

THE CURRENT
STATE OF BELGIAN
FOOTBALL

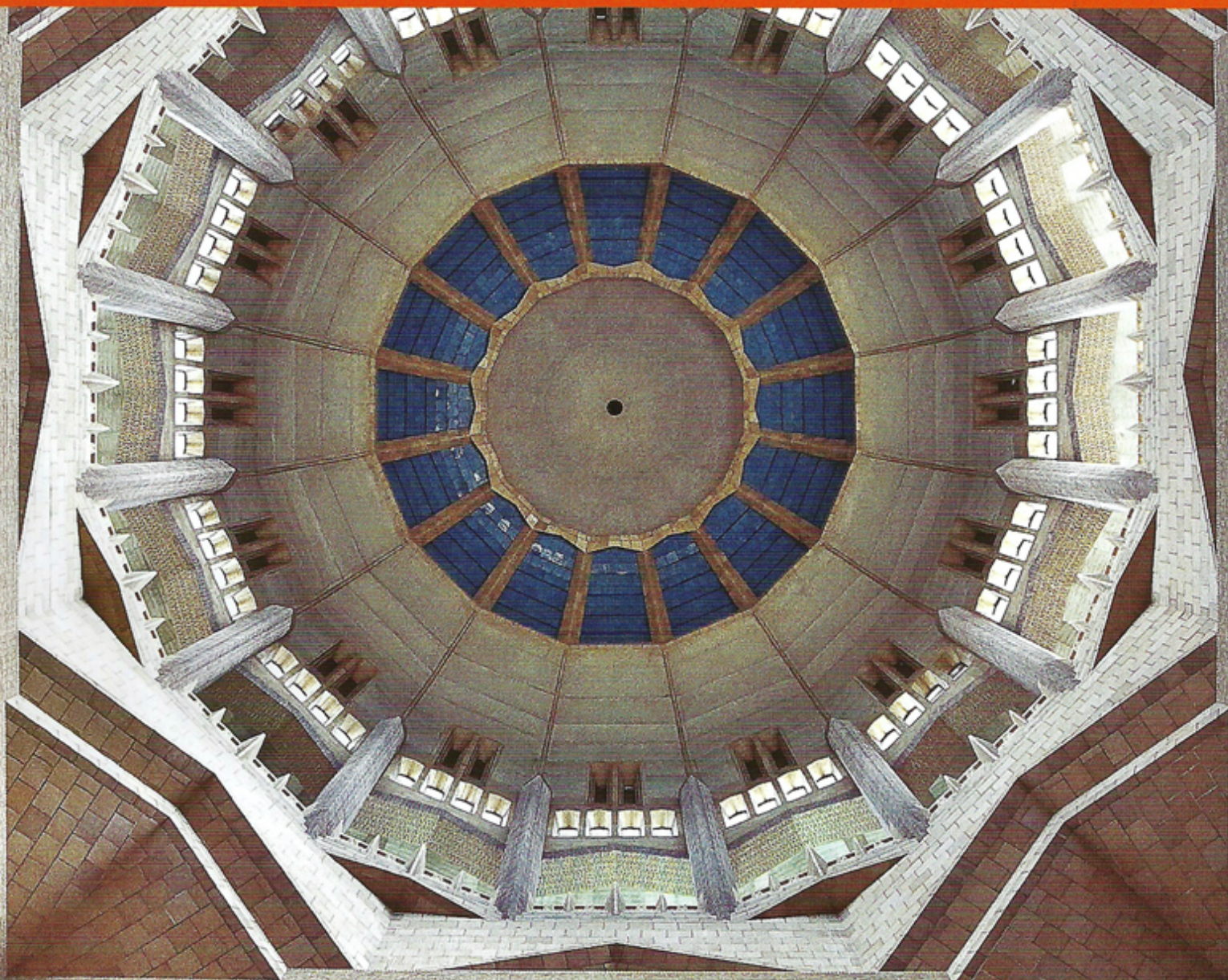
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Art Diving

