

4. Apr: 25

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2. Nov: 25

*Contemporary
Survey*

Contemporary Survey

from Belgium

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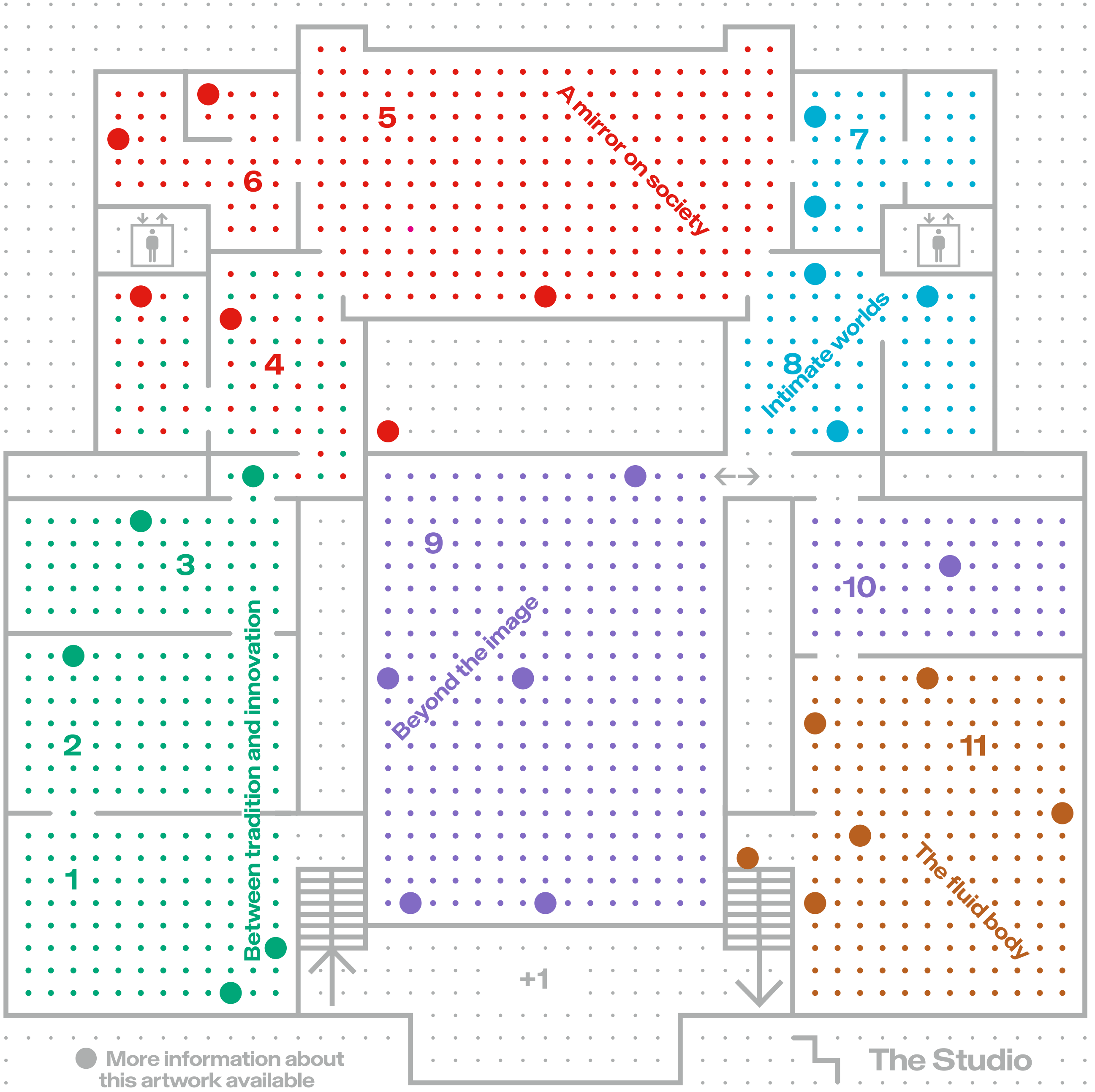
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Floor plan

Anastasia Bay (°1988)

Models Pattern, 2025

In recent years, Anastasia Bay has gained international recognition for her paintings, in which the human figure plays a central role. Her work is rich with references to art history, literature, and popular culture. She draws inspiration not only from historical and modern painting, Japanese prints, and the frescoes of Minoan civilisation but also from comic books.

