

Press release

Nel Verbeke – Embrace Melancholy

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‘Embrace Melancholy’, a contemporary pursuit by Nel Verbeke to re-introduce and re-value acts of melancholy within the domestic setting. Her hybrid approach between visual art and conceptual design results in a poetic sculptural language that questions our way of seeing, acting and living.

Gallery Roehrs & Boetsch is delighted to announce the first solo exhibition of Ghent-based artist Nel Verbeke (b. 1989, Belgium).

Nel Verbeke's ‘Embrace Melancholy’ works are the result of discrepancies between observations of current tendencies, revealing a dominance of the aspiration towards constant happiness and self-control, and research on historical perceptions, where moments seized with emotion were seen as something desirable that were sought for their bittersweetness and intensity.

Could melancholy – that indefinite, essentially autonomous state of mind, with no apparent cause – still be sought after and longed for within the meaning of how we currently organize our life and living?



With a variety of forms, objects and concepts, Nel Verbeke transforms the exhibition space into a situation devoted to the exploration and reconsideration of acts of melancholy. The space becomes an inventory of spheres and objects, thoughts and frames, that each, in their own manner, suggest a possibility to embrace melancholy in our daily existence and domestic settings.

The situation manifests itself as a vacuum: to be there is to break free from the usual rhythms and day-to-day concerns. It radicalizes ways of living a life that deliberately embrace melancholy and the ambivalence of our emotional condition as an indispensable part of our being. The works themselves could, as such, be individual 'tools' or instruments – contemporary and immanent relics to perform the states, seized with emotion, and thus to recalibrate the balance of our mind.



One example are 'The sound of time' works. Throughout the exhibition space, related objects appear in alternating settings. Some are placed together, assembled in a copper structure; another stands on its own, or is balanced in an elegant holder, delicately counterweighted by a copper ball and mounted on a blackened, wooden base.

Their resemblance lies within their form: two conoidal components joined at their narrowest points. Their opaque manifestation makes them enigmatic, almost mysterious. It is within the act that they reveal their secret. As they are turned over, inner material travels from top to bottom, generating a sound: the sound of time.

The objects are individual chapters of a ritual of melancholy, each with its own characteristics and individual nature. When considered as instruments, the objects deconstruct time and its usual metre, allowing us moments of contemplation and introspection, detached from utility or pragmatism. This is time absorbed in itself – the time of time – pronounced only by its own sound; a thought, further radicalized by creating hourglasses in the same materials as their own moving contents.

The materials, forms and concepts of Nel Verbeke's works are the result of extensive research on past rituals of loss and sadness. The material choices and designs were prominently evaluated for their ability to show and experience the beauty of melancholy: wood, ashed wood, glass, copper. Equally important is the way the materials are processed: ancient techniques and crafts seem to absorb and reflect the deconstruction of time – something that melancholy is also capable of.

The exhibition 'Embrace Melancholy' features a unique site-specific rendering of the domestic space, including several new sculptural objects / works developed in the context of this exhibition plus some key works from previous years.

Nel Verbeke (Belgium, 1989) lives and works in Ghent, Belgium. She studied Concept Design at the Design Academy in Eindhoven (NL). Prior to this, she completed her education in Fine Arts at Luca School of Arts in Ghent, Belgium.

Throughout her artistic practice, Nel Verbeke sets out in search of new arrangements and formulations of our surroundings. Her works are alternative compositions of time, space, motion and acts; on the one hand, they question our relationship to the ambivalence of our emotions; on the other, they suggest that emotional states of mind could be habitable spaces, shelters for a profound moment of introspection and contemplation.

For further information, please contact Nina Röhrs (gallery@roehrsboetsch.com).