

Middle Gate II – The Story of Dymphna  
15.09–04.11.2018

EN



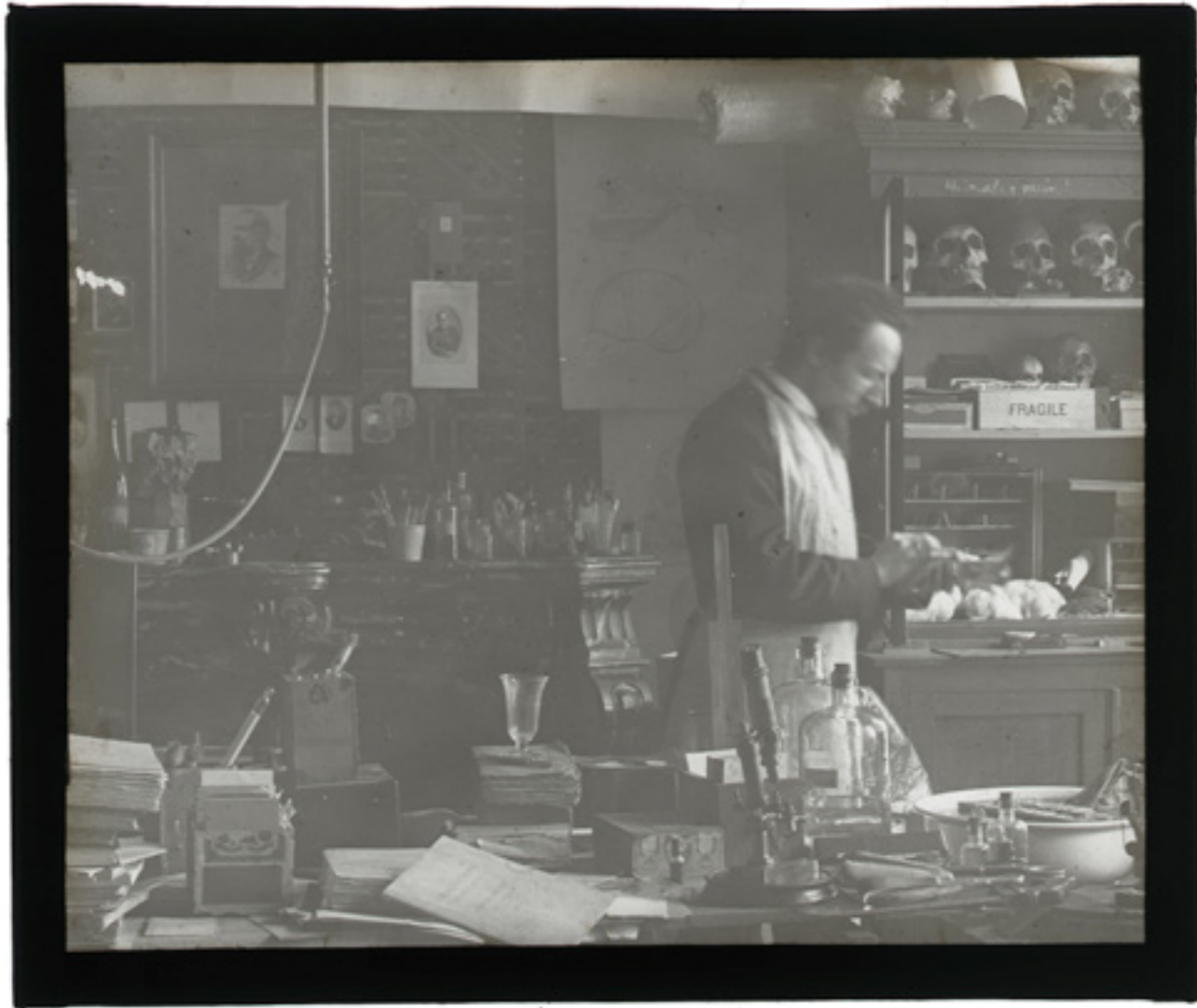
# Middle Gate II

**M HKA**

**Middle Gate II – The Story of Dymphna**

15.09–04.11.2018

**M HKA**



## Glossary

7	<b>Introduction</b>
10	<b>Little Dove (To Dymphna)</b> Lenny Peeters
14	<b>Pilgrimage</b> Vincent Van Menen
20	<b>Artists</b>
22	<b>The Crown &amp; Migration</b>
58	<b>The Sword &amp; Sexual Violence</b>
118	<b>The Devil &amp; Madness</b>
168	<b>The Book &amp; Spirituality</b>
212	<b>Colofon</b>

15.09–04.11.2018

---

With the exhibition *Middle Gate* (2013), Jan Hoet returned to his origins, announcing he wanted to depart from the middle gate. As did the exhibition, that activated art's potentiality and offered immediate added value to both people and society.

*Middle Gate* testified of a love of art – by effectively departing from works of art that had been chosen for their intensity – and a high degree of casualness. This also translated itself organisationally, with a problem solving attitude as permanent alternative to a monetised operation that is based on professional, market and marketing mechanisms. Together with the show *Sint-Jan* in Saint Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent and the unfinished *De Zee* [*The Sea*], both curated by Jan Hoet, *Middle Gate* formed a trilogy of exceptional exhibitions that showed a joyful commitment to art, averse to system pressure.

It's something to be remembered. In the second half of the twentieth century, Flanders has been a heartland of international contemporary visual art (albeit in a somewhat crippled way), with phenomenal and headstrong artists, legendary collectors, small independent galleries and – as far as public institutions goes – lame and underfunded incentives.

We should not forget that ground-breaking exhibitions were made here – starting with the exhibitions at G58/Hessenhuis and, more recently, Catherine de Zegher's route that resulted in *Inside the Visible, Laboratorium* [*Laboratory*] by Barbara Vanderlinden and HUObrist, *Troublespot*

*Painting* by Luc Tuymans and Narcisse Tordoir, and the first chapter of Anselm Franke's *Animism* project. Yet central to all this is the figure of Jan Hoet, who with *Chambres d'Amis* changed the idea of what an exhibition can be. Earlier, he had already curated ground-breaking overviews like *Aktuele kunst in België: inzicht/overzicht, overzicht/inzicht* [*Contemporary Art in Belgium: Insight/Overview, Overview/Insight*] or *Art in Europe after 1968*. After *Chambres d'Amis* he would also take on *Documenta IX*.

Let us continue to include *Middle Gate* in this overview: doing this for the special, small city of Geel, is a nice ambition. Five years after *Middle Gate*, we therefore make – to the best of our a(rt)bility – that what in film terms is called a 'sequel'. Actually, it's a 'prequel', because we go back to the origin of that story of art, myth and madness that Jan Hoet reactivated in Geel: the legend of Dymphna, the female saint who is worshiped here and whose cult made Geel into a 'barmhartige stede' – a Merciful Town.

We noticed how amazingly topical Dymphna's story is: she's a princess who had to leave Ireland because her father forced her to go to bed with him after the death of her mother: 'to marry him', the story has it. Violence, migration, and the mad end: the father who'll decapitate Dymphna personally if she continues to refuse. What is the role of faith here, the reason for which, according to legend, Dymphna refused, fled, and eventually died? Is it a starting point of the story: first act, the heroine becomes Christian. Is it its core: Dymphna symbolising

one's own way of being in, and one's own relation to the world. Or is it just the horror that permeates the entire story, a way of collectively dealing with that madness?

The legend of Saint Dymphna, the Irish princess with a life course that reads like a novel, incites reflection. It's a poignant and topical story about incest, flight and (wo)manslaughter. How do we react when we are confronted with something impossible, even if the impossible is within us? How do we deal with delusions, in and around us, with violence and with the nullity of our existence?

Perhaps the happiest moment in the tale of Dymphna is the moment after her torture, when a community appropriates and shapes her story. After all the madness and violence, the relics are transferred to Geel, where the community builds a church around them, not only to give the possibility of spirituality a collective place, yet also with the intention to transform that spirituality into humanity and compassion, and to deal with the madness.

*Middle Gate II – The Story of Dymphna* seeks an opportunity to update this story. The legend is translated into four themes, around which works of art are collected that seem to make a dialogue with this theme possible, works that can impart something.

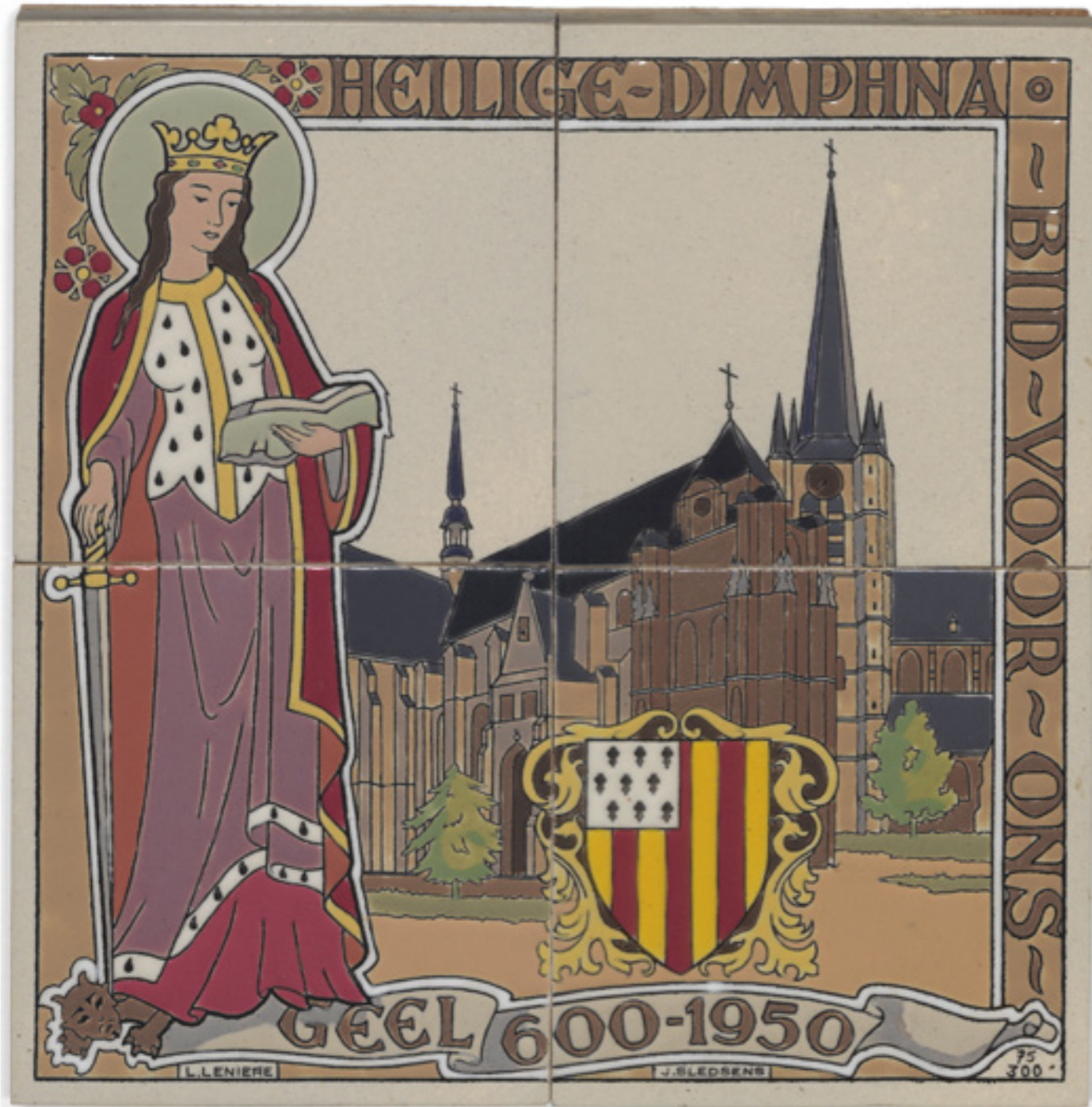
That relationship is not straightforward. The work *De verdamping van de grondwet* [*The Evaporation of the Constitution*] by collective Where Dogs Run from Yekaterinburg, Russia, could logically fit into the theme of 'Violence' – in de Halle, the former town hall – because is there anything that brings more violence into the world than the decline of the rule of law, as we see it happening all over the world? With the text of law and all that is fixed evaporating, it could have been a metaphor for 'Madness'. Its placement under the heading 'Spirituality' then, is a voluntaristic choice, since even if the constitution evaporates, something remains in the air: the meaning from which the constitution originated.

Bart De Baere  
en Leen De Backer



## Little Dove (To Dymphna)

Lenny Peeters



Something is buzzing next to my ear. I can't see what it is. A bee, I think. A mosquito has a higher pitch, and the buzzing of a fly is more nervous. When I was little, I once saved a bee from a swimming pool. I sat down on my knees, made a cup with my hands and scooped it out of the water. Its wings were stuck to its body, and I looked for a place in the sun where it could dry out. The moment I laid it in the grass, and carefully spread open its wings, it stung me. This bee is knocking against the glass above my head and will fly away as soon as the man opens the window. He pushes me across the table until I am hanging with my head out of the window. I can see the farmyard below, and the dogs that saunter back and forth and look up at me full of expectation. The fields all around. The road, winding its way through the fields. There is nobody there. Far away, way too far away from here, is another farm. Perhaps an alarm bell should have gone off a bit earlier. When the woman said that thing about tights and lipstick maybe. But I am a bit slow in certain things. It's nothing serious, I'm just a bit slower than others.

I wasn't nervous when I got into her car. Why should I have been? Curious, yes. And pleased I had got the job. I would do it well. Better than the barman in the café where I sometimes come. He puts the glass down in front of me with a thud and says nothing to me. He

winks and smiles at other women. He leans with one hand on the bar and bends forwards as far as possible when he is speaking to the blonde woman in the short red skirt. Or the woman from Suriname. She has brilliant white teeth and lovely curls. The man at the table by the window does speak to me. 'Just for a moment,' he always says when I go and stand near him. Because he wants to read. At home it doesn't work, he once said. The silence distracts him. He needs to be smothered in a blanket of music and smoke and snippets of conversation. I also distract him, he says, but five minutes is ok. Then he reaches for his book again and I go and sit somewhere else. Once I kept an eye on him for the rest of the evening. I thought it was taking a long time before he turned the page. It was nevertheless an easy book, he had said. Nothing philosophical or anything. I should try it too sometime. 'I don't like to read', I had answered. It's true. After a while the letters start to dance before my eyes and I get a headache. 'Pity,' he'd said, 'I can get completely absorbed by a good book.' I still saw him glancing over the edge and looking at who was coming in and going out. And he immediately put the book aside when the blonde woman came to sit with him, and he even stowed it in his jacket pocket when she went to the toilet later. She walked past my table. Her lipstick was smudged and she had a ladder in her tights. So that was the

reason. She wanted smart staff, the woman beside me. ‘No lipstick, no tights,’ she had said during our first conversation, ‘you understand why.’

What I had put on was also wrong. I realized it the minute I got into the car. It was too late. She looked at my jeans with disapproval, and even though she didn’t say anything about it, I still made the silent resolution to wear the black velvet trousers I had bought for holidays from now on.

She asked if I had any children. I shook my head, and she muttered something like ‘thank goodness’ and ‘little ones are hard to combine with this job’. Her eldest was finally old enough to look after the two youngest, when she had to go out at night. No more carry-on with babysitters. It was a huge relief, she said.

We drove fast. The landscape whizzed past. Fields with cows. Sometimes horses. Lots of advertising boards. Now and then a farm. That’s how it would be every evening from now on. She would pick me up at home, drop me off at home afterwards and pay in cash. Quite a service, I thought. I’d like to be a barmaid. Stand behind a gleaming bar, polish up glasses, serve drinks, put on nice music and talk to customers. All of them. I would make a better job of it than that barman did.

I signed my contract in a messy front room. There were lots of pages and the letters were dancing

again. I told her about me and the reading and writing. And about my being slow. That’s what they always used to say, my mother, my teacher and my boyfriend. That I’m slow. ‘But I’m not lazy,’ I said to her, ‘Not at all. I just need a little bit more time for some things.’ She said I needn’t worry.

That she really didn’t care. And she helped me. ‘You just need to sign here and here’, she said kindly. I wrote my name as beautifully as I could. In the meantime, other girls had come in. They were tottering about on high heels, wearing shiny skirts and open tops that I would never have the guts to wear. That was still what the woman said to me first, after I had handed her the papers back; that I should show more of my body. She rummaged in a basket by the wall and pulled out a glittery dress that she held up to me. ‘It’s too tight,’ I wanted to say, but that instant a bell rang, and I could hear footsteps and men’s voices in the next room. As the other girls ran off, I took off my jeans and squeezed into the tiny dress. ‘Fabulous’, the woman said and smiled at me. She also said something about safety, that it was my own responsibility. I didn’t understand what she meant. ‘You know,’ she said, suddenly annoyed. I nodded and luckily she smiled again. ‘You too,’ she said, ‘from now on, you’ve got to smile. Keep smiling.’ And before I could ask or say anything else, she had taken me by the arm and was guiding me into the bar, straight to

the one man who was still sitting there on his own by the counter.

He was nice to me. He took my hand and spoke to me. He told me of his farm. His dogs. And the pigeons. He was a pigeon fancier, and nearly all his time was devoted to those little creatures, he said. He thought I looked scared. Like a little bird that had fallen out of its nest. And he asked me how I had rolled into this. And whether someone was forcing me to do it. I didn’t understand. ‘Who makes you do this?’ he asked. ‘The woman’, I said. He got angry. He said he was going to help me; he would get me out. She only came running out when were already driving off the parking. She shouted and waved her arms. The man laughed. He turned his window down and stuck up his middle finger. ‘Fucking whore!’ he shouted.

I didn’t see much of his farm, because he took me upstairs right away. He lay me down on my tummy and gave me an injection in each arm. I didn’t feel anything anymore, and I couldn’t move or talk, but I could see what he was doing. Holes in my arms. A needle and thread that slipped under my skin, again and again. Now and then he grumbled something. That it looked pretty. That the last one had been a floosy. That she’d run away before he was able to begin. She had nonetheless nodded her head eagerly when he had proposed it. Just like I had.

Flying and flirting. My boyfriend also spoke to me like that sometimes when mother had gone to the shops and then he’d pull me onto the sofa.

I did find it a bit strange when I came in. There was no bed in the room and I could only see that big table, pushed right up to the window, working materials on the floor and a jute bag leaning against the wall. ‘It’s bulging,’ he said, ‘but I could pick it up with my little finger.’

A nasty smell came from it. Old and sickly. It was musty. Only when he had already started, and put the sack down beside him, could I see what it contained. Feathers, big ones and small ones. Pigeon feathers.

Now he slowly pushes me across the table. Until the top of my body is hanging out of the window. And a little further. The feathers on my arms are shimmering in the morning light.



## Pilgrimage

*Vincent Van Meenen*

September 2018

---

I leave at the river. There's a cruise ship on the quay. Two children play between the empty deckchairs on the blue deck. A sailor touches up the ship's paint with a hand roller. The boat blocks my view. I cannot see the water, even though I know: it is everywhere. Nor can I board here. This ship does not sail to the woods. Not even during the dry weeks, especially not during the dry weeks.

Behind me lies the city, the ship and the heat are waiting in front of me.

I turn around. I leave. Behind me lies the ship, in front of me the cars, the road. Life buoy. Food truck. I balance and jump over the quay wall.

Posters Prohibited. Natural Taste. Nation. Burnt Entrepot. Locker. Enthusiastic and Personal, Mercator. Drive a Poppy, So Come and Look Inside Too, Chelsea Cabinet. The Small Height, Gazelle, Coffee and Travel. The Living and the Dead.

Don't let your dog urinate against the facade pls.

Don't let your dog

Take-away food and drinks

Take me with you – food and drinks

Take me with you – Dymphna!

I reach the Middenstatie without any noticeable problems. Shortly: the bike from lock 4, Drukkerijstraat, gloves. Standard Rate, Back and Forth. So Much is Clear, Cranberry, Sh\*t.

To the woods, to the wild animals!

Back to that shady street where we were before. It's a shady walk.

This train stops at Antwerp-Berchem, Lier, Herentals, Geel, Olen, Mol, Balen, Leopoldsburg, Beverlo, Beringen, Heusden, Zolder, Zonhoven, Hasselt.



My faith runs along the iron road.  
A harsh and sober existence.  
Compassion. He who knows his  
destiny has no fear. An hour I have  
to think about faith, that's stret-  
ching over the landscape in this  
summer heat. There it lies on its  
back between the fields: Faith.  
And I: life, little life. All Tracks, all  
Services, Up the Vestingstraat.  
That's my intention.

Respect your fellow traveller, even  
if she takes place in front of you  
with a stinking dog. Ignore the  
drooling, the dazzling power of the  
pull around the mouth. Focus on  
the faith, on the corn, the marshal-  
ling yard. Compassion. Dry grass,  
dry grass. The thrilling off the  
engines and late Belgian flags, all  
wonder gone.  
No water, nothing flows. I'm  
impressed by existence but at the  
first unsavoury mug, I immediately  
lose sympathy and patience.  
Where is compassion now? The  
lady with the little dog, they have to  
travel a long way with me. I cannot  
bare to look at them. They confuse  
me.

It won't take long now.  
Forests emerge from the lands-  
cape, spring up, form a green  
screen that passes by. Is it this, the  
tired green people talk about when  
they yearn for autumn? Are leeches  
moving through those forests? The  
words of the city have made way  
for leaf, stalk, insect. They are the  
forests of the Kempen. The forests  
of refuge. The forests of Geel  
where I have never been.

But then, out of nowhere: the  
bricks. The residential limbo.  
Rustic farmhouses full of roar and  
bluster, built close together, streets  
full of clinkers and cars tearing off.  
We arrived. Warehouses, key at the  
counter.  
The Cheese Farm, Curtains,

Leather Renovation. The Yellow  
Legend. Bicky Dealer. I wander  
through the streets with their  
scary houses, let the placards  
chase me inside a restaurant.  
Yellow food: yellow curry sauce  
on chips. Posters, that way I get  
to know everything: Mojito Day  
Dessel Swings Booty Rave Tribute  
Festival. A Real Bicky Comes in  
a Box. That's how it is. Me too, I  
want to make a contribution. Why  
am I different here? I'm doing my  
best. I eat all the chips. But I find it  
difficult, Dymphna. The forests of  
Geel were a gross miscalculation.  
The forests of Geel have long since  
disappeared.

There's a church in the centre but  
it's not the right one. That's what  
they tell me at the tourist office,  
where I buy a postcard from the  
church that I have not seen yet. I  
study the map well, so I can recog-  
nise the Dymphna Church. Then  
I send the card home. The post  
office is nearby. The card that must  
remind of this pilgrimage leaves  
Geel even before I reach my goal.  
Where are you, Dymphna? I come  
to you.

The Liberation of Geel (September  
8-23, 1944). On September 12,  
Watchbands and Batteries the  
roof of the Saint Dymphna Church  
Barbershop is set afire. Most likely,  
the British Landscape and Garden  
Architecture Pain-Deco Snackbar  
targeted the church because the  
Germans Security, That's My Job!  
used the tower as a lookout.  
Welcome To the Donor Centre.  
Even before I see the fake tower  
of the Saint Dymphna Church  
sticking out above the roofs, I  
walk past the Dimpna Center, a  
decayed shopping centre with  
hastily painted white window  
displays. In the hall, there are old  
autumn leaves and some empty  
bottles of wine. It is for sale at real  
estate agency Vandamm.  
014 72 00 27 Multipurpose  
Building Approx. 1000 m2  
Household Toys Household Toys.

Road Salt Box.

N71		N118	
13	Retie	Arendonk	19
9	Mol	Retie	13
12	Balen	Dessel	13
9	Mol		

Saint Dymphna College. Saint  
Dymphna Hospital. Saint  
Dymphna Square. It's a scorching  
hot day at its peak. In front of the  
church building I pull a blue long  
sleeved shirt from my bag. It fits  
like a second skin over the singlet  
I've been sweating in all day now.  
I dress up so that I can enter your  
house with dignity.

For a long time I look at the pain-  
ting depicting your decapitation,  
an upward and downward move-  
ment on canvas. Then I read on  
the information boards that the

pilgrims and the sick came here  
from far and wide, also and espe-  
cially from abroad. Most of the sick  
stayed in the church for nine days.

I am not sick. I don't have nine days  
either. I'm not from abroad.  
Tonight I'm expected home for  
supper. Yet a one-day pilgrimage  
is a pilgrimage too? It says that you  
have been in Antwerp. Have you  
seen the river, where I live?

Closer to the altar I draw. Your  
relics should be hanging in the air  
here somewhere. I look straight  
above me in the air. I see a plaster  
of Christ with drops of blood on his  
face. He is flanked by two women,  
the left one I suspect to be Mary.  
To the right of Christ... that must  
be you.  
A plaster you.

At the altar, two marble people are  
lying down, hands folded on their  
chest. That must be you! Enrapt,  
I come closer, alongside and  
through the cast iron gate. I admire  
the fine marble of your face. It was  
a difficult journey, but I made it.  
Then I read the card.

It turns out it is not your face that I  
admire. This grave is a mausoleum  
for Baron John III de Merode and  
his wife Anna. I don't know what to  
think of that. Two rich dead people,  
so central in your church. Where  
are you then, Dymphna, where? Do  
I give up?  
At a kneeling bench rests a guest  
book. I kneel down and write:

August 2, 2018

I have looked for you but I  
could not find you.  
Vincent

Despondently, I walk around the apse. There, against my expectation I find the wooden house: it hangs in the air under a stone ciborium. A hanging wooden house in a forest of stone pillars. The wooden house in which you live? The wooden house in the forests? The wooden house where the wild animals are?

I am too small to look in through the barred window, so I touch the wood and stroke it with one hand. I wouldn't mind a splinter now. It smells like shadows here, and damp.

On the plate I read: fragments of the sarcophagi.

On top of the wooden house below the ciborium, there's a second wooden house, painted entirely white. I do not understand. Who lives there? Geberus? Or is this the wooden house of the forest? I have to look for a long time to try to understand.

I leave the church without answers. There's little else to do other than taking the train back home. I've noticed the border language.

It may exist. It belongs to the written language. Border language is nog Art Brut. Border language is border language. It fills me with disgust, but can I ignore it? This is how I return home. Gansakker. Antwerpsedries. Rose with White Dots. This is an odyssey without salvation.

