

The Quiet Between: The Figurative Sculpture of Hanneke Beaumont.

Essay by Prof. Joseph Antenucci Becherer, PhD, July 2018.

On the frontiers of lucidity there is quiet. It is a quiet that is asking final questions, a quiet that may not yet have answers but senses an interior direction towards finding them. This frontier has traces of a morning mist or flickers of an evening haze. There is not the exactitude of noon. Instead, this is the knife's edge between Realism and Romanticism upon which the true masters of the early 19th century, for example, danced. Two centuries later, it is a terrain navigated by the renowned Dutch sculptor Hanneke Beaumont. Her aesthetic compass reads not North and South, but points to the soul of the past and the spirit of an uneasy present nearing the future. Beautifully juxtaposed, her work is both present and elusive, physical and immeasurable. Quiet.

As with so many of her works, the insignia that titles frequently bestow is intentionally absent. The bronze, **Number 130** (2015), is iconic for the sculptor. The figure is posed cautiously atop a consequential yet not-quite monumental plinth. The torso, arms and left leg face forward, though the head is positioned in classic profile. Subtle shifts in shoulders and wrists melt any degree of severity. Details like the dangling left leg and the right hand over the right foot are masterful touches that pay homage to humanity rather than tired monumentality of traditional figurative sculpture. There is the gestural air of Mannerist grace without the anatomical distortions and psychological yearnings of Mannerism itself.

In the broadest terms, **Number 130** is a hallmark for Beaumont's figurative repertoire in both mood and appearance. The subject is neither clearly masculine nor feminine. However, for many viewers it may prove difficult to make an intellectual pledge to androgyny. We all have our preconceptions and misconceptions. So too, body type and visage fail to betray age as youthful maturity or fully mature youthfulness. Is there age? The clean-shaven head and exposed elements of the body are comfortably above being gaunt, yet fall short of being definitions of the muscular. As with so many aspects of Hanneke Beaumont's repertoire, it is held decidedly in the quiet between.

Clothing is simplified, nearly austere. In such simplicity there is an air of nobility that speaks less of the symbolic vestiges of poverty and more to the elusive robes of timelessness. Costuming would be definitive, so this must be the cloak, the nightshirt, of enigma. In the clothing of figurative sculpture the desire to commit to a narrative point in time is there: messenger or muse cloaked in classical attire, dreamy romantic robed in night linens, futurist survivors covered in the remnants of the past. Yes, for Beaumont, timelessness is perhaps most accurate.

In indicative terms for Beaumont, **Number 130** offers the extraordinary physical grace of a noble form in space, layers of intellectual and psychological ambiguity of body, and a fathomless anonymity of subject matter one desperately wishes to unveil, to resolve. Yet for these mysteries, there are discernible

details that ground the viewer's visual experience in more measurable terms. One of many is the extraordinary juxtapositions of the body itself. That of head and torso introduced above is most exquisite. These are not opposing forces of Western prose, but balanced opposites resembling Eastern poetry. The initial approach is to regard this detail from the front where it calls to mind a Michelangesque bust, but the sublime reward comes from viewing the sculpture from the rear where it whispers of dusk, or better yet, night. As a figurative artist, Beaumont has long since grounded her work in a few details of the mastered measurable.

Another notable detail is the sculptor's treatment of surfaces. Although this example exists in bronze and it is superbly patinated, it is easy to discern the initial use of clay, which guides all of Beaumont's foundational efforts. There are intentional passages where the mark making of tools is legible. There are surfaces that bear witness to the impressions of fibers, of cloth. There are the traces of malleable liquidity slowly hardening before our eyes. Combined, there is the quiet evidence of the artist's process and presence.

"I am very much a clay person in the sense that I let the medium of clay very much speak also in my sculptures," the artist shares. In this way, Beaumont self identifies as a "classical working artist." Beyond the figurative tradition, it is her preference to initiate her creative efforts in clay that binds her to traditions in the history of sculpture that speak lucidly of the 19th century cum early Modernism, back through to the Baroque to the Renaissance itself. With this being considered, it does not come as a surprise that early critical acclaim for her work came from full-scale figures in clay and more recent admiration has grown from superbly cast sculptures in bronze and iron that continue to offer flawless testimony to the clay originals. With respect to the latter metals, she and her foundry have few peers.

Across the international scene, Hanneke Beaumont is a widely respected and earnestly collected figurative sculptor. She has exhibited broadly across Europe, the United States and, most recently, China. Acclaim is as sincere as it is sweeping simply considering the number of her works that appear in prominent public and private collections around the world. Regarding the former, museums in general and sculpture parks in particular have greatly benefitted from the inclusion of Beaumont's sculpture in their collections as she is both a unique, contemporary voice extending the figurative tradition, but is also clearly conversant with the past with fluency and invention.