This fresco, created especially for the ‘Painting After Painting’ exhibition, extends across three museum walls. Designed as a frieze, it engages with the museum’s architecture. For its composition, Bay revisits a classic theme in painting: the allegorical depiction of ‘Les Âges de la Femme’ (The Ages of Woman). This subject reflects the traditional male gaze, portraying marriage and motherhood as the only defining moments of a woman’s life.

In her fresco, Bay challenges this stereotypical representation. She presents free-spirited figures posing as Muse or Venus. In the right section of the composition, older models appear, rejecting the notion of motherhood as life’s ultimate fulfilment.

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Entrance hall

Painting is an ancient medium that continually evolves and adapts to the times. Artists no longer seek renewal in a break with the past, but rather in the creative reinterpretation of existing traditions. In times of crisis, they link historical motifs with contemporary social, political and environmental concerns of a changing world. Contemporary artists draw on the symbolism and pictorial visions of previous generations or create new myths to question reality. Some depict broad social structures, while others focus on the everyday and on how the personal and the political intersect.

**Between tradition
and innovation**

Yann Freichels (°1996)

Kids Unite, 2022

Yann Freichels reflects upon the impressions of his daily life, and the weighty history of the border region in Belgium's Eastern cantons where he grew up. He does this in large, expressionist canvases. For him, paintings are akin to engaged, visual essays about society. While he marks them with numerous historical references, they simultaneously symbolise his relentless pursuit of grand ideals. In 'Kids Unite', a title that refers to punk culture, the artist portrays a group of languid young people. Freichels believes that the sheer weight of history and symbolic objects on the table in the background of the painting makes it impossible to engage in a fresh discourse on the subject. Could this be why one of the figures carries a black crystal ball?

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Room 1

Bendt Eyckermans (°1994)

A transition (fade-in), 2023

Bendt Eyckermans' paintings are invariably shrouded in an air of mystery. The stark contrast with their everyday character and seemingly unambiguous motifs – often scenes from the artist's life – creates a narrative layering in his work. Eyckermans creates open-ended stories, in which dark urban backgrounds are dramatically illuminated. His work blurs the boundary between traditional realism and expressionism, resulting in an emotionally powerful application of light and shadow.

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Room 1

Sanam Khatibi (°1979)

Tasting a piece of her gum, 2023

Continental Charm, 2023

A Sudden Rush of Blood, 2022

In Sanam Khatibi's paintings, idyllic nature scenes featuring animals and mythological creatures are disturbed by unexpected scenes of human violence and ambiguous eroticism. The works are often inspired by true crimes, source material that Khatibi combines with lush landscapes awash with flora and fauna. In 'Continental Charm' and 'Tasting a Piece of Her Gum', crystal-clear bodies of water are surrounded by surreal combinations of skeletons, all kinds of creatures and entangled human limbs. In depicting animalism, nature and sexual urges, Khatibi explores broader ideas about power and the fine line between our fears and desires, domination and submission, beauty and fragility. She translates her ominous, sensual worlds not only onto canvas, but also into tapestries, embroidery and ceramic sculptures.

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Room 2

Diego Herman (°1994)

Yellow Heartbreak, 2024

Diego Herman grew up in a Belgian-Mexican family in Brussels. In his paintings, he examines concepts such as ownership, identity and displacement through the visual language of the alienating landscape. Fascinated by the role of boundaries and limits in our experience of space, Herman repeatedly employs the motif of the industrial fence as a symbol of the obstruction of free movement. In combination with other signifiers, such as empty, natural or suburban places and a thermal colour palette reminiscent of the images of night vision goggles used by hunters to track wild animals, he creates socio-political landscapes that raise questions about how we interact with one another and with our environment.

