

EXTRA CITIZEN

Group exhibition with works by

Meriç Algün, Younes Baba-Ali, Zbyněk Baladrán, James Bridle, Bram Demunter, Cao Fei, Iman Issa Ahmet Ögüt, Dan Perjovschi, Antonis Pittas, Martha Rosler, Marinella Senatore, Philippe Van Snick and Grant Watson

Curated by Antonia Alampi and iLiana Fokianaki

How might we describe citizenship today? How does someone *become* a citizen? When can we say we belong to a place? How much have the informal meaning and legal definition of the notion of citizenship transformed over the last decades?

These questions form the foundation of the exhibition, which serves as an introduction to Kunsthal Extra City's programme for the next three years.

The “extra” in the title invites us to think beyond the conventional meaning of citizenship: what can be added to the normative definition of a citizen, and what lies outside of its confines?

The definitions of citizenship and the questions of what being a citizen can entail are constantly being reformulated. In fact, they have been evolving since the beginning of organised society, reaching as far back as the ancient Greek city-states. Within the accelerated phase of history we are now experiencing, with its renewed path towards far-right nationalism, and a growing frus-

tration surrounding political systems and representative democracy in general, we feel the need to contribute from an artistic perspective to the discussions on what it means to be a citizen, what rights and responsibilities come along with this, but also what parameters are still used to define who is entitled to be or become one.

The composition of people that inhabit the cities of the old continent has changed substantially in the last century. Global migration and the World Wide Web, new and complex forms of mass interaction (social media or otherwise) and knowledge exchange, along with the free movement of goods, capital and services, define the world in which we live. Things such as nationality, birth-place, language, and religion are not the sole defining factors with respect to our sense of belonging to a place or community.

Nevertheless, we are witnessing, once again, a re-emergence of “us” and “them”, a development that denies the complex diversity and hybridity of cultures and world-views that define contemporary European metropolises. We are witnessing the shortcomings of limited integration policies that have failed to result in structural change, while European borders are fortified, denying access to people running from extreme situations such as war or poverty.

On the other hand, grassroots movements have increasingly emerged, intervening in municipal procedures and political agendas, finding new ways and means to organise (socially and politically), offering support, shelter and hospitality to newcomers, presenting alternative and

more accurate images of our present. Furthermore, the reality of our cities has bred new and younger, multi-lingual and multi-national citizens who are defined by their greater cultural, social and economic diversity.

It is for these reasons that today we think it is relevant to reflect once again on the purpose and power of citizenship, not solely in relation to the nation state, but also vis-à-vis other organised communities, from the city to the neighbourhood, and even to supranational bodies.

The intention behind this exhibition and its narrative path, but also of our programme for the upcoming three years, is to inspire reflection on what we might inscribe in a new and much-needed polyphonic definition of citizenship. We aim, together with our audience and contributors, to question the contemporary interpretations of a concept in transition, one that exists in a liminal space between democracy, legality, and our sense of ethics, affiliations and survival. (AA & IF)

CAHIER #1: ON ACTS OF CITIZENSHIP

The exhibition is accompanied by a Cahier, with a conversation between Antonia Alampi, iLiana Fokianaki and Michiel Vandevelde, and new commissioned texts by Lina Attalah, Anton Jäger and Victoria Ivanova. All our publications are free to download on our website.

UNRAVELLING CITIZENSHIP

public programme, curated by Michiel Vandevelde

What are the possible “acts of citizenship” one can undertake in today’s complex world? Over the course of three months, Kunsthal Extra City will become a forum where the notion of citizenship will be unravelled and explored through different lenses.

→ www.extracity.org

Meriç Algün

b. in Istanbul (TR) – lives and works in Stockholm (SE)

‘The Concise Book of Visa Application Forms’ (2009)

‘Ö (The Mutual Letter)’ (2011)

‘Becoming European’ (2012)

‘Billboards’ (2012)

What criteria are used to determine whether or not someone can become a European citizen? The work of Meriç Algün is based on her own experiences as a Turkish migrant in Sweden.

