**Karen Santen**

***Op zoek naar mijn oorsprong / Searching for my origins***

**Exhibition: 2 May 2015 til 7 June 2015**

Karen Santen (born 1951, Amsterdam, NL) lives and works in Amsterdam. She travels extensively around the world, sometimes working in these new territories, and at other times as a visitor. Exploring different landscapes enables her to maintain a childlike curiosity, which carries over into her sculptures. Enjoying the pleasure of walking barefoot through grassy fields, or feeling the rain on skin, Santen says that these travels help to rekindle the simple moments of life that we often take for granted. This way of being offers a creative, experimental approach to making work and a playful, intuitive decision making process. Her forms speak from inside rather than from an aesthetic concern, trying to give vision to a feeling, a memory, a structure, a shape. The clay material a perfect tool for connecting to one’s inner self, a soft and fleshy form that gives a pleasurable sensation as it is squeezed between fingers and palm.

In 2013 Santen took part in *Hyle* a selected group exhibition in the Raveelmuseum in Belgium. Here she was introduced to the idea that certain works of art carried within them a strong artistic resonance, a kind of soul, something that communicates its true nature and origin. The name of the exhibition, Hyle is an ancient Greek name for something which is primordial, formless but full of energy. Since taking part in the exhibition she has embarked upon a self-explorative adventure in which she searches for her origins; signifiers of self, of a personal history that can only be her own. Clues lie in the material she chooses, the way that it is manipulated, and the resulting shapes that form. Forms that seem to repeat through time, like a leitmotif, as is oft to happen through most artists’ lives, there are things that they keep coming back to. A familiarity in a form, a shape, a mark. Something that weaves itself throughout the fabric of our own history, growing, expanding, and shrinking back into itself. ‘We are often unaware of our basic self’, she says, and it is liberating to find out about oneself, why we do something, why we are drawn to create certain shapes, patterns, what a place means to us, how it relates to our personal history. We are all drawn to the familiar, something that speaks of home, a way to connect to our past as it resonates through our present.

In much the same way that she is now enjoying unearthing her history from looking at what she has created, she has always made work with a desire to undress form, to reveal and unfold their intricate workings, imagining its skeletal form. Working from the inside out, she will often make a structure that the rest of the sculpture fleshes out, as it encompasses its many empty spaces. Bony spinal columns that stretch out and recoil, as she inserts another material, with different drying properties to expand within its frame. Clinging to each other’s surface, as parts of it peel away and crack, exposing its fragile relationship to the other. Her sculptures play with the spaces of inside and outside, possessing a bodily, internal intricacy about them. It instills a curious desire to reach inside with eyes, mouth and fingers in a sensuous exploration of it’s chambered cavity.

*Karen Santen has a long-standing relationship with Galerie de Witte Voet since her first exhibition at the gallery in 1981.*

*For more information about her work please visit:* ***www.karensanten.com***

Jennifer Picken 2015