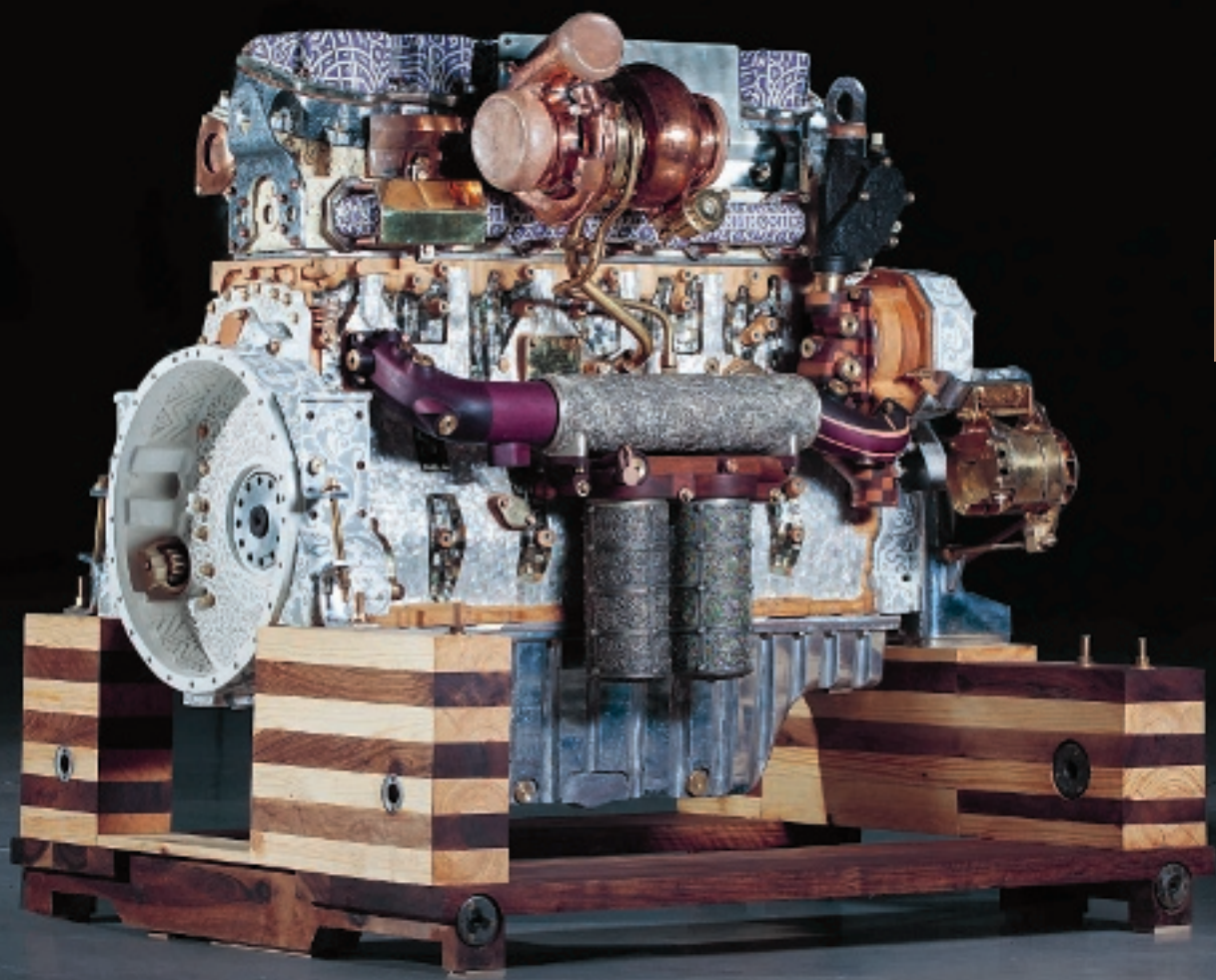


# ÉRIC VAN HOVE FENDUQ

01.02.20 — 27.09.20



English

VANDALORUM, VÄRNAMO

Cover image: *D9T (Rachel's Tribute)*, 2015

Collection Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, acquired with the support of the Mondriaan Fund, the BankGiro Lottery and the Friends of the Fries Museum. Courtesy of the artist and Copperfield Gallery, London.

