



CONTINUUM 119

A BELGIAN ART PERSPECTIVE

OFF-PROGRAM GROUP SHOW

15/04/19 TO 31/07/19

Art does not belong to anyone, it usually passes on from one artist to the next, from one viewer to the next. We inherit it from the past when it served as a cultural testimony to who we were, and we share it with future generations, so they may understand who we are, what we fear, what we love and what we value. Over centuries, civilizations, societies and individuals have built identities around art and culture. This has perhaps never been more so than today.

As an off-program exhibition, I decided to invite five Belgian artists whose work I particularly like, to answer back with one of their own contemporary works to a selection of older works that helped build my own Belgian artistic identity. In no way do I wish to suggest that their current work is directly inspired by those artists they will be confronted with. No, their language is mature and singular. But however unique it may be, it can also be looked at in the context of the subtle evolution from their history of art, as mutations into new forms that better capture who these artists are, and the world they live in. Their work can be experienced within an artistic continuum, in which pictorial elements are part of an inheritance, all the while remaining originally distinct.

On each of these Belgian artists, I imposed a work from the past, to which they each answered back with a recent work of their own. The exercise is as fictitious as it is deeply informative of certain movements that have shaped the history of Belgian art in the XXth century, and therefore of the echoes still reverberating in contemporary artistic creation, however more globalized it may have become. Thus, looking at an arbitrary continuum spanning over 119 years since 1900, allow me to briefly and chronologically introduce ten artists I admire.



Gustave De Smet – *The Eel Fisher* (1900)



Olivier Legrain – *The Shelter* (2017)

Let us first embark on a small wooden boat, floating at dusk in the middle of lake probably in the region of East Flanders. The year is 1900. Gustave De Smet (1877-1943), a young painter from Ghent, was about to come under the influence of *Luminism* and of the painter Emile Claus (1849-1924). *De Palingvisser* (1900) depicts a local eel fisher, waiting for the perfect catch, blended into the crouching darkness of the water and the trees, barely lit by a dying orange sun. The subject of the painting however is clearly the twilight atmosphere bathing the beauty and the grandeur of Nature. De Smet would indeed become famous a few years after he made this painting, at first with beautiful *impressionist* renderings of women and landscapes, then after returning from exile during WWI, with his own avant-garde take on what was to be labelled *Flemish Expressionism*.

His influence lives on, consciously or not, in the work of many Belgian artists today. Olivier Legrain (1970) is one of them. He acknowledges that heritage. As an aficionado of De Smet and Permeke especially, he allows his work to similarly let atmosphere and impression prevail, as in *The Shelter* (2017). This recent painting is one of several landscapes by the Brussels-based artist and film maker, whose work so far has been overly concerned with human figuration, at times relying on a cinema-based iconographic process not so different from that of Antwerp-based artist Luc Tuymans (1958), but representing his very own confrontation of human cynicism and fragility. Legrain's *The Shelter* serves both as a warning against the dangers of the wild, and as an invitation to take refuge, to save ourselves. The title suggests there might be someone in that abandoned cabin. If not, the point of view could be that of someone about to take shelter in the wooden house.

If De Smet creates the impression of orange sun beams dying into shades of green through numerous overlays of paint texture to translate his vision of light, Legrain's palette is decisively darker and more monotonous. His work on paper mounted on a wood panel is even scarred with what resembles 35mm negative scratches. Both works symbolically bare witness to a changing world. De Smet's natural harbor and peaceful way of life would soon enough be disrupted by the Great War, while Legrain's setting could as much be a homage to great American westerns of old, as it could depict a post-apocalyptic stopover from the movie *The Road* (2009).



Prosper De Troyer – *Sacred Heart of Jesus among the People* (1926)



Nel-14512 – *Don't let your Son hand around* (2014)

Nel-14512 (1986), a *pop-surrealist* sculptor from Liege, was charged with the tricky task to rebound on a very peculiar work by artist Prosper de Troyer (1880-1961), who developed a form of *magical realism* in the 20s, inspired by the people, the bible and nature. His work *Prelude* (1925) is currently prominently highlighted at the *Tate Modern* in London, as part of the *Magical Realism: Art in Weimar Germany 1919-33* exhibition which runs until July 14, 2019. While *Sacred Heart of Jesus among the People* by De Troyer, born on Christmas Day near Gent, belongs to a rich period of figurative works started in 1922, after a *fauvist* and later a more famous *cubist* period, its somewhat *naïve* style and colorful *expressionism* often placed it along the lines of the German movement *Neue Sachlichkeit* which took place between 1918-1933. In many ways, this period of De Troyer still needs to be (re)discovered by the wider Belgian public.

Born more than a hundred years later, Nel-14512 has worked along the veins of *pop art* and *surrealism*, in sculpture mostly. Yet her work is equally concerned with human figuration, social consciousness and religious discourse. Recurring themes include feminism, sexuality, the climate and religion, and she was immediately engaged when I showed her De Troyer's *The Sacred Heart of Jesus among the People*. While Proper De Troyer questions the role of religion and the church among the people of Belgium in the years following WWI, touching on the intricate social struggles at play, Nel's sculpture is concerned with Christ as an individual, and his relationship to his Father. *Laisse pas trainer ton Fils* (2014), a pun on the famous title of a rap song by *NTM*, is her contemporary take on the responsibility of fathers to their children, of our generation to the next. Her Christ seems to be accusing his father of denying him the very same values he wishes him to teach. Showing us an abandoned son, bound to a tragic life on earth, the artist questions what the love of God (or universal love) truly means. If we are made in God's image, then why would his own failure at fatherhood not get back at him in the form of a lonely disillusioned son, a Christ who is the opposite of the one depicted by De Troyer, a dissocialized savior. The artistic continuum here lies more in the diversion of popular religious images to comment on contemporary social issues, but their realistic approach also follows similar iconography.



