

4D – The starting point was to make tangible a falling drop of water. On a title and on an exhibition text.

4D

A: 'What do you think of the title: *paix. tranquillité. oubli.?*'

B: 'It doesn't always have to be weighty. My suggestion would be: *espérance. liberté. congés payés.*'

A&B: (laughter)

B: 'On top of that everyone will forget your trinity and replace it with other things, like: *'radio. pantoufles. Richard Gere.* I also find using French pretentious.'

A: 'I shall give it the title *4D* and dedicate it to you, my fourth dimension.'

Embodied thinking

In *4D* I exhibit works made from what the earth brings forth: red-fired clay; wood worked with wax and turmeric; suspended structures of bronze, copper, brass; laid-down ceramics; sturdy casting clay and objects immersed in it. In their interplay they double, split, mirror, enlarge and shrink themselves. In their movement reduced to immobility they make room for the viewer. The narrow definition of sculpture is to add or to remove volume. Every breath is like sculpting.

In this text I describe a starting point and working processes in response to recurring questions, such as:

Why? and What does it mean?.

In exhibition-making, I want to serve the space where my work can be. I ask myself the question: which intervention can create space? For me, it is a paradox that a work of art as an object *occupies* space (is invasive by definition) and at the same time, by being, *opens up* space and allows to breathe.

When I look around I wonder what constitutes silence/emptiness in all that is (architecture, nature, art, our actions) and what the forms of emptiness/silence could be in that which I see. I recognise it in the work of others when the artist makes decisions (demonstrating a certain determination) and at the same time leaves space open. The work is not shut, leaving room for the viewer's gaze to project and associate, which, to my mind, is a form of generosity. I recognize it in the work of people near me, for this reason the nickname of one friend is 'ma parabole généreuse'. He doesn't quite know how to respond to this, but it is the greatest compliment imaginable in a noisy world.

For this exhibition, I made an installation that consists of bronze sheets. The starting point was to make a platform on to which drops would fall. Water would be absorbed by strings that would rest in and on the platform at night. During the day, the strings could be lifted and the water begin to drop.

I still plan to make this installation but it is only by doing, that I see where to stop. So, when I placed the bronze sheets on the leather cords, I saw that the dripping components would be too much. I also saw that the lines of the bronze sheets form a visually expanding rhythm and that one drop would be enough, possibly even in another place in the exhibition.

I was surprised by the curves of the bronze sheets, so I made a second floor to be able to see them from below. The glow of the bronze, the sensory quality it possesses, is an important component for me in the exhibition as a whole. Metals and alloys can have a cold, distant quality – this reflection of light allows them to carry a visual warmth. A second element that surprised me is the colour palette: shades of red and brown, some of them shiny, along with yellow – a colour that has been with me in the studio for a while now.

In conversation, the question of others regarding intent and meaning behind what we see when we look at a work of art strikes me, particularly the longing for an unambiguous explanatory narrative. It is also increasingly desirable for a work of art to be participatory, pedagogical, activist, inclusive and politically correct.

A sculpture can mean everything it evokes in us and this can change over the course of our lives. I have begun to see this openness as a form of freedom that is not always to be desired, because it can evoke uncertainty with explanatory reactions such as: 'I don't understand (contemporary) art'.

The potential of a work of art, I think, is to go beyond that which can be categorized and/or understood by our thinking minds. To face what cannot be instantly defined, that which escapes us and we hope creates a short-circuit in our thoughts.

Often, I find myself re-reading a 1997 interview with the late Belgian artist Jan Vercruyse who opposes compelling tendencies regarding communication and sensation. Without sharing his temperament (in this interview I notice a certain degree of anger) I do share his awareness of what art can be. The sculpture studio was for me a new beginning. Until relatively late in life I did not know that there was such a thing as what I recognise now to be 'embodied thinking'. A thinking from form. A thinking beyond or in addition to a verbal, cerebral thinking. One that brings me nearer to everything that is, and lets me cherish every aspect, literally. Every object, every material is to be cherished.

Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, I have named this exhibition *4D*. I do not bring a sensational fourth dimension through movement or special effects. For me it is an internalized dimension evoked from what is always given: our capacity to feel, to sense rhythm, to observe, to breathe.

Laurence Petrone, May 2024

(Excerpts from the conversation between Anna Tilroe and Jan Vercruyse, *NRC*, 1997)

'No-no-no, communication is a term that should never be used in art! (...) Communication is a neutralising term. Everything is communication nowadays, every action, every gesture is marked by it and even the artist is expected to want to communicate something.'

'Art that shows everything immediately and unreflectively or conveys a message is no more than an expensive kind of newspaper. Surely there must remain within our culture the possibility for silence and distance! As far as I am concerned, that is the place of art. In our society, everything, really everything, is aimed at breaking through this last domain of seclusion, to occupy, seize and commodify it.'

'When every exhibition is turned into a spectacle, the public starts thinking that art must be pleasant and startling, and that it is allowed to participate in it. Participation is now a buzzword. Participation in art is the destruction of art.'

This exhibition is the first exhibition organised as part of the *MARIONDECANNIÈRE PRIZE*. A prize that was established after Marion's unexpected decease.

Marion's commitment to people was extraordinary. Everyone spoke and still speaks of her with great warmth. Many young artists were embraced by her and given opportunities to develop in complete freedom. She welcomed everyone open-mindedly, unbiased, never biased. And she felt that she had a task as a gallery owner: to show just those art and artists who dared to take risks, artists who dared to experiment, who sought depth, substance and innovation again and again.

Hence, on the initiative of her husband, Bernard Verwilghen, their children and Fred, a new incentive award was initiated in memory of her work and commitment.

A total of 15 artists were nominated by a number of experts in the field and relations of Marion. 15 very exceptionally talented people who basically all deserve an award: Stijn Bastianen, Anne Beumer, Elias Cafmeyer, Aimé Fierens, Daniele Formica, Olivia Hernaiz, Fabrice Hofmans, Chris Houben, Timothy Laskaratos, Kaat Lens, Laurence Petrone, Jackie Shallcross Platt, Monique Thomaes, Ian De Weerd, Bernadette Zdrazil and Davide Zulli.

Finally one laureate was chosen: Laurence Petrone

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