

Eens was ik mens! Is this mankind?

By Peter de Cupere

Olfactory Art Exhibition
De Warande, Turnhout, BE
www.isthismankind.com



In 'La passion de Jeanne d'Arc' – a French silent movie from 1928 – the actress Maria Falconetti's head is shaved bald, in the scene in which Jeanne d'Arc is made ready for her execution. Rumor has it that the whole movie crew started crying during this scene. The cutting of hair can release heavy emotions.

With the title – Is this mankind? – Peter de Cupere refers to the book Primo Levi wrote in 1947 about his time in the Auschwitz concentration camp. After all, the involuntary loss of hair coincides with a feeling of identity loss. The protagonist in this book talks about the life in the camps and how the dehumanization continued to get worse. In a seemingly objective manner, Levi reports all the small daily events, such as shaving people's heads bald.



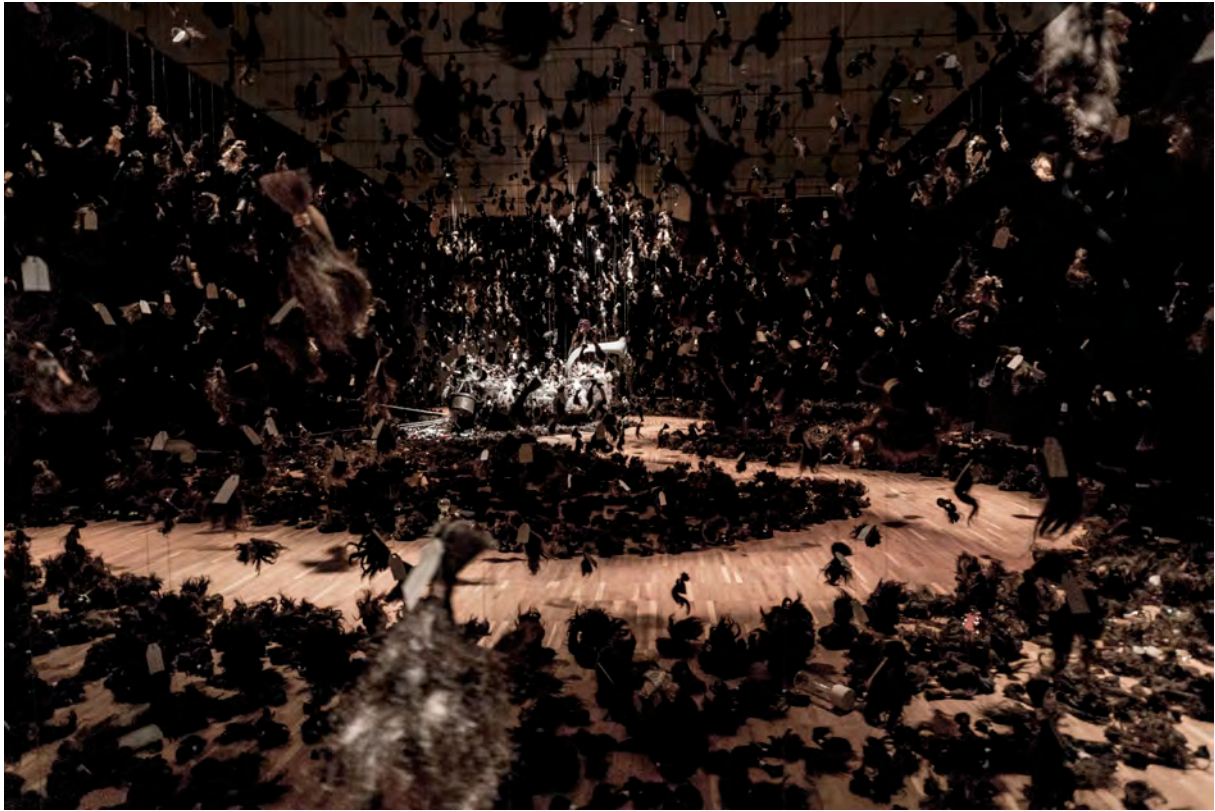
First space

In the first space, here in the Warande, Peter de Cupere focuses on involuntarily having your head shaved bald or having your hair cut. He combines two very different situations. On the one hand, he presents testimonials from cancer patients. The loss of hair is a well-known side-effect of chemotherapy. On the other hand, he displays testimonials from survivors of the Auschwitz extermination camp. Upon their arrival there, people had their heads shaved bald under the pretext of hygiene, even though it was clearly a form of humiliation. In his interviews about both situations, Peter de Cupere focuses on people's olfactory memories.



