



# The Art Institution

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## This Is Us



# This Is Us

***This Is Us*** combines works from the four largest museums for contemporary art in Flanders: M HKA, S.M.A.K., Mu.ZEE and M Leuven. Guest curator Fabian Flückiger sees these art collections as seismographs of the times, re-evaluated with each presentation.

In ***This Is Us***, Flückiger spread the work of fifty artists over three chapters: The Art Institution, Living Spaces, and Telling Stories. These chapters explore the art institution from various perspectives, questioning the power dynamics at play and the issue of representation in art. They also address our current organic and social living environments and inspire us to think about how history influences our perception of art and the world as a whole. New works created specifically for this exhibition deepen the dialogue between the present and the past.

This transforms the exhibition into an ‘artistic learning environment’ in which perspectives are questioned and shifted, sharpened and aligned.

This exhibition emerged from a unique collaboration between Flanders’ leading museums for contemporary art, Z33, and the commissioned artists.



## Chapter 1

# The Art Institution

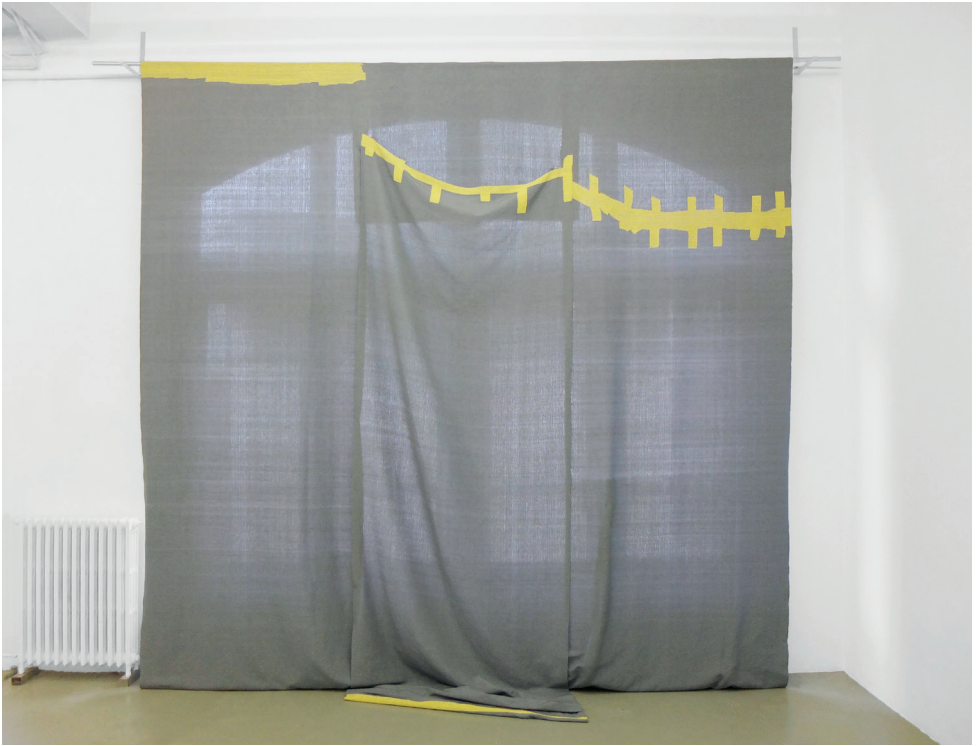
The first chapter explores the history of the art institution as an inclusive entity. More than 130 years ago, an early attempt was made at creating more inclusive art institutions. During his 1889 lecture ‘The Museums of the Future’ at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, the controversial George Brown Goode proposed targeting women as a specific group of visitors, although it would take many decades for works by female artists to be adequately represented in museums. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the art institution has undergone a continuous evolution that has been closely linked with the struggle for equality and social justice in wider society – a process that has gained considerable traction in recent years. That transformation served as inspiration for this chapter. The artworks in these rooms explore the art institution as a political space and a social platform, where new forms of representation emerge that reflect a society in constant motion.

Art institutions and their collections are often seen as places where meaning is preserved, while in fact they only preserve artworks, not their meanings. With each new presentation, they offer a link to the past while simultaneously creating space for new interpretations. In this way, the works and their meanings remain alive. This allows them to meet the ever-changing demands of the dynamic social space that is the contemporary art institution.

In this chapter, a direct link is created between the selected works and the art institution. Themes such as the struggle for equal rights, uniformity, roots, heritage, perspective, power, repair, inclusion and representation are all addressed. The dialogue between works from different time periods and the perspectives of visitors leads to a diverse and fluid interpretation of the art institution.

At the entrance to the long, gently sloping room is a work by **Anna Zacharoff** entitled ***National Museum***. It was inspired by the renovation of the Swedish National Museum in Stockholm. Part painting and part installation, it offers a contemporary take on the art institution. Hidden behind the Renaissance-style facade are burgundy and canary-yellow walls that hint at the museum's history as a salon for the upper classes. By adhering to the aspect ratio of a standard piece of A4 paper, Zacharoff addresses two topical themes in art institutions: maximum accessibility and the risk of homogenization of art.

