



Living Spaces

This Is Us

Cover: Aglaia Konrad, *Shaping Stones*, 2023, commission,
courtesy the artist and the gallery Nadja Vilenne, photo: the artist

Chapter 2

Living Spaces

The second chapter continues with the theme of representation introduced in the first chapter, exploring it through the lens of organisms and the demands they place on their habitats. Here, art and life merge into one. There is a tension between nature and culture and the spaces they occupy. Different organisms encounter each other in nature and artificial environments, rising the need to reflect on the balance between climate, biodiversity and the democratic society. The bodies on display have been automated, hybridised, exploited, categorised, transformed and threatened, or are simply the embodiment of different powers. Their habitats follow overlapping cycles and traditions, each vulnerable in their own way, whether they are made from soil, plants, water, snow, wood or bricks. The works of art in this chapter raise different questions about identity, power and the need for protection.

It starts by juxtaposing two works that question the physical and social aspects of the body. The dancing *Humonid* by **Jean Katambayi Mukendi** engages in a dialogue with four reclining figures in photos by **Ria Pacquéé**. The outsourcing of human skills to robots stands in stark contrast with the bodies marked by physical labour. The resting bodies on the street and the cardboard Humonid raise questions about the relationship and power dynamics between labour and the body in our technological society.

Continuing the theme of the physical state of the body, other works explore how the body has become uniform through culture and politics. Artists draw comparisons to the animal kingdom to speak more freely about bodies, body parts and gender. These analogies also create space to untether the body from the binary restrictions imposed by society. Social discourse is particularly important here, as it defines bodies beyond their biological characteristics. Bodies do not exist in isolation from their cultural contexts but are defined by social constructs as well. These, in turn, are influenced by political power dynamics, resulting in different levels of protection for different bodies.



Jean Katambayi Mukendi, *GMT*, 2017, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Fabian Flückiger

Ria Pacquéé, *Resting*, 2008, Cera-collection / M Leuven, photo: the artist



Monika Stricker, *Not Bothered*, 2022, commission, courtesy of the artist and the gallery Clage, Cologne, photo: Simon Vogel

Marlene Dumas, *Blind Joy*, 1996, collection M HKA / collection Flemish Community, photo: M HKA



In a new work commissioned for this exhibition, **Monika Stricker** compares the genitals of people and primates. This juxtaposition removes all erotic connotations. Instead, the works convey a tender vulnerability. The inclusion of the animal world gives us permission to explore human identity in an unbiased way. Stricker's ape and man motif contrasts with a nude by **Marlene Dumas**. It is one of her many portraits of prostitutes in Amsterdam's Red Light District. Like Stricker, Dumas undermines traditional representations of the nude body in art history. Her watercolour reopens the dialogue about identity and the body in art. The dark figures represent the depths of the human psyche (desire, lust, seduction and mystery), but also consumer goods like 'paid sex', which exist outside this realm as well.

When passing into the next room, **Mona Filleul's** two-part work serves as a vulnerable transition piece that leaves the visitor straddled between concealment and exposure. For this exhibition, Filleul created a bas-relief that brings together characters from Japanese pop culture: Hello Kitty, MyMelodi and Kuromi. They each embody ideal fantasy worlds enacted in separate scenes. The piece is a subversive commentary on gender, sexuality and queerness. Filleul works with protective materials, such as insulation panels, thereby charting the exposure and vulnerability of queer bodies in the public space.