At supper, the city heat does not want to lie down. It makes the furniture in the dining room vibrate. When I bring the fork to my mouth, I hear the empty space of the church reverberate in my head. Why didn't I notice people? I look at my plate. Fragments of the sarcophagi. I'm chewing on rubble.

# Artists

*Middle Gate II – The Story of Dymphna* with works by Nel Aerts, Els Dietvorst, Tinka Pittoors, Liliane Vertessen

---

and Babi Badalov, Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, Victoria Begalskaya, Guillaume Bijl, Louise Bourgeois, Sergey Bratkov, André Cadere, Jan Cox, François Curlet, Anne Daems, Bia Davou, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Edith Dekyndt, Susana Pilar Delahante Matienzo, Jan De Lauré, Luc Deleu, Danny Devos, Lili Dujourie, Marlene Dumas, Róza El-Hassan, Wafae Ahalouch el Keriasti, Nazanin Fakoor, Vadim Fishkin, Aslan Gaisumov, Inge Godelaine, Douglas Gordon, Evgeny Granilshchikov, Dmitry Gutov, N S Harsha, Sigefride Bruna Hautman, Alfons Hoppenbrouwers, Rebecca Horn, Hiwa K, Nikita Kadan, Johanna Kandl, Fransje Killaars, Suchan Kinoshita, Ivan Kožarić, Barbara Kruger, Donna Kukama, Taus Makhacheva, Michèle Matyn, Rita McBride, Guy Mees, Almagul Menlibayeva, Jacqueline Mesmaeker, Sofie Muller, Maryam Najd, Bruce Nauman, Nadia Naveau, ORLAN, Ria Pacquée, Liza May Post, Artūras Raila, Koka Ramishvili, Hugo Roelandt, Guy Rombouts, Cindy Sherman, Mary Ellen Solt, Johan Tahon, Frank Theys, Olga Tobreluts, Joëlle Tuerlinckx, Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, Vanessa Van Obberghen, Jan Van Oost, Philippe Van Snick, Minnette Vári, Wout Vercammen, Loreta Visic, Barbara Visser, Where Dogs Run, Ina Wudtke, Yang Zhenzhong



# 1. THE CROWN & MIGRATION

Location: Stedelijke Academie voor Beeldende Kunst

Campaign image: Tinka Pittoors

Tinka Pittoors and Babi Badalov, André Cadere,  
Anne Daems, Berlinde De Bruyckere,  
Luc Deleu, Aslan Gaisumov, Inge Godelaine,  
Hiwa K, Johanna Kandl, Fransje Killaars,  
Almagul Menlibayeva, Ria Pacquée,  
Vanessa Van Obberghen and Loreta Visic

Dymphna escaping over sea with her confidant Gerebernus to mainland Europe is a key example of migration, a story in which many refugees will recognise themselves. Because of the violence, her kingdom has become unviable for her and so she flees abroad, ending up in Flanders, in the Kempen forests.

By migration we mean everything that has to do with people moving for personal, political, economic or ecological reasons. Migration is often seen as a one-off moment, but it can also be permanent and nomadic. Through the millennia, people have constantly migrated, so that humankind has spread all over the world. Transmigration originally meant large population movements. Today it is defined as taking a route – individually or as a group – and crossing multiple national borders to reach a final destination. Transmigration is therefore primarily associated with the problem of refugees. During wars and in conflict areas, migration often occurs under duress, as a deportation.

The art academy seemed to be the best location in Geel to find a home for the theme of migration. Art is about *what-can-be-thought-differently* and therefore about dealing with changes and shifts. That is what Tinka Pittoors expresses here with her title image. It is charged with the most diverse symbols, from the boat populated with animals to the flags that stand for national borders. Pittoors's construction primarily addresses a consciousness of a meaning that is floating, the essential mobility and changeability of signifiers.

It would take us too far to discuss here in detail what the works have to offer, each from its own perspective. In any case: some – like those by Babi Badalov,

Aslan Gaisumov, Hiwa K and Johanna Kandl – are directly informed by concrete migration problems, others – like those of Luc Deleu, André Cadere, Almagul Menlibayeva or Ria Pacquée, and actually also Fransje Killaars's work – by a nomadic choice of being. But here, the actual core is perhaps the awareness of the relativity of one's own position, as can be seen in the works by Anne Daems, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Vanessa Van Obberghen and Loreta Visic.

Inge Godelaine, just like Visic a teacher at the academy of Geel, looks at what after many years has become of a life-size model of a modernist villa in Balen, a model that Jef Geys left behind in a favela during the biennial of São Paulo. Geys had hoped that it would become a school, but Godelaine can only capture some vague memories of a vanished moment. The 'moving' of people or ideas too – e.g. the museum works that Geys once brought into school as an artistic intervention – is only a moment in a continuum of change.



## Tinka Pittoors

As a visual artist, **Tinka Pittoors** (°1977) views her surroundings – nature, the world around her, and by extension all of humanity – as her artistic habitat, a limitless source of inspiration.

Despite the contradictions between the inner world and outward appearance, between order and chaos, power and impotence, her methods are unmistakably organic, rooted in a cosmic connectedness between form, matter and content. From time to time this connectivity even mutates, becomes coalescent, like roots which intertwine, entangled and nearly indistinguishable from one another, or atoms that bond, cluster together and form new molecules.

Her oeuvre is as colourful as it is peculiar, which can make it more difficult to grasp. A painstakingly constructed structural design lurks behind the seeming simplicity of her sculptures and installations, which are based on the utopia of the makeable world. The impression conveyed here is that the artist has resolved to craft a parallel universe from every imaginable object and living thing found in day-to-day life; all, however, have been transformed into something entirely new. Power, dominance and the law of the strongest are cast aside, if just for a moment. The artist throws her lot in with an imaginary and colourful fellowship which can best be summed up as “to be entirely frank, pleasantly deranged”. While recognisable materials appear to try and meld with reality, the form itself creates a sense of disorientation and vice versa.

Not stopping to ask whether her universe could be lived in, much less habitable, she continues to hammer away at her wayward Utopia, one overrun by a lust for life and daring. Whether she is on a quest for a better world is as yet unknown. All we can be sure of is that she is searching for another.

### ARTWORKS:

Tinka Pittoors uses bright monochrome pedestals of varying sizes to display isolated elements, which could be the remnants, or building blocks, of an imagined existence. She creates a fully contradictory whole out of her mystic grammar of colours, lines and shapes.

*Migrace* is about the relocation or transfer of ideas – and the protection of ideas. Tinka Pittoors reminds us of a quote by whistle-blower **Edward Snowden**: *Arguing that you don't care about the right to privacy because you have nothing to hide is no different than saying you don't care about free speech because you have nothing to say.*



© M HKA

**Babi Badalov** (°1959) was born in the Azerbaijan city of Lerik. After completing his studies at the Art Academy, he moves to Leningrad, today's St. Petersburg, where he lives until 1990. He is active in the semi-official art scene of the city and becomes a member of the independent artists group 'Association of Experimental Visual Art' (TEII). As part of this group, he participates in various art exhibitions, both in Russia and other countries. Badalov currently lives in Paris.

The work of Badalov balances between visual art and poetry. He effectively presents his work as 'visual poetry', in which he uses painting, installations and performance, just as much as experimental and improvised literary formats. The mixture of different languages and orthographic systems, and the combination of words and pictures, is characteristic for his work in all these genres.

Badalov focuses on an exploration of the limits of language, as well as the limitations that it imposes on its users. People that lead nomadic lives – artists, but also economic migrants and political refugees – will experience both the battle and the advantages of cultural adaptation, while they can also become a prisoner of the language. Badalov plays with such situations, thereby alluding to broader geopolitical questions.

**ARTWORK:**

Babi Badalov's recent work – including this installation, produced during the ten-day active period of the 2015 Moscow Biennale – is dedicated to linguistic explorations, associations and words written in the same alphabet as ours, but with different meaning, sound or pronunciation. The nomad life of an artist – or traveller, migrant, refugee – not only cause them to go through a period of adaptation and cultural integration, it primarily turns them into a prisoner of language. Thereby, the artist covers current geo-political topics that echo his own personal experiences.



© M HKA

## André Cadere

**André** (or Andrei) **Cadere** (1934-1978) is born in Poland, but grows up in Romania. During the sixties and seventies, he emerges as an influential artist, who, colours the international art scene, operating mainly from France.

His work is situated at the edge of the artistic space, it can be described as strategically peripheral work. It is both conceptual and concrete, while at the same time clearly delineated and minimalistic, but also endless and elusive as a spiritual perpetual mobile. Cadere bombards the artistic community with a wooden measuring instrument, as a mental reference point, as if “taking measure” of the traditional artistic reality. His bizarre wooden staff, usually referred to as a “*barre de bois*” – consists of painted components with a length equal to the diameter. These separate segments are organised in a systematic and logical order, which is based on the eight main colours of the light spectrum, plus black and white. The artist calls his coloured rods ‘endless paintings’. They can be compared to the stripes of Daniel Buren. Cadere uses his work to present a radical form of what is called ‘institutional criticism’.

Cadere appears uninvited alongside exhibitions of other artists, something that is not received with thanks. In a parasitic way, he infiltrates galleries and museums, hides away his coloured wooden staffs, thereby announcing the presentation of his work in parallel with the exhibition or opening of another artist, through which that opening always also becomes his. With his round *barre de bois*, he quickly becomes a recognisable silhouette at openings, with which he wishes to add a new dimension to the classic art discourse, namely that of artistic meditation and self-assessment – just like prayer beads

– but also that of a serial challenge, which should stimulate the visitors to make an attempt at reconstructing the underlying logic.

The *barre de bois* is not an artistic instrument that only serves to be looked at; it can be understood as part of the rise of semiotics. Namely thinking about how meaning can be demonstrated and how it functions. The object acts as a reference to something else. Ultimately, Cadere produces endless variants of his extraordinary measuring rod, in different materials and in different proportions. The underlying idea, however, remains the same, which only confirms the stubborn power of his unasked intervention.

### ARTWORK:

André Cader’s *Barre de bois* consists of painted segments that have been systematically and logically sequenced. The object is unique, meaningful and unmistakably human. It is thus in keeping with the rise of semiotics: it prompts our contemplation of how meaning works, along with the means by which it may be attributed, and throughout this process the object plays the role of signpost.





## Anne Daems

**Anne Daems** (°1966) (°1966) studies photography at the Saint-Lukas Institute in Brussels, followed by a course at the Rijksacademie in Amsterdam. The hidden layers in our daily lives are the focus of her photographic work.

Daems creates urban snapshots of life on the streets: people on sidewalks, in the underground, underneath piers, in traffic or obscured by the reflection of a shop window. Upon closer inspection these seemingly ordinary images are delicate, not just because they question voyeurism, beauty or individuality, but mostly because of the way in which anonymous and unknown persons are noticed – or not – and classified. Each image is a careful composition, concealing a surprise. Nothing is as it seems. There is always another element, another truth hidden within.

Anne Daems is always looking for what usually remains out of sight. In images that appear empty and without seeking out drama or spectacle, she portrays a generation, a city or an entire zeitgeist. Her photographs show how the commonplace is interwoven with the sublime, which points to an extensive empathic curiosity.

### ARTWORK:

Anne Daems' photographs show how the mundane can be elevated to the sublime and how the borders between public and private fade out. There can be many different interpretations of her work. It can be confrontational, but most often also tender or amusing.



## Berlinde De Bruyckere

**Berlinde De Bruyckere** (°1964) makes three-dimensional sculptures, installations and aquarelles. Her older work has a minimalist character. Steel, stone and glass were her materials of choice. Gradually she leaves abstract motifs to seek recourse in recognisable forms and things, introducing the blanket, malleable lead and straw as materials.

More recently, she has extended her personal iconography with striking sculptures of (stuffed) horses and giant (once-) cuddly animals. The beauty of the materials she uses always has something of the fatal about them. The blankets in her sculptures protect and suffocate, the lead roses seduce and poison, the carpet of begonias bear witness to bloom and decay. She intentionally uses familiar forms to inspire thinking in viewers, to provide them with memories. Her preference lies with materials and forms that mirror ambiguity, something characteristic of the human experience. Beneath the delicate and sometimes deceptively endearing skin of her work is a yawning abyss. Death, fear and loneliness are recurrent themes, though never disconnected from life, love and beauty. Despite the great formal diversity of her works, there is a common thread running throughout her oeuvre in terms of choice of materials, techniques and the repeating of symbols and motifs.

Aside from her three-dimensional works, the artist has also always put her ideas on paper. These works (drawings and aquarelles, or aquarelle and gouache combined on old paper or cardboard) are often preparatory material for the sculptures but are autonomous works in themselves. Berlinde De Bruyckere does not impose 'the' interpretation of her works. She consciously leaves the door open for diverse understandings.

### ARTWORK:

In a series of drawings called 'dekenvrouwen' (blanket women), Berlinde De Bruyckere introduces the human figure in her work in 1994. Paintings follow this series of drawings, amongst others *Spreken* (*Speaking*). The sculptures are life-sized figures with realistic arms and legs, while the rest of the body is hidden under blankets. The bodies have been modelled in wax. The blankets form a kind of second skin – they function as a fur. These are pictures that include the duality of protection and suffocation, security and anxiety, safety and confusion, life and death. The blankets refer to the security of childhood, but at the same time to current pictures of the refugee camps.



**Luc Deleu** (°1944) calls Antwerp his home. In 1970, just after having graduated from his architectural studies, he founds the T.O.P. office (Turn-On Planning office) in Antwerp as an interdisciplinary urban planning company. That same year, Deleu also holds his first solo exhibition:

*Luc Deleu says goodbye to architecture* for new horizons in the self-curated Antwerp Vacuüm gallery. To date, he has given up neither architecture nor art, seeing them both as closely related manifestations of thought: *'I am an artist, because I am an architect.'*

The T.O.P. office has always been radically focused on increasing opportunities for social reflection and has done this in a plethora of different ways. Deleu is a powerful presence on the Flemish and Belgian architectural scene, famous for his heated confrontations with the Belgian Architects Association, and for his recalcitrant perspectives that have influenced generations of architectural students, among which include 'design research', an idea that currently enjoys enormous sway and which he devised himself. Published in 1980, the 'Urbanistisch Manifest' [Manifesto to the World] represents the pinnacle of his ability for critical discourse, advocating that the rationale underlying urban planning be expanded worldwide.

Deleu's radical visual proposals take shape as plans or scale models, as well as in concrete actions, such as exercises in scale and perspective or container constructions. Many of the radical

depictions, but also the arrangement of public architectural-planning presentations and socio-urban spaces for reflection materialise within the visual artistic space, distributed and safeguarded therein as well.

### ARTWORK:

*Mobile Medium University (Floating U.I.A)* – from 1972 – is one of Luc Deleu's first architectural proposals. The idea was to use three brightly painted aircraft carriers (this was at the time of the Vietnam War) for a perpetual tour of Antwerp University's entire curriculum. This work is part of a series which formulates alarming but credible anarchic approaches to issues still waiting to be addressed, such as the environment (e.g. city agriculture), the social contract (e.g. non-programmed TV broadcasts) or public memory (e.g. re-cycling historical monuments as social housing).



## Aslan Gaisumov

**Aslan Gaisumov** (°1991) completes his studies at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Moscow in 2012. As of 2016, he studies at the Higher Institute for Fine Arts (HISK) in Ghent.

In a reaction to the historic fate of his country (not least, also the two wars in Chechnya in 1994 and 2009), Gaisumov develops an oeuvre that bases itself on the personal and collective memory, but where he also knows how to transform and transcend this. His works balance and are positioned between visual directness and social commentary, between the transitory and the monumental. The videos and installations mostly consist of found objects, and of objects that are consciously made by him. Sometimes Gaisumov also exhibits photos and works on paper.

Aslan Gaisumov is loyal to the culture in which he was born, but he is also ready to formulate his own contrary standpoint. He does not avoid major or difficult topics, such as history, culture and identity, and just as little does he let his critical attitude overshadow his search for the aesthetically convincing.

### ARTWORK:

In 1995, during the war in Chechnya, the artist's family and some of their relatives escaped the bombs falling on Grozny: 21 persons in one 'Volga' car.



## Inge Godelaine

**Inge Godelaine** (°1964) has been working for many years as an independent filmmaker and used to work for the Belgian artist and “iconoclast” Jef Geys.

As a filmmaker, she realises a number of reports and documentaries about actions of the Campish artist, such as the project “Villa Wintermans”, which he realised at the biennial exhibition in São Paulo in 1991. One of the most complex public projects the artist ever set up, making a visual connection between art and society. In the middle of the favelas of this Brazilian metropolis, he built a wooden replica – on a scale 1/3 – of the Flemish modernist villa of the cigar manufacturer Wintermans from Balen, putting it at the disposal of the nearby residents for setting up a school. In the bustle of the official art scene of this biennial, this anachronistic intervention almost goes completely unnoticed, and when Inge Godelaine proceeds to search for remnants of the villa in São Paulo in 2006, it appears as though nothing, but a few vague memories remain.

At the same time, the documentary is an echo of a forgotten artistic deed and a registration of the local time and place, which lies completely in line with the oeuvre the artist who instigated this project.

### ARTWORK:

On her own initiative, Inge Godelaine travelled to São Paulo, 18 years after conceptualist Jef Geys had created his architectural intervention. Her purpose was to interview the children, having since grown into adulthood, about their experience with the donated building and artwork donated on the site. The Villa’s structure appears to have vanished... pilfered away, its parts repurposed in the houses of the slums, or burnt and/or rotted away. Geys presents Godelaine’s film work as the fulcrum of an exhibition on the São Paulo project. With this act, the vanishing of an ‘art work’ morphs into something eternal, as though the artist wished too quickly to be rid of the transience, the eventual disappearance of art and architecture.



## Hiwa K

**Hiwa K** (°1975) was born in Sulaymaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan, and has been living as a political refugee in Berlin since 2002. His artistic work is completely dominated by social disruption and emotional despair, which he experienced as a refugee.

In his work, Hiwa K examines the events, encounters and many cultural/social paradoxes that have determined his life, which he analyses sharply and reflects back into the public sphere. “In the final analysis, much of my work concerns the circulation of culture, namely how cultures have influenced one another for many centuries and have been embedded in one another, both at a macro and at a micro level.” He certainly does not evade the world-wide debate about globalisation and transportation. At the same time he predicts the end of humanity and a tragic end for the entire planet. In a sense, Hiwa K does not make art but engages in a debate on urgent topics.

Hiwa K makes sculpture, installations and videos, which are often an edited recording of his performance. The images are often sublime in their simplicity: a cemented staircase leads to an empty bed at a lonely height. The works are made through minute manipulations of reality, sometimes they are taken directly from reality, through this act they are transformed into a reflection on reality. His visual work serves as a medium for the distribution of emotionally charged awareness, which he also converts into words. “Art is without value, because it does not influence the world or stimulate its change.”

### ARTWORK:

For *Moon Calendar* (Iraq) Hiwa K learned how to tap dance, with the intent of tap dancing to his own heartbeat in Abu Ghraib (the symbol of what happened in Iraq). As the dance proceeds, he loses control over his fast-moving feet, which after a certain point are unable to keep up with his heartbeat. The video was shot in one of Saddam Hussein’s former security building in Iraq. Although the video only shows a rehearsal, the viewer inevitably reads the work through the context of historical events, and the traumas of people who were imprisoned, tortured and killed there.





EXtrim east

femin east

art east

Antifash east



national east

DOCS

ORiental east

feish east



**Johanna Kandl** (°1954) studied painting in Vienna and Belgrade. Kandl, who regularly collaborates with her partner Helmut Kandl, often researches the outermost edges of the European Union and the neighbouring 'others'. She was one of the first artists in Austria to react to the transformations that followed the globalisation after 1989 in East and South East Europe.

Kandl works with a wide range of media, but her photographic and cinematic praxis is commonly influenced by her sensitivity as a painter. These links between genres and techniques are visible in her large-scale paintings, resembling monumental enlarged stills from television, portraits that often document the barren conditions of daily life in the rapidly changing political constellations of the former Soviet satellite states and elsewhere.

Kandl academically combines the tradition of historical painting with the bleak reality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as reflected by the mass media. By exposing contrasts, such as between the poignant poverty in the former Soviet Bloc and the flashy lifestyle of those who had a good deal thanks to the New Capitalism, she asks who benefits from who, and how, and why? What larger structures are driving this and how can it be deciphered?

*"I like to imagine stories in which events could have – or have taken a different turn ..."* – Johanna Kandl, 2012

**ARTWORK:**

*Obne Titel (Who's Got The Big Picture?)* from 2006 is a prime example of Johanna Kandl's established modus operandi, in which she successfully weds the tradition of historical painting with the gloomy reality of twentieth and twenty-first century new media. In this large-scale canvas, the glaring poverty endured by many subjects of the former Soviet satellite states contrasts sharply with the glitzy nouveau richesse enjoyed by those whose transition to the New Capitalism happened much more smoothly (such as in this anonymous city in ex-Yugoslavia).



© M HKA

Johanna Kandl, *Zonder titel (Who's Got the Big Picture)*, 2006  
Collection M HKA, Antwerp, Collection Flemish Community



## Fransje Killaars

The oeuvre of the Dutch artist **Fransje Killaars** (°1959) is characterised by textiles and their colours. Through accumulations and shading, she composes a setting which presents itself as an immersive experience.

The layered nature of her work is expressed in striking contradictions: Intimacy versus openness, factory textiles in contrast to handmade materials, mass production as opposed to uniqueness, transparency against seclusion, excessiveness in contrast to a minimalistic structure. The artist plays with patterns – striped, plain, chequered or ornamental – on wool, velvet or damask. The bright colour palette contrasts with the rigid presentation and the abstract linear approach.

The end-results of what is usually classified as so-called high and low art, or of good and bad taste, are brought together in her work and are given a new and generous place.

### ARTWORK:

Fransje Killaars' colourful installations are three-dimensional paintings composed of hand-woven carpets, fabrics and strands of yarn in every colour imaginable. The relationship between humans and textile, the powerful impact of colour and the connectivity of textiles with everyday life have all captured Killaars' imagination. Through the unusual combinations of colour and material, the work causes the viewer to view space in a way that is alien to the everyday gaze. The familiar role that blankets and carpets play in a cosy and homely atmosphere becomes something altogether new in the setting of a museum. An unfamiliar tactile obstacle is created, which alters what is typical of visual perception, forcing, as it were, the eyes to feel, rather than merely see.



© M HKA

## Almagul Menlibayeva

**Almagul Menlibayeva** (°1969) was born in Almaty (Kazakhstan). She now lives and works in Brussel.

Trained as a painter, Menlibayeva exhibited with 'Zelyonyi triugolok' (Green Triangle), a group of young artists in Almaty in the late eighties. In the nineties the burgeoning Kazakh art market created a reasonably high demand for her paintings. Yet Menlibayeva turned to performance and video in the first years of the new millennium. An early example is the action *Vechnaya nevesta* ('Eternal Bride', 2002), for which she roamed the streets and bazaars of Almaty dressed in the long white gown and veil of a Soviet bride. This indicates her strong interest in the female experience and the quest for emancipatory modernity that the USSR also stood for, despite all its cruelty and dysfunction.

Menlibayeva has been called a 'punk-shaman', and it is true that her more recent works very consciously combine exotic imagery with the latest tendencies in digital technology and electronic music. Her strategy underlines many of the gaps and disconnections that become visible in Central Asia (in her case Kazakhstan) as the region now moves 'forward' and 'backward' simultaneously: towards greater integration into the globalised political economy as providers of natural resources and military bases for both Russia and the US, but also towards parochial and paternalistic inertia in domestic politics, where ex-communist rulers gain dominion again and are selling the promise of 'stability' to their populations and international patrons.

### ARTWORK:

Almagul Menlibayeva's film *EXODUS* was shot in Karaganda in the centre of Kazakhstan. The film shows a glimpse of a community of nomads, who, following their gathering, prepare to depart. This departure is interrupted, however, by two women resolutely traversing the lonely steppe. However, the film ends with a departure en masse: a caravan of people, cars, lorries and horses slowly begin trailing their way towards the horizon. Menlibayeva's film provides us with a portrait of a culture torn between age-old tradition and an existence in a globalised world. Both poetic and melancholy, the film illustrates the quest for identity and a departure for an uncertain future.



**Ria Pacquée** (°1954) has been active as an artist since 1979. She portrays casual situations and objects from the everyday world: the street, the market, cemeteries and the desert are her work area.

Initially, her work consists of performances and body art. In the early eighties, for example, she develops the *Madame* character, exploring her life for several years. She is accompanied by a photographer who captures Madame's experiences. Despite the light humourous approach, the photos present an endless loneliness.

Since 1992, Pacquée renounces performance and takes place behind the camera herself. From then on, different series follow. Often, these are pictures of objects found in the street, which are mutually associated through their shape or colour. This way, she shows our environment in a different manner. Pacquée's later work is characterised by observation, with strong elements of visual anthropology and political commentary.

### ARTWORK:

As a film, *Inch'Allah* revolves around the illusion of an objective reality. Our perception of reality is distorted by the position we take, the place in which we live, the events and images we see and hear, and the kind of life we lead. Ria Pacquée seeks to lay bare the impact of this subjectivity, to show us how individual fragments and pieces confers meaning on the greater whole. Through her film, Pacquée suggests the notion that life does not necessarily revolve around knowledge and insight, but rather the way in which people relate to one another is far more fundamental. Everything else is simply an expression of the times.



**Vanessa Van Obberghen** (°1969) uses different media to reflect upon questions such as perception, migration and integration. Her works are concerned with the role of the 'document,' and the misunderstandings that arise when these come to be translated. This way Van Obberghen makes the glances and points-of-view themselves into the subject of her observations. In her oeuvre, Van Obberghen create space and time for viewers to call their own prejudices into question.

**ARTWORK:**

In her research into Cheikh Anta Diop, one of the founders of Pan-Africanism, Vanessa Van Obberghen puts the emphasis on the various roles he fulfilled: scientist, philosopher, anthropologist, linguist and politician. With *Tracing Cheikh Anta Diop*, the artist translates her own personal vision of this documentary history into an image. Inspired by Cheikh Anta Diop's fascination for genetics and DNA, she uses an Asiatic model to address stereotypical thinking with regards to Africa's post-colonial history.



