SEDUZIONE KOEN VANMECHELEN

Gli Uffizi, Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Firenze (IT), 18 JAN - 20 March, 2022



Artist Koen Vanmechelen

Curators Eike Schmidt, Francesca Sborgi Organised in collaboration with Berengo Studio

SEDUZIONE EXHIBITION

Artist, performer, eclectic figure whose interests range from anthropology to bioethics, from the protection of human rights to bio-genetics, Koen Vanmechelen (Sint-Truiden, Belgium, 1965) focuses his research on the concepts of hybridization and contamination.

For the Uffizi, Vanmechelen created a series of installations that focus on the archetypal and antithetical concepts that have always nourished the human imagination and of which the works of art of all time speak to us: life and death, earth and spirit, nature and artifice. These works build, room after room, an evocative and at times disorienting itinerary, developing around the concept of 'seduction'.

Seduction, as the charm generated by beauty and the complex system of meanings that works of art have handed down to us through the ages. But seduction intended, above all, as the inevitable and fatal attraction that has always been the engine of natural evolution and that pushes matter, and living beings, to combine and generate ever new forms of life: new hybrids.

The Seduction exhibition is therefore a hymn to the power of life and the regenerative force of the natural world, which, despite everything, continues to proliferate. An invitation to open up to what is different from oneself and as such surprising, from outside the norm to downright monstrous. To recognise such diversity as an advantage and a concrete possibility of salvation. Finally, a warning to remember our limits as human beings, to grasp the signals that nature sends us, and to understand the urgency of approaching it, finally, with spiritual respect.

"Vanmechelen's works seem to fit naturally into the historical collection, creating hybrids between the ancient model and contemporary expression, in ways that are similar to the biological hybridization that the artist has been personally practicing for decades in the field of nature, among various species of poultry. The image of the chicken thus becomes an avatar and mirror of man, as in Diogenes' famous commentary on Plato. In this way, artistic creation is read in an

ecological key (and vice versa: nature becomes art) opening up perspectives of pressing relevance".

The director of the Uffizi Eike Schmidt:

Anthropocene, we need a new global renaissance. We need a Cosmopolitan Renaissance. This new narrative must be based on an understanding of the interconnectedness of all living beings. The parallel with the Italian Renaissance is clear. Art, being designed for the future, is the way to foster and project new narratives in the world. Art has always been the connective tissue of human existence. It clarifies, opens perspectives, and connects us through diversity. It aspires to sow Ubuntu, a Bantu term that refers to the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity. This realization comes from seeing the reflection of your self-image in the other, an image that is the bearer of the past and the future".

Artist Koen Vanmechelen: 'In this moment, in the

SEDUZIONE ARTIST STATEMENT

Art is seduction. Moving through the Uffizi Gallery is being seduced by the art displayed. The artworks form one extended voyage to the future while feeling the tides of time vibrate through the rooms, the vestibules, the walls, and the halls. The scenes depicted in the museum are part of one temporal vortex that churns and disrupts. It carries off the visitor through many existential layers of the human event horizon. Time after time, it brings the visitors to other worlds, alternative or not, showing the seeds of change and transformation, highlighting the DNA that formed societies and that can be transformed into the Other. Possibilities are endless. Fata Morgana's are lurking in every corner. It all depends on the intentions of the visitor. How deep will he venture into the waters of time? Ankle deep, or will he feel the water touching his breath?

Moving through the Uffizi, one writes a narrative of his own, and every visit is a new narrative. With my works, I add a new dimension, an alternative universe to the universes woven in the palace. In the center is an antagonist in the form of the Other, the animal. The new universe thus created consists of human animals and other animals and their hybrids. A new world of hybridity seduces the visitor, instructs him to reflect upon our origin and the way we try to ignore the animal in ourselves. By doing this, we deny our essence, our DNA. We are in them; they are in us.

