

# **A crazy world**

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## **(text for the book 'Tilting time') 2021**

Vulnerability is our shared destiny. That doesn't sound very hopeful, yet vulnerability there is more strength and future to be found than in perfection and success. Fragility and brittleness are at odds with a society where measuring is knowing and where performance parameters are guiding us from kindergarten onwards. Failure may perhaps still be allowed, but only as a temporary diversions on an obligatory route with the ultimate goal of success. Fear, shame, sadness and anger are not part of it. We live in a time when everything has to be under control.

We act as if we are lord and master over nature and our own lives. We act as if we can do everything on our own. We act as if life is one big sequence of likeable moments. We act as if the torn pages from the book of our lives may never be read or told, even though they are indelibly scratched into the core of our souls.

It is precisely in this tilting time that we are confronted with the limits of our own vulnerability and of the nature in which we live. Boundaries fascinate. Perhaps because they suggest security, separating between inside and outside, night and day, man and nature, us and them, madness and normality, artwork and artist. But far more fascinating than borders is our mad desire to draw them constantly. It is as if we are searching in the indefinable stretch of sand between ebb and flow for a clear boundary between land and sea, for fear of being overwhelmed by our own vulnerability.

Karl Meersman has stood in that indefinable stretch of sand between ebb and flow and allowed himself to be engulfed by vulnerability. The result of his tilting is fascinating, three-dimensional work. Three-dimensional in the literal sense of sculptural work, but also in the figurative sense of three dimensions of vulnerability: that of man, that of nature and that of the artist.

Most know Karl as a gifted draughtsman. His work is highly recognisable because of exceptional *métier* and craftsmanship. He masters ancient but forgotten techniques so well that one gets the impression that he has digital assistance. Nothing could be further from the truth, Karl's work is artisanal mastery.

For the series of portraits 'heads in clay', Karl worked for 6 months among people with mental vulnerability at PC Sint-Hiëronymus in Sint-Niklaas (Belgium). He discovered in the psychiatric centre an oasis of normality in the middle of a delusional world. An oasis where people can refuel hope and regain believe in their own power to build a new future from the broken fragments of their past. "It has changed me as a person," he says in an interview, "because I have come to realise that we are all vulnerable".

The heads in clay may be separate, but they are not separate from us. They are looking at us. The invitation to conversation is stronger than the boundary between

us and them. Karl enters into dialogue with a world full of psychological vulnerability, pushing the boundary between 'normal' and 'abnormal'. Together with him, we discover that no boundary exists between the vulnerable and the invulnerable people. Vulnerability cuts right cuts through every human being's existential desire to understand and be understood.

Karl Meersman's work is a powerful and hopeful plea not to return to the 'old normal' even postCorona. In the old normal, the rythm of the insane life is too fast. We pass through the storm of the everyday hustle and bustle too hurried to see the fragility of true happiness.

Vulnerability is our shared destiny, but the power of vulnerability can also become our shared future.

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