

By Lucette ter Borg

Of course she can't be seen on the beach wearing a flimsy H&M outfit. No, for her cerulean strapless bikini with golden stripes she went to Versace or Gucci. Her lips are painted red, her nails are polished a fierce blue, her hair is hidden under an clever little glitter cap. Gold is shining around her neck, gold glitters between her breasts, above her navel, at her wrist and in her hand. Beside her, on a golden leash, she parades a pet Iguana.

She would be hard to miss, this aging lady. With her hands on her hips, the milky white body yielding to the years and covered with many-coloured veins, she is gauging the other seaside visitors, gauging me. The sight, I believe, fails to please her. The eyes have a dissatisfied look, the mouth is contorted in a disapproving grimace. She turns to decoration for support. Without it she would never expose herself to the outside world.

The nearly nude woman evokes a host of emotions: disgust, curiosity, admiration, as well as pity. I can almost smell the fear and loneliness hidden underneath her painstakingly applied cosmetics. The woman is a *makamba*, as the Curaçaoans say: a rich, often elderly and Dutch intruder leading a life of leisure on the Island. With her ostentatious taste the *makamba* appears to integrate well with the indigenous population.

Dutch visual artist Maartje Folkeringa (1978) built *Lady I with iguana dog* in 2010. The woman and her fancy pet spontaneously grew under her hands. The lady evolved into an emblem of the prosperous and yet dissatisfied Dutch the artists sees on the boulevards and beaches. This is how Folkeringa works. Just start somewhere without a prearranged plan and see where it ends.

Lady I with iguana dog is one such end. The work is done, the sculpture is ready. Folkeringa worked at it in 2010, while she was an artist in residence at the Instituto Buena Vista on Curaçao. But *Lady I with iguana dog* also signifies an ending: it became the last human figure Folkeringa would make.

In 2010, Maartje Folkeringa is a fairly well-known young artist. During her master studies at the Amsterdam Sandberg Institute in 2007 and 2008, she surprised collectors, curators and critics. Before the Sandberg Institute, as a student at the Amsterdam Rietveld Academy, Folkeringa was a filly trying her hand at about any possible art discipline: photography, performances, audio art works, video, kinetic art, paintings, drawings. At the Sandberg she finds her focus. She creates human figures, some as small as my hand, others gigantic. The figurines are made from simple plasticine; the large figures from humble PUR foam. Afterwards it is painted or decorated with plasticine, tape, wax or crayons.

Most noticeable about the human figures – Folkeringa calls them 'Ladies and Gentlemen' – would be their abnormal normality. The giants represent men and women one could meet anywhere in the streets: night owl and bag lady, desk clerk and dare devil. But there is something uncanny about all of these figures. Their backs are bent a little too far, the skin is too pale, the eyes too weary, the chair they sit on is hard and the fancy shoes meant to take on the world with fall apart at their feet. There is a lot of outward display in these sculptures but decay is always lurking underneath.

Lady I with iguana dog also faces this decay: the woman is too old to be posing as a beach bimbo. Tragic and beautiful as that may be, it isn't sufficiently satisfying to Folkeringa in the end. Her tragic sculptures – she feels – attain too many anecdotal features. Every figurative image is just another story. On Curaçao she wants to move beyond that point, to continue on a path that leads away from anecdotic interpretation. In a completely natural fashion she becomes a conceptual artist.

Lady I with iguana dog opens her eyes to all the ambiguities that can be attached to the unashamed fascination with appearances so common in the Caribbean. What makes tinsel so attractive and so utterly wrong? How can façades

be so firm – invulnerable to the hammer – and yet so fragile? To capture such ambivalent characters in sculptures? The answer is rather by turning these characteristic into an investigation.

The island life around her is one of inspiration: loud commercials, magazine ads, obnoxious jewellery, hands, cars with outrageously and grills – everything glitters. Look At Me! And: Admire Me!

There are artistic affinities with the American artist Mike Kelley, for example, who showed that cool can also be about bad taste and irony. In her work Folkeringa recognises the garden gnome kitsch, false romance. Another guiding light is the tycoon Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997) and his paintings that made the artist famous mainly because of the sculptures he made from 1964 onwards. They are abstract, made of aluminium, bronze and glass and appear to be entirely flat you can touch them. Lichtenstein's sculptures are viewed by the viewer with their gloss, with bright patterns and with their iconography. Lichtenstein sculpture is like a record, it listens to a story taken from someone's life. The story exists in fragments: marks, stars, speech balloons. To represent emotion are metaphors. The rest.