## INTRODUCTION

Vandalorum is located in a part of Småland that is often referred to as the heart of Swedish manufacturing. The Gnosjö region, with its four municipalities and a total of 87,000 inhabitants, has about 3,500 registered manufacturing companies today. Some of them are subcontractors, others make end products that are both locally consumed and exported abroad. *Fenduq*, Belgian artist Éric van Hove's first solo exhibition in the Nordic countries, presents challenging perspectives on today's production models. Could future production be more site-specific, characterized by local culture, traditions and resources?

Van Hove's exhibition is the culmination of the interregional and international collaborative project New Småland. Over the last four years, this project has explored matters related to entrepreneurship, migration and rural-urban relations – three topics that characterize both the current and the historical understanding of Småland.

When van Hove initially visited Vandalorum in 2016, as a speaker at New Småland's first international seminar, he presented a recently initiated project: *Mahjouba*. Through a number of prototypes and think-tanks, this artistic engineering experiment aims

to develop the first Morocco-made electric moped, built by craftsmen. Since 2016, van Hove has gone back to Småland several times. He has visited manufacturing companies and craftsmen, and lectured at Vandalorum and Linnaeus University. Furthermore, glass blowers from The Glass Factory in Boda have traveled to Marrakesh to work in van Hove's workshop Fenduq, where he, together with some of the most skilled craftsmen in Morocco, generate art, crafts, social engagement and exchange of knowledge. It is, with the sociologist Saskia Sassen's words, a "glocal" workplace where the authorship, in a sense, dissolves.

This exhibition presents many of the magnificent handmade replicas of advanced vehicle engines created by Fenduq since it was founded in 2014. In addition, the fourth prototype of the hand-built moped will be developed at Vandalorum, in collaboration with Moroccan, international and Småland craftsmen – in dialogue with Småland's business community. The goal is to make a globally manufactured electric vehicle that ultimately can replace the most common vehicle in Morocco: the plagiarized, imported, mass-produced, petrol-powered moped. This exhibition braids together the three themes explored within the framework of New Småland. At the same time, it creates a meeting of the global and the local that questions the hegemony of big companies in the automotive market in a way that is virtually comparable to David's fight against Goliath.

In a 2013 Ted Talk, van Hove claimed that "craft is to industry what animism is to religion – it is the mother of it all, the grandmother." And as we approach the meticulously detailed objects in this exhibition it is apparent that they emit a particular power. This creates an unexpected twist, where the copy emerges as an original and the original as a copy.

Jonatan Habib Engqvist, curator of the exhibition and  
Artistic Director, New Småland

Elna Svenle, Museum Director, Vandalorum

Thanks to Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, the Netherlands





Detail *Ús Heit* (Claas Jaguar OM422 V8), 2018 / 2019



## LIVING ART

Éric van Hove has developed a cosmopolitan consciousness that is markedly evidenced in his artistic practice. He works in multiple genres and with a range of media including installation, performance, writing, photography, video and sculpture. He has visited more than 150 countries and has created challenging works in situ in over 100 of them. His creative practice, intellectual pursuits, and deep engagement with some of the compelling issues of today – such as climate change, social inequality, capitalism, political dogma, and intolerance – reflects a socially conscious artist who has his fingers on the pulse of our contemporary times. Handcrafted sculpture is his current medium of choice. In 2014, van Hove completed the breakout *V12 Laraki*, an ornate and exact replica of the S-600 Mercedes-Benz V-12 engine, now in the collection of Dartmouth College's Hood Museum of Art, New Hampshire, United States. Comprising a variety of local artisanal materials sourced from around Morocco, the sculpture marked a new direction in van Hove's practice on two major planks. First, it laid to rest the peripatetic proclivity that defined his art early on in his career. Second, *V12 Laraki* inaugurated van Hove's current collaborative approach to art making.



