

S.M.A.K. and the Panamarenko Foundation reveal Panamarenko's historic artwork *Magic Carpet* for the first time in 45 years

On view at Room 1 of S.M.A.K., Ghent

29.Nov.2024 - 05.Jan.2025

Free access

Unveiling of the work for press: Thursday 28 November 2024, 11:00 ([RSVP](#))



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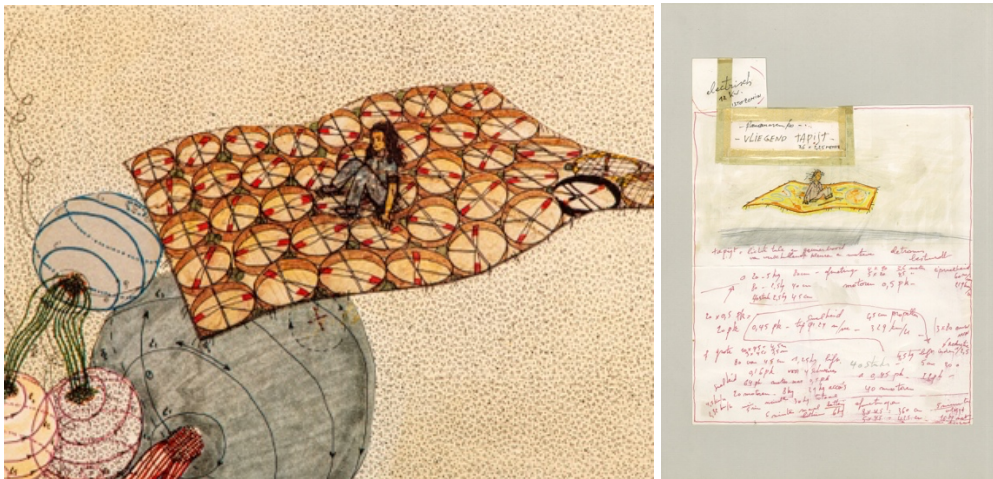
Ghent, 7 November 2024 – The Panamarenko Foundation and S.M.A.K. present the original and historic artwork *Magic Carpet* by the Belgian artist Panamarenko (1940-2019), which has remained hidden from the world for more than 45 years. This remarkable sculpture, which was only shown once at the Biennale of Sydney in 1979, will finally be exhibited to the public from 29 November 2024 to 5 January 2025, free of charge, in gallery 1 at S.M.A.K. in Ghent.

“There is now a possibility to create a flying carpet. The dream of One Thousand and One Nights and of One Thousand and One Inventors. The solution lies in powerful nickel-cadmium batteries and lightweight electric motors.”

- Attributed to Panamarenko, from a typewritten document entitled *Zauberteppich* (Magic Carpet), 1978-1979

Panamarenko spent his entire life dreaming, sketching, designing and creating works about the ultimate goal of flying: to find a way for humans to propel themselves through the air. Straddling artistic and technological experimentation, his work takes the form of airplanes, submarines, cars and birds. He always created spectacular constructions of strange beauty, both playful and awe-inspiring.

Panamarenko created multiple sketches and designs of flying carpets throughout his career. He produced a large-scale drawing entitled *Flying Carpet* in 1978, (currently in a private collection, not illustrated). A sketch of an undulating carpet emphasizes flight with a sweeping pencil line. He also made detailed drawings of one of the 40 propeller rings, made from plywood and powered by a small battery-driven electric motor. According to his calculations, the banks of adjacent propellers would guarantee flight for 1.5 to 3 minutes. Finally, a poetic and vividly executed drawing of the envisioned flying carpet also exists – complete with pilot and fringes.



Some of Panamarenko's drawings and calculations on flying carpets (left: ©Wim Van Eesbeek, right: Courtesy Panamarenko Foundation)

In 1978, Panamarenko was invited to participate in the *European Dialogue* exhibition, part of the 3rd Biennale of Sydney, alongside artists such as Marina Abramović, Joseph Beuys, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Valie Export, Mario Merz, Hermann Nitsch and Gerhard Richter. He proposed a flying carpet sculpture and sent a photo of a model. On 1 November 1978, the Biennale's director wrote to ask whether Panamarenko's *Magic Carpet* should be presented on a wooden plinth. Panamarenko's response remains undocumented.

