

Fieldpost

is a column with my personal observations in the field of sculpture.

*I'm an art critic and correspondent for Sculpture Network in The Netherlands. In **Field Post**, I'm happy to share my experiences and thoughts with you. Anne Berk*



Nick Ervinck, OLNETOP 2012. Location Oostende. Photo Marian Bijlenga.

Beaufort: Sculpture as a space for experience and reflection

While all eyes are directed to the Documenta in Kassel, Belgium manifests itself as another cultural hotspot that cannot not be missed. With *Track* in Ghent the art is spread through the city, like a *Chambre D'Amis* revisited. Genk is hosting *Manifesta 9*. In Antwerp one of the oldest sculpture parks, *Middelheim*, reopens after a facelift. And the Belgian coast line is crowned with sculptures, with the Triennial *Beaufort*.

The journey along the sea has its own merits, with the wind playing in your hair and the endless sky above the rolling waves of the sea. Forty years after the first open air exhibition in Battersea park in London in 1948, the 'museum without walls' concept was extended to the beach. The wide empty space of the shore was discovered as the perfect surroundings for sculpture. South-Korea was forerunner in 1987 with the Sea Art Festival. Australia issued their first Sculpture at the Sea in 1997, and Belgium followed in their footsteps in 2003.

With their choice of artists from 27 European member states, the curators Philippe Van den Bossche (director of Muzee) and Jan Moeyaert present the coast as the rim of our shared European cultural space. Whilst Europe is affected by an existential crises, you can see this as a statement. The thirty sculptures of Beaufort showcase the diversity of contemporary sculpture in the use of materials, scale and topics.

From tiny human figures not bigger than your hand to monumental spaces that are stages for the viewer. From natural materials, aluminium, corten -steel to explorations of colourful synthetic resins, movement and sound; artists use anything except bronze. From a delightful playing with form to narrative work reflecting on the human condition. Beaufort shows how sculpture can offer a space for physical experience and reflection.

To discover Beaufort, I took the local tram, that parallels the coast, from De Panne in the north, to Zeebrugge 67 kilometres down south. I went in and out of the tram looking for the sculptures.

They were not always easy to find, the signage could be better. But it's worth the effort. If you decide to go, by the guide and take at least three days to enjoy this sculpture trail along the beach by tram, bike or walking.



Paolo Grassino *Analgesia* 2012. Location Bredene. Photo Marian Bijlenga

After climbing a dune we are confronted with *Analgesia* of the Italian **Paolo Grassino** (b. Italy, 1967). A flock of dogs has taken possession of three car wrecks, one towering triumphantly on the hood of a car, mastering his environment. The occupants are nowhere to be seen. Look at the way the animals intersperse with the remnants of the cars! This sculpture is interesting from eight angles, as Michelangelo once propagated. I admire the expressive way the animals are depicted. These are not mere casts. Each animal is shaped individually by hand and their fierce expression is alarming. Beware! This scene might be a prophecy of a future when man is extinct, and the remnants of our civilisation are recuperated by nature again. *Analgesia* is the name of a sedative drug. We're inclined to remain in our comfort zone of consumption, that obscures our awareness of the alarming situation we're in. Grassino incites us to reflect on our position. *Analgesia* could be a wake-up call.



Marco Casagrande, *Sandworm*, 2012. Location Wenduine. Photo Marian Bijlenga.

While plodding along through the sand, we perceive *Sandworm* of **Marco Casagrande** (b. Finland, 1971) from afar. Shall we walk another four kilometres to see this brownish structure? When arriving, we're glad we did.

The organic shape perfectly matches its natural environment. It's vaulted shape fuses organically with the curves of the dunes. Amongst the branches meant to deter erosion of the dunes, the willow rods are hardly discernable. But once we entered this inconspicuous construction, we were overwhelmed by the spatial experience. The narrow entrance opens up and gives way to an undulating space of fifty meters that embraces us like a womb. Light filters through the willow rods. The roar of the waves is tempered to a soothing sound. This architecture hardly protects us against rain and cold, but it raises our awareness of nature. It feels like coming home to Mother Earth.

Casagrande is born in Finland and raised in Lapland, in a village near an Arctic river. The experience of unspoiled nature has marked him. With this organic architecture, Casagrande critically reflects on the way we build.

