



Art Attack Art Attack Art

The formidable power of Johan Creten's sculptures

by Diane Pernet

Belgian sculptor Johan Creten discovered the power of his talent while being bullied as a child. Taunted for his skinny physique, he confronted his tormentor one day with a menacing piece of art he had created, telling him, "If you hit me this is going to come and haunt you this night." Amazingly, that put an end to the bullying. Creten realized that his art could literally help him survive.

Creten was first 'discovered' at the age of 11, when a local couple saw him painting outside a local art supply shop in the city of Tienen. Recognizing his precocious talent, they invited the young artist to their home, which was filled with roomfuls of art. It was this couple, the Leonards, who went on to help Creten launch his first serious show.

By the time Creten was studying at the Villa Medici in Rome, his reputation was already quite established—so much so that when the respected Robert Miller Gallery in New York City asked to see a catalogue of his work, Creten responded by simply telling them to

drop by his studio in Rome. Miller ended up buying many of Creten's pieces and offering him his own show at the gallery.

Creten's latest project, *Dark Continent*, was inspired by the writings of Freud and refers to women. It consists of a series of massive bronze sculptures, including a bronze basket representing the cradle of humanity anchored on top of a primitive-looking phallic shape. "I think sculpture is about us and our roots and where we come from and who we are," says Creten.

Creten adds that he is fascinated by the dark mysteries of the woman; he sees her as both the creator and destroyer of life. "*Dark Continent* is something that you want to explore," he says. "It is something that scares you, intrigues you, something that is beautiful, mysterious and fucking scary."

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