Interview with Mikhail Porollo on
Aesthetics & Perfection

April 2014



MIKHAIL POROLLO IS A RUSSIAN PHOTOGRAPHER LIVING IN BRUSSELS. HE STUDIED PHOTOGRAPHY WHILST LIVING IN SOUTH AFRICA. SINCE THEN, BESIDES THE SOUTH AFRICAN COLLEGE OF PHOTOGRAPHY, HE HAS DONE COURSES AND WORKSHOPS IN RUSSIA, BELGIUM, NAMIBIA AND AT THE LONDON'S CENTRAL SAINT MARTIN'S COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN. HIS PREFERENCE FOR ART PHOTOGRAPHY IS SUPPLEMENTED BY A DEEP INTEREST IN ARCHITECTURE, LANDSCAPE AND PORTRAIT. HE HAS REPEATEDLY BECOME A FINALIST AND WON SEVERAL NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS.

Interview

MIKHAIL POROLLO

on Aesthetics and Perfection

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE "AESTHETICS" AND "BEAUTY"? ARE THEY STILL RELEVANT?

They say that the time of "beautiful" art is gone, left behind hundreds of years ago and we now operate more by conceptual terms, and in artwork the idea itself is more prominent than the visual aspect of it. I think this view has some truth: today we are spoiled by a huge variety of media, a number of options to express ourselves and beauty has become less visible among everything else. However, I wouldn't cross out these categories. To me they are highly relevant and will definitely be present in the future. In my work I raise these questions constantly and who knows if I'll ever find the answer. At the end of the day they are very strong tools,

PERFECTION AND AESTHETICS CAN BE ASSIGNED TO TOTALITARIAN AND DICTATORSHIP REGIMES OPERATED BY A PERFECTLY ADJUSTED PROPAGANDA MACHINE. IT HAS A LOT IN COMMON WITH UTOPIA, WHICH AS WE KNOW HASN'T BEEN REACHED YET OR MIGHT NEVER BE DISCOVERED.

which art uses for so many different purposes. They do not have to come together: aesthetic doesn't necessarily mean beautiful and beautiful doesn't necessarily mean aesthetic.

WHAT DOES 'PERFECTION OF THE ART WORK' MEAN? WHAT WOULD BE YOUR CRITERIA?

Perfection of the artwork does not necessarily mean that it has to be perfect in the sense of its appearance. It would rather be a piece that has complexity in its simplicity. In other words an art work which adds more layers of a meaning the more you study it, which stays urgent and gives you something that you didn't know before. Perfection would probably be a feeling, an emotion, when the artist is in agreement with his creation.

SHOULD 'PERFECT ARTWORK' HAVE A PURPOSE: AESTHETIC, SOCIAL OR POLITICAL?

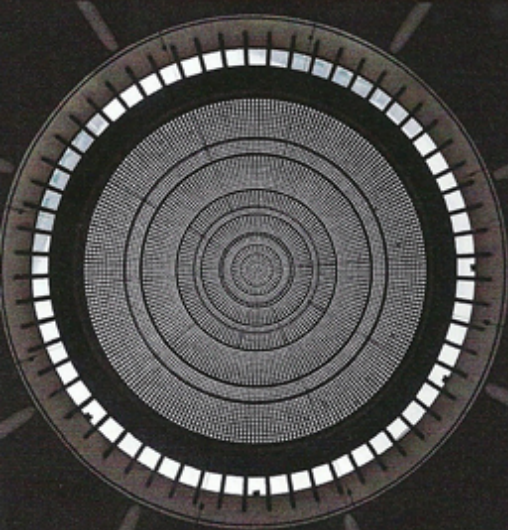
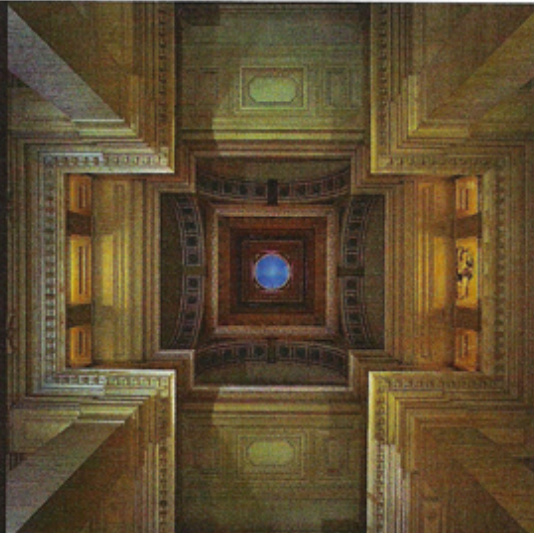
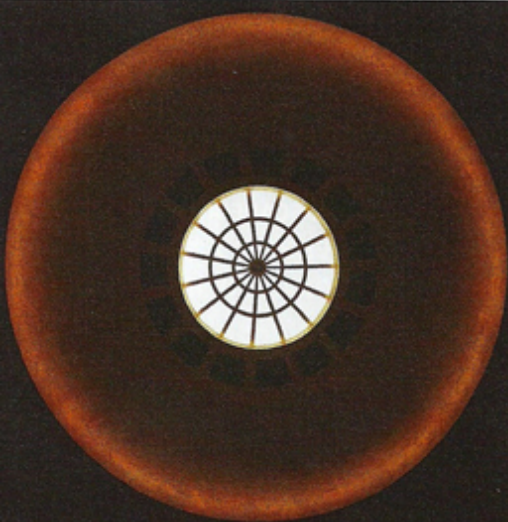
A perfect artwork can have one or more purposes or none, which can also be defined as a purpose. It is difficult to tell if it should or should not carry a specific purpose. We could reflect on tendencies or personal taste but it would be limiting to assign a specific purpose to an artwork. But the urge to create, to say something through your work can be enough reason that's for sure. I vote for freedom of expression.

