# Berlinde De Bruyckere

# PEL / Becoming the figure

# July 3, 2022 – January 8, 2023

# Ein Bild, das Kleidung enthält. Automatisch generierte Beschreibung

**Berlinde De Bruyckere | Courtyard Tales, 2017 – 2018**  
© Berlinde De Bruyckere | Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth | photo: Mirjam Devriendt

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**Press Release**

Rolandseck, July 1, 2022

**Berlinde De Bruyckere**

**PEL / Becoming the figure**

*On view July 3, 2022–January 8, 2023*

***»The skin is the container of the soul«***

Berlinde De Bruyckere

**Berlinde De Bruyckere (b. 1964, lives and works in Ghent, Belgium), is one of the world’s most important contemporary sculptors. At once fascinating and unsettling, her sculptures have a way of »getting under the skin« of their viewers. In opening its doors to her, the Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck is not only welcoming a singular artist, but also presenting an exhibition that is like no other in its insistence on an empathetic reckoning with the art on display.**

*»Berlinde De Bruyckere’s unsettling sculptures do not make it easy for us to find the right words for her work,«* **explains** the Arp Museum’s **acting director, Petra Spielmann.** *»Vulnerability and ephemerality, as characteristics constitutive of all creatural existence, are the center around which her works revolve, with beauty and ephemerality forming a single unit. De Bruyckere’s sculptures bear witness to the suffering in the world. The work’s tremendous aesthetic power arises from the transformational processes that she depicts in such great detail.«*

One of the Arp Museum’s **board members, Andra Lauffs-Wegner, describes her own impressions:** *»Berlinde De Bruyckere’s art represents a sensitive view of human experience that brings the unspeakable into the realm of the visible. It is a special kind of attention that the artist devotes to the lives of humans and animals and everything that signifies life. This rapt attention can serve us all as an example. By following it, we can see art and the world in a completely new way, characterized by understanding and sympathy.«*

**Jutta Mattern, curator** of the exhibition, adds: »*With her works, Berlinde De Bruyckere transforms Richard Meier’s light-suffused spaces into a stage, giving us an impressive demonstration of what ‘life’ can mean. Here, in a cathedral of light, the frightening and often unspeakable is transformed once more into the beautiful and sublime. With their empathetic view of a world that can sometimes be cruel and distressing, the artist’s works present us with a gift of hope, beauty, and longing.«*

**On the title of the exhibition**

With the title *PEL / Becoming the figure*, Berlinde De Bruyckere addresses a central theme of her artistic work. The Dutch word *pel* – to peel, pare, or skin – is a close relative of the English word *peel*. It describes an important sculptural process for the artist, who often strips the coverings from her figures and conglomerations of shapes – or, conversely, helps those coverings, those skins, achieve bodily structure. The interplay between abstraction, form, and figure expresses a vital and transformative process.

**The human body**

With 34 works on display, *PEL / Becoming the figure* provides an overview of the artist’s work over the past 25 years. While the exhibition includes pieces in a variety of media from throughout her career, it returns again and again to a theme that is key to De Bruyckere’s work: human beings, with their psychic and physical wounds.

The representation of the human figure in De Bruyckere’s work rests on **classical formal principles.** Her choice of wax as a material, which she employs in painterly fashion, contributes significantly to the realism of her sculptures. The process produces highly detailed pieces that show the human body in all its vulnerability: Sometimes the naked skin is emphasized, sometimes sutures and wounds can be seen, sometimes bodies appear without heads, and in some works, fragments of the body become defining elements. Often severely deformed, these works resemble lumps of flesh, demanding to be approached with an unusually unflinching and empathetic eye. In the spirit of the title *PEL / Becoming the figure*, De Bruyckere comes at the evolution of her sculptures from a variety of directions, using a palette that ranges from the body’s form-giving outer shell to its fragmentation to a sculpted corporeality.

This is vividly illustrated by works such as *Schmerzensmann IV, 2006*: A naked human body without a head clings to a pole, twisting around it – an image that stands, in Christian iconography, for the Passion of Christ. De Bruyckere’s “man of suffering,” however, is a departure from familiar pictorial tradition. Shaped by her experiences at a Catholic boarding school, De Bruyckere developed an interest in religious painting early on. Today she deals extensively with **Christian themes** in her work. For example, by transforming the martyrdoms of Christian saints into the universal and timeless in her artistic practice, she adapts them to the present.

