

This interview is part of the example project focusing on artists' archives since the 1970s. It follows the initial description of the archive belonging to the visual artist Danny Devos (°1958, Vilvoorde). Project worker Jeroen Staes engaged in conversation with the artist about his artistic career. We looked back over his career as an artist and reflected together on the significance of his archive, exploring possible future scenarios for his artistic legacy and the role the archive might play in it.

Danny Devos: DDV

Jeroen Staes: JS

Performance and early influences

JS: Certain performance artists develop ways of getting their work to circulate within (public) collections – for example by creating instructions or protocols that other performers can carry out. As a pioneer of performance art, how do you feel about that practice? Is it something you feel at home with, or do you experience it as a different approach to what a performance is or can be?

DDV: I have to say that I'm an authorised performer myself of three performances by the French artist Marie Cool (°1961, Valenciennes). She asked me to do that. I went to her studio or her home to see what those three things involved, and I rehearsed them. We performed them once. I don't know if it was already called FIAC back then, but in any case, it was for an art fair in Paris, and the performances were held in the Louvre.

JS: Were those performances by Marie Cool already owned by a museum at that point?

DDV: Yes, they might well have been. She could sell the protocols to a museum or a collector, it wouldn't matter. And I'm one of the people authorised to perform them when necessary. I seem to remember that there were three of us, but I don't know the others. And I haven't heard any more about it since.

JS: Do you see a difference between a performance artist who performs work for another artist and an ordinary actor?

DDV: There really is a difference. And for Marie Cool there was certainly a difference. If a film or theatre director were to approach me to do something in a play of theirs, I doubt whether I would accept. Because in cases like that, I'm not actually open to repeating things. Whereas that performance, it's a fixed element that you have to perform, something very simple, but

you have to do it in that particular way. It's also different because it's something between two performance artists. That's definitely an important aspect.

JS: Are you open to re-enactments of your performances?

DDV: That has already happened on several occasions. A while ago now, but still. I think it's positive because it's a kind of living documentation. What's more, those people usually make their own mark on the performance, since everyone interprets it in a slightly different way. Incidentally, Marie Cool's performances are described in such a way that you simply can't add anything of your own. You do them the way they're supposed to be done. In re-enactments, of course, I've noticed that people do end up doing it their own way. But I don't think that matters, because then I always think of Glenn Gould (1932-1982) playing Bach. He didn't do it like Bach did, either.

JS: Don't you make any protocols or scripts for your work?

DDV: No.

JS: If people wanted to do a re-enactment of one of your performances, they would need to take the available material as a basis, which in your case only consists of a few photos and a very concise description.

DDV: Yes. That description is usually formulated in such a way that it is actually a kind of protocol. For example: you place a razor blade between the wall and your lips and stand there for as long as possible. That is both the description and the protocol.

JS: What function do you see for your archive, then, in that context?

DDV: I don't actually have an archive of my performances, except what is in my book *Danny Devos. 160 Performances* (Club Moral vzw, Antwerp, 2012). That's why I self-published that book, to have everything in one place. But that's all I've got.

JS: How do you see the status of objects and documents in your archive that refer to your performances – are they documentation or also autonomous work?

DDV: Yes, not as work, actually. As documents. *Five Cuts* (1979) did turn into a work, though. It consists of five framed Polaroid photos of a performance, combined with a razor blade that I used for that performance.

JS: Throughout your career, you have referred in performances to international artists who were active in Antwerp, such as James Lee Byars (1932-1997) and Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978). Where did your fascination with these figures come from?

DDV: It's ambiguous, in the sense that in the early years, at the time when I was actually starting to do performances, my inspiration or background didn't so much come from the

visual arts as from the music of the time, such as industrial music, new wave and so on, and from experimental films. There was also an exhibition at the Palace of Fine Arts, entitled *American Art in Belgium* (1977). Bruce Nauman (°1941, Fort Wayne), Dan Flavin (1933-1996) and Donald Judd (1928-1994) really appealed to me with their industrial forms. After that I also went to study sculpture. In 1979, I went to see *Office Baroque* (1977) by Gordon Matta-Clark with someone from Antwerp, when the building was still standing. The exhibitions in the ICC at the time also made a lasting impression on me, although I didn't have any intention to do the same thing. There are bound to be painters who say: 'I want to be a Surrealist too', or 'I want to do this or that too', but that wasn't how it worked for me. I already had a kind of basis inside myself, something I wanted to convey, even before I could identify myself as an artist. I was already doing performances when I was 15 or 16, without knowing that performance art existed. It was just an inner urge that I had and expressed. Even today, that irresistible need to do certain things, whether or not they fit into a given context, is still there.