Mona Filleul, *Kuromi & My Melody* (detail), 2023, commission, courtesy the artist, photo: Mona Filleul

Bruce Nauman, *Untitled (Four Small Animals)*, 1989, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Dirk Pauwels

Robert Devriendt, *Stuffed Birds*, 2000, Cera-collection / M Leuven, photo: Philippe Debeerst



Above and to the right of Filleul's bas-relief hang works by **Bruce Nauman** and **Robert Devriendt**. Devriendt's small-scale oil paintings of birds may seem peaceful at first, but the title, *Stuffed Birds*, brings that feeling with an illusion to an abrupt halt. The series of paintings bears witness to the categorisation and domination of the animal world by humans. It is also a nod to the documentation of bird species that became extinct due to either natural causes or human activity. Nauman's animals above further explore the far-reaching dominance of humans over animals. They were created using rubber moulds taken from animals. The four creatures highlight the endless possibilities of body transformation through genetic modification in the animal kingdom.





Peter Rogiers, *Palm I & II*, 2002, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Dirk Pauwels

The following rooms shift their focus from the vulnerability of bodies to the vulnerability of habitats. Other works demonstrate how the concept of nature has changed throughout history. **Peter Rogiers's** palm trees, for example, can be interpreted in many ways. They may represent the problematic exotic gaze with which we view distant lands and cultures. Alternatively, they could symbolise the popularity of the south with tourists. Or are the trees a nod to the climate crisis? After all, palm trees are shade-giving plants that are capable of withstanding increasingly warm and dry conditions.

Climate change is also addressed in the work of **N. Dash**, which features a thin layer of soil interlaced with dry cracks. This piece explores the condition of the earth and the tension between the natural world (earth) and the industrial world (textile). The individual components of the work act like powerful tectonic plates that shape landscapes – a natural force which humans can never replicate.

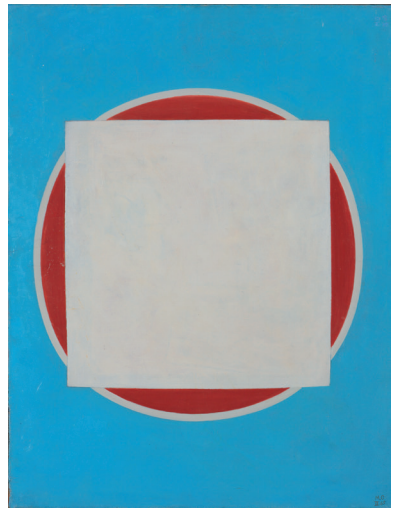
N. Dash, *Untitled*, 2017, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Peter Cox – courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp





Wolfgang Laib, *Blütenstaub von Haselnuss* (*Hazel Pollen*), 1987, collection M HKA / collection Flemish Community, photo: M HKA

Meret Oppenheim, *Sommergestirn*, 1963-1965, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Dirk Pauwels



The raw power of nature also plays a role in the two works by **Meret Oppenheim** and **Wolfgang Laib**, which offer a retrospective on the way these two artists perceived nature in the 1960s and 1980s. Oppenheim's abstract celestial body *Sommergestirn* reflects the elemental power of the cosmos and sparks a dialogue about natural phenomena such as cycles, metamorphoses and coincidence. Laib's work, made from hazelnut pollen, takes a spiritual approach to nature that has since faded to the background, replaced instead by concerns about the fragility of ecosystems, advancing urbanisation and the associated decline in biodiversity.



The last room in this chapter brings together three perspectives on building culture, urbanism and the conditions in which communication thrives. In her ***Shaping Stones***, **Aglaia Konrad** explores the emergence and development of cultural spaces, using stones to symbolise this process. Her work focuses on the architectural history of the past millennia. **Avery Preesman** shifts his focus to the end of the twentieth century and observes the structural changes in urban space during that period, particularly in and around Chicago. He then translates his observations into spatial paintings. **Felix Kindermann** takes the social rather than the material as his inspiration, with a focus on interpersonal relationships. Increasing urbanisation is continuously blurring the boundaries between public and private space. Kindermann's commissioned works explore spatial planning and the concept of social space, which he represents with fences.



