

MAARTEN VANDEN EYNDE

Catastrophic Casualties & Casual Catastrophes

27 May – 16 July 2016

For his third personal exhibition at the gallery, **MAARTEN VANDEN EYNDE** brings us a series of works produced on his return from two recent trips to the Congo and the United States. Putting history at the centre of his research, the artist considers the relationships between our Here and Now with our collective past.

In the right-hand room, the visitor encounters a reproduction on lead (material linked to uranium in a complex decay chain) of the visible impact of the Trinity test, the first trial of an atomic bomb in the desert of New Mexico in July 1945. That test opened the way for use of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Combining the dramatic and the absurd, Vanden Eynde commissioned a lace version of *Gadget*, the weapon tested in New Mexico, as well as *Little Boy* and *Fat Man*, the names given to the bombs dropped on Japan. Upsetting the usual codes of this activity associated with the peace and quiet of lace-makers and the Belgian cultural heritage, the artist uses the complexity of the network of intertwined threads to show that making the bomb was a collective task with repercussions that continue even today. A typically feminine activity (making a richly ornamented item) and a male responsibility (developing a powerful military arsenal) seem to collide in a curious sensation of crumpling. The contrast between these two leads to a bitter smile, as the nuclear threat of devastation remains in the realm of possibilities. Even the shape of the wooden bobbins is reminiscent of that of bombs, as is that of the earplugs positioned in a cabinet like pretty little objects. The title *War on Terror* brings a more tragic dimension to the interpretation of the work, and alludes to the policy of 'turning a deaf ear', which some nations apply to armed conflicts. Only showing one half of the pair of earplugs is also intended to denounce the fact that information supplied by the press is often incomplete (only one side of the story). Resembling the shape of a missile, *Silicon Age*, the silicon carrot exhibited on a base is a way to open up the relationship between technology and culture that interests Vanden Eynde. The mining of raw materials (and particularly the one that lent its name to Silicon Valley) is touched on here, as is the human research on which the technology depends. At the base of this silicon column, Vanden Eynde has engraved a replica of the first integrated circuit, linking the provenance of an object to its purpose. Along the same lines, we see with *Cosmic Connection* in the left-hand room hundreds of circuits soldered into the shape of a satellite, highlighting the paramount role of communication in our era. Communication however also leads to material remnants, as is the case of several thousand of satellites that are in orbit around earth, but of which only a small fraction is still working. *Malachite mobiles*, the series of thirteen telephones sculpted in malachite, reinforces these ideas. The copper carbonate mines in Congo are numerous and productive. Copper is one of the major components of all mobile phones and Vanden Eynde had the idea of working with local craftsmen to reproduce the first iconic models of mobile phones (Nokia, iPhone, Samsung, ...). By calling on local labour, the artist asks once again the colonial questions about the economic system of redistribution while questioning the Western technological revolution. Likewise when he presents the phones as archaeological finds or precious stones while recreating the commercial surroundings of an anonymous phone retailer.

Finally, *Horror Vacui* (fear of empty space) is a work consisting of photographs from a *Study on Ossification of the Hand among Black Children in the Belgian Congo*, published in 1951, and of the cast of the hand of Leopold II made by the artist from the statue of the king on horseback, located in Place du Trône in Brussels. Placing the cast - the negative of the right hand - on a butcher's scales, Vanden Eynde questions the weight of responsibility of the Belgian sovereign in the history of the Belgian Congo in a barely-disguised allusion to the expression 'to have blood on one's hands'.

Belgian artist Maarten Vanden Eynde was born in 1977 and travels constantly around the world to observe diverse complex phenomena (ecology, anthropology, archeology). Vanden Eynde has invented « Genetology », the science that covers several research fields and that forms the theoretical bases of his practice. His work shows us that the usual observation grid to understand our world (opposition of technique and nature /human and not-human) are more and more obsolete and that new ones should be reinvented. The work of Vanden Eynde has already been shown in several countries and contexts of which recently FRAC Lorraine, Metz (France), the Cornell University, Ithaca, New York (USA), the Hordaland Art Center, Bergen (Norway). In Belgium his practice has received visibility in amongst others the Museum M, Leuven and during Manifesta 9, Genk, and principally with his solo exhibition at the M hKA Antwerp. In 2015 his work has been shown in New Orleans (USA) and in Congo, but also in Hangar H18 in Brussels.