

Visitor information

Not Vital – Dialogues with the park and the collection

30th of May to 22nd of August 2021

Not Vital (*1948 in Sent / CH, lives in Beijing, Rio de Janeiro, and Sent) is considered to be among the most significant Swiss artists of the present day. For quite some time, he was better known abroad than at home, owing to his studios in Beijing and Rio de Janeiro and his projects all over the world. In more recent years, his purchase of the castle at Tarasp in Unterengadin and the extensive retrospective of his work at the Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur in 2018 has led to his art receiving considerable attention in Switzerland. Now, Not Vital is visiting the Museum Langmatt, with two dialogues – one with the park, one with the collection – that perfectly convey his artistic vision.

Not Vital is frequently described as a nomadic artist who allows his processes of exchange with other cultures to lead him in creating his artworks. The studios and workplaces that he maintains across the world give him a remarkable knowledge of other cultural spaces. Assistants and local craftspeople play a significant role in the creation of the artworks, contributing their special knowledge and traditional working methods. The artist's work possesses a mysterious aura, and can often be read as metaphorical. Sculptures, objects, and installations appear to possess an almost archaic aura, one not wholly explained either by the material treatment or by the forms they are given. As the scene of his childhood, Sent in Unterengadin serves as a significant reference point for the artist, both in terms of geography and in terms of ideas, even though he has lived almost entirely abroad for many years.

In the Museum Langmatt library, Not Vital creates a subtle dialogue between a number of his archaic-appearing ceramics – created in 2018 in China - and selected 1st and 2nd century AD Han Dynasty pieces from the Langmatt collection. In the Han Dynasty era, the quest for immortality led to the creation of miniature reproductions of everyday objects, which served as sculpture-like grave goods. Some still show traces of a colored glaze. Sidney and Jenny Brown

began their collection of Chinese ceramics as early as 1909 with what was once 240 copies, which was also about the same time as their collection of French Impressionists.

Although they are so different in colour and form, the ceramics of Not Vital and the Han Dynasty show a surprising inner affinity. The secret of life and death appears to be the golden thread linking the epochs. And the incredible time span of two thousand years has almost disappeared in the library.

In the Langmatt's park, three sculptures resembling wrapped hay bales transform the refined lawns of this historic ensemble into a more worldly agricultural area. Not without a certain humour, this provides a counterpoint to what was once an upper class villa with carefully tended English-style lawns. At the same time, these sculptures, with their exceptionally reproduced, geometric form, can also be read as a reference to Minimal Art of the 1960s and 1970s. But there are also associations with gigantic, super-soft marshmallows. And between the two front bales of hay and the two figurative sculptures by Alice Boner and Friedrich Wied on the one hand and the large vases along the path on the other, subtle references unfold.

Many of the Not Vital artworks are characterised by a subtle and peculiar humour that provokes childlike wonder, and thus a new and undistorted perception of culture and of nature. The three hay bales are striking examples of this. Due to its placement in the high, unmowed meadow in the rearmost part of the park, the last of the bales sets a special accent: Where no grass has been mowed at all and therefore no grass is to be filled into bales, the bale grows visibly lonely as a paradoxical sign of civilization, getting out of hand.

LANGMATT

Museum Langmatt
Stiftung Langmatt Sidney und Jenny Brown
Römerstrasse 30
CH-5401 Baden

info@langmatt.ch
+41 (0)56 200 86 70
www.langmatt.ch