

Don't You Know Who I Am? Art After Identity Politics is a major group exhibition at M HKA, the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, reflecting how emergent artists relate to issues of 'identity politics' today.

'Don't You Know Who I Am' is a phrase we might expect to hear from celebrities being refused entry to a nightclub, or politicians trying to dissuade a policeman from giving them a parking ticket and expecting to get away with it because of who they are. In this case it also refers to the fact that many of the artists in the exhibition will be less well-known to a wider audience. This exhibition, on both main floors of the M HKA and in several off-site locations, is intended as a large-scale survey of the modes and means for considering identity and identification.

Various groups in society have, during recent decades, defined themselves along political, economic or social lines such as race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality in order to enhance their visibility and overcome marginalisation. After this established discourse of identity politics, often associated with the art of the 1980s, artists are once again considering notions of identity and what they mean in the contemporary world.

Having outgrown theoretical and visual codes that were too often focused on representations of the self or the body, and that more than anything expressed a desire for social visibility, artists today seem to be more interested in identities (in the plural) as part of an overall understanding of complexity – which the art system has not always been able or willing to accommodate.

New generations of artists interrogate the formation of identities in the world through strategies such as performativity, abstraction, thingness, the logic and aesthetics of the digital, activism, analysis of selfhood from cultural and scientific perspectives or addressing the role of the viewer. These strategies may not always reinforce each other, but artists have not accepted any ban on self-contradiction.

Visual art is still, but perhaps only notionally, an avant-garde in relation to culture and society as a whole. Yet it remains a place for experimentation, and many artists, followed by curators and theoreticians, are asking themselves how they can achieve an ever more nuanced and relevant understanding of what identity means to individuals and their sense of self and how it can be articulated in creative practice. The exhibition will invite and even provoke different perspectives from the artists invited, as well as the audience and other participants in the project, such as writers for the publication or speakers for discursive events.

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