‘The Concise Book of Visa Application Forms’ is an encyclopaedic book of all the visa application forms of the world. “Have you engaged in any other activities that might indicate that you may not be considered a person of good character?” “Are you and your partner in a genuine and stable partnership?” This book gives an insight into a bureaucratic reality that is often hidden from the outside world. In ‘Billboards’, a selection of these almost absurd questions is taken from the visa application forms and reproduced on billboards and banners. They underscore the vague line between the individual’s right to privacy and the state’s right to information.

In 'Ö (The Mutual Letter)', Algün collects all the 1,270 words that have the same meaning and spelling in both Swedish and Turkish, to create a kind of dictionary. In the sound component of this work, Algün and her Swedish partner read the words aloud; although they seem to be mimicking each other, they are each speaking their own language.

'Becoming European' shows all Algün's movements through Europe over a period of four and a half years, mirroring the Migration Office's own records. Alongside the dates, her status is represented using different colours: blue for "tourist", red for "temporary resident", purple for "pending", black for "permanent resident", and green for "waiting for citizenship". Missing dates indicate a period spent outside the borders of Europe. The final date is 3 June 2012, the day Algün became European.



'Billboards', (2012), Exhibition view 'Becoming European', Moderna Museet, Stockholm, (2014), photo Åsa Lundén, courtesy of the artist, Galerie Nordenhake and Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Younes Baba-Ali

b. in Oujda (MA) – lives and works in Brussels (BE) and Casablanca (MA)

‘Shalom Aleikoum’ (2013)

‘Multiculturalism / Multicommunitarism’ (2014)

‘Social Paintings’ (2016)

Can art hold up a mirror to society? Can artists confront us with our ingrained habits and dysfunctions? Younes Baba-Ali introduces familiar objects from the urban landscape to the exhibition space. Like an artistic guerrilla fighter, with an ironic knowingness, he holds up the viewer’s dilemmas and taboos and challenges them to react.

‘Shalom Aleikoum’ literally means “peace be upon you”. It is a form of bilingualism, mixing the common origins of the Arabic and Hebrew greetings. The text thus becomes a message of peace, free from the tensions between both cultures, printed on the doormat at the entrance to the exhibition.

Baba-Ali’s work ‘Multiculturalism / Multicommunitarism’ is an illuminated sign that shows these two words alternately, with a rhythm and an aspect marking a dysfunction. The sign evokes the typical advertising signs of corner stores, but also the precarious nature of the multicultural society.

'Social Paintings', the third work by Baba-Ali in the exhibition, is based on the illegal stands from which immigrants, in Italy and elsewhere, sell their wares. Often they are made of cardboard and can be rapidly assembled or dismantled when the police arrive. They are ingenious objects, a metaphor for people living without legal status. On the wall of an art space they become a symbol of the "*aesthetic of the precarious*", as the artist himself puts it.



'Multiculturalism / Multicommunitarism', (2014),
photo Silvano Magnone

Zbyněk Baladrán

b. in Prague (CZ) – lives and works in Prague (CZ)

‘To be framed’ (2016)

How do we organise our lives? In Zbyněk Baladrán’s film we hear the answer from the voice of a child:

“In the first place we need appreciation. We are not acknowledged by anyone. We must be acknowledged and perceived, it is not possible to be unheard”.

In ‘To be framed’, presented here as film stills, Baladrán reflects on symbolic violence and how excluded individuals and societies are denied the resources required to organise and represent themselves. Baladrán writes: *“While the film, which was shot on the premises of the former military base, was originally intended to reflect the topic of war, it eventually resulted in the topic of symbolic violence, embodied by the medium of film.”*

Violence often remains hidden in our society, or unrecognised if it is not physical. But the violence of discrimination and exclusion can produce societies that are fragmented. Baladrán asks to what extent we make use of violence on a daily basis, in our behaviour, our manner of speaking and expression? In his eyes: *“I wanted the method to be part of the question since one cannot escape the cycle of violence by simply naming it and pointing at it.”* This

work demonstrates how we might organise our lives in including rather than excluding ways, and how we can perceive the receivers of discrimination in a more objective way. Baladrán does that by creating a script where they are symbolically represented by innocent children.



We're invisible, nobody can see us, but we know we're here.

‘To be framed’ (film still), (2016)

James Bridle

b. in London (UK) – lives and works in Athens (GR)

‘Citizen Ex’ (2015-ongoing)

Where have you been today online? And do you know how many locations and their jurisdictions you went through during your online movements? Download James Bridle’s plug-in to discover your digital citizenship.

