

Leaps of Faith



31.03 → 25.08.2024

Vleugel 19

Modern Western art carries a religious legacy even if its primary purpose isn't religious. The influence of religion is evident in the symbolism of art and the unique status attributed to artworks. Art like religion can connect realms: the material to the spiritual, the earthly to the transcendent, and the finite to the infinite. Its religious roots are never lurking far from the surface.

Leaps of Faith explores the relationship between faith and contemporary art. How do we navigate the uncertainties of life? What gives us structure and comfort? For many artists, the significance of faith extends beyond its religious meaning. Faith is about our relationship to the unknown and the unknowable; about doubt and conviction; about what you cannot know but perhaps can feel. In this sense, faith – like art – represents a leap into the unknown.

1 Kris Martin

Kris Martin incorporates found objects into his art, creating new meanings with minimal interventions. This plaster splattered construction site radio plays the famous composition *Miserere mei, Deus* ('Have mercy on me, O God') by Italian composer Gregorio Allegri. This piece is performed in the Sistine Chapel every year on Holy Wednesday (the Wednesday before Easter) and Good Friday. The composition remained cloaked in secrecy for more than a century until a young Mozart, at the age of fourteen, memorized it in 1770. The pairing of this sacred hymn with a grimy worksite radio is an absurd yet profound encounter between the divine and the mundane.

Kris Martin, *Miserere*, 2016. Radio, plaster, electronic units, 40 x 30 x 30 cm. Collection Joost and Siska Vanhaerents-Dezutter. Photo: Dirk Pauwels.



2 Peter Buggenhout

Peter Buggenhout's imposing sculpture, cloaked in a thick layer of dust, occupies the recess of the gallery with chaotic intensity. Upon closer inspection, however, a structure with intricate details emerges. The sculpture does not aim to depict reality, but confronts the viewer with its incomprehensibility. The longer you look, the less you understand. The title, *The Blind Leading the Blind #97*, is derived from a biblical painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. In this context, it serves as a metaphor for the human condition: no one truly knows our origins or our ultimate destiny.

Peter Buggenhout, *The Blind Leading the Blind #85*, 2018. Mixed media (aluminum, iron, paint, polyester, polyurethane, Styrofoam, synthetic plaster, wood) covered with domestic dust, 204 x 158 x 120 cm. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Koen Vernimmen.

3 Kira Freije →

The figures of Kira Freije teeter between fear and hope. They evoke the human search for love and companionship amid the looming threat of the apocalypse. In *permanence of a sacred tongue*, a kneeling woman clasps her hands in prayer. Is she praying for redemption or reveling in ecstasy? In *vocabulary of ruin and the divine wound*, one figure reaches out to another. The gesture has religious undertones while also representing an act of everyday kindness, as someone is offering a light.



Kira Freije, *permanence of a sacred tongue*, 2022. Stainless steel, cast aluminum, cotton, 122 x 65 x 98 cm. Courtesy of the artist and The Approach, London. Photo: Michael Brzezinski.

4 Cathy Wilkes ↓

Cathy Wilkes creates paintings through a process of adding and removing layers until an image is slowly revealed. In her art, what remains invisible is just as meaningful as what is visible. Describing her own work, she says: 'The paintings depict visions of the last days before the end and the objects/atoms have grown old, or are Divine.'



Cathy Wilkes, *untitled*, 2016. Oil on canvas, 122 x 76 x 2.5 cm. Private collection, Bielefeld. Courtesy of the artist, The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels. Photo: Keith Hunter.

5 Antonio Obá

Antonio Obá intertwines Christian symbolism with elements from Afro-Brazilian religions, thereby creating a field of tension in his work. *Alegoria sobre Bruxelas* was created during a period of exile in Brussels. By pressing his hand on the canvas, Obá registers his physical presence, while the spectral bird shapes hint at the unseen but omnipresent traces of Brussels' past. In *Aparição I*, the artist transforms a family memory into a sacred tableau. The third painting depicts an allegorical initiation in which a bride is visited by figures that perform symbolic rituals.