PERFECTION CAN BE ANALYZED AS AN OBSOLETE, UNREACHABLE THING-IN-ITSELF, SPEAKING IN KANTIAN LOGIC. WOULD YOU AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT - 'PERFECT ARTWORK IS THE ONE THAT GENERATES MEANING WITHOUT ANY CONTEXT'?

It would be difficult to argue with Kant but I'll try. I would probably argue that a context can make an artwork perfect. Look for example on a series of squares of Malevich,

ed space, strong composition or a clear and striking message. The choice of media, material, finishing, method to present and size of the work – all these elements have to also be taken into consideration.

3 of Mikhail's works from the 'Goddesses' project will be present at the show 'Chic and Cheap' in Liege. You can see them everyday from 5 to 19 April, from 13h to 19h at 2, rue Joffre - 4000 Liège (in front of FNAC).



TO DEPICT PERFECTION, THE SYMMETRY IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL TOOLS BUT NOT THE ONLY ONE. THE MOST OBVIOUS WOULD BE TO KEEP TO THE BEATEN TRACK: STRAIGHT LINES, EVENLY DISTRIBUTED SPACE, STRONG COMPOSITION OR A CLEAR AND STRIKING MESSAGE.

YOUR WORKS ARE VERY ORDERLY. CAN CHAOS ALSO BE PERFECT?

Absolutely. Because even chaos can be the most orderly thing. We don't have to go far. Look for example at Jackson Pollock's works. Can it be possible to even imagine more perfect disorder?

WHEN YOU PRESENTED 'GODDESSES' FOR THE FIRST TIME, IT TURNED SOME EYEBROWS OF SOME CRITICS. AS I UNDERSTAND, SOMEONE EVEN ACCUSED YOU FOR PROPAGATING AN IMAGE OF ENSLAVED WOMEN. WAS THERE A SPECIFIC MESSAGE THAT YOU WANTED TO COMMUNICATE?

I always say that we judge based on our background, experience, knowledge and personal preferences. Our opinion, our taste, etc. is strictly subjective. So we all interpret the same work differently and everyone gets his own message out of it, which is one of the greatest things about art. And probably putting "untitled" under an artwork bears more responsibility than giving it a title.

The "Goddesses" project is my reaction to things happening in my life. I was questioning

especially on the black square. It is a perfect example of it in my opinion. However, I wouldn't exclude the possibility that a perfect artwork can function by itself and generate meaning. I would even go further and say that it can create a context around in itself.