**Classical mythology** – especially the stories in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* – has been a perennial source of inspiration for the sculptor as well. One example is the tale of the satyr Marsyas. After a flute-playing competition, an offended Apollo punishes Marsyas’s artistry by having him flayed alive. De Bruyckere has two Marsyas sculptures in this exhibition, which approach the question of corporeality in quite different ways. We encounter the satyr once in the form of three skins or pelts that hang from the ceiling, and a second time as a fur-wrapped human figure standing on a plinth. In covering the figure in protective layers, De Bruyckere restores its dignity and gives it healing. Like so many of her pieces depicting humans, its body remains headless, for she regards the head as a distraction. As she explains: »*I don’t need heads or faces, because they’re limiting. I want the sculpture to speak to the viewer through its movement or posture. The expressiveness of these aspects becomes much more apparent without heads. Heads would draw too much attention. It’s about a more universal level, not a portrait of us in the present.«*

With her human figures, De Bruyckere offers very personal interpretations of vulnerability, pain, and suffering, recognizing suffering as a quality common to all living creatures. Viewing these works stirs our sympathy and personal emotions, which are shared as a collective experience. These emotions become a unifying element that engenders a sense of security and peace. In this way, De Bruyckere also deals with the other side of traumatic experience: compassion, community, and hope.

**Art and dance**

De Bruyckere’s sculptures are closely linked to her interest in the expressive potential of posture and dance. The immediacy and emotionally compelling nature of her work is due in part to her close **collaborations with a number of dancers,** with whom she has worked since 2004. The most prominent of these is the Portuguese dancer Romeu Runa (b. 1978, lives and works in Brussels), who will present dance performances during the exhibition at the Arp Museum on three separate dates. The interweaving of visual art and dance shows how shapes taken on by the body can reveal profoundly moving inner states.

An explanation for the second part of the title *PEL / Becoming the figure* can be found in De Bruyckere’s artistic processes. The creation of the artist’s human figures always begins with an idea on a specific theme. She then works with dancers to develop expressive postures, which she captures in photographs. These photographs are later converted into drawings, which play an important role in the genesis of her sculptures but are also to be regarded as works in their own right. Finally, wax casts of the dancers’ bodies are created, which the artist subsequently reshapes, sometimes combining them with other body parts. In this way, all manner of deformations are brought to light.

The series *Romeu my deer*, with Romeu Runa, was created this way. Two drawings from the series are included in the exhibition, and Runa will present a performance of the same name (centering on the myth of Actaeon) at the Arp Museum on two occasions. An important element here, in addition to the body and its movements, is a set of antlers, which can be viewed as both a reference to the underlying story and an allusion to the wall piece *Rodt, 6 januari, XI, 2014–2016*, which is also included in the exhibition. The themes of the classical tale – transformation, pain, and death – are conveyed through expressive dance movements and also captured more permanently in the form of drawings and sculptures.

The exhibition at the Arp Museum will also explore the connections between dance and visual art through a documentary film in which Runa and De Bruyckere discuss their collaboration and describe the interplay between their different forms of expression. A film of another performance by Runa, *PEL*, will be screened as well.

**Equine fates**

The horse has held special significance in De Bruyckere’s work since 1999. She is fascinated by the beauty, spiritedness, and strength of these animals. Her intensive study of historical photographs in the archives of the In Flanders Fields Museum, in Ypres, impressed on her the horrible fates of millions of horses killed and injured on the battlefields of World War I. Using casts of horses’ bodies, which are then covered with real horsehides, she has created arresting and moving sculptures. This process leaves behind seams, visible traces of vulnerability that serve as evidence of De Bruyckere’s artistic intervention.

These casts, too, address the themes of corporeality, vulnerability, and ephemerality and are thus linked to the artist’s representations of humans. Accordingly, the life-size horse sculpture in our exhibition is titled *Lichaam (Corps), 2002–2006*, which translates to “body.” It is the body and its fragility, once again, that forms a bridge here between animal and human. The equine body’s wounds and deformations therefore also symbolize the human suffering of war, which is otherwise nearly impossible to express in images. In a sense, the horse becomes a metaphor for human fates and feelings.

Horse harnesses appear in the exhibition as well. Part of the *Met tere huid* series, these objects serve De Bruyckere as the starting point for sculptural forms covered in wax and wrapped in fabric. Here again, the focus is on skin and coverings, with leather, wax, and cloth layered over one another. The materials used and the emotional quality of these works lend them a delicate but **unmediated sensuality.** In this way, the artist also brings out the theme of sexuality, as the works are reminiscent of both male and female genitalia.

