

Kasper Bosmans  
*The Flower Makes You  
Different*

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## The Flower Makes You Different

by Melanie Buehler

Kasper Bosmans' artworks seem like tarot reading from a beautiful mind, someone who thinks in symbols instead of words. Sometimes the reading pertains to something specific, like an ancient tale, historical fact or vernacular ritual. In other instances, the focus remains ambiguous since the references for the reading are abundant, drawn together from different moments in time, an array of inputs. The most emblematic and longstanding format for the artist's fortune-telling is the *Legends* series – his own set of tarot cards, if you will – a series without conclusive references. When more immediately legible, however, Bosmans' works tend to speak of a specific experience, one that is queer and often also domestic, highlighting forms of labor and craft that have traditionally pertained to the feminized setting of the home. Bosmans' sand patterns, for example, which are laid out on stones, refer to the tradition of the *zandtapijt* (sand carpet) as it was practiced in northern Belgium around the turn of the 20th century. Bosmans talks about how his great grandmother would use a broom to sweep white sand into decorative patterns on the floor when a revered guest, such as the local doctor, was coming to visit. Bosmans' reinterpretation honors this domestic craft while using patterns that relate to a different set of references.

The new patterns, forms and objects that emerge in Bosmans' exhibition in Zuoz involve a range of materials. Next to the patterns in sand, woven wall works show grids and lines with animals on them – a turtle and a donkey, to be precise. Drawings, all derived from motifs and stories connected to the region of Zuoz, are shown in broad, colorful wooden frames, the grain of which shows through the paint. Different murals appear throughout the gallery space. A set of small-scale paintings, Bosmans' *Legends* series, are shown on wooden panels, while, upon entering the gallery, the visitor is greeted by a series of eyes painted on enamel panels.

The title of the show, "The Flower Makes You Different," references Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, also referred to as *The Golden Ass*, the only ancient Roman novel to survive in its entirety. At one point, the protagonist of the story, Lucius, is turned into a donkey by a magic spell that can only be reversed by eating fresh roses. Roses then become the agent for change that will allow him to once again assume his human form.

This ability to transform is the essence of queerness, which, at its core, consists of the “undercutting of the stability of identity and of the dispensation of power that shadows the assignment of categories and taxonomies.”<sup>1</sup> The paranoia that can be evoked by the gaze of others to respond to such categories (such as the binary gender categories of man and woman) looms large in the exhibition and is exemplified by the various eyes encountered at its beginning (*Clocking the Cameo, Madalena, Catfish, Dido, Iris, a Looker*) and end (*Weighted Blanket, Little Boots*).

The eye is also central to the work *Walking on Warm Eggs*, the title of which suggests both discomfort and caution. This work – equal parts bridge, tunnel and half of an eye – references a story about how Leonardo Da Vinci, in his quest to study the eye’s function, first boiled an eye in egg white so that it could be dissected without its contents being spilled. There are other, more hopeful, references to queerness, including the rose, the stand-in for transformative potential, which appears in many works and in a more abstract sense can also be said to structure the rhythm of many motifs in the drawings and sand paintings, given the repetition of fivefold elements (roses commonly have five petals).

Two murals show feet in beaded sandals. Festive, yet anonymous, the feet are shown cut off from the bodies they carry, a framing which invites speculation, an opening, a potential. Perhaps these could be read as references to cruising, the search for anonymous sex in public spaces or through apps. A large woven wall work shows a donkey amidst roses – perhaps the most direct reference to Apuleius’ novel. A second tapestry shows a big white turtle on a bright red backdrop overlaid with a spider web. The turtle refers to the 19th-century novel *À rebours* (“Against Nature”) by Joris-Karl Huysmans, whose protagonist, the reclusive and eccentric Jean des Esseintes, purchases a turtle to match his oriental rug. He then goes on to decorate the shell of the turtle with gemstones, which eventually kills it. It’s again a universe of queer domesticity and metamorphosis that the allusion to this novel evokes, albeit a decadent one. The spider web, meanwhile, suggests the act of collecting. The spider is a collector without an aim: whatever catches its web, is caught. Bosmans is also an eclectic collector of historical sources and stories; however, instead of devouring his catches like a spider does, Bosmans refracts them through his distinct queer lens and his deep appreciation for craft and care.

<sup>1</sup>David J. Getsy, “Queer Intolerability and its Attachments” in: Getsy, David, ed. *Queer*, London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery; The MIT Press, 2016.