Pol Mara – *Two Women in Mirrors* (1975)



Olivier Pauwels – *Guestronauts* (2013-2014)

I met Olivier Pauwels (1974) five years ago. He was busy making big machines out of scrap materials in a huge hangar in Ostend, where he currently lives and works. Pauwels was also filling his unique metallic universe with cyberbabies, unusually blessed with huge heads, often seen behind helmets. The images and the art stuck with me. Around the same period Pauwels was lucky to collaborate with George Miller on the movie *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), a visual next-level post-apocalyptic epic that rocked me in my chair, and for which the art department where he worked won an Oscar in 2016.

That same year I came across an enigmatic work by another multifaceted artist, this time from Antwerp. Born in 1920, Pol Mara navigated the Belgian seas of painting, making his way from *surrealism* into *lyrical abstraction*, only to reach fame with his *pop art* work in the 1960s. His compositions were concerned with popular culture as conveyed through magazines, television and other media, which he distilled and rearranged into very personal portraits for which he won a prize at the 1967 *Tokyo Art Biennial*. Like Pauwels, Pol Mara was a recycler of our popular iconographies. Today his *pop art* works are considered iconic in the Belgian art scene of the 60s and are part of many museum collections. They are also on display at the *Pol Mara Museum* in Gordes (France). *Two Women in Mirrors* (1975) is a typical nude by Mara, who was then overwhelmingly concerned with female portraiture. In a rather philosophically *cubist* fashion, he recomposed these twin portraits of the same woman by splitting the perspectives of their upper and lower body parts, and imprisoning their beauty in mirrors, perhaps as a warning of the increasing power magazines were to have on generations of women reading them.

When I proposed *Two Women in Mirrors* to Olivier Pauwels, he quite naturally decided to answer with two twins of his own. This time, the media mirror is replaced by TV heads imprisoned in space helmets - and like Mara, Pauwels reuses materials to create his statues. His two *Guestronauts* are part of a series of eleven clones created between 2013 and 2014. Through them, Pauwels questions the influence of the media, science, and cloning in particular, as well as our survival on this planet. Through his many depictions of female beauty as portrayed in the media, Pol Mara was also questioning his contemporary world and particularly the emancipation of his sparkling young women through the media. Although the work of both artists evolved in totally separate spheres, there is an artistic continuum that can be observed in their approach to recycling materials to make their own figurative portraits of popular culture.



Fred Bervoets – *Untitled (from the Cicatrice Series)* (1987)



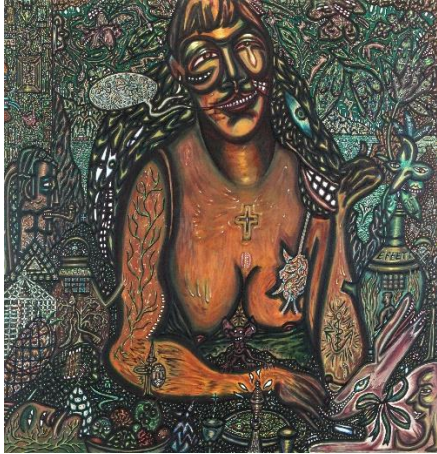
Tom Liekens – *Birds* (2018)

I recently had the opportunity to make a film about Wilfried Pas (1940-2017), a distant family member at first, who I became close to while making the documentary about his work, before his premature and unfortunate passing. Through him I was introduced to the work of Fred Bervoets (1942), a pioneering artist of the Antwerp scene of the sixties along Pas, Goossens and Cox. I later often came across Bervoets's work at *De Zwarte Panter*, the emblematic Antwerp gallery founded by Adriaan Raemdonck more than fifty years ago. Bervoets was a friend of Maurice Wyckaert (1923-1996) who, along Cox, certainly influenced his work. Tom Liekens (1977) studied painting under Bervoets at the Academy in Antwerp, and although their work is seemingly far apart, there are elements that continue from one generation to the next.

The two works in communion here are separated by some 30 years of art history, a lifetime for Tom, a few periods for Fred. Both works are self-portraits. While the large *untitled* and unstretched canvas by Bervoets gives space to a *super-expressionist* portrait-based narration, where a central bird-like figure splits the pictorial plane into four distinct compartments populated by his typical beasts (as well as family and friends perhaps), the birds chasing Liekens (or is he chasing them) obey a more structured composition where the artist is central to a clean white space only disrupted by woodcut overlays which fade into the background, creating the illusion of action. Both artists have worked in very large formats, and in the latter part of the 1980s, Bervoets was slowly putting an end to what is now called the *Cicatrice* paintings (*Scar* paintings). His *untitled* work here belongs to that period, according to me one of his best, although I admire the whole body of work which keeps on expending into new territories. It was made in late 1987 and shown at the *Vlaams Cultureel Centrum de Brakke Grond* in Amsterdam (NL) early in 1988. The artist's ironical and at times almost comical approach to dramatic and tragic subjects like war or love make each of his paintings a journey of its own, with no place for repetition. With Fred, humans are the main protagonists. Himself, usually the main actor in his creations

Tom's work was a discovery, an instant love story. His realm is the animal kingdom where humans appear as rare guests, on occasion. In his work I found the same raw energy as in Bervoets's *expressionist* renderings, where color is free. Tom's paintings often pay a ravishing chromatic homage

to old masters like Delacroix or Van Gogh, so it is an interesting and daring choice by the artist to propose a black and white woodcut collage on canvas as an echo to his friend's *Cicatrice. Birds* (2018) nonetheless carries echoes of his mentor's work, at times made of massive black and white etchings. Although not taken from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), Liekens often uses film frames as a basis on which he expands his own universe as in his recent *King Kong Series*, or as in his work based on *Lust for Life* (1956), the Kirk Douglas biopic about Vincent Van Gogh.



