

**Dirk Braeckman**  
**L.O.-N.Y.-'94, 1994****Collection Flemish Community**

Braeckman's photos often come across as highly abstract and introverted, and yet they are incredibly subjective, even autobiographical. Motifs running through his work include curtains, empty corners, walls and uninhabited hotel rooms, 'non-places' that are bathed in an indeterminate, suggestive, intriguing, gloomy atmosphere comprised of dark shades of grey. Although we get the impression that Braeckman has 'documented' these deserted places, the images are devoid of any kind of underlying story; they exist entirely in isolation. The photographer's focus on their texture and materiality is striking. His photos are tactile still lifes with a pictorial quality that universally and anonymously captures the details upon which his lens is focused. Their coded titles enhance the feeling of indefiniteness.

**Berlinde De Bruyckere**  
**Romeu "My Deer" IV, 2010****Loan private collection**

The sculpture 'Romeu "My Deer" IV' consists of swaddled antler fragments that are suspended downwards on the wall, like hunting trophies whose glory has been stripped away. The pieces of antler are not hard and blunt, as would be expected, but soft and vulnerable like meat. In 'Romeu "My Deer" IV', De Bruyckere treats the horn as a symbol of the destructive side of passion. On the one hand, an antler is supposed to entice, whilst on the other it is deployed as a weapon in a life-and-death struggle for love. The contrast between love and suffering.

The pieces of antlers inspired an intense performance in which Portuguese dancer Romeu Runa interpreted the metaphor of Actaeon, the latter changing into a deer after seeing Diana, goddess of the hunt, bathed naked. After this punishment, the hunter was devoured by his dogs, who no longer recognised their master. The hunter became the prey. In the performance 'Romeu My Deer', Romeu Runa changed into a mythical creature with antlers. The work was performed in London at the launch of the publication 'Romeu My Deer' in 2012 and in S.M.A.K., on the occasion of De Bruyckere's solo exhibition in 2014.

**Thierry De Cordier****Grisaille, (rideau de pluie) – regengordijn, 1991****Friends of S.M.A.K.**

Desolate Flemish landscapes, seascapes, mountains, storms and merciless lashing rain: philosopher and painter Thierry De Cordier is fascinated by all these themes and feels deeply connected to them. As the philosopher that he essentially is, he employs nature in his work as a means for self-reflection and as a sounding board for his moods. For example, the grey-white, heavy curtain of rain in 'Grisaille' expresses a sense of 'Weltschmerz' (a feeling of world-pain or world-weariness). The painting seems to hold up a mirror to our innermost depths, inviting us to contemplate our own existence.

**Raoul De Keyser****Document, 1992****Collection S.M.A.K.**

Many of Raoul De Keyser's works from the 1990s are fragile and minimalist. Although this composition might seem simple, nothing is quite what it seems. Look carefully, and you will see that the background is not pure white. Several other colours are hidden within the paint layer. The splashes of paint add texture to the surface, as though it were a (painted) skin. This kind of work typifies De Keyser as a painter: he researched painting itself, exploring the material limits of both the medium and the canvas. "Every work is for me a kind of essay", De Keyser once said. How much could he omit without losing the essence?

**Raoul De Keyser****Hal (3), 1985****Collection S.M.A.A.K.**

Raoul De Keyser's work became more and more abstract from the 1970s onwards. He increasingly researched painting itself: from the quality and format of his canvases to the type of paint and the brushwork. Even so, the artist always departed from a concrete subject drawn from his immediate surroundings, although his depictions became less recognisable over time. His chosen subjects were excuses to experiment with the formal foundations of painting. Many of De Keyser's compositions from the 1970s and later, such as his work, 'Hal (3)', are composed of combinations of coloured surfaces and lines. The representations are fragmented and multi-layered. They contain layer-upon-layer of paint and different colours, as well as deliberate traces of the artist's painterly actions and gestures.

**Joel Fisher****Untitled no. 5, 1978-79****Collection S.M.A.K.**

Large square sheets of handmade paper hang side by side on the wall. Fisher made the paper himself. The sheets come from the same mould and thus have a common origin, but they are all unique. Each piece contains a small drawing. Fisher calls them 'apographs'. The drawings are determined by the paper itself. To make the support, Fischer scooped fibres of paper pulp into a mould and squeezed it out on a felt mat. Fibres became trapped in the paper as it dried. These form the starting point for the drawings. The hairs and fibres in the surface steer Fischer's pen. The artist selects a hair, or a chance configuration of hairs, which he copies with a pen or pencil at a larger scale on the same piece of paper – as if it were a transcription or copy.

