

## **A moving rapprochement between word and image: Katrin Dekoninck and Steven Van Der Heyden**

As a lover of literature and art, I often think about the differences between the written word and visual arts. They are two very different forms of expression and they often seem difficult to reconcile, at least in one and the same work. However, they do share common starting points or similar goals. Perhaps the sculptor makes sculptures to visualize the indescribable and a writer uses the word to explain the intangible. Either way, it is about the story. Narrativity can never really be eliminated. Man is a storyteller after all.

The exhibition *Breath*, with the works of Katrin Dekoninck and poetry by Steven Van Der Heyden, is a beautiful example of how visual art and poetry can merge and become inextricably linked. We saw them working independently during the Arts Festival Watou in 2017. That is where they found each other and where their collaboration began. A moving amalgam of existing and new works.

The poems by Van Der Heyden express what Dekoninck's images convey, while her clay sculptures are, as it were, an embodiment of his poetry.

### **Rumour**

in clay you are embedded, broadly framed  
you look like a scratch on the earth's crust

sometimes a movement like happiness arises  
germinates from comfort

a vulnerable trail of branched craving  
how, with two hands, ten fingers

you eject ballast, feel for roots  
to give the unthinkable a chance

*Steven Van Der Heyden*

Loneliness, transience and the absence of communication are themes clearly reflected in the work of both artists. In this way they not only address an intimate subject, but also a social issue. Loneliness is of all ages, evident from Dekoninck's sculptures. Upon entering the presbytery, we are confronted with a haunting installation: an elderly woman modelled in clay sits on one of the chairs arranged in a house of prayer, a chapel. The other chairs are empty, but carry traces of those who once sat there: folded clothing, pyjamas, slippers,... a suitable reminder of those who will never return. It seems as if the figure is just waiting for the inevitable. This scene describes the emotional world and the loneliness that often prevails among the elderly. Many of their peers have died or are no longer around due to illness or dementia. This not only means that many older people are left alone, but also that they lose partners to talk to, and are gradually claimed by loneliness. This work by Dekoninck confronts us with social problems, but also with our own mortality. The artist knows how to stir sensitive strings.

### **Loneliness has a limit**

We gather the silence  
in this we are nearest one another

We bang into promises  
trapped in the current  
to see if they will stand

We only consist of inside  
under the surface the questions  
that are not asked

There are no emergency exits in this life  
just limits to scuff  
on the way to who we have remained

Steven Van Der Heyden

Mirrors also play an important role in several of Dekoninck's works. Mirror images or two 'identical' figures sitting opposite each other, shielded by a glass plate, are connected to each other in silent dialogue. At the same time they seem to be miles apart. It is difficult to say who is the reflection of whom. One is an asymmetrical reflection of the other. One of the two figures appears tormented and is, as it were, a representation of an inner struggle.

In addition, the mirror is also present at the macro level: both Dekoninck's images and the poems by Van Der Heyden force the viewer to see themselves through their works. If art is a mirror for the soul, then that becomes clear in the presbytery of Ressegem.

Steven Van Der Heyden's poetry and Dekoninck's images connect as two pieces of the same puzzle. They are complementary and reinforce each other. Van Der Heyden moulds and sculpts his words while Katrin Dekoninck's clay sculptures unmistakably carry poetic qualities. They can be read as poetry. To cut a long story short: both artists 'close' the gap between word and visual art.

Soon, Stichting Kunstboek will also publish a book with the title *Breath*. A meeting between word and image, in which the images of Katrin Dekoninck are united with Steven Van Der Heyden's poetry. The release is scheduled for December 2017. Then, in mid-January 2018, an exhibition by Dekoninck will follow at Gallery Dessers. Definitely something to look forward to!

The exhibition *Breath* in the presbytery of Ressegem is open to the public on Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 October 2017 from 10 am to 5 pm. For more information [click here!](#)

Wouter Verbeke