



# It's only a matter of time

Strook

As part of Musea Brugge's 'Mind the Artist' arts festival, Strook (Stefaan De Croock, b. 1982) is presenting work in three historic locations: the Groeninge Museum, the Church of Our Lady and the medieval attic of the St John's Hospital.

The central theme of his oeuvre and the source of his inspiration is 'time'. Time that is reflected in old, weathered materials. For the artist, they have a magical quality. The colour, the paint and the relief form the aesthetic imprint of the material history with which Strook sets to work.

## Groeninge Museum

In the Groeninge Museum, four works by Strook confront the permanent collection. Two sculptures in wood, a portrait that incorporates marble and a ceramic work.

The wooden sculptures, the 'heads', are familiar to those who follow Strook. They are portraits of ordinary people, without specific facial features, but symbolising each and every one of us. They have clearly lived. Physical and mental injuries are made visible through the worn materials that Strook gathers from different locations. The wood has a history, time has left its imprint on both the surface and the paint. With the authentic colours of the untreated wood, Strook composes a new and timeless relief.

Strook's ceramic sculpture was created from casts of the floors in the St John's Hospital, the Church of Our Lady and the Groeninge Museum. In this way, the artist 'sampled' the patina and soul of the three locations into a portrait. The age-old stories of these spaces are, quite literally, fired within the work.

In the museum, Strook also confronts his work with classic ceremonial portraits from the collection. Here, he uses marble for the first time. This is a reference to the formal pomp and pageantry of these paintings. Because marble is millions of years old, it puts the 'eternal value' of the dignitaries portrayed into perspective. It even questions our human existence in the light of history.

## The Church of Our Lady

In an interview, Strook once stated that he loves the poses in ecclesiastical art: "figures that seem to submit to everything quietly and meekly, while at the same time emanating great power and dignity". In this sacred place full of historical and Biblical art, Strook adds an image of contemporary humanity. One that is constructed, however, from centuries old materials. The portrait is unrecognisable. It is the universal human being, whether religious or not, white or black, rich or poor.



His 'head' in the church is monumental, the portrait occupies a large part of the west wall and yet it is humble. A silent portrait of humankind with all its weaknesses, physical and mental wounds, that is at the service of this place. Strook enlarges the insignificance and fragility into a composition that is 3.5 metres high. Depending on the incidence of light, a form of melancholy descends upon the work.

#### The attic in St John's Hospital

Six portraits can be seen here, together with several freestanding sculptures, such as 'One More Day IV' and 'One More Day V'. These are steel vitrines with matt glass, in which a bust made of scrap wood seems to disappear. The case around the figure creates a distance between the sculpture and the viewer. It prevents any form of encounter. From a distance you can see the contours of the figures, but as you approach, they fade into unattainable beings. Like an illusion of memory. The titles of these works refer to a personal loss. Strook's brother died in 2012. These works revolve around the impossible longing to spend one more day with his brother.

Strook notices that his own memories or feelings, once concrete, are deteriorating. Time gnaws at them, just as it does the scrap wood. His memories become a mental construction; a monument erected in his head. In that sense, you can also see his work as cerebral architecture: a stack of disappearing recollections and thoughts. They are pieces of a distorted reality. Mental spaces and monuments for memories that are gradually slipping away.

In Strook's 'heads', identity is secondary to their emotion. "I don't make wooden portraits of well-defined people. I only portray their emotion or attitude. By dehumanising my figures, I leave the interpretation completely open," says Strook. "They are universal expressions, to which everyone can give their own meaning." For his portraits, Strook uses materials that have been altered by time. In so doing, he touches upon the essence of what it means to be human: as a person, you are shaped by time. By what you experience, what you carry with you and what you eventually forget. "In my work, I try to arrest time, which nevertheless keeps on ticking and fading away," he says. In that sense, it is particularly suited to this location, where you can also see memento mori works from the museum's permanent collection.

Exhibition

**'It's only a matter of time'**

Stefaan De Croock - Strook

Groeningemuseum

Dijver 12, Bruges, Belgium

The Church of Our Lady

Mariastraat, Bruges, Belgium

St John's Hospital

Mariastraat 38, Bruges, Belgium

From October 30, 2021

to March 6, 2022

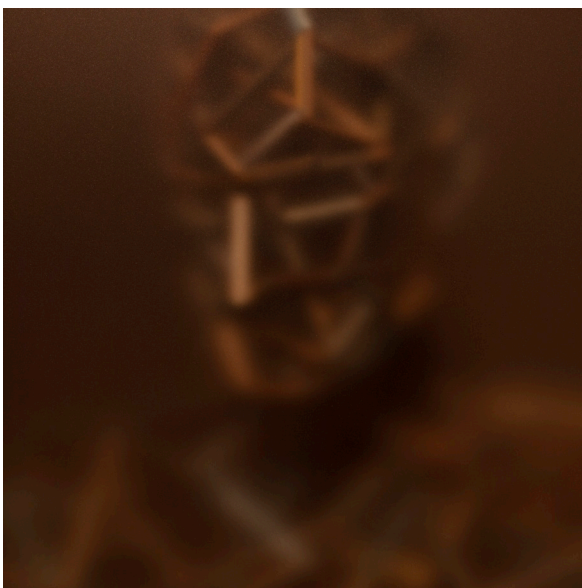
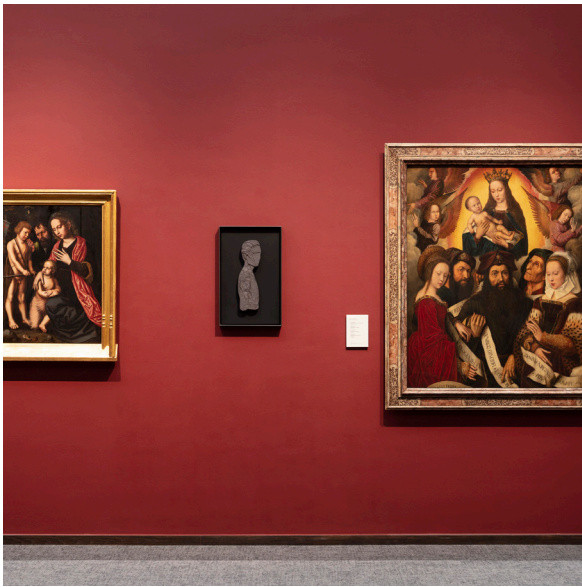
From Tuesday to Sunday

from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Closed on Mondays,

except the Church of Our Lady





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