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Room 3

Matthieu Ronsse (°1981)

ASS 406, 2025

For Matthieu Ronsse, painting is dynamic and changeable. The artist skilfully manipulates the medium's tradition – both that of old and new masters – into what can be called “traces of painting”. The essence of his oeuvre lies in the in-between moments: the creative process and the exploration of how life and reality can intersect and merge, sometimes in an abrasive way.

In this exhibition, Ronsse operates as a nomadic artist. The paintings change with every visit, growing or proliferating. The wall against which everything is placed acts as a memorial to painting, a reminder that it doesn't have to just be an oil on canvas. It can be an image, but also an object, collage, utensil, or record. In other words: it embraces life. Matthieu Ronsse seeks out experimentation and wonders how, with his blind virtuosity, he can explore the boundaries of painting.

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Room 3

Our society is driven by power and capitalism, which penetrate deeply into our daily lives and personal existence. Artists respond to these forces with various approaches and genres. Political satire reflects on life's grotesque masquerade. Contemporary still lifes depict the emptiness of our desires or denounce our inescapable urge for material excess. Symbolic representations stand alongside real objects. They reveal the age-old tension between depiction and literal form in painting. However, art today can also serve as a refuge, a space for self-reflection and slowing down, cherishing familiar surroundings or drawing inspiration from popular culture and local traditions.

**A mirror
on society**

William Ludwig Lutgens (°1991)

Joy Sauce in the Belly #3, 2025

In 'Joy Sauce', a mixed-media installation by William Ludwig Lutgens, the artist integrated a video into a large painting of a surreal domestic scene. The video features a parade of characters. Clad in masks, wigs and painted garments, they move like zombies through a historic abbey. The characters symbolise the condition of today's workers, who are imprisoned in the illusion of freedom and in the ongoing struggle to perform. The sharp, satirical undertone is characteristic of the pronounced visual language in Lutgens' paintings, drawings and installations. 'Joy Sauce', the title of this work, is a nod to the Lacanian concept of jouissance, a paradoxical form of pleasure which transcends mere enjoyment and often goes hand in hand with excess or pain. The artist explores the relationship between the pursuit of passions and the transgressive nature of jouissance, which can be both liberating and self-destructive. 'Joy Sauce' suggests that we always remain attracted to what we reject.

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Room 4

Julien Meert (°1983)

Zonder titel, sans titre, untitled, 2024

With vibrant colours and daring compositions, Julien Meert's recent work explores the boundaries between abstraction and figuration. His paintings often contain fragments of human figures and motifs that he distorts or merges with abstract forms. Meert plays freely with space, layering and stylistic references, imbuing his works with a lively dynamism. The influence of pop culture and contemporary media is subtly present here. His work raises questions about identity and perception, without imposing an unambiguous interpretation. Meert's intuitive painting style focuses on spontaneity and experimentation. This results in paintings that are both alienating and intriguing, inviting our gaze to linger.

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Room 4

Luís Lázaro Matos (°1987)

Diplomatic Immunity (The Eurorats), 2025

Central to this installation that Luis Lázaro Matos created especially for S.M.A.K. is a mural of the European Union flag. Except here, the yellow stars have been replaced by sperm cells. In combination with the mural, Matos presents a series of paintings inspired by the story of Hungarian politician József Szájer.

Although he was an MEP for Viktor Orbán's conservative Fidesz party, which is hostile towards the LGBTQ+ movement, József Szájer himself appeared to be leading a queer double life. This became painfully public when the police invaded a clandestine party in Brussels in the middle of the Coronavirus crisis. The politician tried to escape the drug-fuelled sex party filled with naked men by clambering down a drainpipe – something that quickly became the subject of memes and mockery.

In this installation, Luis Lázaro Matos combines architecture, erotic figures and animals, more specifically rats, in dynamic narratives. As is often the case in Matos' work, the installation can seem light-hearted, yet it questions complex ideas about political identities and queerness. Humour and drama are seamlessly intertwined.