‘Citizen Ex’ by writer, artist and technologist James Bridle investigates how our online movements affect our citizenship – including our rights as citizens – from moment to moment. We move freely from website to website without asking ourselves where in the world these sites are registered or how the various laws there might influence our own rights. Bridle’s browser plug-in ‘Citizen Ex’ allows you to follow your digital citizenship in real time and see how your rights fluctuate during your time online. Bridle calls it an *“algorithmic citizenship”*, *“where your citizenship is a percentage based on the different places you visit, so you may be 60% US, 20% British and 20% German.”*

Security services continuously monitor the data of internet users and assign a “citizenship” based on this. For example, the NSA is not allowed to spy on American citizens, so they use browser data to assign everyone a score: if this score is lower than

50% American, they will still be allowed to spy on the person in question. ‘Citizen Ex’ offers a unique insight into the mechanisms of the digital world in which we are becoming more and more entangled – often unaware of the consequences.

Visit www.citizen-ex.com to download the free plug-in for Chrome, Safari or Firefox. There you can also read a series of essays about different “internet nationalities”.



‘Citizen Ex’ (screenshot), (2015-ongoing)

Bram Demunter

b. in Kortrijk (BE) – lives and works in Ghent (BE)

‘Humans in conversation’ (2016-2017)

How do we organise our coexistence? And who is left out of our groupings? Bram Demunter's paintings are inhabited by diverse creatures, sharing the same space but not necessarily relating to or even seeing one another.

The artist has worked for several years in a small psychiatric institution, which has proved an influential experience with respect to his way of perceiving and depicting humanity. For Demunter it has been an opportunity to observe how emotions – such as greed, affection, aggression, happiness, lust, hate – could be expressed when stripped of any social boundaries, and the ways patients found to accept each other.

Aesthetically inspired by the history of Christian representation, Demunter's paintings also reflect on Western and particularly Flemish society and culture. How do communication and interaction work in a context that is characterised by diversity and yet largely monocultural in practice? Demunter's interest lies in how rituals, beliefs, religious constructions and shared characteristics shape the way we live alongside one another. How do we respond to our tendency to form groups, our need for the other and

our need to love and be loved? But the construction of groups, of societies, is also based on exclusion, which, as the past and present have shown us, can lead to violent traits. In the context of this exhibition, Demunter's characters seem to point to how Europeans live in what is essentially an enclosed garden, a "gated community" to which entrance is heavily guarded and restricted with no regard to the consequences such exclusion may bring.



'Avondmaal in de omsloten tuin' ('Supper in the enclosed garden'), (2017)

Cao Fei

b. in Guangzhou (CHN) – lives and works in Peking (CHN)

‘La Town’ (2014)

Can artists imagine a possible future of the city? With her multimedia projects, Cao Fei explores how young city dwellers are responding to the rapid and chaotic changes in China today, and how these are defining their culture and identity.

In the film ‘La Town’, Cao creates a town where an unspecified disaster has taken place, where time has come to standstill and the characters are frozen on the spot. The plot develops through these static figures in an artificial, handmade miniature landscape over which the camera moves. The fictive, mythical city La Town and its inhabitants undergo a dark transition. In the idyllic prologue, the characters are still relaxing in the fresh green grass, unaware of the impending doom. After the disaster they are seen as zombie-like creatures in a destroyed, apocalyptic world of waste, deterioration and decay, in shabby streets, a desolate supermarket or dilapidated strip club. The dream-like dialogue between a man and a woman is heard in a voice over – scenes from the script written by Marguerite Duras for the film ‘Hiroshima mon Amour’ (1959). In this way, moments of tenderness and affection still permeate this harsh world.

The film ends in a museum where elements from throughout the story are revisited: *“Now, the story of the small town’s past – love affairs, politics, life, demons and disasters – have all been sealed beneath the museum’s vitrines, the historical “specimens” becoming an authoritative but limited interpretation of this town’s history.”*



‘La Town, Center Plaza’ (film still from ‘La Town’), (2014)

Iman Issa

b. in Cairo (EG) – lives and works in Cairo (EG) and New York (US)

‘Making Places’ (2007)

‘Thirty-three Stories about Reasonable Characters in Familiar Places’ (2011)

How can we share the notion of “place” when our relationship with it is coincidental, emotional and highly personal? The work of Iman Issa speaks to our memories and their connections with familiar places, people and situations.