JS: Can you give an example of one of those early performances?

DDV: I grew up in Vilvoorde and Machelen while the Brussels ring road was being built. Throughout my childhood, there were pilings, bulldozers and trucks driving around full of sand. Vilvoorde was the worst-smelling city in Belgium back then. These are all factors that had an influence. For example, I remember making recordings while they were building Vilvoorde viaduct: I went and stood underneath to record the hammering and banging. The result was music, as far as I was concerned. Later I also used it as a background to performances. I think I'm one of only a few people who do that. I also had a cassette recorder, and I'd record the sound of myself dragging a brick across the ground in the cellar at home, for example, until the cassette was full. So I recognised certain elements in the work of Byars, Matta-Clark and the other American artists because I was doing similar things. Later, when I started the Bastard Art projects, I did a lot of research into resistance in art. Because I often got the reaction that what I was doing, performances or installations or whatever, didn't fit the canon of the time. I found out that the American avant-garde, specifically Matta-Clark, had also done things that didn't fit into the established museum policy at the time, but he still managed to make them happen. The same applies to On Kawara (1932-2014), with his telegrams and postcards. So I compared that to urban guerrilla movements like the Baader-Meinhof group and the Black Panthers. Without the Black Panthers, there'd never have been a Black president in America. And without Baader-Meinhof, there'd never have been such a strong ecological party, anti-American party, in Germany. I believed the American avant-garde was also a kind of urban guerrilla movement.

JS: At the time of *American Art in Belgium*, though, a few Belgian artists including Jef Geys (1934-2018) and Jan Vercruysse (1948-2018) actually put up critical resistance to this exhibition and the dominant presence of American artists in our institutions.

DDV: I have to admit that I was too young to be aware of that at the time. I was about seventeen or eighteen, and I didn't yet have enough experience in the contemporary art of the time. It was also much more difficult back then. You had that exhibition on American art at the Palace of Fine Arts. But other than that, you didn't see it on the television or in the news.

JS: Has the attitude to performance artists in an institutional context changed now? Has it got easier?

DDV: Yes, for some people aiming for star status, it has. But not for real performance. I count myself among a specific generation of German, English and French performance artists who emerged from the end of the 1970s onwards, and we are still not represented in museums or important exhibitions, although our work would be a good thematic fit. I believe that's still a problem. Why isn't Günter Brus (1938-2024) in *Painting after Painting* (2025) at the S.M.A.K., for example? Of course it's an exhibition full of young people. But still, you see that there are also elements in performance art that I believe are linked to other media and themes. At the same time, every painter today is doing what they call 'performative' work. And then I wonder, er, where's the performance? Is it just that he moved his arm while he was painting? But all of that is being stolen from us. I literally see it as stealing. Painters aren't performative. That's nonsense. In the past you had Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) and Yves Klein (1928-1962). But painters in Belgium today? Not in a million years.

JS: Do you think that's because of the platform offered by an exhibition?

DDV: It's because the curators are blinkered.

JS: Theoretically you think performance can be part of an exhibition?

DDV: Yes. It's up to the curator to decide how to integrate it into an exhibition. By saying we're going to find performers to do something every Saturday afternoon, for instance. Or we're going to show photos, or videos. When it comes down to it, curators have studied how to make exhibitions; I make work that suits those exhibitions.

Exhibition history

JS: You mentioned the ICC just now. You participated in the exhibition 1980 and did a performance with Ria Paquée (°1954, Merksem). However, the two of you decided to hold your performance outside the ICC while showing it simultaneously on a monitor inside the building. Why did you choose to work that way?

DDV: I don't remember. I think it had to do with what we wanted to achieve. Maybe it wasn't possible indoors. The fact that we did it in the metro, that setting, played a role too, because it was an industrial setting where you were doing something. I had recorded a cassette with the Brussels-based group Etat Brut, on which I'd used the sound of a tram screeching on the rails as music. Maybe we also wanted to break the link with the safety of the art context a bit. A bit like Matta-Clark or other land art artists and performance artists who worked on the basis that you can create and present works of art anywhere.

JS: Did it also play a role that the ICC had the necessary audiovisual equipment?

DDV: Yes, although it didn't end up being recorded. There's a partial recording of Ria Paquée, but not of me. I did three performances then. One at the opening with Ria Paquée. Then the one where I hid in the ICC. And then another performance where I threw myself down the stairs six times on the last day of the exhibition. So those were three different performances in the context of one exhibition.