*'Architectural control goes against nature and thus also against architecture. The building must grow out of the location; it must react to its environment, it must be a reflection of life and also be life itself, as every other living being.'*¹ *I see nature as a real strength and a total entity, one which will not exist without us looking after it. I grew up with it and was taught to respect it as something holy. Destruction of nature affects me.'*²

After transforming an illegal village a sustainable community in 2002, Casagrande is nominated as an ecological urban planning professor in Taiwan.

1. Beaufort04, wandelgids, Borgerhoff&Lamberigts, p.85

2. Inga- Marie Barnett, *A rebel with a cause*, InsideOut , issue 65, Dubai: June 2009.



Hans Opde Beeck *Location 8*, 2012. Location Bommenvrij, Nieuwpoort. Photo Studio Hans Opde Beeck.

When you arrive at Nieuwpoort, check out **Location 8** of **Hans Op de Beeck** (b. Belgium, 1969). This famous artist made an installation in Bommenvrij (without bombs), a former ammunition depot dating from the 19th century. If possible go there alone.

Inside, my eyes have to adapt to the darkness. Sea and sunlight are far away. I've entered a different world. A long scaffolding of scorched boards awaits me. A chain of lights shows me the way, reflected by the dark waters underneath, and leads me to a circular seating area lit by candles. Hans Op de Beeck took great trouble to stage this environment. He covered floor and part of the walls with plastic, and filled the space with water, to create a contemplative atmosphere. While I surrender to the quiet stillness of this place, thoughts slip into my mind. I just walked physically over the long pier, but one could also consider this as a symbolic space. As a passage way to the unknown, to the 'underworld', Death. At school I learned about the Battle of Nieuwpoort in 1600 and this town was besieged many times. The burned wood could refer to the fires and devastations. How many lives were lost in these battles? What incites people to kill each other? The title gives no clues. Meaning is bestowed by the viewer.

Location 8 is part of a series of staged spaces, that invite you to reflect on life. Op de Beeck started in 1998, with a model of an empty intersection, followed by a deserted park, a snowy garden and a life-size highway restaurant at night. You can look at these scenes, or be part of it. They are three dimensional still-life's, mirroring the changing stages of our fleeting lives.

We just drift, Nothing more, nothing less.

*The essence of this life is the emptiness that remains When the party is over.*³

3. Hans Op de Beeck *On Drifting*. In: *On Vanishing*, Mercatorfonds, Xavier Hufkens, Brussel, 2007, p. 208



Nick Ervinck, OLNETOP 2012. Location Oostende. Photo Marian Bijlenga.

You hardly can imagine a bigger contrast between the introspective spaces of Hans Op de Beeck and the radiant yellow sculpture **OLNETOP** of Nick Ervinck (b. Belgium, 1981). Walk around it, look up at the dynamic shape that crowns the dunes. See how it expands in space and reaches out to the blue sky! It's bursting with energy and joy and is the fruit of an optimistic approach of the future.

Although there are some similarities with Henry Moore (whom Ervinck admires) and the fluid forms in surrealist painting, I haven't seen anything like this before. This extraordinary sculpture is not made by carving or adding material. It looks a bit like a solidified fluid, but how can you make that? And this physical phenomenon is combined with traits of a 'living being' into a hybrid

shape, a fantastic creature that walks on three 'legs'...

Ervinck told me he used a film-still of a falling drop of water as a starting point, that he morfed and 'sculpted' on his computer. The resulting virtual shape was reconstructed in polyurethane foam, building it up layer after layer by hand (3D-printers can so far only print forms up to two meters). Engineers calculated that an armature of steel was needed, weighing 1400 kilo's, to anchor this huge sculpture in the sand. And by covering it carefully with three layers of polyester and two layers of yellow coating, OLNETOP was completed. Ervinck is a old-fashioned craftsman and a child of his time, growing up with LEGO and computer games. He collects images from the internet and other sources, and classifies them with the letters of the alphabet. The resulting fantastic shapes are reflected by the combinations of syllables into new words.

Ervinck is haunted by the desire to make the virtual images tangible, as if their physical body makes them 'real'. He anticipates on a future in which living beings will increasingly form a symbiosis with technique.



Jeppe Hein (DK) *Modified Social Benches L-U*, 2012
Location De Haan. Photo Marian Bijlenga

Anne Berk anne.berk@sculpture-network.org

www.beaufort04.be + 32 (0)58 62 39 29

info@beaufort04.be

Order a ticket for all manifestations for 19,50

at www.visualartsflanders.be

+32 (0)9 267 90 40

charline.adriaens@bamart.be

For an organised trips www.art-travel.be or

www.mandarte.nl (in Dutch)