## Loreta Visic

**Loreta Visic** (°1976) was born in Croatia, but moved to the Netherlands as a child. After her studies at the Academy for Visual Arts in Maastricht, she obtained her MA from Antwerp's Higher Institute for Fine Arts. During this period she also took part in different artist-in-residence programs.

Visic works in a subtle way, handling the balance and the connection between the familiar and the strange, the known and the unknown. The apparently tame and pretty atmosphere of 'domesticity' draws the viewer into the psychological spaces of personal intimacy, vulnerability and security. But the innocent-appearing objects of comfort and safety lead to a state of dramatic tension when their seeming calm is interrupted by our own acts of disturbing recognition. Visic is an artist with a marked degree of sensibility and a self-reflexive approach to her artistic practice.

The starting-point for her oeuvre is the mobile and changeable aspects of place, and this leads to a series of thoughtful expressions investigating notions like home, domesticity and belonging. She connects these to subjects like personal space, intimacy, security, religion and culture. Visic inquires into these questions in their most obvious manifestations. She combines a painstaking use of techniques and materials to create stories that are at once convincing and unsettling. Her art is very plastic, figurative, even scenographic.

### ARTWORK:

*Washuis (Laundry-House)* is an installation of a house made on an iron frame; inside hang men's, women's and children's clothes. The physical form/effect of the installation is entirely dependent on weather conditions. If it's fine and calm, the house seems serene, safe and welcoming. But if the wind is blowing, the clothing flaps about and the house appears hostile and threatening. At such moments, the viewer is able to fully experience the essence of Loreta Visic's artistic practice.



© M HKA



## 2. THE SWORD & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Location: De Halle

Campaign image: Els Dietvorst

Els Dietvorst and Guillaume Bijl,  
Victoria Begalskaya, Louise Bourgeois,  
François Curlet, Susana Pilar Delahante  
Matienzo, Danny Devos, Lili Dujourie,  
Marlene Dumas, Wafae Ahalouch el Keriasti,  
N S Harsha, Nikita Kadan, Ivan Kožarić,  
Michèle Matyn, Maryam Najd, Bruce Nauman,  
Liza May Post, Artūras Raila, Koka Ramishvili,  
Hugo Roelandt, Olga Tobreluts,  
Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, Wout Vercammen  
and Barbara Visser

It seems clear that in the case of Dymphna, the sting – t.i., the *violence* – is in the tail of her story, in the beheadings and the flickering sword. But actually, as we understand today, it is in the beginning, when the king wants to force his daughter to marry him.

Sometimes, violence is defined as ‘a force of more than minor significance that is deliberately exercised by one or more persons on others, whether or not with weapons or other resources’. It concerns every act by which a human being, against the will of the victim, is physically or mentally tortured, wounded or killed, or through which personal integrity is violated in one way or another. Sexual acts against the will of the person, such as rape, undesirable physical abuse or intimidation, are increasingly, and more and more clearly, considered to be violence by the public.

De Halle, is the location of this theme of ‘Violence’. In her title image, Els Dietvorst immediately focuses on the main theme, from the perspective of a person who is being subjected to violence. Reality covers us with stigmata: our perception of reality – and our communication with it – hurts us. The immediacy of that experience can be seen in the works by Susana Pilar Delahante Matienzo, Els Dietvorst, Marlene Dumas, Wafae Ahalouch el Keriasti, Michèle Matyn and Liza May Post. Yet none of them are victims: they all have presumptions and act. This is explicitly the case with Vika Begalskaya, who translates the experiences of sex workers – together with them – into a puppet show; Louise Bourgeois, reflecting Goliath’s violence; Lili Dujourie, transforming herself from object into subject; Maryam Najd, questioning the pornographic gaze; Hugo Roelandt, transforming himself rather than undergoing violence –

and Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, remodelling the disintegration into thinking.

The violence that social systems or individuals inflict on others is thematised too. The Indian artist NS Harsha literally makes contemporary urbanity clash with the countryside. Georgian artist Koka Ramishvili documents the civil war from his bedroom window. Danny Devos tries to get through to the motives of serial killers. And with Guillaume Bijl, François Curlet, Nikita Kadan, Bruce Nauman, Artūras Raila, Olga Tobreluts, Wout Vercammen and Barbara Visser, the violence affects the artists and us. It is, rather, the interaction with violence that can open up new pathways.

Violence is intimately connected with power that is not used ethically. In medieval law, violence is the shared property of victim and perpetrator: essentially both parties had to come to an agreement afterwards about what made up the crime. Since the enlightenment, the state has a monopoly on violence and pretends to punish the guilty. But in reality, violence remains a personal matter, initially always undergone by someone, part of a flow of human action, which can and must be countered. Which is exactly what Ivan Kožarić does when he frees the energy of art from the power of its framework, simply by sawing.



## Els Dietvorst

**Els Dietvorst** (°1964) is a socially engaged artist, who uses her visual work as a means of creating social involvement. She graduates from the Sint Lucas School of Arts in Antwerp and holds a Master of Fine Art from the LUCA School of Arts in Brussels. Dietvorst lives and works in Ireland since 2010.

Even in her socially focussed work, Dietvorst finds ways of expressing herself in a highly personal manner, making use of an incredibly wide range of media; along with sculptures and installations, drawing, writing and recently through the creation of visual installations. Her work is focussed on the myriad forms of social communication and interpersonal relationships and conflicts, which she expresses in striking social-artistic projects, such as *De Terugkeer van de Zwaluwen* [*The Return of the Swallows*] in Brussels' Anneessenswijk. The position of the outsider is something Dietvorst specifically focuses on, directing her gaze – sometimes over the span of several years – towards those persons and events that would otherwise go unnoticed. At any given moment she can be found collecting these types of snippets and fragments, assembling them in her pieces. This isn't necessarily to point out injustice, rather her purpose is to personally develop an understanding, to keep track of the bigger picture, and contextualise different events. Her summaries of reality are a visual archive, serving as both mirror and a chamber for reflection.

Her sculptures too, – crafted from perishable materials such as wood and loam – direct the gaze towards social

circumstances such as war, famine and the refugee issue. This is how, for example, the “Skulls” series was created. The skulls allude to the violence of war, but also point towards the existential experience of dying, a process shared and suffered by all.

### ARTWORKS:

The *Skulls* series is created in reaction to the wars in former Yugoslavia, Darfur and Iraq. The first is a gigantic version created – almost symbolically – in a warehouse in the heart of the Maria Ter Heide military base. This skull is large enough to enter, and once inside, you can peer through its teeth, which are formed to look like figures. This Skull is made based on the solitary confinement cages of the Guantanamo prison. The cage in which *Maquette: SKULL* stands, serves as a dovecote. Dietvorst positions small benches around the Skull, on which people can ‘enjoy’ the imprisonment.

Stigmata.

I consider violence to be a faceless thing.

The face has lost all its recognisable features.

Human barbarity has made it unrecognisable.

When I attempt to draw the face of violence.

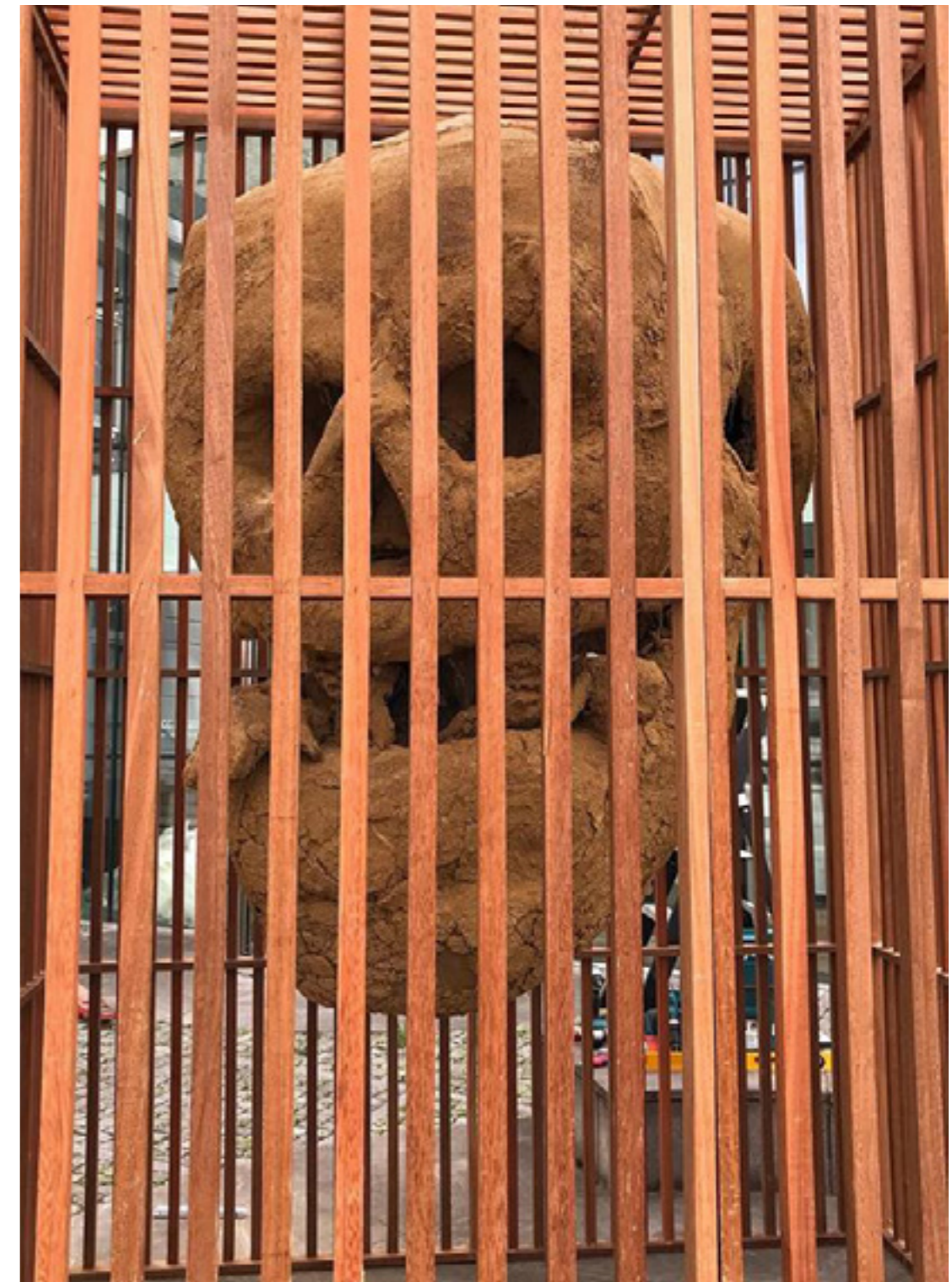
I create white, faded holes.

they are like stigmata, which we should cherish and feel

in the hopes that they will

accompany us freely.

ED 2018.



© Jürgen Addiers



## Guillaume Bijl

Antwerp visual artist **Guillaume Bijl** (°1946) attends a theatre course and initially works as a set designer and painter. From the mid-seventies, he starts his work on conceptual staging to transform the dramatic tragedy of everyday life into museum installations.

Using close reproductions of sales booths for mattresses, lampshades or toilet bowls, Guillaume Bijl reconstructs the clichéd seductiveness of the shop window as a museum installation. Bijl repeats this process using the uninspiring emptiness of a driving school, the amusing gaudiness of a dog salon and the painful gimmickry of television studios where happiness made of plastic and cardboard is won. He draws inspiration from the day-to-day reality of his surroundings in an effort to explore the dividing wall between the reality of the social and its counterpart in the arts. At the same time he challenges the viewer's sense of critical judgement, which is all too easily led astray by the dazzling banality of commercial consumer society. Window dressing and keeping up appearances have pushed reality so far over the edge that whether or not a thing is true is a question that has ceased to be asked.

In addition to these conceptual installations, Bijl also photographically reconstructs reality, with his photo presentation *265 Belangrijke en minder Belangrijke foto's uit de 2e helft van de 20ste eeuw* [265 Important and less important photos from the second half of the 20th century], based on photographs found in cheap development laboratories, serving as a good example. The artist opts to converse with reality by reconstructing a sham reality as art.

### ARTWORK:

Guillaume Bijl's *Behandelingen* [Treatments] are purposeful, detailed scripts played out in both words and images; these also form the basis of Bijl's later "transformative installations". For the *Behandelingen* Bijl designs a number of concrete and detailed interactive pathways that lead the visitor through the different stages of a key (but nevertheless mundane) event. For example, his treatments include a variety of topics: Church, Education, Army, Travel, Building, Ambition, Sex, Psychiatry and the 'Sleur van een alledaags Arbeidersleven' [The daily grind of the average blue-collar worker]. Bijl digs into his own personal experiences acquired during his studies and work as a source of inspiration; however, personal experience is not the only thing he draws from. He also employs the know-how he has accumulated in various fields (visual arts, literature, film and theatre).



## Victoria Begalskaya

Teresa Creative Union of Artists en sekswerkers (Sint-Petersburg, Moskou)

**Victoria Begalskaya** (°1965) is originally from Dnepropetrovsk, a city in the Ukraine. She graduates from the Kharkov Academy of Design and Arts. She currently works in Moscow as a painter and film artist.

In her films Begalskaya makes a parody of familiar situations taken from daily life in Russia and the Ukraine, for instance, taking a military parade and setting it to contrasting music and involving soldiers with peculiar facial expressions, lending an ironic quality to her work. Creating mocking, folkloric montages, she provides the viewer with a pitiless perspective on what social reality looks like in the Post-Soviet Era.

In 2014 she set up a joint project with Aleksandr Vilkin, Marina Denisova, Sergey Potapov, Karina Katwoman Dulina and Baretta, (Teresa Creative Union of Sex-Workers and Artists) all streetwalkers from Leningrad, with whom which she created the “Teresa Creative Union of Sex-Workers and Artists”. Together they developed a puppet theatre using cardboard cut-out figures, paintings and objects, where encounters between sex workers and their clients are staged, given a shape in which the tragedy of the theme always hovers between the moral and the cheerfully debauched. The melancholy interwoven throughout almost makes the harsh reality of the situation tolerable. Almost, but not quite. This film doesn't purport to be an activist protest against male dominance, rather, it is a “grave” parody that can be perceived as being a critique of this critique. It evidences a sense of bravura and pride, and is a clear demonstration that the prostitutes performing in this puppet theatre have not lost control over who they are.

### ARTWORK:

*Aphrodite's Girdle* was created by the Teresa Creative Union of Artists and sex-workers. Vika Begalskaya partnered with sex workers whose efforts tinge a harsh reality with a sense of melancholy, while at the same time giving it an ironic twist. Begalskaya's film must be situated within the context of activist, post-feminist works, positioning her work not as a critique of male dominance, but rather as a critique of this critique. Puppet-like scenes with cardboard cut-out figures, paintings and other objects make it clear that these women remain proud and have not lost control over who they are.



## Louise Bourgeois

The French-American visual artist **Louise Bourgeois** (1911-2010) began developing her oeuvre in the mid-thirties, only gaining recognition and drawing the accolades of a wider international audience in the eighties.

As a result she is considered a figure head for feminism – for the most part unwilling. This status befell Bourgeois because in her role as an artist she expresses herself as a strong woman, unafraid of leaving the world and others to their own devices, instead seeking out the woman within, which leads to an existential awareness of her true self. This introspective quest is conveyed through her visual works – painting, sculptures and sketches –, making her an artist's artist for several decades, which lead to her being an artist appreciated only by other artists for several decades, which also meant that she remained an outsider in the public art scene.

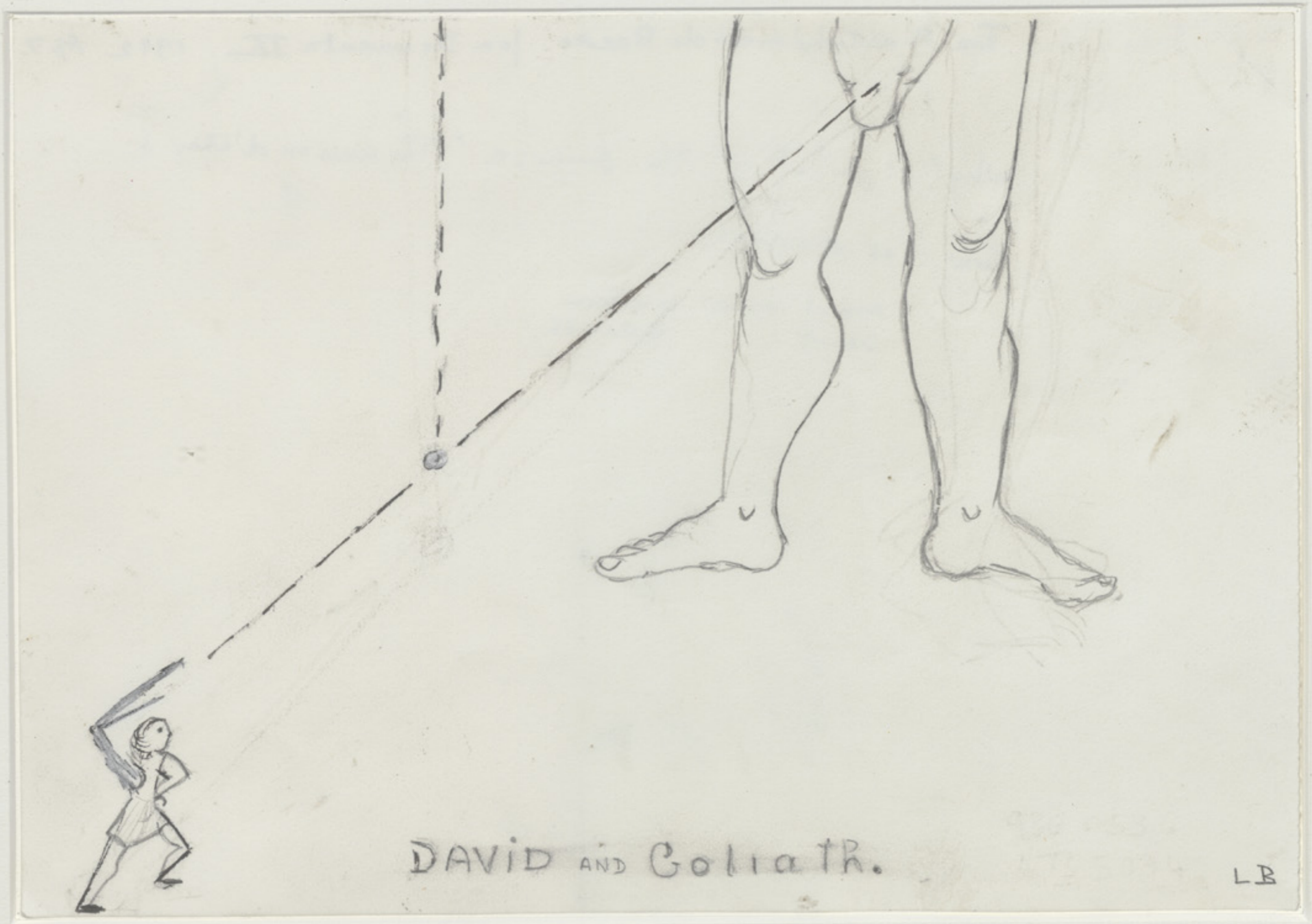
Using symbolic imagery she focuses on themes of fear, sorrow, desire, alienation, aggressive sexuality, oppression and abandonment, emotionally charged concepts that have a significant bearing on her own personal struggle, and which continue to gain social significance in the public eye.

Her artistic circles include André Breton and Marcel Duchamp; she taught at the School of Visual Arts in New York and towards the end of her career became increasingly focussed on sculptures and carvings. In 1992 she is asked to design the American Pavilion at the 45th Venice Biennale, and also contributed to Documenta IX in Kassel.

While her drawings and abstract sculptures are characterised by recurring interpretations of hands, busts, phalluses and faces, her bronze sculptures of massive cellar spiders are in all likelihood the most expressive images found in her generous portfolio.



© MHKA



DAVID AND GOLIATH.

LB

## François Curlet

**François Curlet** (°1967) is born in Paris and lives in Paris, Brussels and the French village Piacé. Since the late eighties he has developed a body of sculptural and graphic work centred on a contemporary notion of thingliness: the commercial world of goods and brands, which he never ceases to deconstruct and reconstruct.

His fields of interest are wide-ranging, eclectic and unpredictable. This, and some of his artistic attitudes – his principle of reversal, his self-deprecating humour, his attempt to make his work accessible to a large audience and his criticism of ‘professionalism’ in contemporary art – places him in the tradition of Fluxus. It should therefore be no surprise that Curlet himself is a great admirer of Robert Filliou, one of the leading Fluxus figures.

Curlet often changes the scale of everyday objects by making them smaller or bigger than they were, or otherwise obscures their function by putting them together to create unrecognisable new objects. Yet his interest in the economy and economic values of these objects remains undiminished, and this keen economic sensibility certainly explains his attachment to the art of the multiple. The ‘democratic’ potential of (mechanically) reproduced art is a formative concern in his artistic practice.

His objects and images bring about shifts in meaning by instigating unexpected meetings between forms that provoke the ‘wrong’ associations. For all their deliberately obvious absurdity and tongue-in-cheek humour, Curlet’s works become contemporary allegories.

### ARTWORK:

In 2010, François Curlet visits the home of Clergyman Andras Pandy in Brussels, which had only just been released for sale by the police; it was a “*psychological Bermuda triangle*” where the serial killer, Pandy, had murdered six family members, later dissolving their bodies in acid. On his return from this voyage into horror, the artist carried with him a number of souvenirs, or relics, including the curtain of the small window at the front door and the spindles of a peculiar banister that lingered somewhere further on, objects which continued to bear the faint stain of those dramatic events. He converts these objects into new likenesses, for example, transforming the staircase spindles into open bird feeders. With the knowledge of these recycled objects’ history, the viewer is forced to pause and contemplate the power inherent of things and how they bear within them the capacity to channel evil.



© M HKA

## Susana Pilar Delahante Matienzo

Cuban artist **Susana Pilar Delahante Matienzo** (°1984) lives and works alternately in Havana and Karlsruhe. She graduates from the Escuela de Artes Plásticas in San Alejandro and the Universidad de las Artes in Guayaquil, and went on to follow a postgraduate study programme at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design in 2013.

The core of her oeuvre revolves around the social barriers and psychological menace that individuals - mostly women - encounter and experience when they find themselves on unknown and therefore hazardous terrain, whether or not they were forced into this space. To illustrate these concepts she draws on the Afro-Cuban tradition of Santería to function as her visual frame of reference. She primarily works with photography and video installations to produce powerful, jarring visual images that always teeter on the edge of the morally acceptable. Her work is incredibly intriguing precisely because of her fearless approach to menacing situations in which she frequently positions herself as a victim; moreover, Matienzo takes no steps to shun subjecting her own body to affliction. This is something she physically exemplifies in her decision to conceive a child in 2007 with the help of an anonymous donor. In this way she experiences the cycle of life and death - inherent to every sperm cell - as a scientific artistic process. After 48 days, this process is brought to its end in a miscarriage, which she calls *The Scandal of the Real*. This project leads to a documentary ensemble, which assembles all the scientific facts, photographs and details of her medical examinations touching upon this personally traumatic experiment.

Susana Pilar Delahante Matienzo's inner artist knows no bounds, with no subject too sacred or taboo. She relentlessly looks the obstacles of life hard in the eye and transforms these into compelling images that captivates the viewer's gaze.

### ARTWORK:

Photography is a place where life and death unite in a single image. With her composition *Pase. Acceso ilimitado (Come in, unlimited access)*, Susana Pilar Delahante Matienzo challenges the viewer to enter a world of danger and violence. She projects self-portraits of pain and suffering onto the body as virtual tattoos, transforming her work into a vital sign of resilience and resistance, but also of persistent accusation.



**Danny Devos** (°1959) lives in Antwerp but carries out his artistic endeavours the world over. Since 1979 he has carried out 160 performances in over 40 cities across 12 different countries. For nearly 40 years he has acted as performance, sound and “forensic” artist, purposefully making it his objective to remain a critical voice within and opposed to the art scene.

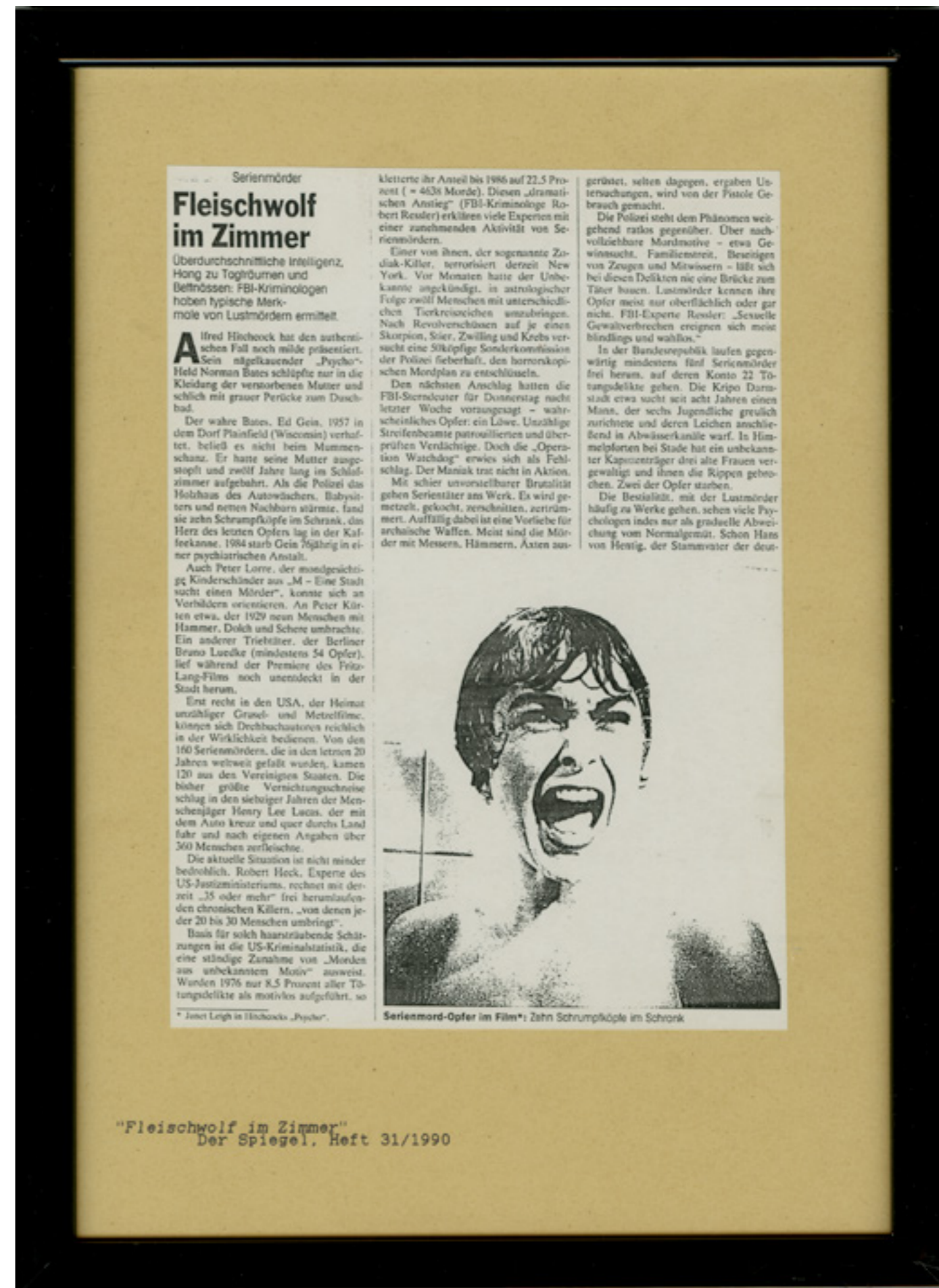
To Danny Devos’s credit as an artist, he has always gone beyond his own research, maintaining an active interest in studies on the actual position of artists in society, independent of the research inspiring his own work. This interest led to the official recognition of artists’ legal social status in 2003. In addition to his independent work as an artist he partners with artist Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven in the Club Moral noise band, and carries out long-term projects on the artistic legacy of artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark and James Lee Byars.

