Made by Sculptors?

Forms of sculpture today

Johan Pas

Prologue

It is the year 3073. The crew of a space ship from the planet XXX sets foot on Luna, the uninhabited sister of the planet Terra. They find just a single interesting trace of civilisation: an anthropomorphic statuette in aluminium, 1.91 cm thick and 8.89 cm long, next to a metal plate with an inscription in indecipherable lettering. After years of study, the object is identified as *Fallen Astronaut* (1971) by the Flemish artist Paul Van Hoeydonck (°1925). This bewildering discovery prompts a new paradigm in art history. Contrary to a widely held belief that had endured for centuries, Flanders was not a nation of painters at the end of the twentieth century, but a nation of sculptors.

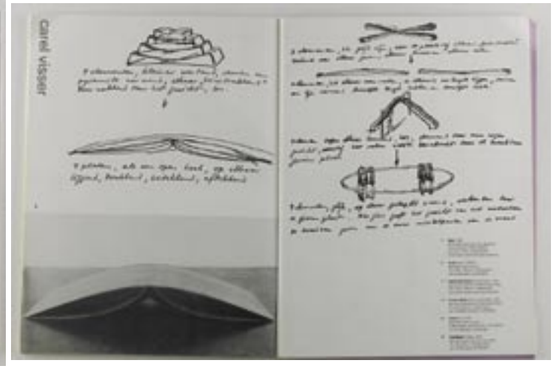
The title of this themed edition of OKV is based on an exhibition entitled *Door beeldhouwers gemaakt (Made by Sculptors)* held exactly thirty years ago in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Back then, this landmark exhibition offered an appraisal of the post-minimalistic , post-conceptual and anti-form sculpture of the 1970s and, in particular, attempted to identify the trans-boundary aspects of this three-dimensional art. Not one Belgian artist was represented at the exhibition. Thanks to the presence of top internationals such as Carl Andre, Richard Serra and Joseph Beuys, the exhibition made a lasting impression on the young Flemish artist Paul Gees (°1949). A good thirty years later, and the world of art has changed radically. Nowadays, sculpture is not what it was (back then). And, more pointedly - is there even such a thing as sculpture now? Apparently so, for in September 2008, the *Antwerp open air sculpture show* took place on the hushed south docklands. This event was collaboration between the Antwerp galleries, the Muhka, and the Middelheim Museum, and was set up by Luc Deleu and his T.O.P. office. The word “sculpture” was featured prominently in the announcement and it wasn’t thought necessary, for that matter, to place it between quotation marks.

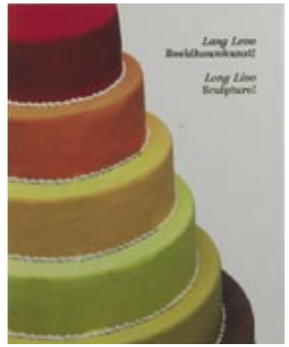
Sculpture is what you bump into when you back up to see a painting.

(Barnett Newman)

Content

Sculpture? Today??





Catalogue of the exhibition 'Door beeldhouwers gemaakt (Made by sculptors)', 1978, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
LIBRARY MIDDELHEIMMUSEUM, ANTWERP

Catalogue of the exhibition 'Lang Leve Beeldhouwkunst! (Long live sculpture!)', 2006, Middelheimmuseum, Antwerp
LIBRARY MIDDELHEIMMUSEUM, ANTWERP

Has sculpture made a return? The Antwerp *sculpture show* and other events do indeed seem to indicate that sculpture has made something of a comeback in recent years. This year the Muhka presented an exhibition on contemporary art from India, with sculpture as its conceptual theme (*Santhal Family. Positions around an Indian sculpture*, 2008). In 2005, the Dutch art magazine *Metropolis M* devoted several articles (issue 5, Oct. Nov. 2005) to the so-called contemporary sculpture. In 2006, the Middelheim Museum organised an exhibition with the (un)ambiguous title of *Lang Leve Beeldhouwkunst! (Long Live Sculpture!)*. That year, I myself put together a small group exhibition featuring the work of a few young Flemish artists who are into a peculiar sort of *unplugged sculpture* (*Sculpturaal Verlangen [Sculptural Desire]*, CC Belgica, Dendermonde, 2006). Last year, the British publishers Phaidon issued a substantial survey of contemporary sculpture, *Sculpture Today,* by Judith Collins (2007), which, for that matter, features no less than eight Belgian artists: Wim Delvoye, Jan Vercruysse, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Jan Van Oost, Ann-Veronica Janssen, Jan Fabre, Didier Vermeiren and Panamarenko. Though it may appear only natural, this interest in sculpture is only so at first sight. The art has been becoming less and less self-explanatory since the late 1960s. Even thirty years ago, the term "sculptor" would have sounded fairly ambiguous in *Made by sculptors*, for there was no sculpture, in the traditional sense, to be seen. The question mark placed at the end of the title now undermines the positive, affirmative character of the original 1978 exhibition. In other words, this themed issue on contemporary sculpture starts out on a querying note, and not from an established position. What can be considered as "sculpture" today? And is that description of any actual value in contemporary art?

THE POWER OF THE INERT

It seems that, thirty years ago, there was also talk of a return to sculpture in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. After the temporary events or the textual documentation of conceptual art in the late 1960s, processes again appeared to be condensing into objects. The most commonly used materials were, by normal sculpting standards, unorthodox to be fair: rope, fibreglass, chicken wire, neon and video tapes. But alongside this, there were also works to be seen in "traditional" and "natural" materials such as wood, stone, bronze and clay. This is precisely why *Made by sculptors* marks an important moment in the development of contemporary sculpture. At this point, the strictly action, idea and process-driven arts that were still dominant until shortly before then gave way to a return to palpable and static works of art. It seemed that sculpture, having been absent for a while from the progressive discourse, was now well and truly back. Only, during the process, it had lost the naturalness of its existence, and its innocence. The radical experiments of the 1960s had made it nearly impossible to pursue sculpture with any degree of naivety. That is why today, another three decades later, dedicating an exhibition, book or magazine edition to a discipline as specific as sculpture is not as natural as it would seem.

Until the late 1980s, publications with titles such as Schilderkunst in België (Painting in Belgium) or Beeldhouwkunst in Vlaanderen (Sculpture in Flanders) were still quite normal. But in the last decade, *multidisciplinarity* (*using* different media) and *interdisciplinarity* (*combining* different media) seem to have become a matter of artistic necessity. Even those artists who obviously concentrate on, and associate themselves with, one particular medium, such as painting or sculpture, feel almost obligated to take a lateral step towards film or photography these days. Indeed, our contemporary artists are expected to show extreme versatility and flexibility. Clinging obstinately to just one medium (let alone a traditional one) is simply out of the picture. In many cases, this interdisciplinary route is inherent in the artistic vision of the artist, but in others it appears to be more of a fashion imposed by the art world. Today, artists involved in classical sculpture do opt very deliberately for this unruly, laborious and physical medium, which is rooted firmly in tradition. It is anything but natural in this era of digital information and lightning fast communication. This is because techniques such as modelling, casting, burnishing, assembling, welding and constructing are complex, labour intensive, and time consuming. This makes sculpture something of an inert medium. But what some people see as an inherent weakness in the medium is perceived by others as its very strength.

AFTER DEMATERIALISATION

In this sense, choosing sculpture goes against the grain as much today as writing or video did in around 1970, before painting and sculpture lost their dominant positions. In those days, new media such as film, photography and video only really started to find their niche in the visual arts. Andy Warhol was a pioneer who played a crucial role in this process. Alan Kaprow's happenings and the musical events held by the Fluxus artists also led to an opening up of the idea of "visual art". Belgian pioneers are Marcel Broodthaers, Jef Geys, Jacques Charlier, Hugo Heyrman, Filip Francis, Guy Mees, Philippe Van Snick and Panamarenko. What these artists have in common is that they no longer start out from one particular medium but from an idea, on the basis of which they select a medium (assemblage, installation, photographic work, film, artists' book, etc.). This conceptual turning of the tables, which took place in the second half of the 1960s, is crucial to any understanding of contemporary sculpture.

Prior to this, after about 1960, sculpture itself experienced drastic shifts. Whereas pop artists soon allowed it to coincide with reality (for example, Warhol's *Brillo boxes*), minimalists reduced it to its most basic aspects (colour, form, space: the *floorpieces* by Carl Andre, for example) and earthwork artists stretched it out into large-scale projects in natural settings (for example, *The Spiral Jetty* by Robert Smithson). The studio was abandoned in favour of the landscape or city. *Post-studio* and *intermedia* were the buzzwords for the new avant-garde of the late 1960s. Art and artists helped themselves by escaping the straightjacket of the traditional art business and its obsession with paintings and sculptures. By the year 1970, visual art was no longer required to be visual in the strictest sense. There was even a sense that painting and sculpture was passé. Events, situations, processes, projects, concepts and documents seemed to advance the sorely needed dematerialisation of the art object. The American artist Lawrence Weiner published his sculptures as written statements to be commissioned, or not, by the owner. This liberation movement was extensively documented in 1973 by the American critic and exhibition organiser Lucy Lippard in the standard work, *Six Years. The dematerialisation of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (Praeger, NY, 1973).

BETWEEN CONCEPT AND OBJECT

This purge of the artistic exploit acted as a form of purification. Visual art became stripped of its technical, aesthetic and intrinsic clichés. Until well into the 1970s, this conceptualistic, multi and interdisciplinary approach was predominantly associated with the rather marginal phenomenon of the avant-garde . Traditional artists continued to paint and sculpt and, in doing so, generally confined themselves to a single, strictly defined medium. For a long time, art education also remained blinkered to this multidisciplinary trend. Artists graduated as a painter , sculptor , graphic designer or photographer . However, in the course of the 1980s, the plastic versatility of the avant-garde became increasingly mainstream. The mediatisation of contemporary art through magazines and television popularised the image of the versatile, multidisciplinary artist as an artistic chameleon. In the 1990s, art schools acquired new departments with names such as free studio" and "intermedia". The bulkheads separating the disciplines collapsed under the pressures of the present day artistic reality. *Cross-over* became the new form.

But the boundaries between the art world and the "real" world were also gradually being transcended. Enterprising artists cropped up in environments normally inhabited by scientists and businessmen. Choice of material and technique became subjugated to the concept or project under development. In many cases, the physical production of the piece was contracted out to workers or an external technician. As a result, the artist's freedom to express himself exactly as he wanted to grew enormously. The world was now his studio. At the same time, a gaping void emerged in some cases between the concept and the object, between the formation of the idea and its materialisation. This can be easily explained. The art market was crying out for marketable art objects, while the saleable art object, since the critical, conceptual art of the 1960s, had in a certain sense been discredited. One solution was to think up a work of art and have it made by others.

Bernd Lohaus, Kassel, 1992, Antwerp Sculpture Show, 2008

In this way, the artist killed two birds with one stone: he prevented his conceptual freedom from becoming tarnished by physical work, yet something was produced which could be viewed and sold. In the 1980s, for example, the American artist Jeff Koons became an international breakthrough with his smooth-surfaced, kitsch-looking sculptures in stainless steel, polychrome lime wood, painted porcelain and coloured crystal. Not one of these sculptures was made by the artist himself. Multiple copies were made according to his instructions by experienced, generally traditional, craftsmen. In Belgian art, we can point to Wim Delvoye, who had his bronze sculptures and high-tech installations (consider the famous *Cloaca* machine) made by a small army of skilled workers and technicians. And, once again, it was good old Andy Warhol who paved the way for this decades ago, with his *The Factory* and the screen prints and wallpapers produced by his assistants.

UPWARDS TO IMAGES

In the 1980s, the lines between avant-garde and academism appeared to have all but disappeared. While neo-conceptualists in New York occupied themselves with ideas about appropriating images from the mass media and works of art from other artists, we saw a return to "wild" and expressive painting and modelling in Germany and Italy. The conceptual purges and theoretical distancing of the 1960s and 1970s created a real "hunger for images" (the telling title of a book by Wolfgang Max Faust and Gerd de Vries in 1982). It was the post- punk era. Primitivism was in. Physical effort and hard labour with paint, canvas, charcoal, paper, clay and bronze was again possible without the corny or conservative labels. At the same time, there was a mature understanding of the mechanisms of the museum and of the art trade.