In every scene I depict, this comes to the surface. The Cosmopolitan Fossil, for example, shows us that we carry the little monster the lurks inside us, and that scares us, always trying to find a way out. Amid Uffizi's well-known artworks, testifying humanity's invariable longing for the divine and the unreachable of possible paradises, this and my other works offer a new world. One we all long for, one we want. This seduction is one of the snakes in Paradise that forces us to understand the other who radically differs from us and with whom we nevertheless have to merge. The result from this merger is unpredictable and dangerous. Hence the glassworks displayed here.

Glass is a material that can make you bleed; The new nest created with it is unknown. When you go into without previous reflection, you get hurt for life. This pain is needed for the creation of new life. The contrast between pain and pleasure, estrangement and understanding, joy and sadness gives us the ingredients to build tomorrow's society. It urges us to embrace our natural surroundings more by taking more distance from them. So we will not suffocate what we love and need.

Koen Vanmechelen

CONNECTION LORENESE VESTIBULE

Connection

History shows the way. It is encrypted in an ancient stone in Greek writing. The encrypted stone connects the past with the present, culture with nature. This installation shows the visitor the way. It refers to the interaction between the works on display. The lion with the body of an iguana conveys the message that movement and hybridity imply change. Permanent change needs encoding of DNA and, in the case of homo sapiens, coding in the text. The golden cord protruding from the hybrid connects to the invisible, the unseen other. The invisibility of things in a museum like Uffizi is the greatest gift.

This artwork is installed in the entrance hallway and directs the visitors to the rest of the exhibition.



Connection © Koen Vanmechelen

SEDUZIONE THE GALLERY CORRIDORS



THE GALLERY CORRIDORS TEMPTATION

The East, South and West corridors on the top floor of the Uffizi Galleries are an iconic feature of the Gallery, and indeed the term "Galleria" universally used to describe a collection of paintings originated from this very place. In the 1580s, Grand Duke Francesco I, son of Cosimo I and founder of Vasario's Uffizi Galleries, began to adorn the loggia that crowns the Uffizi courtyard with ancient statues, paintings and other works. The corridor ceilings are decorated with frescoes, the first of which was painted in the first (East) corridor in 1581 followed by the second and third corridors over the next two centuries. After the completion of frescoes of the first corridor commissioned by Grand Duke Francesco I with largely Grotesque-style mythological depictions, Grand Dukes Ferdinando II (as part the decorative works prescribed by his brother Cardinal Leopoldo) and Cosimo III oversaw the completion of the frescoes with themes exalting the glory of Tuscany and the House of Medici.

Temptation

Inspired by collections of ancient statuary from the Uffizi, Koen Vanmechelens sculptures in the Temptation series depict emperors, philosophers, warriors, heroes, gods but also ordinary men and women sculpted in white Statuario marble. They represent humanity travelling and discovering, either physically or through intellectual effort. Their heads are covered with egg fragments. From the egg, hybrid creatures are generated: an invitation to escape from the limits of rational thought and codified norms, to follow the challenge of change and let oneself travel to unexpected contaminations: to finally discover oneself, with an open mind, freer.







curator Francesca Sborgi and Koen Vanmechelen with Dying Alexander © Uffizi Gallerie

Temptation, Seduzione, Uffizi Gallerie © Koen Vanmechelen

Breakthrough

Out of an enlarged eagle skull, a transparent horn reaches for the sky. It represents an invisible unicorn and leads to another world. Even if only the fossil remains, after death overtook its owner, the energy keeps on being transmitted. There is always hope to break through reality and reach another world.



Breakthrough © Koen Vanmechelen

In times of trouble

Two bodies melt into each other. Their physical characteristics suggest they are tapirs. Both their heads are gone. When in love, heads get lost, and lives get entangled. Smell, vision, hearing are gone. Indeed, love makes blind. Consequently, the unseen danger is lurking, and Damocles' swords are near. Despite the infatuation, the evil of the past lingers. The transparence of the blades here indicates the nature of the impending trouble is unclear. This installation refers to the experience of the dispossessed and the displaced. Looking for the right place to nest. Only commitment, dedication and passion keep the swords of the past at bay.