Antonio Obá, untitled, 2019. Oil on canvas, 100 x 150 cm. Private collection, The Netherlands. Copyright of the artist. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, Paris, New York. Photo: Bruno Leão.



6 Berlinde De Bruyckere

Berlinde De Bruyckere draws inspiration from Christian iconography, detaching these subjects from religious contexts and connecting them to contemporary issues. *Sjemkel I* was created in 2020, in the early days of the pandemic. De Bruyckere's inspiration stemmed from a painting by Venetian Renaissance painter Giorgione, depicting an angel comforting a suffering Christ. De Bruyckere's angel is imperfect, unusual, and somewhat melancholic. The wings are made from wax casts of animal hides, supplemented with brocade and other luxurious fabrics. The curvature of the fabric creates the impression of the wing embracing a human body, offering solace and protection.

Berlinde De Bruyckere, *Sjemkel I*, 2020. Wax, animal hair, silicone, textile, polyurethane, metal, epoxy, 78 x 45 x 197 cm. Private collection, Sint-Martens-Latem. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Mirjam Devriendt.



7 Justin Caguiat



Justin Caguiat, *Blue Madonna's Material Cell*, 2019. Oil on linen, 302.4 x 218.2 cm.
Raf Simons Collection. © Justin Caguiat.
Courtesy of the artist and Modern Art, London.
Photo: Robert Glowacki.

8 Danh Vo



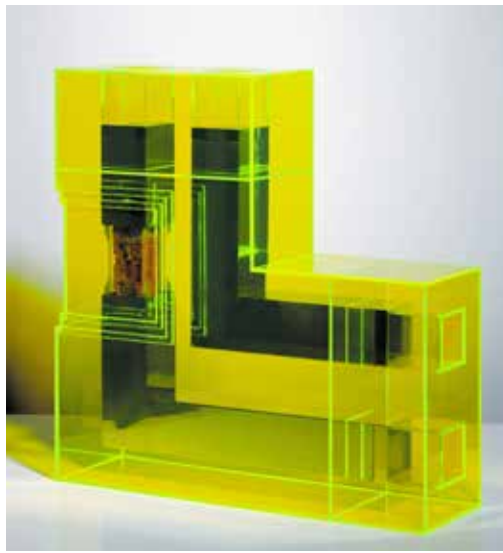
In Danh Vo's sculptures and installations, major historical events are intertwined with elements of the artist's life. When Vo was a child, his family fled Vietnam and settled in Denmark. He was raised Catholic and has long been interested in European evangelism and colonization. Here, damaged Christian sculptures are held by wooden structures built on site or encased in crates once used to transport Western goods, such as soup and condensed milk. The title of *meat cables* pays homage to the artwork of the same name by Paul Thek, which can be seen in the next room.

Danh Vo, untitled, 2021. Carved limewood relief from South Germany (c. 1520), Gloria Lait wooden crate, 32.5 x 22 x 48.5 cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels. Photo: HV-studio.



9 Paul Thek →

Paul Thek is widely regarded as one of the most significant artists of the twentieth-century. His work is closely connected to themes such as religion and sexuality. His *Technological Reliquaries* or *Meat Pieces* were inspired by the open coffins in the catacombs of Palermo, which he visited with his partner, photographer Peter Hujar. *L-Column* offers a commentary on the detached minimalism prevalent in 1960s art. The sculpture reintroduces a human presence into the artwork through the inclusion of simulated flesh. After the *Technological Reliquaries*, Thek focused on creating 'environments' using simple and cheap materials. The *Meat Cable* in this exhibition is strung wall to wall. The two newspaper paintings are related to a body of work created for the exhibition *The Crib* from December 1973, in which a group of children staged a Christmas performance. Thek appears to link the comet to the star that announced the birth of Jesus to the Three Kings. For *Earth as a Mandala*, Thek used the most famous photograph of the Earth: 'The Blue Marble'. This iconic image was taken by the Apollo 17 crew in 1972. The mandala (meaning 'circle') is an important motif in many religions, including Hinduism and Buddhism, and is used to aid concentration or meditation or to indicate a holy place. The blue globe in a dark and empty universe is a powerful symbol of the fragility of life and the mystery of the cosmos.