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Room 5

Michael Van den Abeele (°1974)

Spaghetti/Jeans, 2024

Against Nutrition, 2025

Michael Van den Abeele's versatile oeuvre includes drawings, photographs, installations, sculptures and videos. In 'Against Nutrition', he assembles empty, inside-out crisp packets into a collage. The bags, which were once functional, are thus transformed into a formal composition with a glossy surface. For 'Spaghetti/Jeans', Van den Abeele bleached a canvas fashioned from denim. A tangle of lines was thus rendered visible, twisting like strands of spaghetti. In both works, Van den Abeele takes consumer goods as his starting point. Decoupled from their original function and capitalist logic, they are reduced to mere surfaces with a new, almost decorative potential. Yet the ingrained promise of desire sometimes subtly shines through.

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Room 6

Dieter Durinck (°1983)

Popular Mechanics / Juan Gris – Nature morte sur une chaise (1917), 2023

With his 'Bootleg Paintings', Dieter Durinck copies well-known and lesser-known paintings from recent art history. The concept of making copies and honouring great works has deep historical roots in painting. Durinck reprises this tradition, but sometimes changes the format, and executes the paintings entirely in green. This is a reference to the green computer screens of the 1980s and the aesthetics of night-time images during the Gulf War. With his work, Durinck questions authorship, the status of painting in a society dominated by screens, and the way in which our knowledge of artworks is often confined to reproductions.

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Room 6

Contemporary painters have a deep connection with their medium, which also reflects their inner experiences. Feelings, relationships and moods are captured in a nuanced way. This intimacy is now influenced by digital technologies. In the online realm, the boundaries between the physical and virtual, private and public, authentic and staged are becoming increasingly blurred. The internet, social media and artificial intelligence distort our perception of ourselves and others. At the same time, they provide a space for the creation of new identities. This generates a form of painting that balances between self-reflection and a critical examination of digital content and its credibility.

Intimate worlds

Mae Dessauvage (°1995)

Revelation, 2023

Doll, 2024

Medieval iconography, Renaissance painting, post-modernist architecture, and comics are all influences that Mae Dessauvage incorporates into her work, in addition to her own experiences as a transgender woman. She deliberately eschews the classical form of paintings, often choosing a more spatial approach. This is also the case with this work, which recalls the painted coffin of a medieval shrine.

Helmut Stallaerts (°1982)

For Annie, 2024

Out of Body, 2024

The Split, 2024

Helmut Stallaerts is known for his muted, often uncanny paintings that exude an uncomfortable atmosphere. This psychological tension is intensified by his use of pale colours. As an artist, Stallaerts often experiments with a variety of supports and a range of materials. For example, he also works with beeswax, resin and jute.

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Room 7

Che Go Eun (°1988)

Blisters, 2023

Che Go Eun integrates her mastery of traditional Korean painting techniques into her digitally oriented work. Through this combination of old and new technologies, she explores human relationships. She created 'Blisters', a work made of wallpaper, plexiglass, epoxy, glass, paint and wax, using AI prompts from her diary. She then converted AI-generated images into watercolours. The result is a richly decorated visual language full of floral motifs, inspired by Belgian Art Nouveau with subtle nods to Che's traditional training. The work reflects the (mis)interpretation of human feelings and emotions by artificial intelligence. By using technology to reference home decoration, 'Blisters' connects the intimacy of a home with that of the digital world.

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Room 8

Anthony Ngoya (°1995)

20h37, 2023

Visage, 2023

Fig.13, 2023

Anthony Ngoya is a French artist with Congolese roots. His work revolves around collective memory, emotional archives and diasporic nostalgia. Ngoya makes use of images and objects, including archival material, old family photos, textile remnants and tiles. By placing and editing these objects, which already have a history, he explores the construction of memory and identity. Ngoya wants to write alternative stories and complete the gaps in his personal history from multiple perspectives. The works 'Fig. 13, 20h37 and Visage', which are part of the 'Le Long Voyage' series, reflect the artist's quest to understand his identity.

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Room 8

Emmanuelle Quertain (°1987)

My address, 2023

'My address' consists of a selection of 'Data Paintings'. 'Data Paintings' refer to a way of painting data, numerical information, in Emmanuelle Quertain's practice. The installation of 467 watercolours is based on images and videos that the artist viewed on her computer, from sources including news sites such as the BBC, Arte and Euronews. The installation can be considered a portrait of the artist's IP address. The watercolours, presented in a dense grid, encompass a range of diverse subjects. Quertain captures the randomness of what we see when we follow the news through the media, a stream of bite-sized and rapidly digestible online content.

