

September 7th
October 5th, 2019opening
Saturday, September 7th
from 11 am to 9 pm

Stefan Rinck

To eat or be eaten

press release

On the sculptures of Stefan Rinck

Seemingly unbiased by art history, Stefan Rinck adopts the figurative forms of expression of culturally collective fantasies; but he does not follow conventional gestures of meaning like “Death and the Girl”, “The Puppeteer”, “The Wise Old Owl” or “Apelike Mimesis”. Instead, he reshapes such topoi via the raw force of rendering in stone. In this way, the stone can assert its independence or resistance against the attempt to artistically master it. The language of the stone remains strong and Starck, with a protestant obstinacy. If Luther had sculpted at table instead of talking, the result would have been something like Rinck’s centrepieces.

Rinck’s sculpture achieves numerous abductions, hollow forms and extremist asymmetry, as if he has secured a contractual assurance from the stone that it will keep still for an experiment. One can feel that the stones like to chastely boast with upstretched arms holding the accusatory activist banner “And my atrophy is all your fault!” What a charge all stones hurl at sculptors! Even Michelangelo could only partially do justice to the potential that lies dormant in natural stone. In any case, Rinck’s achievement is that the stone is visibly proud to oppose its status as inanimate matter with a properly erected member. “Eros and Thanatos”, a chef d’oeuvre of Rinck’s concept of gestalt. Formal energy animates the dead stone.

Since La Fontaine’s fables and Lavater’s theory of physiognomy, we are familiar with extreme caricatures where we see meaning in distorsion, order in chaos, and form in the informal. The all-purpose gestalt figures of apes are especially popular for this procedure as the effect of gestures, mimesis and other forms of expression is always based on empathy, the parallel action of imitation. The monkey has been the heraldic beast of all painters since it was assumed that painters imitate nature the way apes imitate humans. In 1990’s, Jörg Immendorff made an ape society in bronze in which the human viewers experience themselves as animal empathizers. It has always been known that dog owners come to resemble their pets. With Immendorff’s panorama of the cultural gestures of chimpanzees/ bonobos (showing as pointing, reading as teaching, gifts as threats, small-talk as saying nothing, etc.) we fulfil the “know thyself” of ancient temple wisdom: we recognize ourselves better in animals than in other members of our own species. Rinck extends this shaping of what comes after by what came before, the self-characterization of humans in terms of their animal origins, adding the necessary sarcasm and the radical thinking of those who got stuck in evolution, the humans. This can certainly be understood as a vision of death: death as the end of any claim to higher development. “Death Vision”, skulls with pyramid-shaped sight rays protruding from the eye sockets, demonstrates this self-revocation by which man seeks to survive beyond death

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in abstraction.

I approve all the more of Master Stefan Rinck who bravely counters the anonymous and collective forces of cultural-religious certainty with his powerless critique and mordant wit. Instead of harnessing age-old cultural and religious modes of expression to his own greater glory, he returns to an anthropological level. This is a proven strategy of self-testing. One asks oneself, for example, how far one could go, as a present day individual, in matching the inventiveness of earlier humans? Would one be capable of achieving the leap from inclined plane to rolling wheel? Today, would we still be able to invent the calendar, weather forecasting or astronomy, could we exorcise evil spirits or construct steam engines? (Quite apart from the fact that as non-specialist individuals, we are unable to understand even today's inventions.) In a similar vein, Rinck asks himself whether a modern individual is capable of activating historical modes of spiritual and intellectual expression. He does this at his own risk, without seeking the shelter of religious or institutional acceptance. His sculptures are quite clearly not awaiting the approval of either priests or critics. They come across as a confident rejection of the showiness of today's rituals for awarding praise and prizes. This is based on the frequently taboo insight that even in today's humans, the entire history of our species' evolution is actively preserved. It is not only in violent act and market competition that atavistic behaviour surfaces. Even in the rapture of love and the intoxication of artistic creativity (as shown by the German Expressionists on their journeys into humanity's past to the so-called primitives) the primal forms of expressive behaviour shine through. Every phylogenesis is an abbreviated ontogenesis, as the connoisseurs of evolution have noted—and Rinck says: everything created by an artist today contains the same spiritual and intellectual developments that manifested themselves in the caves at Lascaux or on Easter Island. This means that every making of a work passes through the history of the quest for expression of a thousand generations. Master Stefan's works show that there is a specific atavism of modernism, both a barbarism of progress and a primitivity of scientific idiom. Precisely these aspects of our behaviour that we believe we have left behind or need to relinquish in the name of progress reveal themselves as being implicated with modernism.

Bazon Brock

Excerpts from the essay in Stefan Rinck's monography published by Lubok Verlag in 2016

Bazon Brock (born in 1936) is a German art theorist and critic, multi-media generalist and artist. He is considered a member of Fluxus. He was a professor of aesthetics at the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg, the University of Applied Arts Vienna and the University of Wuppertal.