JS: In that case, my next question is superfluous. I was going to ask whether the action where you hid happened with the ICC's knowledge, but apparently it didn't?

DDV: We hadn't made any arrangements. I'd probably told Ria Paquée that I was going to do it, but not when. Right before the exhibition in the ICC, Ria Paquée had participated in a performance of mine in Paris, and we also sent each other a lot of mail art. That was part of the reason that Ria thought, "I haven't received anything from Danny for a few days. That's not normal, because I usually get something every day." And then she must have thought, "he was planning that, so I expect he's in there." That got the ball rolling.

JS: For *Antwerpen 93*, you made the publication *Dossier Antwerpen* with Club Moral, in partnership with Ruimte Morguen and Parbleu. In it, you research the presence of foreign artists in Antwerp between 1968 and 1990. How did the idea for this publication arise?

DDV: Antwerp was about to become the Cultural Capital of Europe. So there was quite a bit of pressure to do something, because clearly there was money in projects linked to *Antwerpen 93*. Actually, though, most things were arranged by the city, and local initiatives were rejected. As is often the case, local artists don't really count.

JS: That's what sparked your reflex to seek connections with international artists?

DDV: Yes, because we'd all seen plenty of things in the past, thanks to the ICC and also the Wide White Space and other galleries, and that gave us the idea of investigating what had happened to those people and if they still remembered anything about it. And whether they'd be interested in doing something again. That's how we managed to do something during *Antwerpen 93* after all. In fact, we started by funding it ourselves, because we already had sufficient experience in making publications and organising exhibitions.

JS: And it involved mail art again.

DDV: It was probably easier or more acceptable for artists to respond to a request from other artists. It's a completely different relationship. Artists asking each other for something or a curator asking an artist for something. Curators often have a different mindset, whereas for us it was really just curiosity between colleagues.

JS: There was also an exhibition in the ICC then, wasn't there?

DDV: Yes. Because we had all that correspondence, it wasn't that difficult to exhibit that material. And maybe we also exhibited work that we still had. People who did something at Club Moral sometimes left works behind. We were never collectors, but we did swap things. It also happened that people would stay with us for a week, and there'd often be something left over that could be exhibited later.

JS: Is there an archive of that correspondence?

DDV: No, I don't know where it went. We haven't got it. I think Mark Schepers (°1952, Antwerp) from Ruimte Morguen has that material; you'd have to check. I'm 90% sure it isn't here, because Anne-Mie would have mentioned it if it was. Because *Dossier Antwerpen* has cropped up again now, with all the trouble facing the museum of contemporary art here.

JS: In what sense?

DDV: There's a letter from Carolee Schneemann (1939-2019), for instance, in which she mentions that she has donated two screen prints to the Gordon Matta-Clark Foundation. We're working on Save the Museum | Museum at Risk at the moment, and now it's about that. So I asked the M HKA: where are the two screen prints that Carolee Schneemann donated? Because there's not a trace of them in the ensembles. So, well, there was a tentative answer. They hadn't been able to find them, in any case. They pointed out that a lot of works had been promised that weren't ultimately donated. It was also common knowledge that Flor Bex (°1937, Antwerp) had a lot of works left piled in his hallway, if you see what I mean. I contacted the Carolee Schneemann Foundation to ask whether they knew anything about the works, but they didn't reply.

JS: In 2003 you spent thirty minutes with your hands and feet tied and a bag over your head, lying on the ground in front of the M HKA. That performance was entitled *Trop = Teveel*. There was an exhibition running in the museum at the time with works from the Cera Holding collection. Can you tell us a bit about the context in which that performance emerged?

DDV: People who were actually working for the M HKA, including Bart De Baere (°1960, Vilvoorde), Luk Lambrecht (°1959, Ronse) and others, were advisors to Cera Holding. So I thought it was unacceptable, really. They exhibited the collection in a museum, with the obvious result that the collection increased in value. Every work exhibited in a museum increases in value. Every work that is featured on the cover of an art magazine increases in value. That's how the art market works. And a museum should not be part of the art market. Furthermore, I was the president, or at least the social secretary, of the NICC at the time, and Cera was paying the salary of a legal expert at the NICC. So obviously Cera read me the riot act, and I replied that my artistic freedom was independent of the fact that they were patrons of the NICC.

JS: That critical stance is traditionally seen as an essential and valued quality in contemporary art.

DDV: Not many people do it, though. I'm seeing it again with everything that's going on with the M HKA. Protest, nowadays, what does that even mean? It's little more than a token gesture.

JS: Of course you can compare the recent occupation of the M HKA with the occupation of the ICC in 1998.

