

Laurie Cluitmans

Rein Dufait;

Strange bodies, hesitancy, and porous borders.

A few months after his solo exhibition at P////AKT, I speak to Rein Dufait. I would have liked to have spoken to him earlier, and was keen to visit him at his seaside studio in Ostend. However, time had a different plan, and doesn't always let itself be led very easily. I pictured a romantic studio where a seeming chaos reigned but was in fact arranged with the utmost care so that materials, processes, and sources of inspiration could flow through one another naturally. A large studio, but with a slight draught that offers you the taste and smell of the Ocean's breath. Instead of this projected image, I drink a blockbuster-coffee at the Amsterdam Central Station, in the midst of the bustling crowds and the tourists. With my name on my cup I have become a tree.

Over the telephone Rein describes the recently finished collages of what he calls "stones folded inside out". The meticulously and yet playfully composed constellations of lines and coloured surfaces are like a blueprint and landscape at once. The bright colours form a contrast against the prevalence of earthly hues of the sculptures that were exhibited at P////AKT. He has been working at Ostend beach for one year. The necessity – a lack of space in his studio – he turned into a virtue. He dragged plastic moulds over the beach and perceived how these gradually filled themselves, how the mass of sand pushed against the plastic encasement. The transparency of the colourless mold made this tension clearly visible and made the sand an impressive mass. "At the time, I couldn't stand any colours", Rein tells us. "The space of the sea and the beach are so overpowering that colour can't have meaning in this environment. What colour could you add to nature, in which all is contained?"

*Elpha* from 2017 is a work that has emerged from such a 'beach investigation'. It is a Plexiglas house – a vitrine and a mold at once – in which a cement sculpture appears to have organically grown its way inside. The remains of sand upon the inner side of the Perspex serves as a memory of the process of the building. The tension between the inner and outer sides seem to reveal the potential of the material. For P////AKT he made the next step with *Corpora aliena – variant I with red* and *Corpora aliena – variant II*. Here, the exhibition space functioned as a temporary studio. Upon two tables designed ad rem, he dumped three tons of sand that functioned as mold in order to cast the cement. The digging and casting occur simultaneously with the process of giving shape to the materials. He considers in part the steps beforehand: "what can and what cannot be done". After the digging follows the assemblage, without which there is no sculpture. "Then bits get removed, reunited, and new 'rules' can apply, such as allowing parts to lean against each other in positions they couldn't have been cast in." Rein has the fate of the material in hands, yet the material adversely influences him and the potential outcome. That organic character is visible in the final product: sometimes it results in a seemingly dualistic tension, at other times it slips, returns into a fluid, organic whole. The result is like a skeleton of loose elements and bones, the binding parts can be seen popping up, a hand

appears, several finger tops are falling off. The fragile stacks lean against each other, solid and vulnerable, soft and heavy.

When Rein speaks of the existence and the shaping of his images, the labour involved, but also the work with the material, he selects his words carefully, searching for the most precise words to fit the process. It is reminiscent of what Maaïke Lauwaert described during an interview with Joseph Vogl as an analytic hesitation:

*Just like the hesitation, art can create a liminal space that is located between acting and not-acting, that embodies a counter-gesture in the face of the greed for consequence and the increasing urge for target accuracy. Art can, similar to hesitancy, deliver us 'to the edge of a world that is coming-into-being and over which there has yet to be made any decisions regarding possible fate and future.'*<sup>1</sup>

Rein's formulations revolve around classical problem formulations of the artwork: questions of composition, texture, form, volume, mass, colour, movement and light. Not only his *corpora aliena*, but also his collages can be read as various answers upon a fluid story of problem formulations. Constantly returning to the potential of the material he finds different expressions. It appears to be not so much the question of fulfillment that is central, but the constant state of becoming, in which the classical elements are repeatedly destabilized in new ways. It is not the doubt of indeterminacy, but an active gesture of drawing doubt upon the process of making. The boundaries between the distinction between making and creation, the making- and process of growth, become porous. The cement assumes shape; the hand grows. Where Brancusi's *La Muse Endormie* can be kissed alive at any moment, Rein's objects emerge from living material with a will of their own.

*Corpus Alienum* is a literal translation of a 'foreign body', a term that derives from medicine and refers to an object in a body that does not belong there. They are objects that have been swallowed, or inserted, a splinter for instance. But also internal prostheses are foreign bodies according to this definition. Similarly, we tend to view unwelcome objects in a machine as such; consider birds in an airplane engine or fishes in a pump. In Rein's sculptures, however, it is not so clear which part is the foreigner. Is the artist who is submitting the natural material to his own will the foreign body? Is the final result the foreign body, in which you can recognize a skeleton, a composition of magnified finger joints? Or is the material itself the strange body? The field of tension between culture and nature is emulated by the field of tension between existence and the cultivation of the material. These oppositions raise questions regarding that which Jane Bennett calls *Vibrant Matter*. Agency, argues Bennett, is not only conferred upon humans. She is averse to the idea that things, material; the inanimate, represent merely the background of our actions. On the contrary, it is important to acknowledge and recognize the active participation of non-human powers in the shaping of reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Maaïke Lauwaert, *Heroes of the Unwillingness*, Tubelight #66, januari 2010  
<http://www.tubelight.nl/helden-van-de-tegenzin/http://maaikelaauwaert.com/articles/interview-joseph-vogl/>