The 'apographs' often serve as the source of inspiration for sculptures. Fisher 'recreates' the drawings on a larger scale and selects the most appropriate material. This might be bronze, stone, plaster, wood or wax. The contours of the small drawings become those of the larger, three-dimensional works. This lends durability and weight to the fragile drawings.

**Michel François****One Another (Football), 2008****Collection S.M.A.K.**

'One Another (Football)' by Michel François is a sculptural object inspired by everyday life. A leather jacket hangs on a wooden stool beside a football. That was crafted using pieces of the same garment. The title of the work alludes to Michel Foucault's philosophical concepts and his notion of 'heterotopia', or the other place. According to this idea, 'heterotopia' sculptural object finds itself in an in-between space that reflects the world on the one hand, and disturbs and challenges it on the other. With 'One Another (Football)', François poetically imbues simple and everyday objects and materials with new meaning, and influences the way in which they are perceived. In parallel to the artists of the Italian Arte Povera movement, he explores how meaning evolves over time and is transformed by new associations, layers of significance or interactions with other artworks or exhibition spaces. The work, which is constantly changing, thus becomes a symbol of endless possibilities.

**Gilbert & George****A Drinking Sculpture, 1974****Collection Matthys-Colle**

'A Drinking Sculpture' is an early work by the British artist duo Gilbert & George. The 'Drinking Sculptures' series, to which this work belongs, was created in the early 1970s. Its origins lie in the Balls Brothers bar in Bethnal Green in London, where Gilbert & George got drunk while celebrating the sale of their first artwork. 'A Drinking Sculpture' is a constellation of blurred, distorted and fragmented photos in which glasses, bottles and views of tables come to the fore as an overarching motif and are juxtaposed with a self-portrait of the artists. The work evokes a feeling of drunkenness whilst simultaneously alluding to the idea of 'Englishness'. It points to the socio-political situation in Great Britain at the time, which was dominated by high unemployment, a growing number of worker's protests, temporary blackouts and escalating violence in Northern Ireland. As the artists say themselves, the series is a reflection of life: "Artists would get smashed at night, but in the morning, they would go to their studio and make a perfect minimal sculpture". They were alcoholics but their art was dead sober". 'A Drinking Sculpture' acts as an antecedent to the 1986 manifesto 'What Our Art Means' in which Gilbert & George make the case for accessible art. The work also demonstrates the way and which Gilbert & George experimented with media in the 1970s and gradually shaped their identity as 'living sculptures'.

**Ann Veronica Janssens****HEM 600 – Fragment, 2015****Donation S.M.A.K. Collection**

Ann Veronica Janssens (b. 1956, Folkestone) is a Belgian artist who belongs to a generation of sculptors that is trying to radically rethink the medium in terms of a more sensual and physical experience of art. Her artistic visual language often circles around the immaterial, the fleeting and the ephemeral. Light and optical and sensual experiences are central tenets of her work.

In 2016, two much-debated artworks were installed on the Korenmarkt in Ghent. One of these was 'HD400' by Ann Veronica Janssens, an enormous 20-metre-high column. The title refers to the world of construction; namely the type of support beam that underpins many modern structures. Here, the artist pays tribute to contemporary architecture, which she thereby causes to enter into dialogue with the thirteenth-century Saint Nicholas Church. As is always the case in Janssens' work, the (interplay with) light also performs an important role here. The enormous sculpture shooting into the air is both solid and weightless. Thanks to the reflective surface, it not only takes up space in its surroundings but also mirrors them. A paradox is hereby created between materiality and immateriality. This work in polished steel, 'HEM600', serves as a scale model for the final version of 'HD400'. Janssens donated the works to the museum collection in 2016, the year of both her exhibition at S.M.A.K. and the installation of 'HD400' in the heart of Ghent.

**Mike Kelley****Innards, 1990****Donation S.M.A.K. Collection**

In the catalogue for Mike Kelley's posthumous retrospective exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 2013, John C. Welchman placed 'Innards' in a sub-group entitled 'Half a Man' (1987-'93), which Kelley had commenced in 1987. What 'Half a Man' has in common with other subgroups, such as the slightly older 'Arenas' or the slightly later 'Dialogues' and 'Afghan Works', is that they are comprised of soft toys and other found objects arranged on a white sheet on the floor. The title of the work and the arrangement of toys suggest scattered innards, violence and trauma. For the artist, all the works from the 'Half a Man' series, despite their differences, coalesce around questions such as gender-specific visual language, family and lost innocence. The white sheet can be read as a symbol of innocence. Sheets and hand-knitted blankets ('afghans') regularly recur in Kelley's oeuvre. In the series 'Dialogues' (1990-'91), Kelley adds a third element to the white sheet and soft toys scattered on top: sounds amplified by a stereo installation.