DDV: There's no occupation at all, if you ask me.

JS: Was it too organised?

DDV: No, an occupation always needs to be organised. If real occupiers, like Greenpeace, go and hang a banner from a cooling tower somewhere, that's organised down to the last second, as it were. The same applies to Gaia. When they break into an abattoir, they're drilled to carry it out perfectly. That's what I'm missing here. At the ICC, it went pretty smoothly and everyone got the point right away, and everyone saw the need for it. So, yes, that's what I'm missing. It might not have anything to do with it, but today there was someone who said that they wanted to organise a day in the M HKA on 23 November with lectures about Gordon Matta-Clark. And then they hear from the M HKA that they aren't allowed to do it downstairs in the entrance hall. Someone from our action group asked: "Well, what are we supposed to do, then?" And I said: "Come on, are you anarchists or wussies?" The entrance hall is a public space. You're free to sit there and work at that table. Go and stand on an empty crate, if you have to, and start

your presentation. Have they got bouncers to throw us out? Or are they going to call the police? That's the difference between taking action and waving a hanky.

Artist, bus driver and stand builder

JS: How do you look back on the combination of your artistic work with your job as a stand builder, and has it had a negative effect on your artistic career?

DDV: No, not in the slightest. When I graduated, I could still sign on and do all kinds of things. We already had Club Moral back then, and we organised events with it. We had a kind of business model that involved selling cassettes and magazines, and swapping things. We could cover most of our costs with the income from that. Anne-Mie also had a job, by the way, in a factory for neon and Plexiglas advertisements. I did all kinds of jobs at first. I painted people's homes and fixed their doors. When the benefits stopped, I had to go and work as a bus driver in Antwerp. I did that for six months and then looked for something else, because enough was enough. That's when I got into stand building. I already had a lot of skills. I could do everything they were doing there. Carpentry, welding, that kind of thing. My creativity and focus on solutions came in handy.

JS: In 1989, however, you wrote a letter to Flor Bex and Patrick Dewael (°1955, Lier), the Flemish Minister of Culture, in which you described your situation as a stranglehold. Can you explain why you defined your circumstances in that way then?

DDV: Well, it was true, of course. Especially driving the bus, which was between four o'clock in the morning and two at night. For example, on New Year's Eve, I drove the last bus to Zandvliet. And when you get off the bus in Zandvliet, you have to find your own way home. And the next morning, I had to pick up another bus from the terminal in Noorderlaan. Not just that – you often only knew one day in advance where you'd be working the next day, and sometimes you had to work two shifts in one day. So you couldn't make any plans of your own. It also happened that I was waiting in the bus at Rooseveltplaats and people like Bernd Lohaus (1940-2010) or Guillaume Bijl (1946-2025) got on and started asking if it was a performance. No, I had to drive the bus to make a living, didn't I? I wrote that letter, under their influence and the influence of others who said it was unacceptable and a scandal, but it didn't change anything.

JS: Was teaching ever an option?

DDV: There were no openings for a performance teacher back then.

JS: In 1994 you approached Flor Bex again, this time to offer your services in building exhibitions. Did you ever do that, at the M HKA or elsewhere?

DDV: Yes, I did, for Anne-Mie. For her retrospective in Kassel, I even took over the responsibilities of the technical manager at the Museum Fridericianum. I said, if we keep messing around like this, it will never get done. So take the day off and I'll get everyone working like they should be. They saw that I did, and they even paid me for it afterwards. But that's Germany, though.

Serial killers

JS: How did you become fascinated with serial killers, and do you see a link between serial killers and artists?

DDV: It was because of the murder of John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) in 1963, when I was little. I remember seeing it on television, and that my grandmother was almost in tears in front of the TV. For people here, back then, he was the loveliest and best man in the world, and he was shot dead, and you saw it happen on TV. And then you saw Oswald, without actually knowing yet if he'd done it or not, and he was shot dead too. Then I thought, that must have been a strange man. That has always stayed with me. Back then, they still called them mass murderers. The term serial killer only emerged in the seventies, and in the eighties over here. The term serial killer was coined by an FBI agent who discovered the pattern you always find with serial killers. He compared it to a television series in which the same characters do the same thing in every episode. That's where the word 'serial' came from. In Belgium, for example, we had the Linkeroever Strangler, the Muizen Vampire and the Black Anorak, who gave me the same feeling: they must be pretty strange people to do that kind of thing. What struck me very early on was that Jack the Ripper was one of the first to mutilate his victims like that. Or to nail a heart to a wall, to stage the act. I also saw that as a form of creativity. And that's how the idea took hold in me, and I started researching it. It is indeed a generally accepted theory that scientists, artists, apparently motiveless criminals or multiple offenders, and religious thinkers share the same psychological profile. They call it the schizoid profile. Which isn't the same as schizophrenia. But it is a specific profile in psychology, describing people who initially do something that has no use in society and are driven by an inescapable urge or inspiration.