He begins to combine his bodily performances with *industrial noise* in the eighties, simultaneously delving into a profound psychological study on the motives and drives of murderers. In 1987 he begins his correspondence with convicted serial killers such as Belgium’s Freddy Horion and Michel Bellen along with John Wayne Gacy in the United States. Since embarking on this study he has created objects and installations related to the macabre deeds committed by these killers, photographing himself lying naked at the scene of the crime, or performing - with or without audience - to music both horrid and terrifying. The collection of visual materials and framed letters comprise an artistic whole that

always alludes to the sites on which the victims were murdered or the context in which the perpetrators carried out their gruesome deeds.

**ARTWORK:**

Since the mid-eighties Danny Devos has maintained correspondence with convicted serial killers to gain a deeper understanding of their motives. From 1987 onwards he has been creating objects and installations referencing famous killers and their crimes. The Jockel project is one of his seminal works because it integrates a number of different facets of Devos’s method. He provides the viewer with evidence of his study by presenting framed letters of his correspondence with the inmates. The four performances at the site of the four murders bring together the bodily practice of his art and performances with the project. The objects used reference his sculptures and installations.



## Lili Dujourie

**Lili Dujourie** (° 1941) studies both painting and sculpture at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, but without graduating. Dujourie is both a solitary and a seminal figure in Belgian art since the late sixties. Her work is rich in variation – of materials and techniques, of references to different periods in art history – but also remarkably consistent in its insistence on the emotional and cerebral precision that is particular to visual art.

In the late sixties and early seventies Dujourie engages mostly with recent and contemporary American art (abstract, minimal, conceptual), which is then the dominant force in the world of art, and formulates a critical reflection on it.

The 17 videos Dujourie made in 1972–1981 are another key part of her oeuvre. The series begins with the five versions of *Hommage à...* (1972), which establishes Dujourie as a proponent of both feminist and feminine aesthetics. In the seventies she also works with collages: sometimes using images from magazines, sometimes torn pieces of coloured paper.

From the early eighties onwards Dujourie works with a progression of distinct and sometimes very demanding materials: velvet, marble, lead, plaster, ceramics, steel, *papier mâché* etc. The Flemish ‘primitives’ of the fifteenth century and the baroque painters of the seventeenth century are an important inspiration for her ‘wall sculptures’, featuring carefully constructed cascades of velvet drapery in strong colours.

### ARTWORK:

*Hommage à ...III* (from a series of 5 *Hommages* from 1972) is one of the first filmed works by Lili Dujourie. It takes place during the experimental stage of video art, when video recording technology was still in its infancy. The work is recorded in real time, without additional montage work, and shows a space that unfolds over time and a character who remains bound to this space. Sensuality, the passage of time and boredom all feature in her video work. In this video the model – Dujourie herself – plays not only the role of object, but is also the subject of the work; she fuses into artist and viewer, throughout the entire process Dujourie literally monitors herself.





## Marlene Dumas

*'I am an artist who uses second-hand images and first-hand emotions'.* - Marlene Dumas, 1989

**Marlene Dumas** (°1953) grows up in Cape Town, South Africa under the apartheid regime, which continues to have a big influence on her critical thinking. She studies painting at the Cape Town Academy. The dark, figurative and worrisome works from that period are permeated by a sultry unrest. The censorship, however, starts to weigh on her and in 1976 she moves to Amsterdam, where she still lives today.

During the first years in Amsterdam she works mostly with paper, creating large drawings in pencil, ink or chalk, usually with text, sometimes with newspaper and magazine clippings. The paper is pasted, torn, mottled and scratched. Dumas brings together events from her own life and stories and images from movies and books, but she always allows the viewers to make their own interpretation.

The role of women is a central starting point in her work, ranging from the female nude, which has lost its meaning, to the naked woman who loses her senses. She paints many portraits, sometimes in soft colours, that present hard truths. A portraits of a child shows no laughing, rosy face, but an aged child with a stony look, full of knowing. Many faces cover her canvases, ranging from the mentally ill to female idols.

Dumas searches for a specific person, rather than the general, a person set in a specific time, rather than a symbol. Her paintings share the same qualities as the photographic source material: a directness, loss of details, overexposure, lack of sharpness and skewed proportions.

### ARTWORKS:

Interestingly, it is the female nude, one of the canonical forms of Western art history, that occupies a central place in Marlene Dumas' watercolours. At first glance, the watercolours from the *MD-Pin Up Series: Blind Joy, Indian Summer, Mis-Cast, Sailor's Dream and Slight Delight* seem devoid of the embittered, lugubrious undertone that is characteristic of much of Dumas' work in oil; they appear as symbols of a certain pleasure that may prove more empowering than we are willing to admit as we enter the minefield of post-feminist gender politics. However, the paintings are based on Polaroids Dumas made during a visit to a notorious Amsterdam strip club named Casa Rosso, as well as on photographs cut out of pornographic magazines.



© Syb'l. S. - Pictures



## Wafae Ahalouch el Keriasti

**Wafae Ahalouch el Keriasti** (°1978) is born in Tangier, Morocco, but lives and works in Amsterdam. According to Ahalouch el Keriasti, what she attempts is to “expose serious issues that deal with family, religion and society, without being offensive”. This concern goes beyond her artistic practice alone, because her dream is to set up a school for art education in Morocco sometime in the future, geared specifically towards women.

Because her childhood was not spent in her native country, she is able to express her social and religious viewpoint in imagery that is not confined to the Moroccan. She reveals her personal viewpoint of an increasingly alienating world through her drawings, murals and installations. Her pieces are primarily composed of flowing, black lines, reminiscent of the black and white prints found in colouring books. At the same time, however, she juxtaposes the storybook print she uses with images that depict the harsh realities of life. She appropriates visual material from the media and uses it to respond to how daily life evolves around us. By letting as much detail as possible fall by the wayside, she reduces her work to its essence. The way in which she distils her abstractions into uncomplicated black and white motifs testifies to her tremendous mastery of graphic design, which she in turn couples with her mastery of the psychological content of her work. These combined elements allow her to use the circus world as a comprehensive metaphor for the complexities of daily life, where all the acts on stage become blown up versions of society’s framework of values and norms.

The intense emotions subtly expressed by Ahalouch el Kerasti play out on the broader stage of what it really means to be human: love, betrayal, faithfulness, sorrow, temptation and attachment.

### ARTWORK:

The tranquillity of Wafae Ahalouch El Kerasti’s drawings and paintings often reveal a disconcerting side of reality, and by letting as much detail as possible fall by the wayside, she reduces her work to its essence. The images are both fictional and realistic, layered with a humour that makes the perpetually covert violence bearable. In this way, the artist expresses her own experience with everyday existence’s false bottom, where nothing is what it seems to be at first.



**N S Harsha** (°1969) is born in 1969 in Mysore in the state of Karnataka, India, where he still lives. Harsha trains as a painter in his home city and at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Maharaja Sayarajao University in Baroda (now Vadodara, in the state of Gujarat).

He is among the internationally most well-known Indian painters of his generation. His visual language is influenced by historical miniature painting, by the so-called Company Paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (produced by Indians for the British who wanted pictures of 'native life') and by comic books and didactic illustrations aimed at children. He has collaborated with schoolchildren at several occasions to stage actions and produce installations.

Harsha's paintings are often populated with multiple small figures, each adding a piece of narrative to the surface, which nevertheless forms a unified visual whole. This method can also be sensed in his installations, which comprise drawing and painting as well as sculpted elements and found objects.

**ARTWORK:**

Driven by the gravity of the situation, N S Harsha produces a number of works that depict the rural-urban divide. His works are derived from his reflections on the liberalisation of the agricultural sector in India and the sale of genetically modified seeds, which in contrast to the green revolution's boast, have led to spiralling debt and even mass suicides among farmers.



## Nikita Kadan

**Nikita Kadan** (°1982) is a Ukrainian visual artist who is confronted with how he as an artist must form his own socio-political point of view in his native Kiev. He is forced into this position due to the frenzied and tumultuous political realities of his world. He synthesises a special pictorial capacity with reflections on the unsettling, and above all, violent history of his people, his country and, by extension, the whole of the former Soviet Union.

Kadan, who studies monumental painting at the National Academy of Fine Art in Kiev eagerly employs methods that are interdisciplinary and which transcend borders. He draws, paints and creates installations – often collaborating with architects, human rights activists and sociologists, initially collaborating with the artist group R.E.P. – always directing his gaze towards the dark and sinister aspects of the past and how these aspects are handled here and now. Despite there often being no trace of blood-letting, he is still able to depict a host of different forms of oppression, torture and other excesses of misplaced patriotism with razor-sharp focus. Time and again, he questions the extent to which it is possible to make events, in all their complexity, visible.

Kadan doesn't simply rely on historical images, medical manuals and photographs to render the horrors of the past visible – elements which he often integrates in his installations, sometimes painted over or repainted –, but he also draws from images of the daily reality of these places. In this way the question he poses acquires a broader significance for society. Despite the socio-political motives underlying his work, Kadan is, at his essence, a

true aesthetic in the classic sense of the word. His drawings also bear witness to a fascination with the human form itself, even when that form is presented in contexts of mutilation, torture, pain and sadism.

Kadan's objective is to show how the atrocities of the past are still visibly present– and tangibly – in the here and now. He not only puts the extent to which he himself struggles with culture, heritage and patriotism on display, but chiefly reveals how the harmful consequences stemming from the abuse of these concepts continues to determine the course of life, and by extension history itself.

### ARTWORK:

*The Chronicle* is a series of watercolours illustrated with victims of torture, pogroms and massacres committed by various parties in the border zone dividing Poland from the Ukraine in the period around the Second World War. It alludes to the long-standing practice of photographic manipulation: photographs are disseminated with titles disguising and altering the true origins of both executioners and victims. This makes it possible for the same images to be used to tell stories that contradict one another. The battle for control over memory ends in a competition to create ideological versions of memory that are then pitted against each other. Nikita Kadan suggests that history – without exception – must be looked at directly, in its immediacy and therefore in all its complexity, no easy feat.



© M HKA

## Ivan Kožarić

**Ivan Kožarić** (°1921) is born in Petrinja, Croatia. He lives in Zagreb. Having graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb in 1947, he receives a grant in Paris, and subsequently moves there for several months.

In Paris Kožarić becomes closely acquainted with the contemporary European art of the time. Upon his return to Zagreb he joins the legendary avant-garde group Gorgona as its only sculptor. Kožarić is perhaps best known as a modernist sculptor with an idiosyncratic approach to form and narrative, but he also uses a wide variety of media, such as assemblages, proclamations, photographs, paintings and installations to create an oeuvre that does not fit into any readymade categories.

Kožarić's fundamental contribution to Socialist Yugoslavia's post-war avant-garde is fittingly memorialised through his presence at documenta XI in 2002, which introduces him to a wider global audience. He sends almost his entire oeuvre, consisting of 897 sculptures, 61 paintings, 373 printed works, 10 photographs and 5297 drawings, thereby challenging not only the convention of the retrospective exhibition, but any notion of art as a static phenomenon that can be neatly organised.

According to Kožarić, art grows just like people grow. Art is alive and must evolve continually. He combines existentialist insight with the formal grammar of constructivism. Each new work questions fundamental principles of the modern sculptural tradition.

### ARTWORKS:

For *Found Sculpture* Ivan Kožarić uses wooden roadblocks. A new life is assigned to these 'ready-mades' by the use of unconscious association. From the moment of inspiration the roadblocks become dogs entangled in a mating dance. According to the artist, the power and energy of the artwork arises as the intuitive and constructive elements in the artwork withdraw.

This work is part of *I'm Feeling Like the Belly of a Lion That Has Eaten Too Much*. A stylised sculpture of a lion doubling as a vessel (literally a golden bowl) that holds other works and multiples by Ivan Kožarić – but why stop there, why not the entire content of the world?



© Jürgen Addiers

## Michèle Matyn

**Michèle Matyn** (°1978) develops a versatile practice that includes photography, sculpture, installations and performance art. Her work is an act of reflection on how cultural constructs such as folklore, myth and ritual arise in various societies, examining in particular how nature is perceived and interacted with.

As an artist, her conviction that everything surrounding us is more or less alive, forms the cornerstone of her work. She is not on any particular quest for communion with a higher power. What she does, however, illustrate the human soul's sensitivity and receptivity to impressions, moods or experiences that are not capable of being interpreted rationally, but which do exemplify a direct connection to the essence of nature.

Matyn's visual work often starts with a journey into the unknown, to locations which are visually unfamiliar and which show little sign of human encroachment. This allows her to encounter the types of places and situations that may potentially serve as sources that inspire folk religion, often arising from the urge to explain the unexplainable. Matyn seeks human interaction with the landscape, and from her own perspective makes an attempt to participate in the rituals inherent to them. She makes these rituals her own by physically shaping raw materials and reworking them, re-employing them in rites of her own creation. Her works centre on the field of tension dividing human perception and the supernatural.

### ARTWORK:

In this early photograph, Michèle Matyn provides a glimpse – actually a reflection – of the physical collectibles that populate her inner world.



**Maryam Najd** (°1969) has roots in Tehran, but for the past several years Antwerp has been both her home and workplace. She works both purely abstract – using subtle colour gradations – and thematically figurative. What appear to be diverging concerns at first sight, turn out to be two sides of the same coin. Her figurative paintings are the most accessible to viewers; they demonstrate a reflective artistic process that simultaneously interweaves and unravels the social chasm dividing the two cultures. Najd juxtaposes the Middle East’s oppressive and conflict-charged context with the West’s utopia of “freedom”, and in doing so creates an open, but critical discourse between two opposing worlds.

Her work draws on a number of recurring themes: the corporeal versus the spiritual, Western women’s freedom as expressed in the issue of naked versus veiled femininity, and the visible versus the invisible, for example the mysterious existence of anonymous refugees, migrants and world travellers. In her paintings Najd uses images that in their essence evoke the most pressing and frequently asked existential questions. Maryam Najd persistently seeks the point at which extremes intersect. Two people at sunset walk casually beside the ocean surf, while in the painting’s foreground, a man lays stretched out on the beach; he’s been wrapped in a sinister looking thermal shroud of shiny foil.

Painting with an overwhelming sense of empathy, and yet without drifting into the melodramatic, Maryam Najd portrays characters with exacting clarity that do full justice to their human dignity.

Her portraits convey a sense of the artist’s ability to position herself within the European tradition, while not sacrificing her “Eastern” perspective. The migrants depicted are not impoverished beggars, but instead elegant characters, heads held high under ill-fated circumstances.

The connections she makes in her pieces are always unexpected, for instance between origin and yearning, between utopia and ideology, or between individuality and concealed beauty. In the end, it all revolves around the concept of freedom, not just as a goal in and of itself, but also as a philosophical concept and eternal point of enquiry. Is freedom a right or a gift? Is it a challenge or a trial? And what about the freedom to commit transgressions?

### ARTWORK:

Maryam Najd flips norms and values upside down. Does the presence of a veil disrupt the sexuality of an elegant woman’s body? Shedding it does not lead to balance; the eroticism is tensed by a covering up that borders on the aggressive. It seems to be an exercise between virtue and sin. The work’s title completes this sense of ambiguity – it does so with incredible subtlety.





## Bruce Nauman

**Bruce Nauman** (°1941) is often referred to as one of the founding figures of contemporary art. He is the eternal novice, leaping from one type of media and technique to the other, time and again, in this way escaping the categorisations and generalisations inherent to certain generations of artists and their artistic movements.

In 1965 he forsook painting to create his first objects: various T-shapes in glass fibre intended to be associated with the movements of the body. Nauman comments: "These are not just forms to be looked at; these are the shapes of my body, which alone are sufficient to justify their existence." In smashing the boundaries of sculpture that characterise it as "merely a form to be looked at", he already places himself far beyond the practice of other artists at the time. This artistic feat is what makes him a worthy and important pioneer of conceptual art. He is also famous for the saying: "*You don't have to look at a box - all you have to do is think about it.*"

Nauman sought to understand what it means to be an artist, which led him, for example, to film himself in his studio towards the end of the sixties. At the same time, his film was also a first step towards what later would become an art form itself, that is, the option of capturing things on their own, without an accompanying script or story, assisted by new media. And yet, the narrative, literary, and especially the verbal are important in his work. For instance, his neon objects made up of words. Art is what the artists does in the studio. Once he arrives at this elementary yet utterly all-encompassing conclusion, art

seemed more to him an activity than a product. Nauman concentrates less on developing a style than on the way in which a process or activity may be transformed into a work of art. For that reason he sees the artistic practice as something that consists of "exploring the possibilities of what art could be", instead of "adding a work of art to a collection".

Nauman's work consists of performance, sculptures, environments, photography, film, holograms, lithographs, prints, books and drawings, comprehensive neon projects and video installations.

### ARTWORK:

This fragment of a video from Bruce Nauman's installation *Violent Incident* lasts a mere 28 seconds. The larger work consists of twelve screens, which form a single wall; the screens themselves display twelve defining moments of a romantic candlelit dinner. Partially comical and partially biting, this piece illustrates how easily domestic tensions can escalate to unbearable levels. This tension between humour and malice tells us something about the contradictoriness inherent to human nature, which is an important catalyst in Nauman's work.



## Liza May Post

Dutch photographer **Liza May Post** (°1965) didn't enrol in her first art course until she was 23, first at the Rietveld Academy and later at the Rijksacademie, both in Amsterdam. Her focus is on highly-stylised photography and film work, through which she attempts to capture the essence of human postures and movement.

Post devotes her time to exploring the coercion that people experience as a result of their surroundings along with their inability to resist this pressure. She takes the impotence of humans and distils it, as it were, into scenes that have been radically simplified; the characters in her work are anonymous 'interim figures', devoid of personal characteristics. They are positioned in such a way as to obscure the viewer's gaze, with faces turned away or hidden beneath or behind garments. All the while they perform a strange, irrational choreography, contorted and frozen in their positions, alone and isolated, and unable to come into contact with each other. They appear to be lost, wandering and caught up in an autistic universe.

Her film work contains no escalating build-up of tension or any dramatic developments, her intent is rather to elicit a certain atmosphere. She implies more than she says, and her works live and move and find their being in the logic of dreams rather than the rational. Liza May Post personally describes her own work as sublimated images from the stories that live in her head. She doesn't really care whether the viewer is able to reconstruct those stories, it is "the point", the essence and the atmosphere that she

is seeking to convey, all condensed into a single image. The result is often a comical or ridiculous fusion of movements and situations; however, more often than not what prevails is a feeling of oppression and a bitter aftertaste.

On a scale that barely skims the surface, her works represent psychological disorders, psychological breaks and the mind's collapse. Despair and madness are recurring elements in this oppressive oeuvre.

### ARTWORK:

*Duwen* [*Push*] shows huge refrigerated counter full of pre-packaged meat. The viewer sees the case from the top. A person's hand presses into the plastic foil wrapped around one of the meat packages. This bizarre perspective, combined with the packages of raw meat, regimented in orderly rows according to the type of meat, and the rusty shades of the tiled floor turn this photograph into a piece that could almost be called abstract. *Duwen* highlights the bizarre act of "pushing" to an even greater extent through the tight, geometric background that dominates the piece. The only glimpse the viewer has of the character is an arm, a lock of hair, a shoulder strap and a shoe. The space *Duwen* occupies is in itself a kind of vacuum: there is no plot and there is no rhyme or reason to the story.



© MHKA

## Artūras Raila

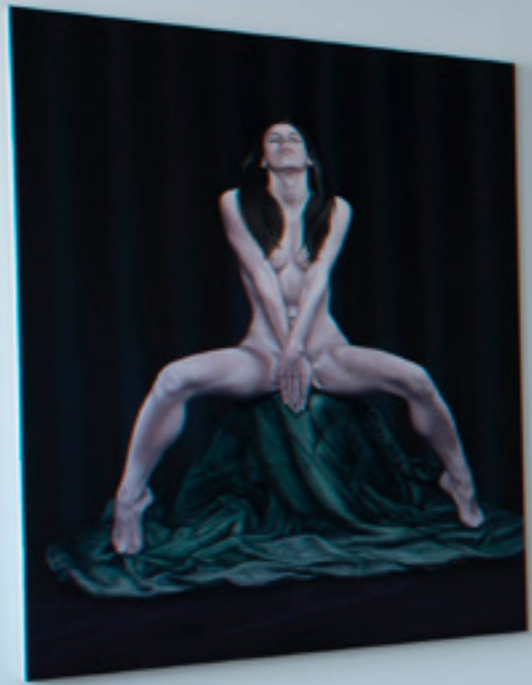
Shortly after finishing his studies on sculpture, **Artūras Raila** (°1962) decided to change the direction of his artwork. Since the mid-nineties, Raila has created subversive works in diverse forms of media, which inspire reflection. His pieces employ all manner of techniques, from film and photography, to the written word and performance art. Some of which take place in art institutes, while others do not. Raila lives and works in Vilnius where he teaches photography at the art academy.

His intelligent, non-academic approach to institutional criticism and discourse analysis are what make it possible for him to effectively expose the concealed undercurrents of contemporary society, both in Lithuania and elsewhere. His pieces often show or simulate how “ordinary people” perceive their world, history and the society they live in. To accomplish this effect, Raila works in close proximity with social target groups and subcultures. From an ethical and practical perspective he is utterly transparent with the people he works with. By relying on this method he is able to simultaneously tone down and further accentuate the critical tone of his creations. Raila incorporates the contributions of these people into the scripts of his new pieces; however, he always leaves room for the unexpected.

### ARTWORK:

*Under the Flag* exposes how the world view of self-proclaimed neo-Nazis is deeply rooted in the everyday Soviet mentality. The work allows us to see the workings of illiberal populism up close. Fifteen years ago the EU made half-hearted attempts to boycott Austria after Jörg Haider’s party joined its federal government, the start of a continuing rise of right-wing extremism. *Under the Flag* shows the leaders of a Lithuanian neo-Nazi party as they express their fascination for Haider. In doing so, they expose themselves, on a platform provided by the artist, to the public.





## Koka (Akaki) Ramishvili

**Koka (Akaki) Ramishvili** (°1956) lives and works in Geneva. He is one of the many Georgian artists whose work has been strongly influenced by post-Soviet topics. His art has a political dimension, but it reflects on politics, rather than take a stance. Ramishvili uses various topics and media to react to the changes in values he observes.

In the seventies, Ramishvili studies painting, but finds that he could no longer create 'traditional' artistic images in the long 'transition period' following the renewed independence of Georgia in 1991. Instead, he starts a continuous visual analysis of the new reality. For this reason he starts to make 'documentary' images (photos and videos) and sometimes appropriates images of other authors, which he places in new contexts. Another recurring theme in his work is the overlap of private and public space, and the influence of moments of general crisis.

In Ramishvili's work there is a continuous interaction between the various media he uses. The complexity of his work stems from an awareness of the specificity of each medium and the relationship with other forms of expressions. This awareness also leads him to greater accuracy in the different themes he intertwines.

### ARTWORK:

The series of black and white photographs *War From My Window* is a bold comment on the bloody conflicts in Georgia after the declaration of independence in 1991. Over a period of twelve days, the artist photographs the combat in the centre of his hometown, Tbilisi, from his window. Displayed as a filmstrip and presented as a story, the smoke of the bombs creates an alienating contrast with the seemingly calm, indifferent neighbourhood.