Pjeroo Roobjee – The Illness of P. (K. von S.)
or the Tragical End of Silence (1988-1989)



Peter Depelchin – Hortus Conclusus I (2014)

The fifth and final artistic face-to-face is the one I proposed to Peter Depelchin. I confronted him with one of Pjeroo Roobjee's majestically complex canvases, in a typical green hue for the Gent-based artist: *The Illness of P. (K. von S.) or the Tragical End of Silence (with Reiner going to the Horses of Knokke)*, dated 1988-1989. I must admit I secretly hoped Peter would answer back with what I consider to be his masterpiece so far: *Hortus Conclusus I* (2014). Both works have in common that it is impossible for the viewer to grasp their essence at first sight. They each require time, immersion and engagement to dissect the pictorial elements, their linkages and the artistic process through which they imbricate. To me both works projected sound first, like baroque compositions justifying the richness of the motifs and decorations. They made me want to dance, to fly, to be in motion, which I suddenly was, for I needed to zoom in, to walk closer, to step back to consider that the whole is only made of details; that life is an endless sequence of fast and slow breaths which both artists express in lines and colors, representing a disappearing world, with fear and hybridity in the case of Depelchin, and with ostentation and nostalgia in the case of Roobjee.

Upon first laying my eyes on it, I sat down in front of the Peter's *Enclosed Garden*, the first of a detailed series, and tried to imagine how he spent years researching, inventing and drawing a universe of characters who appeared as if they belonged to both our future and our past, at the crossroads of civilizations, as if our icons and our gods all met in a limbo of despair, waiting for us to call them back into our faiths. I could have stayed there, sitting in front of his 172 x 323 cm drawing for the rest of my life. Its raw sexual power is hidden in lace-like ink patterns that draw the viewer into what looks like the organized stage of a theatre of chaos, perhaps a visual metaphor for human existence, torn between unlimited freedom and societal survival.

I first met Pjeroo through books of his paintings, and later in the flesh. Just like Peter after him, the artist elaborated a personal universe of stories, images and colors that perfectly coexist on canvas. His work investigates our history, our history of art, and his personal history, to then twist it all with irony and wit. A master illusionist, a modern wizard, Roobjee's paintings are open windows into a magical world. In his *Tragical End of Silence*, the artist paints a smiling woman who seems to emerge from the sea, like a siren, naked but wearing a double-faced monstrous scarf on her shoulders. All around her, hundreds of creatures seem to be laughing, while her flaming fingers disappear into the mouth of a red hare. And this is only the first layer of pictorial elements which one has to go through to start grasping the ensemble. The continuum here lies in their approach to the multitude of elements making the whole and perhaps also in the joyfulness of chaos which transpires in their works.

I hope this introduction will encourage you to jump into this *continuum 119*, as I call it. An exercise that ends up making a lot of sense to me. It informs me on my tastes, my conceptions of visual narration and of vital energy. It confirms that the history of art which we so often break down to better understand it, is foremost a continuity, never interrupted, always reinvented.

Klaus Pas, April 2019

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TOM LIEKENS
PJEROO ROOBJEE
PETER DEPELCHIN

A BELGIAN ART PERSPECTIVE
opening soon on kloser contemporary art and on artsy



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Gustave De Smet (1877-1943)

Gustave Franciscus De Smet was a Belgian painter. Together with Constant Permeke and Frits Van den Berghe, he was one of the founders of *Flemish Expressionism*. His younger brother, Léon De Smet (1881-1966), also became a painter.

Gus de Smet was born in Ghent in 1877. His father, Jules, was a set decorator and photographer. Both Gustave and his brother began working in their father's studio, then attended the *Royal Academy of Fine Arts*, where they studied under Jean Delvin. Unlike Léon, Gustave was considered to be an indifferent student.

In 1908, he and his wife followed Léon to the artists' colony in Sint-Martens-Latem. There, they initially came under the influence of *luminism* and the painter Emile Claus, who lived in nearby Astene. At the beginning of WWI, he and his family joined his friend Van den Berghe, and fled to the Netherlands. From 1914 to 1922, they moved about, visiting and staying at the art colonies in Amsterdam, Laren and Blaricum. His meeting with the *expressionist* French painter Henri Le Fauconnier (1881-1946) marked a turning point in his style which, up until then, owed much to *cubism*.

It was in Deurne in the late 20s, that his mixture of *expressionism* and *cubism* peaked, with a series of works depicting circus, fairground and village scenes. After his death in 1943, his house in Deurle was preserved as a local museum. Gustave De Smet's work is part of national museum collections in Belgium and the Netherlands.