JS: The *Ed Gein Gloves* (1987) are circulating in various online contexts, often without mentioning you as the author, and they are even seen as the ‘real’ gloves belonging to the American serial killer Ed Gein (1906-1984). How do you feel about the fact that this work has taken on a life of its own, separate from your artistic practice and intention?

DDV: In a certain sense, I get more satisfaction or pleasure from it, because they’ll never find their way into a museum. I’m also a character in *Le Poulpe*, a French series of crime novels about a police inspector. What I also love is that there have been two articles about my work in the *Bild-Zeitung* (a German tabloid). Not many artists have ever had an article in *Bild*. The thing is that you reach a completely different audience there. Firstly, I don’t know what they make of it. And secondly, I don’t know if there is any benefit to me in it, but it is out there. And I’m fascinated by the fact that it’s taken on a life of its own. It’s more or less comparable to the discovery of ancient species of animal. 200 years from now, people might say: “Oh, but that’s... let’s trace it back, and that’s where it comes from. Goodness, what a story.” I just think that’s more interesting. I get more pleasure and satisfaction from that, now, than I would if I sold the gloves. I could sell them. They’re immensely famous now. Maybe there’s some big, rich fan of Ed Gein somewhere who is willing to pay a fortune for them.

JS: There really are people who collect ‘murderabilia’, as it’s called.

DDV: I have two paintings by John Wayne Gacy (1942-1994), but there are many people with a lot of money, including pop singers and famous artists. Mike Kelley (1954-2012) also had paintings by John Gacy, but he probably paid a lot more for them than I did, since I bought mine directly from John Gacy when he was still in prison. Mike Kelley will have bought his through an agent, for a hundred times the price I paid.

JS: Do I understand rightly that the circulation of your work outside the traditional arts circuit gives you more satisfaction today than an exhibition in a museum context?

DDV: Not more than an exhibition. An exhibition is still a form of recognition. Let’s be honest, recognition is important for an artist, after all. You might say: “Yes, but you have the recognition of the 30,000 people in the Texas Chainsaw Massacre forum who think those gloves are fantastic.” But I’m still an artist. And I’d like to receive recognition for what I do from an official angle now and then, during my lifetime. Irrespective of all my side projects and interests, my attitude or awareness since my youth has been that I’m an artist, and all the rest is fun and pleasant at certain times, to get through the day as it were. But you also want to derive satisfaction from the work you create. Those gloves are popular and I could sell them, but not the rest. A lot of my work has only been exhibited two or three times, or never in my life. And then I think: that’s not actually normal.

JS: Besides the M HKA, there’s a museum in Poland that has work of yours, isn’t there?

DDV: The MOCAK (Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow) has one of my installations, *The Red Spider of Katowice* (1993). They organised an important exhibition, *Crime in Art* (2014), with a lot of other well-known artists, at which many of my works were shown. I think eight of my works, whereas there was only one Andy Warhol (1928-1987). But it isn't like that in Belgium.

Archive and legacy

JS: How do you see the future of your archive?

DDV: Archives are popular these days. The fact that you're here. The fact that someone is spending three days filming Anne-Mie while she's drawing, for some research project or other. In any case, we get this kind of request relatively often. And since we're getting on in years, we are aware of it. When you see our house here, our studio and Anne-Mie's other studio, you see it's full of things we consider to be our archive. Obviously, the rolls of filament sitting here, all the experiments, all my pliers, chisels and screwdrivers aren't part of the archive. But there are a lot of things that function as a kind of side branch, like a fungus that spreads from one house to another. A lot of things are interconnected. We haven't found a solution for these things yet with anyone we've spoken to. In my case, for example, I have more affinity with electronic music, the noise music of the 1980s. That also has to do with Club Moral, but some of my own work too, because I also did things, collected and swapped them. Lots of those little A5 zines made of folded photocopies. Imagine, when I'm gone, that they say: we're going to exhibit Danny Devos' works and photos of his work and this and that. I think to myself: right, but what about those zines that were a source of inspiration to me? What does that mean for those three boxes of true crime books sitting outside? There are some very rare books in there, which are worth a lot. What will happen to those two paintings by the serial killer John Wayne Gacy?

