

# WASSERMANPROJECTS

## **Belgian Artist Koen Vanmechelen Brings His Interdisciplinary Explorations Of Diversity to Wasserman Projects in Detroit**

**New Exhibition to Feature Photography, Sculpture, Mixed-Media and Video Works,  
And Living Art Installations**

**Wasserman Projects Also Announces New Collaboration with Detroit-based Nonprofit  
Oakland Avenue Urban Farm, as Part of Artist's Community-based Initiatives**

**Detroit—July 13, 2016**—On September 22, Wasserman Projects in Detroit will present an exhibition of works by Belgian artist Koen Vanmechelen, whose wide-ranging oeuvre includes photography, sculpture, mixed-media installation, video, and living art initiatives. The exhibition marks the newest phase of Vanmechelen's ongoing, 20-year-long Cosmopolitan Chicken Project (CCP), which crossbreeds chickens from around the world as a means of exploring cultural, biological, and aesthetic diversity. Featuring the artist's 2D- and 3D-works, alongside live chickens from CCP, the exhibition highlights the artist's engagement with ideas of singularity and duality as manifested in the crossbreeding process and his metaphoric representations of the chicken and the egg. Titled *Energy/Mass*, the exhibition will remain on view through December 17, 2016.

Each year, Vanmechelen introduces a chicken from a different country to CCP, mating it to create a new bird and continuing the genetic diversification of the flock. For the exhibition at Wasserman Projects, the 19<sup>th</sup> generation Mechelse Cemani chicken will be bred with the American Wyandotte chicken—named for a Native American tribe historically prevalent in the lower Great Lakes—producing the 20<sup>th</sup> generation Mechelse Wyandotte. This new fully-grown chicken, which now holds aspects of the DNA of 20 international breeds, will be housed in a specially created coop, along with its parent birds, as a living installation that highlights the confluence of art and science. The exhibition will also feature recently hatched Mechelse Wyandotte chicks, housed in a separate enclosure within the exhibition space.

Together, the birds reflect the core artistic and philosophical premise of Vanmechelen's work: that the chicken offers a mirror to human culture, and through it we can explore the significance of the relationships between humans, other species, and the environment. Visitors are invited to engage with these ideas by examining the physical attributes of the chickens, the intricacy of the crossbreeding process, and the connections between the evolution of the cosmopolitan chicken and the development of our diverse communities, societies, and cultures.

“In every country, humans have developed a chicken that says something about that nation's culture. The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project stands as a metaphor for those differences and attributes, and at the same time, the idea that all living beings are reliant on each other and the environment,” said Vanmechelen.

“This idea of singularity and duality are at the heart of my work, and something I keep questioning and studying through my paintings, sculpture, installations, and other projects. If there is one universal truth that has risen to the surface through my more than two-decade investigation, it is that every organism needs another organism to survive.”

The exhibition will feature a range of artworks from across Vanmechelen's creative output, including:

- A **photographic pedagogy** of 20 generations of CCP chickens, showing, visually, the progression of the species through the Mechelse Wyandotte, along with an installation of *Open Secret, 2015*, a book-shaped vault that contains the complete genomes through the latest breed of chicken.
- *Energy/Mass, 2016*, from which the exhibition derives its name. The neon diptych responds to the age-old question, "What came first the chicken or the egg?" For Vanmechelen, and as examined in the exhibition, the answer is neither: all life begins with energy and results in mass.
- A new mixed-media installation, titled *Unpredictable, 2016*, that features a large-scale stainless steel sword, measuring approximately 12-feet in length, suspended from the wall with a bronze rooster positioned on the hilt. The work explores the relationship between weapon and wielder, and where the power lies.
- *Fragile Breed, 2016*, a mixed-media work that is comprised of a barbed wire nest, eggs molded from marble and glass, and horns made from bronze and glass. The beauty of the work belies its thorny, and potentially dangerous exterior, while the materials make reference to the dichotomy of strength and fragility.
- A new series, titled *Material World, 2016*, that includes 12 taxidermied roosters, created especially for the exhibition, with crowns and feet formed in chrome—a reference to Detroit's auto industry—which emphasize the physical beauty of the chicken.

