

Artist Statement - Fia Cielen

I make drawings, sculptures, installations and monumental digital prints. An important recurring aspect in my work is metamorphosis, I like to introduce a natural element in the work that goes beyond my control. Like in the series of works where I introduced living spiders to weave webs around my sculptures- for example in the work 'The Great Indoors'. It could be described as a hybrid of a museum showcase and a lab/terrarium: positioned inside the vitrine there is a bough with golden geometric structures attached at the ends of its branches. This showcase serves as a habitat for a house spider which is expected to spin its webs around the geometric forms and thus become part of the artwork. While introducing an element of chance, the piece blurs the boundaries between art, experimental "test arrangements", and nature. Raising questions as: how artificial is our perception of nature and how natural is culture?

For me the most important part of the works in which I introduce a natural element is creating a sense of wonder in myself and the audience. An inspiring concept is "the Marvellous" as described by art historian Hal Foster: "A state at once otherworldly, secular and psychic". I seek to achieve a sort of re-enchantment of a disenchanted world.

I guess it stems from living in an urban environment, an artificial state in which every natural event becomes a phenomenon. By introducing a living species to an otherwise static work of art, it becomes a dynamic piece; it's like adding the magic ingredient, it's a sort of alchemy. I can never completely foresee what the outcome will be, there's always a chance of failure, but the process is the most important element, the metamorphosis.

In more recent works I experimented with growing crystals on my sculptures, by making mixtures of different kinds of salts and chemicals. The audience can see the crystallization process on the sculptures during the exhibition and so witness the transformation of the work in situ.

I have also worked with monumental digital prints on transparent plexi glass, which use the natural light from windows as a lightbox. During the day the natural light changes and so do

the colors and the shadows in the work, again changing the static prints into dynamic pieces.

I am attracted by in-between states, transitory zones and the uncanny, which becomes evident especially in my drawings. They are populated by creatures which exist on the threshold between the human, the animal, and the elemental. Beings on the verge of their next materialisation.

In my drawings I draw inspiration from masks as well: carnival masks, old folklore and ritual masks, ritual animal disguise. Masquerade is something that is ingrained in European culture, and originates from a time before the christening of Europe, a remnant of times when the wild and magical were still part of daily life. I've always been fascinated by the hiding of the face as it also implies the hiding of the civilized. For example in carnivals: people wear a mask and through this transformation a sort of inner wildness comes to the surface, they are able to transgress beyond the rules of civilized society. I find it a suiting metaphor for our modern culture, with its thin layer of civilization, the wildness brewing underneath. Maybe the civilization is the mask, and not the other way around, maybe it is our true nature underneath. Maybe humanity is an illusion? Have we domesticated ourselves into something beyond natural? I don't pretend to have the answers to these questions, and finding answers is also not what attracts me to this topic. What intrigues me the most in these mental and physical transitory zones is this feeling of being on a threshold. This in-between state of being creates possibilities without an outcome. In an overregulated modern world, for me these are the states in which we can reclaim a sense of wildness. In my works I want to get away from a marker of fixity and into a state of becoming. This doesn't emerge from a purely theoretical concept, but also out of an intuitive feeling that this estrangement is intrinsically more natural to me.