For example, the unanimous decision to acquire Beaumont's landmark works, **Number 25** and **Number 26** (both 1995-1996), for Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park was as soulful and sincere as it was strategic. On one hand, these sculptures are in active visual dialogue with imagery from Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930-1917) to Kiki Smith (born 1954), but on the other are in quiet conversation with earlier masterpieces by Jacques Lipchitz (1891-1973) and Marino Marini (1901-1980), among others. In private surroundings, her sculpture is melodious, contributing greatly to the daily life of those who are able to live with and among her forms, ideas and suggestions. The installation of **Stepping Forward** (2005) above a still pool on a private, wooded estate is quite simply Arcadian. It extols the virtues of sculpture installed within a natural surrounding, but even the best images can but hint at the qualities of private experiences with the work in daily life.

Testimony to the compelling nature of Hanneke Beaumont's imagery are the large number of civic institutions, which have made it possible that her sculpture be made permanently available for the enrichment of a broad and diverse community at large. Precious urban spaces from Belgium to Germany and France to the Netherlands attest to this in the public placement of her works in bronze and iron. Although it would be in error to discuss the sculptor as a public artist in the truest definition of the term, public venues have uniquely benefitted from, and been elevated by, the inclusion of her work.

An enlarged version of *Stepping Forward* (2008), installed at the European Union Council in Brussels, Belgium is a noble example of public placement, but perhaps its vernacular errs on the side of monument, of tradition. However, it is in the bronze and iron installation *Number 56* (2000) in the emblematic Gothic city of Chartres, that the artist completely re-imagines public sculpture as something communal. For centuries it has been in the agora, the forum, the square where we have met and reached out to one another. Although Beaumont is decidedly a citizen of the world, she is ultimately European – one who understands the communal space intimately because she has lived it, emerged from it. The pomp and desired authority of pedestalled bronze nobles and prelates of old are symbolic insertions in the public realm, but not of the public themselves. *Number 56* offers testimony to Beaumont's innate European understanding of this.

Beaumont was born in 1947 to a large Catholic family in Maastricht, the Netherlands. From her childhood she recalls, "I always enjoyed drawing and doing things with my hands." As pastime or premonition, she also recalls playing endlessly in the sandbox. The tactile seems genuine to her being. She came to the United States to study dentistry in Boston, Massachusetts and returned to Europe settling in Brussels where she began her family. All the while, an artistic calling was strong, especially towards three-dimensional forms. She literally began making sculpture in her kitchen, then basement, then garage. She admits, "[a]s my children grew, so grew my sculpture."

Her formal studies began at the Académie des Arts de Braine l'Alleud then with a decided focus on sculpture at the celebrated École National Supérieure de La Cambre in Brussels. In addition to her work at La Cambre, as it is reverently known, she also studied at Hogere Rijkschool van beeldende Kunsten in Anderlecht. In reflecting upon her earliest sculptural endeavors, she created many portraits and worked with models. She notices, "people were asking me more and more to do portraits, but I didn't really want to get into this any further." Bravely she stepped away from portrait commissions and the model and began to work increasingly with images of forms that preoccupied her imagination and were influenced by the general situations of people that appeared before her. What slipped away were figures that were anatomically exacting or visages that were specific to an individual. In other words, what dissolved were concerns for a human and greater, more profound expressionism of humanity. There is a difference.

Although she had her first solo show in 1983, she continued for more than a decade until her breakthrough in 1994 when her sculpture *La Courage* (1994) was awarded at the Centre Internationale d'Arte Contemporain Château Beychevelle. From there, the momentum of her critical recognition would only continue to grow throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium. Her presence as a significant and highly individualistic figurative artist for our time was emerging. Although she had

foregone the traditional use of the model and chose instead to focus on her conceptual rendering of a figurative type, she remained committed to the use of clay. These first figures were terracotta.

Preferring not to build up a form around an armature, instead she painstakingly built up the forms as hollow at the core. In the process, keeping the clay moist and malleable was challenging. "Slowly, layer by layer, I achieve the form," she shares, "then, I would do the firing process which was actually composed of several firings." It was through these initial, life-size terracotta figures that Beaumont truly captivated critics, curators and collectors, alike. Foremost, these were quietly unique contributions to the dimensions of Contemporary figurative sculptures in form and content. Parallel to this, they were wondrous feats of the kiln that astonished anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of the frequent tragedies over rewards in firing on such a large scale. In many ways, these works are significant to the history of contemporary ceramics and merit further attention as such, but for the artist, they are sculptural endeavors.