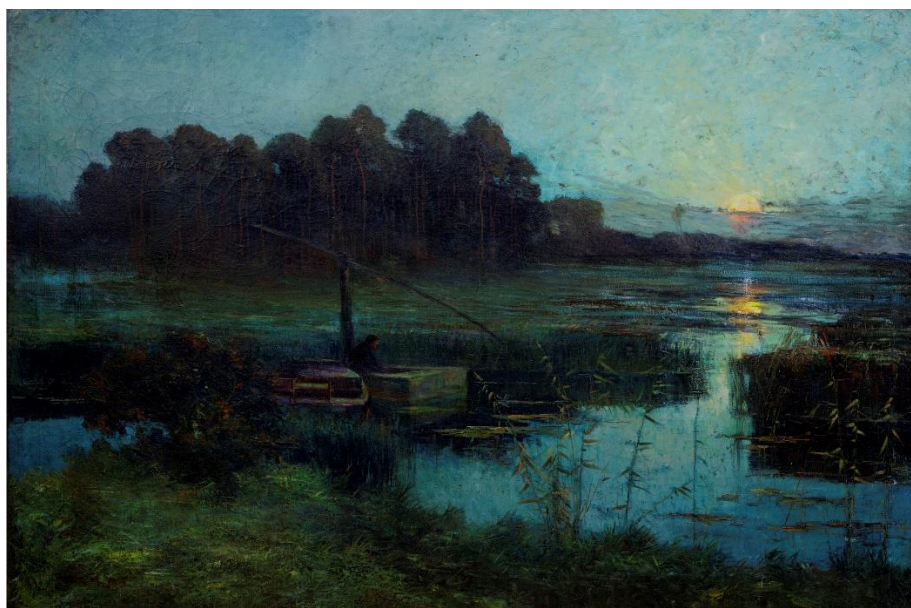
GUSTAVE DE SMET (1877-1943)

Title: De Palingvisser (The Eel Fisher)

Year: 1900

Dimensions: 122 x 181 cm (framed)

Technique: Oil on Canvas



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Olivier Legrain (1970)

Born in Brussels in 1970, Olivier Legrain is a painter, illustrator and storyboard artist. After studying at *Institut Saint Luc* in Brussels, he begins to practice music and for a moment hesitates between professional drummer and illustrator.

The storyboard of *IP5* (a feature film by Jean-Jacques Beineix), published in 1992, helps his choice. Soon enough, drawing, painting, music and cinema start being more intertwined in his different professional experiences. He even makes heavy metal album covers for a while, before a few years of lay-out at *TBWA*, *Duval-Guillaume*, *Publicis* and other advertising companies.

His first cinema break-through is as screenwriter of the now cult *Dikkenek* (2006), with its golden cast and amazingly fresh and politically incorrect comedy that inspired so many films since. This first collaboration with *EuropaCorp* soon leads Olivier to storyboard *Go Fast* (2008), while collaborating with Michel Gondry's *Partizan* at the same time.

Thus, storyboarding becomes Olivier's specialty and he starts showing his work in galleries, notably at *Pierre Hallet* in Brussels. He works on storyboards for several film directors, among which Du Welz, Garbarski, Roskam and Polanski.

In 2014, Olivier Legrain's paintings are noticed by the *Belgian Gallery* which soon organizes the first exhibition of his work on canvas. His paintings are overly concerned with the treatment of light. Their main subject is the human body, which Legrain tortures in fleshy compositions tainted by a violent chiaroscuro. He is never afraid to use new techniques to draw and paint, ranging from ecoline, Indian ink, bleach, pastel, fat, acrylic, walnut husk and oils.

OLIVIER LEGRAIN (1970)

Title: The Shelter

Year: 2017

Dimensions: 74 x 107 cm (with frame 85 x 120 cm)

Technique: Mixed Media on Paper mounted on Wood Panel



“Much like in the painting of Gustave De Smet, the work I here propose is at first sight a depiction of calm and serenity. The title I gave it is no coincidence because it is a "refuge" (*The Shelter*). Although mysterious through its light coming from nowhere, it refers to the night and to dreams. It is a Lynchian light.

In *The Eel Fisher*, we find a more realistic light with the sun on the horizon. Yet we do not know if it is dawn or the end of the day. There too, time does not precisely exist.

In *The Shelter*, we are moving forward in a sort of divine light that appears more surreal. Much like in dreams, it shines on the snow that covers the ground in front of the cabin, which seems abandoned. It is an isolated location like the pond of Gus De Smet. Whether in a cabin or on a boat, there is a similar feeling of loneliness and a communion with nature.

In *The Shelter*, although poorly insulated, the cabin remains a place to protect oneself from the cold, to hide. Sound is suffocated by the snow and one can barely perceive the wind blowing or footsteps in the distance.

However, despite its immobility, the universe of *The Shelter* seems more hostile than that of *The Eel Fisher*, because the night is much darker, and we have no information on the background. At any moment, anything could come out of the dark. A little girl, a doe, a bear, a storm or a serial killer. Yet we are drawn to this small wood house. From there we could see without being seen. It is a refuge, a hiding place, just like the pond is for this man on a boat, in the middle of nature. This light makes us feel like preys to the surrounding darkness and we can't wait to get to that cabin. And just like the darkness, the depths of the water also hide a calm and invisible secret in the large canvas by Gustave de Smet. “

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Prosper De Troyer (1880-1961)

Prosper de Troyer was born in Destelbergen in 1880 into a family of twelve children on Christmas day, in a barn surrounded by water as a result of the break-up of the Scheldt river dike, which his father was busy trying to repair. Prosper received his first artistic training at *Saint-Luc* in Oostakker but when his mother died in 1894, he had to leave school to provide for his family and worked as a blacksmith.

