

CAVE MYTHS

(endless
Spelunking)

Quetzal Art Center proudly presents the group exhibition *Cave Myths (Endless Spelunking)*, that will be on view from 31 March 2019 until 30 March 2020. *Cave Myths (Endless Spelunking)* brings together works by modern and contemporary artists who explore the artistic possibilities of the cave. An important core of the exhibition is formed by works from the Bruin-Heijn Collection, its curatorial angle partly generated by a group of works by Mike Kelley in particular.

The consciousness of modern man was born in the darkness of the cave. It was in the subterranean dwellings of early man where the modern human soul has awakened, in artistic reflections on contemporary life. The cave plays a crucial role in our understanding of creativity, and the slow coming into being of a complex, sensitive human intelligence, somewhere between primordial chaos and the first structures of civilization. In its most famous philosophical allegorization, the cave is the place where our truths and ideals were born: a dark place that holds the keys to the mysteries of our existence.

In *Cave Myths (Endless Spelunking)*, a selection of works by artists who engage with the cave and its artistic potential is presented. There seems to be a contemporary urgency to return to the cave. In our current post-truth age, in which ideological bankruptcy, ecological neglect and technological hubris have outlined a horizon of global collapse, a closer look at the cradle of human civilization feels more necessary than ever. It could teach us something profound about who we are, and help us to imagine the future in a different way.

In *Grotto Profunda Approfundita* (2017), Pauline Curnier Jardin has constructed a cave-like room that, once inside, evokes the sensation of being swallowed inside the bowels of a human body, allowing the artist to ironically play with clichés surrounding the cave as a spiritual and gendered space. Past Paul Thek's *Unfinished Dinosaur in Flames* (1975), we encounter *The Sophisticated Neanderthal Interview* (2013) by Nathaniel Mellors, a cave-side meeting between a modern man and

a Neanderthal, who discloses an alternative theory on the origins of cave art, and suggests a budding, cynical capitalist logic behind its institutionalization. Mike Kelley reflects on the Platonic cave and its juxtaposition of truth and illusion in his drawing *Exploring*, that formed part of his large installation *Plato's Cave, Rothko's Chapel, Lincoln's Profile* (1985). Here, the artist orders the viewer: 'When spelunking, sometimes you have to stoop ... Sometimes you have to go on all fours ... Sometimes even crawl ... Crawl worm!!' Kelley's work deals with the cave as a Freudian space, allegorizing the subconscious as physically penetrable: the deeper we enter it, the darker the traumas we may encounter. In a more restrained and abstract sense, Rachel Khedoori's scale model of a floorplan of rooms (*Untitled*, 2017) alludes to similar Freudian connections between physical and mental spaces, memory and trauma. Connections that are further explored in *Hotel des Grottes* (2005) by Alexandra Leykauf, a video work set in a network of fictional caverns below the eponymous hotel. In these works, the artistic methodology rests on psychoanalytical concerns: the darkly subterranean as the locus of our deepest fears and desires, to be subjectively explored and conquered. The grotesque mouth depicted in Lee Lozano's *She Bites* (1962), baring its protruding incisors in an aggressive grin, presents an associative, gendered link to the cavern as a voracious aperture, ready to devour everything and everyone.

Luís Lázaro Matos offers us a symbolic trajectory in the opposite direction. His commissioned site-specific installation presents the visitor with a transcendental possibility, an escape from the darkness of the cave towards the light, suggesting us to (as if responding to Kelley's imperative): 'Come with me, out of our cave – Little vampire, climb!'. Up and out there, in the blinding daylight, we might find ourselves back in the pastoral surroundings of new beginnings, as suggested in Georges Dorniac's sprawling *Les Amants (The Lovers)* (1917), an interpretation of the earthly paradise as depicted in religious art of centuries past. For his contribution *¿Yucatán?* (2019), a sculpture consisting of two abstracted quetzals around a cave or ear, Dick Verdult defines new beginnings through cultural misunderstandings. Playfully combining historical and mythological sources, Verdult offers yet another alternative reading of the cave.

Cave Myths (Endless Spelunking) is co-curated by Aveline de Bruin and Xander Karskens.