**Bernd Lohaus****Zwischen/Als/Gegen/Für Lohaus, s.d.****Loan Collection Flemish Community**

As with many sculptures by Bernd Lohaus from the mid-1960s, 'Zwischen/Als/Gegen/Für' consists of several simple, identical volumes. The four weathered, conical wooden blocks stand alongside one another and have the words 'zwischen' (between), 'als' (as), 'gegen' (against) and 'für' (for) inscribed in white chalk on their upper surface. The addition of these prepositions imbues the banal pieces of wood with a layered meaning, without being anecdotal or narrative. On the one hand, the elements enter into a relationship with one another and with the space in which they rest, whilst on the other hand the relationship between the artwork and the viewer is explored. As with the majority of his other sculptures, Lohaus, in this work, poses questions about concepts such as time, space and identity.

**Atilla Richard Lukacs****Brandenburg Series, White Hammers, 1989****Brandenburg Series, White Cog and Wreath, 1989****Collection S.M.A.K.**

The 'Brandenburg Series' by Atilla Richard Lukács stems from a fascination for recent political history and the rise of ideological movements such as fascism and communism. Lukács created the series in the late 1980s when he lived in Berlin and his studio was located close to the Brandenburg Gate. In 1989, with the fall of the wall that had divided the German capital for almost thirty years, the historic city gate came to symbolise freedom and embodied the desire for German reunification. The twenty-five works from Lukács' 'Brandenburg Series', including 'White Hammers' and 'White Cog and Wreath', explore the fall of communism in Germany. The works, painted on maps of the city, show politically charged symbols such as cogs, hammers and garlands of wheat, maize or other crops.

**Bruce Nauman****Study for spiraling project, 1974****Loan Matthys-Colle Collection**

Drawing occupies an important place in Bruce Nauman's working process. For him, it is the first step towards transforming his thoughts into images. At the beginning of his career, he mainly produced small, quick pencil sketches that he used as notes. Later, these tended to become large format drawings, such as this one. With this type of drawing, the artist tried to envisage the final execution of a work. The pencil notes offer a glimpse of Nauman's inner thought processes. This schematic preliminary study of a sculpture in spiral form also illustrates how systematically and precisely the artist approaches his installations.

**Bruce Nauman****Suspended chair, 1986****Loan Matthys-Colle Collection**

The suspended chair, attached by cables to the walls of the exhibition space, appears regularly in various guises in Nauman's oeuvre from the 1980s onwards. This drawing served as a design sketch for the 1987 installation of the same name: a steel chair suspended by steel cables. The empty chair is an art historical motif that also occurs in the work of Van Gogh and Warhol, amongst others. In the first place, it evokes the absent human body. But because the chair is hung upside down in the room, and is therefore unusable, it evokes an uneasy feeling. For Nauman, the chair is a metaphor. It is an indictment on the persistent political abuses and brutal violations of human rights that characterised the period in which he made these works.

**Bruce Nauman****Drawing for Cast Iron Sculpture, Square to Circle to Triangle, Model for Tunnel, 1981****Collection S.M.A.K.**

Bruce Nauman's drawings often look rough and unfinished. He started making drawings for tunnels as early as the 1970s. Later, he actually built them, often in raw materials. The installations vary in scale. Certain works hang from the ceiling, others stand or rest on the floor.

Nauman studied mathematics at university level and, even as an artist, remains fascinated by geometric equations and the relationship between squares, circles and triangles. In his sculptural work, he explores the relationship between these shapes. Drawings play a central role in his creative process: they make concrete what he envisages. Sometimes they are small, quick sketches that serve as notes for sculptures or diagrams for films and performances.

Large-format studies, like this work, help the artist in the execution of a sculpture, when he tries to imagine what it will become. His sketches often contain annotations as well, as you can see in 'Study for Spiraling Project' (1974), a work on loan to S.M.A.K.

**Michelangelo Pistoletto****Divisione e moltiplicazione dello specchio – S.M.A.K. Divisione Pistoletto, 1975-1978****S.M.A.K. Collection**

In 1978, in the catalogue of his exhibition at Galleria Giorgio Persano in Turin, Michelangelo Pistoletto described the two directions in which he wished to further develop his work. The first, 'Divisione e moltiplicazione dello specchio' (Distribution and multiplication of the mirror) derives from Pistoletto's assessment that a mirror can reflect everything except itself. By dividing the mirror in two, as is the case in this work ('Specchio diviso' or 'Divided mirror'), and by shifting the parts along the legs of a corner that starts from the axis of the division, the mirror can in fact reflect and multiply itself. With the mirror glass, the frame is also divided. The contact points between the profiles confirm the original unity of the sawn-up wooden frame.