It was not long before Beaumont began to translate and then cast her works in bronze and more recently, in iron. The tradition is historically honest and we have compelling and widespread evidence of sculptors initially working in clay then bronze going back to the Renaissance and the Baroque. Evidence is most illustrative and abundant in Italy where there had long been a system of patronage matched by numerous, technically superior foundries. However, what should be noted is that such historical evidence is largely in the form of *maquettes* or models, and perhaps most appropriate to the Italian, *bozzetti*. Herein, the clay is really more of a "sketch" than finished work in either scale or surface. Beaumont's practice differs in that she originally works in clay and casts at the same scale from the actual clay. She is meticulous with textures and surfaces so that original textures and surfaces are more than discernible, but they are part of the visual dialogue of the finished work itself.

Looking back, it would be accurate to note that the sculptor laureate Auguste Rodin(1840-1917) set an extraordinary precedent in terms of permanently capturing in bronze his beloved and bedeviled fixation with his original materials. For him, this was not ultimately clay, but plaster. Such translation of material obsessions were not lost on, but rather were inspirational to sculptors from the Post-Impressionist Medardo Rosso (1858-1928) at the dawn of the 20th century to Pop-Art sculptor George Segal (1924-2000), well into its long sunset. Taking these dimensions into consideration, it must be recognized that perhaps few figurative sculptors in recent memory were as successful in the rigorous translation of original surfaces than Magdalena Abakanowicz. Her bronzes, in particular, are highly successful in conveying original, rather fragile materials and meaningful messaging through to the durability of bronze. With merely these few examples, Beaumont is in honest conversation and historical consideration and must not just be recognized, but applauded.

To examine for a moment the Abakanowicz phenomenon, one of the most underappreciated aspects of Contemporary sculpture, it is insightful towards understanding Beaumont more fully. There are three levels of discourse. In the first place, there is issue of stability and longevity that the translation into bronze offers that the original materials fail to provide. Whether clay or fibers, plaster or mixed media, there is an inherent fragility to overcome. Secondly, casting offers the opportunity to create in small, identical groups or multiples. In editions traditionally of 3, 6, or, perhaps stretched to 12, there is

something prudent for a sculptor to create small editions after the extraordinary investment in making just one. Thirdly, and perhaps most profound, is the opportunity to place the work out of doors.

Since the middle of the 20th century, there has been greatly increased interest on behalf of European and American sculptors to place works *en plein air*. No one person, artist or patron contributed to this phenomenon more decisively than the legendary British sculptor Henry Moore (1898-1986). When he simply stated that he would rather see his sculpture in the open air than in an interior gallery space, he more than revived an ancient tradition for outdoor sculpture, but fueled an interest and appreciation for outdoor sculpture that has only grown. Moore knew that light and air, atmosphere and environment, would embrace and inform his bronzes in meaningful experiential ways that even, stabile gallery conditions simply could not. The key was to find ways to successfully translate his original forms into bronze. For Beaumont, such translations eventually meant looking to the greater history of bronze casting, which simply meant to look south of the Alps.

Certainly one of the elements that contribute to her success as a sculptor in metal is her decision to spend significant time working in Pietrasanta, Italy. In 2014, Beaumont moved her home and studio from Brussels, Belgium to Middleburg in the Netherlands, but her connection to the fabled region and foundries of Pietrasanta has been a constant presence in her career since 1995. Collectively, its history is a living history and the region boasts a lineage of gifted founders that stretches back generations, even centuries. Beaumont is quick and gracious in acknowledging that although she has done many bronzes she was “fortunate to find excellent foundries where they also make beautiful patinas.” Summarily her efforts from the original clay **through to and in** harmony with the efforts of her foundry have created, take on the mantle of historical consequence themselves.

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However, history is as curious in the themes of its chapters as it is long in names and places. Italy is no doubt more complex in its artistic continuum than most cultures. By this statement, it means that there is much more to the elevated technical impact and foundry traditions of Pietrasanta on Beaumont, but it is as much aesthetics as of the history of sculpture as well. No other world culture has contributed so profoundly to the history of sculpture in more prodigious and prolific terms than that of the Italians. From antiquity through to the Middle Ages, to the successive chapters of the Renaissance, followed in short order by the Baroque, through to the 19th century and corresponding legions of native and immigrant sculptors, the history of sculpture, in both bronze and stone, is often synonymous with artistic life on the Italian peninsula.

For an artist as sensitive and perceptive as Hanneke Beaumont, it is could never be just working in Italy. This is far too pedestrian. She is invested there and therefore it is working within the larger sweep of the history of sculpture that is Italy. From a veiled distance one can discern the harmony of her many accomplished sculptures with the fragments of ancient statuary. Understand that she does not create fragments herself as Contemporary artists such as Igor Mitoraj (1944-2014), who have eloquently committed their oeuvre, but there is a correspondence. Perhaps it is the stillness? Maybe it is the distressed surfaces? Perchance an indefinable aura? No matter, the connection to the antique is there without quoting antiquity itself.