## Hugo Roelandt

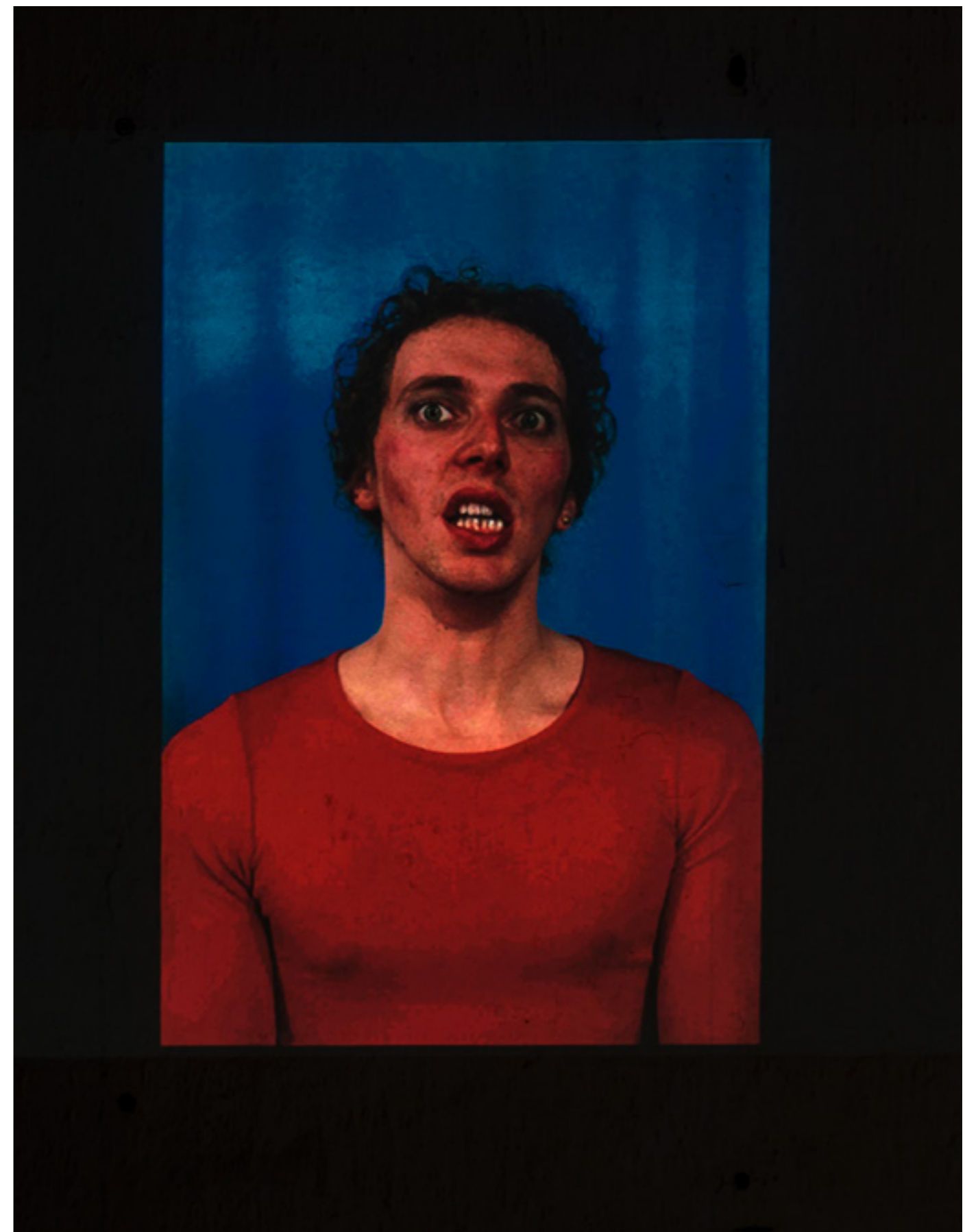
The Belgian artist **Hugo Roelandt** (1950–2015) is one of the pioneers of performance art in Belgium in the seventies and eighties. He consciously operates outside the art market and has an eye for questions about society. Besides that, he was a real ‘artist’s artist’ and a reference in both his city of origin Aalst and in Antwerp, where he lived for most of his life. He advocated an art beyond the art market and geared towards society. During the mid-seventies he visualises gender and identity fluidity in a way that is still relevant.

Combining his insights from photography and performance art, he evolves towards a personal crossover of performance, documentation and installation art for which he coins the label ‘post-performance’. Charismatic and energetic, he continuously cooperates with a multitude of people.

Hugo Roelandt generously bequeathed part of his estate to the Antwerp Academy, where he was a teacher in the photography department. In consultation with Lydia Van Loock, his spouse, the Academy decided that the artists’ archive should stay together at M HKA as a platform for research about the artist and performance art in Belgium.

### ARTWORK:

In the series *Geprojecteerde gevoelens tegenover iets of iemand* (Projected Feelings Towards Something or Somebody) Hugo Roelandt expresses a variety of feelings and emotions. In these self-portraits we see Roelandt in several guises. The facial expressions in the eighty slides are often exaggerated or comical. Roelandt found that the preparations for these photos were more fascinating to him than the final result. During this period Roelandt prefers the creative process, the staging and manipulating, which was his first step to ‘live’ performances.



## Olga Tobreluts

**Olga Tobreluts** (°1970) is born in Leningrad, where she first studied architecture, later turning her hand to the visual arts: photography, video, sculpture and painting. She was part of the Neo-Academism Movement championed by its creator, Timur Novikov, taking the techniques associated with this movement and combining them with cutting-edge developments in media technology.

Since the nineties Tobreluts has been using the computer as a full-fledged technical medium to create realistic 3D models, which she often integrates in both her paintings and photographic works. Through her combined use of historical fact and myth, as well as the challenges of contemporary culture, both content-related and thematic, hybrid manipulations manifest that convert the past into an estranging hyper reality.

Tobreluts is considered the pioneer of Russia's digital art movement.

### ARTWORK:

Olga Tobreluts uses modern technology to render heroic battles of the past as hyper-realistic events that are populated with contemporary characters. This technique results in grotesque images of a virtual future assembled from recollections of a primeval past, where contemporary dancers and sports players battle dragons and demons in settings that are a direct reference to the baroque.



© M HKA

## Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven

**Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven** (°1951) – also known as AMVK – covers a broad range of media in complex installations. Her practice contains drawings, paintings, performances, computer animations, video installations and self-published printed material.

In 1981 Van Kerckhoven founds the anarchist band Club Moral together with fellow artist Danny Devos. This experience reverberates in her subsequent work, with its activist, alternative edge.

In her critical and socially engaged oeuvre the image plays a central role, particularly the image of women – not as an innocent iconographic motif, but as a projection surface for many unresolved social, political and ideological issues. With her images of strong, confident women AMVK offers an alternative to the traditional visual understanding of seductive female nudity. Van Kerckhoven says: 'I use the female figure specifically as a metaphor for what the world does to people, to our culture, to us.'

Among her recurring themes is the relationship between intelligence and intuition, man and animal, human and artificial intelligence. For AMVK art has an explicitly critical function when it comes to society. She questions the active power structures in the art world and in society in general.

True to her background in noise music, she sometimes combines her visual work with strong lyrics and expressive music. Her oeuvre 'rescues' words from their everyday context and inserts them into a new context that makes the activation of new meanings possible. Yet she primarily addresses us in images and words that are deliberately ambiguous.

### ARTWORKS:

Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven adapts two books of fabric samples. On each patch she combines a drawing of a woman in a voluptuous, seductive pose with such words as: 'action' or 'conduire le mental'. These images of naked pin-ups are combined with concepts from widely diverse contexts, such as advanced technology, anatomy or psychology. The connection between the words and the images, which appear to have nothing in common, disrupts the usual and familiar meaning of these words and images.



© M HKA





Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, *Concept of Anxiety*, 1993, Loan M HKA from Stichting Beeldende Kunst Middelburg/De Vleeshal  
Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, *Traité du Caractère*, 1993, Loan M HKA from Stichting Beeldende Kunst Middelburg/De Vleeshal

## Wout Vercammen

**Wout Vercammen** (1938-2018) is an Antwerp artist who took his Belgian nationality and turned it into a readymade product. He patents the Belgian national flag as an artistic concept and employs this striking colour pattern in much of his graphic art.

As a young artist, he studies to become a typographer, and develops a special interest in the turbulent events of the time, both in contemporary art and on the political stage. During the early sixties, he is closely involved with the happenings and colourful, carnival-like street performances orchestrated in Antwerp's city centre. By using images and text collages, he gradually develops his own unique form of expression. He creates letter and action paintings that form a critique on society – mostly in oil or acrylic on canvas – with a very direct and often humorous imagery. Subversive thinking and cynical understatements are frequently featured in his works. Over time he also uses the square metre as a standard measurement for his canvases.

His uncompromising attitude makes him a living legend on the Antwerp art scene, at the same time it caused him to become both outsider and outcast in the established world of contemporary art. Shortly before his death he is recognised in the public sphere, with three exhibitions of his work shown at M HKA in 2015; these exhibitions were prompted by the publication of a monograph on Vercammen, authored by Ronny Van de Velde.

### ARTWORK:

For the 2015 INBOX presentation, Wout Vercammen reissued his vividly-coloured silkscreen prints based on his original works from 1972. *Orgasme-strijder* [*Orgasm Warrior*] is part of a series of images made up of collected news items from various newspapers and magazines. For the 2015 reissue, Vercammen placed what were once separate images on top of one another, creating a cohesiveness in terms of content and causing the images' internal discourse to be even more explicit. War, religion, the sexual revolution and the capitalist system are all addressed in Vercammen's series.



Dutch conceptual artist **Barbara Visser** (°1966) works mainly as a photographer, film and performance artist. She also works as a director, documentary maker and scriptwriter. Visser studies photography at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam and continues her studies at the Van Eyck Academy in Maastricht.

Her artistic practice is characterised by the creation of chaos amidst patterns of expectation. To achieve this she employs, in a fashion uniquely particular to herself, the alienation of reality by using overwhelming powers of visual persuasion. She not only tries to sow confusion and mislead her viewers, but attempts to nestle within the dubious twilight zone that spans the myriad realities. Barbara Visser's efforts are occupied with the highly uncertain relationship between recording and dramatization. In addition, she toys with the concepts of the original and the copy, and explores how images can influence and distort history and collective memory. In so doing she attempts to expose clichés and shatter entrenched conceptual frameworks. Among others, she draws attention to her work with a series of photographs of a bather, basking in the sun – entitled *Le monde appartient à ceux qui se lèvent tôt* [*The World Belongs to Early Risers*] – juxtaposed with a photographer taking shots of a refugee washed up further ashore.

**ARTWORK:**

Toying with alternate realities or possibilities, and working with copies – to cast doubt on authenticity – are recurring themes in Barbara Visser's artistic practice.



© M HKA

# 3. THE DEVIL & MADNESS

Location: Gasthuismuseum

Campaign image: Liliane Vertessen

Liliane Vertessen and Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin,  
Sergey Bratkov, Jan Cox, Jan De Lauré,  
Douglas Gordon, Sigefride Bruna Hautman,  
Rebecca Horn, Barbara Kruger, Donna Kukama,  
Taus Makhacheva, Nadia Naveau, ORLAN,  
Cindy Sherman, Frank Theys, Joëlle Tuerlinckx,  
Jan Van Oost, Minnette Vári, Ina Wudtke  
and Yang Zhenzhong

It's a crazy story, that of Dymphna, and a story full of madness. The devil lurks around every corner. But what is the core of the madness here? The desperation of the father when his wife dies, the delusion of marrying his daughter, or the fury leading to her decapitation?

Hallucinations and delusions can occur, making thinking and emotions confused. Disorders affect identity and physical functioning. Insanity or madness or lunacy: reality loses its normal sense because reason is disturbed, the mind bewildered. Where the Middle Ages distinguished categories such as phrenesis, insania, epilepsy and hysteria, the enlightenment started seeing madness as the opposite of reason, and subsequently, madmen were declared mentally ill. A pathological system was developed, but without clarity about the causes, which can be biochemical as well as genetic, and in which both psychological and social factors play a role. With sixties anti-psychiatry, these systematics and their treatments are rejected, and seen as social constructions and power manipulations.

The Gasthuismuseum (or Hospital Museum) is a good location for the theme of madness, not so much because once, alongside the sick, pilgrims were also cared for, but above all because, as tradition has it, it was built on the spot where, in a fury, Dymphna was beheaded by her father.

Liliane Vertessen takes up the knife herself in her title image, *It's the experience of madness*. One's own border experience is also the starting point for artists like Jan Cox, who exorcises his childhood memories; Douglas Gordon, who transfers a truth drug to what is only apparently just a self-portrait but is actually a portrait

of the artist; and Cindy Sherman, who again and again transforms her self-appearance. Frank Theys and Yang Zhenzhong evoke the nightly delusions of life and death. Madness also has a social dimension: that of drug use and its criminalisation (portrayed by Sergey Bratkov); media forgery (thematized by Barbara Kruger); social adjustment (undone by Donna Kukama); and the relationship between ethnic platitudes and the personal (a subject by Taus Makhacheva).

For art, shifting the image people have of themselves, and aiming to change the one they try to make of the world, is not a problem, but a possibility. Art embraces the space in which the false certainty of ideologies crumbles and the unstable 'comes into the picture'. This is what Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, Jan De Lauré, Nadia Naveau, Joëlle Tuerlinckx and Jan Van Oost show us. And it allows us to question one's own position, as Sigefride Bruna Hautman, Rebecca Horn and ORLAN do, with lust for freedom and grandeur; Minnette Vári, who relates to the flood of images; and Ina Wudtke, who embraces the whole absurdity of her position and gets to work. It is imagination that opens up and makes reality once more into a possibility.



**WAANZIN**

**Liliane Vertessen** (°1952) has, since the beginning of her career, developed an incredibly personal vision for her work, employing her own outward appearance and basing this vision on photographs that she shapes to her own ends. Her multimedia installations take these aspects as a point of departure. At the root of her work is a pictorial sensitivity, in this way uniting her to an artistic movement that has seen a steady increase to the coalescence of different forms of media.

Vertessen photographs herself in a variety of poses, poses which are erotically charged and highly staged. She experiments with a wide spectrum of those roles in which women are so often depicted: seductress, lady, sex object, prostitute and innocent little girl. These roles are presented for consideration, as objects of both celebration and criticism; however, there is often an element of melancholy that pervades her works. They are reminiscent of images from the past, imbued with poetic intensity and a power that exudes authenticity.

Vertessen regularly combines analogue photography with neon or other elements in her works, thereby embedding the photograph as base into a pictorial experience. Many aspects of her work display similarities to painting: the *mise-en-scène*, the self-portrait as a subject, or the creative process taking place in the intimacy of the studio may all be seen in light of this tradition.

Despite her frequent depiction of herself as a fighter and someone who puts her own interests first, the truth, nevertheless is that she is and remains an artist who is reserved and remarkably modest. She does very little to catapult herself into the world of art's blinding spotlight.

### ARTWORKS:

In this self-portrait the artist embraces her imagined alter ego. It is an early work by Liliane Vertessen, from the period in which she experiments with neon's and skimpy clothing to portray her internal struggle with identity and intimacy. The image exudes a desire for freedom and personal development, but also sin and rebellion.

This black and white self-portrait shows despair and madness. The mirror image appears to want to engage in a dialogue with itself, however this is obstructed by the threat of the knife. The image hesitates and remains speechless.



## Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin

The Turkish artist **Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin** (1957-2007) studies aesthetics, sociology and art history at the universities of Ankara and Paris. In the beginning, the young academic takes a philosophical professional approach as a critic, photographer and author, but from the nineties onwards he becomes more and more active in the visual arts, with a strong thematic interest for globalisation, migration and cultural interaction.

Inspired by major geopolitical changes taking place in society – to be specific, the unstoppable force of capitalism, which takes place in all layers of society and almost everywhere in the world – he concentrates on his artistic research, on the quality, the objective truth and morality of the overriding consumption rationale. Concretely, he starts to show the dreams and illusions, which are presented to the population of the world as real, by including them in his metaphoric installations, slogan-like neon signs and confrontational photographic series.

Alptekin belongs to the first generation of Turkish artists, who were active and influential throughout the world. As the protagonist of the of the modern Turkish art scene, he is invited to represent his country at the Venice Biennale of 2007, with the installation *Don't Complain*. He exhibited previously at the Biennale of São Paulo (1998), Manifesta 5 (2004), and was granted the UNESCO prize for the entirety of his oeuvre, which can be seen as the aesthetic conclusion of sociological research and political statement.

Alptekin strives for a radical ethical positioning in his art, without raising the slightest suggestion of moral superiority. Nostalgia and melancholy are softly interwoven with transience and leniency. With that, Alptekin has always remained true to his academic origins: He is an aesthete and a moral philosopher camouflaged as an artist, and vice versa.

### ARTWORK:

*Tremor Rumour Hoover* is one of a number of works produced using a commercial sign-making technique that forms rows of large sequins which shimmer in the wind. *Tremor Rumour Hoover* is based on highly subjective wordplay and puns. Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin would often write poems offering philosophical understandings of his life and the world. In his notes he captures the saying “Tremor makes rumour / Rumour makes Humour”. This should be put into relation to the fear for another earthquake in Istanbul, following the large earthquake on 17 August, 1999. Alptekin often chose series of words with multiple meanings, both simple and complex.



© M HKA

## Sergey Bratkov

**Sergey Bratkov** (°1960) is born in Kharkov, Ukraine, where he finishes his studies at the Repin Art Academy in 1978 and at the Polytechnic Academy in 1983. As a photographer, he becomes a member of the artists' collective "Litera A" in the eighties, and subsequently of the "Rapid Response Group", which is known for creating provocative photo campaigns, as a reaction to political and social atrocities. Bratkov lives and works in Moscow since 2000.

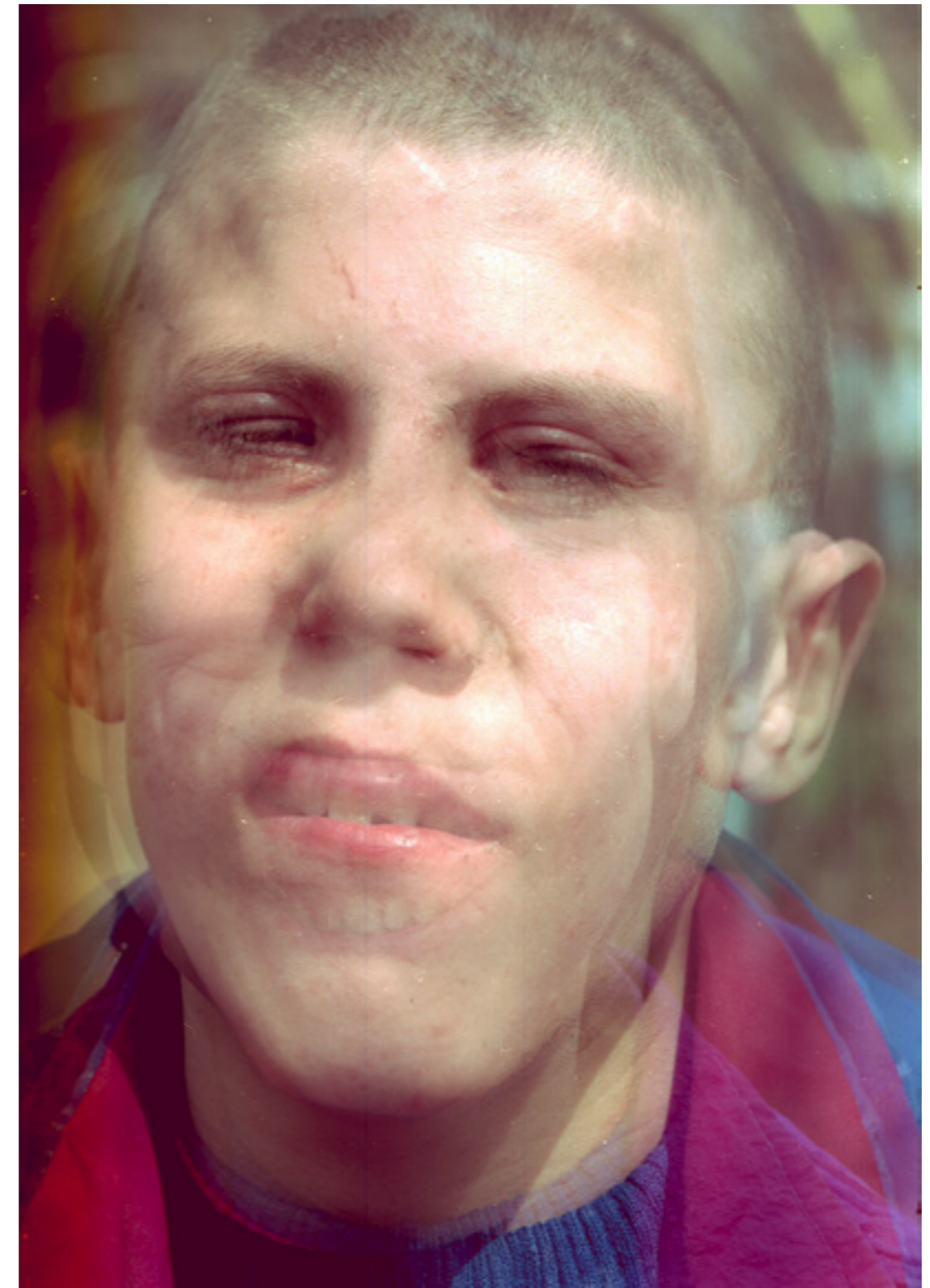
He makes series of photos and video installations, installation and performances. His works reflect the social reality of Russia and the Ukraine, with a special focus on the life of the homeless, the poor and the impoverished middle-class. He shows social poverty in post-Soviet daily life and transforms it through very specific, at times absurd, choices in his imaging.

His work is known for its brutal openness and biting irony, whereby provocation is a necessary evil for achieving the goal of gaining sharper insights.

With his carefully staged visual language, Bratkov questions propaganda of a continent in transition: caught between a glorification of the Soviet system, on the one hand, and the illusion of a free market on the other hand, which has been idealised by mass media. These serially conceived photos of Bratkov are his artistic witnesses of social resistance.

### ARTWORK:

The series *Glue Sniffers* consists of pictures of glue-sniffing youths. The pictures are taken in a closed correctional facility for underage delinquents, on a sun-flooded courtyard with grapevines. Bratkov took double-takes using a 6x6 camera, which resulted in blurry, unclear pictures, much like the vision of a drugged individual. The series can also be interpreted as a reflection on the Soviet rhetoric of the 'Happy Soviet Childhood'.





## Jan Cox

The Belgian-Dutch painter and graphic artist **Jan Cox** (1919-1980) studies history and archaeology in Ghent. In 1945, he co-founds the Jeune Peinture Belge group, which renewed the foundations for contemporary art after the Second World War through abstract modernism.

In 1950, Jan Cox moves to New York, where he is employed as a professor of painting, in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. After artistic wanderings via Rome, he moves back to Antwerp in 1976, where he concentrates fully on painting and graphic art. Together with Fred Bervoets, Walter Goossens and Wilfried Pas, he becomes one of the pivotal artists of the Antwerp gallery De Zwarte Panter. The work of Jan Cox during this period is characterised by careful compositions, with a magical, surreal atmosphere, a gestural capacity and an expressive colour palette, which refers back to the Cobra artists. Cox, however, works in a more controlled fashion – no spontaneous Fauvism but well-considered compositions, with references to ‘classic’ themes such as violence, cruelty and vulnerability. In his last work – which lays at the core of M HKA’s commitment to Cox – he is even more explicitly searching for a way to cope with the atrocities people both experience and cause. This had been an obsession of his since his experience as a young man in the time leading up to the Second World War. In 1980 the artist takes his own life.

### ARTWORKS:

In *Oh! Those Voices, Boston* Jan Cox combines scenes from daily life with flashes of memories and feelings. Visions induced by alcohol intoxication alternate with phantasms of death and doom, like those we see in stories from the Bible and Greek mythology.

Jan Cox’s later work is characterised by exhaustive reflections on life and work, expressed in both his paintings and his written journals. This is not difficult to understand, at the time Cox suffered from an exhausting manic-depressive breakdown, marked by extreme emotional surges seesawing between periods of hyperactive excitability and deep mental depression. During this period Cox re-examines childhood memories, translating these in a number of paintings. In *Herinneringen aan mijn kinderjaren (Memories of my Childhood)*, these early recollections reverberate alongside later vivid impressions of the Arizona deserts.



© M HKA



Jan De Lauré (°1978) bases his paintings on images sourced from the media; in his own words: they are images, that are impossible to forget. He has no interest in looking for predefined themes, but rather opts to work with images that have piqued his interest. In an effort to create a painting almost photographic in its quality, he works with thin layers of oil paint; this process, however staggeringly impressive it may be in terms of technique, takes a back seat when juxtaposed to the sheer representational power and impact of the image itself.

The artist often emphasises images that at first glance appear almost banal, but which still leave a lasting impression. He uses shifts of emphasis and purposeful disfigurement to occasionally evoke a sense of cynicism in his images, sometimes with bizarre, alienating undertones. It is precisely in focussing on what is baffling about the image, a characteristic always worked out in the minutest of details, that he conjures feelings of loss in the viewer, as though its essence has taken leave or has somehow gone missing.

#### ARTWORKS:

Jan De Lauré paints to show fragments of the world that might otherwise go unnoticed by the viewer. The work *Untitled* is a 'fossilised', timeless image. The grand emotions are absent from this painting; it mainly evokes an introverted, melancholic atmosphere. The figures are portrayed isolated from the world, which lend a sinister sensation to his works. As can be seen in this girl, who one would expect to be holding a doll, rather than a baby. The viewers have to provide their own interpretation.

The 2015 work *Sterven is oefenen # 2 [Dying is practice #2]* depicts three silent characters of bygone days, who with a sacred quality, incarnate the ascendancy of a woman's body. The painting is executed on two glass plates and requires special lighting, which further reinforces the astral magic of dying.





## Douglas Gordon

**Douglas Gordon** (°1966) is a video artist and photographer, who also does performances, actions and makes installations. Gordon creates art with a strong foothold in life: he makes no distinction between 'the outside world' and the 'art world'. The message is key and the medium changes according to it. The place is also adapted to fit the message; after all, the context determines if the receiver is able to understand the message. This is why he doesn't just create pieces for museums, but also carries out his projects in cafes, on buses or via the post or internet.

Gordon is intrigued by how individuals handle familiar images in an entirely unique and personal way. He explores how memory, imagination and images from the world around us all interrelate. He adapts and manipulates fragments of memories in his art works. This allows him to show his own version of the visual material stored in his subconscious. Gordon starts from original images, but disconnects their seemingly familiarity by showing them in extreme slow motion or through unexpected reversals or duplications. Each viewer in turn responds in their own, personal way to the works. This variation is what fascinates the artist. He prefers to describe his works as 'democratic', rather than 'ambiguous'. The viewer decides what he does with his experience.

### ARTWORK:

*Self Portrait (Kissing with Scopolamine)* is one of the works in a three-part series Douglas Gordon describes as 'portraits with truth drugs'. During the performance, the artist kissed three different people on the lips, each time with a different 'truth drug' on his lips. Despite the x-ray-like close ups and the use of the 'truth drug', the viewer is left in the dark regarding the true circumstances of the relationship between the two kissing parties. With the series Gordon offers a commentary on the voyeurism in our society, the urge to see what usually remains unseen.