As a result of this exercise, Pistoletto developed a series of works in which he focused on the principle of division as a universal element of organic development and – socially speaking – of division as a logical alternative to accumulation – of division as a logical alternative to accumulation. Pistoletto already started to use the term 'sharing' in this context. Furthermore, everything that can be said about his 'mirror paintings' is also applicable to this work. In the work, Pistoletto designated this a 'permanent performance'. A similar work from 1975-'78 can be seen in the Menil Collection in Houston: a mirror divided into two halves and installed in a corner. It is enclosed in a baroque, gilt frame, however, rather than the simple, wooden frame seen in the Ghent work.

**Thomas Schütte****Trio, 1993****S.M.A.K. Collection****Thomas Schütte****Weinende Frau, 1989****Collection S.M.A.K.**

Thomas Schütte began making installations with small but expressive human figures in the 1980s. Many of the miniature works in this series were recreated on a monumental scale in the 1990s, using various materials. Schütte was exploring whether figurative sculpture still had a role to play after decades of abstract and conceptual art. But the meaning of his sculptures is not always unambiguous.

Schütte often depicts disquieting faces, as with this larger-than-life weeping woman. Sadness and pain are not only etched on the expressive countenance. As with much of Schütte's other work, this sculpture seems to physical the 'human condition': the confusing emotional and physical contradictions that we can experience as human beings.

**Walter Swennen****Untitled (Beste P, bis), 1984****Collection S.M.A.K.**

A yellow banana skin painted in crude sweeps of light paint against a dark background. In the top left corner, you read 'Beste P, bis' [Dear P, again]. The 'bis' probably alludes to the work 'Beste P (Peau de banane)' [Dear P (Banana skin)] from the same year (Mu.ZEE, Ostend), in which a smaller banana is set against a light background. Is this banana skin a (second) warning? The painting will not provide the answer. Swennen wishes you to complete the work with your own associations and emotions. In other words, the artist considers it unnecessary for us to 'understand' the painting. For the artist, the primary goal of painting is painting itself. He believes in the total autonomy of artworks and regards his work as a continuous process of exploration: of the possibilities and limitations of the medium, and of directions and techniques. Swennen paints without purpose or objection: "You begin, and you react to what there is. People who write about painting forget that painting is usually nothing more than an appointment between the painter and the painting."

**Richard Tuttle****Story XX, 2020****Collection S.M.A.K.**

As with many of his earlier works, Richard Tuttle's 'Stories' series underlines the traditional restrictions of media and materials in order to experiment playfully with form, scale and presentation methods. 'Story XX' comprises a series of eccentrically cut-out and painted wooden reliefs with which the artist brings painting into a new dimension. The series also attests to Tuttle's fascination with "the art of making art" and emphasises the importance of openness in his work. 'Stories' arose during the coronavirus crisis of 2020 and every object, such as 'Story XX', is linked to two short tales that Tuttle wrote in isolation. With the title, 'Story', he alludes to Giovanni Boccaccio's book 'Decameron' which consists of a hundred novellas narrated by seven women and three men who are isolating in the Tuscan countryside in order to escape from the plague pandemic of 1348 in Florence.

**Luc Tuymans****Body, 1990****Donation S.M.A.K. Collection**

Although the identity of the figure is not revealed, in 'Body' Luc Tuymans confronts us with a naked torso. In his monochrome white torso of a doll has two striking black-brown stripes around her middle. These allude to zips with which the body can be opened to add stuffing or create volume, to make it (more) lifelike. The stripes, an entry point for imbuing it with meaning, are also reminiscent of deep cuts with clotted blood. The dark line that accentuates the pubic area alludes to the age-old naked headless female torso. In this sense, the image could be regarded as a sexual artefact or archetype, but it is devoid of any erotic signal. The doll even appears to be covered with craquelure, causing 'Body' to resemble an old painting. With this, Tuymans alludes to the vague, imperfect images that our memory reproduces. The contours of the memory remain intact, while the image itself becomes progressively blurred. The presentation is kept impersonal and deliberately meaningless.

