



# Telling Stories

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# This Is Us



## Chapter 3

# Telling Stories

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



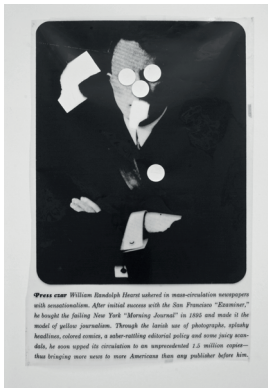
A special window, designed by architect Francesca Torzo, is used in ***This Is Us*** to link the first and third chapters through the work commissioned by artist **Clare Noonan**. It highlights the connectedness of the three chapters, which reflect on the institutional collection and exhibition of art.

In the third chapter, the stories from the previous two chapters are explored in more detail. How does print media, social media, television, artificial intelligence and written history shape our perception and our understanding of the world? How do they influence daily life? In addition to media reports, this chapter focuses on historical events in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, their impact on art discourses and the degree to which historical interest influences aesthetic judgments. For example, it questions how archaeology can influence imagination and how it can inspire a more critical approach to history.

Michael Van den Abeele, *Dinosaur*  
#07, 2014, Cera-collection / M Leuven,  
photo: Isabelle Arthuis

Stories and images are something construed, omitting certain things or creating a focus. *Dinosaur #07* by **Michael van den Abeele** was inspired by the birth of an idea. Palaeontology, the study of ancient life based on fossils, is a relatively young discipline that originated in the nineteenth century. What we think dinosaurs looked like was heavily influenced by the discoveries made in this discipline, which were subsequently translated into visual representations by illustrators and artists. Van den Abeele thus delves into the methodology of image production and links it to genres and motives in art history.





**Cady Noland, Willem Oorebeek and John Baldessari** examine the influence of print media on our understanding of the images, texts and political leanings of different publishers. **Press Czar** by Cady Noland is a portrait of American publisher William Randolph Hearst. A man of many titles, Hearst is mainly known as the father of yellow journalism and one of the most influential journalists in the United States. Sensationalist journalism, media-driven opinion, truth and the dark side of the American dream are all addressed in this work.



Cady Noland, *Press Czar* – telling the story of Randolph Hearst, 1990, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Dirk Pauwels

Willem Oorebeek, *Pages, met zonder KOP*, 2005–2021, collection of the Flemish Community / M Leuven, photo: the artist

John Baldessari, *Arms & Legs (Specif. Elbows & Knees), etc.: Arm and Plaid Jacket*, 2007, Private collection, Belgium / long-term loan to S.M.A.K., Ghent, photo: Dirk Pauwels





The work of **Karin Hanssen** and **Dara Birnbaum** deals with the influence of television and film as mass media that shape reality and fiction. Birnbaum uses the television series *Wonder Woman* to explore positive yet stereotypical portrayals of women in film. Feminism also plays a central role in **Natasja Mabesoone's** extensive series ***Bernice Bobs Her Hair***. Here, the three works from this series are presented alongside three mural interventions. 'Bernice Bobs Her Hair' is a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald about social norms and imagery in American society, which is fractured into rural and urban, black and white communities.



Karin Hanssen, *The Approach (Donald Duck)*, 2007–2008, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Dirk Pauwels

Dara Birnbaum, *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*, 1978, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Dirk Pauwels



Natasja Mabesoone, *Le ruban au cou d'O*, 2021, collection M HKA / collection Flemish Community, photo: M HKA





Emmanuel Van der Auwera,  
*VideoSculpture XXVI (Over-the-  
Horizon)*, 2023, commission,  
courtesy the artist and Harlan Levey  
Projects, photo: Adriaan Hauwaert

**Emmanuel Van der Auwera's** work is devoted to the latest technologies in image production, such as artificial intelligence and the associated information and image databases used to create so-called 'deepfakes'. He explores a new kind of 'dream factory' that will replace Hollywood and usher in a new, post-truth era.

The last room in this chapter is devoted to the media's representation of historical events from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the front of the room is **Fort Pattil II**, an installation by **Sophie Nys**, inspired by a photo from 1915. The photo was taken during the construction of the Wall Street subway station in New York City and includes an old water pipe lying on the ground as if unearthed by an archaeologist. Nys' installation consists of a ceramic pipe mounted onto two Emeco Navy chairs, which were developed by the U.S. Navy during the Second World War. To the pipe the artist added the sad, blue eyes of Walt Disney's Dumbo. With these props, Nys makes reference to the persecution and genocide of the indigenous population throughout the United States' first centuries. The pipe symbolises the absence of historical and archaeological heritage that may have improved our understanding of the country. The military-imperialist and colonial structures referred to in this work are still being reproduced today, including in the American film industry.

Sophie Nys, *Fort Pattil II*, 2015, collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, photo: Dirk Pauwels







Sammy Baloji, *Lakafu, 1898. The Lakafu Station. Morning roll call.* François Michel. *Lofoi, 2010. The Lofoi Station called 'Bon Gain' or 'Good Profit' by the Belgians and 'Mbonge' by the local population., 2010, collection Mu.ZEE Ostend, photo: Fabian Flückiger*

Ana Torfs, *[...] STAIN [...]*, 2012, collection Mu.ZEE Ostend, photo: the artist



European history is no less destructive. In fact, it served as a breeding ground for the history of America written by European immigrants. The photographs by **Sammy Baloji** show how states were colonised by European countries such as Belgium through claims of power and the promise of economic gains. Political and ideological motives are often closely intertwined with economic and aesthetic ones, as **Ana Torfs' [...] STAIN [...]** reveals. In the mid-nineteenth century, the production of dyes flourished. A chance discovery by an English chemistry student named William Henry Perkin led to the production of the first synthetic dye: mauve. A discovery that paved the way for the economic boom of chemical companies. The forward march of science took a dark turn when German chemical companies such as BASF, Bayer, Agfa and Hoechst merged to create IG Farben, which became a central cog in Hitler's war machine during the Second World War.

Colour is also an important theme in the work of **Heimo Zobernig**. With their monochrome palette, his paintings are reminiscent of minimalism of the 1960s and 1970s. Artists of this movement sought to deny authorship with their monochromatic works and questioned the meaning of objects and colour. Zobernig wants to re-examine this era through a different lens. Today, we know there are no neutral objects and that authorship cannot be escaped. The austere artistic objects in minimal art symbolise the infiltration of industrial standards, machine production and capitalism into society and art.



Heimo Zobernig, *Untitled (blue)*, 1995,  
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

Stúdio de Ronners, Antwerpen

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Artists

**John Baldessari**

**Sammy Baloji**

**Dara Birnbaum**

**Karin Hanssen**

**Natasja Mabesoone**

**Cady Noland**

**Sophie Nys**

**Willem Oorebeek**

**Ana Torfs**

**Michael Van den Abeele**

**Emmanuel Van der Auwera**

**Heimo Zobernig**

House for Contemporary  
Art, Design & Architecture