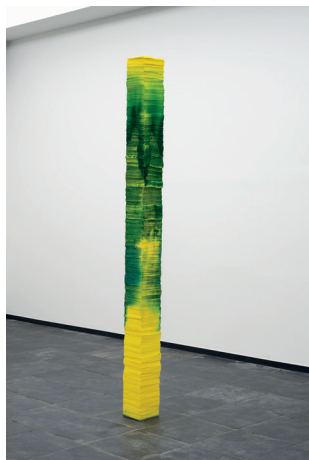
Aglaia Konrad, *Shaping Stones*, 2023, commission, courtesy the artist and the gallery Nadja Vilenne, photo: the artist

Avery Preesman, *Zonder titel*, 1994, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Fabian Flückiger

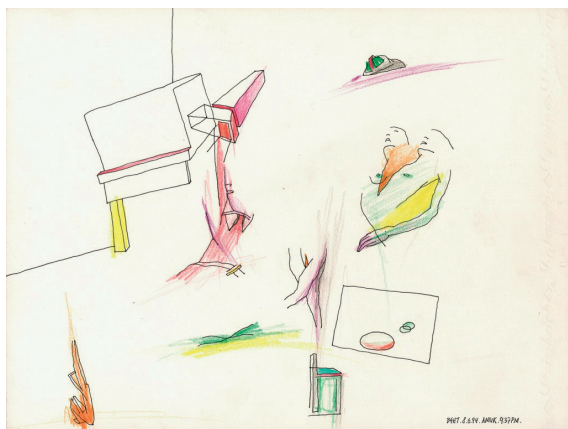
Felix Kindermann, *That Wants It Down*, 2023, commission, courtesy the artist, photo: the artist



The small rooms featuring works by **Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, Jura Shust, Anne Daems, Richard Artschwager** and **Konrad Lueg** are devoted to the domestic, to role models in the private sphere, to interior design, and to everyday family life.



Anne Daems, *Stoel Gustave Serrurier-Bovy bedekt met kledingstukken 8*, 2019, Cera-collection / M Leuven, courtesy the artist and galerie Micheline Sz wajcjer, photo: Vildana Memic

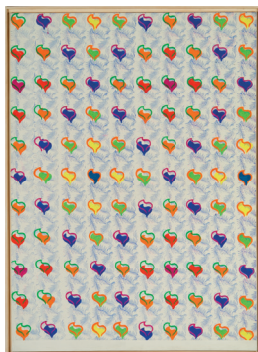


Jura Shust, *Faint Young Sun*, 2015, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Dirk Pauwels

Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, *Untitled*, 1994, collection M HKA / collection Flemish Community, photo: M HKA

Konrad Lueg, *Tischdecke*, 1965, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Dirk Pauwels

Richard Artschwager, *Splatter Table*, 1992, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Dirk Pauwels



Colophon

Curator

Fabian Flückiger

Tekst

Fabian Flückiger

Fabian Flückiger guest curates ***This Is Us***. He is a curator and lecturer based in Bern and Brussels. After various institutional positions (Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern; Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva; Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein), he has been working as a freelance curator since 2021. He has realised exhibitions and publications on Nora Turato (2019), Steven Parrino (2020), Miriam Laura Leonardi (2021), Manon de Boer (2022), and ektor garcia (2022), among others.

Graphic design

Studio de Ronners, Antwerpen

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Artists

Richard Artschwager

Audrey Cottin

Anne Daems

N. Dash

Robert Devriendt

Marlene Dumas

Mona Filleul

Joris Ghekiere

Ann Veronica Janssens

Jean Katambayi Mukendi

Felix Kindermann

Aglaia Konrad

Wolfgang Laib

Konrad Lueg

Dyan Marie

Bruce Nauman

Otobong Nkanga

Meret Oppenheim

Ria Pacqué

Marina Pinsky

Avery Preesman

Emmanuelle Quertain

Peter Rogiers

Jura Shust

Monika Stricker

Keith Tyson

Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven

Jan Van de Kerckhove

Maarten Vanden Eynde

House for Contemporary
Art, Design & Architecture