## Sigefride Bruna Hautman

**Sigefride Bruna Hautman** (°1955) is an arresting figure in the Flemish art scene in the early eighties with the emergence of a new form of figurative art. Her focus lay on sculpture, freestanding sculptures and reliefs, and poetic reflections on paper, often in English and illustrated with speech balloons, eye-catching headings and captions.

Her work is hermetic and difficult to pin down, and yet it communicates well. Its content bursting with spiritual imagery, most evident in her written work, but also appearing in her expressive works of art. Her oeuvre unites word, image and painting, without the intent of abolishing the boundaries dividing them: each of the forms co-exists with the other, giving rise to a poetic unity. Her sculptures and images give the impression of being thoughts which have solidified into clay or plaster, with poetry broken up into fragments, like wisps of a dream, blossoming from the subconscious. Figuratively speaking, her work remains only partially legible and draws on recurring symbolic images: leaping figures, masks, urns, eyes, plants and waves of water. All is sculpted, cast,

drawn or engraved. Associations with cosmology (earth, fire, water, air) are conjured up, and become an invitation to psychoanalysis; yet with every rational revelation new questions are raised imbuing these manifestations with a mythic character, inundated with the cryptic and unexplained.

### ARTWORK:

The obstinate simplicity of the English statement employed here as title exemplifies the imagery of Sigefride Bruna Hautman's oeuvre. The installation is an invitation to accept what is earthly and mundane – for heaven itself is unattainable – while at the same time leaving space for meditation and reflection.



## Rebecca Horn

The German artist and filmmaker **Rebecca Horn** (°1944) has studied painting and sculpture at the Hamburg Academy. She lives in Barcelona after her studies, where, due to a respiratory ailment, she stays at a health care centre for a long time. There she creates objects that are as bizarre as they are simple, she calls them “body extensions”. Eroticised prostheses made of soft materials, which are carried by Horn and her associated artists during performances. The artist leads an adventurous and nomadic life, which brings her alternately to Paris, London, New York and Berlin.

As of the end of the seventies, more and more mechanical equipment and all kinds of disconcerting machines appear in her oeuvre, and references to occult rituals are embroidered with masks, feathers, wings and prostheses. Her theatrical-poetic imagination conceives a wondrous dream world, filled with emotional fragility and a desire for transformation.

At the end of the seventies this constant tension between performance and representation leads to the production of a first feature film – *Der Eintänzer*, which is followed by four more films, in which the artist brings sculptures and choreographies from her pictorial oeuvre to life. These are bizarre stories, full of unexpected, surrealistically tinted twists and turns. In these films, her objects gain an increasing independence – they appear as actors next to living persons: hammers

hammer away on their own, empty swings swing back and forth, springs move until they come to a stop, with unexpected force and violence. Lifeless objects gain a human inspiration, and people turn into monstrous machines. The mechanised sculptures become pictures of human vulnerability, impotence, aggression or desire. Conversely, the persons in the films lose their intuitive and individual capacities and, in their obsessive behaviour, begin to resemble machines. Above all, these films evoke her mental obsession for the imperfect body and of imploring rites for coping with this.

### ARTWORK:

In de performances van Rebecca Horn The human body is central to Rebecca Horn's performances of the seventies. With her choreographic rituals, as an artist she centres her focus on the mythical identification of humankind with nature. Nature, culture, mythology and technology all coalesce in these performances. A vital and significant relationship between the spectator and her work is brought about by the movement of these performances: they evoke astonishment or it is precisely this sense of wonder that the spectator awaits in anticipation, followed by an expectation that this sense of wonder will be repeated.



## Barbara Kruger

**Barbara Kruger** (°1945) lives and works in New York and Los Angeles. She studies visual arts and design in New York and works for several magazines as a graphic designer and head of the design department.

This background would prove crucial to her subsequent artistic activity. Visual language drawn from the mass media offers very powerful communication tools. Barbara Kruger appropriates the clichés and techniques used in the mass media for artistic ends. She works with the same strategies, but only to transmit her own critical message on sexuality and social and political issues. She replaces messages that in the mass media are intended to encourage consumption by critical, aggressive one-liners like *I shop therefore I am*, *I am not trying to sell you anything* or *When I hear the word culture I take out my check book*. She raises questions about how power functions and its effect on the human condition: how is power accumulated, used and misused. Constantly recurring themes in her subversive and investigative work are feminism, consumption, individual autonomy and desire. She designed posters for a women's-rights demonstration in 1989 in Washington, wrote a much-translated feminist pamphlet and published pieces on discrimination against minorities and AIDS patients.

Kruger's work is shown in museums and galleries, but also on advertising billboards, bus stops, posters, T-shirts and plastic bags, as well as in stations, parks or other public places.

At first sight, what you see is advertisement. But what you read, clashes with customary advertising messages. In recent work, in addition to written text, Kruger also uses sound, and video-projection alongside photography. The confrontation with the viewer becomes ever more intrusive and claustrophobic; her work comes even closer to the public. Kruger's concept is both public and political.

### ARTWORK:

*We Are Not What We Seem* refers both to the photo itself as to the broader social context. No image exists that can be interpreted without ambiguity. Is this woman holding a magnifying glass in her hand, is she taking a contact lens out of her eye? Nothing is what it seems at first sight. Illusion and reality are intertwined and merge into one another. The montage is deliberately made visible. The veracity of photography and the deceptive language of the mass media are being questioned here. The combination of typographical messages and black and white photography makes Barbara Kruger's work easily recognisable.



© M HKA



**Donna Kukama** (°1981) uses performance to make visible the movements, tensions and emotions of contemporary society. To diagnose and perhaps even heal society, we might say, if that weren't such a stereotypical statement about South Africa. Kukama's own country is her main arena, although she also works elsewhere in the African continent and in Europe. She performs in 'real' spaces – streets and squares and shopping malls – with 'real' people in them, but she introduces a significant specification: *"Half of the time it's real spaces and real people, and the other half it's kind of imagined somewhere in the past or future."*

Kukama's art creates strong visual images that are open to socio-political interpretation. She is trying to combine the solidarity of the political activist with non-alignment of the artist. Her works become meaningful not only as commentary on people's expectations of and frustrations with social reality, but also as a response to the framework she has chosen to work in: art history in its 'universal' western-dominated form.

**ARTWORK:**

Donna Kukama is standing in an open field in Nairobi as participants are leaving a meeting celebrating Kenya's Mau Mau uprising against its British colonisers in the fifties. At first it appears that she is putting on lipstick, which may or may not be signalling respect for the elderly passers-by. But gradually, as she paints outside the accepted area, her whole face becomes blood red, and the retiring freedom fighters may read this as allegory, or even illustration, shedding light on their mostly unfulfilled political expectations.



## Taus Makhacheva

Between 2002 and 2013 **Taus Makhacheva** (°1983) follows different education cycles in arts, communication and economy, both in Russia and in England. While she is still a student, she takes part in the 4th Moscow Biennial.

Taus Makhacheva is part of the Avars, the largest ethnic group in Dagestan. Her grandfather was the country's national poet, known throughout the Soviet Union. Makhacheva uses objects, movies and performances to re-position herself in a localised narrative within a context where the notion of "nation" does not exist. Makhacheva's oeuvre questions the classical forms of history, governing cultural conventions and gender issues. With an attitude that is both humorous and critical towards contemporary society, Makhacheva strives to reconcile the present-day with nostalgia, local with global, and tradition with progress. She scrutinises the complex Caucasian society and the relationship between its history, collective memory and daily reality. With a sense of humour, Makhacheva explores the limits of identification within a cultural or physical landscape. As the successful 'Super Taus' she also refers to a character from an Iranian artist, the anti-hero 'Super Sohrab'.

Makhacheva asks poignant questions about the functioning of art, museums and art history. How are collections kept, how are collections assembled, to what extent is a museum a reflection of past and present values, what can be seen as useful art? In addition, she also looks at who is leading the dialogue and seeks a more active role for objects in local museums. She also questions her own practice: how will you be remembered as an artist, what is your legacy and how do you handle criticism and the opinion of others?

### ARTWORK:

*Landscape* consists of a miniature mountain range made of wooden noses. The noses are modelled after North Caucasian faces. Taus Makhacheva explores the limits of identification within a cultural or a physical landscape with a sense of humour. At the same time the work refers to affordable plastic surgery, a recent development



© M HKA

**Nadia Naveau** (°1975) studies sculpture at the Koninklijke Academie and trains at the Higher Institute for Fine Arts, both in Antwerp. She has been teaching sculpture at the Antwerp Academy of Fine Arts since 2006 and exhibits regularly in Belgium and abroad.

Naveau experiments with forms, material and use of colour in her work. She draws inspiration for her sculptures from a variety of contexts, which she moulds together to create a strange, highly personal imagination. She seamlessly unites classical forms and iconography with those of our contemporary society. Every image has its own story. Naveau explores the boundaries between the figurative and the abstract, the Baroque and the stylised, the contemporary and the classical, and blends them in her works. The eclectic images consist of different forms and elements, composed in a single sculpture or combined in an installation.

*“It is important to me that an image creates a sense of estrangement. I like images that pull me in and make me feel unsure about what I should do with them, what their intentions are. You can taste a good image, it has something appetising...”*

Naveau creates both life-sized and very small pieces, generally fashioning them

in clay. She then executes her sculptures and installations in the most varied of materials: plaster, ceramic, polyester, concrete or plasticine.

**ARTWORK:**

*Nicholas Heracles* shows the face of the painter Nick Andrews, Nadia Naveau’s friend and soul mate. Heracles (or Hercules) is a figure from Greek mythology, famous for the Twelve Labours he fulfilled at the request of King Eurystheus. In antiquity he was often depicted as a monumental figure in action, for instance killing a snake or a lion. In this work Naveau refers to the form of the classical portrait bust, but she gives it a contemporary interpretation. Her images never consist of just one form; they are always composed of different forms and/or materials. This is a good example of her many-faceted art.



© MHKA

## ORLAN

ORLAN (°1947) studies painting in the sixties and dives into the French art world with photographic *Body Sculptures* and performances that focus on her own body as a physical and mythical manifestation of the female.

ORLAN formulates strong gender positions and is keen to achieve precise and clear communication. Her artwork is literal and legible. At the same time, it connects with powerful 'basic layers' of human culture, such as myths, rites, body and instincts, which corresponds to what Freud called, in his attempt to categorise the unconscious, *Verdichtung and Verschiebung*.

ORLAN's work questions the collective unconscious expectations of what the female body and the female mind should be. In recent years, she has been increasingly identified with her use of surgery, and the changes to her own body as an artistic medium, especially with the videos and the permanent physical results of her *Surgery Performances* (1986-1993).

Nevertheless, her place in recent art history was already assured by the series of *MesuRAGE*, performances she started in 1968. *Mesurage* means 'measuring', while *rage* can both refer to 'mad rage' and 'doing your best'. The frequent use of easels and pieces of cloth at the beginning of these actions is a clear reference to painting. And it is said that the bed linen fabric comes from ORLAN's trousseau – an equally clear reference to traditional models of femininity.

In the summer of 1980, ORLAN enacted a remarkable performance at the Place Saint-Lambert in the historic city centre of Liège. Over a stretch of four days ORLAN physically committed herself to the preservation of the square, under siege by an ill-considered urban development project. She witnesses the arrival of a bulldozer, the same machine used at the time to demolish the square, and allows it to move her body like rubble from one place to another. Her objective in having

herself lowered into the bulldozer's blade is to physically embody a social issue. She looks at her gesture as a resistance at the margins, in a pose that alludes to the Statue of Liberty.

ORLAN uses her own body in these performances to act as a gauge for two types of objects: institutions and streets named after men. The setting of her performances are unique: they are performed without an audience, but rather with witnesses who describe them afterwards. Lying on the ground, ORLAN measures the length of the public space, to be documented after, but also notices the by-products, the dress itself that she is wearing to be washed out after, with rinse water mingled with dirt that in turn will also be stored. The signature of the witnesses becomes a different final form, and there are forms of memory, and other by-products, e.g., the ORLANcore, a measuring instrument measured to ORLAN's height, or life-size images of her accompanying the presentation of the documents.

### ARTWORK:

In 2012 M HKA and ORLAN re-enact the *MesuRAGE* performances, based on documentary and production material stored in the ICC archive, ORLAN not only creates two new *MesuRAGE* performances, at the M HKA and the Andy Warhol Foundation in Pittsburgh, she also creates a blow up sculpture of the performance, which took place over a quarter of a century earlier in Liège. In it she combines two images that were crucial to her in Liège, the bulldozer and her own person, reminiscent of the Statue of Liberty. She holds out a bottle filled with the dirt once caked on her white dress.



© M HKA



## Cindy Sherman

The American photographer and filmmaker **Cindy Sherman** (°1954) is one of the most important and influential art photographers of the past thirty years. Her work consists of staged photographs and can be described as a constant questioning of contemporary visual culture and its impact on how our images and identities are constructed.

The medium photography enables Sherman to work in a more conceptual way. She explores these concepts in photographic series, always untitled, in which she questions the role and representation of women in society, media and art.

Sherman's photos mostly refer directly to elements of contemporary visual culture. To create her 1980 debut series, *Untitled Film Stills*, she photographed herself as the embodiment of every imaginable Hollywood cliché about women in the fifties: devoted housewife, naive city girl, confident career woman, and so forth. By using herself as her model, Sherman simultaneously suggests that she is all of these women and none. The theme recurs in subsequent series. Her pictures gradually become more confrontational and shocking.

Sherman produces pictures in black and white and colour that are manipulated down to the smallest detail. Central to her work is the dual role she adopts as photographer and model. Sherman is simultaneously director, make-up artist, hair stylist, dresser and model. This way, she plays with the traditional gender roles that have defined the art decorum for centuries. Her photos evoke questions about authenticity and imitation, identity and identification. With stereotypical images and clichés, she knows how to get a grip on the viewer's fantasies and memories.

### ARTWORK:

The photograph *Untitled No 120 A* is part of Cindy Sherman's series *Fashion*. This series was commissioned by a New York fashion house for *Interview* magazine. The photographs exude an estranging, near-sinister air, certainly not in keeping with the usual conventions of fashion photography. With fashion advertising as medium, Sherman raises questions about clothing as 'second skin' and sign of identity.



© Syb'l. S. - Pictures

## Frank Theys

**Frank Theys** (°1963) studies fine art at the Brussels Academy of Art and philosophy at Brussels University. Theys, together with his brother Koen, initially produces audio-visual work, directs and stages theatre productions. Since 1996 he creates video installations, interactive multimedia and film. Theys is driven by fundamental research question and by further reflection on the medium 'video'.

His unique interpretation of the modern world stems from his fascination for technology and science and the effects they have on how we see and experience the world. The combination of this scientific interest and his personal reflection on the theme cause a tension that is inherent to his work. The theme of human vulnerability and our raw, everyday reality likewise recurs in his work. Theys approaches them in his own inquisitive way, offering the viewer a personal interpretation of contemporary society.

Using controlled and convincing video technique, Theys creates sensory films with an almost tangible power.

### ARTWORK:

A figure wakes up in the middle of the night and is afraid that he is suffering from a heart attack. *Night Fever* is a portrait of someone with a panic disorder. The film installation shows a person who sits imprisoned in his own house, his own world, a place where his fears are growing and he uncertainly asks help from the outside world. All the elements – the image, its positioning, the sound and the installation – cooperate in transmitting this oppressive and haunting experience to the viewer. With the help of a multi-screen installation and his assembly techniques, Theys wants to let the public creep into the head of the character.



**Joëlle Tuerlinckx** (°1958) studies in Brussels at the city's École de Recherche Graphique. Tuerlinckx' artistic practice can be summed up as a reflection on the fundamentals of art and is rooted in the ideas of Minimal and Conceptual Art. Her restrained works explore the border between being and not-being, something and nothing.

Tuerlinckx creates simple, almost intangible drawings, videos and installations using basic materials like paper, rope and plastic, together with light and colour. She frequently returns to forms and elements that have been art's basis for centuries: point, line, circle, square and colour. She often works in situ for her exhibitions, allowing the final artwork to be shaped by the architecture of the space. She uses small interventions, actions and gestures to create carefully poised total works, which only crystallise into art through the perception of the beholder.

Tuerlinckx' starting point is that art works can only arise in the mind of the viewer, who attempts to complete and interpret what he or she is seeing. She reveals these mechanisms by merely suggesting the image with her sober tools, rather than showing it explicitly.

**ARTWORK:**

A small sheet of paper hangs behind a glass plate, on which you can see the text "To see the other side, make a hole in the wall here". A small cross indicates where the hole in the wall has to be made. Joëlle Tuerlinckx invades the architectural space, with such simple resources as this. The reference to an exceedingly simple action suggests the disappearance of the wall.





## Jan Van Oost

The visual artist **Jan Van Oost** (°1961) lives and works alternately in Ghent and Tuscany. Since the mid-eighties, he has been making drawings, paintings, sculptures and installations, in which temptation and transience are recurring key terms.

The entirety of his oeuvre is a symbolic interpretation of human existence, which he calls up through recognisable objects that express specific feelings: A coffin, a skeleton, a child's head, a veiled woman's body. The expression of his pictures always enters into an open dialogue with the viewer, who is challenged to face his own fears and emotions.

His choice for resistant, precious materials such as gold, silver and marble stands in sharp contrast with the vulnerability that is exposed. The notion of the end of life is a central concept in his work, together with the ritual of suffering, as a constant warning of our own mortality. Besides skulls and torsos, the image of the woman is explicitly present in his oeuvre.

His extensive series *The Baudelaire Cycle*, from 2001, includes hundreds of drawings of the female body in many different ways – naked, anatomical, fleeting, fragmented – through which the most contrary human emotions are evoked. *Zonder titel* from 1993 also shows this game of attraction and rejection inspired by the tension between Eros and Thanatos. A model, wrapped in black, sits huddled in the corner of a room, her face hidden behind her long black hair. The bearing of the lifelike sculpture calls up associations with isolation, sorrow and hopelessness. The person has clearly turned its back on and closed out the world, but we nevertheless continue to look at it curiously. The artist destabilises our view of the body and its intimate tragedy. Van Oost makes empathetically styled work about the lot of humans.

### ARTWORK:

The theme of transience is overwhelmingly present in this work, where both the erotic and death have been intertwined. The works of Jan Van Oost are persistently underscored by this duality, where positive and negative elements go hand in hand.



© M HKA

## Minnette Vári

**Minnette Vári** (°1968) lives and works as a white artist in Johannesburg. That in itself is not terribly significant, were it not for the fact that Vári often explicitly incorporates this racial reality in her photographs and videos. In her earliest work, during the first half of the nineties, she used images of black women, but decapitated them and topped their bodies with her own head. This act made it possible for Vári to place herself in a different ethnic and social guise.

By situating herself among black women, she seeks to convince the viewer that her desire is to be identified with the black community and show off her positive outlook on an interracial community. Nonetheless, this act also contains a reference to South African history: in order to replace a black woman, she must first decapitate her.

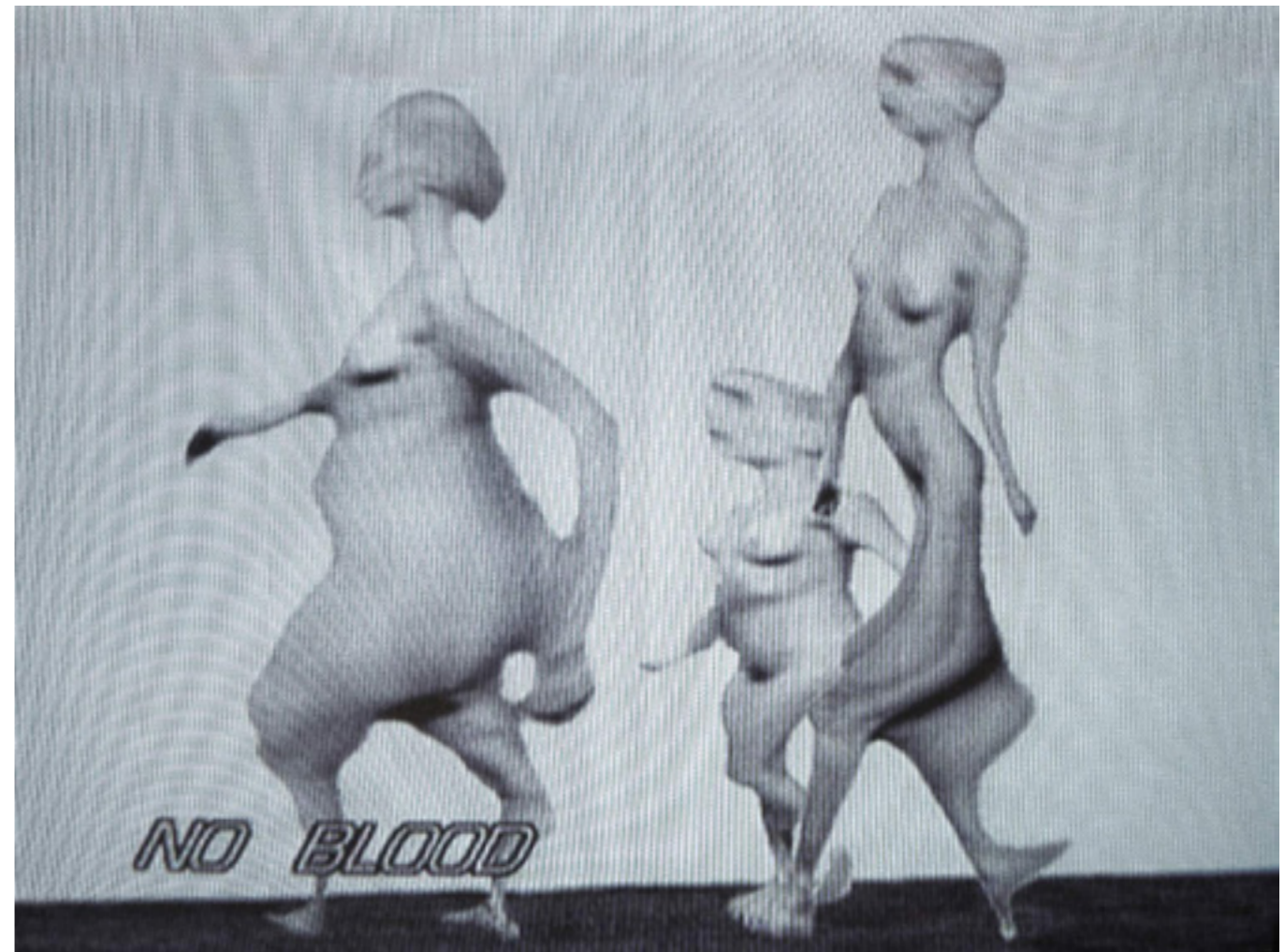
The black women and men are extras in documentaries on South Africa, which Minnette Vári records directly from the television screen. These images are then edited into new videos with the artist playing the lead role. The television images used show events in South Africa as of 1994 and provide Vári with a means for rediscovering herself in the subjects of global communications and visual culture. For her, this is key, because in her understanding, the cornerstone of our visual culture is the perpetual interpretation and rewriting of reality.

Since the end of the nineties, Vári's habit has been to appear nude in various digitally created scenarios, no longer using any other bodies in her work. Nevertheless, she still continues to use images taken from media, selecting them based on their symbolic significance to her, such as a coat of arms, representative of both power and oppression.

Her existence as a woman is also of tremendous importance in her work. Themes such as identity in relation to external characteristics are therefore inextricably bound up in their meaning within South Africa's socio-political context.

### ARTWORK:

Using a video camera, Minnette Vári films images she finds striking on television, which she then splices and incorporates in a montage that includes recordings of herself. Her purpose in creating this film is to provide a response to our visual culture, not so much in terms of its proliferation and excess, but first and foremost as a commentary on indoctrination and deception. Some of the film's sounds are from original recordings; however, dialogue from the science fiction film, *Alien*, has also been incorporated throughout. Her own heartbeat beats in the background, whereby Vári establishes a place uniquely her own in all that takes place.



**Ina Wudtke** (°1968) is a conceptual artist from Berlin. Her work, based on research, calls the hegemonic socio-political discourse into question and further empowers counter-discourses on subjects such as work, gender and housing.

Her artistic practice takes a number of different forms: she is a visual artist, writer and DJ. In 1992, during her time as a DJ in Hamburg's Soul Kitchen, DJ Wudtke's alter ego was born: 'DJ T-INA', who also bore graphic ties to the hip-hop scene of which she was part. DJ T-INA's practice has had an enormous influence on Wudtke's artistic work, resulting in unique crossovers between hip-hop and visual art. From 1992 to 2004 she publishes the queer-feminist artists' magazine *NEID* and organises a host of different musical events, spoken word events, lectures, exhibitions, film screenings, debates, and so on.

Her work draws on various forms of representation, ranging from installation to print media, and from music, digital animation, to video and photography. She explores the social hierarchies involved in both presentation and representation of bodies in her work.

#### ARTWORK:

In the video, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Worker*, Wudtke recites a poetic essay written by Belgian philosopher and writer Dieter Lesage on her work. With a tone of irony and tremendous solidarity, it puts the multiple layers of artistic practice today under the microscope, along with the whole range of side jobs that artists are forced to perform simply to survive financially as artists. The video employs cheerful techniques from the world of DJs and MCs and includes performances by Ina Wudtke aka DJ T-INA darling, Berlin mc quio and Caro Leszcinski (singer of the "trash cats"). *A Portrait of the Artist as a Worker* is a witty, clever and provocative speech about working (as a woman) in the contemporary art world.



## Yang Zhenzhong

**Yang Zhenzhong** (°1968) began studying textile and painting in 1995 with photography and video. One of his first mature works was *Lucky Family* (1995), a series of photos of a rooster, a chicken and a clutch of chicks, illustrating different family standards (and commenting on China's one-child policy).

Yang characterises himself and his praxis as 'inconsistent,' which of course can also be formulated as 'versatile.' He is an important figure in Shanghai's art scene. He has not only influenced its development as an artist, but also as a curator. He has been organising exhibitions with other influential artists since the end of the nineties. These projects have a positive effect on Shanghai's art scene and help the artist with his international profiling.

One of the recurring themes in Zhenzhong's work is the desire to emphasise the many contradictions and inequalities in society. In addition, he wants to explore the (mis)perception of space and the associated political and psychological appropriation.