The exhibition will be followed by the launch of Vanmechelen's Planetary Community Chicken project (PCC) in spring 2017. The vision for PCC is to explore how artists and art projects can connect with and benefit communities. In Detroit, the project marks the first collaboration between Wasserman Projects and the Detroit-based nonprofit Oakland Avenue Urban Farm, which launched in 2008 and is committed to developing new models of economic sustainability through urban farming initiatives and neighborhood collaborations. In response to community demand, the Farm will begin to incorporate egg production into its existing farming and sales operations. The chickens—a crossbreed of the latest generation CCP rooster and an industrial egg-laying hen—will be bred on Vanmechelen's farms, and then transferred to Wasserman Projects and the Oakland Urban Avenue Farm for care and farming operations. The Detroit launch follows PCC projects in Vanmechelen's home city of Genk (Belgium), as well as in Harare (Zimbabwe), Havana (Cuba), and Novosibirsk (Russia).

"The Cosmopolitan Chicken Project is an elegant metaphor of global diversity. What better place than Detroit, a city built on diversity, and now invigorated by that diversity of people, cultures, ideas, art and commerce, to introduce in North America the impact of this global endeavor into the consciousness, imagination, and life of the community," said Gary Wasserman, Founder of Wasserman Projects. "This project invites the viewers to reconsider and appreciate the values represented through art, and extends into science, agriculture, and commerce. The possibilities of this interdisciplinary practice are the basis of our collective agriculture and art project with Oakland Avenue Urban Farm, which will begin to add eggs to their product line, based on the Cosmopolitan Chicken, enhancing their nutritional and commercial potential."

#### **About Koen Vanmechelen:**

Koen Vanmechelen (b. 1965) is an internationally renowned conceptual artist based in Belgium. He employs a diversity of approaches to his cross-disciplinary practice, from painting and sculpture, to video and installations, to drawing and glasswork, in addition to his living art initiatives. He is best known for his

Cosmopolitan Chicken Project (CCP), which he launched 20 years ago and through which he crossbreeds chickens from across the world as an ongoing study into diversity, nationality, and identity. To date, the hybrid chicken consists of regional breeds from Belgium, France, England, America, Germany, The Netherlands, Mexico, Thailand, Brazil, Turkey, Cuba, Indonesia, Italy, Russia, China, Egypt, Senegal, Slovenia and Austria. CCP has also given rise to other living art projects that explore diversity, including La Biomista, which is currently in development in the former zoo in Zwartberg, Genk.

Across the last decade, Vanmechelen has collaborated with scientists from different disciplines. His research and work earned him an honorary doctorate from the University of Hasselt in 2010, and the Golden Nica Hybrid Art award in 2013. His ongoing investigations, with the support of project partners, led to the creation of the Open University of Diversity, which invites people from different fields of study and practice to engage in a dialogue and new projects that examine ideas of diversity.

Vanmechelen has shown in major institutions across the world, including The National Gallery London, Victoria and Albert Museum (London), Museum Kunst Palast (Düsseldorf), Venice Projects (Venice), Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ (Amsterdam), Museum of Art and Design (New York), Pushkin Museum (Moscow), and across Belgium, including at the Verbeke Foundation, Watou, Museum M and Z33. In 2015, he participated in the Havana Biennale, where his Cosmopolitan Chicken Project was responsible for reintroducing an extinct species of chicken back to Cuba.

#### **About Wasserman Projects:**

Wasserman Projects was conceived by Michigan-native Gary Wasserman, and opened its doors in a former firehouse in Detroit's historic Eastern Market, one of the oldest and largest year-round markets in the U.S., in fall 2015. Wasserman Projects is guided by a spirit of collaboration, recognizing that artist projects are best realized and most meaningful when they engage a broad range of cultural organizers, community leaders, and the dynamic and diverse populations of Detroit. The organization works with artists from across disciplines and around the world, presenting exhibitions and performances that will spark a discourse on art, but also cultural, social, or political issues, which are particularly active and timely in Detroit. Wasserman Projects is nimble in its approach, operating in part as a for-profit gallery as well as a presentation space, and helps artists bring to fruition new projects that may not otherwise be possible.

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