‘Making Places’ is the result of encounters with spaces in cities that struck the artist as familiar despite having never seen them before. She thought that perhaps what she was recognizing was not the presence of a familiar element but the absence of a distinguishing detail. By introducing notable components into these rather generic spaces, Issa seeks to transform them into more defined ones.

The installation ‘Thirty-three Stories about Reasonable Characters in Familiar Places’ consists of three parts. The first part is a book containing thirty-three stories. In a dry and aloof tone, Issa speaks about familiar and often banal situations – such as a visit to the zoo, being at school or on holiday – with extremely minimal descriptions of places and characters, not mentioning any names or details. Because the

gap was so great between the generic texts and the real colourful memories on which they were based, Issa felt the need to fill in the missing details. This led to the creation of the second part of the installation, an “epilogue” to the book consisting of artworks and videos that serve to visualise the memories of the artist. To help the viewer navigate between the text and the visual elements from the epilogue, Issa created a third part of the installation, an “index” that would provide the art works with descriptive titles. *“The different sections are linked. A viewer can choose to follow these links through or to approach each element independently”.*



‘Thirty Three Stories about Reasonable Characters in Familiar Places’ (detail), (2011), courtesy the artist and Rodeo, London

Ahmet Öğüt

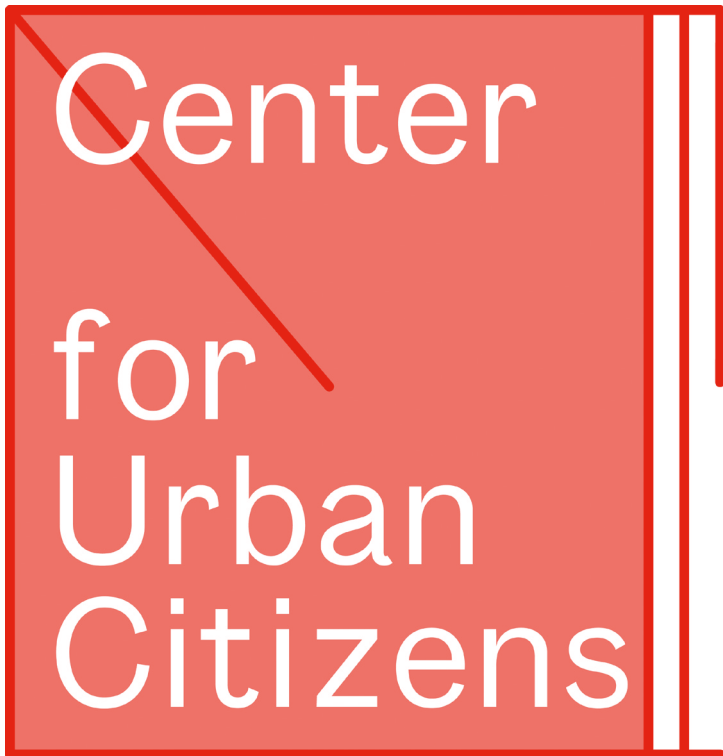
b. in Diyarbakir (TUR) - lives and works
in Amsterdam (NL)

'Centre for Urban Citizens' (2017-ongoing)

Could cities and their inhabitants take the lead in the search for a new interpretation of citizenship?

The 'Centre for Urban Citizens' by Ahmet Öğüt is housed in an optical illusion room that creates a destabilizing spatial experience. This room contains research materials such as documents, books, maps, objects, videos, and recorded talks, conversations and interviews addressing the social, political and civil dimension of citizenship in relationship to new movements and informal forms of assembly initiated in different urban settings around the world.

In Öğüt's project, "citizens" stands for people inhabiting a place, including those deprived of legal recognition. Hence, the 'Center for Urban Citizens' seeks to be a site where the boundaries of what constitutes a citizen can be stretched and questioned. It looks into progressive forms of governance in particular, brought forward by mayors, and municipality-led networks, intervening in the loopholes of national laws or looking at new global and European alliances to strengthen support structures for their inhabitants (with or without citizenship) and their economic conditions.