Prior to *V12 Laraki*, van Hove was concerned with impermanence and cosmopolitanism as artistic tropes; the role and impact of mobility on the production and reception of the art form or object. Although his practice at large is context-specific as opposed to site-specific – in the sense that location is not primary to the existence of his art – his condition of itinerancy, early on, resulted in his creation of ephemeral works or prototypes for more permanent works that considered the countries in which they were developed. His work has since taken on a more permanent status centered in *Fenduq*, based on the *funduq*, the Moroccan mixed-bag of commercial and workshop space, where he operates from with his team of local craftsmen. The product of van Hove's atelier is not decidedly local or authentic, though it is all of that and more. Instead, it is a *mélange* that is old and new, local, national, transnational, and global. A multi-cultural art object that combines old and contemporary techniques and that is reflective of Moroccan, Maghreb, African, and European sensibilities. Whereas van Hove is not the first artist to run a studio-style workshop, he is arguably the first to hire traditional craftsmen who are treated as artists and co-producers of the realized artwork. I argue that what emerges with the current dispensation of van Hove's practice is a complex bricolage that imbibes art, artisanship, tradition, contemporaneity, social entrepreneurship, utopia, and idealism.

Van Hove's collaborative practice is located at the interstice of what he describes as 'living craft' and contemporary art. Living craft refers to artisanal practices that are crucial to the advancement of modern life as opposed to the framework of cultural heritage and tradition within which the crafts industry, tied to tourism, is promoted. Van Hove describes his sculptures as socio-economic objects precisely because of their relationship with craftsmanship, a living tradition practiced by nearly three million Moroccans, representing 20 percent of the active workforce, and with a dedicated ministry by the Moroccan government. Every Moroccan family has a practitioner, which means that it is quite possible to write Moroccan familial history through its craftsmanship tradition. In the souks of old medinas such as Fez, Casablanca, Rabat and Marrakesh, the *savoir-faire* of Moroccan craftsmanship is evident in elaborate leatherwork, embroidery, ornate rugs, tiles, furnitures and jewelry. Van Hove embraces the traditional system of network at the base of artisanal practice in Morocco whilst expanding what the network can be as a self-sustaining co-operative. He plugs

Moroccan craftsmen into the formal industrial economy, offering them a path to financial stability, and ultimately makes a meaningful impact on the local economy by aligning craftsmanship and high art. He proposes a new social economy that ultimately reinvents artisanal practice and extends its critical potential for entrepreneurship. But how did he get to this point?

Ever the astute master of metaphors, in the preface to the book *Éric van Hove: V12 Laraki*, van Hove describes a meeting with a former heroin addict in the lobby of an opulent hotel in Dubai in 2005. The man narrates his chance encounter with Cofán people of the Amazon forest and his experience of witnessing their burial practice. The old do not die. Instead, when they are ready to join the ancestors, they begin the process of becoming one with the environment by binging on leaves and then falling into coma. The relatives discover the body, strip it, and cover it in honey. The body is then carried into the deep jungle and left on an anthill to be feasted upon by fire ants. It is a process of dispersal in which the body is fed to the natural environment, atom by atom. For van Hove, what remains is a living idea, a cultural practice or form that does not die.

The conversation in Dubai resolved several things for van Hove. First, to achieve something profound with art, it was important to travel, lose oneself in other cultures, learn from the human stories of the world's cultures, find a common connection upon which to bring the cultures together. Like the Cofán practice of returning the body to a natural redistributive state, van Hove has sought out craft because it embodies the everyday experience. Second, craftsmanship offers him a pathway to the humble origins of humanity's industrial past, affirming as well, his critique of post-Fordist capitalism that dictates contemporary lifestyle. Artisanal practice centered around the engine became a centralizing myth of this search. The engine weaves together a network of relations consisting of various individuals, cultures and social experiences, and is thus, for van Hove, a monument to humanity.

The inspiration for van Hove was a dream he once had to create an engine that would involve the idiosyncratic skill sets of craftsmen from all over Africa. This vision had come to him while working with blacksmiths in Senegal. These craftsmen would melt down engine blocks and fabricate them into household utensils such as forks, spoons and knives. This sort of artisanal re-use or repurposing is widespread across Africa. In Kenya it is called the *Jua Kali*, a Kiswahili word for 'the hot sun' used metaphorically



to refer to the Kenyan informal economy, populated by craftsmen of different persuasions. Initially, van Hove wanted to pursue this vision of exploring the engine using the Kenyan government's unrealized early postcolonial aspiration of manufacturing cars locally as a point of departure.