IN YOUR PROJECT 'THE PERFECTION OF FORM' AND 'GODDESSES', SYMMETRY HAS A KEY ROLE. IS PERFECTION RELATED TO A SET OF RULES OR FOLLOWING A PARTICULAR PRINCIPLE, FOR EXAMPLE SYMMETRY?

I would say that in the "Perfection of form", it becomes even more complex and intricate compared to the "Goddesses" project because there the symmetry is not only horizontal but around the centre of the image. To depict perfection, the symmetry is one of the most powerful tools but not the only one. The most obvious would be to keep to the beaten track: straight lines, evenly distrib-

the standards of beauty, our way of seeing it, dealing with it and the way our body changes as we grow and what could be found behind it. I was also interested in the interaction between the artist and the viewer through codes, which the artist gives as a set of rebuses or puzzles to the viewer. Another thing I focused on was changes in the world, specifically the growth of global migration and blend of cultures. We travel more and we change places and countries more than ever. Having moved to Brussels, I met so many different people originating from all over the world. I wanted to put myself in the centre and become the connecting link between all of them.

AESTHETICIZATION OF ORDER PROVED TO BE QUITE DANGEROUS IN POLITICS. TOTALITARIAN, RUTHLESS AND DEHUMANIZED REGIMES IN THE WORLD'S HISTORY PROVED TO BE THE MOST AESTHETIC. FOR EXAMPLE FASCIST ITALY

AND GERMANY OR STALINIST USSR. THE IDEA OF POWER - AESTHETICALLY PERFECT, ORDERLY AND SYMMETRIC - SEEM TO INSPIRE PEOPLE TO GO FAR BEYOND THE MORAL LIMITS. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE 'DARK SIDE' OF PERFECTION AND AESTHETICS?

I agree with the fact that the attributes of perfection and aesthetics can be assigned to totalitarian and dictatorship regimes operated by a perfectly adjusted propaganda machine. It has a lot in common with utopia, which as we know hasn't been reached yet or might never be discovered. Here we can probably detect a fine line between light and darkness. Any extreme is extreme. Let's say the most striking about it is the order and affectation, which doesn't exist in nature as we see it: no absolute symmetry can be found in the most perfect flower. That makes us think differently, it changes our mind in a way. Desperation to create the unreachable breaks the brains of many people. It can be dangerous.

WHAT CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS INSPIRE YOU?