In his work, he also investigates the human body and how it could be thought of and depicted on the threshold of the millennium. The Mao regime's disciplinary collectivist ideology was making way for more fluid but no less interesting social practices that responded to China's new role in global capitalism.

### ARTWORK:

Yang Zhenzhong taps into the unexpected, confronts the viewer and stirs up thoughts and feelings. *On the Pillow*, a collection of works from 'Usefull Life', an impactful exhibition for the Shanghai art scene, shows a series of black and white photographs of couples lying in bed. Although a shot like this usually evokes an erotic atmosphere, the mood is abruptly disturbed. The people have disfigured heads and anxious facial expressions. These powerful images have an astounding and alienating effect.





# 4. THE BOOK & SPIRITUALITY

Location: Saint-Dymphna church

Campaign image: Nel Aerts

Selected works by:  
Nel Aerts and Bia Davou, Edith Dekyndt,  
Róza El-Hassan, Nazanin Fakoor,  
Vadim Fishkin, Evgeny Granilshchikov,  
Dmitry Gutov, Alfons Hoppenbrouwers,  
Suchan Kinoshita, Rita McBride, Guy Mees,  
Jacqueline Mesmaeker, Sofie Muller,  
Guy Rombouts, Mary Ellen Solt, Johan Tahon,  
Philippe Van Snick and Where Dogs Run

Dymphna is interwoven with Christianity, from her secret baptism by her confessor and confidant Gerebernus, to the care for the poor and needy and the hermit's residence to which she emigrates. She is therefore also accompanied by the book. But actually, her spirituality is enclosed in a short, steadfast answer: 'no'.

In the European Middle Ages, spirituality stands for the spiritual, as opposed to the physical and sensory side of life. Spirituality represents 'the heavenly sphere of light versus the dark world of matter'. Spirituality in the broadest sense relates to matters concerning the mind. The word is used in many ways and there can be connections to religion or supernatural powers, but the emphasis is on the personal, inner experience. In a strict sense, the word indicates consciousness, or the human inner being that sees its origin in a divine or other transcendence, or in relation to a higher or endlessly larger reality. Spirituality is a special, but not necessarily confessional, take on life by a human being concentrating on transcendent truth or the highest reality.

It's in the Saint Dymphna Church – the translation of a legend into a possibility of faith within a public building – that contemporary art introduces proposals that testify to man's tendency to feel part of the value of a greater reality. This happens in front of the relics of Dymphna and Gerebernus. Not only the primary relics of their bones, but also the secondary relics: the fragments of the sarcophagi in which the bones supposedly once were preserved. Around the former, there's a thirteenth-century reliquary with angels that is stored in a late Gothic casing figuring seven painted panels with scenes from the life of the saint.

With her enigmatic title image, Nel Aerts sets the tone for a series of artistic interventions that create space. The core of the body can serve as a starting point, like in the works by Dmitry Gutov, Sofie Muller or Johan Tahon, but Aerts also looks for broader connections. The smallest gesture contains the largest one, as is evident with Edith Dekyndt, Rita McBride or Guy Mees. And art can focus on essential experiences and their possibilities of giving meaning: light, in the works of with Róza El-Hassan and Nazanin Fakoor; colour like in those of Alfons Hoppenbrouwers and Philippe Van Snick; height (Vadim Fishkin); time (Suchan Kinoshita and Jacqueline Mesmaeker). And finally language as an experience (leaving behind the mind and) going for a broader meaning, such as in the works by Bia Davou, Evgeny Granilshchikov, Mary Ellen Solt and *Where Dogs Run*.

For *Middle Gate II*, Guy Rombouts creates a work that he considered for the first *Middle Gate*: a hat alphabet. It has become a silent work, spread over the church's prayer chairs, with each of the letters of the alphabet getting its own hat, folded from a blank sheet of paper that was once intended for newspaper *Het Nieuwsblad van Geel*.



Nel Aerts, *Dobberende Dimpna*, 2018, Courtesy of the artist

## Nel Aerts

The Dutch artist **Nel Aerts** (°1987) lives and works in Antwerp. She makes drawings, paintings and collages, in a playful and colourful style, in which diverging traces can be recognised from a rich tradition in the art of painting. She uses an abstract play of lines, which is penetrated in a radical manner by Cubist figures, round forms or even surfaces of colour. Her work is never artificial or far-fetched; these are direct pictures, sometimes figurative, containing a simple, innocent pictorial language that breathes a large degree of freedom.

Nel Aerts paints without complexes, almost like a spontaneous experiment, for extracting as much individuality as possible from her paint and imagination. With her brushes, she almost carelessly creates impressions of kings, pub visitors, slender female bodies or decorative wallpaper. However busy or cut up they may sometimes be, her scenes always radiate a certain peace, like a picture from a movie that is momentarily put on hold and is then fixed as a stubbornly strong *Gestalt*. The same is true for her drawings. She can turn the word “nothing” into something on the canvas.

Her self-portraits, on the other hand, have both a cartoonish and a tragic quality.

She poses uneasily in our own small world, even if we do not know what is pose and what is real. In a recent work she uses more and more textiles, with which he makes collages that allow her to replace the classic texture of oil on canvas with a new medium.

### ARTWORK:

*The soul-searching of the beautiful Dymphna floats ever further. Underneath a purple sky with grey clouds she sails down the Kempish floral fields.*

-Nel Aerts



## Bia Davou

**Bia Davou** (1932-1996) studies painting at the atelier of Costas Iliadis (1952-1958). Initially she paints compositions which tend towards the style of Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel. From the early seventies on, she shows an interest in creating a new form of language communication based on the codes of science and technology.

In 1970 she exhibits a series of three-dimensional syntheses made from plastic materials, at the PR gallery in Athens. Consequently she turns to researching the diagrammatic structure of the image, reproducing computer programmes and codes via specific commands. These commands give Davou the opportunity to develop her personal theory about the work of art, its social function and its communication potential.

In 1976, she participates in the show of the art group *Processes - Systems* at the Athens Art Gallery, where she presents electrical circuits on copper plates. Two years later, she presents her *Serial Structures* at Desmos gallery, a natural progression from her previous interests via which dots are organised according to sequences of Fibonacci numbers and binary language systems, having the ability to go on forever.

In 1981 she translates the rhythmic scheme of 'The Odyssey' into serial structures on white sails/canvases which comprise a parable of Odysseus's journey. She thus inaugurates a series of presentations with sails which

gradually develop more freely in space and transform from solid sails on stable bases, to suspended triangular pieces of lightly woven painted cloth. The sails are organised according to the space they are shown in.

### ARTWORK:

Bia Davou composes a system of principles, a strict *modus operandi*, based on the organisation of the elements of her works in numerical sequences such as the Fibonacci series and the binary system. In the series of drawings under the title *Serial structures 2. Odyssey* Davou copies verses from Homer's epic in a geometric alphabet, organising them on the basis of numerical sequences that do not follow the metric system of the poetic composition. The artist's selection of excerpts from the *Odyssey* concentrates on the travels of the Homeric hero, suggesting a parallel between the duration of Odysseus' voyage and of the artists' creative act.



© M HKA



**Edith Dekyndt** (°1960) studies at the *Atelier d'Images Imprimées des Arts<sup>2</sup>* (*Arts au carré*) in Bergen. She lives and works alternately in Doornik and Berlin.

She likes to see things – however small – as very large, spatial and different than the reality as it is usually presented. She ignores a number of common ideas about plastic art, one of those is about working in an atelier. She concentrates completely on working on-site and she uses every space that is assigned to her – a gallery, a museum, a pavilion – as her personal working space, for examining the wide world. In this regard she uses a range of everyday objects and materials, such as clay, blankets, the trunks of small trees, curtains, water droplets or banners. She uses these to build a point of departure for her mysterious creations. They are intriguing because there is always an invisible, impending component that, after some time, slips into and completes the work.

Her entire oeuvre – often installations that are supplemented with videos, photos and drawings – is a reflection of numerous small empirical perceptions, biological-scientific experiments and other miniscule research of the physical phenomena of (and on) our planet, and the many modifications they undergo unnoticed.

Dekyndt not only works horizontally, but also across time. Her work has no beginning and no end.

Sometimes it dissolves by itself. It evolves, completes itself, or it dissolves in something else. Dekyndt never focuses on the final form of the work, because it does not exist. Instead, she focuses on the process of development, the moment that a form, a colour or a movement is born – and frequently also disappears again. Through this she exposes what usually escapes us: the invisible, the intangible and the transitory.

### ARTWORK:

The work of Edith Dekyndt is neither political, nor activist. In a simple and minimal way, more so out of respect and fascination for materials than as a conceptual statement, she incites a deeper awareness for the unseen exchange of natural forces all around us, and our place in this exchange.



© Jürgen Addiers

## Róza El-Hassan

**Róza El-Hassan** (°1966) is born in Budapest, where she still lives today. After studying painting at the Academy for Fine Arts in Budapest, she continues her studies at the Städelschule in Frankfurt and subsequently in the intermedia department in Budapest. Her mother is Hungarian, her father is Syrian, which spurs her on to question the formation of identity and society.

El-Hassan works with many different media, often covering 'true to life' political topics. Her work becomes directly involved with the subjugated 'other', something the art world frequently chooses to neglect. In this way she works intensively at increasing awareness, concerning the fate of the Syrian people during the civil war.

While she is now internationally seen in a discursive framework, her work was originally primarily seen as imagining energies, such as for instance her literally mounted objects from the middle of the nineties. This dimension of her work can be seen in the mystical tradition of Middle Europe.

Her hybrid background sometimes lies at the basis of projects, which formed her artistic practice for the past 10 years, such as research and exhibition projects in cooperation with others. For instance, in *Extra-Territoria*, which she realised with the Serbian artist Milica Tomi, or in her research on social and artistic changes that were caused by the Arab Spring.

For her, the artistic and the social aspects are two sides of an integrated thought process that is searching for connections.

### ARTWORK:

In her early works El-Hassan aims to visualise energies and natural forces. In this work she offers a 'light meal'. For *Lichtmahl*, Róza El-Hassan places light bulbs of various sizes in pieces of fresh fruits and vegetables. The lights underline the presence of nutritious power in each piece, it can also emphasise their fragility; as the fruits and vegetables start to rot, the lights fully expose their decay.



© M HKA

The Iranian visual artist and scenographer **Nazanin Fakoor** is born in Teheran but grows up in Germany, where she studies theatre arts in Munich. Her subsequent education in scenography, at the *Sorbonne Nouvelle* in Paris and at the *La Cambre School of Visual Arts* in Brussels, lead her ever more to the border between theatre, literature and the visual arts.

In 2004 she meets the American avant-garde director Robert Wilson, who introduces her to his artistic laboratory in New York, where they work in a similarly integrated manner: Photography, performance, video, choreography, sound and light influence one another, as partial fragments of modern (visual) art. Fakoor is asked to participate in various cooperative projects and exhibitions, in theatres, museums and opera houses throughout the world, where she collaborates with Zhang Huang, Anish Kapoor and La Fura dels Baus.

Her drawings and visual installations are utopian approaches to reality, which are also located at the boundary between the recognisable and estranging, between truth and illusion.

**ARTWORK:**

In her installation *Light Drawing*, Nazanin Fakoor gives free range to the influence of the environment on her artistic practice. By using the reflection of light rays on a reflective fabric, a light pattern is created that is graphically influenced by small air displacements, which are caused by the movement of visitors. Because the drawing is continuously in movement, the reflected picture of the light source is always changing, generating hypnotic patterns that refer to cosmic evocations.



## Vadim Fishkin

Russian artist **Vadim Fishkin** (°1965), who is trained as an architect, works with technological aspects: projections, shadow, sound, growth and other interactive and directly perceivable situations – more like installations – with which he produces striking connections between science and art.

During the early eighties he joins the art association *World Champions*, in Moscow, becoming part of the Post Conceptual art scene. He searches for a connection to the spiritual and the scientific roots of the Russian avant-garde. His research leads him to Slovenia, where he increasingly becomes engrossed with cosmogony – the philosophical-scientific study of the origin of the universe. Since then, many of Fishkin's interventions simulate the many hidden phenomena of the natural sciences. The artist attempts to make the processes of nature, which often remain outside our perception, measurable and controllable in an inventive but exceedingly simplified manner. While this can pertain to major cosmic movements, it can also relate to simple things such as an “invisible” relocation of a shadow line, or the simulation of meteorological phenomena, through the use of controllable sound, light and video projections.

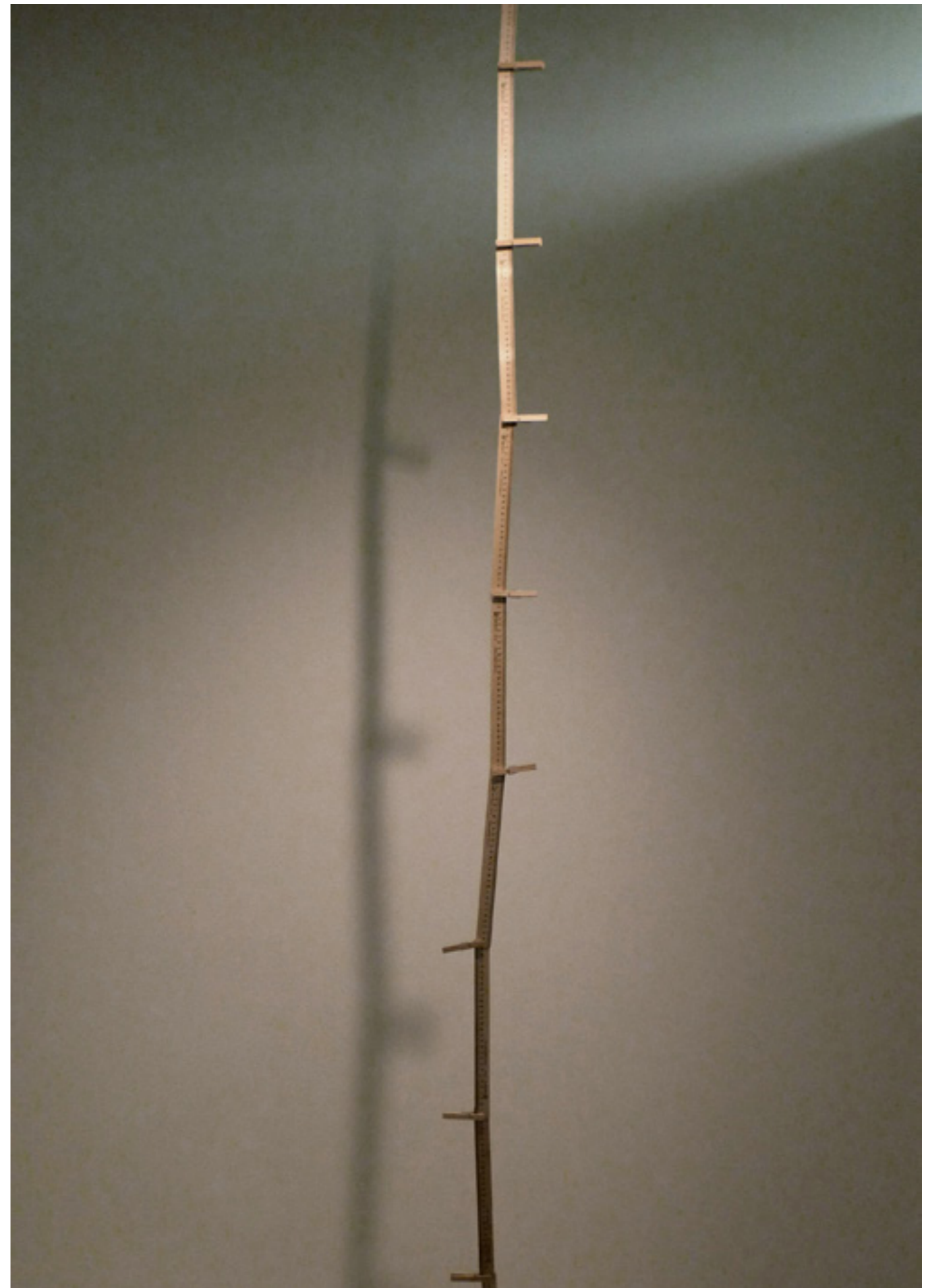
In 1996, the artist makes a light installation that is linked to his heart, making the light pulsate like a lighthouse, a rhythmic display of the variations of his pulse. With his scientific representations, he always attempts to make the invisible visible, creating an esoteric feeling that ties the physical to the supernatural.

To make the spectator aware of the many things that seem evident and that escape our attention each day, he also makes installations that are in contradiction with themselves, such as a glowing lightbulb,

whose contact is clearly visible and is not connected to the electrical net. Or he positions an inkpot under the light bundle of a stroboscope, however replacing the generated shadow with a different object, through which a short-term visual conflict is created. What we think we see is, on closer inspection, not what we actually see.

### ARTWORK:

Vadim Fishkin explores the relationship between art and science with photographs, drawings, installations and sculptures. Many of Fishkin's works mimic physical phenomena, attempting to make natural processes, which transcend ordinary perception, measurable and capable of representation, in this way transforming them into something that can be controlled or managed. With cutting, theatrical and at the same time light-hearted humour, Fishkin alludes to technology's futility as metaphor for the absurdity of human desire and ambition.



**Evgeny Granilshchikov** (°1985) is a Russian artist, photographer and film director. He grew up in Moscow, where he finishes his studies at the Lyceum for Animation-Cinematography, the Institute for Journalism and Literature and the Rodchenko School for Photography and Multimedia. He has been making video installations and experimental short films since 2011, in which social topics – to be precise the personal development of young persons – are implicitly linked to the political abuses and historical errors, which have determined daily life down to the present day, leading to frustrations. To achieve this he uses a sophisticated visual language, which is telling of a great knowledge of film tradition. He also pairs diverse formats freely, for example, using smartphone recordings of everyday situations alongside re-enactments of such moments with a professional film crew.

With consciously staged geographic blurring and relocations he creates a timeless and generally recognisable picture of the social landscape in today's Russia. In 2013 he is awarded the Kandinsky prize for his film *Position*, and in 2014 he gets international recognition for his film *To Follow her Advice* and his *Anti-Movie* trilogy. He follows and films young people, without a scenario and without making use of actors, in search of their inner, hidden battle of life, which shows itself in their daily life on the streets. Without making any moralising conclusions, he shows how many of his contemporaries are caught between the collective memory on the one hand – the spectre of oppression, repression and political dependence – and their impossible urge to achieve complete personal and social liberty on

the other hand. The ominous directness, with which Granilshchikov brings his characters to life, is both touching and highly dramatic at the same time.

**ARTWORK:**

This series of fragile (textual) collages are a special digression in Evgeny Granilshchikov's oeuvre and form part of his efforts to create total installations in which film fragments, interior elements and various artistic forms are capable of being merged. Like his films, they look for meaning at the margins of communication.



© M HKA

**Dmitry Gutov** (°1960) is born in Moscow, which remains both his home and workplace. Not only is he a visual artist, but he is simultaneously theoretician, ideologist and art critic. After graduating from the Russian Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg, he embarks on his career in the arts, largely deriving inspiration from his passion for philosophy, literature and his knowledge of Soviet cultural history in general.

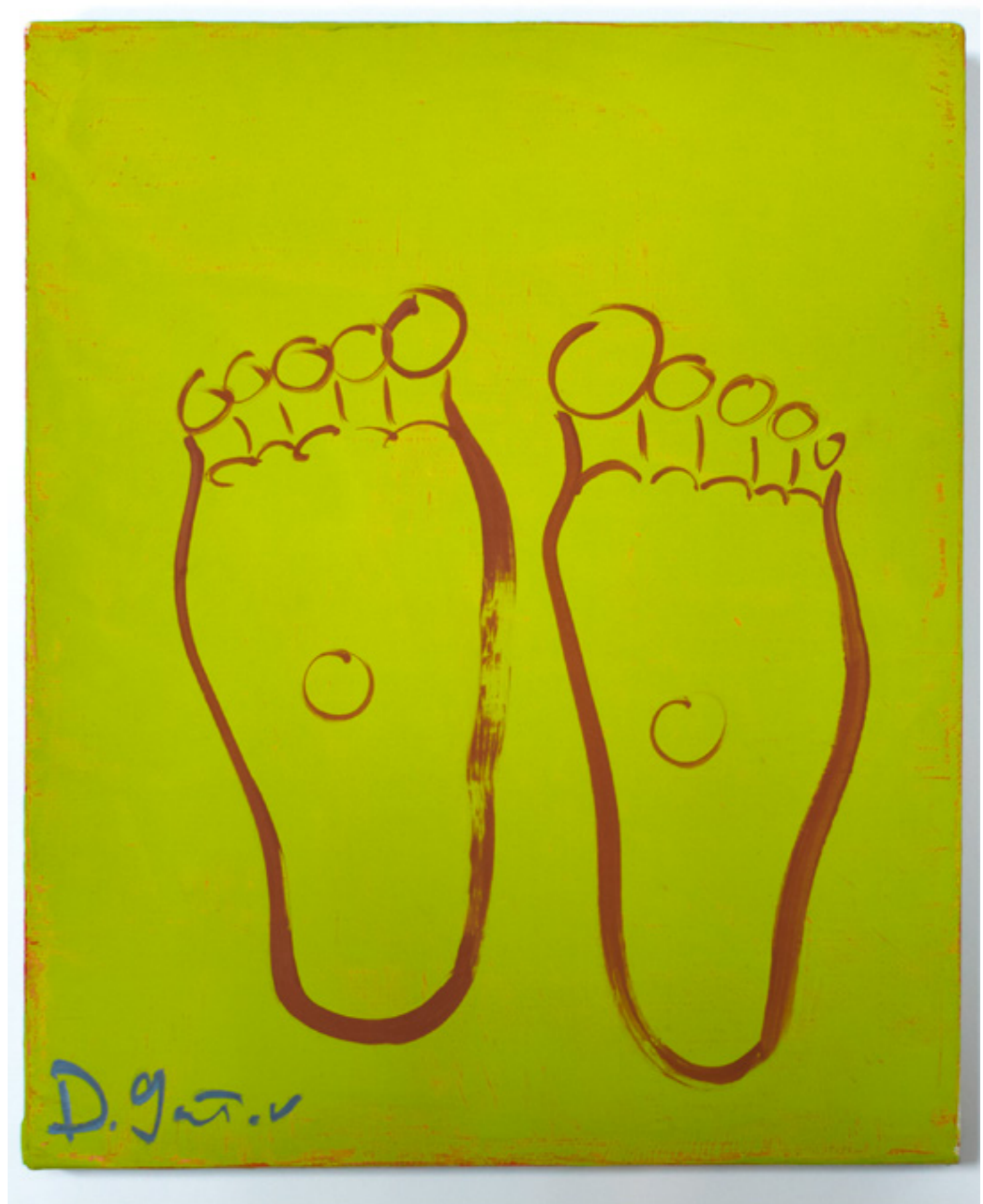
Gustov combines his bookishness with artistic studies into contemporary painting and the abstract, along with the calligraphy of the Far East and graphic design. Although he started out making Post Conceptual installations, and using a diverse palette of media as an artist, employing photography, painting, video or digital art, he is currently best known for his canvas paintings and his myriad drawings and sketches in ink, which incidentally have frequently been executed on canvas as well.

Over time he has developed an intellectual visual language that embodies his obsession with the visual nuance of the traditional canvas. The images he creates have a unique appeal due to their precision and pictorial simplicity. Every picture expresses a sense of haste, as though it were made as a thoughtless exercise of the fingers, while at the same time exhibiting power, a straightforwardness that is both purposeful and well-considered. His oil portraits and landscapes on canvas have the appearance of “painted silkscreens”, often with a background colour in monochrome, with subtle contrasts woven throughout.

In terms of content, Gutov draws from every imaginable theme, object and form of expression found in culture in its broadest sense, paying no mind to time, place or ideology. Each work functioning as a short essay summarised in an image.

**ARTWORK:**

Dmitry Gutov is fascinated by the motif of the footprint in stone – in art and philosophy – as a metaphor for persistent ideas that are maintained despite turbulent times. In his piece *But, for true need - You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need. “Or in a nutshell Patience”*, the artist combines his examination of this concept with his view on Marxist philosophy following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a notion that has survived history’s twists and turns.



© M HKA

## Alfons Hoppenbrouwers

The life and works of **Alfons Hoppenbrouwers** (1930–2001), a member of the congregation of the Broeders van de Christelijke Scholen (Brothers of the Christian Schools), are characterised by a greater social and pedagogical involvement, behind which an artistic or culturally bound vision can be found.

Besides being an architect, a teacher and the co-founder of the St-Lucas Archive, he is also an abstract painter. As an architect, one can see links to Modernism and Constructivism, influenced by the work of Le Corbusier and the Dutch art movement *De Stijl*.

He is sometimes considered to be part of so-called “Brutalism”, because of his striking use of concrete and glass constructions as bearers of the outward form, which is subjected to the functional requirements of the inner.

As a visual artist, he often works with abstract oppositions – figure versus background – and cognitive installations of complicated scientific calculations. These abstract-geometric acrylic paintings – more than 600 in total – are based on the relationship of numbers and series, which are inspired by the music of Bach. The series of paintings under the title *Die Kunst der Fuge - BMW 1080* (*The Art of the Fugue*) consists of canons and counterpoint compositions, just as in the work with the same name by Bach. This is how the artist wishes to show the importance of scientific patterns; not only in architectural calculations, but also in musical scores and even on canvas.

### ARTWORK:

Alfons Hoppenbrouwers seeks salvation in higher things, the spiritual and the religious in his personal life. And yet as a scientist and artist, he is, in fact, more of a Cartesian: straight lines, calculated angles, purity of colour, fixed patterns.



## Suchan Kinoshita

**Suchan Kinoshita** (°1960) is born in Tokyo into a Japanese-German family. In the early eighties she studies music in Cologne. Throughout the eighties Kinoshita also works for the Theater am Marienplatz in Krefeld, Germany, where she acts, directs and designs props. In the early nineties, after completing her studies at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, the Netherlands, she emerges as a visual artist. Several years ago she moved to Brussels after having lived in the Netherlands.

Kinoshita's art incorporates – quite literally, because it usually concerns the body – elements from her background in experimental music and theatre, not least the direct connection she establishes between work and audience. Her works of art unfold through time, as a dynamic process in which the personal relationship between the spectator and the work take shape. The here and now of the presentation is key. Static depictions and representations of 'something else' are only a distraction.