One specific and moving connection is with a greater affinity with the Italian Renaissance than the Italian Baroque. In spirit and form, Beaumont's figures such as **Number 124** (2014) call to mind the Early Renaissance in particular. Save for the individualism and dramas that are uniquely by the mature Donatello (1386-1466), there is a clarity of surface and gesture which seems to reflect a wide variety of Tuscan, specifically Florentine, masters who offered redemptive contemplation in both reliefs and figures in the round. Andrea Verrocchio (1435-1488) certainly comes to mind when considering works such as **Number 124**. There is confidence in the overall pose, which is at once simple and complex. The positioning of the arms and legs is particularly noteworthy. But perhaps, it is the assured gesture of the raised right hand and arm that the clarity of the Early Renaissance can be discerned.

At this point in her career, such referencing to the larger history of art in the work of Hanneke Beaumont is requisite. It appears all too infrequently in the existing literature on her. Perhaps at an earlier moment it would have felt too much as positioning, or worse, promotion – ideas which are definitively foreign to the very being of Beaumont as an artist and as an individual. As a Contemporary sculptor she does not paraphrase nor appropriate the past – viable streams for many sculptors succeeding in and contributing to the waters of Post Modernism and beyond. On one hand, there is a distilled essence in the form and spirit and body of her work, which calls to mind the sculptors of the past, even distant past. On the other hand, there is the robust presence of her work amongst peers across the Contemporary scene from the 1980s through today that is not simply justifiable to signal but necessary to note.

With a bit of historical distance, we are only now beginning to see the larger phenomenon of reinvesting, rethinking and, ultimately, reinvigorating figurative traditions in American and European art the 1980s. A pluralistic moment to be sure, it continues with stunning complexity even to the present day. Post-war abstraction, minimalist and hard-edge trends, and bold environmental statements from the 1950s through the 1970s had little use for figuration. Pop discourse that we now understand as global were often commercial discernments on representation; these are statements on the figure not works of the figure itself. New Realism was broad in scope, but it did not often delve into the soul of figuration. This being considered, what one can reflect on with the clarity of hindsight is that beginning in the late 1970s and burgeoning in the 1980s, often described as the long 1980s, diverse visual voices were chorusing around the use of and the reappearance of the human form.

More than just a swing in the aesthetic pendulum from abstraction back to representational imagery, the last decades of art history prove that the human form in art fulfills a significant need for human expression and enlightenment. Empowered by pre-war conceptualism and post-war experimentation, figuration over the course of the last two generations is broad and diverse in form and content, materials and message. Not to be misconstrued as anything even vaguely approximating a cohesive movement, it is perhaps better understood as a witness to the power of the human figure across the more expansive history of art. We, humans, seem to have timeless need to hold a mirror to ourselves and consider the many variations of discernible reflection.

No one has yet to fully consider Hanneke Beaumont within and against the backdrop of this phenomenon, but it is honest and necessary. As noted, her oeuvre developed and greatly expanded in

the 1980s and 1990s. As such, this is not just about her calling as an artist and specific choice to work as a figurative artist, but also about audience response. Viewers, both casual and discriminating, are decidedly invested in the figurative pluralism of art as it exists today. It thrives in painting and sculpture, for sure, but also through installations, photography and film. All this considered is a commentary from the creators, the givers, within the art world, but what about those on the other end, the viewers as receivers.

Another unsaid, though well-exemplified truth for the work of Hanneke Beaumont in relation to the larger history of art is in the profile of many informed and well-versed individuals who exhibit and collect her sculpture. Individuals who tend to have a greater, perhaps more in-depth, appreciation for the longer art historical narrative tend to gravitate towards her sculpture. From an objective, outside observation, it can be noted that those who admire and collect Old Masters, for example, find Beaumont's bronzes, in particular, compelling even if they may be unsure of or even confounded by other trends in Contemporary art.

Engaging and overheard conversations at her exhibitions are often less of the tributaries of today and more of the broader, open waters that represent larger expanses of time and artists that tend to be both of their time and timeless all at once. In this, there is no more compelling set of discussions from the observer's point of view than those that revolve around Hanneke Beaumont and Auguste Rodin. Perhaps this is commentary on what audiences and art historians bring with them into the dialogue than resource from the artist herself. In fact, in her formative period as an artist Beaumont reflects on being drawn to more abstract sculptors such as the Spaniard Eduardo Chillida (1924-2002) and the Japanese-American Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988). This said, it clearly illumines Beaumont's highly sophisticated attraction to the power of materials as well as the deep psychological, perhaps even spiritual possibilities of abstraction.