This is one of my reasons for beginning this sketch of contemporary sculpture around the year 1980.

Postmodernist philosophy broke through in this period and the taboos were lifted from traditional sculpture. At the same time, new sculpture was affected by the theoretical influences of the conceptualistic and anti-object art of the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, the concept of "sculpture" became more ambivalent, more complex, and therefore, richer. A "classical" form no longer stood for traditional content as a matter of course. Nor did a "modern" form stand for progressiveness. Hidden meanings, art-historical references and an ironic attitude gave rise to ambiguous images. There was room for dissent. Furthermore, most of the artists who came into the limelight around 1980 are still working today. They are part and parcel of present-day art, and their past and present work interacts with the work of younger generations. This means that the birth dates of the artists in this publication vary from 1940 (the generation of Panamarenko and Bernd Lohaus) to 1980 (the generation of Nick Ervinck and Thomas Lerooy). In other words: the youngest artists in this survey first saw the light of day at a time when others already had an oeuvre and career to look back on.

Photo: Philippe De Gobert

Photo: Sybil S. Pictures

Peter Rogiers, Two reclining figures on a calder base, sculpture for Middelheim, 2006, polyester and steel, 165 x 245 x 258 cm.
MIDDELHEIM COLLECTION, ANTWERP

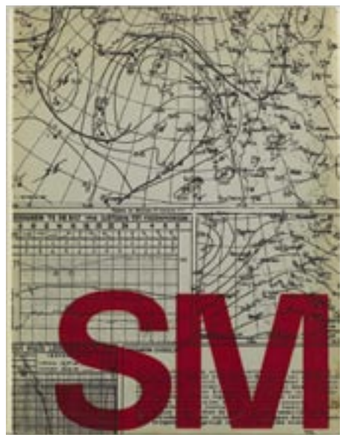
Patrick Van Caeckenberg, Luipaard, 1990, leopard skin with "moon", "sun" and "stars" carved into it, wooden pedestal and glass dome, 150 x 146 x 186 cm.
MUHKA COLLECTION, ANTWERP

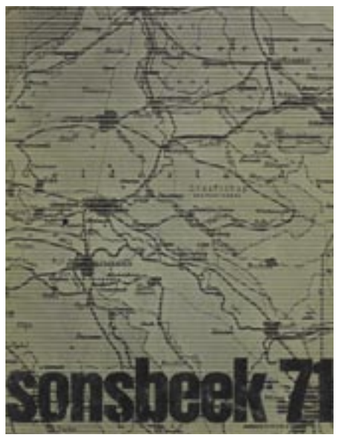
In our country, there is a certain tradition for publishing surveys of sculpture. In 1962, for example, we had Gilberte Gepts's *Beeldhouwkunst in België* (published by the Antwerp Publishers, Helios). In her introduction, the author lets it be known that in her eyes, Flanders is more a nation of sculptors than of painters, as the cliché goes. Her survey begins with nineteenth century outsiders such as Constantin Meunier and George Minne and sculpting painters such as Rik Wouters and Georges Van Tongerloo, and ends at the wood reliefs of Vic Gentils and the mobiles of Pol Bury. Assemblages and kinetic constructions are indeed the most progressive forms of sculpture at the beginning of the 1960s. A more recent survey appears in the book entitled *Hedendaagse beeldhouwers in Nederland en Vlaanderen* (Stichting Ons Erfdeel, Rekkem, 1998). The Flemish contribution is made by critic Marc Ruyters. He selects Panamarenko, Lili Dujourie, Guillaume Bijl, Philip Van Isacker, Thierry De Cordier, Patrick Van Caeckenbergh, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Wim Delvoye, Carlo Mistiaen and, the youngest scion, Peter Rogiers.

Nine of the ten also crop up in this themed issue of OKV, accompanied by a number of other, mostly younger, artists. As with previous publications, this selection should not be seen as a definitive survey, but more as a provisional introduction. This is because it gives a fleeting and subjective picture of what qualifies as contemporary sculpture in these parts in the year 2008. It makes no claims as to completeness; it has no academic pretensions. Therefore, this edition is best likened to an exhibition (and one that is transient, subjective, and set in context) rather than a monograph (which is more permanent, more objective, and contextually unspecific). For that matter, I am well aware of the vagueness and ambivalence of the terms "contemporary" (here understood as manifesting itself "today") and "sculpture" (here understood as a spatial work of art with a more or less "tangible" dimension and generally "static" character).

To ensure that the views of the author are not imposed on the artists presented in this edition (and generate friction in the process), we have invited them to select a work of their own for this publication. The aim is to allow the images to speak for themselves. Indeed, these images are actually all of them definitions of what sculpture means today. Correspondingly, this themed edition takes shape in two parts: the first contains an introduction to set the context, and offers a potential framework of reference (without delving into the works of the artists in greater depth) and the second is a kaleidoscopic collection of "sculptural images" . Therefore, a few of the contributions in this second part could very well contradict the sentiments of the first (or at least so I hope). Though there is an interaction between both parts, it is possible, as I see it, to read or view them separately. Consequently, the question as to what sculpture is or might mean today is of much greater significance than any answer we might offer.

Showing sculptures





Words like "sculptural work of art" and "sculpture" are quite treacherous. They appear to be self-explanatory, but can be understood in various ways, broadly and narrowly. Just like the term "painting" for that matter. A little less than ten years ago, for example, the exhibition *TroubleSpot. Painting* (MUHKA an NICC, 1999) championed an "expansive" understanding of painting. The exhibition showed video work and installations next to standard paintings, and in doing so, covered a period of more than thirty years. Recently, there have also been exhibitions on painting which have showed an almost exclusively recent collection of traditional paintings. *Back to the Picture* (Vlaams Cultuurhuis De Bakke Grond, Amsterdam, 2005) and *Pushing the Canvas* (Cultuurcentrum Mechelen, 2007) defined the painting as what it essentially is: a flat surface containing colours. There is something to be said for both outlooks (the broadened and the narrowed). They relate to changing notions and understandings, but equally to tastes and fashions. Is it a coincidence that the first exposition was put together by artists (Luc Tuymans and Narcisse Tordoir) and the next two by curators (Thibaut Verhoeven and Koen Leemans)? Can the same be said about exhibitions of sculpture?

ORIENTATIONS

As is the case with exhibitions of paintings (and the opinions on painting expressed in them), there is with exhibitions of sculpture (and the opinions on sculpture expressed in them) a shuttling to and fro between "broadening" and "narrowing". But, whereas in the case of paintings, this movement largely takes place at the visual level, in the shifting perceptions of sculpture, the material and spatial aspects play a much bigger role by definition. This is evidenced, for example, in the famous quote by the painter Barnett Newman at the top of this piece. It can also be deduced from the fact that painting is a much more ready symbol of the avant-garde than sculpture. In actual fact, there are no sculptural equivalents of early modern painters like Delacroix, Corot, Courbet and Manet. Neo-classicism and historicism dominated the sculptural discourse until the end of the nineteenth century. We have to wait for Rodin before sculpture finds its first avant-garde pioneer. Furthermore, it is often painters who produce the most experimental sculptures (consider Picasso, Gauguin, Matisse and Boccioni).

Catalogue of the exhibition 'Op losse schroeven', 1969, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
LIBRARY MIDDELHEIMMUSEUM, ANTWERP

Catalogue of the exhibition 'Sonsbeek buiten de perken', 1971
LIBRARY MIDDELHEIMMUSEUM, ANTWERP

The word "sculpture" for that matter, as opposed to painting is dated. A painting is in most cases - despite some attempts to broaden it - actually painted (in other words paint is applied to a surface). On the other hand, a sculptural work of art is not necessarily, literally "sculpted" (i.e., carved from wood or stone; or modelled in wax or clay). Alternative modernistic techniques such as assemblage, objet trouvé, readymade, environment, installation and performance eroded the concepts of sculpture in the course of the last century.

Is the *Fountain* (the upturned urinal) by Marcel Duchamp a sculpture? Is the *Autorijschool* by Guillaume Bijl a sculpture? Not if you define sculpture as something created or sculpted by the hand of an artist; but it is if you define sculpture as something static and three-dimensional. Perhaps sculpture is best defined *ex negativo*, by that which it is *not* is (painting, video, photography, performance, etc.).

The borders between sculpture and installation are much more difficult to define.

And, actually, there is no real need to. Whereas the word sculpture calls a more monolithic association to mind, installation sets us to thinking more about all kinds of, sometimes heterogeneous, forms and objects distributed throughout a space. Just like sculpture, an installation makes inroads into the surrounding space, but the viewer generally takes a different position. This is because the dimension of time is dependent on the beholder's pattern of viewing and moving. In the case of a sculpture, you usually walk around the piece. An installation is generally something you get inside of. But here too, the borders are extremely vague, and they do not really have to be defined. In this article, and in the image section, we will cover both the broader and narrower interpretations of sculpture, linking them in, wherever possible, with their historical contexts. One extreme end of the spectrum may well be occupied by an artist like Guillaume Bijl, who composes his installations and compositions from existing objects (or has his sculptures made by other people). At the other end, we have someone like Berlinde de Bruyckere, whose figurative sculpture ties in closely with art-historical tradition and for whom the activities of drawing, modelling and casting are crucial factors. Both sculptural positions are equally contemporary.

BEYOND THE LIMITS

Contemporary sculpture in Flanders and Belgium is difficult to interpret without casting an eye over those exhibitions which have placed sculpture on the artistic agenda, both nationally and internationally. Museum and exhibition interest in sculptural works of art is actually quite a recent, post-war phenomenon. Prior to this, sculptures were mostly represented in the context of painting exhibitions. In 1948, Battersea Park in London began a long tradition of open air sculpture exhibitions. Barely a year later, the first Dutch exhibition of sculpture took place in Sonsbeek Park (Arnhem), quickly followed by Middelheim Park (Antwerp) where the first international exhibition of sculpture was held in 1950. *Documenta* 1 (1955) and 2 (1959) in Kassel also focused the attention of the post-war public on the roots and topicality of modern sculpture. Sculpture also claimed a place in public areas after the war. It played a huge role in the rebuilding of the Western European cities. Modern art became a symbol of freedom and progress (and an antidote for the idealist classicism of the Nazis and the socialist realism of the Eastern Bloc).

The grounds and pavilions of the World Exhibition in Brussels (1958) were also literally strewn with modern sculptures and fountains. The sculpture presented in the big exhibitions in the 1950s and 1960s was usually on a pedestal, generally a stylised figure, and almost always made from stone, iron or bronze. It was distinctly modern, but seldom if ever experimental. It conformed to established perceptions of what a statue should be and did not disturb the passer-by on the street or the walker in the park. This all changed in 1969 when pioneering exhibitions like *Op losse schroeven. Situaties en cryptostructuren* (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1969) and *When Attitudes become Form. Works-concepts-processes-situations-information* (Kunsthalle Bern, 1969) showed processes, projects and installations for the most part. Panamarenko (°1940) was the only Belgian artist represented at both exhibitions. Two years later, *Sonsbeek. Buiten de perken* turned the Dutch art world completely upside down. Instead of being about sculpture, as were previous editions of this sculptural exhibition, it was now exclusively about "situations", "structures" and "activities".

The works themselves changed, but so did the approach to the exhibition location. Instead of confining it to the park, composer Wim Beeren scattered *Sonsbeek 71* across the whole of the Netherlands. This probably meant that nobody actually saw the exhibition as a whole. As a result of this and the many short-lived projects, the documentation (and therefore, the catalogue) became more important. Some artists designed a piece for a specific location. Others showed only a film, created a book or did something purely for the catalogue. The Belgian participants were Panamarenko, who futilely attempted to fly from Antwerp to Arnhem in his airship, the *Aeromodeller*, and the *Mass Moving* collective, which covered the street surfaces of Arnhem in large stamped flower motifs. Public protest and criticism was rife, and *Sonsbeek 71* clearly marked a new approach to art and exhibitions.