'Centre for Urban Citizens', (2017-ongoing), logo by
karankobel / Thanks to Mondriaan Fonds

The centre will be activated and appropriated by
different actors and communities, continuously
growing during its three-year period at the premises
of Kunsthal Extra City.

Dan Perjovschi

b. in Sibiu (RO) – lives and works in Bucharest (RO)

‘The Entrance Issues’ (2017)

Can a line be drawn between “artist” and “citizen”? Can artists assume an active role in society? With his “intellectual cartoons”, his sharp, humoristic line drawings and ironic wordplay, Dan Perjovschi provides a ruthless commentary on the world around him. Perjovschi was invited to make a large-scale drawing on the facade and the Vitruvian of Kunsthall Extra City.

Since the nineties, Perjovschi has produced hundreds of contributions to newspapers and magazines, including the magazine 22, the first independent, critical weekly paper to be published after the Romanian Revolution. Its name comes from the date 22 December 1989, the day on which the dictator Ceaușescu was forced to step down. The paper, of which Perjovschi was both the illustrator and art director, became an important platform for alternative thinkers – writers, artists, philosophers – fighting for human rights and freedom of speech in Romania. Perjovschi used the medium of drawing as a powerful tool for the spreading of information and political commentary, showing that artists can be politically engaged without being preachy. *“I believe that art should have a place in the eight o’clock news, it shouldn’t only be politics, weather*

and sport. As a citizen of my country and as a citizen of the world I make a more fascinating statement about my country and my world than the majority of politicians. Art and artists shouldn't be the stuff of weekend excursions, leisure time, the cultural sector or whatever other daft idea liberal society comes up with to keep creativity and free expression in a cage."



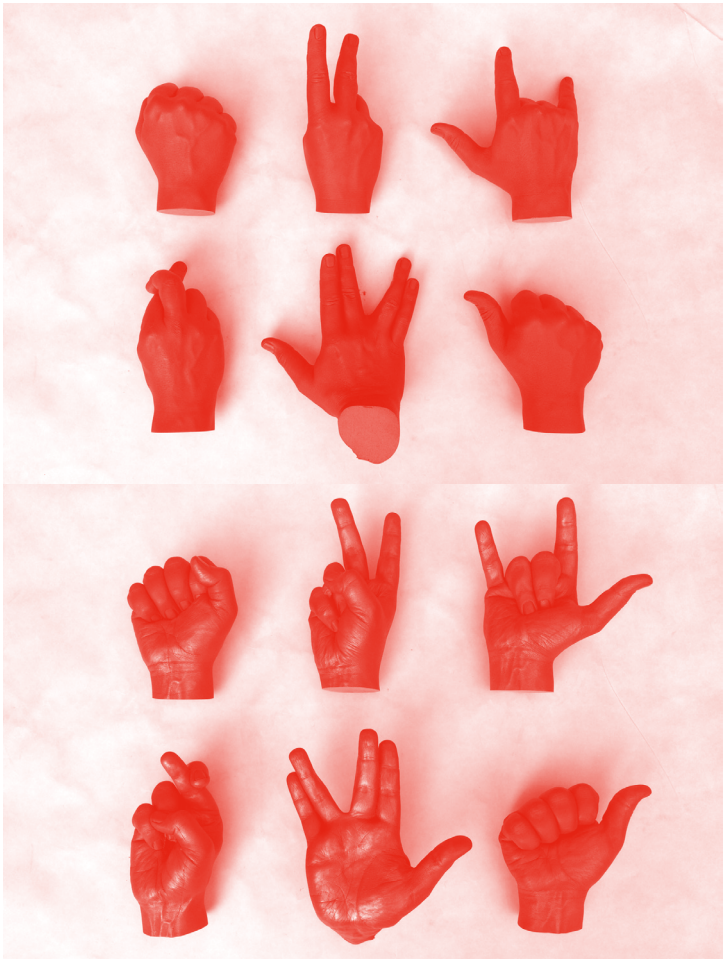
Antonis Pittas

b. in Athens (GR) – lives and works in Amsterdam (NL)

‘Handle Citizens’ (2017)

What happens to an everyday object when it is included in an exhibition? Does it instantly become an artwork? Artist Antonis Pittas invited local residents to “invade” Kunsthal Extra City with a personal object, more specifically the door handle of their own home. With this intervention he seeks to challenge the idea of the art space as an impenetrable fortress, only accessible to art experts who hold the correct password. At the same time Pittas asks the question of whether “high art” can only be made by the artist themselves.