SEDUZIONE IN TIMES OF TROUBLE



COSMOPOLITAN FOSSIL BAMBINO CON GALLO

Cosmopolitan Fossil

As in the 19th-century plaster cast by Adriano Cecioni from the collection of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in the Pitti Palace, a child holds in his arms a creature that he evidently cannot keep under control. Vanmechelen, inspired by Cecioni's group, transforms the rooster into a hybrid to represent the eternal confrontation between human and animal taken to the extreme of its emotional tension. Suddenly, the irritated child realises that nature, irretrievably, escapes his grasp. Though, one must be very careful: the creature, made of glass, is highly fragile. A balance that risks breaking at any moment, to the detriment of the child, or Nature.





Bambino con il gallo, Adriano Cecioni © Uffizi

Cosmopolitan Fossil © Koen Vanmechelen

SEDUZIONE **EXHIBITION**





SARCOFAGI DI ANIMALE NIOBE ROOM

According to the Greek myth, Niobe – who was daughter of Tantalus and wife of Amphion, Thebes king – had fourteen children, seven girls and seven boys. She was so proud of her own offspring, that she dared laugh goddess Latona, who had only two children, the gods Apollo and Artemis. To punish Niobe's pride, Latona sent her own two sons, charged to kille Niobe's children. The clear educational purpose of the myth – warning against damages of pride – made it subject of many artistic and literary representations. The Uffizi houses a group of twelve ancient sculptures, Roman copies from an original Greek, of which we know neither the date nor the location.

Sarcofagi di animale Mechelse Padovana - 23rd Generation Cosmopolitan Chicken Project

The two marble sarcofagi represent the 23rd Generation of Vanmechelen's Cosmopolitan Chicken Project; a crossing between the Mechelse Maatiaskana - 22nd generation and the Padovana chicken. The Padovana or Padovana dal gran ciuffo is an ancient Italian breed of small crested and bearded chicken. It originates in, and is named for, the city and surrounding province of Padua, in the Veneto region of north-eastern Italy. Despite continuing discussion surrounding its true origins, it is recognised in Italy as an indigenous Italian breed. Two marble statuettes of Padovana chickens Alessandro Ghigi can also be found in the Sala degli Animali of the Vatican Museums. The artist therefor calls this crossing; the holy generation.

Two mummified bodies of embalmed deceased chickens from the same generation are presented on a nearby pedestal – like an archeological find. Sarcofagi di animale represents the previous generations and the possibility of a resurrection, of a new existence.







Daughter of Niobe bent by terror © Uffizi Gallerie Sarcofagi Di Animale © Koen Vanmechelen

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NIOBE ROOM

Domestic Violence

A tiger lies motionless on a tapestry of chicken feathers, like a kitten on a mat. She is unaware of the threat surrounding her. Swords attack her, but they are transparent and invisible. The tiger is strong enough for now to deal with that threat and survive. Bur for how long? This installation is pregnant with symbolism and contradictions. The predator has become the prey. Hence the chicken relics below her, the human artifacts around her. The tiger has become a commodity. She balances on the border of existence; her survival is in the balance. As is the case with beleaguered nature, it will only spring into action when the need is there, when the threat becomes too real. This installation depicts how violent humans interact with the world and our fellow creatures. The violence we exert on all other life on this planet only becomes visible when nature fights back, as is currently happening. Domestic Violence conveys how we're destroying what's left of our beautiful world in our haste to turn it all into a commodity.