This thread was picked up and developed in 1977, when the first edition of *Skulptur.Projekte* took place in Munster. The first part of this influential open air exhibition consisted of a historic overview of modern sculpture from Rodin to the minimalists. The second part, put together by the young curator Kasper König, showed a few new projects by artists Carl Andre, Michael Asher, Joseph Beuys,

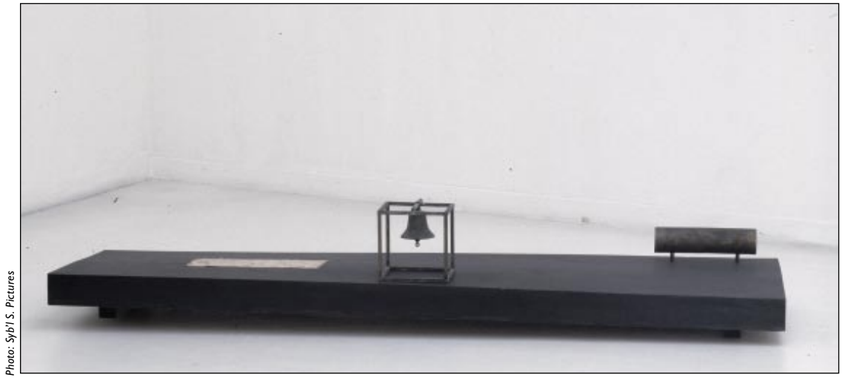


Photo: Sybil S. Pictures

Above:
Jan Fabre, De man die de wolken meet, 1998, silicon bronze, 336 x 80 x 45 cm.
S.M.A.K. COLLECTION, GHENT

Top left:
Ludwig Vandevelde, Nachtscène, wood and metal.
MUHKA COLLECTION, ANTWERP

Left:
Thierry De Cordier, Trou Madame (Mould), 1994, mixed media, 95 x 191 x 114 cm.
S.M.A.K. COLLECTION, GHENT

Donald Judd, Richard Long, Bruce Nauman, Claes Oldenburg, Ulrich Rückriem and Richard Serra. With *Sonsbeek 71* and Munster 1977 it was not longer possible to imagine an exhibition without *site-specific* sculpture. The traditional statue on a pedestal appeared to have been relegated to the past for good. A year later, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam got in on the act with the exhibition mentioned at the beginning of this article, *Made by sculptors*. Although no mention was made of this in the catalogue, its conception may well have been inspired by a crucial book published exactly one year before, *Passages in modern sculpture* by Rosalind E. Krauss (1977).
In this book, the American art historian sketches out an almost linear progression of sculpture from Rodin to minimal art and earthworks. The exhibition in the Stedelijk picked up on this and showed various forms of revelatory sculptural "investigation" such as that carried out in the wake of arte povera, concept art, earthworks and body art. Projects and interventions in space were central to this (documentation was exhibited on the legendary Antwerp project *Office Baroque* in 1977, by Gordon Matta-Clark, who died in the same year). The human figure, which had predominated humanist sculpture in the years after the war, made way for orientations and processes. Bronze for wood, canvas, rope, sheet steel, lead, videotape, neon light and rubber. In Belgium, this post-conceptual and post-minimalist sculpture manifested itself at that time, among other things, in the weather-beaten wooden sculptures of Bernd Lohaus (°1940), the technophile assemblages of Panamarenko (°1940), the Lego sculptures of Luc Deleu (°1944), the fluorescent lamps in water by Leo Copers (°1947), the constructive assemblages in wood, steel and stone of Paul Gees (°1949) and the newspaper heaps and book cuttings of Denmark (°1950).

AFTER THE MODERN

The artistic paths of each of these artists were extremely individual, and came in the wake of what exhibition organiser Harald Szeemann described in 1972 as individual mythologies . Therefore, the 1980s seemed to usher in an extreme sculptural stylistic pluralism, in which radical minimalism and baroque excess could appear alongside each other, expressivity alongside cool. Primitivism and postmodernism went hand in hand. In the early 1980s, through analogy with new painting, people started talking about new sculpture . This new form reacted against the reduction of minimal art and the dematerialisation of conceptual art. Once again, more materials and textures were used, and ideas were borrowed extensively from art history, kitsch and design. What characterises the sculpture of the 1980s, particularly the German, is the inspiration provided by architecture, scale models and furniture design (consider, for example, Harald Klingelhöller, Reinhard Mucha and Thomas Schütte). However, the new British sculpture appeared to reside under playful recuperation and bricolage (for example, Tony Cragg, Julian Opie and David Mach).

Photo: Ronny Heirman

Lili Dujourie, The Kiss, 1987, wood, fabric, varnish, velvet, chicken wire, silver, glass and liquid, 244 x 432 x 102.5 cm.
MUHKA COLLECTION, ANTWERP

Anachronism became the new figure of speech for the 1980s. Postmodernism also went in tandem with a new method of exhibiting. In 1988, Harald Szeemann developed the exhibition *a-Historische klanken* for the Boymans-Van Beuningen museum in Rotterdam. There, recent sculptures by Klingelhöller and Bruce Nauman began a dialogue with art works and utensils from the recent and distant past. This development from the uniform to the eclectic was also clearly discernable in the work of Belgian artist Lili Dujourie (°1941). Her extreme minimalist installations made from sheet steel in around 1970 evolved into baroque stage scenes with references to opera and seventeenth-century still life in the 1980s. Other Belgian artists such as Jan Vercruysse (°1948), Philip van Isacker (°1949), Didier Vermeiren (°1951), Thierry De Cordier (°1954), Maen Florin (°1954), Ludwig Vandevelde (°1957) and Jan Van Oost (°1961) all wrestled in some sense with the heritage of the avant-garde. Having grown up in post-war modernism, these artists appeared to be gradually distancing themselves from it. Or better still: they liberalised the reductive, formalist-leaning modernist visual language of the 1960s and 1970s. This distancing and transformation went hand in hand with a feeling of emancipation, but also one of loss. The fabulous future pictured by the post-war modernists was reduced to an illusion; modern art had lost its orientating function. The big picture had become fragmented.
In the works of these and other artists, we see traces of melancholy, portrayed through references to motifs from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (in the works of De Cordier and Vandevelde), fragments and pieces (in Vermeiren and Van Isacker), monuments and tombs (in Vercruysse), classical mythology (in Florin) and vanitas still life paintings (in Van Oost). Some of these artists featured in the exhibition entitled *Het Sublieme Gemis. Over het geheugen van de verbeelding*, where this post-modern practice formed the theme (composed in 1993 by Bart Cassiman for the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp). We see a more playful, less gloomy approach in the work of Guillaume Bijl (°1946), Guy Rombouts (°1949), Fred Eerdekens (°1951), Luk Van Soom (°1956), Jan Fabre (°1958), Philip Huyghe (°1958), Patrick Van Caeckenbergh (°1960) and Wim Delvoye (°1965). Whereas Fabre and Van Soom shared a preference for baroque and anthropomorphic figuration, we see in the work of Eerdekens, Rombouts and Van Caeckenbergh a surrealistically inclined interest in language, collections and bricolages. Finally, in installations with banality and kitsch as the underlying themes, Bijl and Delvoye can be considered the archaeologists of the quotidian.
Clearly the wind that blew through the art world in the 1980s was one of installations and neo-conceptualism. The avant-gardes of the 1960s had been resurrected. Sculpture established a rapport with installation art and in some cases could be defined as pure "orientation". Artists such as Jason Rhoades, Jessica Stockholder and Thomas Hirschhorn broke down the borders between sculpture, painting and installations. A wealth of colours and textures dispensed with any idea of plastic homogeneity. The smooth aesthetic of the 1980s was eaten away in their complex, often chaotic looking installations, and recuperated and recycled objects and shapes took on a new significance through their combination with other objects. Shabby materials were often used and linked together.
The emergent Belgian artists of the late 1980s, including Michel François (°1956), Ann-Veronica Janssens (°1956), Joëlle Tuerlinckx (°1958) and Ellen Augustynen (°1958), frequently knocked together, constructed and staged environments. Their works often arose in dialogue with the given (exhibition) area and generally managed to transform them temporarily but fundamentally (consider, for example, the misty landscapes of Ann-Veronica Janssens). In other cases, the additions were extremely subtle and barely noticeable. In the installations of Honoré d O (°1961), Peter Buggenhout (°1963), Dimitri Van Grunderbeek (°1964), Gert Verhoeven (°1964), Herman Van Ingelgem (°1968), Christine Clinckx (°1969), Hans Op De Beeck (°1969) and Gert Robijns (°1972), the onlooker became part of the piece in some cases, or was even able to actively participate in it. Sculptures then became traces of an activity or beacons in given space. The emptiness between the objects was just as important as the objects themselves. Heterogeneous materials and unorthodox textures served to corrode sculptural integrity. Buggenhout s dust sculptures , for example, are usually presented in a constellation of walls, pedestals and lighting, which gives the works an extra dimension and blurs the line between the object and the surrounding décor.

THE HYBRID AND THE HOMOGENEOUS

In the 1990s, the *Posthuman* exhibition (Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, 1993) signalled a new trend: the return of the human figure, only in its most artificial form. To a large extent, the look of this exhibition was shaped by dolls, robots, prostheses and body fragments, and among them, *The Garden* by Paul McCarthey (1991-92) left a strong impression on me. At around the same time, Mike Kelley presented *The Uncanny,* his contribution to the *Sonsbeek 93* open air exhibition. Here, too, there was a fascination with artificial bodies, sex dolls, anatomic models, film trickery and wax figures. The Ameri-

Photo: Sybil S. Pictures

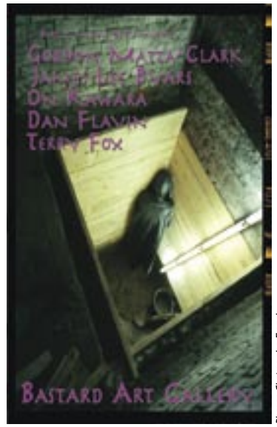
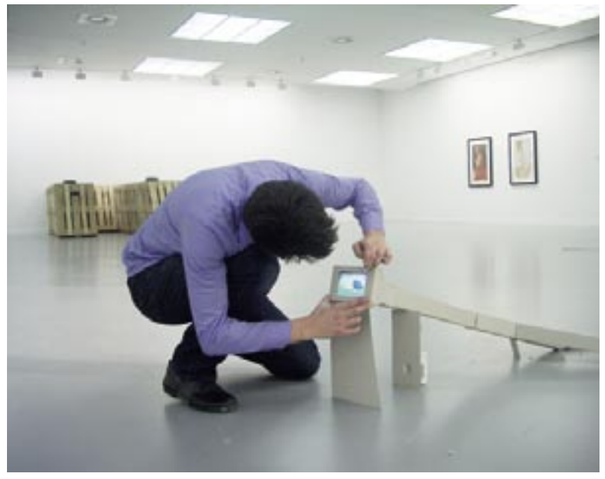


Photo: Christophe Engels



can west coast art and its rancid, and at times morbid, aesthetic gradually permeated the European art world. The human figure was well and truly back, but appeared alienating and completely devoid of its human properties.

All traces of humanist ideals or great social utopias had evaporated. Sculpture was now more a form of materialised cultural pessimism. Not long after, the "young Brits" broke through with their abject sculptures and installations. Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin and Jake & Dinos Chapman gave sculpture a new, punky yet glossy allure. A self-portrait in frozen blood (Mark Quinn), a giant shark in a preservative-filled aquarium (Hirst) and other shocking motifs lay in wait for the general public in over-hyped exhibitions like *Sensation. Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1997) and *Apocalypse. Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art* (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2000). Collector Charles Saatchi rather bombastically dubbed the new tendency as "New Neurotic Realism".

The "dirty" aesthetic of the American west coast artists and young Brits had an effect. It made sculpture more playful, but more nettling and provocative at the same time. This was because the physicality of a sculptural object can be much more confrontational than the visual distance of video, film or photography. The use of different materials and colours gave rise to images which were hybrid in various respects. There was a noticeable interest in low-tech and craftsmanship, but with some kind of strange twist. At times, the figuration leaned toward the expressionistic, but influences came in from everywhere, from art history, pulp and kitsch. There was talk of a certain playfulness and of hidden meanings. The use of materials was not homogeneous, and was often unorthodox. The taboo on colour usage had also completely disappeared. The good taste of the modernists was often trampled underfoot.

