

Anne Wenzel | *House of Fools*

20 January - 2 March, 2024



Anne Wenzel, *House of Fools (Christopher)*, 2023, ceramics, metal, 132 x 95 x 80 cm, installation view *Carte Blanche (Fuck The Dictator)* at Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, 2023, photo by Peter Tijhuis

AKINCI is proud to present the solo exhibition *House of Fools* by Anne Wenzel. A large part of the eponymous series of sculptures made by Wenzel for her solo exhibition *Carte Blanche (Fuck the Dictator)* at Stedelijk Museum Schiedam will be on show in Amsterdam from 20 January to 2 March 2024. In addition to the *House of Fools* series featuring busts of controversial figures from history, ceramic reliefs showing archetypes of protests from the series *Reality Check* will be on view. For the exhibition at Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, curator Selen Ansen wrote the essay *Statues Die / Also*, in the catalogue *Anne Wenzel - Carte Blanche (Fuck the Dictator)*.* The quotes in this press release are taken from this essay.

In response to the contemporary iconoclasm that has taken place in recent years where statues were thrown from their pedestals, damaged or defaced, Anne Wenzel created a new series of work. The artist faced an ambiguous debate: the destruction of work by colleagues and the necessity of political protest. However, Wenzel felt that some nuance was missing. Without searching for an answer to the question of who is/was 'good' or 'bad', Wenzel created the space-filling installation *House of Fools*.

The *House of Fools* 'family' currently comprises of two rulers (Leopold of Belgium and William of Orange), two governors (Johan Maurits and Jan Pieterszoon Coen), a minister of the French king Louis XIV (Jean-Baptiste Colbert), a naval officer (Witte Corneliszoon de With) and a seafarer-explorer (Christopher Columbus). In her essay, Ansen describes the group as follows:

“United by the material of which they are made and their brilliance, these petrified ‘imbeciles’ stand in solidarity with each other. Their kinship traces a genealogy of violence. It stems from the blood these men spilled, from the slavery they profited from and/or glorified, from the conquest of lands not their own.”

The installation at AKINCI consists of the embodiment of Johan Maurits, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, Witte Corneliszoon de With and Christoffel Columbus. The sculptures are not intended to be exclusively realistic depictions of the individuals in question. When making a sculpture, the vision of a historical figure also comes into play. Wenzel makes the statues tower over people; they seem to radiate power. Ansen explains this further:

“I had been wrong to think that Anne’s work is an accomplice of monuments whose intention is to raise men-who-die and immortalise their powers. Her own verticality is descending, aiming at the ground that is trampled on without regard / instead of the summits that are held in respect.”

With the same dedication with which the sculptures were constructed, there were holes added to them. It gives the impression that the sculptures have been eaten away by termites, are rotting from within or charred black. The sculptures are not only heroic, but they also show traces of protest and decay.

For Wenzel, it was important to give the people a place in her exhibition as well, not only the group of ‘heroes’. To achieve this, she created tile walls that divide the space. By walking on huge slabs of wet clay, stomping on them with boots, and rolling tires over them, the tile walls (literally) depict the traces of the street. To demonstrate the power of the people, Wenzel also developed the series *Reality Check*, in which ceramic semi-reliefs depict scenes of collective rebellion and archetypes of protest. Somewhere between sculpture and painting, the reliefs belong to a tradition of imagery used to tell heroic stories. Reliefs are usually placed on the wall, but Wenzel places them freely in space, close to the ground. In this way they emphasise the place of the people and their position of power in a traditional hierarchy. The depictions on the reliefs, combined with the thick, glossy, colourful glaze, make the figures appear to be in full motion.

In her artistic practice, Wenzel draws inspiration from those who have been attacking symbols of power for more than 2,500 years. But unlike these iconoclasts, who attack representations of which they are not the creators, Wenzel attacks her own work.

“... Anne intentionally wounds what is within her reach. She adds new ruins to existing ones; she revives what has already taken place by interpreting it.”

In the *House of Fools* exhibition, Anne Wenzel’s works reflect a past resistance that echoes in the present. Without seeking the answer to the question of who was right, Wenzel broadens the perspective by subtly drawing attention to the downside of heroic stories.

“Barely born / already in ruins. They stand upright on plinths / yet those they embody teeter.”

***Bibliography**

Ansen, S., *Statues Die / Also*. In: *Anne Wenzel - Carte Blanche (Fuck the Dictator)*, Rotterdam: nai010 Publishers, 2023.

The catalogue was published during the exhibition *Anne Wenzel - Carte Blanche (Fuck The Dictator)* at Stedelijk Museum Schiedam and Boksschool de Jong: 8th July 2023 - 14th January 2024.

Biography

Anne Wenzel (1972, Schüttorf, Germany) studied at the Academy for Visual Arts and Design in Enschede (NL). Her work is shown at leading art institutions in the world. Wenzel had solo exhibitions at Stedelijk Museum Schiedam where she got carte blanche (2023/2024); Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen (2019); Princessehof Leeuwarden (2017); Rijksmuseum Twenthe (2015); TENT Rotterdam (curated by Daria de Beauvais, 2014). Wenzel was part of group exhibitions at a.o., Museum Jorn, Silkeborg (2018); Triennial for Contemporary Art, Duffel (2018); Rijksmuseum Twenthe (2018); 60th Faenza prize, Faenza (2018); Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam (2017); 9th Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale, Korea (2017); ARTER Istanbul (curated by Selen Ansen); Lustwarande, Tilburg (2016). Her works are included in many public and private collections, including Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Rijksmuseum Twenthe; Princessehof, Leeuwarden; Stedelijk Museum Schiedam; Vehbi Koç Foundation, Istanbul; Stedelijk Museum Den Bosch; S.M.A.K Ghent and Frac Auvergne. In 2023, Wenzel created the Razzia Monument commissioned by Stichting Razzia Monument Rotterdam that is now placed permanently alongside the Maas in Rotterdam. Wenzel is one of the artists filmed for the series 'Dutch Masters of the 21st Century'. She lives and works in Rotterdam.