**Layer by layer**

In addition to wax, other materials come to the fore in the museum’s cabinet room – namely, **paper and cloth.** On view here are some of De Bruyckere’s most recent pieces: ten works on paper created for the exhibition at the Arp Museum, where they will be shown for the first time. Operating in the space between drawing and collage, their allusions and potential interpretations are every bit as multilayered as their materials. Consisting of fine ink linework on translucent, earth-tone layers of paper, they address the theme of sexuality with delicacy and sensitivity.

They also enter into dialogue with a large and striking textile work made up of tattered blankets, titled ***Courtyard Tales, 2017–2018*.** This piece resembles detached frescoes that have been assembled by the artist to form a kind of relief. Despite the absence of any human body, the blankets nonetheless invoke the people they once covered, sheltered, and kept warm. They are evidence of unknown histories and biographies, of undefined life circumstances, and they draw our gaze to the interior, to that which lies “behind the curtain” and remains otherwise hidden.

In the singular light of the Richard Meier–designed building, in the liminal realm between earth and sky, Berlinde De Bruyckere’s arresting works shine forth. Natural light embraces them and allows them to make themselves felt in peaceful silence. We are touched by their portrayals of suffering, reconciliation, hope, and compassion. We are moved by their vulnerability and melancholy as they alternate between vitality and death, harmony and deformation, figuration and abstraction. They are proof of visible and tangible processes of transformation in both human and animal lives. And in this way they give us, as part of the whole, the courage to meet the unknown with hope.

**Performances at the Arp Museum**

In collaboration with Berlinde De Bruyckere and inspired by her work, the Portuguese **dancer Romeu Runa** will present two performances on three dates. *Romeu my deer* is based on the classical myth of Actaeon as told by Ovid. While hunting, Actaeon stumbles upon the goddess Diana while she is bathing and is transformed by her into a stag. In this new form, he is hunted and torn apart by his own dogs. The second performance, *Sibylle*, also refers to a story from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The central character here is the Cumaean Sibyl, whose body ages in tragic fashion as the result of an unfortunately phrased wish. As she lives through century after century, her physical decay progresses until all that remains of her is her voice.

**Romeu my deer** July 3, 2022 | 4 pm | Lobby, Richard Meier building

October 9, 2022 | 2 pm | Banquet hall, historic station building

**Sibylle** January 8, 2023 | 5 pm | Within the exhibition

**About the dancer**

Romeu Runa (b. 1978, Cova da Piedade, Portugal) graduated from the National Conservatory of Lisbon and performed with the Gulbenkian Ballet until its disbandment. Since then, he has worked with Miguel Moreira (Utero), Rui Horta, Paulo Ribeiro, Clara Andermatt, Olga Roriz, Teatro Praga, Labour Graz, In-jun Jung, Claudia Novoa, Hillel Kogan, Alain Platel, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Martin Zimmerman, Gonçalo Wadington, Tonan Quito, Cassiana Maranha, James Newit, Vânia Rovisco, José Fonseca e Costa, Tiago Guedes, Yann le Quellec, Marco Martins, Beatriz Batarda, Vittorio Santoro, Tiago Lima, Jeanne Waltz, Diogo Costa Amaral, Pedro Paiva, Margarida Cardoso, Paulo Filipe Monteiro, and Peeping Tom.

**Exhibition catalog**

A catalog of the exhibition in German and English, with numerous illustrations and installation views, will be published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König. It will contain a foreword by Petra Spielmann and essays by Jutta Mattern, Romeu Runa, Alain Platel, and Berlinde De Bruyckere.

**Media guide**

The exhibition will also be accompanied by a media guide providing background information on each of the works on view. The guide will be available to download in the Arp Museum app as an in-app purchase.

**Artworks in the exhibition**

16 sculptures (including one outdoors)

18 prints

**General Information** Supported by:

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**Opening times:** Tuesday to Sunday and on public holidays 11 a.m. until 6 p.m.   
  