In Belgium in the 1990s, we started to see the power for this new, eclectic figuration in the work of Philip Aguirre Y Otegui (°1961), Johan Creten (°1963), Goele de Bruyn (°1963), Berlinde De Bruyckere (°1964), Johan Tahon (°1965), Sven t Jolle (°1966), Paul Casaer (°1967) and Peter Rogiers (°1967). These artists deliberately opened a dialogue with the past. In these works, craftsmanship with, at times, a traditional touch went hand in hand with a thorough knowledge of visual culture and a self-styled approach to the tradition. Sketching, modelling, casting, painting and other manual techniques gave these images a strongly physical presence. After 2000, we also find ambiguous and fluid figuration in the work of slightly younger artists such as Nadia Naveau (°1974), Bart Van Dijck (°1974), Anton Cotteleer (°1974), Caroline Coolen (°1975), Philip Metten (°1977), Filip Vervaet (°1977), Kati Heck (°1979), Wouter Feyaerts (°1980), Nick Ervinck (°1981) and Thomas Lerooy (°1981). What is characteristic here is the experimental approach to materials and material combinations. Bronze, plaster, porcelain, as well as artificial leather, plasticine, silicones and polyester are placed side by side and were even sometimes mixed. Conspicuous too is the sense of humour and irony in the work of these artists. Sculpture is a game about sculpture, in which formal and conceptual conventions are chipped away and remodelled, sometimes with the help of digital imaging (as is the case with Ervinck).

There is also renewed interest in

Honoré d'O, All the details extended, en fractures récomposées, 1995-2000.
MUHKA COLLECTION, ANTWERP

Danny Devos, Diggin' for Gordon, 2006-2008.

Gert Robijns, Speedy take it easy, 2003.
MUHKA COLLECTION, ANTWERP

Fabian Luyten, Pavillion I, 2000, bangkirai, MDF, plywood and polyester, 250 x 350 x 230 cm.

Els Dietvorst, Model: SKULL 3, 2008.
MUHKA COLLECTION, ANTWERP

Bart Van Dijck, Sick Sculpture, Antwerp Sculpture Show, 2008.

more time-related and "relational" projects, often with a more or less social critique. The ephemeral character of these projects requires thorough communication and documentation. Danny Devos (°1959), once trained as a sculptor, articulates sculptural manipulation as a critical performance by referring in his recent bootleg actions of modern art pioneers such as Dan Flavin, James Lee Byars, Terry Fox and Gordon Matta-Clark. In Devos's case, the archiving and opening of the material (via the Internet) is an essential aspect of artistic practice. Els Dietvorst s (°1964) film project *De Terugkeer van de Zwaluwen*, which she made with local residents in Brussels, is a form of "social sculpture". As was the case in the 1970s, the recording and archiving of these temporary processes plays a crucial role. In addition, Dietvorst remains true to her sculptural roots. At this point, performance is more inclined to involve itself with sculpture, which is then given a functional role, as in the public space actions of Benjamin Verdonck (°1972). In the case of Vaast Colson (°1977), sculptures seem more like stage props - traces or remains of passing action - than objects as an end in themselves. In this sense, he is closely related to the Fluxus and happening artists, who placed experience centre stage.

This interest in the "performative" character of sculpture is partly to do with the rediscovery of the late avant-garde. Minimalist art and conceptual art, which had by now passed into history, were already beginning to attract new interest by the end of the 1980s. Art historians and exhibition organisers are not the only ones to get started on the progressive heritage of the 1960s and 1970s. Quite a few young artists base their work on minimalism and conceptualism. Cool geometry, smooth surfaces, primary colours, hard edged compositions and references to modern design can be seen in the sculptures and installations of Tobias Rehberger, Liam Gillick and Jorge Pardo. These works often have a trendy, *loungy* atmosphere about them, and the feel of hip retro-modernism. Twentieth

century avant-garde is stripped of its utopian cargo and given a purely (nostalgic) form. In one sense, a few of the younger artists "recycle" their avant-garde heritage, in much the same way as the artists in the Renaissance made use of what remained of classic antiquity. The traces of modernism are interpreted once again and became transformed in the process.

In some ways, Richard Venlet s (°1964) architecturally inspired installations of the 1990s were the precursor for this. The non-figurative sculptures and installations of younger Belgian artists like Boy & Eric Stappaerts (°1969), Fabian Luyten (°1974), Koenraad Dedobbeleer (°1975), Stefaan Dheedene (°1975), Leon Vranken (°1975), Yves Maes (°1976), Jan De Cock (°1976), Wesley Meuris (°1977), Louis De Cordier (°1978) and Hans Wuyts (°1978) often contain references to the constructivism of the 1920s and the minimalism of the 1960s. Though not always explicit, they are expressed through the overlaps they sought with architecture, design and, in the case De Cordier, (natural) science. The work generally has a smooth and clean look, but it often had a dark or irrational side to it in the conceptual background. To these artists, born in the 1970s, modernism no longer stands for an outlook on the future, but for the finished past. The avant-garde has slipped into the realm of archaeology: the art of the 20th century is an archive which could be richly plundered (often without reference to the source).

Artists selection

Photo: Kaen de Waal

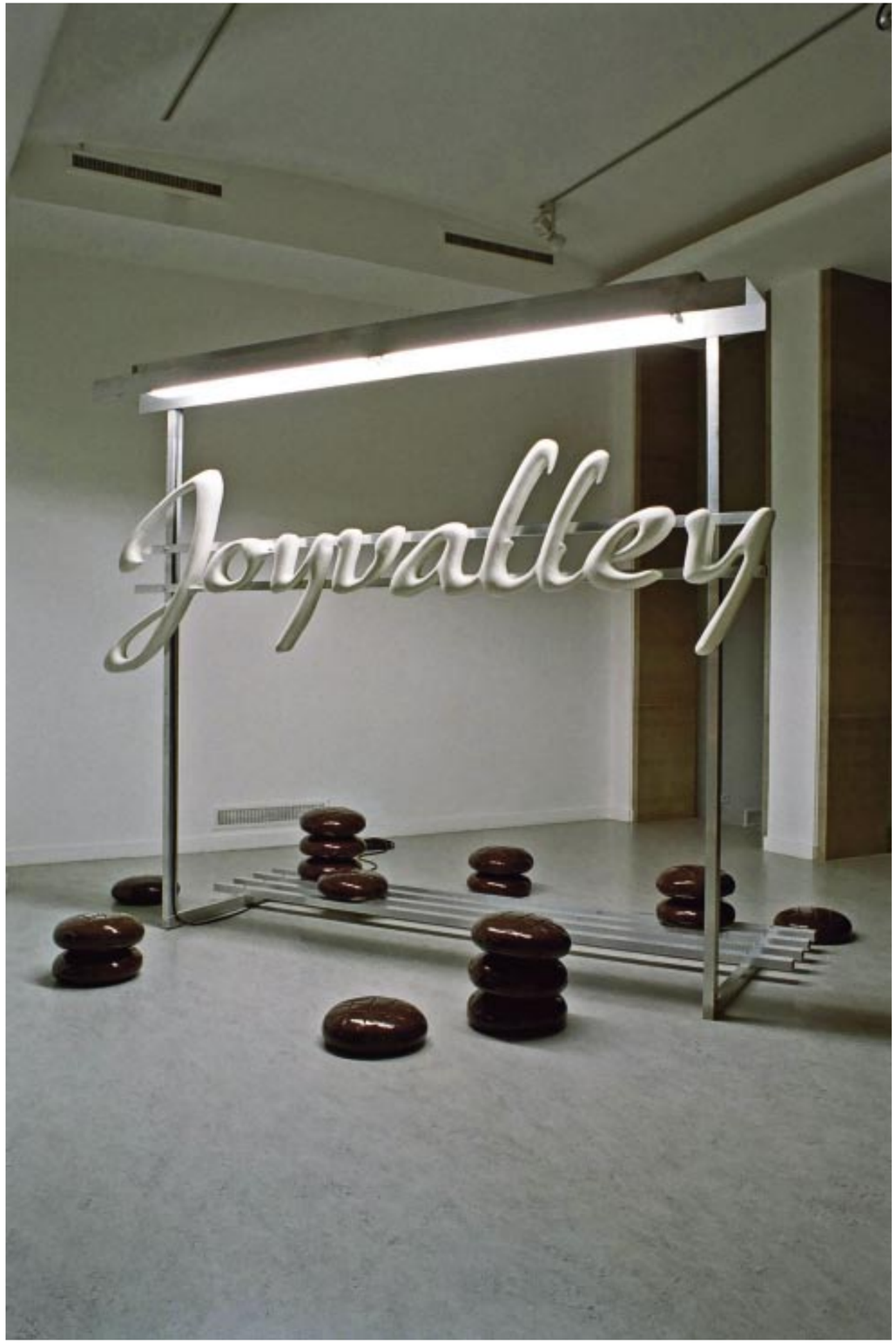
Left:
Philip Aguirre y Otegui,
Waterdrager, 1999,
bronze, 180 cm.

Right:
Guillaume Bijl, Miss Flanders
Beauty, SMAK, 2008

Peter Buggenhout,
The Blind leading the Blind
#11, 2007, polystyrene and
disposable material covered
with household dust
Exhibition entitled
"ARTempo", Venice, 2007.
HAUSER & WIRTH COLLECTION,
PRIVATE COLLECTION

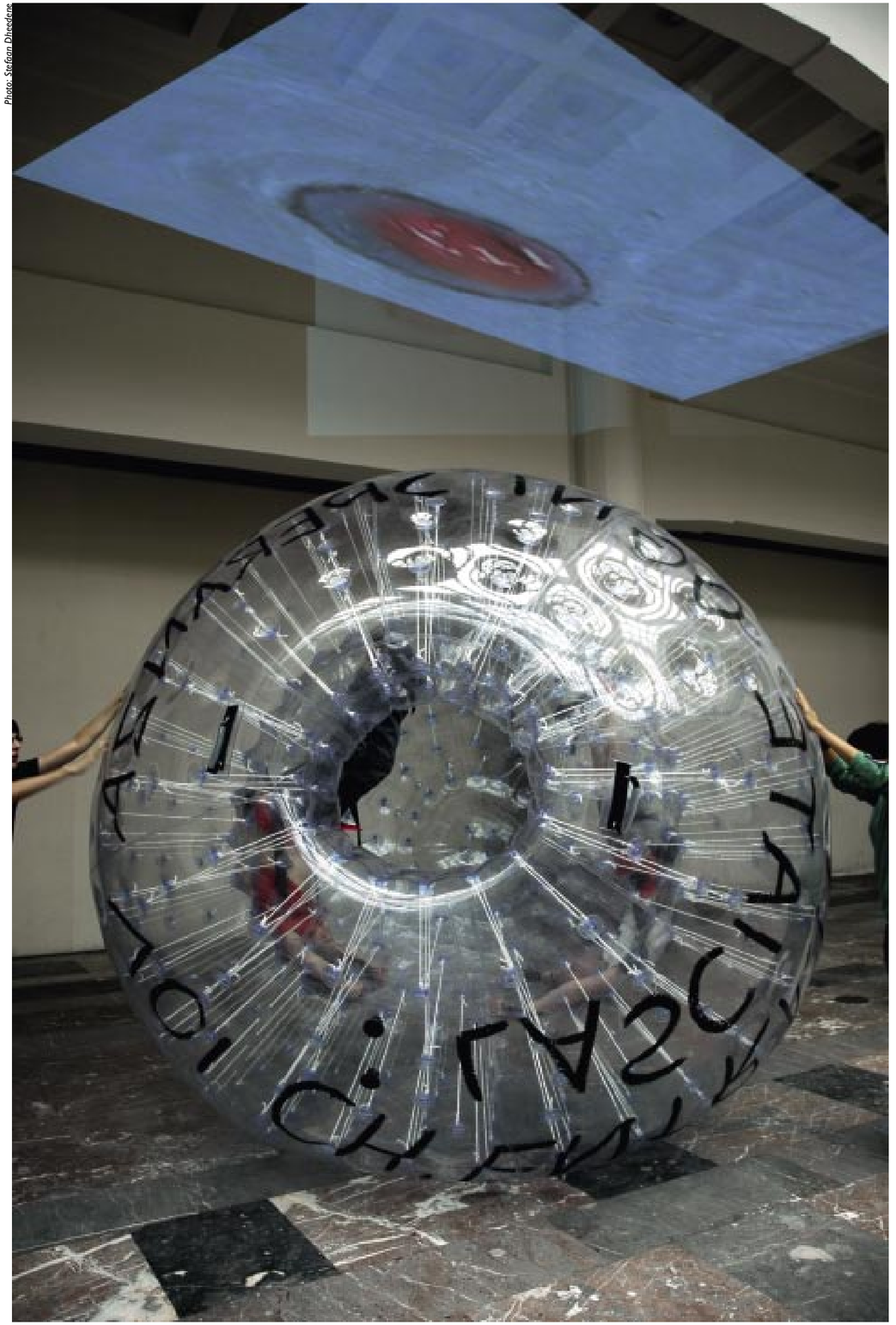
Photo: Dirk Pauwels

Photo: Mirjam Devriendt



Paul Casaer, Joyvalley, 2008, aluminium, wood, varnish, polyurethane, fluorescent tubes, 300 x 320 x 340 cm.