Kinoshita's mixed background and her experience in multiple artistic disciplines are clearly visible in her work, in which she looks for boundaries, transgresses them, and ignores them. The experience of time and space is a common theme in her work. Important here are both the different conceptions of time and space in the two cultures in which she is rooted, as well as the different ways in which time and space are employed and depicted in the disciplines of theatre, music and visual art. She combines the process-based approach of theatre and music with the generally more static nature of visual art.

### ARTWORK:

Suchan Kinoshita is continuously rediscovering time. She invents mechanisms that deregulate metrics. This work is part of a series of hourglass-like bottles made in different shapes and sizes. Each bottle contains a different liquid or substance, giving them each their own unique tempo. This bottle is filled with a mixture of honey and oil – to stop coagulation. As is often the case in Kinoshita's work, this piece takes as its starting point everyday and recognisable objects and connects them to daily activities.



© M HKA



**Rita McBride** (°1960) studies at Bard College and the California Institute of the Arts. She splits her time between New York, Rome and Düsseldorf, where she teaches at the Kunstakademie.

McBride's work ranges from architectural sculptures to off-beat publishing projects, and her work is influenced by industrial design, modernist sculpture and minimalist sculpture. Since the mid-eighties, McBride's work has focused on inconspicuous and seemingly unimportant elements in the contemporary urban landscape, which she takes out of context by playing with their scale, their materials and their connections to their surroundings. She reinterprets parking lot structures, grandstands, conduits, HVAC units, water towers and awnings, and gives them a metaphoric character.

McBride uses materials ranging from rattan to Murano glass, Carrara marble, bronze and canvas, in an effort to illustrate the contradictions between mass production and craftsmanship, between high and low culture. Some of her pieces are large-scale works that are critical of the social uses of public space, and she often accompanies her sculptural architectural works with performances.

McBride also works with publications and actively participates in the production of her exhibition catalogues so that they go far beyond simply illustrating her works and they take on an artistic life of their own.

**ARTWORK:**

In *Mini Manager*, Rita McBride makes sculptural abstractions from household control panels. The original appearance and function of these objects is removed, and they are covered with an even white layer. McBride wants to investigate the function of these panels, precisely by hiding them in her work. Does our imagination permit us to immediately assign a new function, or do we associate these white sculptures only with the operating panel for heating? By bringing them into an artistic context, McBride makes us aware of their presence, and also of the potential beauty that these inconspicuous objects have.



© Jürgen Addiers

## Guy Mees

**Guy Mees** (1935-2003) emerges as a painter in Antwerp in the late fifties, when post-war avant-garde art from the US was just beginning to find its way to Belgium. His first mature works are a series of black charcoal paintings doubling as reliefs.

Between 1960–1967 Mees produces an extensive body of work using industrially manufactured lace and neon lights in different flat and three-dimensional constellations. These are all titled *Verloren Ruimte* ('Lost Space'). Around 1970 Mees experiments with performance and super 8 film. In the seventies, eighties and nineties Mees mostly works on, or with, paper. In 1983 he begins to use his former title again: he sees his site-specific variations with coloured paper as another kind of 'lost spaces'.

Mees' work is systematic, but the system is created in the work itself. With the exception of a short text in *Flash Art* in 1973, he never comments on or explains his work, probably because he considers spoken and written words as too definitive for what he intends for his artistic praxis. The accuracy of the oeuvre – intertwining elements of painting, sculpture and performance, which emphasise the importance of colour, texture and space experience – is altogether different from a merely adequate verbal 'definition'.

Towards the end of his life Mees loosens his strict approach to abstraction, which had given him sufficient variation and freedom till then, and begins experimenting with descriptive, figurative elements.

### ARTWORK:

Guy Mees uses various types of paper, newsprint, textiles, and even canvas and aluminium foil from time to time. Sometimes it is only the shadows cast that suggest that the bands of colour have been neither painted nor glued. Paper surfaces differing in width and shape create an illusion of depth that arises from the effect of the colours banded opposite one another. From 1983 onwards, the partially open compositions consisting of various clippings are gradually simplified into uni-coloured clippings.



© M HKA

## Jacqueline Mesmaeker

Belgian visual artist **Jacqueline Mesmaeker** (°1929) begins her artistic career in the sixties as a fashion designer. She receives her degree from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels in 1967. She teaches at various of schools while applying herself as a visual artist, creating installations, videos and photography. On the side-line she continues to write, draw and design throughout her entire oeuvre.

Mesmaeker plays with space and time, with the visible and illusions. Her work is layered and structured, which allows her viewers to gain access to her thought processes. These trains of thought are largely defined by the relationship between the concepts “space” and “time”, both paved the way for an entirely new approach to the concept “image” since the invention of photography. Before this invention reality was a passing event.

A person – or the artist – was the only one capable of attempting to capture reality in images, true to form or not. Photography led to images with anachronistic discrepancies: what is seen on paper is a “has been” that is “present here and now” (according to Roland Barthes). In this case the viewer becomes the connecting factor for the image, a link in an unbroken and linear space-time relationship.

Perhaps this strange contradiction between spatial presence and absent time is the leitmotif throughout her work.

Jacqueline Mesmaeker’s images allow viewers to go on an imaginary time travel, while floating through uncertainty. Is it a memory or a recollection? A trail or a labyrinth, a dream or forgetfulness? She leaves all her options open by playing with the many aspects and empirical traits of photography: projection, print, duplicate, oxidation, fixation, petrification.

### ARTWORK:

*Caméra non assistée* includes recordings of the night-time views from windows. The dates of the recordings are displayed on the image. At first sight the “unaided camera” appears to give a simple, direct and objective account of a trivial view. Yet, there is more than meets the eye. The film is questioned by connecting cinematographic components – recording, projection, light – with visual and architectural elements, such as window blinds and streetlights. The entire montage aims to widen perception.



© M HKA

## Sofie Muller

**Sofie Muller** (°1974) studies painting at the Royal Academy in Antwerp, followed by sculpture, graphics and 3-D design at the Sint-Lucas Institute in Ghent.

Her oeuvre presents an unbiased view and a gift for creating images that, despite their simplicity, show a striking depth. The characters she creates, on paper, sculpted or cast, express a broad scale of human emotions. Fear, sadness, desire or constriction. Muller shows the insufficiency of life, but also the comforts of memory.

The naïve honesty with which she faces these emotions head on, shows an individuality that the artist appropriated early on. No matter how much she experiments with externalising human suffering, her work always remains heart-warming, with a special sense of empathy and intimacy. Many of her characters share an inner pain, a human defect or an indivisible scar.

Muller consciously searches for 'injured' pieces of material with 'mistakes' or a natural erosion. This in part is why her mental portraits do not show any recognisable stereotypes, quite to the contrary. Each character, and even each separate part of the body, speaks of an individuality that is uniquely recognisable and can be universal, precisely for that reason. The works bear witness to youth, a dream, an illusion in relation to a defect. You perceive it immediately, at first sight, something is off, but it's not irreconcilable. Sofie Muller covers all sorrow with the cloak of love.

### ARTWORK:

This work consists of an isolated head that lies on a small cart, together with bags of cement that could also be small pillows. The installation appears to still be part of the studio. The head is battered, partially dirty and coloured pink, and it shows both physical and psychic injuries.



© M HKA

## Guy Rombouts

**Guy Rombouts** (°1949) receives an education as a printer/typographer. Since the seventies he has been working on alternative communications systems. For various reasons, Rombouts questions our current communication systems.

The father of Rombouts was a typographer and printer in Geel. He also was the publisher of the local newspaper *Het Nieuwsblad van Geel*. Printer's type is therefore one of Rombouts' earliest everyday experiences. Rombouts first studies typography, but later, in part inspired by the exhibition program during the seventies of the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp, he decides to become a sculptor.

According to Rombouts, direct communication is not possible via our language and, as a consequence, some feelings simply cannot be put into words. That is why as of 1979 he searches for systems, in which form and content interact as much as possible. He and his partner, Monica Droste (1958-1998), develop an alphabet with the name AZART. In the alphabet words take on forms. AZART refers to AZ-Art, as in art from A to Z, but also to the French term *hasard*, which means as much as coincidence. Each letter corresponds to a line that has a predetermined name. Every letter of the alphabet also gets its own colour, which corresponds with the first letter of that colour.

Alongside the AZART alphabet, Rombouts continues to develop new alphabets of colours, foodstuffs and other materials or immaterial phenomena, always connecting his sense of language and material.

### ARTWORK:

For *Middle Gate II* Guy Rombouts creates a hat alphabet. The folded hats are made of unprinted newspaper – once intended for the Geel newspaper *Het Nieuwsblad van Geel* – from the old French standard paper size, a half Colombier. Each hat is folded different; 13 times a fold sharper. Repeating the process in the opposite direction. A letter in the corresponding shape of Rombouts' 'Azart' alphabet is attached to each hat: 'angular' for 'A', 'bairnsteel' for 'B' and so on. The hats are presented on the chairs in the church.

The colour alphabet is an ode to synaesthesia and designed in a similar way as the azart-line alphabet, without intersections. Every first letter of the name of the colour is the same as the saturation of the letter. 'I' is indigo, 'A' is aquamarine and so on.

See [www.azart.be](http://www.azart.be)



© Jürgen Addiers

## Mary Ellen Solt

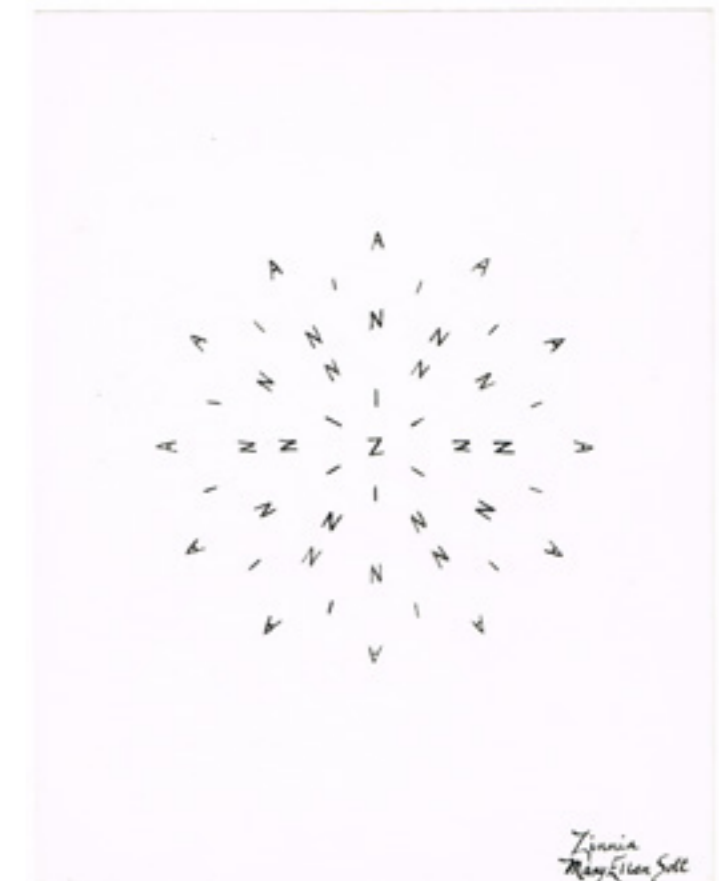
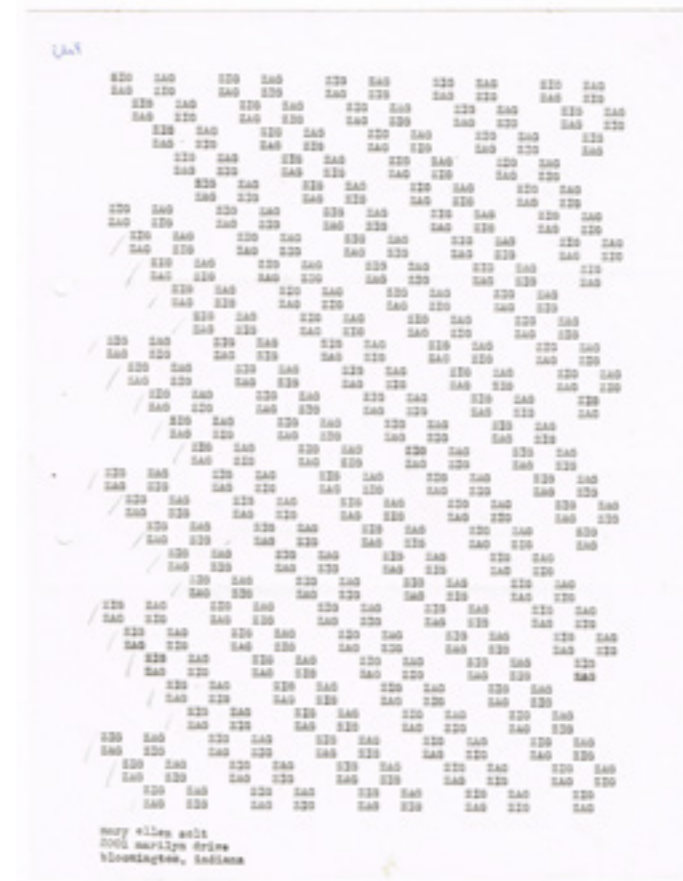
The American writer and poet **Mary Ellen Solt** (1920-2007) makes a name for herself in the United States as an essayist, translator, publisher and lecturer, but she is above all known for her concrete poetry, with which she adds an artistic dimension to classic literature from the sixties onwards.

Her most well-known poems – which are in the shape of flowers – are combined in the bundle *“Flowers in Concrete”* in 1966. At the same time, she emerges as one of the pioneers of concrete and visual poetry, which then gains attention and is emulated throughout the world. Her work is exhibited at the Venice Biennale, a clear recognition of the written word as a visual art form. With her broad, international perspective, she attempts to unite authors from various countries and continents, which results in her book *“Concrete Poetry - a World View”* published in 1968. It consists of poems and manifestoes that extensively explain the new medium of “material poetry”.

The common thread throughout her many experiments in concrete poetry is her literary practise, which aims to let the rhythm of language coincide with the visual dimension of writing and drawing. This new kind of literature does not direct itself primarily on the content of the authors’ message, but on the manner in which the text is presented. It relates to language that surprises through its form and through the positioning of the letters, through omissions or repetitions, and by interacting with the concentration of the reader, who is stimulated to see associations and make connections himself.

### ARTWORK:

Mary Ellen Solt composes her poems as graphic images. For her series of flowers, *Flowers in Concrete*, she orders botanical names according to the shape of the plants they refer to.



© M HKA

Mary Ellen Solt, *zig zag*, 1966, Collection M HKA, Antwerp, Donated by Wilfried Wijnants, 2018  
 Mary Ellen Solt, *Zinnia*, 1966, Collection M HKA, Antwerp, Donated by Wilfried Wijnants, 2018  
 Mary Ellen Solt, *Forsythia*, 1966, Collection M HKA, Antwerp, Donated by Wilfried Wijnants, 2018  
 Mary Ellen Solt, *Wild Crab*, 1966, Collection M HKA, Antwerp, Donated by Wilfried Wijnants, 2018

As a visual artist **Johan Tahon** (°1965) is driven by questions about the meaning of his existence. This necessity for surpassing daily reality strives towards a level that can be associated to the Jungian idea of archetypes. The artist is more than a craftsman, he places images in the world, which are developed through his inner connection to matter. This connection is fluid and intangible; it is only to be perceived as an indefinable contact between the minds of people, or a spiritual sense of inevitability. The quest that Tahon is on is a search for a hidden, mystic truth, which becomes visible in the vulnerability of his pictures.

The artist believes that the godlike in humans is expressly not to be found in (or with) rationality, but instead in the sensitive, namely the bodily and the intuitive. He uses his atelier as a temple for the mind and a workplace for the body, which enters into combat with the material over and over again; not in order to create beauty in the first place, but for expressing the unexplainable and for making a connection with a deeper form of consciousness.

Tahon's sculptures appear in diverse forms and sizes, for example as white heads that are covered with tears and have a recognisable figurative face, ready to enter into a silent dialogue, whereby the body and the limbs have remained formal abstractions. In a certain sense, these pictures are never finished and certainly not perfect. They are a summary of the tragic beauty of existence, the understanding that something is missing at all times, that the search never ends

and that the universe is keeping so much hidden, that the only thing that remains is the nullity of humans. However, overburdened the spirit of his oeuvre may sound, in reality everything is as light as can be with Tahon. There is no anger or despair, no screaming and certainly no pose. His craft-like work is based on insight and acceptance, even if this sometimes leads to pictures that appear to be crying from every pore.

### ARTWORK:

White is the colour of peace, of stillness, but may perhaps also signify the resignation evident in Johan Tahon's oeuvre. In a way, his images are never finished and most definitely never achieve perfection. They sum up the tragic beauty of existence, the realisation that there is always something missing, that the search is an endless one, and that the universe conceals so much that only the futility of human existence remains.







## Philippe Van Snick

**Philippe Van Snick** (°1946) makes work that is characterised by an extremely simple visual language, akin to minimalism, and the repeated use of the same colours: sometimes only using blue and black, the colours of day and night. Since 1980 Van Snick has been using his ten colours systematically: the primary colours red, yellow and blue, the secondary colours orange, green and purple, the non-colours white and black (representing the immaterial) and gold and silver (referring to materialism and material wealth, but following the occult tradition of Alchemy, as 'inert' or 'pure' metals. In addition, they proverbially signify 'silence' and 'speech'. For Van Snick, colours have both mental and physical meaning.

Van Snick's works are closely related to the notion of space and the physical experience of the viewer in a room. Van Snick uses a simple and clearly defined visual vocabulary consisting of conceptual photography, mathematics, fragile sculptures and his own palette of ten colours. With these and other decimal systems, he creates abstract worlds that are governed by bipolar fundamental forces. This bipolarity – the contrast between light and dark, colour and its absence, and smooth versus rough surface – is an important aspect in Van Snick's entire oeuvre.

### ARTWORK:

The work *Eilanden (Islands)* consists of ten elegantly shaped organic surfaces in the ten colours characteristic of Van Snick's oeuvre (primary and secondary colours, the achromatic colours of white and black along with the gold and silver metallic), supplemented by three daytime and night islands in blue and black. The work symbolises a densely populated archipelago of clearly distinct geographical entities. The installation is displayed across the floor, but puzzlingly gives the impression of swallowing the room whole.



© Jürgen Addiers

## Where Dogs Run

**Where Dogs Run** is the name of an enthusiastic Russian artists' collective from Yekaterinburg in the Urals, they use multimedia techniques for creating intellectual and slightly subversive, artistic statements, in the form of installations, videos and DIY packages.

This group, which could be called media artists, combines innovative visual techniques with scientific research instruments and low tech for creating hybrid installations that produce a form of artificial intelligence, which is also questioned at the same time.

This intelligence is, however, consciously controlled and influenced, which immediately exposes their political and scientific suspicion. The creative collective, which was established in the year 2000, uses a broad scale of techniques (sound, video, installations, performances), with which they let their personal, idealistic ideas interact with empirical research and their bodily experiences, but also doctrines or mythological stories.

With an advanced imagination, they create pseudo-scientific installations, which are designed to expose the psychological and social mechanisms that, unnoticed, determine daily reality. This makes it possible for them to create an artificial world that wants to be futuristic and free, but which nevertheless remains inseparably connected to the demonic background of historic reality. The group consists of Vladislav Bulatov (°1975), Natalia Grekhova (°1976), Olga Inozemtseva (°1977) and Aleksey Korzukhin (°1973).

### ARTWORK:

For the work *Evaporation of the Constitution* Where Dogs Run translates the text of the Constitution of the Russian Federation into Morse code. This is transmitted with the help of drops of water, pauses between them, and hot irons. A drop falls only if the iron is sufficiently hot. The goal of the process is to transmit information in the form of steam. The text of the Constitution is displayed on a screen and disappears gradually, this allows the viewers to follow along to the information that is being evaporated at the moment. In this version not only the Russian Constitution is being evaporated, the American Constitution and the Treaty of Lisbon also go up in vapours.



© Jürgen Addiers



## Colofon

This publication was published on the occasion of the exhibition *Middle Gate II: The Story of Dymphna*, organised in Geel from 15 September till 4 November 2018.

### EXHIBITION

Curator: Bart De Baere, Leen De Backer  
Coordination: Kris Cuypers  
Production: Roel Van Nunen  
Site Management: Jürgen Addiers  
Construction: Hughe Lanoote, Leen Bosch, Paul Hendrikse, Gerry Boeckx, Nik Mertens, Tom Slegers  
M HKA Ensembles: Kaat Vannieuwenhuysse  
Mediation: Kaat Vannieuwenhuysse  
Communication: Madiken Verboven, Els Verhaegen, Nadine Stuyck  
Press: Bert De Vlegelaer  
Design: Christophe Clarijs, Nathan Gotlib  
Campaign image: Peter De Jongh

### PUBLICATION

Authors: Bart De Baere, Leen De Backer, Lenny Peeters, Vincent Van Meenen, Hans Willemse  
Coordination: Kaat Vannieuwenhuysse  
Editors: Leen De Backer, Kaat Vannieuwenhuysse  
Translations: Portaal, Kate Mayne, Steven Talon  
Photography: Christine Clinckx, Peter De Jongh  
Design: Christophe Clarijs, Nathan Gotlib

### WITH THANKS TO

All artists  
Guides: Jef Bal, Valerie De Raeve, Jan Frederickx, Mireille Govaerts, Louis Laenen, Koen Vandecruys, Luc Vandecruys, Marleen Van Genechten, Jitse Vanlommel, Georges Vannuten, Rita Verachtert, Jef Van Bael  
Fotomuseum Antwerpen  
Kringwinkel Zuiderkempem Geel  
Bruno Verachtert, Bart Vaneysendeyk, Guy Van Reusel, Maarten Mertens, Jo Dierckx, Walter Heylen, Jef Van de Weyer, Walter Van Doninck

### Special thanks to all partners in Geel

Mayor: Vera Celis  
City Council of Geel  
Council Member for Culture: Marleen Verboven  
Division Manager – Leisure: Ilse Daniëls  
Het Gasthuismuseum: Frie Vanravensteyn  
Academy of Fine Arts Geel: Ariane Van der Veken  
Church: Maria Gerits  
Tourism Office  
OLV Woonzorgcentrum  
K.erf

### Board of Directors of the AGB Cultuur Geel:

Chairman: Marleen Verboven  
Secretary: François Mylle  
Directors: Vera Celis, Iris Devos, Carine Jacobs, Geert Hendrickx, Nadine Laeremans, Bart Schoeters, Myriam Smets, Tinne Vangeel, Tinne Van Gelder, Bart Vanherck, Ivan Wartel

### CC de Werft

Werft 32  
2440 Geel  
+32(0)14 56 66 66  
info.dewerft@geel.be  
www.dewerft.be

### Team Cultuurcentrum de Werft

Director Cultuurcentrum de Werft: Kris Cuypers  
Team: Sofie Alen, Gerry Boeckx, Pascal Breugelmans, Marc Broeckx, Lief Cools, Annemie Geyskens, Lydia Martens, Nicolas Masset, Nik Mertens, Gerd Palmaers, Jef Peeters, Mathias Roggeman, Tom Slegers, Monique Smeyers, Nadine Stuyck, Roel Tulleneers, Judith Van De Putte, Imke Vannuffelen

## Colofon

### Team M HKA

#### General and Artistic Director:

Bart De Baere

#### Business Director:

Dieter Vankeirsbilck

#### Team:

Jürgen Addiers, Raoul Amelinckx, Fadil Ayoujil, Katrien Batens, Lotte Beckwé, Giulia Bellinetti, Evi Bert, Maya Beyns, Carine Bocklandt, Leen Bosch, Els Brans, Josine Buggenhout, Veerle Bydekerke, Tom Ceelen, Ann Ceulemans, Riyad Cherif Chaker, Celina Claeys, Christophe Clarijs, Christine Clinckx, Ingeborg Coeck, Leen De Backer, Jente De Graef, Bert De Vlegelaer, Jan De Vree, Martine Delzenne, Liliane Dewachter, Kunchok Dhondup, Frederic Diependaele, Dirk Dumoulin, Lode Geens, Nav Haq, Marco Harmsen, Abdelhouahed Hasnaoui, Ria Hermans, Sabine Herrygers, Joris Kestens, Nico Köppe, Anders Kreuger, Renild Krols, Christine Lambrechts, Hughe Lanoote, Viviane Liekens, Natalie Meeusen, Geertrui Pas, Ghislaine Peeters, Ilse Raps, Marleen Reijmen, Gabriëla Rib, Chantal Saelens, Anja Isabel Schneider, Marte Sommen, Jan Stuyck, Henk Willem Summerville, Georges Uittenhout, Jos Van den Bergh, Chris Van den Broeck, Ria Van den Broeck, Frank Van der Kinderen, Sarah van Hapert, Chantal Van Hauter, Piet Van Hecke, Kaat Vannieuwenhuysse, Roel Van Nunen, Gerda Van Paemele, Lutgarde Van Renterghem, Marjon Van Waelvelde, Madiken Verboven, Els Verhaegen, Lot Wens, Ina Weyers, Hans Willemse, Abdel Ziani

### Board of Directors M HKA

**Chairman:** Herman De Bode

**Vice-chairman:** Yolande Avontroodt

**Directors:** Joy Donné, Annick Garmyn, Vasif Kortun, Katrien Mattelaer, Frederik Swennen, Jan Rombouts, Liesbet Sommen, Eugene Tan, Toon Wassenberg

#### Government representatives

**Representative of the Flemish Minister for Culture:** Kristina Houthuys

**Representative of the Flemish Minister responsible for Finance and Budget:** Karin Heremans

ISBN 9789072828606

D/2018/4828/5

CATALOGUSNUMMER: 198

All rights reserved

© 2018 M HKA, the authors and the artists

Anyone who has wrongly not been mentioned, or who thinks that he or she can still assert rights, is requested to contact the publisher.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or made public by means of print, photocopy, microfilm, or any other means, without prior written permission of the publisher.

M HKA is an initiative of the Flemish Community and is supported by the City of Antwerp, Klara, H ART, De Olifant en Allen & Overy



# M HKA

Leuvenstraat 32  
2000 Antwerp  
+32(0)3 260 99 99  
[info@muhka.be](mailto:info@muhka.be)  
[www.muhka.be](http://www.muhka.be)