**Admission**: Adults, all exhibitions: 11 Euro, reduced: 9 Euro

**Our complete program:** www.arpmuseum.org

**Facebook**: www.facebook.com/arpmuseumbahnhofrolandseck

**Twitter (**#arpmuseum**)**

**Instagram (**#arpmuseum)

**PRESS MATERIAL** on the homepage of the Arp Museum via:

<https://arpmuseum.org/en/museum/about-us/press.html>

**Press images**

**»Berlinde De Bruyckere. PEL / Becoming the figure«**July 3, 2022 – January 8, 2023

Ein Bild, das Kleidung enthält.

Automatisch generierte Beschreibung

Berlinde De Bruyckere | Courtyard Tales, 2017 – 2018

© Berlinde De Bruyckere | Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth   
| Photo: Mirjam Devriendt



Berlinde De Bruyckere | Marsyas, 2020 | © Berlinde De Bruyckere   
Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, The Netherlands | Photo: Ela Bialkowska



Berlinde De Bruyckere | J.L., 2006 | © Berlinde De Bruyckere   
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth | Photo: Mirjam Devriendt



Berlinde De Bruyckere | Het Hart Uitgerukt, 1998   
© Berlinde De Bruyckere | Private Collection | Photo: Mirjam Devriendt



Berlinde De Bruyckere | Parasiet, 1996   
© Berlinde De Bruyckere | Collection of the artist | Photo: Jan Pauwels

Ein Bild, das Galerie, Wand, Raum, Szene enthält.

Automatisch generierte Beschreibung

Berlinde De Bruyckere | Foot, 2008 | © Berlinde De Bruyckere   
Private Collection, London | Photo: Mirjam Devriendt



Berlinde De Bruyckere | Lichaam (Corps), 2002–2006 | © Berlinde De   
Bruyckere | Galleria Continua | Photo: Mirjam Devriendt

Ein Bild, das Text, Strichzeichnung enthält.

Automatisch generierte Beschreibung

Berlinde De Bruyckere | Romeu “my deer”, 2010  
© Berlinde De Bruyckere | Collection of the artist | Photo: Mirjam Devriendt

Ein Bild, das Tasche enthält.

Automatisch generierte Beschreibung

Berlinde De Bruyckere | It almost seemed a lily, 2019-2022   
© Berlinde De Bruyckere | Collection of the artist | Photo: Mirjam Devriendt



Berlinde De Bruyckere | It almost seemed a lily II, 2017   
 © Berlinde De Bruyckere | Sara Hildén Foundation / Sara Hildén Art Museum  
| Photo: Jussi Koivunen

Ein Bild, das Gebäude, Person, draußen, Mann enthält.

Automatisch generierte Beschreibung

Portrait of Berlinde De Bruyckere | © Photo: Burkhard Maus

Ein Bild, das Boden, drinnen, braun, stehend enthält.

Automatisch generierte Beschreibung

Exhibition view »Berlinde De Bruyckere.   
PEL / Becoming the figure« | © Photo: Helmut Reinelt

Ein Bild, das drinnen, Boden, Möbel enthält.

Automatisch generierte Beschreibung

Exhibition view »Berlinde De Bruyckere.   
PEL / Becoming the figure« | © Photo: Helmut Reinelt

Ein Bild, das Gras, draußen, Beton, Zement enthält.

Automatisch generierte Beschreibung

The work »Herbeumont, 2017-2019« in the outside area |   
© Photo: Helmut Reinelt

**Exhibition program 2022/23**

**Theme year of »Female Pioneers«**

until September 4, 2022 **Art Chamber Rau:**

**»These are my Modern Women« Trading Monet for Modersohn-Becker**

until October 16, 2022 **Unwesen und Treiben**

**Heading for a Permanent Exhibition for Arp and Taeuber-Arp**

April until October 2022 Exhibition **Students**

Design students of the KISD (Köln International School of Design) under the direction of Prof. Iris Utikal and Tanja Godlewsky

Exhibition **Pupils**

Pupils of the FEG (Friedrich-Ebert-

Gymnasium), Bonn under direction of Dr. Eva Christine Raschke

Exhibition **Inclusion**

Participants of the Nak Nak Kunstlabor,

Cologne under the direction of the artist Monica Pantel

until January 8, 2023 **Berlinde De Bruyckere**

September 18, 2022 until March 26, 2023 **Art Chamber Rau:**

**Animal action! Animals and their People**

**Art Chamber Rau: »These are my modern women«   
Trading Monet for Modersohn-Becker**until September 4, 2022

Ein Bild, das Text, Zeichnung enthält.