Photo: Stefaan Dheedene



Christine Clinckx, Boek van de mens, 2008, PSK Brussels, video projection and PVC ball.

Vaast Colson, Helena's Sculpture, 2006, wood, aluminium, leather, acryl, wheels and 12 paintings, 100 x 185 x 413 cm (closed), 130 x 225 x 638 cm (open).
COURTESY OF MAES & MATTHYS GALLERY

Caroline Coolen, Boars, 2008, ceramics and rubber, 180 x 160 x 210 cm.

Right page:
Leo Copers, without title, 2004-2007, lacquered steel, gilded bronze and printed paper, diameter 29.5 cm, height 35 cm.

Anton Cotteleer, Luxury prosthesis (in the foreground of the photo), 2007, plaster, paint, brass and glass, 62 x 62 x 159 cm.

Johan Creten, Strange Fruit, 2008 sculptures in stoneware. Exhibition in the Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Miami.

Photo: Caroline Coolen

Photo: mARTine

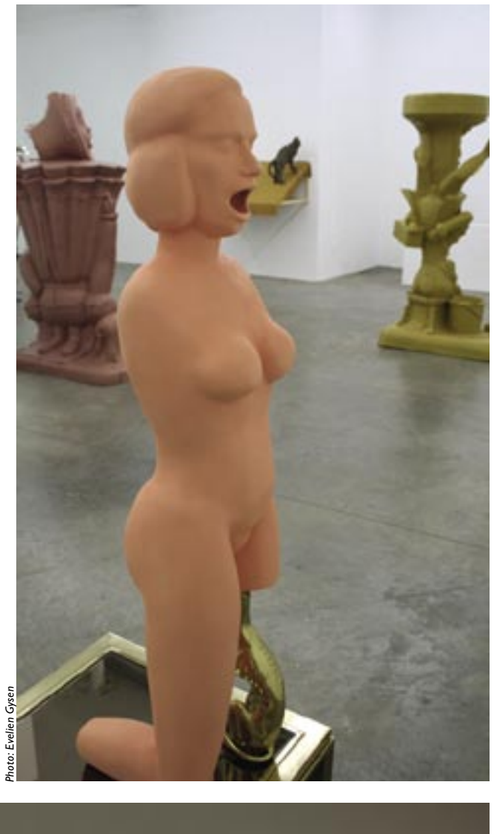


Photo: Evelien Gysen

Photo: Mirjam Devriendt

Photo: Paul Ilegems. © Goele De Bruyn

Goele De Bruyn, without title (support barrier for the onlooker), 2002, steel, leather and rubber, 437 cm.
© GOELE DE BRUYN

Berlinde de Bruyckere, In doubt, 2007-2008. Exhibition in the Yvon Lambert Gallery, New York, 2008.

Jan De Cock, Module CXXXVII.

Photo: Peter De Cupere

Peter De Cupere,
Peppertreeduplicateballs
PTB-Tree Virus
Exhibition entitled "Exoten, Beelden op de Berg", Arboretum, Wageningen
Epoxy, PU components, wood, metal, plastic, paint, peppermint concentrate, black pepper concentrate with scent activator, 370 x 700 cm (diameter).

Koenraad Dedobbeleer, Confused without the use of any words, 2007-08, View of the exhibition entitled "Remember to Remember", Gallery Mai 36, Zürich. COURTESY OF GALERIE MICHELINE SZWAJCER, ANTWERP
PRIVATE COLLECTION, THE NETHERLANDS

Photo: Luc Deleu

Luc Deleu & T.O.P. office,
VIPCITY, the nautical mile,
(model 1/100), 2004,
19.73 x 5.68 x 1.97 m.

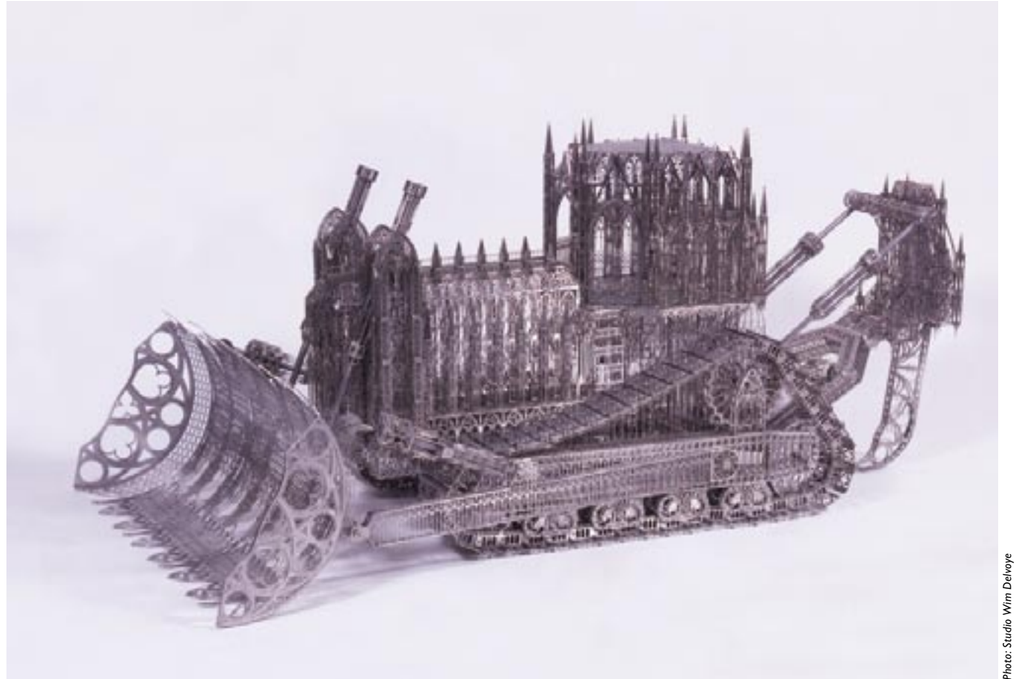


Photo: Studio Wim Delvoye

Wim Delvoye, D11 scale
model, 2008, laser-cut
stainless steel,
220 x 121 x 94 cm.

Photo: Denmark

Denmark, Artforum,
January 2008, 2008,
boxwood shapes in the
form of a parrot filled
with wads of pages from a
magazine on contemporary
art, 30.5 x 9 x 28 cm. (3x)

Photo: Philip Braem

Gerry De Smet,
De wanen in ons
Exhibition at Verbeke
Foundation, Kemzeke,
2008

Photo: Stefaan Dheedene

Stefaan Dheedene, Gate 4,
Deweer Art Gallery, 2007
Lighting for Asur Carpets,
fabric to scale.

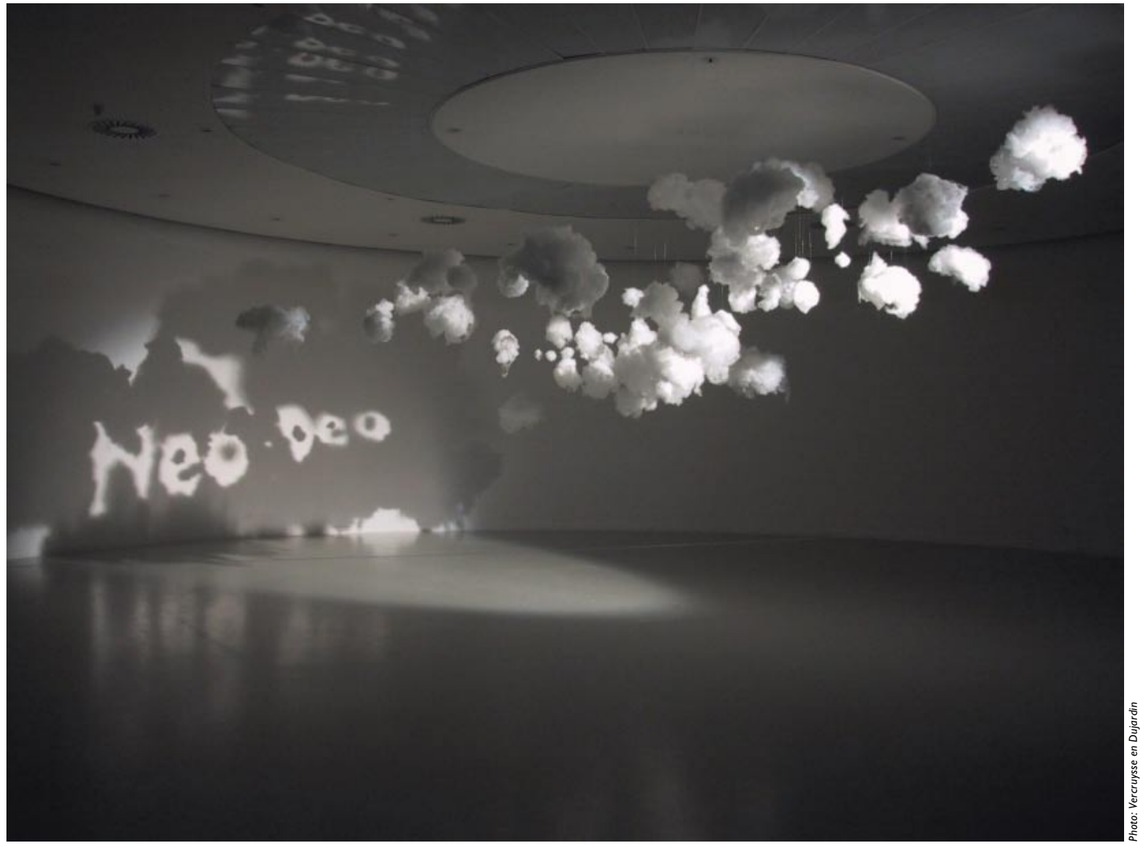


Photo: Vercruysse en Dujardin

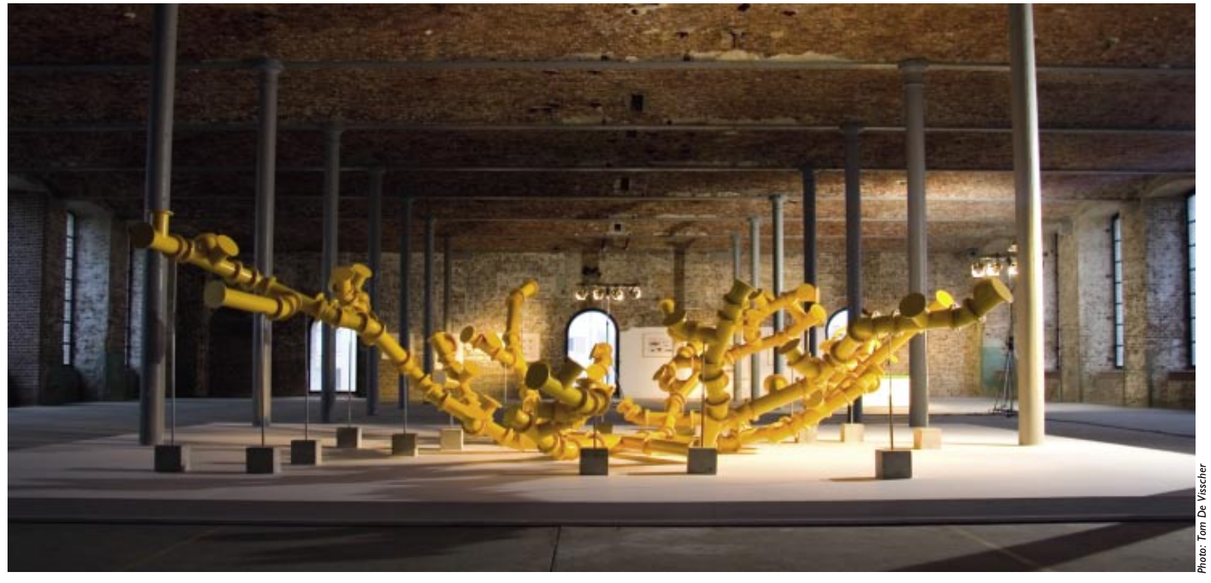


Photo: Tom De Visscher

Nick Ervinck, Yarotubs L,
2007, PVC, concrete and steel,
170 x 700 x 800 cm.