The pictorial evolution of De Troyer obeyed an internal logic that lead him from *realism* to *abstraction* in the 1920s. He then evolved towards *neo-impressionism*. During WWI, he painted close to the spirit of *Brabant Fauvism*. He was part of the circle around Paul van Ostaijen (1896-1928) and attended Brussels artistic circles.

He assimilated *fauvism* and *cubism* into his work at the end of the war, when he discovered Marinetti's *Manifesto of Futurism*. It is Marinetti who made sure that De Troyer's drawings appeared at futuristic exhibitions in Florence. With Paul Joostens and, before him, Jules Schmalzigaug, De Troyer is one of the few Belgian artists to have adhered to this mode of expression. From 1920, he shortly moved fully into *abstraction* and adopted the "pure expression", which he applied to abstract works where his vision became more geometric. Malevich's *supremacism* particularly attracted him in those year.

1922 is the year that marked the artist's return to *figurative* painting. With themes such as the mother, the child, the man, landscapes and religion, De Troyer evolved towards a very personal *expressionism* close to the German movement *Neue Sachlichkeit* (*New Objectivity*), the theories of which he applied

to powerful and monumental compositions, with simplified forms and themes borrowed from family life and the Bible.

The work of the artist is part of museum and private collections notably in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Mechelen and Ostend.

PROSPER DE TROYER (1880-1961)

Title: Sacred Heart of Jesus among the People

Year: 1926

Dimensions: 123 x 154 cm (framed)

Technique: Oil on Panel



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Nel-14512 (1986)

Born in Etterbeek, Nel-14512 is a Belgian *symbolist-surrealist* sculptor.

Her body of work is born out of the inventive blending of a figurative style tainted by *pop art* with the deconstruction of the French language. At first sight, the viewer discovers works that play with expressions and their mental projections to perpetually oscillate between the *symbolism* of a concept and its literal representation.

What is the meaning of an image? Must it be one with its explanation? Thus being one with its title? Following this very interrogation and this play on signifying and signified, Nel-14512's work undeniably adopts the visual style of *surrealism*, with the same attention to detail and resemblance, but her own use of language does not translate into an absence of link between the word and the image. It is quite

the opposite, for her sculptures dive deeper into the meaning of their title, gracefully exhausting its symbolic meaning.

Nel-14512's technical and documentary research all aim at creating a visual shock resulting from the juxtaposition of images, words and objects, whereby she expresses herself almost philosophically, shamelessly shaking some of our core beliefs.

NEL-14512 (1986)

Title: *Laisse pas trainer ton fils (Don't let your son hang around)*

Year: 2014

Dimensions: 53 x 20.5 cm

Technique: Edition of 5 (3 in Polyester & Marble Powder and 2 in Polyester & Rust Powder)



"If time had not been running out so fast, a new work should have seen the light of day in response to Prosper De Troyer's *Sacred Heart of Jesus among the People*. It would have born the same title to illustrate with irony a contemporary reinterpretation of the expression of faith, of sharing, or even of the value of Christianity.

Here is a brief description of the work that should have been:

A bench, a metal bar, some evocative details, a graffiti... Gray/monochrome sculpture, except for a sacred bright red heart. A seated Christ, in a subway, a young man almost lying on the bench, legs spread under his dress, nonchalant air. A hand on his thighs, looking at his smartphone, absent ... On the smartphone, a sacred heart, and no one to see it...

The objective with this piece would have been to capture of a great loneliness escaping from the setting, highlighting the growing religious disinterest, or the disinterest for sharing, by extension. The

work would have been the prequel of another piece that I made in 2014, titled *Laisse pas trainer ton fils* (*Don't let your son hang around*), in reference to the famous *NTM* song. An opposition approach between the signified / signifiers as is almost always the case in my work.

In the end, this earlier existing work is the one I chose to treat the resonance of our respective pieces. In my cultural lexicon, this sculpture evokes a disillusioned and/or honest vision of an abandoned father/son relationship. It is a representation of a son abandoned to his fate by a father who seems very poorly sensitized to the notions of support, education and trust.

"*Don't let your son hang around, if you do not want him to fall...*" (lyrics of the song). If God is Love, and especially in our image, why then would his lack of paternal involvement not get back at him, like a boomerang, in the form of a disillusioned and dissocialized son? For me, it was a question of humanizing the divine figure, and without a doubt to also humanize the paternal figure. Once made human, God/father would be more likely placed on an equal footing, at times forgiven, perhaps understood.

This dialogue between the work of Prosper De Troyer and mine was an opportunity for me to discover the work of this artist. In fact, it seems that some of our semantic research have followed similar paths. At least, as far as the treatment of Christian subjects is concerned.

In his work, I detected a touch of irony or at least a desire to distort reality so as to inspire in the viewer an emotional reaction. It has to do with distorting a well-known and defined subject by drawing on its symbols, however unconscious, to create a new expressive intensity. The result should be in an invitation to decipher a superior reality that can be broken down into multiple levels of reading. And even if the first layers might seem light, this process stems from a desire to see successive levels of reading as steps going down, one after the other, to an ever more serious understanding of the subject.

Moreover, if our artistic aesthetics are far apart, his work triggered in me the melancholy of the Belgian landscapes, the coldness of this country that needed a long time to seduce me. But it is precisely these melancholic sensations that remind me that our common country is deeply rooted inside me, and that it nourishes the expression of a Belgianhood now fully claimed in my work."