As a whole, the works also document the period in which Quertain's body replicated the images, with the watercolours gradually becoming more sketchy and less detailed. Thus, they depict not only a subject, but also a 'time of concentration'. 'My Address' offers a visual interpretation of digital data and takes a fresh approach to intimacy. In her work, Quertain often explores the abundance of images in contemporary society. She questions the way in which we perceive and engage with the visual world.

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Room 8

By entering into dialogue with new technologies or seeking connections with hybrid forms and conceptual approaches, painting does not disappear but is transformed. Abstract visual languages explore the boundaries of perception and representation and translate them in various ways: from formalistic research and lyrical gestures to social and transcendent abstraction. Painting is no longer defined exclusively by its traditional form (canvas, oil paint, etc.), but also functions beyond these strictly material boundaries. In this 'post-medium condition', painting often integrates aspects of architecture, installation art, digital art and performance art. It calls the idea of medium specificity into question.

Beyond the image

Leen Voet (°1971)

Naar Constant Dratz

Constant

Pauls schildersezels en canvassen

Pauls model from the series Bernard,

Paul & Constant, 2022

These four works are part of the series 'Bernard, Paul & Constant', in which Leen Voet revisits three works from the studios of 19th-century painters. She responds to the absence or subordination of women in the studio by omitting men. Her colour palette also reflects this, as she deliberately confines herself to primary colours. She presents some of the works on trestles, thereby altering the usual perspective from which we generally view paintings. The series ties into Leen Voet's broader critical questioning of patriarchal influences in art through her work.

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Room 9

Melissa Gordon (°1981)

3260 Coney Island Avenue, Brooklyn NY, 1944

Female Readymade (X ray of Mondrian painting, sticks from Marlow Moss paintings, re-painting of 'The Sea of Ice', George Sand, house on the dutch dunes, boots, 'The Waves', riding crop, bungee cord, wind vane, fishing net, cut out 'Fluid Concept', digital wave erasure), 2021

Female Readymade (Pollock's shed, photos of Janet Sobel, letter from Mark Rothko, keys, wire cutters, "Blow Up" detail of Pollock painting and of Sobel painting, chain, smoking gun, p.218 of 'American Type Painting', gestures), 2021

Female Readymade (Helen's calendar, Morris Louis' account of April 4th, 1953, plug, long shadow, Kairos, Marianne Moore quote), 2023

Melissa Gordon often reflects on art history in her prints and paintings. Among other things, this presentation showcases work that problematises the painterly gestures of abstract expressionism, and documents how this builds on the work of female predecessors. For example, she references Helen Frankenthaler's influence on Morris Louis' work, and Janet Sobel's drip technique, which was adopted by Jackson Pollock. These legacies remain largely unrecognised to this day. The same is true of the work of Marlow Moss, whose queer identity hindered artistic recognition, despite close ties with Piet Mondrian and his oeuvre. The works are exhibited in a reconstruction of Sobel's studio. Not only is this a tribute to an underappreciated artist, but it also provides a new, transparent structure for a more comprehensive understanding of art history.

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Room 9

Vedran Kopljar (& ouders)

Painting After Painting [34 min. 35 sec.], 2025

‘Painting After Painting’ is a mural that acts as a documentary, sharing the same subject and title as this exhibition. The work, with a duration of 34 minutes and 35 seconds, fits within the tradition of accompanying videos and documentaries at exhibitions. Such films provide context for and historical insight into the exhibited works. Often, this is also an attempt to allow the artist’s ‘voice’ to be heard in interviews. This work can be seen as additional commentary on the exhibition ‘Painting After Painting’, while simultaneously being a work of art within this exhibition. Videos and films transformed into murals are a recent addition to the practice of Kopljar (& parents). The first of these was made in 2024 for the exhibition ‘Meta Detective SCHOOL’.