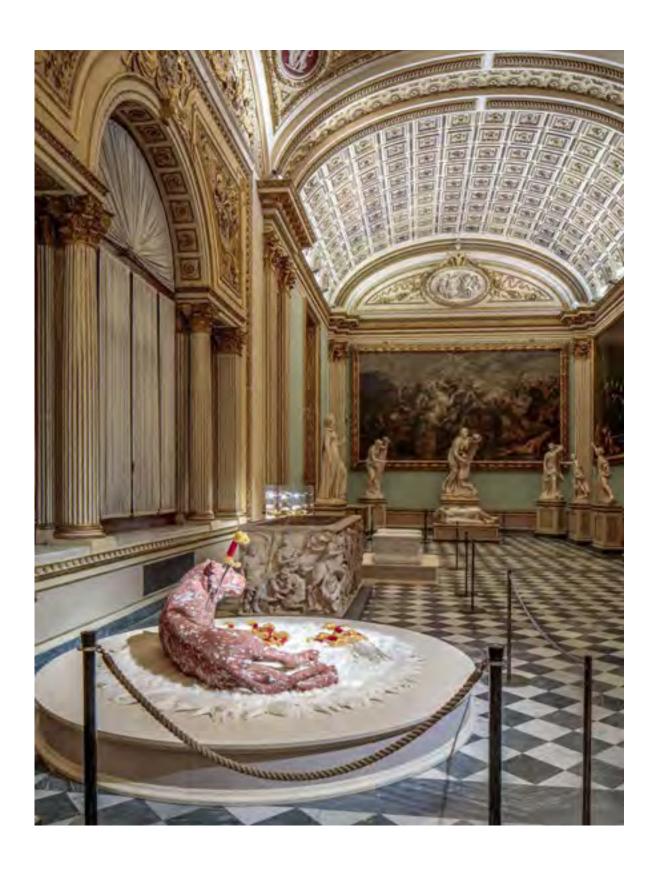


Domestic Violence, detail



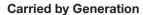
Installation view, Seduzione, Koen Vanmechelen, Uffizi Galleries

SEDUZIONE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

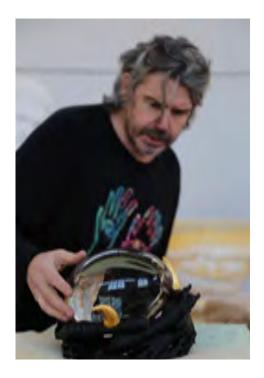


CARRIED BY GENERATIONS ROOM OF HERMAPHRODITE

The Sleeping Hermaphroditus is a Roman sculpture from the 2nd century AD after a Hellenistic original. In the body of Hermaphroditus, the male of father Hermes and the female of mother Aphrodite coexist harmoniously. Indeed, its dual nature expresses conciliation beyond opposites. The young and sinuous body is stretched out on a feline skin that the sculptor skilfully manages to reproduce in detail. Praised by Michelangelo himself, it is undoubtedly one of the most sensual works of antiquity. Ovid in his Metamorphoses tells about the transformation of this extraordinary being. In history, hermaphrodites were revered as superior creatures endowed with both sexes, celebrated as divinities beyond any gender conflicts.



A transparent egg cradled by a nest of chicken feet. Filled with the hopeful promise of an unknowable future: what will hatch from the egg? Invisibly sculpted by previous generations, keepers of history through their genetic code: the next generation is ready to flourish. It is supported by a cushion. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes. The pillow is a metaphor for dream and sleep, vital processes that allow people to discover new worlds and to break boundaries



Koen Vanmechelen working on Carried by Generations



Installation view, Carried by Generations and the Sleeping Hermaphroditus, Seduzione, Uffizi Galleries

UBUNTU SELF PORTRAIT GALLERY

Ubuntu

A self-portrait of Koen Vanmechelen looks at us through a glass mask. The mask distorts our gaze as well as that of the artist. Transparency gives you insight into others. You also gain insight into yourself, because it is impossible to hide behind a glass mask. And yet there is distortion too. It makes it clear that something is no longer what it once was.

The mask forms an extra layer and makes past, present and future visible.

The work is entitled 'Ubuntu' which means: "I am, because we are". The concept lies at the heart of the philosophy of the South-African Bantu people. It is based on giving and taking and on the universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity: we are there for each other. Biologically and socially we are nothing without others. For the Bantu people this philosophy implies humanity, universality and openness.

Ubuntu © Koen Vanmechelen

This artwork will remain at Uffizi Gallerie as a permanent part of the collection.