Paul Thek, *L-Column*, 1965–66. Beeswax, plexiglass and metal, 77.5 x 22.9 x 77.5 cm. Collectie museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar.



10 Peter Hujar ↓

Peter Hujar's photograph of a deceased person is both tender and confronting. Hujar took multiple black-and-white photographs in the Capuchin catacombs of Palermo, where some 8,000 bodies were buried between 1599 and 1880. In the publication *Portraits in Life and Death* (1976), these images are juxtaposed with portraits of writers and artists from Hujar's New York circle. In the book's introduction, author Susan Sontag describes Hujar's work as a memento mori, suggesting that his subjects 'appear to meditate on their own mortality.'

Peter Hujar, *Palermo Catacombs #4*, 1963. Vintage gelatin silver print, 371 x 37.5 cm (unframed). © The Peter Hujar Archive/Artists Rights Society (ARS). Courtesy of Maureen Paley, London and Pace Gallery, New York.

11 Namsal Siedlecki ↓

Namsal Siedlecki works like an alchemist, fusing old and new images. In *Viandante*, copper replicas of a Gallic pilgrim figurine from the 1st century BC are submerged in an electrolysis bath. Historically, such figurines were thrown into the water as offerings to a deity. In this exhibition, they undergo a metamorphosis as the bath gradually strips them of their copper. While the figurines are transformed into a kind of relic, their material is absorbed by a cathode, which gradually evolves into a monstrous figure. In this way, the artwork reflects on such themes as transience, loss, and sacrifice.

Namsal Siedlecki, *Viandante*, 2023–24. Electrodeposition tank, copper sulphate, zinc, plexiglass, electrical wires. Courtesy of the artist.



12 David Bernstein



David Bernstein's installation *Baruch is the one who knows that spinning will take you higher* revolves around the symbolism of the spiral and the intertwining of the holy and the secular. Viewers are invited to remove their shoes, enter the space, and interact with the sculpture. The shape is inspired by the braided candle lit during Havdalah, which marks the end of the Sabbath and the separation between the sacred and the everyday. Bernstein describes himself as a Judeo-Futurist. In his work, he questions and reconsiders the meaning of Jewish rituals, objects, and symbols. The spiral symbolizes the idea that time goes in a circle; we return to the same point, but from a new location and a new perspective.



Theaster Gates, *Billy Sings Amazing Grace*, 2013. Colour video with sound, 12' 24". © Theaster Gates. Courtesy of the artist and White Cube.

David Bernstein, *Baruch is the one who knows that spinning will take you higher*, 2022. Ink on paper, 19 x 28.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



13 Theaster Gates



Theaster Gates frequently collaborates with the Black community of Chicago's South Side. In the video *Billy Sings Amazing Grace*, Gates and his musical ensemble, The Black Monks, rehearse with soul singer Billy Forston, riffing on the melody, lyrics and history of 'Amazing Grace'. The hymn, originally written by a British poet for a Christian context in the late eighteenth century, has been appropriated and reinterpreted within African American folk traditions and spirituals sung by enslaved African people during the slave trade in the United States. The deep emotional and spiritual significance of the hymn resonates powerfully in this remarkable performance.

14 Edith Dekyndt



Edith Dekyndt finds beauty in vulnerability. She meticulously pieced together shattered pieces of glass, which offer a fragmented reflection of the triptych on the opposite wall. The central piece was buried underground, allowing minerals, insects, and bacteria to transform it into something new. The flanking works are adorned with gold and silver. Although these metals also originate from the earth, they evoke associations with the transcendent. The gleaming surfaces are reminiscent of a gilded altarpiece.

Edith Dekyndt, *Snap*, 2021. Fabric and glass, 127 x 180 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Greta Meert.