With the crafted object as a creative obsession, van Hove has since been working with Moroccan craftsmen to bring to life his utopian vision of a commingling of cultures centered on what I may refer to as the cult of the sublime engine. *V12 Laraki*, the first of these engines, was inspired by the story of Abdeslam Laraki, a local Moroccan entrepreneur and sports car enthusiast, who has since relocated to California. Laraki created Morocco's first indigenous luxurious car but had to import the engine from Germany. Van Hove completed Laraki's vision by producing a utopian non-functional replica of the exact same Mercedes-Benz V-12 engine in collaboration with 57 local craftsmen. The realized art object recognizes Laraki's attempt, but more importantly, it is a celebration of Moroccan craftsmanship and industry, as such, and an ode to the working class whose modernity in the context of Morocco is often ignored. Created with 59 local materials, *V12 Laraki* is also a testament to van Hove's managerial ability to galvanize the different individual skill sets, creativity, and technical sophistry, and knowledge base of different local crafts-materials despite his outsider status, especially in the early stages of his sojourn in Morocco from 2013 to 2014.

In a body of work produced over the last five years, ranging from handcrafted meticulous replicas of an engine and engine parts, car and moped prototypes, and a rebuilt Mercedes-Benz 240D, van Hove proposes a vision where the hand-crafted meets the industrially manufactured. It is this exchange between technical virtuosity typified in the human hands, the superfluity of myriad materials commingling and giving life to form. Revealing the artist's activist desire to re-valorize artisanship, van Hove's works delight in the glory of details, the beauty of craftsmanship, and the conceptualism of contemporary art.

He has employed a diverse range of locally sourced materials used by Moroccan craftsmen to create his work. They include, middle Atlas white cedar wood, high Atlas red cedar wood, walnut wood, lemon wood, orange wood, ebony wood of Macassar, mahogany wood, Thuya wood, Moroccan beech wood, pink apricot wood, mother-of-pearl, yellow copper, nickel-plated copper, red

copper, forged iron, recycled aluminum, nickel silver, silver, tin, cow bone, goat bone, malachite from Midelt, agate, green onyx, tigers eye, Taroudant stone, sand stone, red marble of Agadir, black marble of Ouarzazate, white marble of Béni Mellal, pink granite of Tafraoute, goatskin, cowskin, lambskin, resin, cow horn, rams horn, ammonite fossils of the Paleozoic from Erfoud, Ourika clay, geometric terra cotta with vitreous enamel (zellige), green enamel of Tamgrout, paint, cotton, argan oil, cork, henna, rumex and camel bone. These materials and more are evident in van Hove's magisterial sculptures, meticulously handcrafted and well put together in arabesque perfection.

In more recent works, van Hove and his collaborators strip the sculptures of the ornamental craft which hitherto tied them to tourism and tradition. They now focus on concise and precise creative strategies in communicating the realized translated engine forms as pure art. In other words, emphasis is less on the charms of the superfluous and the heavily elaborated. Instead, it is now on the purity and the materiality of form and ideas. Aesthetic affect has since become the watchword and perhaps it is this borderline that distinguishes craft from art, heavily present in earlier works such as *V12 Laraki* and the *D9T*. At that point, both van Hove and his collaborators were more insistent in making a case for the revival of craft tradition as that which gave rise to art and formed the bedrock of mechanized industry. Yet, one could argue that in focusing on purity of form, the artist and his collaborators are now aiming for precision, the holy grail of technological innovation.

The clarity and purity of form lending itself to technological innovation cannot be any more apparent than in *The Mahjoubia Initiative*, a project that shifts emphasis from ornamental replications to actual motorized objects, centered on the moped, the major mode of transportation for a broad swath of the Moroccan public. The project is intended to revolutionize the transport sector of Morocco by creating an indigenous moped industry through critical partnership with the local network system at the base of artisanal practice in the country. In 2015, van Hove created the first prototype, *Mahjoubia I*, borrowing its basic design from a cheap Chinese electric moped called the *Beswag* in Morocco, and deriving the name from the old Arabic female name Mahjoubia, which is in turn derived from the Arabic word 'mahjoub' which colloquially means 'covering sacredness with a veil'. As van Hove implies, it is its literal meaning 'unveiled' that describes