Installation view, Ubuntu, Seduzione, Koen Vanmechelen, Uffizi Galleries

MEDUSA CARAVAGGIO: MEDUSA

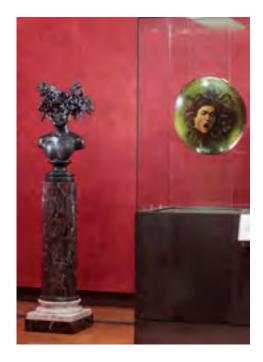
In the room dedicated to Caravaggio's Medusa, a magnificent painted parade shield is displayed in a case against the backdrop of a large red panel. On the walls, in addition to Cecco Bravo's Armida, it is worth highlighting a painting of the Gorgon's head crowned in writhing serpents painted by Otto Marseus van Schrieck but attributed in past centuries to Leonardo da Vinci and thus formerly admired by countless travellers as one of the most celebrated paintings at the Uffizi.

Medusa

Able to give great power and at the same time to turn into stone, Medusa fully embodies the duality of things and the unpredictability of natural evolution. Order and chaos, life and death: only the balance between the two opposites leads to evolutionary success.

On the head of Vanmechelen's Medusas we find some chickens, intertwined with the serpents. Like the venom of Medusa and her snakes, which in mythology is believed to awaken from the dead, chicken eggs are also used in modern medicine as a basis for drugs and vaccinations.

Overbreeding has created new lethal diseases for humankind. Danger always lurks in what we think we know. But there is always a certain way to look at Medusa - to approach her with respect - to save oneself from danger.





Black Medusa © Koen Vanmechelen

Caravaggio's Medusa © Uffizi Gallerie

SEDUZIONE EXHIBITION





VESTA D34

Vesta Mechelse Cubalaya

'Vesta – C.C.P' is a colossal portrait of one of the deceased chickens from Vanmechelens Cosmopolitan Chicken Project. This is the artist's worldwide cross-breeding program involving national and regional chicken breeds. It started in 1999 and aims at creating a truly Cosmopolitan Chicken, a hybrid carrying the genes of all the world's chicken breeds.

The portrait resembles the sacred murals, icons and images of holy and important persons. Guarded by Vesta, the virgin goddess of home and family in Roman religion, whose presence is symbolized by the sacred fire that burned at her temple.

The Cosmopolitan Chicken holds a mirror to the human visitor. It seemingly blends in with the traditional propagandistic murals and icons of significant persons, mostly men. But actually it does not. The fierce and striking colours of the animal, mostly yellow and red resemble the proudly scarlet and red coloured robes of catholic clergy. Representing courage and sacrifice. The crooked beaks and emotionless eyes give the scene a strong sense of austerity and gravity.

But it is the title of the artwork which reveals its deeper meaning. Vesta is the goddess of the hearth and home. Her presence is symbolized by the sacred fire that burned at her hearth and temples. History has always been written by men, but was made possible by women. Pope Honorius III decreed: Women should not speak. Their lips carry the stigma of Eve, who led men to perdition. Vesta – C.C.P restores their position and their dignity, not as Mary symbol of virginity and sterility, but as Mary Magdalene, a woman of flesh and blood.

The Vesta is installed in room D34, a room dedicated to Rembrandt, Rubens and Van Dyck. The faces portrayed by Rembrandt, Rubens and Van Dyck in small- and large-format paintings form a succession of rightly famous works which, brought together in this way, comprise a breathtaking group full of cues prompting a reflection on the great painting of the 17th century, which was primarily European on account of the lively circulation of ideas and of the many, ongoing contacts among artists and patrons who cared little for national borders or boundaries.