JS: Will people realise what they are? Because he's not an artist in the regular circuit.

DDV: No, but if you look carefully, you'll see a book upstairs entitled *They Call Him Mr. Gacy; Selected Correspondence of John Wayne Gacy* (1989, McClelland Associates) that includes a letter from me, with a painting in the same genre on the cover. Among those books there are three or more about John Wayne Gacy. So, well, where does it start, and where does it end? Because those paintings are also part of one of my works.

JS: They're part of an installation?

DDV: It's a work. That big metal thing, you saw it, didn't you? But will anyone realise there's a book upstairs that includes a letter from me? Or the correspondence with John Wayne Gacy

that I still have in a folder somewhere, what will happen to that material? Will the M HKA say, for example: “Yes, but come on, we’re not going to take it that far, we’re not going to include books about John Gacy in our archive.”

JS: Strictly speaking, they have nothing to do with visual art. But it’s a fact that an artist’s book collection says a lot about who they are and what they have to say.

DDV: Yes, a lot about me and even more in Anne-Mie’s case. In a sense, my areas of interest are fairly limited or well-defined. I also impose limits on myself.

JS: You do explore your interests in depth, of course.

DDV: Yes, it’s more intense with me, and broader for Anne-Mie. She also buys a lot more. She’s been collecting magazines since she was young. She has a lot of first editions of artists’ magazines, and ones about fashion and interior design too. And, for example, is the issue of Interview Magazine with Andy Warhol more important than a hip, contemporary magazine?

JS: Yes, for the collector’s value, but no, not from the perspective of an artist who has used that material as inspiration. From that standpoint, both magazines are equally important. So those things can exist alongside each other in an artist’s archive without status.

DDV: I think so too. If you visit the studio of Francis Bacon (1909-1992) in the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, you’ll see they’ve made a painstaking reconstruction. And there’s a lot in there. His illustrated books for doctors, about car accidents and venereal disease, books I have too.

JS: What is your opinion of reconstructed studios, like Francis Bacon’s?

DDV: I approve. Bacon’s studio is fantastic. Have you seen it?

JS: No, I’ve never been. I’ve heard a lot about it, though. And I always think places like that have something artificial about them, because they’re supposed to evoke the impression that the artist has just left the room.

DDV: Yes, of course you realise that. I mean, we’re intelligent people. We realise the artist didn’t walk out of there yesterday. We understand it’s kind of a frozen moment in time. Bacon’s studio is accurate down to the last millimetre, you might say. That’s what makes it so special. There are also a few rooms where various objects are exhibited, including a crumpled magazine photo of Kennedy’s murder. So it does make that connection. You see Kennedy’s head, shot to pieces. That’s what Bacon painted. And that’s why it’s important for the photo to be there.

JS: What do you think of the Panamarenko House?

DDV: I've never been inside. We have visited the studio bedsit of the abstract painter Jozef Peeters (1895-1960) on De Gerlachekaai, and Nietzsche's archive in Weimar. It hasn't been touched since his death.

JS: Do you think something similar might be possible for this house, along with Anne-Mie's archive?

DDV: I doubt it, because the house itself isn't special enough to keep. That's why I think there'd need to be someone, or an organisation, doing research into it. Maybe right here, eh? I don't know, but it's not for us to decide. But it could just as well be in a room somewhere else... Imagine, for example, if they had a room they didn't need at the M HKA, they could create a kind of virtual home. Because the two of us built our kitchen entirely by ourselves, for example. Using historical items too, tables that belonged to Anne-Mie's parents who were event organisers. It's all been incorporated into it. But it's not up to us, we can't insist on it. You know that KANAL is interested in all the original layouts by Force Mental, don't you? They want to archive and digitalise it all. But then the problem is always what to do about the rest. Imagine if someone else were to come, a music centre for instance, and say they were going to archive all the Club Moral material. I'd include in that contract that if there were another major organisation that was archiving a larger share of our archive, KANAL would have to share it or hand it over.

JS: Because otherwise it will always be incomplete.

DDV: Yes, and then many things slip through the gaps.

JS: So you have a permanent presentation in mind, instead of something that is only exhibited occasionally?

DDV: I do understand that this isn't possible for everyone, but honestly, I think we can say that the two of us are a bit of an exception. To start with, we're an artist couple. There aren't many couples like us. We each have our own work. And we also have work we create together. We've got Club Moral, an organisation, which is something different again. So I do believe, without wanting to make my own interests seem more important than they are, that we're an exceptional case.

JS: I believe that monographic museums can become too static, but with your work – with links to music and performance – there is the possibility of regularly activating the collective, to keep it alive.

