

The Walk

June 2 - July 15, 2017

We are not among those who have ideas only between books, stimulated by books - our habit is to think outdoors, walking, jumping, climbing, dancing, preferably on lonely mountains or right by the sea where even the paths become thoughtful.

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* §366

Nietzsche was a great walker. A philosopher of the outdoors who generated ideas by moving. Like Rousseau before him. The starting point of this exhibition takes as its source the observation that the act of walking enables understanding of the world by striding through it, as well as understanding of the body by setting it in motion. A way of bringing body and mind into an intimate rapprochement. Walking is conducive to creativity. That is the aspect which is being emphasised here. Visitors will understand that only certain avenues have been explored while others have not, such as walking perceived as transhumance, as migration. This is a deliberate omission because that kind of walking would require an exhibition in its own right.

Left-hand room

The act of walking is bound up with the history of humanity. It is reasonable to assume that mobility made human beings more intelligent. Head and foot are intimately linked (1). Dating back about two million years, the evolution of the human species is profoundly connected with its «specialised bipedalism, very efficient walking and enduring running», as pointed out by paleoanthropologist Pascal Picq, whose discipline studies the skeletons of our ancestors in order to understand our origins (2). Man walks and discovers the world. Fabrice Samyn (3) reminds us of this by meticulously engraving a world map on the top of a human femur, the bone that symbolises walking. Man has continually walked through the world to the point of exhaustion (4) and once he had the technical capabilities, he overcame the constraints of gravity to set foot on another planet (5, 9). Walking enables connection to the infinitely large. Anish Kapoor with *On the Horizon* (6) and Claudio Parmiggiani (7) bring in this metaphysical aspect, while Evariste Richer (9) considers the concept of time with *Caesium's shoes* (8), caesium being the element used in atomic clocks to define the accuracy of seconds.

Right-hand room

Walking can be seen to be a key element in the work of many artists. Chaim van Luit explores the bowels of the Earth in *Lost Valley* (11). He shows the outside world from the inner depths of a cave. Walking means connecting the inside to the outside, the intimate with the infinite, connecting Man with his environment (12, 13, 21). The urban environment is constantly observed by artists in their wanderings (14, 15, 16, 17, 18); Lieven De Boeck photographs graffiti on the concrete of the streets of the Village in New York City, Rinko Kawauchi captures an instant in the scattered crowd in Japan, Jordi Colomer questions town planning practices by making a character run around the streets of Barcelona with a scale model of the Torre Agbar skyscraper. The world is complex but, far from the city, the reflection of a woman's shoe appeals through its exoticism (19). What can one say about the journey of these wooden feet from Egypt, bought in the United States over the Internet by an artist living in the Netherlands, ultimately to be exhibited in Belgium (20)?

Rear room

Sociologist Michel de Certeau found an excellent way of comparing the act of speaking with the act of walking (22). Walking is the repetition of an alignment of steps and the large installation by Méndez Blake that covers the walls lists texts that are repeated and refer to rain (23). Many poets or writers have combined walking or wandering with their words. One of the finest examples is probably Rimbaud, the man with the soles of wind who, having criss-crossed Northern France and Belgium, escapes from Europe - here - to go there, in this case Abyssinia (24). Far away from everything and everyone. Accepting to get lost, accepting not to follow the predetermined course, but instead to face up to the labyrinthine journey so dear to the heart of Borges (26, 28, 29) or be transported by random events like Vladimir Nabokov in his butterfly hunts (25). «Encountering freedom as a torrent within me of a rebellious Nature which is completely beyond me. Walking can cause these excesses: excessive fatigue which makes the mind delirious, excessive beauty which overwhelms the soul, excessive intoxication on the mountain-tops [...]. By walking, we escape from the very idea of identity, the temptation to be someone, to have a name and a story.» (F. Gros). Walking frees us from the horrors and the cares of everyday life, but can lead us to face up to the insoluble questions of the meaning of life, according to the poet Fernando Pessoa, in his room or in the streets of Lisbon (*Le Livre de l'intranquillité* - *The Book of Disquiet* by Thu Van Tran).

The call of the wild is a recurring theme in the literature of writers/walkers; the large mineral drawing by Jorge Méndez Blake (30) illustrates it well, and finds a pertinent echo in his video (31), where we see him crossing a dense, volcanic nature, between the National Library of Mexico and the University Museum of Contemporary Art.

Knowing the world means listening to it, measuring it and recording its oscillations (32). It means delving into it and searching, as does Oriol Vilanova (33) when he criss-crosses the flea market, to collect postcards showing the riches of the world, by showing them in a way which needs no commentary. Knowing the world means being part of space, maintaining the curiosity to drink in every possible diversity, it means strolling, it means walking.