This 'rest' is Folkeringa's search. After *Lady I with iguana dog* she leaves quite an impression with her necklace, hanging in the air with necklaces attached. *Special Gu* is a gigantic glitter sculpture built from fragments. Instead of a story, *Special Gu* is a lump of emotion: a non-functional object you would love to possess so it made

STARDUST

Folkeringa is a fairly well-known figure from her master studies at the Groningen Institute in 2007 and 2008, as a curator, directors, curators and critics.

At the Groningen Institute, as a student at the Groningen Academy, Folkeringa is on hand at about any possible photography, performances, audio-visual art, paintings, drawings.

She finds her focus. She creates figures as small as my hand, others as large as my hand. Some are made from simple materials like PUR foam. Some are painted or decorated with wax or crayons.

She is concerned about the human figure. She calls them 'Ladies and Gentlemen' to highlight their abnormal normality. The men and women one could meet in a dream: night owl and bag lady, angel and devil. But there is something off about these figures. Their backs are curved, the skin is too pale, the chair they sit on is hard and unyielding, and they want to take on the world with a single hand. There is a lot of outward-looking sculptures but decay is always present.

Iguana dog also faces this issue. It is too old to be posing as a young girl and beautiful as that may be, but it is satisfying to Folkeringa in the way it is made – she feels – attain too easily. Every figurative image she creates. On Curaçao she wants to continue on a path of anecdotic interpretation. In her current fashion she becomes a

Iguana dog opens her eyes to the world. Figures that can be attached to a narrative with appearances so convincing. What makes tinsel so interesting? How can façades

be so firm – invulnerable to the force of a sledge hammer – and yet so fragile? What does it take to capture such ambivalent characteristics in sculptures? The answer is rather straightforward: by turning these characteristics into subjects of investigation.

The island life around her is one big source of inspiration: loud commercials, newspaper and magazine ads, obnoxious jewellery adorning necks and hands, cars with outrageously decorated bull bars and grills – everything glitters, shines and shouts: Look At Me! And: Admire Me!

There are artistic affinities as well. With the American artist Mike Kelley (1954-2012) for example, who showed that contemporary art can also be about bad taste and indecency. In Kelley's work Folkeringa recognises the lyrical poetry of garden gnome kitsch, false romance and glamour. Another guiding light is the American pop art tycoon Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997). Not for the paintings that made the artist world-famous, but mainly because of the sculptures he made from 1964 onwards. They are abstract images made of aluminium, bronze and glass. Although they appear to be entirely flat you can still walk around them. Lichtenstein's sculptures seduce the viewer with their gloss, with bright colours in clear patterns and with their iconography: looking at a Lichtenstein sculpture is like dreaming that you listen to a story taken from something the artist painted. The story exists in fragments of exclamation marks, stars, speech balloons. All conditions to represent emotion are met. Now we just need the rest.

This 'rest' is Folkeringa's field of research. After *Lady I with iguana dog*, she makes quite an impression with her newly invented logo, a medal, hanging in the air with the decorated necklaces attached. *Special Guest* (2010) is a gigantic glitter sculpture build from abstract elements. Instead of a story, *Special Guest* is one big lump of emotion: a non-functional accessory you would love to possess so it made you just a trifle

more special than your fellow man, lift you up in the sky just a little bit higher.

Where ordinary bling-bling thrives on exuberance, Folkeringa transforms her *bling bling* into sober abstraction. None of the sculptures she made since 2010 refers directly to items displayed in department stores. They sooner resemble geometric wall pieces made from crystal, shiny foil, velvet, PUR foam, aluminium and glitter. Giant brackets are standing on pedestals or hanging from the walls while they form a line of hearts together with their shadows. A series of absolutely normal carton cylinders has been adorned with gold and black velvet, and attached to the wall in various sizes. This way they form a sparkling, rhythmical pattern of shape, light and colour. These precious objects, made from scratch, beg for introspection. They couldn't be further removed from extrovert ostentation.

During a work period in 2014, at the foundry and artist workplace Beeldenstorm in Eindhoven, she experiments with aluminium. Just around the corner is exhibition space Onomatopee, where she is showing primarily pieces. At the foundry, awards are created that no gymnastics club would want to present. Sculptural wall decorations appear with silver-coloured stars, flashes and arrows in blue and baby pink. The sculptures appear to be hard and week at the same time: the points of the stars are broken much like the paper darts from my youth that I tried to glue together using too much spit.

Since 2010, Folkeringa treads a gaudy path. On that path anything related to conceit, pomp and narcissist display of status eases away from the individual story. The sculptures of decoration and adornment are stardust. Without regard for persons they stand on a pedestal, are pedestals. In this way they not only uncover the emptiness concealed beneath the dust, they also expose themselves ever so subtly.