Fred Eerdekens, Neo Deo,
2002, plastic and light
projector, diameter 1,
400 cm, height 400 cm.
COURTESY OF SPENCER
BROWNSTONE GALLERY, NEW YORK

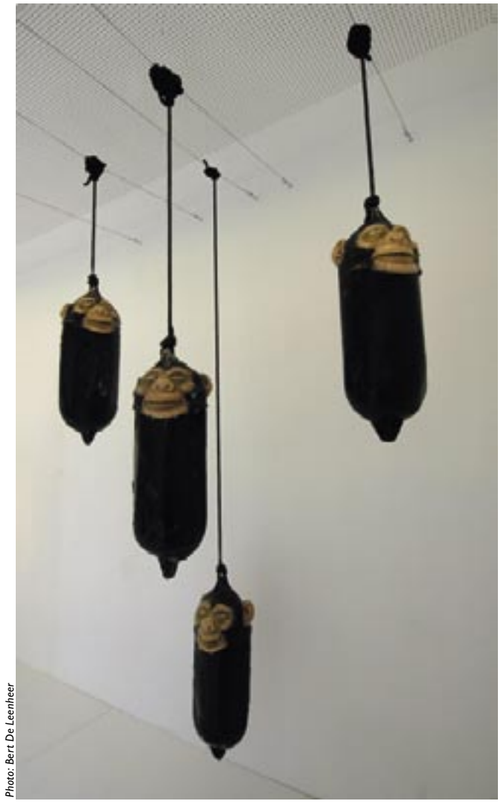


Photo: Bert De Leenheer

Photo: Maen Florin

Left:
Wouter Feyaerts, Nitwit: horen, zien en zwijgen, 2008, mixed media, 80 x 26 x 22 cm. (rope 50 cm.).
COURTESY OF GALERIE TRANSIT MECHELEN

Maen Florin, [no title], 2008, rubber, resins, textiles, 77 cm.

Kati Heck,
Dabei sein ist Alles, 2006
Exhibition
'Welcome Home.
Hommage to
Fred bervoets',
MUHKA, ANTWERPEN, 2007

Right:
Thomas Lerooy, Obelrisk, 2007, bronze and black patina, 195 x 43 x 39 cm.
COURTESY OF RUDOLPHE JANSSEN GALLERY, BRUSSELS

Right:
Nadia Naveau,
Le Salon du Plaisir, 2007,
ceramics and mixed media,
420 x 180 x 170 cm.
SNS REAAL FONDS COLLECTION, AMERSFOORT

Ives Maes, ?Hazard Marking System?, 2006, enamel and steel, 45 x 220 cm.

Wesley Meuris, Entrance Kit for Candy & Nut Shop, 2008, wood, glass, paint and title on the wall, 350 x 455 x 120 cm.

Left:
Philip Metten, Codebreaker 1, polyester and paint, 60 x 26 x 15 cm.
COURTESY OF GALERIE ANNETTE DE KEYSER

Photo: Jo Vandermariiere en Nadia Naveau

Photo: Ives Maes

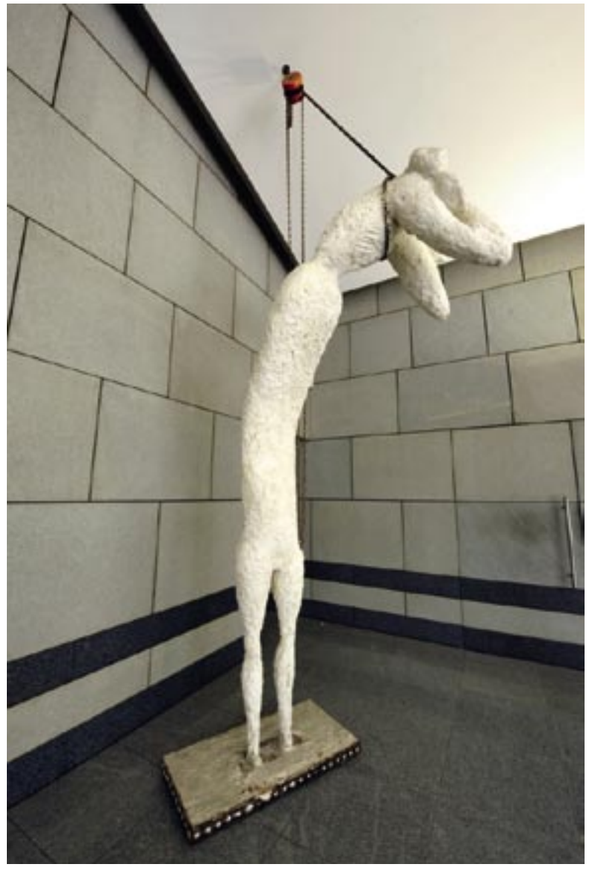
Photo: C. Demeter

© Panamarenko

Panamarenko, Hazerug, 1992, 60 hp engine, metal, Kevlar, epoxy, wooden propeller, felt, plastic, 70 x 80 x 70 cm.
© Panamarenko

Hans Op de Beeck, Location (6), 2008, sculptural installation, mixed media, mist and artificial light, diameter 18 m x height 4 m (cylinder).
COURTESY OF XAVIER HUFKENS, BRUSSELS; GALLERIA CONTINUA, SAN GIMIGNANO-PEKING; GALERIE KRINZINGER, VIENNA; RON MANDOS, AMSTERDAM-ROTTERDAM
CO-PRODUCED BY HOLLAND FESTIVAL

Johan Tahon, Esso Vision, 1996, plaster and metal, 386 cm.
FLEMISH COMMUNITY COLLECTION, GRAAF DE FERRARIS BUILDING, BRUSSELS



Dimitri Vangrunderbeek,
Groene schijf,
MuHKA, 2002,
grenen en polyspan,
diameter 13 m.,
hoogte 50-140 cm.

Photo: Jan Kempenaers

Philip Van Isacker,
In de beweging van
de tijd, 2008,
diverse materialen
en media

Luk Van Soom,
Een kosmisch verlangen,
2005, bronze,
490 x 460 x 120 cm.
Location: Heymans NV,
Graafsebaan 65, Rosmalen.
Recommendation: Stedelijk
Museum s'Hertogenbosch.

Jan Van Oost, Tokyoghost,
1993, textile,
hair and fur, life-sized.
PRIVATE COLLECTION

Photo: Geert Vanden Wijngaert

Photo: Pieter Huybrechts

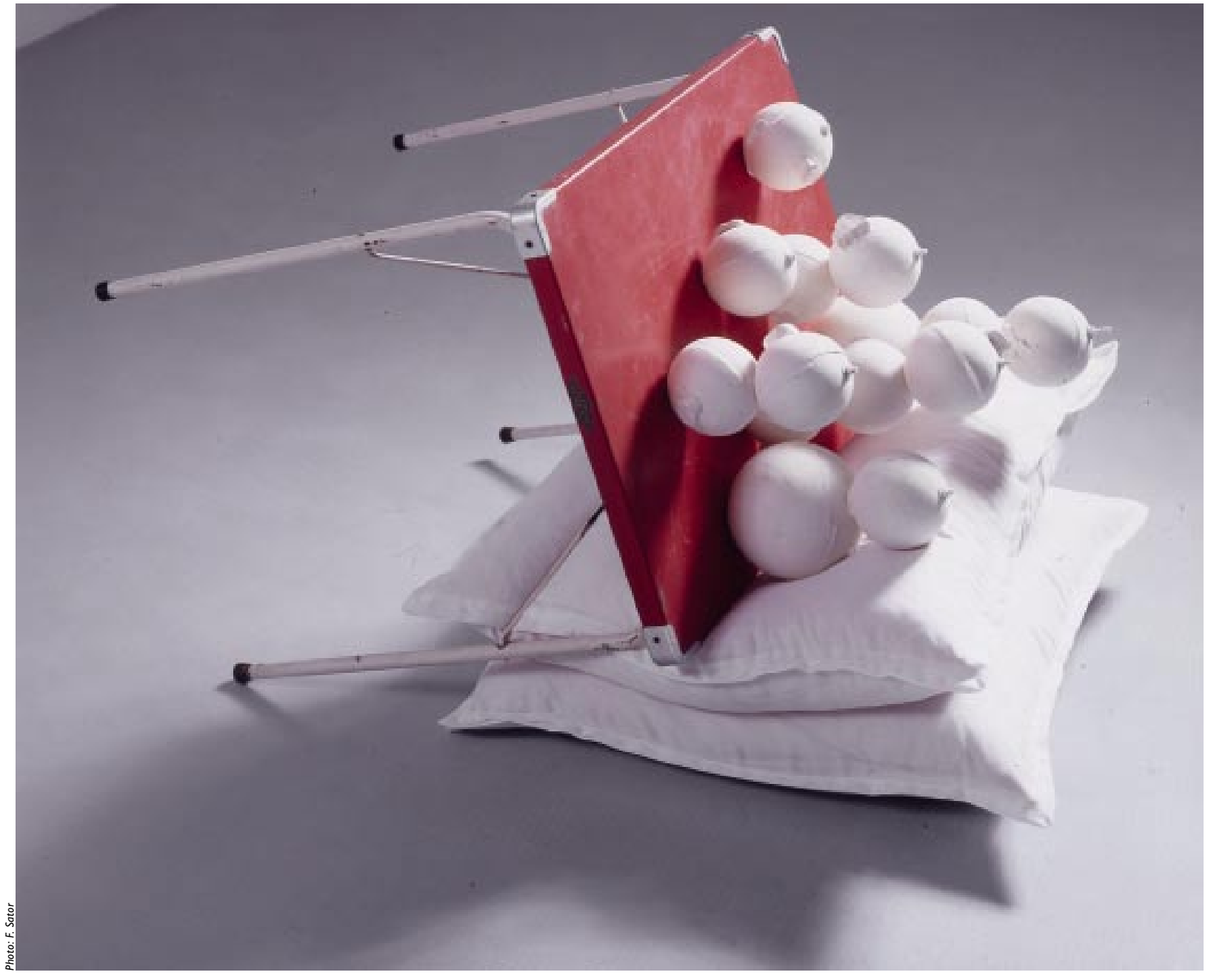


Photo: F. Sator

Left page, clockwise:
Richard Venlet,
Installation-Cit.Cit. 2
Etablissement d'en Face
Projects, Brussels, 2005.

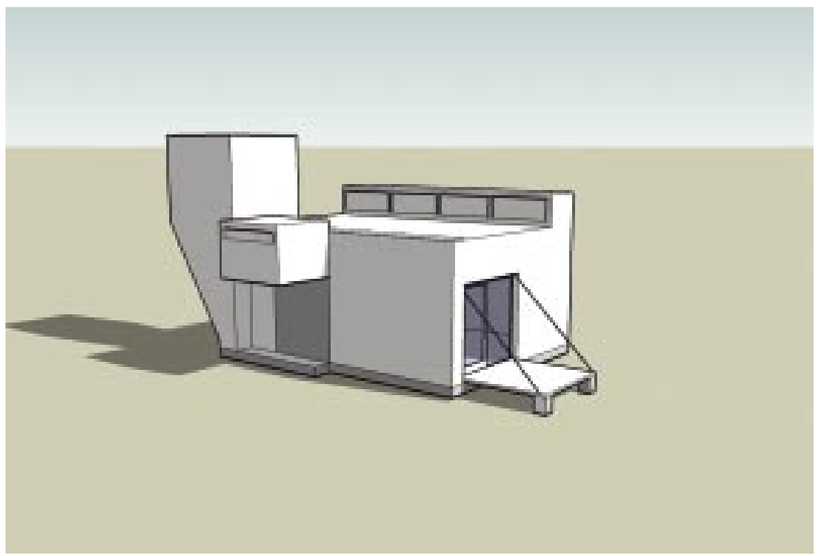
Benjamin Verdonck,
Hirondelle/dooi vogeltje/the
great swallow, 2004.