Vesta © Koen Vanmechelen
Installation view, Vesta, Seduzione, Uffizi Gallerie

PRESS CLIPPINGS **SELECTION**





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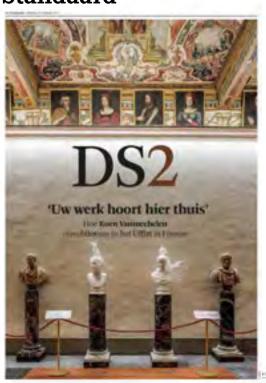
TUSSEN EN DA VINCI Belg Koen Vanmechelen in het Uffizi 15

'Het virus was de trigger voor deze kunstwerken'





dS De Standaard





Koen Vanmechelen sluipt door Uffizi in Firenze



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'Je kunt hier makkelijk falen met hedendaags werk'

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PERSONAL PROPERTY.



Kunstenaar Koen Vanmechelen mag zijn werk tonen in Firenze, naast Caravaggio: "Feestje in mijn hoofd"





HET BELANG VAN LI

KUNST MAKE THE PARTY

Koen Vanmechelen verleidt Italiaans topmuseum met expo 'Seduzione'









La Libre

LibreECO temasonal

Koen Van Mechelen au musée des Offices

Koen Van Mechelen, né à Saint-Trond, 56 ans, a développé une œuvre conceptuelle inclessable, à mi-chimin sribe art, science et philosophie.





il est connu pour son projet d'hybridation des poules, métaphors du métissage nécessaire des sociétés humaines. En 2019, il inaugurait sur le site des miries de Zwartberg et de son zoo, Labiomista, un singulier mix entre parc naturel et animalier, atelier d'artiste, et projet accentifique et philosophique autour de la diversité trumaine et de la nature, Cette. fois, il est l'invité du prestigieux musée Uffizi de Florence où il montre une trentaine d'oeuvres (soutolures et peintures) consocrées à l'évolution et l'hybridation, au mileu de chefs-d'oeuvres comme la Medusa du Caravage et la sculpture d'un hermaphrodite. Avec des iguanes corrus, un tigne rouge, la portrait d'un ancêtre-poulet, des bustes aux cheveux de serpents.

VIVI FIRENZE E LA TOSCANA | 11 Mestra Polit (pune expende um digre trento opere dell'artista belga Vannachelen Im Caravaggio e altri oppiavant. - Necessaria l'intercomendence di natigh-men vivanti

Creature che seducono Uffizi, un inno alla vita





EEDECOR ARCHITETTURA DESIGN TRAVEL CASE DESIGN/SHOW

ABBUINATE MOVISLETTER

d

L'AGENDA DELLE MOSTRE DA VEDERE QUESTA SETTIMANA IN TUTTA ITALIA

Pittana scultone, mula e fotografia, de enformar a renlementació, ma en Ja, mindiazona Sentetta le nel legio della selezione () expansioneme la rengió de mod e sud





L'agenda delle mostre da vedere questa settimana non lascia spuno ai dubiti suno veramente tantissimi gli appuntamenti culturali intressumi da seguire. Si inizia da un artista ragerizo conregente che, attraveno i suoi deieti, introde superure l'ormagne steresmpara che appartiene ul suo popolo, per pei passare a un'attista affermata che partira le travec del tempo e del suomo, impresso nella maseria organica sotetizzata delle suo sculture. Tra le proposte di fine gennaio

un posto di primo piano sperta anche alla fotografia che si esprime in modalità differenti, spaziarado da quella di architerana, dedicata al parrimonio modernizo della Georgia, a quella di vestatosnianza, la questo ambio spiccamo il ritratto di Venezia, volta dall'alterza di punti di vista inconsecti, quello della scontia cipti irrahena, Mossi, nei giorni della ricostruzione dopo la sconfina dello Stato Islamico, o ancora uno sguardo sulla vita quotidiana che animuva in cutta venavane, fi poi c'e la modo che, grazio a un propetto esponitrio 'speciale', avvia una riflemiene sull'importanza dell'economa circolare e della nonembritali per di luturo, infine, tra le mostre imperdibili di gennaio va sicuramente unociata quella che savia a scoprare creature finide fanantiche del mondo natorale, trarsposensio un vinggio originale insteno nil'idea di seducione.

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