

NEED

10.10.2025 – 30.12.2025

GALLERIA CONTINUA is pleased to present *NEED*, Berlinde De Bruyckere's first solo exhibition in its Paris Marais space, crowning over 25 years of collaboration. A major figure in international contemporary art, the Belgian artist transforms the gallery with an ensemble of monumental sculptures alongside more intimate artworks exploring some of the major themes she has developed in recent years.

The exhibition's title, *NEED*, reflects the imperative that runs through De Bruyckere's work: the necessity to give form to what language struggles to convey, touching upon the extremes of human experience through transformation and sublimation – whether it be pain or desire, repulsion or attraction, decay or rejuvenation. "It is the ever-recurring horror and beauty that we, as humans, do not fully understand, but of which we are nevertheless a part," explains De Bruyckere.

De Bruyckere's captivating universe is made up of works imbued with poetry and references to art history – notably religious iconography, classical mythology, and masterpieces by the Old Masters of the European Renaissance and 15th century Flemish painting. These influences allow her to delve into today's world with astonishing precision, blending universal themes that surpass notions of time and space, and atmospheres that are both dark and soothing, with a disquieting realism that bewilders as much as it fascinates.

For over thirty years, the artist has developed a unique vocabulary and technique combining wax, animal skins, used textiles, metal, and wood. At the centre is always life, whether in a state of vitality or decline, in its eternal metamorphosis. Her sewn or punctured blankets, marked by use and time so that the passage is almost visible, her suspended bodies, and her wax casts under glass domes testify to a condition perpetually suspended in tension, on the threshold between life and its absence, the animate and the inanimate.

On the ground floor, the monumental wax sculpture *Palindroom* (2019) evokes what is referred to in veterinary circles as a "phantom mare," a substitute for the female animal used in horse breeding for artificial insemination, designed to stimulate the male's desire. Although it serves as a representative of the female sex, it paradoxically suggests a phallic form. It is precisely this ambiguity that lies at the heart of the artist's reflection. Inanimate yet a driver of impulses, Berlinde De Bruyckere stages an object devoid of life yet intended to generate it – a volume without anatomical attributes, yet fully a sexual image.

Counterbalancing the bold and imposing nature of *Palindroom* (2019), the series *It almost seemed a lily* introduces fragility and delicate precision, gently guiding the visitor from the ground floor to the first floor. Deeply inspired by the *Enclosed Gardens* – private devotional cabinets created in the 16th century by the Hospital Sisters of Malines and adorned with meticulously handcrafted flowers in various stages of growth and decay, hidden messages, human bones, and other relics – De Bruyckere offers here a reinterpretation of these unique mixed-media artefacts alongside a series of collages based on the same theme. These combine various types of old tracing papers with floral patterns into new compositions. Though associated with religious devotion, the 16th-century private altars also expressed a form of spiritual intimacy and sublimated desire. This erotic component is most present in De Bruyckere's 2023 collages, where pencil drawings of male genitalia serve as the pistils and stamens of wilting lilies.

The concept of fragility – a common thread throughout Berlinde De Bruyckere's work – finds one of its most striking expressions in her *Glassdome* works: intimate wax sculptures enclosed within antique glass domes, blurring the boundaries between protection and exposure. The exhibition presents several versions of these pieces, housing her renowned archangels

as well as other representations of the body. In **Madonna del Parto (2025)**, presented to the public for the first time, a subtle tension emerges between masculine and feminine, between impudence and chastity. The work is a reference to Piero della Francesca's eponymous fresco (c. 1460, Museo della Madonna del Parto, Monterchi, Italy), depicting two angels opening a curtain to reveal the pregnant Madonna, who, in turn, points to the opening in her gown. Dressed in a purple silk cloak, the sculpture evokes the female sex while referencing the robes worn by priests during Easter rituals and funerals. With its richly layered iconography, this composition simultaneously embodies both the source of life and the presence of death.