DDV: Yes, you've got Stijn Streuvels' House in Anzegem, the Raveel Museum in Machelen, the Permeke Museum in Jabbeke, or FeliXart & Eco Museum in Drogenbos. There's a whole wing

devoted entirely to Felix De Boeck there, but they've also got space for other things. I think something like that really should exist, or otherwise within a major organisation like KANAL, where they have enough space. They could easily devote a room as big as our house to it.

JS: Would an external location also be possible, as long as it was managed by an institution?

DDV: The material needs to be worked with, and the place also needs to attract people. And contacts with universities and art historians need to be maintained. They need to get access to that information. I believe that genuine academic research is important. Because all those art books that appear have so little content. I wonder, who will still be interested in 200 years' time, if you don't include any content or context in those publications? They're only focused on themselves. And not on the space they occupy or should occupy or might be able to occupy in history.

JS: How do you see the relationship between your archive and your works of art?

DDV: The models of the performances I make function as a form of archiving, for instance. This is almost a cry for help as well, because nobody is working on archiving, preserving or exhibiting them, or anything at all.

JS: Or owning them?

DDV: I believe availability to society in general is more important than ownership. When we had to move away from Kattenberg, where Club Moral used to be, we had to look for somewhere else. People said to us, "You should buy somewhere." And we replied, "No, because we are against ownership." Ultimately it did turn out to be more practical to buy a house. We'd never have been able to do so much in a rented home. So, in that sense, that move really was something between archiving and remaking something.

JS: In the sculpture *Tower of Crime* (1987), you incorporate the true crime novels from your personal collection. In that work, part of your archive is temporarily transformed into a work of art, or how do you see that?

DDV: To begin with, they were original books. And the first time the work was exhibited, someone bought it. Then, of course, I had to explain that it was without the books, because I needed them. So I bought all the same books, in consultation with the person who had bought the work, to put different copies into it. And when I exhibit it, for example at Kiosk in Ghent, I put my own books in it again.

JS: Your website includes an extensive overview of your exhibitions. There are also photos of many exhibitions online. What motivated you to organise your website so well?

DDV: Well, I'm a collector, you might say. I'm also just someone who loves classification and databases. To me, that's also creative work, getting to grips with a FileMaker database and

making something of it with the resources at hand. I'm also interested in new technologies, so I ended up with a content management system and immediately realised this was the place where I could host all my information. I started inputting my *Birth (+) Fact (x) Death (-) Calendar* into that system. It was only afterwards that I added my own website, Anne-Mie's and Club Moral's. My website is now just over ten years old, but Anne-Mie and I already had a website back in the 1990s. I believe it is important for people who want to organise an exhibition on a subject and search online to be able to see everything I do. There is even more material to be added, because I'm digitising a lot right now so that I can put everything on Instagram. Also to prevent my website from disappearing in the foreseeable future.

JS: Have you always seen classification and ordering as an extension of your artistic practice, or is it something that has only started now that you can look back on an extensive oeuvre and many activities?

DDV: If you look at my work *Daders van Dodingen* (1996), it is a classification of criminals' eyes. Or *Jockel – Bibliographie* (1993), a work in the M HKA's collection: it consists of about 400 framed newspaper cuttings. So this is something I've always had.

JS: In your Instagram account, you also open up a large proportion of your artistic practice by means of documents from your archive. How do you feel about the vulnerability of this medium, which is known for suspending or even entirely deleting accounts unexpectedly, for unclear reasons?

DDV: I can't get into my Facebook account anymore, but the page is still there. I also used to have a page for Club Moral and Performan. They're still all there, but they're 'orphans'. I can't access them. But, well, I made a mistake there, of course. I thought they'd be there forever. Obviously, I know you can't put nudity on Instagram. So I don't provoke that kind of situation. I'm even more cautious since I lost my Facebook account. But I think someone reported me, as they say. Probably because of all the Turner images I post.

JS: Big Tech probably doesn't have the right sensitivity to understand the artistic intention behind appropriations correctly.

DDV: Right, and there's no one at Facebook who takes the trouble to look and see.

JS: Is there still anyone there, I wonder?

DDV: Mmm, that too. That's where it starts.

JS: To what extent are you involved with Anne-Mie's archive and website and the management of her collection?

DDV: Well, I'm responsible for, how shall I put it, the technical back end, as they call it. Also when her assistant comes to work and a new year or a new category needs to be added to the database.

JS: Do you also store your work and Anne-Mie's on digital platforms such as the Wayback Machine, Internet Archive or UbuWeb?

