and shelter, reinforced here by the venue's spiritual intensity.

In 2013, De Bruyckere was selected to represent Belgium at the 55th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia where, in collaboration with Nobel laureate J.M. Coetzee, she unveiled her monumental, site-specific work 'Kreupelhout – Cripplewood'. Throughout her practice, De Bruyckere has rendered hybrid forms with human, animal and organic features. Drawing from the legacies of the European Old Masters, the Flemish Renaissance, Christian iconography, as well as mythology and cultural lore, the artist layers existing histories with new narratives suggested by current events to create a psychological terrain of

pathos, tenderness and unease. Investigating the dualities of love and suffering, danger and protection, life and death, her works surpass theological connotations, transferring them to the realm of the universal and profane.

About the exhibition

The first group of works occupying the Basilica highlights the archetype of the archangel appearing as a veiled, hybrid figure, juxtaposing the human with the divine, the creatural or earthly with the celestial, and the temporal with the eternal. It consists of an installation of Arcangeli, each of them emerging from a modular sculptural cluster composed of an irregular, pillar-like pedestal with a silver patina, a tilted mirrored screen multiplying the figure of the archangel and the surroundings, and a monumental banner deepening the ritualistic aspect of the setting and the works.

In the Sacristy, De Bruyckere displays an installation of metal welding tables with felled or dead tree trunks cast in wax on and around them. The installation conveys a post-apocalyptic scenario in which fragments of dead nature undergo further congelation, while opening up a redemptive horizon of rejuvenation and rebirth, lending the situation the potential of growth. Interfacing with the woodwork of the Sacristy, the tree installation provides a precarious environment for the painting on the altar by Giuseppe Porta (Salviati) of Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem.

A third group of sculptures in the Monastery's Gallery derives from the exceptional carvings of the 16th-century Flemish woodcarver Albert van den Brulle, who decorated the Basilica's Choir with walnut bas-reliefs portraying the life of Saint Benedict. De Bruyckere has responded to these 16th-century elements by mounting a sequence of new wall-vitrines in which motifs from van den Brulle's bas-reliefs have been revived and fossilized for a present day context.

Lastly, and also in the Monastery's Gallery, the presentation includes recent works from the artist's oeuvre, giving further context to the new works produced for this exhibition, including examples from De Bruyckere's sculptural series *Anderlecht* and collages from De Bruyckere's *It almost seemed a lily* series.

About the artist

Berlinde De Bruyckere was born in Ghent, Belgium in 1964, where she currently lives and works. Since her first exhibition in the mid-1980s, De Bruyckere's sculptures and drawings have been the subject of numerous exhibitions in major institutions worldwide. These include the current exhibition 'No Life Lost' at Artipelag, Gustavsberg, SE, as well as recent solo shows 'Crossing a Bridge on Fire' MAC / CCB, Lisbon, PT (2023); 'City of Refuge II', Diözesanmuseum, Freising, DE (2023); 'City of Refuge I', La Commanderie de Peyrassol, Flassans-sur-Issole, FR (2023); 'PEL / Becoming the figure', Arp Museum, Remagen, DE (2022); 'Plunder / Ekphrasis', MO.CO. Montpellier, FR (2022); 'Engelenkeel', Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, NL (2021); 'Berlinde De Bruyckere', Middelheimmuseum, Antwerp, Belgium (2020); 'ALETHEIA', Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy (2019); 'It almost seemed a lily', HVB, Mechelen, BE (2018); 'Embalmed', Kunsthall Aarhus, DK (2017); 'Suture', Leopold Museum, Vienna, AT (2016); 'The Embalmer', Kunstraum Dornbirn, AT and Kunsthaus Bregenz, AT (2015).

About the Abbazia di San Giorgio Maggiore - Benedicti Clastra Onlus

The Benedicti Clastra Onlus, the non-profit branch of the Benedictine Community of Abbazia di San Giorgio Maggiore, was born in 2012 from the desire of Benedictine monks to promote and recover a dialogue between Church and Contemporary Art through collaborations and site-specific projects for evangelization and the growth of an authentic humanism.

The Benedictine Community is led by the Abbot Dom Stefano Visintin o.s.b.

Director of the Benedicti Clastra Onlus and Institutional Curator of each project is Carmelo A. Grasso.

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Caption and courtesy information:

Berlinde De Bruyckere
Arcangelo II (San Giorgio), 2023-2024
(work in progress)
2024
Wax, animal hair, silicone, iron, epoxy
251 x 82 x 105 cm
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
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Photo: Mirjam Devriendt