**Jan Van Imschoot****De Mirabello, 1992****Collection S.M.A.K.**

For each new work, local history or an affecting event in his milieu or wider society. Motifs within his oeuvre include freedom, censorship, and the violence associated with political and ideological systems, both past and present. Van Imschoot's 'anarcho-baroque' works are influenced by art history in terms of form.

Cross-references to artistic predecessors also appear in this canvas. The influences of Francisco Goya and Edouard Manet seep through via the intense dark colours and menacing atmosphere, for example. The pieced-together perspective, strong colours and vivid contrasts are typical of Van Imschoot's oeuvre. In addition, there is the striking title: 'De Mirabello'. Some of the artist's titles function like signposts and allude to his erudition. Others are more ambiguous and lead you astray. In his combinations of words and images, Van Imschoot deliberately leaves room for a range of associations.

**Philip Van Isacker****Completion-Emptiness, s.d.****Collection S.M.A.K.**

'Completion-Emptiness' is part of a series of sculptures in the form of tables, which Van Isacker has developed throughout his artistic practice. Several such works can be found in the public domain. 'Completion-Emptiness' consists of two minimalist-looking tables. In the middle of each is an engraved word: "completion" on the first and "emptiness" on the second. Van Isacker sees the table as "something very lively, something on which you can do all manner of things." The table, as a place for eating, drinking or talking, symbolises an encounter. 'Completion-Emptiness' is an invitation to consider, to communicate, or to call things into question. The words "completion" and "emptiness" serve as a foundation for this reflection.

**Lawrence Weiner****The Level of Water / De Waterstand, 1979****Friends of S.M.A.K.**

Lawrence Weiner, one of the American pioneers of conceptual art, broadened the concept of 'sculpture' in his own unique way: language was his medium; he made sculptures with text. It did not matter to him whether or not an artwork was actually realised. As early as 1968, he made an exhibition in the form of a booklet with short texts describing artworks that we can imagine in our mind's eye. This artist's book, published in 1978 by the Society for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, as an edition of 300, is similar. Both images and text-based works feature in the 48-page book with unnumbered pages.

The title of the book, 'The Level of Water / De Waterstand', relates to an artwork from the S.M.A.K. collection: 'Above Below the Level of Water with a Probability of Flooding (i.e., a Dike)' (1977). The aforementioned installation offers a commentary on the site for which Weiner devised the work, namely a dike in the Netherlands. From the 1970s onwards, the artist lived part-time on a boat in Amsterdam. He eventually knew enough Dutch to be able to utilise it in his 'word sculptures'. For Weiner, it was important to make a text-based work in the language of the place in which it was sited. This strengthened the relationship between the work, the place in question and the public.

**Franz West****Ohr, 1986****Donation S.M.A.K. Collection**

Franz West's 'Passstücke' are grotesquely-shaped, somewhat amorphous masks, which must be held before the face or a part of the body or carried like a shield on the arm. They are instruments for physical and mental processes, signs and symbols of social intercourse which interpret body language. In the 1980s, West further expanded his 'Passstücke' with capricious arrangements of isolated appendages such as mouths, noses and ears. 'Ohr' is an ear fashioned from paper-mâché that can be used as an extension of the body. West refused to make images that could only be viewed or contemplated. He wants us to enter into dialogue with his objects. Initially, his works could also be touched and held. West also tended, in the beginning, to use them in performances during which he would demonstrate their uses.

The body, with its various postures and parts, is one of the key pillars of Franz West's uncompromising oeuvre. Multiple art movements from the 1960s and 70s embrace and elevate the body to an autonomous visual entity, albeit within artistic actions and before an audience or camera. West transcends this by transferring the role of artist to friends, acquaintances, or individual viewers, such as ourselves. The moment that we touch or handle the objects, we ourselves become performers. West subsequently extended this idea to the bodies of his audience, without lapsing into populist interactive art. Time and time again, he depicting the human body and its depiction as a visual medium that reveals social tensions and processes.

**Franz West****Objectbild – Object Picture, 1974****Collection Matthys-Colle**

Communication and interaction with art, and through it, are themes within Franz West's oeuvre. For the artist, the usability of his work takes precedence over its appearance. He explores this boundary: when is something an art object and when is it a functional item? And also: do we relate differently to an everyday object than to an artwork?

This research took shape in West's work in the early 1970s via his 'Objectbilder' [Object Pictures], in which he plays with irony and alienation. The artist placed everyday objects centre stage: a bathing cap to put on or sandals to step into. The objects are glued to weathered sheets of wood that are lacquered in monochrome colours. Viewers are encouraged to try them out or to use them. West thereby wishes to stimulate our inventiveness and disrupt our conditioned behaviour in exhibition spaces.