

Press Release

November 18th
December 30th, 2023

Opening
Saturday, November 18th
from 11am to 8pm

Easter Eggs Laurent Le Deunff

The sculptures featured in the exhibition *Easter Eggs* are totem-like forms, made up of a combination of unexpected objects, both natural and cultural, that the artist has put together with a great sense of freedom. On the walls hang monumental charcoal drawings from the "Brouillard" [Fog] series, inspired by cartoon explosions. These drawings are made up of a misty fog, in an almost *sfumato* style, reminiscent of the skies in Renaissance paintings, combined with graphic and typographic elements such as commas and brackets.

Within this exhibition, two opposing forces are at work: on the one hand, a centripetal force in the sculptures, where the forms are centered around an axis, and on the other, a centrifugal force in the explosion drawings, where the elements expand and disperse out of frame.

Laetitia Chauvin: Do you do preparatory sketches for your sculptures? As you sculpt, are you guided by your own inspiration or by the way the wood is formed and its different aspects?

Laurent Le Deunff: Recently, I've been doing more and more sketches for my sculptures and installations, but this act has more to do with the simple pleasure of drawing and the freedom to explore different possibilities than the need to plan out a particular sculpture.

I often compare wood sculpture with pencil drawing: the log is like a blank page, a support that is constrained by its format, but where anything remains possible. A log or a section of tree trunk is not sterile in nature, it has already been part of a living thing, and within, it carries an awareness of life.

During the sculpting process, the grain of the wood, the knots and the beginnings of branches, as well as the size of the block obviously have a bearing on the shape the sculpture will take.

LC: Should we be able to perceive a kind of rebus in these sculptures? Obviously, the viewer is drawn in by a process of montage involving the imagination: are you trying to produce the same kinds of unconscious association sought by the Surrealists with their exquisite corpses?

LLD: I have no intention of telling a specific story with this series of sculptures; I'm just trying to create exquisite corpses with logs and by invoking other works or styles through the use of imagination. I'm inspired by artists who regularly work with wood such as Stephan Balkenhol, Constantin Brancusi, Claudia Comte or Martin Puryear... to name but a few, as well as, and above all, by forms seen on chainsaw sculpture competition websites and various curios and objects from the world of handicraft or the so-called vernacular practices.

In a similar way to the Surrealists with their folded sheets of paper, I use chalk to divide the block of wood into three equal parts. I begin by working on one end, the resulting shape leads to a second and so on until the sculpture is finished. What motivates me with this technique is knowing how it starts, but never how it will end up.

LC: These sculptures obviously bear a certain resemblance to the Native American totem poles of the North-West (Alaska, British Columbia, etc.) and moreover you also spent some time in Vancouver and on Victoria island. Did memories of this period inspire you while sculpting these "totems"?

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LLD: Of course, it would be difficult not to think of Native American totem poles when you see my own vertical sculptures, made up of superimposed figures. This however wasn't done intentionally. And yet, there is perhaps something spiritual in these forms: I never feel alone when I'm working in my studio; it's as if I were surrounded by ghosts. This series is a means of summoning them and lending them material and visual form.

LC: *Production methods and supply chains have always been an important factor in the creation of your sculptures. As far as possible, you favor locally sourced materials, encounters with artisans, YouTube tutorials, studio work and D.I.Y. This translates into research into the simplest, most natural, direct and meaningful of forms. Where did you find the materials used in this series of sculptures?*

LLD: One of the things I like most about working with wood is the relative economy of means. It's important to me to be able to work with short chains of supply, with local tree species that I can find within a limited perimeter. Since my workshop is in the South-West of France and my parents live in the country, it's fairly easy for me to get hold of various types of wood. For the larger works, I call upon an artist friend, Christophe Doucet, who used to be a forester, and I purchase the rarer wood types from a retired fellow who lives in Brittany and who I met through an online mail order site. The type of wood I use is very important in terms of color, hardness and shape, which vary from one species to another. Moreover, the title of each work is given according to the type of wood used. My eventual aim is to produce a sculpture in each existing type of wood, even if that involves a lot of travelling to find the raw materials.

LC: *On the walls of the gallery space, we find large-format drawings of cartoon explosions. What is it about these comic explosions that fascinates you so much? Is it the stylization of catastrophic events a means of distancing oneself, of reducing the disaster to a size the mind finds easier to cope with?*

LLD: It's not really the explosions that fascinate me—in my mind, these drawings are more like clouds—but rather the way they are represented in cartoons. I find them by freeze-framing. I carefully go through a sequence, second by second, until I find the image I'm looking for. The instants I draw are not necessarily visible when watching the sequence normally, as the time they appear on the screen is very, very short. What interests me is literally the smokescreen effect, the way everything is erased, the interlude, the pause and the way it transforms the narrative.

LC: *Finally, could you tell us what the title Easter Eggs refers to?*

LLD: I chose this title for my installation in the project room because of its analogy with an Easter egg, its position in the gallery and the incongruity of the objects I've chosen to present.

I often play video games with my son, in particular *Red Dead Redemption 2*, a kind of melancholic western that plays on the codes of generic western movies, in an open world, whose every nook and cranny I love exploring. The game involves many "Easter eggs" in the form of secret levels, referenced phrases, concealed objects etc., all hidden away by the game's authors.