Many informed observers who knowingly admire the French master of Modern sculpture also have an appreciation for Beaumont's more current efforts in clay and bronze, in particular. As evidence over coincidence, those who first encounter Beaumont's sculpture frequently harken back to aspects of Rodin iconic and universally well-known repertoire in order to begin to understand what new forms are before them. In examining this phenomenon through works like Beaumont's *Number 105* (2010) for example, the treatment of textures and surfaces can be a bridge between past and present. At the base level, this stems from the respective admiration for original materials in which a specific figure is first given form. As noted above, for Beaumont it is the clay. For Rodin, it may have originally been clay but was eventually the plaster. When moist, they are both highly malleable, therefore highly expressive materials. Again, works like *Number 105* are by no means imitative but honest and sympathetic with regard to materiality.

Meaning and materials are critically important to both artists, but so too is its translation to a more permanent state. Treated perfectly, clay and plaster can have a long life, but bronze truly lasts. This truth has not merely centuries but millennia on its side. Furthermore, successful translation into metal relies upon meticulous mold making and the highest quality of casting. But thus far, one has only pieces, not figures. Further still there is the conjoining and chasing of the bronze and, lastly, the patina.

Done to perfection, the end result is the very visceral spirit in impermeable bronze of the malleable and expressive original plaster or clay. It is this very visceral spirit that for many brings these two sculptors in question into meaningful introductory conversation.

Then there may be the actual figures themselves. In Rodin's calmest moments, this is more readily available. When his figures are bound by their inward thoughts or just stepping forward into life, one is offered a more open narrative and senses the emotional and psychological space between things.

Beaumont's 105, among other examples, is here in harmony with Rodin. However, bolder physical and narrative experiences of Rodin exemplified in amorous embraces or cascading damnation separates them. So too does the enhanced muscularity of some of Rodin's sculpture. In their very anatomy, these examples burst with decisive storylines. Here, the mystery for Rodin has lessened through increased expressions of physical energy, sexuality, even tumult.

To her credit, Beaumont has never been an imitator, certainly never a copyist. Therefore there are limitations to viewer discussions, which may initially involve Rodin. Her figures, in general or in detail, are original and personal. They are of a stylized type that faintly echo her academic training and early portraiture, but in fact result from the distillation of her own imaginative and creative forces. "I make them out of my head," she shares. Her work is of human life not necessarily descriptions of a specific human life. Defined streams of narrative energy and robust muscularity considered, Rodin worked largely from life. He worked from models and drew copiously using them. This gave him energy and in turn energized and increased the decibels of his work. In her originality, Hanneke Beaumont is not silent, but always very quiet.

Pausing amidst such quietude, it is interesting to note that Beaumont has personally had an appreciation for the work of Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966). For all intents and purposes, Giacometti became the figurative sculptor of the central part of the 20th century – an island amidst seas of abstraction and Expressionism. His work also became the existentialist touchstone of modern anxieties made visible. In her work, Beaumont does not take the viewer to this precipice, but instead avails awareness that such a precipice is but one option. She has remained authentic to her own discernment but more important to her own inspirations that ultimately derive from observations of daily life and a becalmed intuitive approach to her work.

Such quiet is established with the base description of the figures themselves. **Figure 142** (2018) is a most distinguished case in point. The head and body are of a type that has become signature to the artist. Reflecting upon her early work around portraiture and her broader evolution as a sculptor that brought her to this point, she shares, "I wanted to work completely without a model." Again studies with models is part of a learned past, but now distantly informing not defining a creative present. "They become my figures because that's the way I see them," she continues, "the way the head comes out is just pure intuition." Perhaps it is in her stylization of the human form that she is able to achieve a certain calm, a neutrality: neither masculine nor feminine, neither too young nor too old, neither vigorous nor weak, neither of today nor yesterday nor tomorrow. Between.

The quiet of Beaumont's art is about the space, physical and psychological, between states of being. In **Figure 142**, the figure appears to have rested temporarily and is turning to consider rising again. The repose and reflection is between. The positioning of the body – gently turning around a strong, central core – is beyond dignity but too modest to want to grasp at majesty. The limbs have released and dropped to the sides but may soon elevate and move once again. This is but a moment between. The head has turned and the view is focused, but it will likely turn back, or around. Between. The same can be said of upper torso and shoulders. Between, yet again. This sculpture is a snapshot moment in time, not a studied portrait. Herein is the great and cohesive honesty that Beaumont wanted to move away from working from life, from models. Snapshots may offer candor, but they are almost always between fixed or posed moments in time. Between establishes the quiet, quiet establishes the between, that informs Beaumont's oeuvre, but it also establishes a tone of ambiguity, or better yet mystery.

