

PRESS RELEASE

18.05 - 30.06.2017

JAN FABRE

GOLD AND BLOOD (SCULPTURES AND DRAWINGS)

24, RUE DU VIEUX-BILLARD

OPENING 18.05 – 18H

"In the ancient times of Rhameses and Thutmes, superstition interfered: the image of the world and its diurnal revolution was seen in the rolling sphere; and the Beetle received divine honours: it is the sacred Beetle of modern naturalists, in remembrance of its former glory. »

- Jean-Henri Fabre, *Souvenirs entomologiques*, Fifth series, Introduction, Paris, 1897.

Art Bärtschi & Cie is pleased to present *Gold and Blood (Sculptures and Drawings)*, the third solo exhibition of Belgian artist **Jan Fabre** at the gallery.

Fascinated by the work of French entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre (1823-1915), Jan Fabre articulates his work around a typology where Man and animal merge in a common field of a universal language. The spiritual connotation of gold brings back their forgotten glory and gives the whole a sacred entomology: under the artist's gesture, they obtain a certain immunity.

By replaying the codes of their presentation, these sculptures obtain a new autonomy by successive off-centering. In the gallery space, two beetles are surmounted by a bishop's staff and a tree of life (or knowledge). Symbolically, the first is strong enough to support the weak, hooked to catch those who get lost and pointed to prick those who hesitate. The beetle works like art, a spiritual guide in the service of Humanity towards total consciousness. Jan Fabre takes up religious iconography, composed of golden and solemn figures that demand respect and faith in order to better integrate the spectator in his own spiritual journey.

A salamander utters a phrase that evokes transmission through the ages ("From another side of time"). An owl, a nocturnal and solitary animal (potential personification of Jan Fabre), makes an appeal to the artist's predecessors ("Hey, what a pleasant madness!"). These two sculptures allow the exhibition to be realised through horizontal and vertical time. One bas-relief shows a pigeon worshipper, and the inscription it bears ('Flemish Artist') fixes its creator in the majestic footsteps of those who wore this cult status before him. Symbolically presented as the guardian of an ancestral knowledge, the artist is also the bearer of a sacred skill. The dwarf parrot, as Jan Fabre's second alter ego, surpasses by its status the condition of its terrestrial equivalent: it does not repeat itself. Finally, Marcel Broodthaers looks at René Magritte in an order of precedence where the admirer contemplates the admired. But in the possible world of sacred parrots, which one precedes which one?

The drawings in the series *My body, my blood, my landscape*, produced between 1978 and 1999, which recall a famous performance in which the artist slashed his body with a razor blade and used his blood to write on the paper, allow the exhibition to reflect real time. Blood possesses a magical, mystical substance, symbol of crucifixion and resurrection, but also the purifier of the human body. Blood, like art, is life. By using his own blood, the artist marks his devotion to art. Starting from the figure of the artist and operating by successive eccentricities, *Gold and Blood (Sculptures and Drawings)* shows us a metaphysical proposal that unfolds the different times and as many moments of identity construction.

Jan Fabre (1958) was born in Antwerp, Belgium, where he lives and works. An artist known for his multidisciplinary work (as a visual artist, performer, playwright and author), he has occupied a prominent place in the international contemporary art scene for more than 35 years. He has carried out permanent public works on important historical sites, such as in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Antwerp with *L'homme qui porte la croix*, in 2015. He was the first artist to be the subject of a major exhibition during his lifetime at the Louvre in Paris (with *L'ange de la métamorphose*, in 2008) and at the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg (with *Knight of Despair / Warrior of Beauty*, in 2016).

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