

THE COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT (CCP)

1999 — 2016



♂ MEHELSE KOEKOEK
Belgium

♀ POULET DE BRESSE
France



♀ MEHELSE BRESSE
CCP

♂ ENGLISH REDCAP
England



♀ JERSEY GIANT
U.S.A.

♂ MEHELSE REDCAP
CCP



♂ MEHELSE GIANT
CCP

♀ DRESDNER
Germany



♀ UILEBAARD
The Netherlands

♂ MEHELSE DRESDNER
CCP



♂ MEHELSE UILEBAARD
CCP

♀ LOUISIANA
Mexico



♀ MEHELSE LOUISIANA
CCP

♂ ไท้ ♂
Thailand



♂ MEHELSE ไท้
CCP

♀ AURACANA
Brazil



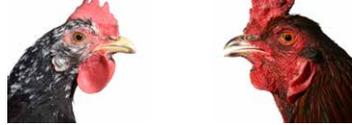
♀ DENIZLI HOROZU
Turkey

♂ MEHELSE AURACANA
CCP



♀ MEHELSE DENIZLI
CCP

♂ CUBALAYA
Cuba



♀ ANCONA
Italy

♂ MEHELSE CUBALAYA
CCP



♂ MEHELSE ANCONA
CCP

♀ ОРЛОВСКОЙ
Russia



♂ MEHELSE ОРЛОВСКОЙ
CCP

♀ 乌鸡 ♀
China



♂ MEHELSE 乌鸡
CCP

♀ ألفيومي ♀
Egypt



♀ POULET DE SENEGAL
Senegal

♂ MEHELSE ألفيومي
CCP



♀ MEHELSE SENEGAL
CCP

♂ STYRIAN
Slovenia



♂ SULMTALER
Austria

♀ MEHELSE STYRIAN
CCP



♀ MEHELSE SULMTALER
CCP

♂ AYAM CEMANI
Indonesia



♂ MEHELSE CEMANI
CCP

♀ WYANDOTTE
Detroit

THE COSMOPOLITAN CHICKEN PROJECT (CCP)

DIVERSITY AND DUALISM

Nothing is what it seems. That is but one of the many - much more surprising - lessons of the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project (CCP), a worldwide crossbreeding program involving national and regional chicken breeds that started in 1998 by visual artist Koen Vanmechelen (b. 1965, Sint-Truiden, Belgium).

Vanmechelen found that each successive generation of hybrids was more resilient than its purer-bred parents. The chickens lived longer, were less susceptible to disease, and exhibited less aggressive behavior. Also, less unexpectedly, the morphological and phenotypical characteristics were blurred by selective breeding. The ultimate result of many generations of crossbreeding is a truly Cosmopolitan Chicken, carrying the genes of all the world's chicken breeds. The starting point for all these different breeds once was the Red Junglefowl - the original chicken. Its many descendant breeds are all man-made endpoints, sometimes literally so, in the sense that they are infertile. Vanmechelen wants to end all these breeds by blending them into a new starting point, providing a chicken-breeding example of the principle of creative destruction. But the CCP does not aim to reconstitute the proto-chicken. It does not want to return to the past. On the contrary, it symbolises the future. The CCP is the starting point of a new form of evolution that will never end, a perpetuum mobile of genetic diversification and recombination.

Vanmechelen's oeuvre is as diverse and as hybrid as the Cosmopolitan Chicken itself: it's a unique mix of painting, drawing, photography, video, innovative 3D techniques, installations and wooden sculptures, whose unifying theme is the chicken and the egg. But, as mentioned before: nothing is what it seems. The core of the project is neither chicken nor egg, but crossbreeding and the diversity that comes from it.

The Cosmopolitan Chicken holds up a mirror to us. Crossbreeding is a practical but also a philosophical necessity, if not a moral duty. Today's chicken breeds are failing; to prevent inbreeding and de-

generation, new blood is needed. "Every organism needs some other organism in order to survive," says Vanmechelen, "If there is one secret in life, maybe it's that everything is dual. Chicken and egg, cause and effect, good and bad, construction and destruction: everything exists in relation to the Other. If you pursue this line of reasoning, you might even conclude that there's a parallel solar system outside our own, ensuring our continued survival."

"I see the chicken as a metaphor for man and the egg both as a metaphor for the world and as the laboratory of the future. The egg is a protected environment and a source of life. Yet it is also a cage, a restriction from which we have to break free." History teaches us that progress is predicated on daring to let go of what we already have. The result of hybridisation is often uncertain. Do we dare expose ourselves to the unexpected? Vanmechelen certainly does: "Fertilisation, enrichment – they always come from outside. It's precisely the unexpected things that are important to me. I take notice of apparent coincidences." This is why the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project is also an answer in progress, a work of art that will never be complete. How the Cosmopolitan Chicken will turn out or where the program will end, remain open questions, just as what will come out of the egg is an open question, every time around.

The diversity that characterises Vanmechelen's work is not confined to the media he uses. The CCP involves a symbiosis of art, science, philosophy, politics and ethics. It is Vanmechelen's way of reflecting on the existential questions of individual identity and life, and it touches on contemporary issues regarding globalisations, racism, genetic modification and cloning. The project invites the onlooker to join in the debate.

The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project: approach and state of progress

The first generation hybrid, the Mechelse Bresse, resulted from crossbreeding the Belgian Mechelse Koekoek - the pride of Flemish chicken farmers - with the top French chicken, the Poulet de Bresse. Each successive generation of hybrids comes from crossbreeding the previous generation's hybrid with another pure breed.

In 2015, the artist's ongoing creation of a world- hybrid chicken reached, with the Mechelse Cemani, its nineteenth generation; born on the occasion of the Biennial of Indonesia as a result between the crossing of the completely black Javanese Ayam Cemani and the Mechelse Sulmtaler. One year before, this Mechelse Sulmtaler came into existence after a crossing between the Austrian Sulmtaler and the Mechelse Styrian, a royal generation, born in the castle of Chimay (BE). To date, the hybrid consists of regional breeds of chickens in Belgium, France, England, U.S.A., Germany, The Netherlands, Mexico, Thailand, Brazil, Turkey, Cuba, Italy, Russia, China, Egypt, Senegal, Slovenia, Austria and Indonesia.