Returning to the domain of the larger history of art, one is given pause to consider the number of artists truly comfortable with quiet, with mystery. The profoundly important and duly lauded Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) comes to mind if not as being definitive of the topic at hand then at least as eloquently representational of it. His intimate interiors are drenched in tranquil sunlight and populated by singular figures or pairs engaged in hushed contemplation or soft conversation. Although the environment and dress are of a time, and models and portraiture are employed, the action and mood is calm, unperturbed. Vermeer represents the apogee of quiet grander and noble simplicity that informs so much of Dutch painting of this epoch and Dutch art at large. In fact, it helps to define much of Dutch culture even today.

It seems appropriate at this moment to consider Hanneke Beaumont as a Dutch artist. It is ineffectual and limiting to consider her work in the course of Dutch sculpture alone because, as a genre, it is such an extremely small community even, collectively inclusive, over the centuries. Rather, it can be rewarding to consider Beaumont within the greater breadth of Dutch art, which is dominated by painting. Although she has travelled the world, lived abroad and been exhibited and collected internationally for decades, she embraces her nationality with passion and compassion. "I am Dutch, I am very much Dutch," she shares. In saying as much, it is critical to also recognize the modesty which prevails in Dutch culture and that Beaumont herself would never even suggest to herself any comparative statement with the likes of a master such as Vermeer. However, through a critical lens of art history and an outside perspective, the sense of quiet and mystery are harmonious and share more than the casual breadth of cultural language, but the nuances of soulful dialect as well.

While momentarily outside the comparative parameters of sculpture, Beaumont's sculptures may also call to mind the elegiac canvases of the 19th-century French Symbolist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898). Among the most celebrated muralists of his day, he created tranquil landscapes sparsely populated by indefinably classic figural types. Certainly such indefinability is complementary with many of Beaumont's figures, but it is a greater sensitivity for quiet, for mystery that weaves together a reasonable discussion. For Puvis de Chavannes, there was a marked ability to fuse trends of Classicism and Romanticism in a way that appealed to the Modernists of his era. He was, for example, the favorite painter of none other than Auguste Rodin. Herein, a full circle that includes Hanneke Beaumont feels complete.

After such considerations, returning to **Figure 142** offers an even more rewarding experience for the viewer. As a solitary figure there is a condensation of artist's vision and intent. Works such as these are perhaps most well known from within Beaumont's oeuvre. Such singularity for the viewer is immediately met and matched by the disposition of object itself. In its compositional and emotional gathering of self, it is at once totemic and reflective. Sculptures of this nature are of great consequence to Beaumont's repertoire. Like the main vertical posts that support and define a building in and of itself and across the landscape, sculptures like **Figure 142** are central forces that support the structure of her oeuvre over time and allow for subtle variations and extended exchanges.

Turning to a sculpture like **Searching for Balance - Number 121** (2013), Beaumont's careful navigation of variations on a form and extension of an idea are readily apparent. Seated, it is sibling to **Figure 130**, yet increasingly less quiet and not as inwardly facing. **Number 130** pivots in place. Anchored by the lower torso, the upper torso and arms move back while the lower legs and feet twist and bend as if to rise. The head not merely turns more dramatically than anything yet encountered, but cranes forward as if responding to a call. What had previously been held bound, Beaumont has started to release into physical space and nearly launches into a narrative. However, such release and launch are restrained by the definitive quiet of the artist's larger repertoire. For its suggested movement, head and limbs are still close in orbit to the torso. Only the straining of the neck and legible emotional stance of the facial features register as truly novel. The fact that this head and neck are centered on the torso retrieves the energy back inward and ever so slightly. But one is not yet prepared for the elevation of the arms. Considered only unto itself, just a gesture would merit greater discussion, but in consideration of the larger body of Beaumont's sculpture it offers a gentle surprise and opportunity to think rather than to react. A fledgling creature breaking out into space. Note how the entire torso and legs remain fully stable, planted. This gives foundation to any experimentation with form. So too, the decided symmetry of the figure ground the overall form in rational thinking and preparedness to move into something new. For Beaumont, change is neither daring nor bold, but measured and assured. The sculpture exists in several scale versions and several glorious drawings done as a studies. The overall figure registers as quintessential Beaumont even from a distance. However, the extended arms, avian as if about to take flight, and the intensity of the position of the head and its countenance possess an awakening, a level of enlightened theatricality, that is unique. Even more forceful than the sculptor's figures which actually step forward or twist in space, this single figure is engaged in space and changes the energy of that space. However, what keeps this form from the truly dramatic is the control of the body and decidedly clear and balanced composition. Lower torso is firmly grounded to the base on which it rests and the extended legs and feet are firmly balanced. Further, the overall figure is marked by calming sense of symmetry. Balance, as the title suggests, and symmetry, as is clearly legible, allow for the poetic surge of upper torso and ascendancy of the upraised arms.

