

Torotismo

by Ko van Dun



The book has been on the shelf for a while. It wasn't till the holidays that I started thumbing through it in more detail. *Torotismo* by Paul Ceulemans. Except for a brief explanatory preface, there are only pictures of bulls. Shot in black and white with an analogue Hasselblad and printed in large format. *Torotismo* is not the bull but something like "bullhood", a tribute to the phenomenon "bull".

The opening picture of the book says it all: a two page close-up, in fact so close up you can almost smell the bull. As if steam is coming from the pages. And yet, strangely, the image seems to pull back from the observer. This is what you experience throughout the book. This is a realm that is aeons away from our world, a realm untouched by time and undisturbed by human presence. Nevertheless you feel at once connected.



It's fascinating, as if your memory takes you back to the beginning of creation when things were in a state of existence impervious to beauty, to good or evil. This is evoked by the bull, but especially by the bull as portrayed by Paul Ceulemans. Very slow, often photographed with the aperture opened up, caught in subtly modulated, velvet greys.



Last week I visited the artist in his studio in Tilburg, in the south of Holland. One of the pictures from the book was hanging on the wall, framed, more than a square meter in size. Two bulls under an enormous tree, magnificent. Accompanied by two large water-color sketches and a number of bronze sculptures on pedestals. Of course our conversation was all about bulls and about Spain, particularly the region surrounding Salamanca, home to the major breeding farms. This is where Paul Ceulemans lives half the year. Little by little things fell into place. *Torotismo* is not just about the bull; first and foremost it represents a primal image of vitality, embodied by mass in motion. Even without horns Paul Ceulemans' bronzes would make a profound impression.