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Room 9

Stijn Cole (°1978)

Colorscape Oostende 13/7/2024 19:02, 2024

Colorscape Oostende 13/7/2024 21:21, 2024

Stijn Cole's work is driven by a fascination with light and its influence on our perception of colour and form. He chiefly explores this theme through landscapes. Cole expresses himself in a wide range of classical art forms, such as paintings, drawings, sculptures and photographic works.

An important part of his oeuvre are the 'Colorscape' paintings. Cole uses a computer programme to accurately analyse the colour compositions of landscapes. Images are reduced to 256 colours, arranged in a 16 x 16 grid. In it, the brightest colour is at the top left, and the darkest at the bottom right. After printing this diagram, Cole meticulously searches for the correct shades of oil paint, which he then applies to the canvas.

The 'Colorscapes' are abstract translations of landscapes, the visual DNA profiles of specific places at specific times. With this method, Cole captures the volatile and elusive properties of our natural environment. His work thus becomes a poetic record of time and change.

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Room 9

Anne Van Boxelaere (°1983)

Agreement #7, 2024

Agreement #8, 2024

Agreement #9, 2024

In her work, Anne Van Boxelaere reacts to urban bustle and visual pollution. To capture this tension between order and chaos, she experiments with different formats, with various types of paint, but also with figuration and abstraction. In this series, she layered supermarket brochures, applying them one by one and then sanding these down, before continuing to work on them with acrylic paint and gesso. The title 'Agreement' is undeniably a complex concept that reflects the layered nature of the work. It encompasses not only the final congruity, but also the labour-intensive process that underpins it.

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Room 9

Sarah Smolders (°1988)

Turning Oneself Into Place, 2025

For the work 'Turning Oneself Into Place', Sarah Smolders draws inspiration from the architectural qualities of the exhibition space. Smolders accentuates the surrounding architecture and responds to specific characteristics with spatial and painterly movements. Through the addition of subtle shifts and changes, the artist reveals details that one might otherwise carelessly overlook. The work is therefore an invitation to look anew and to experience the space.

Especially for S.M.A.K., Sarah Smolders constructed a spatial installation that takes the blue stone that encircles the museum as its starting point. A stone that is characterised by its typical groove, or *ciselé*. Smolders translates this blue stone onto paper through a variety of printing and painting techniques such as *frottage*, *combing*, and the use of lime and beeswax. Here, the entire perimeter of the museum is revealed in multiple layers that are superimposed on each other in the space. The twelve stones indicate the corners of the *façade*, thus serving as a kind of index of the work.

Room 10

As is often the case, Smolders also integrates residues of previous installations. Here we see unpainted canvases that are held together in padouk frames. They will gradually fade through exposure to sunlight. These works evoke the suggestion of windows, thus enhancing the dialogue between the museum's interior and exterior spaces.

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Room 10

Painters have long explored how stereotypical representations of the human body are influenced and reinforced by art history and the media. They no longer view identity as an intrinsic trait, but rather as a social construct that is shaped by coercive forces and power systems, such as patriarchy and the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm. Through their critical approaches, they create new images of the body, which are not just sites of resistance, but also celebrate their otherness. In their work, identities are formed that defy any conventional definition. Fluid and hybrid beings explore our inextricable connection to – typically aqueous – natural and digital ecosystems, while also probing the limits of what it means to be human.

The fluid body

Natasja Mabesoone (°1988)

La Coiffure/Combing the Hair, 2025

Natasja Mabesoone created this site-specific installation especially for S.M.A.K. It consists of a series of layered screen prints, monotypes and drawings with make-up on wallpaper. The installation reinterprets the painting 'Combing the Hair ('La Coiffure')' by Edgar Degas. By using foundation, blusher, lipstick, and other make-up, Mabesoone aims to amplify the pink hues of a traditional version of femininity. She thus highlights the tension between touching and looking, between the private and the public sphere. Mabesoone frequently explores these themes in her work. In playful and poetic images, she expresses the sensuality and subversive nature of domestic life. Deploying a variety of printing techniques, from monotypes to impressions of her own body, she explores how an image can be conveyed through physical pressure.