Automatisch generierte BeschreibungThis year, the Art Chamber Rau offers a special kind of collection meeting. 19 works from the Rau Collection for UNICEF enter into dialogue with 35 highlights from the Roselius Collection from the Böttcherstraße Museums in Bremen, as well as with four additional works from the Paula Modersohn Becker Foundation. The artist Berlinde De Bruyckere joins them with three striking works. Thus an energetic force field is formed around the exceptional artist Paula Modersohn-Becker, to whom this show is centrally dedicated. As if under a burning glass, her example allows us to observe groundbreaking changes in society and art around 1900. Resolutely »painting straight ahead,« she pursued her path unperturbed by any criticism - a thoroughly relevant role model right up to our own time.

The exhibition focuses on spectacular nudes by Modersohn-Becker, some of which are life-size. Many were created during her studies. But even years later, she repeatedly returned to them and worked them into impressive canvas paintings that celebrated the natural beauty of the body - the »great simplicity of form,« as she called it.

**Unwesen und Treiben  
Heading for a Permanent Exhibition for Arp and Taeuber-Arp**until October 16, 2022

Ein Bild, das Text, Person, drinnen enthält.

Automatisch generierte BeschreibungEin Bild, das Text, Person enthält.

Automatisch generierte Beschreibung*Who was Hans Arp? Who was Sophie Taeuber-Arp?* And to what extent is their pioneering artistic work still relevant for us today? These are questions we ask ourselves again and again at the Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck. Over the past 15 years, we have tried to answer these questions in various formats: through our exhibitions, in which we showed the groundbreaking works of the two artists, through academic research and comprehensive publications.

Now we want to dare something new! We are opening the museum and invite our visitors to join us in a venture with an uncertain outcome. With the exhibition »Unwesen und Treiben« (lit. »mischief and doings«), we are laying the foundation for the permanent exhibition planned for 2023, which will be dedicated to these two pioneers of modernism.

In the exhibition, we no longer on our own pose the big questions that surround the artistic principles of Hans Arp’s and Sophie Taeuber-Arp’s art, but wish to enter into a dialogue and thus open up new perspectives on Arp’s and Taeuber-Arp’s creative work. We want to »do some mischief« together (»Unwesen treiben«), inspired by the two artists who thoroughly turned the art world upside down during their lifetime. They did things differently, thought them in a new way and created works whose relevance is still undiminished today. A modernist couple who with their innovative radiance continue to inspire. Their oeuvre always offers new approaches for thinking, living and creating art in a free and creative way.

In order to get support, we invited three groups to reflect, ask questions and try things out with us: students of the Köln International School of Design (KISD), participants of the Nak Nak Kunstlabor in Cologne and pupils of the Friedrich-Ebert-Gymnasium in Bonn. By means of workshops before and during the exhibition, the participating groups will engage with the art of Hans and Sophie. The new perspectives gained in this way will then be on display in three alternating exhibitions in the cabinet room on the upper exhibition floor and will thus continually complement the show.

**Art Chamber Rau: Animal Action! Animals and their People**September 18, 2022 bis March 26, 2023

Ein Bild, das Text, Gruppe, Vogel, mehrere enthält.

Automatisch generierte Beschreibung In the second half of 2022, there will be great deal of »animal action« at the Art Chamber Rau! That is because in many of the paintings and sculptures in Gustav Rau’s collection you will hear a crowing, barking and grunting. From September onwards, we will be unleashing the animal world, from the Middle Ages to modern times.

Mythical beasts and tamed creatures are central figures in religion and popular belief. Sometimes they are spiritual ancestors, helping gods, cursed demons or symbolic representatives of man. They reflect the traditionally close bonds between animals and humans. These bonds are ambivalent, characterised by love and fear, by uncompromising possessiveness and the acceptance of a useful helper by man’s side. Some of these helpers will be presented as examples: dairy cows, sheep, horses and chickens will take centre stage in the pictures.

The untamed wild animal, on the other hand, remains a prey. Freshly shot down, retrieved by the faithful hunting dog, it is captured by baroque painters to demonstrate the courtly sport of hunting and its successes. More and more, the individual dog emancipates itself from the anonymous pack, becomes the closest companion and finally, in the 18th century, the friend of man. While in classical portraits the greyhound served the lord of the hunt as a badge of his nobility, it now sits as a companion on a table or bench, almost on an equal footing with him. The artworks in the Rau Collection for UNICEF tell these eventful stories of animals and humans right up to the present day.