15 Francis Alÿs

The Modern Procession draws a playful comparison of the veneration between artworks and religious objects. Francis Alÿs organized a procession for the temporary relocation of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) from Manhattan to Queens. MoMA's collection of iconic artworks makes it a place of pilgrimage for art lovers worldwide. In collaboration with the museum, the Public Art Fund held a procession with more than a hundred participants who carried reproductions of MoMA's most famous works through the city on palanquins. Kiki Smith, a living 'icon' of modern art, was also carried along in the procession. A Peruvian brass band set the pace for the journey, as rose petals were scattered and fireworks were set off along the way.

Francis Alÿs, *The Modern Procession*, 2002. Film still. Video documentation of an action, 7'22". Made in collaboration with Rafael Ortega, The Public Art Fund and The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Mot. Photo: Francis Alÿs.



16 Sophie Nys

Sophie Nys uses everyday objects to explore philosophical and political themes. The alms box alludes to the historical role played by the church in caring for the poor and ongoing questions about social redistribution. It is also a nod to the artist's self-sacrifice, driven by faith rather than money. For *Tragaltar III*, Nys used her own cutting board to symbolize the inevitable need to provide for our daily bread. *Seelenfenster* ('soul window') was inspired by the sliding hatches in old houses, which are said to have allowed the inhabitant's soul to escape after death. The hatch would then be closed so that the spirit could not return.



Sophie Nys, *Tragaltar III*, 2023. Construction material, cutting board, 33.3 x 49 x 8.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Greta Meert.

17 Daan Gielis

At first glance, the neon sculpture *Caltrop* resembles a shining star, but the title hints at a deeper meaning. Gielis presents us with an impossible choice, inspired by the painting *The Misanthrope* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1568). In this picture, a man threatens to step into a pile of caltrops when he tries to run away from the world. For Gielis, this symbolizes the futility of trying to escape reality: you cannot exist outside the system. Meaning comes from embracing life's contradictions – a glimmer of hope that shines through in this sculpture.