*The Mahjouba Initiative* – with the crafted moped aiming at unveiling to the Moroccan people the potential power of their own craftsmanship legacy in modern times. The visually arresting *Mahjouba I* is 90 percent handcrafted from locally sourced materials such as red copper, yellow copper, camel bones, cedar wood, resin, tin, recycled brass, recycled aluminum, and goat skin, and powered by an electric engine. Van Hove has since created other examples of the sturdy moped, emphasizing mechanical precision, and shorn of the overly decorative. At the level of craftsmanship and art, *The Mahjouba Initiative* is groundbreaking and offers a tantalizing model of socially engaged practice that reinvents the wheel. Its major strength, however, lies in the humanist concerns it proposes, namely, how to provide sustainable means of income for some of the world's economically disadvantaged; one which relies on their talent, instituting an economic model that is locally engineered.

In all, van Hove monumentalizes the social-self by reconsidering the relationship between art, craft, and entrepreneurship. He articulates a new kind of partnership between the handmade and the industrial, in which the handmade is no longer in service to the industrial but both are brought together to forge a new sustainable economic model. It is also this ability to find a socio-economic role that art can play, one that destabilizes the idea of the solitary autonomous genius and instead builds on the social imperative of cooperative society. Finally, by inventing a new artistic vocabulary that offers new modes of interpreting and translating the mechanical form, van Hove has begun a new chapter for Moroccan craftsmanship in the 21st century. It is one that could have an unimaginable and enduring impact for decades or even centuries to come.

Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi

Steven and Lisa Tananbaum Curator in Painting and Sculpture  
Museum of Modern Art, New York



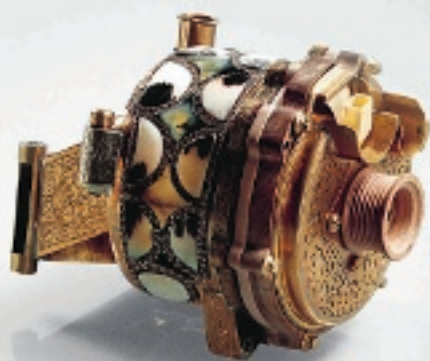
*D9T (Rachel's Tribute)*, 2015







*V12 Laraki alternator*, 2013  
Collection Fries Museum, Leeuwarden,  
the Netherlands, acquired with the  
support of the Mondriaan Fund.





