**MILAN – GALLERIA GABURRO**

**2 DECEMBER 2022 – 12 FEBRUARY 2023**

**THE EXHIBITION**

**JAN FABRE**

***La saggezza del Belgio***

**Curated by Giacinto Di Pietrantonio**

**The Gaburro Gallery in Via Cerva 25, Milan, presents a solo exhibition of works by Jan Fabre
(b. 1958, Antwerp), one of the foremost contemporary artists. The event runs from 2 December 2022 to 12 February 2023.**

Entitled **La saggezza del Belgio** (***The Wisdom of Belgium)*** and curated by Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, the exhibitionincludes about **thirty small-format drawings from the *Folklore Sexuel Belge* and *Mer du Nord Sexuelle Belge* series**, together with **ten sculptures, which are being shown for the first time in Italy**. In these works, Jan Fabre questions Belgian identity, sexuality and sensuality, which he examines through the visual lens of surrealism, a feature of his work and indeed of all Belgian art.

Jan Fabre, who in this case clearly refers to himself as “Le Bon Artiste Belge”, shows a series of works that aim to reveal a national Belgian identity that is by no means unambiguous, but rather highly diverse, as a result of its three different communities – Flemish, Walloon, and German-speaking. These communities are themselves even more fragmented internally, but he seeks to find wisdom and commonalities within them in order to “unite rather than divide”.

Each drawing bears the witty inscription *ÉDITÉ ET OFFERT PAR JAN FABRE LE BON ARTISTE BELGE* (*Published and offered by Jan Fabre, the good Belgian artist*), which takes from an advertisement for chocolate: “Côte D’Or, Le Bon Chocolat Belge”. The original slogan appeared in the 1960s on postcards with Belgian folklore pictures, attached to the famous brand of chocolate, a powerful worldwide symbol of Belgium. However, Fabre accompanies his drawings with these words not just for the sweetness of the chocolate, but also metaphorically for its “dark side” – its origins in Belgian colonialism in the Congo, a theme the artist has been working on for many years.

As a self-proclaimed “Warrior of Beauty”, he acts within art and in defence of art, interacting with scientific knowledge, popular wisdom, and the relationship between man and nature, making everything converge on a central poetic vision of metamorphosis. Fabre thus acts as an artistic revolutionary as he attempts to overturn the current state of things, often using references to the carnival as a means of overturning and suspending reality. His sculptures are extravagant, irreverent and flamboyant, like the carnival, folklore and theatrical traditions of Belgium.

“In his attempt to overturn the visual language of the world and its rules,” remarks Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, “Jan Fabre reconsiders the rules of sexuality, which in this particular case lead him to interact with some prototypical artists, even going back to the most “surrealist” of all: Hieronymus Bosch. The iconography and iconology of Fabre’s drawings and sculptures in this exhibition do indeed appear to emerge from the paintings of the heretic Flemish artist of the Renaissance. Marine elements, including shells, men, animals and plants, undergo surreal and symbolic human-animal metamorphoses in an orgy of colours, shapes and sexuality, which Fabre astutely also reinterprets in light of the evolution of popular cultures.”

“His art”, continues Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, “is always a swing between high and low, past and present. His modus operandi also keeps him tied to the tradition of the voluptuous baroque bodies of his fellow citizen Rubens. This is particularly evident in his *Mer du Nord Sexuelle Belge* series, in which plump little cupids and chubby little Venuses are born from seashells. On the other hand, in terms of their palette and characterisation, the *Folklore Sexuel Belge* drawings close the circle at the modern end, with an eye to the carnivalesque and grotesque expressive art of his compatriot James Ensor’s *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889*. In his artistic maturity, Fabre draws on the wisdom of Belgium, reinterpreting an alternative visual and narrative tradition of folk legends forged by a culture that stretches back into the mists of time and that art saves from extinction.”

**Jan Fabre. Critical and biographical notes**

Jan Fabre is an artist of consilience and has been working since the late 1970s as a visual artist, theatre artist and author taking up the tradition – especially that of Flemish and Italian Renaissance art – of a time when artists worked in many different fields to promote a revolutionary humanistic ideal.

Born in 1958 in Antwerp, Belgium, where he currently lives and works, Jan Fabre has gained international fame as one of the most innovative artists of his generation, for his ability to master not only a variety of disciplines and themes, but also for his constant experimentation in a range of issues and materials.

Jan Fabre has taken part in major international events, including the Venice Biennale (1984, 1990, 1997, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2017) and documenta in Kassel (1987, 1992, 2017).

Recent solo exhibitions include those put on by such important institutions as the Louvre, Paris (2008), Kunsthaus, Bregenz (2008), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (2011), Musée d’Art Moderne, Saint Etienne (2011), MAXXI, Rome (2014), Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (2016), Forte di Belvedere, Palazzo Vecchio, and Piazza della Signoria, Florence (2016), Pinchuk Art Centre, Kyiv (2017), Musée d’Art Contemporain, Lyon (2017), Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul de Vence (2018), and Museo di Capodimonte, Naples (2019).

A number of works have been commissioned from Jan Fabre for public spaces in Belgium and abroad. These include *The Gaze Within (The Hour Blue)* (2011-13) on the steps up to the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels, and *Heaven of Delight* (2002) at the Royal Palace. *The Man who Bears the Cross* (2015) is housed in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp, the city where the artist was born. Taking up the tradition of Rubens, Jordaens and van Dyck, Fabre created a triptych for the church of St Augustine/AMUZ, also in Antwerp. Like *Heaven of Delight,* this beetlewing triptych is made with the elytra of jewel beetles. His latest site-specific installations include four red coral sculptures in the Pio Monte della Misericordia chapel in Naples (2019), which conceptually interact with Caravaggio’s masterpiece (*The Seven Acts of Mercy*).

Milan, October 2022

**JAN FABRE. *La saggezza del Belgio***

Milan, Galleria Gaburro (Via Cerva 25)

2 December 2022 – 12 February 2023

**Opening hours**:

Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., 3-7 p.m.

**Admission free**

**Information**:

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