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Pol Mara (1920-1998)

Pol Mara, a pseudonym for Louis Leysen, was a Belgian painter, draftsman and lithographer. Born in 1920 in Antwerp, he studied at the *Royal Academy of Fine Arts* and later at the *National Higher Institute of Fine Arts* in Antwerp from which he graduated in 1948. He then started working as a graphic designer for *Janssen Pharmaceutica*.

At the start of his artistic career, Pol Mara worked as a *surrealist* painter before moving on to *lyrical abstraction* in the 1950s. In 1958, he founded the Antwerp avant-garde group *G-58 Hessenhuis* along with Paul Van Hoeydonck, Mark Verstockt, Filip Tas and Dan Vanseveren.

In the 1960s, Pol Mara introduced photorealistic elements in his work, linking up with emerging mass communication by interweaving elements from the world of television, film and illustrated magazines. He thus ventured contemporaneously with Robert Rauschenberg into the *pop art* scene. Pol Mara often painted a dream world in which beautiful young women were regularly found in light undergarments. His figures clearly displayed a kinship with the world of fashion magazines and

advertising. By creating this aesthetic world of illusions, Pol Mara wanted to criticize the injustice and the repulsiveness of his contemporary society.

Along with Evelyne Axell (1935-1972), Pol Mara was at the forefront of the *pop art* movement in Belgium. In 1974 he painted murals in the *Montgomery* metro station in Brussels. Since 1972, partly for health reasons, he spent most of his time in Gordes (France), where the *Pol Mara Museum* opened in the castle of Gordes in 1996, displaying two hundred of his works.

POL MARA (1920-1998)

Title: Two Women in Mirrors

Year: 1975

Dimensions: 107 x 68 cm (framed)

Technique: Mixed Media on Paper



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Olivier Pauwels (1974)

Olivier Pauwels, also known by his tag BOHI, is a Belgian artist. He started his career as a painter and graphic designer, but quickly turned his attention towards three-dimensional assemblages. With an eye for detail and a strong preference for old materials, combined with sweet little babies, Pauwels creates an apocalyptic image track. This track seeks the balance between humor and threat, violence and love, renewal and reconditioning.

Famous for his cyber babies: android creatures, born from classic toy dolls and old machine parts, Pauwel's humanoid contraptions, which originally were given an undeniably steampunk look or donned military attributes, are moving as well as fascinating. Through them, the artist guides us towards a surreal world of "Cyber Babies" and futuristic machines. It's an escape from reality, as well as a statement about launching every baby, every new-born, into an outrageous world. A world in which the mass hysteria of the constantly wanting more determines our rhythm of life. These babies are the seed for the next generation. They're a blank slate on which we can project our wishes, fears and dreams of the future.

In his work, objects are decontextualized and are given a new dimension, a new identity, whereby they lose all connection with their past. *"Where the life of an object stops... the dream world of the artist begins."* The artist's specific way of assemblage got him in touch with film legend George Miller in 2010 and he participated in shaping the image of the movie *Mad-Max Fury Road* (2015), which was rewarded with 6 Oscars.

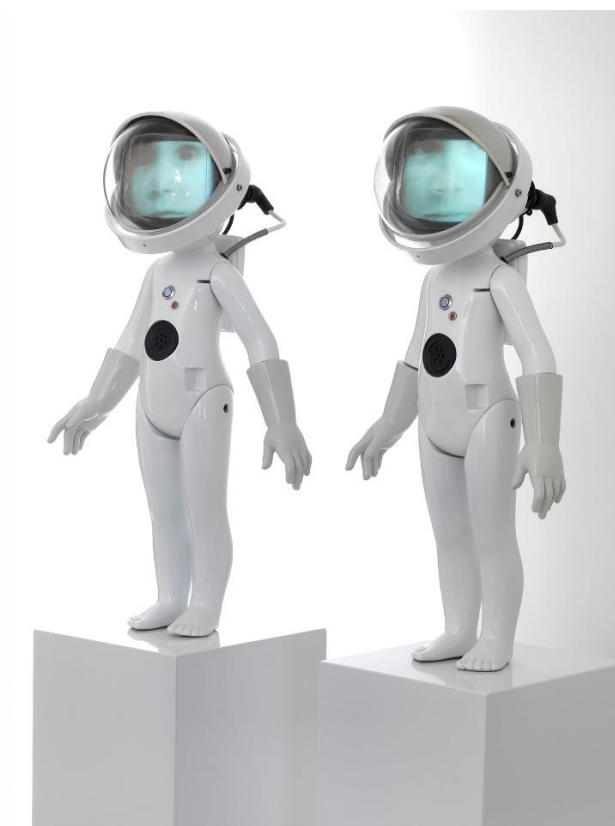
OLIVIER PAUWELS (1974)

Title: Guestronauts

Year: 2013/14

Dimensions : 63 x 25 x 25 cm (+ Basis 93 x 25 x 23 cm) TOTAL: 166 x 25 x 25 cm

Technique: Mixed Media with TV & DVD system, 220 Volt, Edition 1/11



"Apart from the fact that we received the same education and that I also started my career as a graphic designer in the advertising world, there is no real link between my work and Mara's later global work."

Although... Pol Mara (1920-1998) is part of generation in which many of my idols had their place in art history such as Vic Gentils (1919-1997) and in particular Paul van Hoeydonck (1925).

Paul van Hoeydonck... through his inspiring work I started visual work, the fact that Paul van Hoeydonck and Pol Mara were both members of the avant-garde group *G58 Hessenhuis* certainly reinforces my connection to Mara's work and especially the period.

