

Biography Philippe Van Snick

Philippe Van Snick (Ghent, 1946 – Brussels, 2019) is one of Belgium's most important contemporary artists. Combining the legacy of modern abstract art and the conceptual art of the 1970s, his work explores a field of speculations on the perception of the world and life.

Van Snick's work has repeatedly been considered from the perspective of the fundamentals of painting, yet recent reviews of the oeuvre have shed light on his recurring experiments. These traverse a wide range of disciplines: conceptual photography, film, installation, artist books, and site-specific projects.

Like a spiral, Philippe Van Snick's work constantly unfolds from the infinitesimal to the infinite. His artistic proposals not only encompass mathematical rigor but also an experimental attitude that embraces the element of chance in life. They are poetic and unconventional, at once tense and airy, empathetic and yearning for the world, still and dynamic.

Van Snick created his first works after graduating from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent: abstract 'white' paintings, drawings and installations. At the end of the 1960s, he participated in the 6th Paris Biennale at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. He soon emerged as one of the most promising artists of his generation.

In the midst of the cultural and political upheavals of the 1970s, his affinity with the conceptual art of the time prompted him to study communication theory, indeterminacy, and physics. This, in turn, propelled him towards a 'dynamic' worldview. He exhibited in leading museums and galleries in Antwerp and Brussels, such as the X-One Gallery, the Wide White Space and Plus Kern, together with artists such as Daniel Buren, David Lamelas, Ian Wilson and Raoul De Keyser.

Van Snick developed his 'decimal system' within the context of conceptual photography, creating simple works that addressed notions of time and duration, everyday life and human action. The system, which makes his work unique, revolves around a series of numbers composed of ten digits from 0 to 9, which can be endlessly combined. Van Snick subsequently widened the scope of his practice by combining numbers and colours. He also turned to painting, using an abstract, minimal language that was recognised in the art world.

Instead of slipping into a hermetic, self-referential formalism, Van Snick wanted to embrace the endless variations in the world, nature and human action. In his references, the playful legacy of concretism – in the guise of Georges Vantongerloo – is ever present in the background. Many of his projects attest to an affective worldview: a continuous 'fair play' between the subject and the conditions of perception and experience.

Philippe Van Snick's 'grammar' and his free spirit are revealed in his numerous projects, mainly in Brussels and Ghent, but also in Japan, Canada, Italy, the United Kingdom or Brazil. Amongst many other themes, his work is characterised by subjects such as duality *Traditionele L-vormige kamer* (1969) or *Day | Nacht* (1984, 1986); the instability of perception *Polychrome Déstabilisé* (1979) and *Monochrome Déstabilisé*

(1980), or *Pans de Sensation* (2005-07); the microscopic and the cosmological *Instability of Fundamentals* (1990); and the place of the observer *Territorium* (1999 and 2000).

Throughout his artistic career, Philippe Van Snick dedicated himself to capturing the unstoppable rhythm and movement of nature. This determined his choice of a rigorously conceptual visual language. He gained these experiences in the intimate setting of his own garden, a domestic extension of his studio and life, and an important place for the contemplation of the essence of his work.