Pittas replaced each of the participant’s front door handles with a new one cast in the form of his own hand. The hand evokes the local legend whereby Antwerp (in Dutch: “Antwerpen”) is said to have gotten its name. Long ago, as the story goes, the city was once besieged by the giant Antigonos, who forced all shippers to pay a toll if they wanted to cross the River Scheldt. If they refused, the giant cut off their hand and threw it in the river. Antigonos was eventually slain in a fight with the Roman soldier Brabo, who then threw the giant’s hand into the Scheldt. The Dutch for “to throw a hand” is “hand werpen”, hence the name “Antwerpen”.



'Handle Citizens' (detail), (2017), photo Anthony Sgard, courtesy Annet Gelink Gallery and Antonis Pittas / Thanks to Mondriaan Fonds

Martha Rosler

b. in New York (USA) – lives and works in New York (USA)

‘Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained’ (1977)

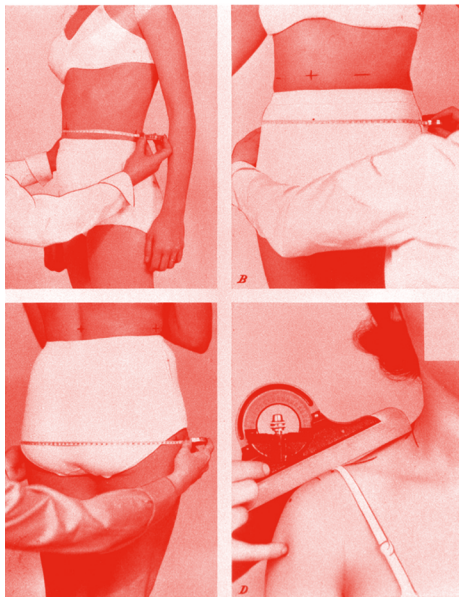
When do we begin to see ourselves and others as objects? This film by Martha Rosler from the seventies criticises the depersonalisation and suppression of the woman and the Other.

At the core of the video is one long shot in which every centimetre of the naked body of a “citizen”, played by the artist herself, is meticulously measured by two doctors in white coats, assisted by a “chorus” of female assistants. What first seems to be a routine check-up slowly reveals itself to be a brutal assessment of the physical characteristics of the female body. Every aspect of the body is measured and declared as “below standard”, “standard” or “above standard”. In the meanwhile, different voiceovers comment on standard measurements, externally applied but also, critically, internalised, in an implied critique of society’s gender expectations.

In the final scene we see a slideshow of black-and-white documentary photographs from the thirties, of women and children being measured by American civil servants purportedly for statistical purposes. At the same time we hear a voice recounting a series of crimes and aggressive incidents against women, from testimony collected during the

'International Tribunal of Crimes against Women'
held in 1976 in Brussels.

The cold, sterile image that Rosler creates of the carefully conducted inspection alludes to the official use of the "science" of measurement, periodically employed to justify gender and racial discrimination in immigration, in concentration camps, the army, and the police force, but also at schools, prisons, workplaces, and beauty contests, official and unofficial.



'Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained'
(film still), (1977), courtesy the artist

Marinella Senatore

b. in Cave de'Tirreni (IT) – lives and works in Paris (FR) and Berlin (DE)

‘Protest Bike’ (2016)

Do we, as citizens, let our voices be heard as often as we could? Jump on the ‘Protest Bike’ by Marinella Senatore and shout, say or sing your complaint, slogan, objection or qualm over the bike’s megaphones. The artist invites citizens to use the bike for a personal or public protest.

With her work, Senatore seeks to offer alternative, open platforms for demonstration and action. She combines forms of protest with aspects of participative theatre, oral history, dance and music, public ceremonies, civil rituals and mass events. She reflects on the political power of communities and their impact on the social history of places and societies. Senatore is proposing that groups formed around music, dance or spectacle are capable of bringing about social change. Her performances, paintings, collages, installations, videos, photos and sound works focus on social themes and urban issues, such as emancipation and equality, working conditions and the commons.

