

BRAM DEMUNTER

Crowded Valley

21 May - 4 July 2026

Tim Van Laere Gallery presents *Crowded Valley*, the fourth solo exhibition by Bram Demunter at the gallery. For this exhibition, Demunter unveils a new series of paintings and watercolor drawings, while introducing bronze sculpture into his practice for the first time. These new works mark a distinct shift within the artist's oeuvre. Where earlier paintings unfolded as expansive narrative landscapes populated by countless simultaneous scenes, a more concentrated and self-contained visual world now emerges. Central figures - floating heads, hybrid bodies, or solitary travelers moving between islands and mountains - serve as anchor points around which smaller scenes, animals, spirits, and fragments orbit. The compositions adopt a pronounced circular structure, evoking cosmograms, mandalas, or mythological maps.

What gives these works their particular force is their resistance to any singular interpretation. Rather than functioning as linear narratives, they unfold as networks of associations. Fragments appear without fixed hierarchy, references accumulate without explicit explanation. The viewer is invited to forge connections and construct meaning within images that resist definitive reading. In this sense, the paintings operate according to the logic of dreams or myths: coherent yet irrational, structured yet non-linear. A key source of inspiration is the medieval genre of the *Immram*: mythical sea voyages such as that of Saint Brendan, in which islands are inhabited by wondrous beings and timeless, unchanging scenes. This suspended atmosphere helps explain the silent, stoic gaze carried by many of Demunter's figures. They appear as archetypes: travelers who are at once hero, hermit, monster, and witness. Echoes of characters such as Dante Alighieri, Odysseus, Gilgamesh, or Dulle Griet can be discerned, even as these figures dissolve into vegetation, earth, and animal forms. In *Crowded Valley*, the human figure is no longer presented as an autonomous individual, but as a node in which different forms of life converge. Bodies continuously mutate: human becomes animal, plant, or landscape. As such, the paintings do not operate as straightforward stories, but as layered constellations of meaning in which associations accumulate without stable hierarchy. Demunter constructs a visually intertextual world in which everything can coexist simultaneously.

The painting process itself mirrors this continual transformation. Demunter works on multiple canvases at once, repeatedly overpainting sections and allowing compositions to evolve organically. Structure often emerges only retrospectively, as though the image gradually organizes itself from within. He compares this working method to the layered complexity of Tibetan thangka, Mughal painting, or enclosed late medieval gardens: even within overwhelming visual abundance, a hidden order eventually reveals itself.

Alongside the paintings and watercolors, Demunter presents bronze sculptures for the first time. Finished with patina and oil paint, these works extend the same hybrid and organic visual language into three dimensions. Tree, body, animal, and relic flow seamlessly into one another. The sculptures appear both archaic and animate, like enchanted objects or amulets from an unknown mythology. For Demunter, they function as tangible condensations of the same world evoked in his paintings: fragments of a cosmos temporarily taking material form. Religious and spiritual image traditions play an equally important role. Influences drawn from Christian iconography, saints' lives, and visionary imagery (including that of Hildegard of Bingen) resonate throughout the exhibition, alongside references to animistic spirits, demonology, and mythologies from diverse cultures. As in much of Demunter's work, the central figures are often those who withdraw from the world: hermits, seers, travelers, and guardians seeking meaning within a fractured reality. At the same time, contemporary anxieties permeate the imagery. Climate change, war, social upheaval, and existential uncertainty are filtered through ancient stories and symbolic forms. Rather than offering direct answers, Demunter's work searches for ways to making chaos and complexity perceptible through imagination, ritual, and fiction.

With *Crowded Valley*, Bram Demunter further deepens his exploration of image-making, mythology, and collective imagination. Together, painting and sculpture form a dense and transformative world in which nothing is ever entirely fixed: a contemporary mythology where human, animal, landscape, and history remain inseparably intertwined.