There is clearly a certain link, call it a resemblance, between the work I proposed and *Two Women in Mirrors*, in which two women are depicted with their heads trapped in an elliptical bubble. As a spectator, it is not immediately clear what Mara means by this. Is it a kind of futuristic image? Are they astronauts of some sort? Whatever his intention, it brought me immediately back to my *Guestronauts*, where I also trap the faces (via TV) in a spherical helmet that is part of a bigger astronaut suit.

It is a strange feeling to see these faces, apparently trapped in a kind of sphere. Trapped in a static robot that can come alive at any time. Trapped in a closed world. Our world. My intention is for the face on this TV to be that of a guest, hence the title *Guestronaut*. Up to each collector to then choose which guest to record and to trap into the space suit! The Guest becomes the artwork!"

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Fred Bervoets (1942)

Fred Bervoets was born during WWII and grew up in the smoke of the factories in the port of Zwijndrecht and in the shadow of the church of Burcht. He studied at the *Royal Academy of Fine Arts* in Antwerp and at the *Higher Institute of Fine Arts*.

The oeuvre of Bervoets does not show homogeneity or continuity in the strict sense of the word. His themes and style undergo many changes throughout the years and are thus often categorized in "series". The period from 1964 to 1970 was characterized by influences of the *CoBrA* movement, although the works were already closely relating to the life and ideas of Bervoets.

From 1970, snakes and intestinal figures often appear in his monumental paintings, coining the name *Spaghetti Canvases* – busy tales in a psychedelic world. From 1972-1974 he abandons this detail intensive process and creates *Totems* and *Cabinets*. In addition, he increasingly uses assembly techniques, whereby he cuts and combines etchings, sticking them on fabrics, or fastening them with nails and ropes. During this period, Bervoets mostly made use of gray, blue and green with aggressive red intrusions, giving birth to what is now referred to as the *Grays* series.

In his following period, anger and sadness come to reflect the loss of his painter-brother Jan Cox in 1980 and the drama of *Wounded Knee* in 1973. In 1982, Bervoets exhibits at the *KMSKA* in Antwerp and a year later receives the *Lobende Anerkennung* from the jury of the *European Graphical Art* in Baden-Baden, after his participation in the *17th Biennial of São Paulo*.

From 1987 his works are characterized by mutilated self-portraits and scars which were often made in the darkness of the night with acrylic paint on unprepared canvases. That same year is also marked by the *Nevada series*, made of impressions - mostly on brown wrapping paper or camouflage cloth - of his trip to the Mojave Desert and his visit of his friend Albert Szukalski (1945-2000).

In 1991, he receives the *State Award for Fine Art* and in 1994 exhibits his work besides that of Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988) under the title *A Museum in the making* at the *Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts* in Scottsdale (USA).

FRED BERVOETS (1942)

Title: Untitled (from the Cicatrice Series)

Year: 1987

Dimensions: 198 x 144 cm (framed)

Technique: Mixed Media on Canvas



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Tom Liekens (1977)

Tom Liekens Tom Liekens has a completely unique position in the Belgian art landscape. Both his subjects and the way in which he elaborates them into monumental paintings and collages make him one of the most original painters of his generation. His interest in nature is striking. He is fascinated by the unrealistic way in which fauna and flora are presented in paintings, in fairy tales or in films. The artificial world of zoos, natural history museums and tropical greenhouses is also a permanent source of inspiration. Again and again his work is overloaded with art and cultural-historical references.

Tom Liekens lives and works in Antwerp where he graduated in 1999 from the *Royal Academy of Fine Arts*. Since then he has participated in numerous exhibitions, won the *Camille Huysmans Prize for Painting* (2006), and was nominated for the *Visual Arts Prize of the Province of Antwerp* (2005). Three large monographs of his work have already been published. His work is part of numerous private collections as well as public collections such as the *Museum of Contemporary Art (MUHKA)*, *Bank*

Belfius, National Bank Belgium, Artesis Antwerp University, Antwerp University, Art collection Province of Antwerp and Museum Van Bommel-Van Dam Venlo.

TOM LIEKENS (1977)

Title: Birds

Year: 2018

Dimensions : 152 x 102 cm (unframed)

Technique: Collage of Woodcuts on Canvas



“I studied at the *Royal Academy of Fine Arts* in Antwerp where Fred Bervoets (1942) was then a teacher. Although our work is very different, there is undoubtedly common ground. Just like in Fred’s work, my work is a mix of pathos and drama, topped with a relativizing irony. We obviously also share a preference for monumental formats and crowded compositions.

In my self-portrait *Birds* (2018), birds play a violent leading role: dozens of pigeons are harassing me. It looks like a scene from *The Birds* (1963) by Alfred Hitchcock. And just like in Fred’s self-portrait from the *Cicatrice* series, I place myself in the leading role of a self-created universe.”

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Pjeroo Roobjee (1945)

Pjeroo Roobjee, a pseudonym for Dirk De Vilder, is a Flemish artist who studied at the *Royal Academy of Fine Arts* of Ghent, where he was born in 1945. He later attended the *Rijksacademie* in Amsterdam (NL).

Roobjee works as a painter, draftsman, graphic artist, actor, author, theater director, entertainer and singer. His plastic as well as his literary works have earned him many awards, notably *Le Prix de la Jeune Peinture*. He was a laureate of the *Leo J. Kryn Prize* for his debut novel *De Nachtschrijver* and in 1984 received the *Eugène Baie Prize*. In 1994, he was awarded the *Louis Paul Boon Prize*, the *Ark Prize of the Free Word* in 1998 and in 2004 was a laureate of the *Culture Award* of the city of Ghent for the ensemble of his literary work.

