

Where It Ends for the Caterpillar

Warre sculpts a bestiary of imaginary creatures in clay: a hands-on craft on a human scale. Like an alchemist conjuring worlds by combining materials and elements in his study Warre creates a universe of hybrid figures that recall medieval mythical creatures with mismatched body-parts, harlequins from *commedia dell'arte*, or archaic divinities guarding the passage to another world. His sculptures are both familiar and strange: we recognise the motifs that have been assembled in them, but the combinations are new and unusual, and sometimes even a bit impish. They are playful and disquieting at the same time.

Such resonances turn Warre's work into a map of the collective unconscious. His sculptures contain countless references to traditional symbolism from different cultural traditions. That is, in fact, the way in which every culture deals with the unknown, the transcendent, or the mysterious: by connecting back to stories and symbols from the past that are made topical again by introducing them into new contexts. This is the principle that the iconologist Aby Warburg called a *Wanderstrasse*: certain motifs can be traced from context to context throughout art history. In every period they are taken up from past traditions, acquire new meaning, or a meaning that slightly shifts previous meanings, and are thus assembled into new wholes. Warre's sculptures can be deciphered in a similar way. They carry a past along (sometimes literally, as several figures carry a symbolic load on their back) and usher it into the present.

Warre's universe is a world of endless transformation, a world that is constantly moving and changing. He assembles fragments in an intuitive way, but this process is not random: his iconography has its own logic (a mischievous Pinocchio sports a Hitler hairdo: where do we draw the line between playful mischief and deep-rooted evil?). Furthermore, his collage-like approach to sculpture is also a form of recycling. It is a creative life-cycle in which the ancient is constantly forged into the new: creation as endless process. It is therefore no coincidence that one of his figures, who looks like a messianic father-figure, reaches out to hand us a caterpillar. For the death of a caterpillar is not a real death: it is the beginning of pupation, which culminates in the beauty of a butterfly. Caterpillars represent the metamorphosis of form and meaning.

Warre's work seems deceptively simple. For what seems child-like is in fact a challenge to the viewer to surrender their preconceptions and engage with an imagination that is led by a sense for ever new possibilities. The universe in which this process takes place shows all the traces of a wide-ranging heritage. The play of imagination never starts from scratch. Rather, it produces images about images, and in doing so, it refashions old meanings for a new world.

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