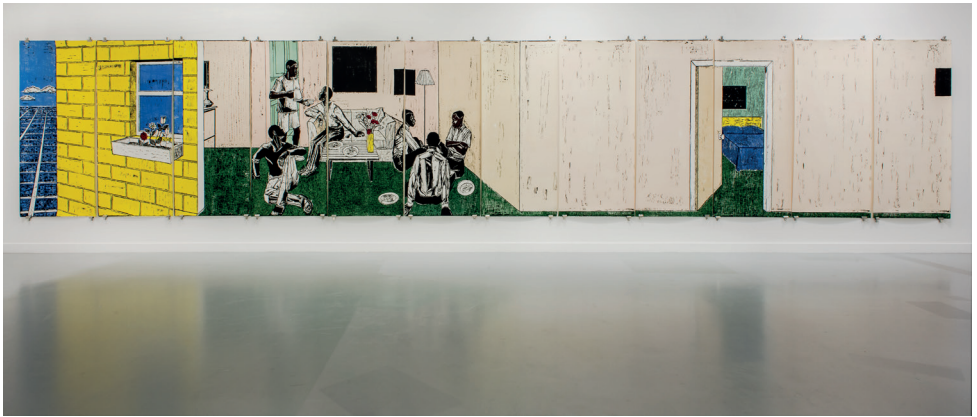




Hana Miletić, *Materials* (platinum mercerised cotton, gun metal grey cottolin, yellow mercerised cotton, yellow cottolin, light grey conductive yarn), collection Mu.ZEE Ostend, photo: Mu.ZEE

The large curtain in **Hana Miletić's *Materials*** is a nod to a bourgeois past that is increasingly unravelling. Miletić photographs street scenes, mainly in Brussels, that reveal a process of change, decay and improvised stabilisation. Through a complex and artisanal weaving process, she translates these photos into textile collages. Her work is both concrete and abstract, referencing specific cityscapes that capture a fragile moment between coherence, change and decay. In relation to the chapter 'The Art Institution', the work may be read as a commentary on the notion of art as a patchwork of political claims, urban environments, resources and individual perspectives.

Anna Zacharoff, *National Museum*,  
2019, Cera-collection / M Leuven,  
photo: Miles Fischler

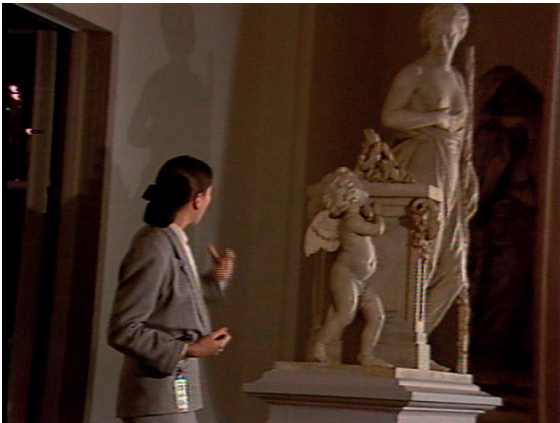


Kerry James Marshall, *Untitled*, 1999, collection M HKA / collection Flemish Community, photo: M HKA

Opposite Miletić's curtain, **Kerry James Marshall's** 15-metre-long woodcut depicts a social scene. In a cinematic manner, the eye is drawn from the outdoor space to the living room and into the bedroom of a brick apartment. The motif reflects the intention of the art institution to present exhibitions that offer a perspective on reality in which art and life converge. Six black people engage in a peaceful conversation. It is in the presence of these six protagonists the central meaning of the work is revealed. Since the 1980s, Marshall has sought to correct the underrepresentation of the black community in art and art institutions.



Representation in art is closely linked to political power dynamics. This issue is addressed in ***Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*** by **Andrea Fraser**. In this film, Fraser leads a tour of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the guise of a fictional docent named Jane Castleton. With an air of ironic seriousness, she discusses the museum as a place for people with cultivated tastes who do not have the economic means to acquire such art themselves. She also refers to the museum as a big-city draw and a tourist attraction. In a gallery dedicated to Flemish art, she shifts her attention to the adjacent toilets, suggesting that a single wall is all that separates the sublime from the ordinary.



Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*, 1989, collection M HKA / collection Flemish Community, photo: M HKA

The commissioned work by **Clare Noonan**, displayed at a height of ten meters, can only be seen from a panoramic vantage point on the first floor. Her black mirror was inspired by the Claude glass: a small, convex mirror with black-tinted glass that was used as a pre-photographic lens by eighteenth-century landscape painters and travellers. The painterly quality of the landscape in the reflected image became an aesthetic ideal that ultimately influenced landscape painting, garden design and even – as legend has it – the English industrial revolution. Within the context of this exhibition, Noonan's work questions the sometimes dubious aesthetic paradigms of art institutions and the resulting underrepresentation of women and underrepresented communities.

Clare Noonan, from *Pilgrim Tourist*, 2007,  
foto: Jeremy Booth.



## 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

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Artists

**Andrea Fraser**

**Kerry James Marshall**

**Hana Miletić**

**Clare Noonan**

**Anna Zacharoff**

House for Contemporary  
Art, Design & Architecture

