

Bernard Abtey Paris, Galerie Orenda

**Paris.** The exhibition of the French artist Bernard Abtey's work has been extended due to its great success. His powerful yet delicate pieces made from marble, wood and metal have been on show since late February in the Carré Rive Gauche – at the Galerie Orenda – located on the left bank across from the Louvre in the elegant Parisian art quartier of St. Germain.

Among the sculptures, which frequently have tall and slender silhouettes, are pieces belonging to his "*Frémissements*" series: Each piece consists of a single block of marble, the core of which contains precisely shaped and detailed human figure – surrounded by delicate layers of marble which encase the figure like fine leaves, cut away from the marble, layer by layer, in fragile balance. A single block of this heavy and dense rock – months of finely detailed and intricate work by the artist.

The Carré Rive Gauche in Paris boasts some of the most expensive real estate in France and the Galerie Orenda, formerly San Lazzaro's Galerie XX Siècle, is a special place where in past decades a number of great French painters achieved recognition; famous names such as Chagall, Miró and Delaunay form part of the gallery's history. The gallery's current owner, Nikolas Rostkowski, son of the artist Maria Papa Rostkowska, more or less grew up in his stepfather's gallery. The quartier's many posh temples to art are often tiny; such small spaces are highly challenging for artists wishing to present entire creative periods.

The sculptor Bernard Abtey's background as an artist and craftsman is the stonemason's workshop of the Strasbourg Cathedral, where he trained for over a decade. Abtey has been creating sculptures made from marble, wood, iron and similarly heavy materials in his studio for 30 years. The sculptor spends a great deal of time subtly shaping each of these materials until they look fragile and delicate – all the while preserving their intrinsic energy.

Abtey, who is in his early 50s, works internationally. Many of his early pieces are reflections of his time as a humanitarian aid worker in war-torn Sarajevo, as well as the result of his work with young prison inmates in France. In subsequent decades, he lived and worked in Carrara – home to Italy's most important marble quarries – worked on a large project in Brazil and lived in the USA. His sculptures have been shown in Eastern Europe, the USA, Canada, and in many places in Europe, with recurring exhibitions in Germany.

What happens within us, and what "elevates us spiritually" are the questions that continually preoccupy and motivate Abtey to take his creative process yet another step further. "It's like with a sculpture: first a solid foundation is formed within us. Then something happens that means we have to adapt – and transform ourselves!" Only then does something new develop within us.

Abtey's sculptures show this development. With their solid materials and delicate cores, they mirror the human personality and the profound changes and developments in the layers that encase us – the changes and developments that ultimately allow our personalities to mature. The unblemished, pure substance, which constitutes the core of our being, also forms the soul of Abtey's sculptures – and continually impels him to create new forms and perspectives with which he reveals the most important aspects of our innermost selves: "Because life, love and feelings are essential to us." Sculptures as a profound reflection of our soul.

The exhibition in the Parisian Galerie Orenda in rue de Verneuil is on now through 2 April.

Heike Rudloff,

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54, Rue de Verneuil  
Paris 7e