Senatore works with local communities to create a platform for public engagement and assembly. Participants share their expertise and acquire new skills from one another, thus themselves becoming

ing writers, costume designers, camera operators or dancers. She encourages the public to influence and even control the result of her work. In this way she is challenging the traditional roles of the artist as creator and the public as a non-participatory receiver.



'Protest Bike', (2016)

Philippe Van Snick

b. in Ghent (BE) – lives and works in Brussels (BE)

‘Autoband’ (1971)

‘Wandelaars’ (1973)

‘Lady Comfort’ (1983)

‘Boulders, Borders & Bodies’ (2016-2017)

How do we understand cities as organic spaces that evolve around us? How are they related to us and how do they affect us? Philippe Van Snick is interested in the architectural, physical, mathematical and natural elements of the places we inhabit. Through his eyes we are able to reconfigure in our minds the spaces around us and understand them anew.

Van Snick, one of the most prominent living conceptual artists of Belgium, observes life at its most mathematical and structural. Best known as an abstract painter, he belongs to the category of artists that have a meticulous precision and patience with respect to form, materiality and tactility. His work is densely conceptual and complex in spite of its aesthetic simplicity.

The works in this exhibition, spanning a period from the 70s to today, demonstrate the artist's interest in

the mundane details of our lives. An example of this is the work 'Wandelaars' ('Wanderers', 1973), made during his time in Antwerp. In his 'Autoband' series of photographic works from the 70s, Van Snick seeks out the form of the ellipse in everyday objects and in nature. From 'Lady Comfort', his seminal sculptural installation from 1983, to his recent series of paintings 'Boulders, Borders & Bodies', from 2016-2017, the underexposed aesthetic value of the details found in the world we inhabit, and the artist's critical approach towards it, remain the core elements of his work. This underexposed aesthetic quality arises, in the artist's words, from *"a confusion, a reflection of what one has said, what one has seen, and what one expects to see"*.



'Boulders, Borders & Bodies (Black)', (2017), photo We Document Art, courtesy the artist and Tatjana Pieters, Ghent

Grant Watson

b. in London (UK) – lives and works in London (UK)

‘How We Behave’ (2012-ongoing)

Can a life be a work of art? ‘How We Behave’ is an ongoing project by Grant Watson, inspired by an interview of the same name with Michel Foucault and published in Vanity Fair in 1983, in which he asks if we can think of life as a work of art. Foucault’s concern was not with lifestyle or the link between life and art but with the question of how we understand and potentially shape our life individually and collectively as a practice and a form of resistance.

‘How We Behave’ includes a growing series of portraits, made in cities across the world from Amsterdam to Los Angeles to Delhi. These portraits show how people experiment with unconventional lifestyles variously through work, spirituality, alternative family structures, sexual behaviour and social or political engagement. In each location, the interviews respond to their specific context – in India, for example, where certain homosexual acts are illegal, the interviews focus on questions of sexuality.

Through a process of transcription and editing in collaboration with the interviewees, answers from a first-round of questioning develop into shorter texts to become the foundation for a second filmed



‘How We Behave’, (2012-ongoing)

interview in a part-scripted, part-improvised presentation for the camera.

Especially for this exhibition, Watson has made three new filmed portraits of women based in Antwerp and Brussels, with an emphasis on collectivity and feminist practice.

‘How We Behave’ is supported using public funding by Arts Council England and was originally commissioned by If I Can’t Dance, I Don’t Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution. The Antwerp and Brussels portraits were produced by Kunsthall Extra City with the support of If I Can’t Dance, I Don’t Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution. Special thanks to Wiels.

GUIDED TOURS and YOUNG CITIZENS PROGRAM on Sundays. Visitors can participate in a free public tour every second Sunday: on 10 and 24 September, 8 and 22 October, on 5 and 19 November and on 3 December 2017, starting at 14:00.

While the parents follow a tour or visit the exhibition independently, children from 5 till 12 years old can participate in a creative workshop, discovering the exhibition and their young-citizenship, guided by a professional cultural worker/artist.

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