Filip Vervaet, The return of
Pan (installation entrance),
2007, wood, polyester, glass
fibre and paint,
220 x 450 x 760 cm.

Leon Vranken, Oak Rumble,
2006, solid wood and glass,
171 x 72 x 177.5 cm.

Gert Verhoeven, Palla Palla,
2003, mixed media,
105 x 135 x 70 cm.

Hans Wuyts, Artist residence
model 2, The sculpture.



Exhibitions and themes

Have there been any exhibitions devoted entirely to sculpture in recent decades here in Belgium, and if so what themes cropped up? To answer this, we have to go back to the very beginning. In 1950, following a successful international exhibition of sculpture, and on the initiative of Mayor Lode Craeybeckx, the Middelheim Open Air Museum was set up. A biennial exhibition was organised every two years, and in the meantime, a collection was gradually put together. Most Middelheim biennials were on the moderate side when it came to modernism. Radical contemporary art or innovative experimentation (such as earthworks) simply did not get through.

FROM "BEELD IN DE STAD" TO "CHAMBRES D'AMIS"

In the summer months of 1958, the year of the world exhibition, Antwerp provided the backdrop for the prestigious *Het beeld in de stad (Sculpture in the City)* exhibition. This featured work by, among others, Jean Arp, César, Lynn Chadwick, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore and Ossip Zadkine. It gave an almost complete picture of modern sculpture since Rodin. Some of the pieces found their way into the Middelheim collection. But sculpture was not to stay as it was for long. Late in 1967, a remarkable exhibition was held in the Antwerp headquarters of the Gemeentekrediet van België: *Objart. Objecten door kunstenaars*. It was put together by Karel Geirlandt, Phil Mertens and photographer Filip Tas, and gave an early survey of a relatively recent trend in Belgian sculpture: assemblage. A few iconic pieces of contemporary art entered the limelight alongside surrealist and abstract compositions by several generations of artists. Marcel Broodthaers showed a "construction with jam jars" *(L'oeil magique d'Ida Rubinstein*, 1966), Hugo Heyrman, a giant motorcycle in painted Stryropor, based on a dinky toy model (*Honda-Bentley motorcycle*, 1966, destroyed during a happening in 1968), and Panamarenko, this being one of his first group exhibitions, his first airplane, entitled *Curieus vliegtuig*, 1967 in the catalogue (now in the Smak collection).

Not long after, another aspect of the sculptural avant-garde was exposed in the exhibition entitled *Kleur-Object,* organised in the spring of 1968 on the initiative of the vzw Middelheim Promotors. Put together by critic Ludo Bekkers, Jan Gloudemans (ex-secretary of G58) and artist Mark Verstockt, it offered a survey of minimalist sculpture as practiced by a number of younger artists in Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, France and England. The title was borrowed from the work of the same name by Jan Van den Abeel. Most of the work was attracted via the avant-garde galleries of Swart (Amsterdam) and Ad Libitum (Antwerp).

Exhibition poster 'Het beeld in de stad', 1958, Antwerp
COLLECTION AMVC-LETTERENHUIS, ANTWERP

Exhibition poster 'Belgische Beeldhouwkunst in Middelheim', 1974
COLLECTION AMVC-LETTERENHUIS, ANTWERP

Catalogue of the exhibition 'Kleur-Object', 1968, Middelheimmuseum, Antwerp
LIBRARY MIDDELHEIMMUSEUM, ANTWERP

The Belgian participants were Hugo De Clerq, Yves De Smedt, Walter Leblanc, Jan Van den Abbeel, Guy Vandenbranden and Mark Verstockt. By international standards, the exhibition was woefully late, but by Middelheim standards, it was fairly radical. This was because there were several geometric-abstract sculptures to be seen, some in alternative materials such as plastic, or with an unusually vibrant colouration. In his introduction, Geert Bekaert also advocated replacing the words "statues", "forms" and "objects" with "conditions": "Condition is a way of being, nothing more. In actual fact, all we can do is allude to it: everything and nothing." And he forthrightly labelled the participating artists as scientists.

While the museums waited to see which way the wind blew, the new art could be seen in the many progressive galleries that emerged in the 1960s. Wide White Space Gallery (Antwerp), X-One Gallery (Antwerp) Plus Kern (Ghent), MTL (Brussels), Yellow Now (Luik) and New Reform (Aalst) were the main Belgian galleries to open up to the minimalist and conceptual trends. De Zwarte Panter (Antwerp) on the other hand, operated a rather contrary policy by having regard for various forms of assemblage and figurative sculpture. Sculptors like Wilfried Pas, Camiel Van Breedam, George Grard, Etienne Desmet, Mark Jambers, Kris Van Hemelrijck and Dré Peeters found their niche in the gallery s gothic chapel area. Their work was generally in the periphery of a progressive art heavily influenced by reduction and purging in the 1970s.

In 1998, there was an exhibition in Bank Brussel Lambert (Brussels) with the title *Minimal art*. Featuring sculptures by Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Robert Morris, it showed the tenors of the American minimal. A pithy detail: all the works are from private Belgian collections. In other words: Belgian collectors were (are) not at all blind to the new avant-garde, unlike the Belgian museums, which did not start buying contemporary art until the late 1970s and the 1980s. In 1971, a remarkable exhibition, *De Metamorfose van het object. Kunst en antikunst 1910-1970,* ran in the Brussels Palace of Fine Arts. It sketched the development of the objet trouvé, the ready-made, the collage and the assemblage in twentieth-century art. In the contemporary section, devoted to nouveau realism, pop art and related genres, there were works to be seen by, among others, Oldenburg, Christo and Beuys. The Belgian artists included Marcel Broodthaers, Panamarenko, Vic Gentils, Roger Raveel and Paul Van Hoeydonck.

The next significant juncture was the *Belgische beeldhouwkunst in Middelheim* exposition in the summer of 1974. After a good few biennials, devoted to a variety of guest countries, they set out to sketch the Belgian state of affairs through no less than 150 works. By present-day standards, the exhibition was something of a hotchpotch: figurative and even traditionalist sculptures could be seen alongside pop art, abstract and minimalist work. The more "current" artists tailored their work to the actual context of the park. The artists' collective *Mass Moving* presented a solar-powered sound sculpture; Jan Dries dug out a geometric *Meditative Space* in the grass; and Leo Copers presented his *Marinetti-Monument*, a sound installation that peppered the unsuspecting park stroller with the sound of machine gun fire. But his radical presentation turned out to be too unorthodox: the work could not be set up for "technical" reasons. Copers then decided to improvise a few "illegal" guerrilla sculptures from materials found lying around: iron bars, flower pots and sods of grass. It was only recently that the *Marinetti-Monument* could be experienced for the first time, at the *Leo Copers* exhibition (Middelheim, 2008).

From then on, the Middelheim biennials basked in a timeless modernism that slid into modern mannerism and gradually lost all appreciation of modern developments. Paradoxically, when the avant-garde of the 1970s was shown there, this was only retrospectively. In 1983, the 17th Biennial presented a survey of the sculpture of the 1970s. In his catalogue essay, critic Marc Callewaert gave a detailed account of developments in the preceding decade; an exercise which, shortly after the facts in 1983, was far from easy. The list of participants looks impressive: Carl Andre, Antony Caro, Edward Kienholz, Sol LeWitt, Mario Merz, Bruce Nauman, Giuseppe Penone, Richard Serra, Gilberto Zorio and others, all belonging to the international avant-garde. With these illustrious names, the museum was, in some way, attempting to fill in a few of its programming gaps.

Also represented were a number of younger sculptors who returned explicitly to art-historical figuration and heritage, such as the Italian "*transavantguardisti*" Sandro Chia and Enzo Cucchi. Belgium was represented by the divergent sculptural approaches of Roel D'Haese and Wilfried Pas (both of whom worked in an expressive-figurative context) and Panamarenko. In this sense, and by virtue of the recent character of the majority of the works, the exhibition functioned more as a pluralistic state of the art than as a purely retrospective survey. It gave rise to an interesting snapshot, in which late modern and post-modern practices, craftsmanship, and avant-garde were presented alongside and in interrelation with each other. For the first time ever, the Antwerp galleries coupled their programming to the biennial by opting in unison for sculpture, object art and projects.

In Ghent, in the meantime, they were in the process of working on an exhibition that struck out on completely new paths. On a postcard, sent to Jan Hoet on 15 June 1983, German critic Amine Haase suggested the title of *Chambres d'Amis*. Here, the art was no longer manifest in the museum or on the street, but lodged in people s homes. The starting point for this was the site-specific character of contemporary work. The guest artists, almost all at the top international level, in-

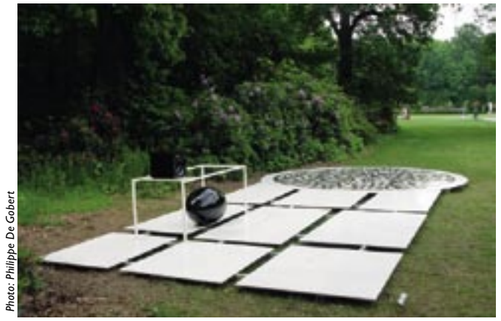


Photo: Philippe De Gobert

Photo: Bert de Leenheer

Left to right
Boy & Eric Stappaerts, Dancefloor, painted nickel fibreglass, 1200 x 500 x 115 cm.
MIDDELHEIM COLLECTION

Herman Van Ingelgem, Home, installation for Kunst and Zwalm, 2007.
COURTESY OF GALERIE TRANSIT

Ellen Augustynen, Schildersverdriet, Antwerp Sculpture Show, 2008.

corporated their works in the living rooms and sitting rooms of sixty residents of Ghent. As a result, several relationships were re-explored. The artist became a guest, the resident entered into a daily relationship with the piece, and the visitors became intruders or voyeurs. The participants on the Belgian side were Raf Buedts, Jacques Charlier, Jef Geys, François Hers, Danny Matthys, Panamarenko, Roger Raveel, Charles Vandenhove, Philip Van Isacker and Jan Vercruysse. They all created or installed their work in specific relation to the private location.

Inside & outside (& inside)

This approach was *countered* as it were in 1987, when the 19th Middelheim Biennial was dedicated to the "monument". This markedly postmodern theme was explored not only through an extended exhibition in Middelheim Park, but also through sculptural actions in the city centre of Antwerp. Whereas the exhibition largely rested on international artists (including leading figures like Anish Kapoor, Michelangelo Pistoletto and Jean Tinguely), the public area became the domain of a number of younger Belgian artists (among others, Luk Van Soom, Philip Van Isacker and Guy Rombouts). Of historic interest here was the attention devoted to a few representatives of official pre-perestroika Russian art. For the first time, plenty of thought went into the provision of a discursive framework. The catalogues contained interesting essays by young authors such as Lieven Van Den Abbeele, Jo Coucke and Lut Pil.