In February 1979, the sculpture and three unrelated drawings travelled to Sydney for the exhibition, which ran from April to May 1979. Aside from a *European Dialogue* catalogue page featuring Panamarenko's portrait, a model photo and a text by Raimund Hoghe, no other photographs or records of either the exhibition or the *Magic Carpet* presentation have emerged. Jan Hoet and Panamarenko later complained about the lack of information they received from the organizers. A letter dated 4 October 1979, from the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst (the forerunner of S.M.A.K.) to Panamarenko, indicates that the crates with the drawings and flying carpet had returned to Ghent, awaiting Panamarenko's presence to open the sculpture's crate. However, as he never returned to verify it, the museum stored the work in its depot.

In 2021, Eveline Hoorens, Panamarenko's widow, received an email from S.M.A.K. mentioning a Panamarenko work that was preserved at the museum, labelled *Magic Carpet*. The crate had recently been re-registered as part of a digitization project. Upon inspecting the crate and the associated documents, it turned out to contain the *Flying Carpet* exhibited in Sydney in 1979, which corresponds to the large design drawing from 1978.

Today, the Panamarenko Foundation and S.M.A.K. are proud to announce that Panamarenko's original wooden *Magic Carpet* will be shown to the public for the first time in 45 years. The work will be on display, free of charge, from 29 November 2024 to 5 January 2025, in Room 1 of S.M.A.K. This unveiling sheds new light on Panamarenko's visionary legacy and offers the public a rare opportunity to discover a historically significant masterpiece that has remained hidden for decades.

The presentation also marks the start of the Panamarenko Year in 2025, celebrated in collaboration with M HKA – Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp; KMSKA – Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp; Havenhuis – Port of Antwerp-Bruges; Opera Ballet Vlaanderen; and the Scharpoord Cultural Centre in Knokke-Heist. The accompanying publication *Panamarenko Fundamentals* is published by Borgherhoff & Lamberigts.

Quotes

"Panamarenko was an *Ausnahmekünstler*, an irreplaceable, visionary artist who challenged science. Thanks to the establishment of the Panamarenko Foundation, his material poetry will continue to inspire future generations."

- Philippe Van Cauteren

Thanks to:

Panamarenko Foundation (Eveline Hoorens, Valentina Gatti and Pascal Van Overmeire), advisor Jo Coucke, Sébastien Munck, Claudia Kramer (S.M.A.K.), Rom Bohez (former S.M.A.K. staff member)

About Panamarenko

Henri Van Herwegen first rose to prominence in the mid-1960s. He created the pseudonym Panamarenko – a reference to Pan American Airlines, with a Russian-sounding suffix – and held his first solo exhibition in 1966 at the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp, featuring actions, happenings and poetic objects. Through the gallery, Panamarenko connected with international artists, such as Joseph Beuys, who convinced him that his work was indeed art. Over the following decades, Panamarenko became famous for his imaginative aircraft, cars, submarines and fragile mechanical creations, until he retired from art in 2005. Panamarenko died on 14 December 2019.

About the Panamarenko Foundation

In June 2021, the [Panamarenko](https://www.panamarenko.foundation/) Foundation was established as a private foundation with the aim of preserving and protecting - in the spirit of the artist - the artistic integrity of Panamarenko's work and legacy. To continue to inspire future generations by keeping Panamarenko's dream, genius art and unique vision alive.

<https://www.panamarenko.foundation/>



About S.M.A.K.

S.M.A.K. shows art from its own collection in dialogue with works of contemporary artists from all corners of the world. By means of contemporary art, S.M.A.K. seeks and gives meaning to this complex and fragmented world. In doing so, the museum makes every effort to be accessible and inclusive, because art is for everyone.

www.smak.be

Jan Hoetplein 1, 9000 Ghent

+32 (0)9 323 60 01 - info@smak.be

Opening hours

Mon > Fri, 9:30 -17:30

weekends and school holidays, 10:00 - 18:00

every first Thursday of the month open until 22:00

Press contact & interview requests

Fran Bombeke, fran.bombeke@smak.be, +32 (0)494 90 71 66

Images for press: download [here](#) (HR Images of the work will be released after press opening on 28.11.2024.)