

PRESS RELEASE

BERLINDE DE BRUYCKERE: Schmerzensmann

10 November – 16 December, 2006, Hauser & Wirth London

Opening: Thursday 9 November, 6 – 9 pm

The first UK exhibition of work by Berlinde de Bruyckere will open at Hauser & Wirth London in November. De Bruyckere works in a range of sculptural media, including wax, wood, wool, horse skin and hair. These are combined to create compelling figures that suggest distorted human and animal forms. Her figures are often faceless, malformed and fragmentary. They perch precariously on high stools or are suspended from the walls or ceiling. At first their shape seems familiar although their forms resist interpretation, offering a disturbing vision of fragility and suffering.

De Bruyckere's work is infused with ambiguity. The patterned woollen blankets that she incorporates in her sculptures not only symbolise warmth and protection, but also evoke fear, sickness and debilitation. Female figures made of wax crouch beneath their heavy burden, which threatens to suffocate as well as shelter. In later sculptures, the figures appear overcome by the cloth that sticks to them like a second skin. De Bruyckere's darkly abstract horse sculptures – synthetic shapes covered with real horse skin – are equally unsettling. Their massive crippled forms are ominous, articulated by shadows, seams, and holes. The brutal nature of their physical form suggests not only past suffering, but also some unknown terror to come.

De Bruyckere's exhibition at Hauser & Wirth London will present frail-looking wax figures suspended from tall iron columns. They invoke the *Schmerzensmann*, the eternal 'Man of Suffering'; their forms appear vulnerable and violated, their skin stretched and broken. One imagines these figures to have once perched on top of their mantles like heroic symbols; however here they seem to have fallen from grace. At Swallow Street, a fourth figure lies crumpled inside a glass vitrine. The texture of the pallid wax suggests a skin so thin and fragile that it is almost translucent. Close inspection reveals subtly mottled hues and textures that imply vulnerability to heat and cold but also to the more intangible threat of violence and fear.

Berlinde de Bruyckere (born Ghent 1964) won international acclaim at the 2003 Venice Biennale, when her sculptures were shown in the Italian Pavilion. Since then, her solo exhibitions have included Hauser & Wirth Zurich (2004); 'One' at La Maison Rouge, Fondation Antoine de Galbert, Paris (2005); and De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art, Tilburg (2005). This year, her work was included in the 4th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art and was exhibited in a two-artist show at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. Berlinde de Bruyckere lives and works in Ghent.

An illustrated catalogue, published by Steidl Hauser & Wirth, will accompany the exhibition:

BERLINDE DE BRUYCKERE: DER SCHMERZENSMANN

Book design by the artist and Casier/Fieuws, Brussels

Photographs by Mirjam Devriendt, Brussels

Introduction by Gregor Muir; essay by Ali Subotnick,

64 pages with 50 b/w and colour plates; 28 x 39 cm; hardcover.

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