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Hans Op de Beeck, *Dancer* (2021). Courtesy of Galleria Continua.

In Hans Op de Beeck's New Show in Italy, Rich Narratives Unfold in Lifelike Sculptures

By: Artnet Gallery Network
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A young couple, teenagers it seems, sit on the edge of a cliff clasping hands. A man stands, shirtless, rowing a canoe that is filled with baskets of fruits and vegetables, a hen, and a dog—perhaps all of his worldly possessions. A woman dressed in a Brazilian carnival feather headdress sits on a couch in a moment of rest. In Belgian artist Hans Op de Beeck's new solo show, "The Boatman and Other Stories" at Galleria Continua, recent and never-before-seen sculptures conjure up fascinating narratives.

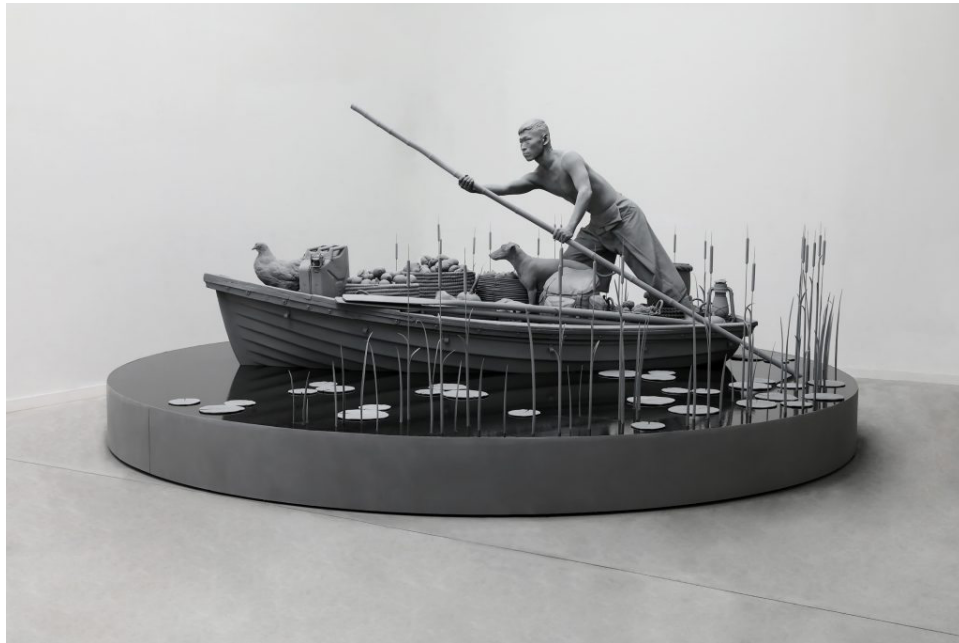
Mainly figurative, along with a few evocative still lifes, these sculptures feel like snippets of many lives, scenes unfolding around the world as we glimpse men, women, and children going about the simple tasks of living.

Op de Beeck has worked for many years not just as a visual artist, but also as a theatrical director, dramaturge, and composer. His figures have the feel of specific characters, too; over the last few years, the artist has modeled these men, women, and children not as portraits, per se, but as imaginary figures whose stories he alone fully knows.

Of *The Cliff*, the sculpture of two teenagers, a boy and a girl seated with hands clasped, Op de Beeck explained, “it’s a bittersweet image of the whims of young love intertwined with the marked innocence that comes from an impetuous perception of a world not yet lived, to which we are invited to return.”

There is an awareness of death and life’s transience to these works, too. In *Vanitas XL* (2021) and *Vanitas Table (the coral piece)* (2021), these sculptural floral arrangements harken not only to the Dutch vanitas tradition but also to funeral parlors. In *After Work* (2021), two skeletons happily chat—this is a new and recurring motif in the artist’s work, a light-hearted way to hint at mortality.

“The Boatman and Other Stories” speaks about our growing pains, the search for identity, the difficulties, awkwardness, and silences inherent to our existence, but also about our dreams and hopes for a better future and the search for inner peace and wonder,” read a statement from the gallery.



Hans Op de Beeck, *The Boatman* (2020). Courtesy of Galleria Continua.