Acknowledged for her single figures, Beaumont also brokers change in a select number of carefully paired figures and one masterful trio. The former are illustrated in kneeling figures such as **Number 87** and **Number 88** (2008) and the standing **Number 119** and **Number 123** (2013-2014). In each eloquent example, one of the pair seems totally self-engaged while it seems considered from near arms length distance by another. The measurable space between the respective sets of figures seems as important

as the figures themselves. They can seem close, almost intimate, were one of the two not so captivated by their interior being. As such, each figure in each pair maintains a viable independence that could prevail if fully considered as independent. In such a manner, Beaumont is succeeding at a journey into a new frontier.

Number 87 and **Number 88** are compelling in a manner that the previously discussed **Number 25** and **Number 26** are as well. Despite their successful independence, there is co-existence. They are relational to one another and to humanity, but they are not of, nor in, a human relationship. There is a difference as the relational suggests larger issues of the human condition, perhaps cultural or spiritual, social or societal. That Beaumont has kept each of these examples close to the ground, kneeling or sitting, has an implicit connection to their role in something larger and more timeless of themselves. The standing pair, **Number 119** and **Number 123**, seems to offer something different. In pose and demeanor they are decidedly more totemic. There is a suggested relationship between them not necessarily of their kind. Standing atop a cubic base and raised on a pedestal, they seem more fragile. Yet, it is the sense of quiet that washes across each pair that binds them in a way that the viewer is bound to Beaumont's individual examples. As we are compelled by our realities with her sculpture, they are somehow obliged to one another in the mysterious reality Beaumont has created for them.

The sculptor is at her most expansive in a seemingly interconnected trio, titled "Connected-Disconnected": **Number 91** (2008), **Number 93** (2009) and **Number 99** (2009). Taken together this is the closest that Beaumont comes to monumentality, but hers is not a monumentality of things measurable, but based in the complexity of things immeasurable. Two of the figures kneel; each decidedly reminiscent of an aforementioned pair. Added is an upright, kneeling figure. In full twist at the torso, it is amongst the most animated of Beaumont's figures yet encountered. As with the pairs, each of the figures in this grouping can be considered as independent. However, two things are significantly different. As two of the three figures focus on the third, Beaumont comes the closest she ever has to the suggestion of narrative possibilities. The quiet remains, but the sense of mystery is lessened. One does not know the narrative but rather feels the implication of a certain narrative. Clouds have begun to part.

Also of great difference is the importance and complexity of composition. The very use of three elements, the very legibility of the triangular, the very existence of trio, is critical. Glances and gesture connect, but more significant than ever is the sculptor's use of space both between and among each figure. Rather than filled with tension, it is pregnant with certain levels of apprehension and anxiety. Although beyond many reportorial norms, "**Connected-Disconnected**" is as successful for Beaumont as it is for the viewer. It also underscores her willingness to investigate new ideas that are honest to her experience and artistic being. She first challenges herself, and then she extends the challenge to those approaching the work.

A most exceptional case in point for such challenges is a genre within her larger body of work that has appeared in recent years, which are figures that are represented in relation to an inanimate object. Held or confronted, extended forward or filling a gap between, these objects range from what appears to be shards of vessels or gatherings of cloth. As objects, they lack any complete definition, as do the

figures themselves. Therefore, there is no iconographic implication as in a Medieval or Renaissance painting. In sculptures ranging from **Number 122 (Pieta)** (2013) to **Number 131 (November 2015)** to **Number 137** (2017) what is held is matter, even if it closely resembles material. In essence, what is considered in relation to the figure is equally primeval as it is potently Post Modern. From the head and hands of a lesser artist, the inclusion of any such objects could easily read as secondary, even trivial. Yet considering the extended arc of Hanneke Beaumont's extensive career there is the essence if not definition of logic, which makes this genre successful.

Among the most intriguing of this genre within Beaumont's oeuvre are examples like **The Middle World/Number 107** (2010) and **Abundance and Chaos/Number 96** (2009). In each example, the role of an inanimate object, rough and undefined matter, plays a critical role in the center of the composition. In the former, it exists as a central force flanked by a pair figures that seem equally connected to it as well as withdrawing from it. While in the latter, such matter cloaks and blankets the single, centrally positioned figure. In each example, one cannot help to but consider the clay original of the matter – a clear reflection of Beaumont's love and mastery of the media; this considered each work offers a kind of reflective examination of repertoire or a degree self portraiture on materials and process. **The Middle World** allows for a narrative around the unformed, the chaos and potential of mass from which we each universally arrive and to which we individually shall return. It asks large, unbounded questions. **Abundance and Chaos**, is perhaps more comforting, less existential. The great flow of matter cum material both binds the figure and protects it. Were the arms not embracing, there would be a thought that it could overwhelm. But there is no evidence of struggle, let alone losing it, yet there is an acknowledgment of such potential to succumb to excess and disorder. For as much as each work calls to mind the artist's initial efforts in clay, it is her decision to cast in bronze which offers a permanent and effective translation.

