

## **Endless as nature itself**

At the back page of the NRC newspaper, two photos from the article 'Fallusforest inspires architects' catch my eye. Both building designs, created by architect firm Zwarts&Jasma and MVRDV in Korea and Vietnam are inspired by Asian stupa's. I stare at the photos and immediately recognize the resemblance with Warffemius' series of sculptures "Chautara". Both architecture and visual art are obviously inspired by the same matter, independently of one another.

Warffemius' title refers to Nepal. The sculptures stratification is both a reference to the size and construction of a stupa (a typical Buddhist structure) , as well as a reference to a chautara (the pedestal on which holy trees are planted in Nepal). The (trapgewijs) chautara is centrally located, honours trees, and at the same time is used as a place to meet and rest. This inspired Warffemius with the specific build of the series 'Chautara'. The architectonic works created by Zwarts & Jansma and MVRDV have a similar Asian influence. In MVRDV's work the green colour and terrace like set up, are found back in the surrounding rice fields. Warffemius adds another new dimension. The combination of the Stupa and its Nepalese surroundings are joined together in Warffemius' work; the tree makes the sculptures unique. His work is an illustration of the connection between the earthly character of a tree and the spiritual character of the chautara and the stupa.

The Asian influence to Warffemius' work is not only from recent time. During his travels – since 1982 - he was given a huge insight in the local art and culture. During preparation for this publication, we spoke about this topic in his studio, whilst looking at his collection of ghurra's (keys). This Nepalese collection of keys has been put together over the last 25 years. It is this simplistic, stylish shape of the key that has inspired him in making his sculptures. The ghurra's have a clear front and back side. Although the key is a simple utensil, some are adorned with buttons and animal shapes.

The similarities between the ghurra and Warffemius' work are not the style or decoration, but rather the profile. The actual similarity is seen when comparing the profiles of both Picture 'Van 1 naar 4', 'Gestapeld' and 'Early Spring' (on page???) with the ghurra. The shape of the sculpture is strong, and when studying the side you will see that it does not give away anything of its intensity, its character and its treatment of the front and back side. The sculptures are straight lined and at the same time mystical.

Warffemius helps us to appreciate and look at the ghurra's, as if they are a piece of art instead of a simple utensil. What struck me is that the above mentioned piece of art, from the side, shows the same layeriness as the earlier mentioned chautara. This natural shaping of layers is created by Warffemius, using the most straight forward, widely available, but strongest material in the world, cardboard. With simple shapes, Warffemius presents strong sculptures, which leave a lasting impression. By referring to the Nepali culture, Warffemius' pieces add to the culture's history, which is felt and seen in the results.

Dutch bronze casters know what to do with Warffemius' sculptures. A mould is prepared and the sculpture is drained several times. For more unique sculptures, the bronze caster will use the old 'wax technique', whereby the wax model melts throughout the casting process. In Nepal this is done differently. The model is accurately, handmade with wax. From each copy, the bronze caster makes one sculpture. The result is more unique, less industrial and has a closer connection to its inspiration source, the ghurra.

In 2006, Warffemius is invited to spend the summer in the Kunsthaus in Postdam, near Berlin. The distance and the isolation – only few people have his mobile number - enable him to focus for a period of time on his own work. Potsdam offers him new opportunities. In his studio in the Hague, I find a twig which reminds me of the sculptures I saw in the gallery. I touch the twig carefully, and realise this is the one and only Postdammer twig. It is a fragile 6cm long twig, which Warffemius discovered on one of his morning

walks. The twig was the start of a new inspiration and resulted in at least one small bronze sculpture and a large cortenstalen sculpture, named 'Potsdamtwig' (page xxxxx). With Warffemius' accompaniment, we study the twig and are mystified by the way the side branches grow. The name of the twig is not known. For Warffemius, the visual aspects and the mystery of nature are more important than the name of the plant itself. His sculptures are a repercussion of the fascination by which nature grows.

Warffemius' inspiration comes from many sources. His sculptures are inspired by the stupa, which is part of an international development, whilst his paintings are inspired by nature, with trees and plants in particular. Some of his contemporaries such as Armando (1929), Sjoerd Buisman (1948) and herman de vries (somebody who does not accept the hierarchy between small and capital letters, 1931) to name but a few have also used nature as their inspiration source for many of their works. Some of the above mentioned artist also worked - for some time, in the Postdammer Kunsthaus. The reasoning why nature is chosen as inspiration source is totally different for each of the different artists. Armando uses the tree as imagination of history (and dealing with) past experiences. In Sjoerd Buisman's work, the human influences into nature are important topics, whereas for herman de vries' work, the structuring and de-structuring of nature by humans is the main focus. For Warffemius, the tree is chosen as a symbol for the relation between earthly and non earthly matters that will never be understood; the mystique.

Armano --- Sjoerd ---- herman de vries.

Warffemius works simultaneously on different painting. The trees surrounding him 'grow' gradually around him, as in nature. The pieces surround him in his studio and he literally paints from top to bottom. A completed piece is replaced by a white and new canvas - so each work has its own spot in a continuous series. It speaks for itself that Warffemius' oeuvre (an artist' total collection) is therefore consistent and any changes to his work happen gradually over time.

The last couple of years, Warffemius' work became a little 'looser'. The deep and sober style that we know from earlier paintings is gradually disappearing. This development has no direct link to a certain occasion/event. The recent work is more romantic and softer. Details are no longer left behind – but fluff and seeds are shown. By closely studying the painting strokes in Warffemius' work, one can see (Kastanje page...) that the technique has changed as well over time. The so called 'air roots' are created by lifting the wet painting from the ground and rotate it. These painting drips support the natural shapes and sizes of plants and add to the mystique of the painting. In 'Nachtlandschap' the drips are not only an interpretation of 'airroots' but turn into a fixed piece of the plant. The dark colour of the canvas symbolizes the threat of the night, whereas the light horizontal drips remind more of lashing rain.

Two paintings that catch the eye are "Engelwortel" and "Circle of life", both paintings have a sensitive charm. The thin blades reach to the sky and nearly fill up the complete canvas. Light colours and thick paint drips show the disappearing water and reiterate the volatility of the moment. A little breeze of air will blow up the seeds, but this situation is only temporary. The circle of life is about to end, and start again. These precise poetic paintings show life and dead, united on a canvas. Engelwortel. *Angel root* "Angel root", the name itself explains the symbioses between heavenly and earthy. Art as reflection of the non observable, of the heavenly, and still logically connected with all the facets of daily life. The artist's personal 'memento mori' ('thought to die'). The meaning of the painting increases when I realize Warffemius put the Angelroot on his father's grave, a last gesture of Warffemius to his dad.

The Warffemius' composed paintings, which were created since 1998, have been the starting point for more recent sculptures and paintings. The Asian influences and the sculptural possibilities of the material Warffemius uses, makes these works as an independent collection to his painting oeuvre. The sculptures, with inspiration from the Nepalese chautara, the ghurra's and the natural elements of

the landscape – with the tree in specific -, connect the mystery with the earthly. The influence of both the composed paintings and the flat shaped ghurra's, lead to a nearly two dimensional character of the sculptures. The style of painting developed in a softer and more detailed art, whereby the visual possibilities of the paint are applied/ used as a new tool. The work is more romantic. More details of Warffemius' personal life are added to his work. Warffemius' work develops quickly and the artist is not shy to go different directions. Both directions have their own identity, remain exciting and mysterious and both are as endless as nature itself.

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