Roobjee was a co-founder of the Ghent branch of the *Kabouter* movement in 1970, for which he participated as a leader in the municipal elections. From the early 1970s, he actively wrote in various literary genres. His play *Ubu Kaka Pipi* premiered in 2000 at the *Gravensteen* in Ghent and was published by *Theater Taptoe*. The theater group *De Verrukking* played his *Omhelzingen* the same year. In 2011, Roobjee made his debut as an actor in the animated film *De Veer van César*, a melancholic reverie about an orphan toy dealer. In 2019, Pjeroo Roobjee received the *VUB Literature Prize*.

His plastic work revolves around painting and drawing, where he expresses his passion for freedom across artistic forms, revisiting European history, its great master painters, and its many demons in a personal celebration of life through a richly painted universe.

PJEROO ROOBJEE (1945)

Title: The Illness of P. (K. von S.) or the Tragical End of Silence (with Reiner going to the Horses of Knokke)

Year: 1988-89

Dimensions: 200 x 200 cm (framed)

Technique: Oil on Canvas



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Peter Depelchin (1985)

Peter Depelchin grew up at the Western Flemish sea side, spent some years in Italy and New York City and nowadays lives in Brussels. His artwork witnesses of each of these places and unstoppably evokes new places Peter wishes to discover and to interpret through art. This cultural gourmandize is the motor behind his mentality, art and work.

Depelchin's artistic practice is articulated in two main steps: first, a research phase, for which he develops an amount of studies and small writings. These preliminary examinations result in series of sketches or collages. In a second movement, after having studied his subject at length and after having set-up the outlines of the intended artworks, he starts drawing, printmaking, filming or creating installations. The initial sketches are clearly put to use either as a stable point of departure for later artwork, or as autonomous artworks in their own right. Notwithstanding his interest and experience with a variety of media, drawing makes up the core of his artistic practice. The materials he uses to develop allegoric drawings are pen, Chinese ink, bistre and silk paper. This combination justly evokes visionary images with both Eastern and Western cultural influences. Likewise does his grip on several ancient printmaking techniques such as woodcut and intaglio.

Peter's recognizable artistic universe comes into being thanks to an intense art-historical and literary observation followed by a personal interpretation. As a matter of fact, he wants to create a new intercultural imagery containing a symbiosis of art history and topicality and avoiding cultural appropriation. To this end he explores art-historical characteristics of aesthetics and the power originating from an image when reversing its beauty or toying with the significance of artistic subjects, themes, archetypes and symbols: de-contextualization and neo-contextualization. As the recycled images are part of our enormous visual culture, their reinterpretations consequently have a strong effect on the spectator. He wants to break open the collective cross-cultural consciousness, starting from the concept of the "human identity". Hence, he searches for the "human being" and the "being human" exploring humanity. Finally, he accomplishes step by step a new, more universal imagery that draws from the past and reflects on the present.

Peter has been very active on the international art scene, with residencies in The Netherlands (Vlissingen 2008-2009), in Italy (Rome 2014-2015) and in the USA (New York, 2015-2016), exhibitions in Rome (*MAXXI*), Brussels (*Kasteel van Gaasbeek*) New York (*Brilliant Champions Gallery*) and London (*Young Masters*). He is involved in an artistic P.hD. program and plans several new exhibitions and residencies in its framework.

PETER DEPELCHIN (1985)

Title: Hortus Conclusus I (Enclosed Garden I)

Year: 2014

Dimensions: 172 x 323 cm (framed under glass)

Technique: Pen, Chinese Ink and Bistre on Chinese Silk Paper



"I chose *Hortus Conclusus I* (2014) to confront the monumental painting *De Ziekte van P (K.von S.) of Het Tragische Einde van de Stilte (met Reinier naar de Paarden van Knokke)* of Belgian artist Pjeroo Roobjee. Roobjee's 1988-1989 composition was made after a memorable day with the Dutch painter Reinier Lucassen spent in Knokke. It appeared to have been a journey full of spleen and sadness, the end of an era. Their farewell seemed for good (thus time has proven), especially when Reinier and Roobjee shook hands and kissed goodbye. The used iconography in Roobjee's painting evokes a lost Arcadia. He included symbols of a desired universe.

Providentially, my monumental drawing is all about a lost Arcadia. However, I turn this mythical wood into a horrendous enclosed garden where one doesn't wish to get in, nor to get out. I wish to attract and repel at the same time. And so does Roobjee. His central figure stands for all the Moirai (the Fates in Greek mythology) and is inspired by a bourgeois lady of the beau monde of Knokke. My virgin is originally a "Maria Lactans", but likewise she is represented in a far more decadent way.

Next to these comparisons of content, there are lots of visible parallels between both our works; their strong *expressionist* style, for example. I manipulate space to evoke this *expressionist* effect (as Robert Wiene did in his all-time classic *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920)), whereas Roobjee paints in an expressive, almost modernist way. Consequently, we both strongly refer to the past, use iconography and sample art-historical imagery. Not to speak of our passion for small iconographic details as for example, the crucifix in Roobjee's painting, the gallipot, the still life, the snake around the lady's neck (Garden of Eden) or the skulls she speaks of. All kinds of similar visual elements are to be discovered in my *Hortus Conclusus I*."

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