On the opening the parents of the artist cut his more than 20 years old hair tail. Afterwards the artist cut the hair of 12 volunteers





Second space

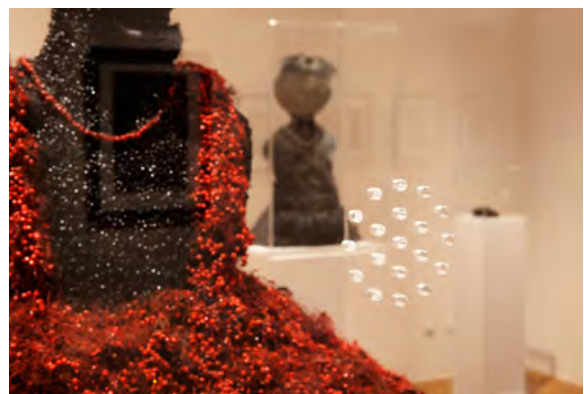
In the second space, the visitor enters a forest of hair. This is where Peter de Cupere displays a collection of 21,000 human hair tresses. The hair tresses each have their own scent, connected to a specific human identity. For example, the smell can refer to a perfume, to certain dietary habits, or to specific lifestyles. This way Peter de Cupere wants to restore the honor of the lost identities. This room also contains a sculpture of a boat coated with hairs. The boat symbolizes a reference to contemporary refugees who cross the sea with hopes of reaching land. Even though their hair isn't cut, they also involuntarily lose a large part of their identity because violence forces them to leave their possessions in search of human freedom.





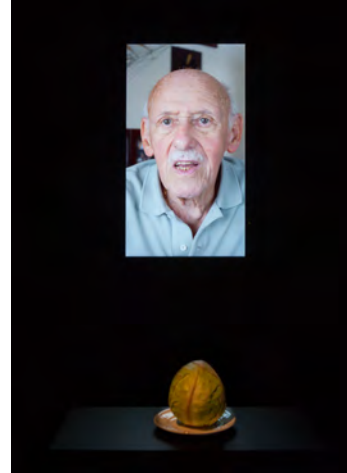
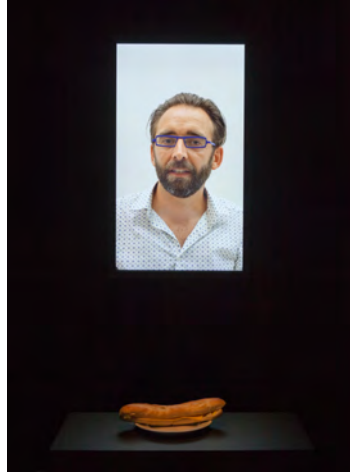
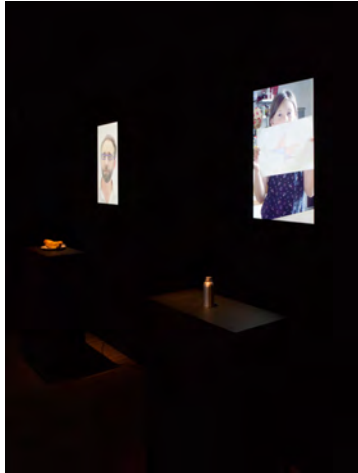
Third space

Finally, in the third room, the artist presents six recent sculptures. They consist of herbs, as well as hair. The sculptures are anonymous figures called “Monsieur” or “Madame”. They have no senses except for their olfactory system (i.e. their sense of smell). Their noses are up in the air, as if they are exploring their surroundings. Moreover, this pose provides a somewhat stuck-up impression. The artist added a lot of humor into these sculptures, which can be read as a type of catharsis.



More photos of the olfactory exhibition





Olfactory testimonials from survivors of chemotherapy and survivors of Auschwitz. Watch the videos to hear them tell about their olfactory memory of the situation where they were in.

See website www.isthismankind.com





Perfume Hair Sniffer

The night before the cut of his hair, artist Peter de Cupere realized a sniffing performance. During several months he let also grow his beard to have his face disappeared almost totally in his hair during the sniffing performance. The performance video is shown on a big monitor (180 cm W, Full HD)

The performance is also part of the total olfactory installation. The soundscape of the sniffing fills the first space. Once the spectator put on a headphone he only hears the voice of the person that tells his/her olfactory testimonial



Photos Second space



More than 21.000 human hair tails perfumed with more than 300 perfume brands. On the ground lays more than 1.000 empty perfume bottles.





The scented hair tails are labeled with name, number and year.



Photos of the third space