DDV: We're not on UbuWeb. All our music is on the Internet Archive. All the cassettes we've ever released or other people's cassettes we've distributed, Etat Brut, for instance.

JS: You did all that yourself?

DDV: Yes, it's on the Internet Archive. In WAV files, so in high quality. But I don't think you can add work to UbuWeb yourself. In any case, I haven't looked into it yet because I've got too much other work. And then, of course, there's the Wayback Machine. You can find old websites there anyway. Recently I searched for something because I had a technical problem with my calendar due to a software update. I ended up using it to find out how I'd done certain things.

JS: Ok, those were my questions. Is there anything you'd like to add?

DDV: Who told you to come here? Or is that confidential?

JS: I pretty much decided for myself. But an action file was drawn up before I got the job. The focus was on the key artists in M HKA's collection, born before 1966. That date is a very logical one: the priority is there because it's important to make this generation of artists aware of the importance of their archives and legacy. It's more urgent for them than for someone who is currently 30 or 40 years old, obviously. I am trying to create a good geographical spread, and artists whose careers have shown that they are important. But I'm paying attention to lesser-known artists too. Personally, I think the selection is successful, one that represents this generation. Ultimately, the aim is for me to deliver a file with an overview of my findings, highlighting the individual needs and circumstances of these artists related to their archives and, by extension, their legacies.

DDV: I always wonder: what happens to that information? And with the time and genuine interest we've put into it? And also the things that we learn from it ourselves, of course. Because as I've said a couple of times, we're working on these areas in a sense, but it's not that we've already taken steps towards doing anything, because we still don't know. Both of us have always made a lot of material about our work accessible, for free. And the activities we did with Club Moral were always for everyone as well. We've never earned money on any

of this, or just enough to be able to do what we wanted to do. And we're very proud of this independence. We've never received many subsidies or sold much work. We're not in big collections, either. We don't have any financial problems. Neither do I see any on the horizon. Unless we both suddenly get ill. But we do have this need because we don't have any children. Who is going to bother with it when we're gone? I don't expect our families will.

JS: Managing an artistic legacy is specialised work. You need time, knowledge and experience, and you can't just expect that from family.

DDV: I only have one sister, and she has no feeling for art. Two of Anne-Mie's sisters and her brother are aware that she's a renowned artist, though. At any rate, the question of inheritance tax always plays a major role in this kind of situation.

JS: Obviously, you want to avoid decisions being made under pressure of time that are detrimental to your legacy.

DDV: They won't be able to understand the importance of my noise zines from the 1980s. They won't know what they are. I don't blame them; that's just how it is. Or all my true crime books. Anne-Mie's brother, who's a lawyer, will say, "We want that one and that one", but of the three hundred books I have, he'll maybe keep about three.

JS: The point is the collection as a whole, though, isn't it?

DDV: Yes. So that's a problem. There was also someone at the Beaubourg (Centre Pompidou) in Paris who said: "Yes, it should stay together." Lots of people share that opinion. But what we need is for it to be written down on paper somewhere, authored by a source other than Anne-Mie and myself. People who recognise the importance of our archive and see the connection between my true crime books and my work, for instance, or Anne-Mie's fashion and interior design magazines and her work. And have an idea of it, or even if they don't, an appreciation that all the material should stay together. Apart from the fact that we believe it should all stay together, we actually have nothing. Because of course we believe it should all stay together. Every artist will say that.

JS: I hope, at any rate, that my work can contribute to that.

DDV: That's the reason I ask: are we going to have anything tangible? Anne-Mie and I don't give our time for nothing. Because if we get nothing, as it were, after this, then someone from the CKV needs to come back.

Rationale

On 13 November 2025, Jeroen Staes, a project worker at the CKV, conducted an interview in Dutch with Danny Devos at his studio in Antwerp. The conversation was structured by prepared questions, along with additional questions that came up as the conversation progressed. The interviewee had received the questions, most of which were based on various historical facts, in advance. The conversation lasted a total of 118 minutes and was digitally recorded in full using the Apple Dictaphone app. The recording was transcribed using AI software and then checked and corrected by the interviewer. This full transcript formed the basic version of the conversation. An edited version was also produced. It contains a selection of questions and answers written out in full, plus corrections and additions by both the interviewer and the interviewee. To increase legibility, punctuation was added, syntactical and grammatical adjustments were made, and the order of certain passages was changed. Both the digital recording of the conversation and the written-out version can be found in the CKV archive. The interviewee also has a copy of the full transcript and the edited conversation. Danny Devos has given his permission for the interview to be published on the CKV website.