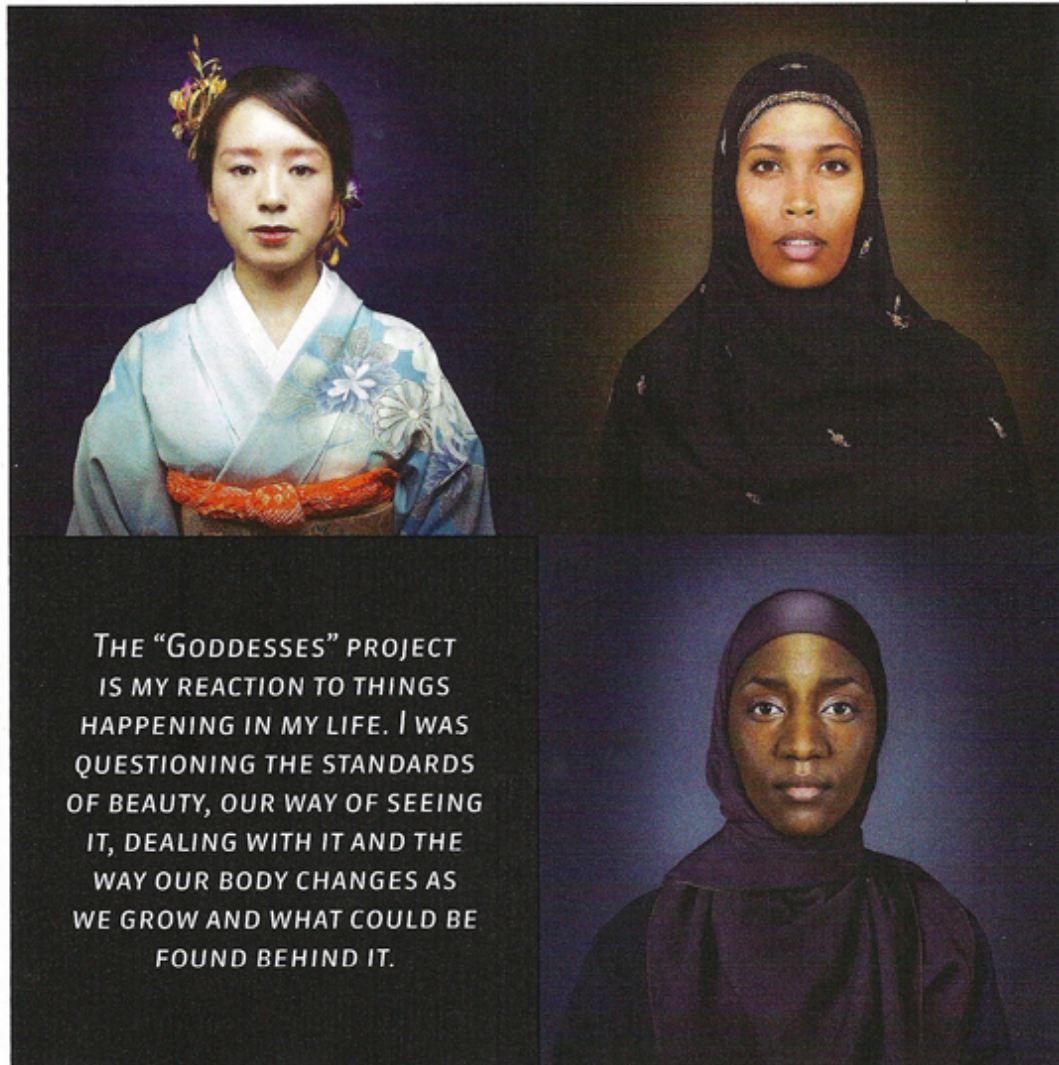
There are so many great artists that I could name. The very first name which comes to mind would probably be Marina Abramovich. I admire her work. She has so much energy and power. What strikes me most is the fact that she has that rare gift of ability to access her own endless source of energy and use it in full. She is a pure inspiration to me. If we talked about photographers I would definitely say the "Dusseldorf guys". Among them I would pick out Candida Hofer, Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth. These people simply changed the world of photography of the last few decades. Also, I cannot remain indifferent to the work of the Canadian photographer Jeff Wall. Additionally, I must mention the artists from the "Young British Artists" group. It is amazing how many great artists stand behind this name.

I do not really want to name all the artists whose art I respect and am interested in, as the list would be too long. But I must however add the classics of the times they are also present and play an important role in my life to this day.

IS MENTORING IMPORTANT IN CONTEMPORARY ART? DO YOU HAVE A MENTOR?

In my opinion, it is necessary to have a person whom you can trust and ask for advice. Not only for an emerging artist but also for a more experienced one. It

is like to have a caring friend who, like an anchor, not only keeps you to the ground when necessary but also guides you to continue your growth. For me personally, I was lucky enough to meet with Lynn Davis when I was still living in Moscow, a great American photographer, and my friend since more than ten years whom I consider my mentor and could probably "blame" for becoming a photographer. I still remember her asking



THE "GODDESSES" PROJECT IS MY REACTION TO THINGS HAPPENING IN MY LIFE. I WAS QUESTIONING THE STANDARDS OF BEAUTY, OUR WAY OF SEEING IT, DEALING WITH IT AND THE WAY OUR BODY CHANGES AS WE GROW AND WHAT COULD BE FOUND BEHIND IT.

me about my "blue dream" of my life. She has given me so much and still does.

WHAT IS YOUR VIEW ON THE ROLE OF THE CURATOR TODAY?

The curator is like a key to a lock. His role is very important in art and becomes even more important when we talk about conceptual art. The way the show was curated determines success of everything. I would say he/she is a necessity of the whole process of showing, presenting, and "opening" art to a viewer. It is amazing how critical the presence of a good curatorial work is. A talented curator can turn the whole show upside down and make things work. He can completely change the way you see and perceive art, and can totally change the whole idea of the show.

For more information about Mikhail Porollo and his work, please visit his personal website: www.porollo.com