Among these works, those cast in iron resonate in dimensions far different than her earlier successes in clay, then bronze. In recent years, sculptors across the international scene ranging from Antony Gormley to Ai Weiwei have found great opportunities working with cast iron. The clash of present and past is intentional, the Iron Age and 21st century merge, but such is the gripping visual reality of the rawness of iron. Beaumont has long used raw metal as part of various bases and plinths and the consequential weathering has served in poetic contrast to the patinated bronze, but the rawness of iron is another consideration entirely. In many ways it speaks of the earth in ways similar to the ways in which terracotta and all forms of clay do. From a distance, Beaumont's works like **Number 94** (2009) may read as fired terracotta – the earthiness is so sincere. However, as the sculpture approaches the tonal variations and visual densities of the cast iron that come into focus.

Although perfectly situated for the nominative Iron Age itself, most sculptors and their respective societies have tended to look down upon the use of iron as being practical, but coarse. Perhaps best said as: it is an unworthy match for true artistic expression. The Industrial Revolution created innumerable opportunities for iron, so too did sculptors executing on a colossal scale; but for interior, structural purposes. A few highly inventive and rigorous sculptors in the early 20th century such as Julio

Gonzalez (1876-1942) utilized iron; post-war masters of Abstract Expressionism also found iron enticing. Summarily all came to and employed iron in a constructivist vocabulary. This is far different than sculptors like Beaumont who cast in iron.

In the ambiance of this discussion of color and texture, it is perhaps most effective and justified to note Beaumont's extraordinary drawings. "Drawing is very direct," she insights, "and I just enjoy drawing but sometimes I find I have too little time for it." Largely unknown and somewhat hesitatingly exhibited, the drawings are among the most soulful aspects of her oeuvre. These are not preparatory works that lead to a model or to a full-scale sculpture, but the drawings occur within the sculptural process or occur as reflections after particular works. This may register as surprising since Beaumont follows so many traditional steps; one might expect that drawings lead to *maquette* to clay model culminating in the fired clay or cast bronze or iron. But as one has seen, so much happens with the artist between things, between states of being, that drawings done during or following her sculpting processes seem coherent, logical. She finds time to draw on her travels or in logical pauses in the making of a sculpture. She furthers, "while the clay (original) will be drying, I will have two, three weeks and I like to spend that time on drawing." The rewards of that fortnight, give or take a day, can be immense.

The drawings connect to her larger oeuvre in both candid and slightly elusive, if not guarded, ways. To be expected, the figure reigns supreme and very specifically captured in three-dimensional form can be or should be discerned. In addition, there is a choice of palette that speaks of her sculpture as well. There are drawings informed by an array of red ochre and rustic browns alike. All can call to mind her fired terracotta sculptures as well as the more recent irons. Others still offer fields of gray, which venture up into macaroon whites and across into steely grays and blacks. Often these seem harmonious with some of her patina choices. Regardless of color and hue, she explores ranges of color even as she explores the human form. These are largely mixed media endeavors, although glints of white chalk and dashes of black enliven the surfaces and delight the eye. In some drawings, Beaumont is operating at her most expressive and in a gesture here or there that offers evidence of bravado.

However, perhaps the most profound connection of the drawings to the sculptures is the element of ambiguity, the lack of definition, the layering. The mystery arises, once again. None of figures in the drawings are fully defined. Contours are intentionally incomplete. The layers of media veil and unveil, then veil again. These are far from studied academic presentations but highly visceral and deeply enigmatic and contemplative visual essays. Each is complete incompleteness. Ultimately, they offer the only signal to the beginning of a breakthrough sculptural work, which may hint at where Beaumont may next take us.

Number 138 (2018) is vaguely familiar to those that have studied and deeply considered her career. Yet, it is a complete stranger as well. The initial sensation is that of a recently kneaded mass of clay. Layers and slashes, crevices and textural tumult resound. However, a small Beaumontian figure comes into focus at right. Seated, its back is supported by a gash in the sculpture. There is a level of chaos battling calm that is understood. Of course, the energy and anxiety of the original clay resounds, but more exacting is a relationship to her drawings style at large. Here, the sculptor has pushed the viewer beyond the frontier of lucidity towards a distant thunder of ambiguity. She has increased the volume of quiet.

There are still questions, but the questions seem more pressing, thespian. If a final question, perhaps we are ill-prepared to proffer answers. Certainly in its visual vibrancy, compasses of interior direction may prove to be false. For this form is new. Its uncertainty is authentic and only the sculptor will be able to guide to the next level. We must wait in the quiet between.

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