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Room 11

Anna Zacharoff (°1987)

Successful Search History, 2025

Leading Questions, 2025

In this series of oil paintings, Anna Zacharoff depicts minimalist marine organisms on untreated canvas. With her focus on the blobfish, which collapses into a shapeless mass when taken out of the water, the artist explores the transformative nature of these deep-sea creatures. Just like in Zacharoff's wider oeuvre, where fish, sea snails, crabs and other marine life forms play the leading role, this series evokes the vastness and mysterious depths of the ocean. On the one hand, these paintings are classical studies of form, whilst on the other hand, they also question the perception and (in)sufficiency of our understanding of other species.

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Room 11

Vedran Kopljar (& ouders) (°1991)
InnerSpacePortal (Ajugubuh), 2022

The series 'InnerSpacePortals' occupies a distinctive place in Vedran Kopljar's oeuvre, which, in addition to paintings, also includes more conceptual and performative work. These paintings are the result of his research into interior spaces, in a physical, metaphorical and poetic sense. Kopljar regards the series as a portal to what we experience or project into space. For him, painting is an illusion, driven by our desire to see what we hope to see. The works balance between object and painting, taking the form of canvases with distinctly organic wooden frames. The frames act as a portal, and the canvases as the 'other space'. Kopljar often explores the idea of the frame and the illusory nature of painting within the context of Western art history.

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Room 11

Brieuc Dufour (°1997)

Kissiguma, 2020

In 'Kissiguma', a three-dimensional painting tailored to the human body, Brieuc Dufour merges traditional visual techniques with physical expression and digital culture. As an artist and former student of psychomotor therapy, he forges a connection between art and care. He achieves this with layered, colourful works that encompass physical, organic and digital elements. By combining images of digital noise, such as glitches, pixels and bugs, with paint and screen printing, he creates works that blur the boundaries between the physical and the virtual. Dufour invites us to seek out these rich interactions between the body and its environment in order to enhance our sensory experiences, emotions and physical sensations.

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Room 11

Che Go Eun (°1988)

Dptych, 2017

In 'Dptych', Che Go Eun paints a pornographic internet advertisement that was targeted at her after she moved from Korea to Belgium. The unfathomable online algorithms reinterpreted and sexualised her Asian identity. With the work, the artist expands into the digital world questions about the representation of women, and examines online prejudices related to gender, ethnicity and age.

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Room 11

Kati Heck (°1979)

Zum Teufel, Positionen!, 2012

Although Kati Heck is best known as a painter, her oeuvre also includes sculpture, film, performance and photography. Her work has a bold, often grotesque aesthetic with a strong narrative slant. Heck combines references to art history, literature and folklore with scenes from her daily life. She frequently alternates realistic portrayals of details with more schematic or unfilled sections of the canvas. This painting takes the same approach. In this depiction of a dream, a figurative painter – clearly a self-portrait of Heck – sits at the table with an abstract painter. The work calls for dialogue and dreams about art.

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Straircase

DUO2Gent students, William Ludwig Lutgens *The Hustle Algorithm, 2025*

When are you successful and what does it really mean? The number of followers on social media, going viral or being able to call yourself an 'influencer' play a big role in this today. The students of the third degree dual learning of DUO2Gent incorporated their view on this in *The Hustle Algorithm*. Under the guidance of artist William Ludwig Lutgens and 'S.M.A.K. Moves' guides Omar Pluymers and Bert Warson, they worked out characters resembling well-known figures. In the short scenes, the students criticise current events and the fake nature of the world of 'influencers'.

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The Studio

Nico Dockx, VOET architectuur & Studio Zuidervaart

Tussen Piraten en Papegaaien, 2023-25

The pavilion by Nico Dockx, VOET architectuur & Studio Zuidervaart is a meeting place for artists and the public: a creative sanctuary for discussion, workshops and artistic encounters. Inspired by a spider web structure, the construction moves with people and nature like a living organism. Within the tubular structure, canvases are suspended, which are gradually painted during the exhibition period.

Invited by Be-Part, it was first built in Waregem in 2023 and then travelled to the Triennial Kortrijk, to now settle in Room 1 of S.M.A.K. With a view to sustainability, the materials are always reused.

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The Studio