

Onni Nordman

Among the Chancellors

Draped burdock sculpture with 80 monotypes (touchable sculpture)

Sculpture height: 1.82 m

Monotypes installed: 3.04 x 3.04 m, 2017

This piece is called 'Scarecrow Among the Chancellors'.

The scarecrow is built of seed pods from the burdock plant. Go ahead and touch him. He's like a Buckingham Palace guard, it's part of his job to put up with it. How many burrs? I'll save you time counting. There are 25,500 burrs. Each one stands for a day, a day in the life. So 25,500 is seventy years, your threescore-and-ten. A scarecrow is essentially a security guard, but at that age he's known as a commissionaire.

The burrs were picked in the first week of August in that time-window of about a week just before they blossom with purple flowers. They were green when the burr man was built, but now they're sepia brown, like an old photograph. He's wearing a mustard-coloured silk jacket. You can soothe your fingers on the silk after touching his prickly flesh. He's wearing a gold chain around his neck because he has something of the fancy man about him.

At the end of his right scarecrow-stick arm he's holding a business card reading "Yikes", and at the end of his left hand there dangle three old bells. When you ring them, they all sound together. Individually, their sound is rather sweet, but together they sort of cancel each other out.

The burr man's legs are a very solid set of bright red table legs. It makes him very stable, he couldn't fall over even in a high wind. He's not as stable up top though, he's somewhat frail. So it wouldn't be such a good idea to give him a hug or slap him on the back or anything like that. He's a scarecrow after all, so he's working.

That red of the legs is the same colour as the background of the eighty portraits on the wall. The images of the chancellors --they're actually all sorts of older German politicians and businessmen --and a few women-- are monotyped, which is to say, they were painted on a smooth plexiglass surface that really allows you to push the paint around as frictionlessly as if you were ice-skating. Then the image is transferred from the plexiglass to the paper under pressure. This makes the paint spread out in not entirely predictable ways, so every image is a surprise. If you run your fingers gently over the faces, you'll feel the interesting crusty surface that results when you pull two surfaces of wet paint apart. In biology this called a hydroid pattern. Painters spend a lot of thought adjusting the texture of their surfaces, because they love the material, but in most museums and galleries you can't go up and touch the paintings. But here, you're encouraged to do just that.