

## Berlinde de Bruyckere



*Schmerzensmann III and IV*

★★★★★

**Hauser & Wirth** West End

For a new era of existential fear, Ghent-born sculptor Berlinde de Bruyckere retools the anguished, body-fixated expressionism of Bacon, Giacometti et al, with ancillary nods to post-minimalist front-runners such as Eva Hesse and Bruce Nauman. She is not an ineffectual throwback, but neither does she approach the standards of her forebears.

In the main space, three truncated lamp-posts stretch some 20 feet into the air; each supports a slumped human figure made from wax and epoxy resin. Two have virtually been impaled on the apex, one of which looks to have been eviscerated, or deflated, and its torso slashed. Attached improbably to the side of its rusty pole, a third one implies that the

body is just a kind of containing sack; its feet are distended and baggy, as if gravity had dragged the contents of the skin downwards. In a shopfront on nearby Swallow Street, a fourth figure is laid in a cabinet – emaciated and headless, its scant but meaty flesh mottled with blue.

Inevitably, one thinks of concentration camps, of human life made cheap, of the Crucifixion and, more broadly, of (mostly photographic) imagery recording man's inhumanity to man over the last century and this one. But this generalised sense of mourning detracts from De Bruyckere's project, by making it appear uncomfortably keen to use the traumas of the recent past as its engine, while not adding to the sum of our understanding. In time, these lamentations could look as well-meaning and as kitsch as anything made in 1950s Paris. *Martin Herbert*