Equally "postmodern" in character, but with a different theoretical perspective, was the international group exhibition entitled *Deconstruction* in the Hallen van Schaerbeek. We see new forms of abstraction and recycling, among other things, in the works of Belgian sculptors like Paul Gees, Kris Fierens, Luk Coeckelberghs, Carlo Verbist, Marie-Jo Lafontaine Richard Venlet and the duo of Guy Rombouts and Monika Droste. In the year 1987 (also the year of the second *Skulptur Projekte Münster*), sculpture appeared to be omnipresent in Flanders. The very recently opened Muhka devoted its first thematic group exhibition *Inside Outside. An aspect of contemporary sculpture* to the inside-outside relationship in the sculpture of the 1980s. The catalogue contained a brilliant essay by Jan Foncé, in which this young art historian identified a few guiding lines in modern sculpture and, in the process, gave the works on display a historical context. In particular, the exhibition itself emphasised the object-like and the architectural character of contemporary, two trends which are indeed illustrative of three-dimensional art in that period. The eye-catchers included the recently acquired *Kamer III* by Jan Vercruysse, the pigmented sculpture by Anish Kapoor and a *cabane eclatée* by Daniel Buren. A few works, including the impressive installation *Come not between the dragon and his wrath* by Denmark (33 tons of waste paper in 21 bales), were given space in the vicinity of the museum.
At the same time, the exposition offered a sample sheet of Belgian sculpture since 1980: Guillaume Bijl, Rob Bruyninckx; Jan Carlier, Luc Coeckelberghs, Leo Copers, Marin Kasimir, Bernd Lohaus, Baudouin Oosterlinck, Barthel Ritzen, Jean-Marc Navez, Tapta, Christine Vandemoortele, Wim Van Der Plaetsen, Jan Van Oost, Luk Van Soom and Carlo Verbist. Barely a year later, the Muhka presented an impressive survey of British sculpture from the 1960s to the late 1980s (*British sculpture 1960-1988*). The stylistic themes were minimalism, earthworks, concept art and postmodernism. The exposition offered the perfect art-historical background for the work of those young British artists who were set to break through as YBA (*Young British Artists*) in the 1990s.
In 1990, the Provincial Museum in Hasselt put on the *Status of sculpture* exhibition in collaboration with the *Espace Lynnoais d'Art Contemporain*. Featuring work by, among others, Robert Gober and Cady Noland, it highlighted a young batch of American "sculptors" for whom ready-mades and sculpture were not mutually exclusive. The main tones were irony and social criticism.
In the late 1980s, sculpture left the protective cocoon of the gallery and museum and went out into the open air. One important initiative in Flanders was *Nieuwe Beelden*, a project set up in the framework of Antwerp Cultural Capital 1993, which took place in Middelheim. Having observed that the format and content of the Middelheim biennials were waning in terms of interest and quality, and that the collection was growing without any real grasp of the present-day, curator Bart Cassiman decided to use the biennial budget to commission 10 works. Richard Deacon, Isa Genzken, Per Kirkeby, Harald Klingelhöller, Bernd Lohaus, Matt Mullican, Juan Munoz, Panamarenko, Thomas Schütte and Didier Vermeiren took up the invitation and created new, often monumental work for the open air museum s permanent collection. To allow for this, the existing collection was rearranged and the exhibition space radically extended. This provided the museum with the spur for a more up-to-date programme and acquisition policy, which has, since then, grown to become a place for work and reflection about art in public spaces. Shortly thereafter, Guillaume Bijl installed a *Romeinse Straat* (1994), Lawrence Weiner created the monumental textual work *Wind en de Wilgen* (1995) and Wim Delvoye exhibited his tattooed pig for the first time (1997).

Out and about

In the course of the 1990s, Flanders hosted more and more exhibitions in which artists responded to a given situation. Many of these projects took place in a park or a more rural biotope, located outside the established centres for contemporary art. A guest curator was generally involved in each edition. The Zoersel biennials (at the Domein Kasteel van Halle), which began in 1980, played a pioneering role. One interesting example was a series of exhibitions that began in 1997 and ran for 10 editions in the rustic area of Speelhoven near Aarschot. That year, I myself, was given the opportunity to organise *Nature Morte??*, an exhibition project on art and ecology in the town centre of Leuven. Luc Deleu, Guillaume Bijl, Jean-Georges Massart, Bob Verschueren, Kris Van Hemelrijck and others realised new projects in public space. Other examples included *Beelden Buiten* (Tielt), the biennial *Kunst & Zwalm* art route, and the Watoe poetry summers, which discovered visual art after a long tradition of poetry.
Smaller towns like Leuven, Hasselt, Bruges and Louvain-la-Neuve also discovered the rewarding format of Biennials and Triennials. They allowed contemporary art to be linked with various forms of city marketing. It was becoming more common for an artist to be asked to "do something with a location or environment", often before he or she had even gained any real experience. As a result of this and a vast range of similar initiatives, walks and city exhibitions have lost some of their original appeal in recent years. They have become a curator s cliché, but nonetheless, manage to tap into a new public. In 2000, *Over the edges* supplied no less than 50 public projects or sculptures for the city centre of Ghent and is considered by curator Jan Hoet as a successor to *Chambres d'Amis*. Unlike that exhibition, the artists now went in search of streets and squares. The Belgian participants were Dirk Braeckman, Thierry De Cordier, Peter De Cupere, Wim Delvoye, Honoré d'O, Jan Fabre, Bernd Lohaus, Emilio Lopez-Menchero, Gert Robijns and Angel Vergara. In 2003, the biennial *Beaufort* sculpture festival, which went under the motto of "Art at sea", started presenting sculptural actions in 10 Flemish coastal areas. Its value as a spectacle and the calibre of what Gordon Matta-Clark once described as "*one-shot-images*" was fairly high. On the one hand, the event made efficient use of the media and, on the other, it reached that much sought-after, not particularly art-appreciative, public.
Whereas during *Chambres d'Amis,* the art rather modestly withdrew to the private rooms of the art lover, in the year 2000, it was actually difficult to escape. The work of art manifested itself publicly, it obtruded. In doing so, it laid itself bare to the critical gaze of outsiders, the wind and weather, and various forms of vandalism (which in some cases passed as applied criticism). Furthermore, the local authorities were not always enamoured with the artists' presentations. Thus, the exhibition *Onderstromen / Bovenstromen. Interventions in public spaces* (2002), organised by the NICC in Bruges, ran up against administrative inertia and political obstinacy (the documents and correspondence were included in the catalogue). In a certain sense, public spaces were the ultimate test for a work of art.
Jan Fabre's controversial "ham pillars" (*Over the edges*, 2000) have now become a part of our collective memory. As have the fortunes of Dan Graham's glass pavilion on the rebuilt Sint-Jans Square in Antwerp, which speak volumes. Despite its title, Graham's minimalist *Funhouse for the Children of the Sint-Jansplein* (2001) failed to charm and was irreparably damaged after just a few weeks. The piece was cleared away and was recently recreated in slightly modified form in the Middelheim Museum. In its place now stands the sculpture *Pepto Bismo* by Panamarenko. To date, it is still unharmed. And that raises questions. Is this because his work is figuratively legible and therefore more accessible? Or is it because Panamarenko, an artist from Antwerp, is more highly valued in this working-class area? Or, simply because it cannot be reached on top of its high pedestal?
The relatively wild growth of in-situ projects and route exhibitions in the 1990s lead - almost predictably - to a renewed interest in the "autonomous" statue, the sculpture which, free of all site-specific intent, was born in the workshop and would always elicit different meanings and effects in different places. In Flanders then, in 2006, as we have already mentioned, two exhibitions took place which deliberately focused on non-site specific

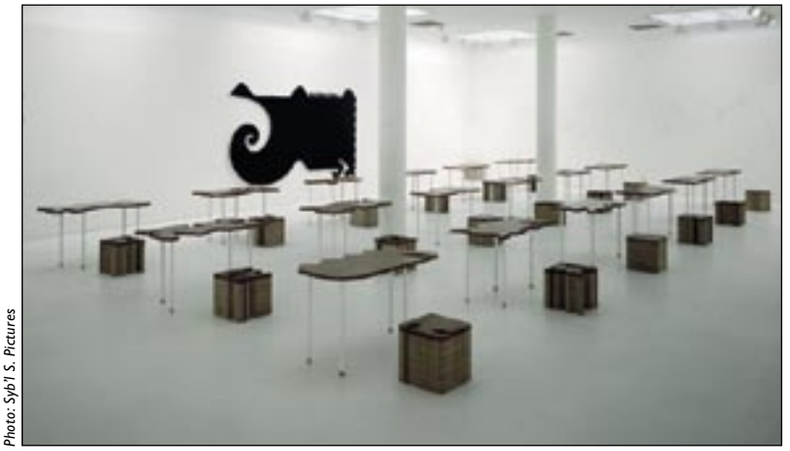


Photo: Syb't S. Pictures

Photo: 't Jolle

Guy Rombouts and Monica Droste, Gebeurtenissen die zich verharden tot het object waarop we zitten en abstracte zelfstandige naamwoorden die de stevigheid van een tafel verwerven, 1986-1987, MDF, metal, wood and varnish, 205 x 370 cm. (plate), 39 x 40 x 40 cm. (x 20 tabourets), 73 x 120 x 60 cm (x 18 tables).
MUHKA COLLECTION, ANTWERP

Paul Gees, Vertikaal gerold, 1986, wood, steel and granite, 170 x 210 x 22 cm.
MUHKA COLLECTION, ANTWERP

Sven 't Jolle, De betere klasse heeft ook recht op ontspanning: jong en onwetend en arbeider met ballonmuts, 1998, installation, plaster and polyester, 160 x 200 x 150 cm.
MUHKA COLLECTION, ANTWERP

and non-context related sculpture: *Sculpturaal Verlangen* in Huis Van Winckel (Dendermonde) and *Lang Leve Beeldhouwkunst!* in the Middelheim. The first concentrated on the work of relatively young Flemish artists who deliberately opted for a figurative language and sculptural technique. Elements from archaeology, anthropology, pulp culture and kitsch merged into hybrid, and in some cases even "impure" pieces. The participating artists were Philip Aguirre Y Otegui, Caroline Coolen, Anton Cotteleer, Nadia Naveau, Peter Rogiers, Sven 't Jolle and Bart Van Dijck. At the Middelheim, there was indoor and outdoor work to be seen by ten artists from a variety of countries. The Belgian participants were Peter Rogiers and Philip Metten. One of the themes was the deliberate linking of these works to sculptural tradition, and the fact that the pieces also work at other locations without losing their meaning or artistic value. In this sense, they are more nomadic than context-related.

Compared with the Netherlands, where post-war urban development focused a great deal of attention on public art, interest in public art in Flanders is a relatively recent development. This is also true of art education. In 1998, for example, the department of Free Monumental Art of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp changed its name to *In Situ*. Since then, it has worked explicitly on art integrations and on art in public spaces. Now that the department has started sharing its workplace with the sculptors' studio, there is a chance that this will give rise to more and more interesting interactions. Politicians are also discovering the potential of public art. Last year, Z33 (Hasselt) organised an international symposium entitled *Out of the studio! A symposium on art and public space*. It served as the impulse to consider a prestigious programme for art in public spaces, which the province of Limburg hopes to realise in the near future. The project manager is Jan Debbaut.

Finally, we can mention the importance of private initiatives. In 1994, in Gijverinkhove in West Flanders, the Georges Grard Foundation was set up with the purpose of allowing access to a collection of this artist's pieces and designs. It also has regard for present-day sculpture, and allowing sculptors such as Johan Tahon, Johan Parmentier and Henk Visch to enter into dialogue with Grard's oeuvre. A recent and interesting example is the Verbeke Foundation in Kemzeke, where, on a site that stretches along the side of the motorway, artists of differing plumage are being given the opportunity to produce and present their work. "Our exhibition space is not designed as a haven of peace. Our show is unfinished, in motion, unpolished, contradictory, untidy, complex, inharmonious, animate and un-monumental, just like the world outside the museum walls," says Geert Verbeke describing the mission of his maverick art site.

The unconventional site is hugely popular with young artists and art lovers. One of the strong points is that the public is able to see the works "in progress", and that the works themselves are in close interaction with the public and the environment. So today, it seems that "sculpture", in all its manifestations, is alive and kicking. It actually owes its eternal youth to two things: a regular return to its roots and an inquisitive glance over its borders to other disciplines. It would seem that awareness of the older as well as the other is still an inexhaustible source of energy. In other words: you cannot create an image without being visually aware. What characterises the practice of the art today is that sculpture has become a medium beside and in between the others. Artists involved in sculpture today are not tied down to it (as their predecessors were in the 1950s and 1960s), but can easily combine sculpture with other media such as photography, film projection, performance or painting. Sculpture has lost its virginity. It has become a an image between images.