



SOFIE VAN LOO AND PETER BUGGENHOUT

NILESH AGHAREKAR

Of spaghetti and recycled waste

An encounter with Belgian artist Peter Buggenhout and the leftovers he has served up at Warehouse on 3rd Pasta, gives MARIA LOUIS food for thought

WHEN PETER BUGGENHOUT IS CONFRONTED with our bustling city of dreams, he sees a big plate of spaghetti. "Everything is all mixed up like spaghetti and sauce," muses the Belgian artist, trying to express in clear and precise English the chaos he has experienced since he arrived in Mumbai to set up his solo exhibition, *res derelictae II* (objects sans owners, in legal parlance). "People are literally crawling over and under each other, there are cars and bikes everywhere." Such clutter must be like manna from heaven for someone whose work is all rubbish and we don't mean this in a derogatory sense, for Buggenhout's sculptures are born out of the discarded debris of garbage heaps.

There are many of those to be found near the Warehouse on 3rd Pasta, where his work is being shown and maybe that has caused him to change his mind about the way he presents his monumental sculptures titled *The Blind Leading the Blind*, made from waste material (iron slag, polystyrene, polyester), plastic packaging, rubbish and residue glued together with "abject" and rejected material. After experiencing the chaos while waiting for his shipment to arrive, he discarded his earlier plan of creating an incessantly heaving installation of dust "creatures" that the audience could walk through. "I was convinced I should not try to compete with what is going on outside," confirms the hardened

visitor, who has been to Mumbai on holiday twice before, the first time around eight years ago.

In consultation with the curator (fellow Belgian Sofie Van Loo) and presenter (gallerist Abhay Maskara) of this show, he decided to instead create within the cavernous 3,250 square feet, spaces where viewers could "sniff like a dog" around the unfathomable seemingly living trash. You are first repulsed by what seem like monstrous beasts that you cannot quite figure out and then you begin circling them suspiciously in concentric circles that grow smaller as you conquer your fear and loathing – until you are intrigued and begin to absorb each work and its innards.

"What I want to do is to make sculptures that are not classifiable but flexible – so in a church, they might be religious objects but if you put them in an archaeological museum, they function in a completely different way," declares the artist who has been influenced by French intellectual Georges Bataille's perception of abject materials (that is, materials withdrawn from their original state) as those that can declassify things. On opening night, Peter Buggenhout was far from abject – for he has succeeded in what he set out to do. He placed judiciously-picked junk in a gallery, and it is being viewed as art! **V**

(res derelictae II is on view at the Warehouse on 3rd Pasta, Mumbai, till September 7).