

# It's in the details

Robin Vermeersch's art: the essence of life enlarged and on display

REBECCA BENOOT

Thirty-four-year-old Robin Vermeersch is the youngest member of a highly artistic family. "When you grow up in a family that is very artistic, you always see your father making paintings, your grandfather making sculptures, your brothers making drawings. Even my mother was a painter so I had contact with different kinds of art at a very early age." He went on to study painting at the Sint-Lucas Academy in Ghent and has since then evolved more towards sculpture and drawing. Ultimately, "becoming an artist was something normal," he affirms.

His latest exhibition is *Watching Windows* at Forum+, a new platform for contemporary art in Bruges located above the concert hall and offering a spectacular view of the city. One of the most striking features in his works are his use of depth and texture. His preference for pastel colours in his drawings is especially fitting with their organic, almost flesh-like nature.

A lot of elements in his work resemble human cells, organs, shells and other organic manifestations, calling up life and ultimately creation. It is also this aspect that interests Vermeersch the most: "The fact that I can create differ-

ent images and objects that are not yet in our society fascinates me. I mostly make sculptures, giving them new forms so I can create something previously unknown... I take organic materials and then I start to reshape them. I like the art world because I can create my own universe and it's also a shell where I can hide... In my work many forms of nature come back because the most inspiring thing is seeing things grow. I try to create sculptures that have their own life and can grow further without my help." The idea behind his work is thus that every new work of art becomes a new entity in this world, it is a life in itself.

Despite his apparent need for creation, Vermeersch doesn't have a message or hidden agenda with his blossoming art: "I don't have a big discourse. I want to do something that people can feel. I want people to be able to relate to my art on an emotional level. They have to be able to recognise and relate to it despite its being a new creation. I want them to be touched. This is also why I try to create my own world because in this world a lot of the beauty gets lost. I make simple art that shows the essence and hopefully gets through to people."

In an age where far too often you



get the feeling: *So they call this art?*, Vermeersch goes back to the beginning and lets basic beauty, elegant emotions and surreal simplicity do all the talking. "I can imagine that some people don't feel it and never understand it but I don't want them to have to read a text to understand my work. I want my work to be a soft confrontation, a feeling like they see something that they have lost. You live and ask questions and you forget your emotions."

## Watching Windows

The most impressive part of the exhibition is a large diorama called BE-PART. "I made it in BE-PART (contemporary art platform in Waregem) as artist in residence and I don't give titles to my works so that's why it's simply called BE-PART after the location. I wanted the viewer to see that on the outside, it is just a box, but on the inside there is a totally different atmosphere. Just upon looking through a window, it's like a whole new world opens up."

BE-PART in fact is an extraordinary and explosive creation filled with wave-like forms and a multitude of colours that are spectacularly contrasted with light and shadow. "I used paint on wood and different forms and I put them together with a lot of white-black contrasts – a lot like playing with the light. It was an idea I had done a few times before but now I only added a couple of holes to look through. And it is also something I liked to do as a child – make those small boxes where you can disappear briefly before returning to reality."

Vermeersch really loves his dioramas and that's why he has also created a new one especially for Forum+. It is a large wooden platform with tiny holes showing a wide variety of organic and possibly even human features. Not really knowing what you're looking at makes it all the more intriguing for the spectator and the artist as well: "Working in a different world and not really knowing what it is forces you to imagine what the forms might be,"

according to Vermeersch.

This diorama also ingeniously illustrates his love for detail, emphasizing the contemporary splintered world that we cannot fully grasp. "For me it's difficult to get the total picture so I focus on something, looking only at the details. For example, I might look at stones or grass and fantasize about what's under them or near them. The small things consume me more than the factual world which is nonetheless present in the details."

*Watching Windows* isn't a large exhibition but it is a refreshing one. Vermeersch presents you with the inner beauty of a world that is often hidden below the surface, just behind the bigger concept. This concept is also cleverly incorporated in the stunning location that offers you a panoramic view of the city on the outside and an exploration of the essence of our universe and of Vermeersch's art on the inside. ♦

➔ [www.concertgebouw.be](http://www.concertgebouw.be)



This year's Silver Award winner: *Earth II – Reki* by Hiroshi Suzuki

## Silver Fever in Ghent

*Poetry in Silver*: the rather lacklustre theme of the 4th edition of the Schoonhoven Silver Award all the same resulted in a diverse, surprising and distinctive collection of silver objects made by designers from 11 different countries. Until 13 September the results of this international competition for silversmiths are to be seen in the Ghent Design Museum

VEERLE DEVOS

There are five Belgian designers among the 45 laureates, including the Ghent-based silversmith and jewellery designer Siegfried De Buck, whose *Lavabo in info-centra manus meas* was selected. But it's the London-based Japanese Hiroshi Suzuki who won the Schoonhoven Silver Award 2009, a prize named after the town in South Holland renowned for its traditional silver industry. "His impressive vase is archetypal and combines monumentalism with a refined and poetic feeling for detail and finish," the jury says about winner Hiroshi Suzuki.

"He renders a transcription of a traditional silversmith technique, in which a perfected hammer stroke has gained a truly meditative character of its own by its performance and power of repetition. The hammered skin reflects the light in every direction and generates strength. This work of art convinces, the natural result of many years of personal development."

Bernadette De Loose of the Design Museum is happy with the winner: "His vase is exquisite! There's so much movement in his

design, like it's made of wrinkled silver foil that has been smoothed out. The vase could be a sacred object for an offering, or an urn. In short, to me it's of an almost spiritual beauty," she confesses.

The Design Museum is showing Suzuki's winning vase and the other silver objects in a rather austere and traditional way, to make sure they get all the attention. After all, this museum has a long love story with silver, so whoever drops by for the Schoonhoven exhibition should also visit the permanent collection.

Discover old masterpieces by architect Henry van de Velde, contemporary design from Belgian designer-of-the-year Nedda El-Asmar (from cutlery to a silver condom holder), and key works like the Fruit Dish of Ettore Sottsass. Because although we may no longer dream about the traditional 30-piece silver service like our grandparents did, silver design remains very attractive. ♦

➔ <http://design.museum.gent.be>