Detail *D9T (Rachel's Tribute)*, 2015



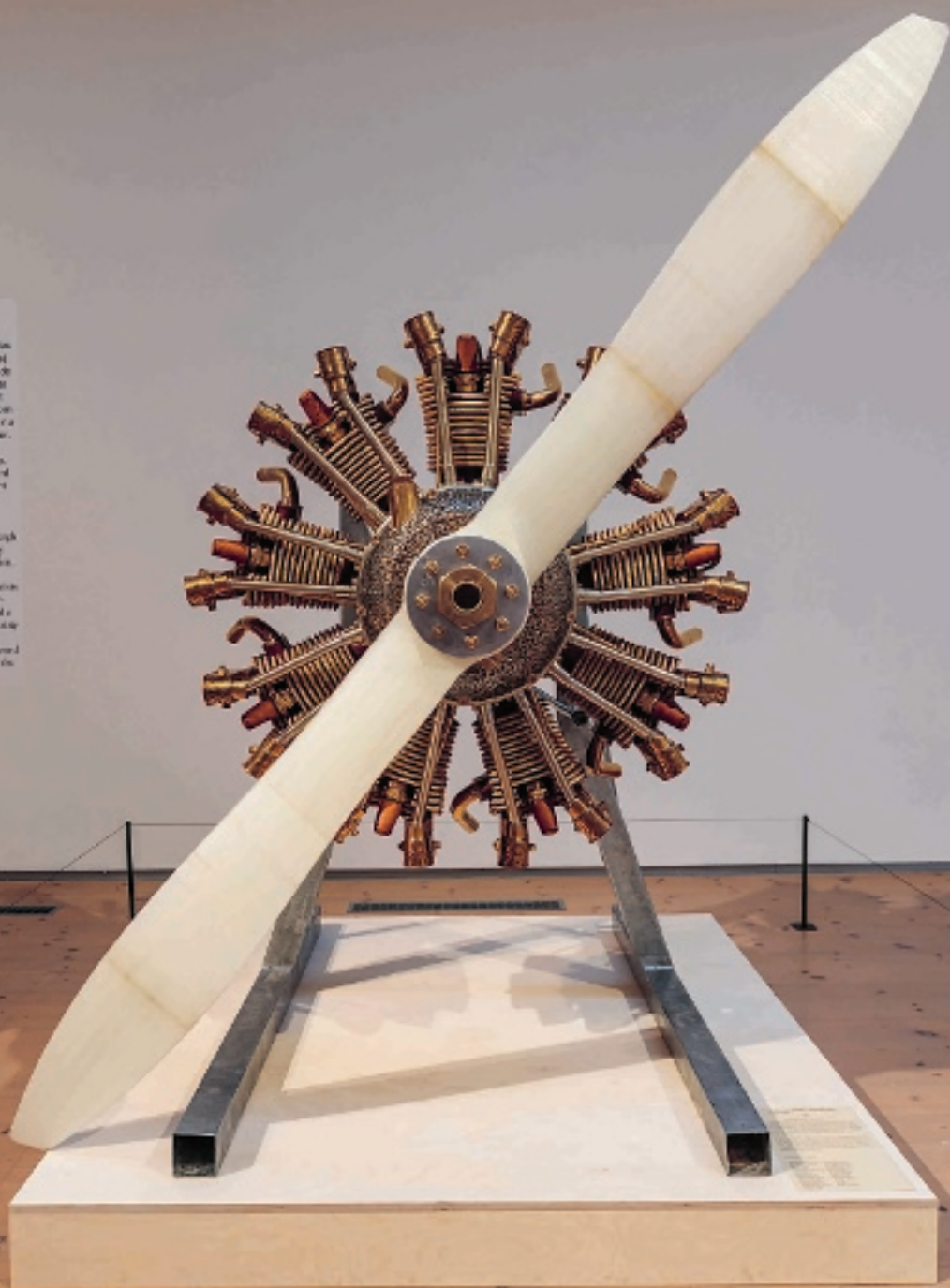




*Al'Atlassi (Wright R-790 Whirlwind), 2019*

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James Charles Lindbergh  
May 1925. This copy  
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Others like *Esquire*,  
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if a commercial edition of it  
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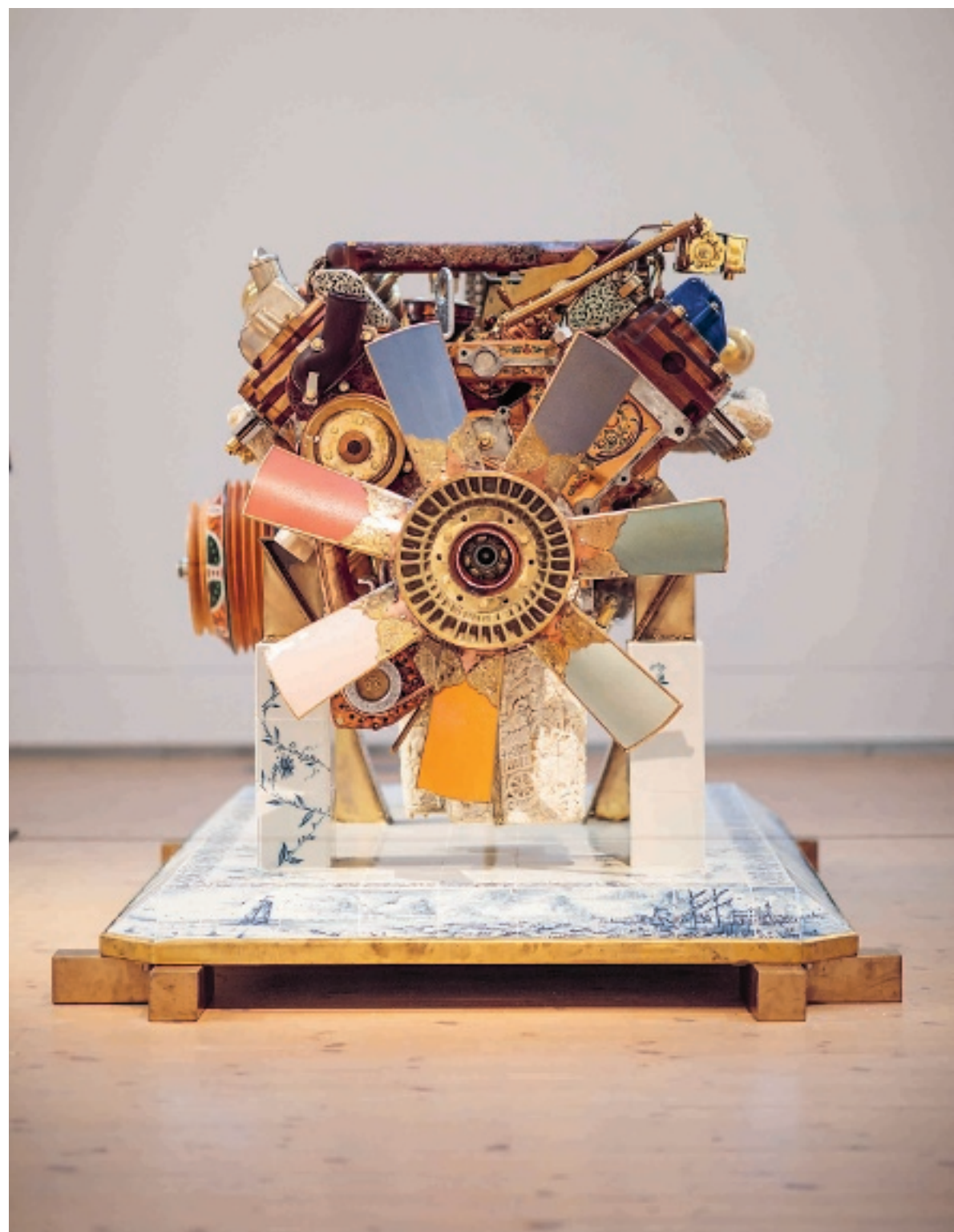


Process *Ús Heit* (Claas Jaguar OM422 V8), 2018 / 2019



*Ús Heit (Claas Jaguar OM422 V8), 2018/2019*

Collection Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, acquired with the support of Aegon, the BankGiro Lottery, the Mondriaan Fund, VSB Fund, Fund 21, and the Friends of the Fries Museum.







*Dorigin, 2016*







*Team Fenduq*

*Mahjouba I*, 2016  
Collection Fries Museum, Leeuwarden,  
the Netherlands, acquired with the support  
of the Mondriaan Fund.







*Mahjouba II*, 2016  
Collection Mu.ZEE, Ostend, Belgium







Éric van Hove: Fenduq  
February 1–September 27, 2020  
Vandalorum