Interested in the union of opposites coexisting in the world, De Bruyckere offers in her new **Plunder** works a striking depiction of humanity's darker truths: the violence we are capable of inflicting on others and the need for self-preservation exercised simultaneously. The title, which usually carries a negative connotation, raises questions about ownership, fundamental human rights, and fluctuating moral codes – inviting us to refrain from one-sided judgement and to investigate the subtle complexities of the human condition. The experience that inspired the **Plunder** series was the artist's visit to various museums during her trip to Iran in 1996. After the pillaging that had taken place during the days of the revolution, the museum displays were left half empty, often still showing the imprints of stolen valuables and the ribbons that had once held them.

The exhibition's journey culminates and transcends in the two **Need** vitrines, a continuation of a series of works originally conceived for the Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore during the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024. Inspired by the woodcarvings of the Basilica's main choir – depicting scenes from the life of Saint Benedict of Nursia, notably his extreme act of penitence, throwing himself into thick brambles to overcome carnal temptation and purify his soul – Berlinde De Bruyckere presented sculptural relics inside four vitrines, combining personified branches, flayed skins, and wounded bodies cast in wax. The **Need** works here on view incorporate yet another element from the artist's 2024 presentation in the Basilica: the mirror. Both the torn piece of flesh-coloured tree bark, supported by an iron structure in **Need VII (2025)**, and the brittle wax trees – resembling flesh or even human bones – literally held together by a thread and leaning on one another in **Need VI (2025)**, are illuminated by a backdrop of antique mirror panes, allowing the visitor to see the totality of the work at once, and thereby become part of it. The **Need** vitrines are a simultaneous embodiment of immortalized life and death in their most vivid form, blurring all boundaries between permanence and evanescence.

The exhibition unfolds the full power of Berlinde De Bruyckere's art, confronting viewers with the complexity and transitory nature of the human condition, challenging all criteria of judgment, and inviting contemplation, emotional engagement, and reflection on the profound tensions that traverse both existence and the experience of art.

About the artist:

Berlinde De Bruyckere was born in Ghent, Belgium in 1964, where she currently lives and works. Since her first exhibition in the mid-1980s, De Bruyckere's sculptures and drawings have been the subject of numerous exhibitions in major institutions worldwide. Recent exhibitions include *Lift Not The Painted Veil*, Ernst Barlach Haus, Hamburg, Germany, *Khoros*, Bozar, Brussels, Belgium (2025), *City of Refuge III*, collateral event of the 60th Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy (2024), *No Life Lost*, Artipelag, Stockholm, Sweden (2024), *Crossing a Bridge on Fire*, MAC CCB, Lisbon, Portugal (2023), *City of Refuge II*, Diozesanmuseum, Freising, Germany (2023), *City of Refuge I*, Commanderie de Peyrassol, Flassans-sur-Issole, France (2023) *PEL-Becoming the Figure*, Arp Museum, Remagen, Germany (2022), *Plunder/Ekphrasis*, MO.CO, Montpellier, France (2022), *Engelenkeel*, Bonnefanten, Maastricht, The Netherlands (2021), *'Aletheia'*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy (2019–2020), *Il Mantello* (5x5x5 event for Manifesta 12), Santa Venera Church, Palermo, Sicily (2018), *Berlinde De Bruyckere*, Sara Hilden Art Museum, Tampere, Finland (2018), *Embalmed*, Kunsthall Aarhus, Denmark (2017), *Suture*, Leopold Museum, Vienna, Austria (2016); *No Life Lost*, Hauser & Wirth New York (2016); *Berlinde De Bruyckere-Penthesilea*, Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg, France (2015); *The Embalmer*, Kunsthau Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria (2015); *The Embalmer*, Kunstraum Dornbirn, Dornbirn, Austria (2015); *Berlinde De Bruyckere*, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague, Netherlands (2015).

In 2013 De Bruyckere was selected to represent Belgium at the 55th Venice Biennale where she unveiled her monumental work *Kreupelhout* – *Cripplewood*, a collaboration with Nobel Prize novelist J.M. Coetzee.

Recently De Bruyckere has extended her field of activity towards the performing arts as a Scenographer, in close collaboration with photographer Mirjam Devriendt. Projects include: *City of Refuge IV*, Ruhr Triennale 2024, Bochum, Germany (2024), *Mariavespers*, Holland Festival, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2017); *Nicht Schlafen* Les Ballets C de la B, Ruhrtriennale, Bochum, Germany (2016) and *Penthesilea* La Monnaie, Brussels, Belgium (2015).

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