

7. JILL MAGID, 'THE OFF HOURS'

A Continuation of 'The Migration of The Wings'

Leuven's St Peter's Church

20.10.2023 – 28.04.2024

M Leuven is pleased to present 'The Off Hours', a special in situ-presentation by American artist Jill Magid at St Peter's Church. Every night, during the church's closing hours (4:30 pm until 7:30 am) a musical score inspired by the nocturnal flight calls of migrating birds will emanate from the chapel that usually houses Dieric Bouts's triptych *The Last Supper* (1464-1468), and echo throughout the church.

'The Off Hours' is a new chapter of Magid's film and sound installation 'The Migration of the Wings' presented at M in the spring of 2023. The project explores the forced migration of the side panels, or 'wings' of 'The Last Supper', commissioned for St. Peter's. Throughout the triptych's 600-year history, its wings, depicting scenes of Jewish diaspora from the Old Testament, have been repeatedly removed and exploited as commodities, spoils, and reparations of war between Germany and Belgium. Meanwhile, the central panel, with its nearly frozen scene of the Last Supper, has remained in the church.

Like the absence of the painting from its home, the score that fills the space resonates what cannot be seen, only sensed. "Jill is using the building itself as a musical instrument — a monumental church like St Peter's is made to resonate chants, prayer and music. In this case, the music resounds with a haunting story of exile, taking place in the margins of time and space", says curator Valerie Verhack.

The musical composition of 'The Off Hours' – constructed around the constraint that sound cannot be played during the Church's public hours – draws a new metaphorical thread to the themes of Jewish diaspora already present in the painting. Incorporating the nocturnal flight calls of European migrating birds, the music is composed by clarinetist Stuart Bogie and programmed by Eric Sluyter to develop over the 15-hour period when the church is closed. The composition changes throughout the night mirroring the migratory flow of birds, and peaking, like their flight calls, at dusk and dawn.

Accompanying the sound installation in the chapel of 'The Last Supper', two books will be on view, one old and one new. The 'Liturgical Manuscript of the Holy Sacrament Altar', also known as The Book of Hours, was composed in the 15th century by order of the League of the Blessed Sacrament, who also commissioned Bouts' 'The Last Supper'. Magid imagines its volume to represent the 9 hours during which the church is open during the day. To complement this Book of Hours, she has created 'The Book of Off Hours': a visual score of the new composition, with a volume proportional to the 15 nighttime closing hours.

With 'The Off Hours', Magid uses as material the emptiness that the triptych's absence has created, and the migrations that formed it. She calls it "a concert for the church and its ghosts." Passersby's may catch the music by standing near the chapel windows during the night hours.

Updates on other ways to hear *The Off Hours*, including a live performance and a radio broadcast, will be announced soon.

Curator: Valerie Verhack