Éric van Hove was born in 1975 in Algeria. He grew up in Cameroon as the son of engineers involved in development projects. When he was 14, the family returned to Belgium. After studying at École de Recherche Graphique in Brussels, van Hove traveled to Japan, where he earned a master's degree and a doctorate in calligraphy from Tokyo Gakugei University and Tokyo University of the Arts. He is currently based in Marrakesh in Morocco. He has exhibited at, for example, Ueno City Art Museum, Tokyo; Marrakech Biennale; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; Mu.ZEE, Ostend; Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt; and Fries Museum, Leeuwarden.

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Kettja Allard p. 14–15, Lieven Geuns p. 1, 16–17,

Jan Bensliman p. 18, 20–22, Badr El Hardag p. 26, Alessio Mei p. 27

The exhibition is a collaboration with Fries Museum in the Netherlands, and is a part of the interregional project New Småland.

Thanks to Samya Abid, Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, Nathalie and Wouter Barendrecht, For Arts Sake, Mu.ZEE, Geneviève De Vriendt, and Skeppshultcykeln.

The exhibition program at Vandalorum is made possible by Swedish Arts Council, Region Jönköping County, Värnamo Municipality, and Vandalorum's Partners: Hamrin, Liljedahl, Svenstig.

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NYA SMÅLAND