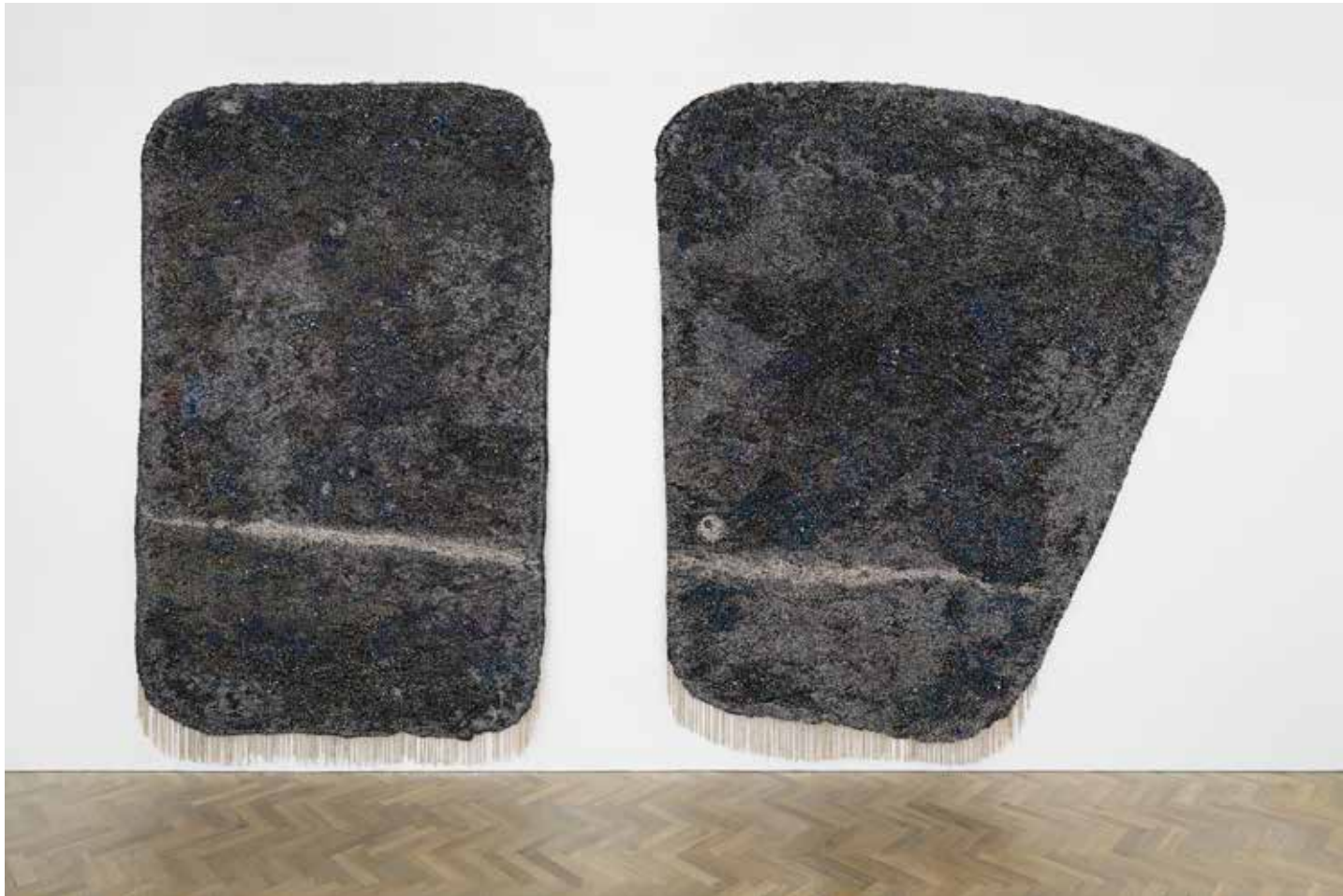


Daan Gielis, *Caltrop*, 2020. Neon, 119 x 122 x 5 cm. Courtesy of The Daan Gielis Estate. Photo: Seppe Elewaut.



When Dust Settles is about finding one's path in life. The worn linoleum floors are sourced from homes in the Cape Flats, just outside of central Cape Town, South Africa, where people of color were forcibly resettled during Apartheid. The floors are records of private lives traced out onto the pattern floor by daily use. They hold all shades of experience including pain and struggle, but also joy, celebration, and unnoticed acts of love. The sculptures, crafted from garden fencing, represent the idea of physical barriers becoming mental and emotional boundaries over time, and how these can be overstepped if one becomes aware of them. The titles *Crawl*, *Hang*, *Carry* and *Fall* reflect the everyday nature of this struggle. Breaking through barriers is a recurring theme in Adams' work: *Sterverligte paadjie huis toe* is inspired by the desire lines that connect the segregated neighborhoods of Cape Town. For Adams, they symbolize the possibility of forging your own path and paving the way for others after you.

Igshaan Adams, *Sterverligte paadjie huis toe*, 2023. Cotton twine, polyester and nylon blend rope, mohair, plastic, glass, semi-precious and wooden beads, tiger tail metal wire, silver link chain and fabric dyes, 360 x 567 cm. © Igshaan Adams. Courtesy of the artist, Thomas Dane Gallery and blank projects. Photo: Ben Westoby.



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Z33 would like to thank the galleries and lenders: Axel Vervoordt Gallery; blank projects; Collection Joost and Siska Vanhaerents-Dezutter; Collection Marie-Luise von Sachsen; Collection Virgínia Weinberg; Collection Yasmine en Peter Koenig, Germany; Galerie Greta Meert; Jan Mot, Brussels; Maureen Paley, London; Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, Paris, New York; Modern Art, London; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen; Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar; Pace Gallery, New York; Private Collection, Bielefeld; Private Collection, Sint-Martens-Latem; Private Collection, The Netherlands; Raf Simons Collection; The Approach, London; The Estate of Daan Gielis; The Modern Institute / Toby Webster Ltd., Glasgow; Thomas Dane Gallery; White Cube; Xavier Hufkens, Brussels; and those lenders who wish to remain anonymous.

Thanks to the entire team at Z33.

This is a publication of Z33. This publication was published on the occasion of the exhibition *Leaps of Faith* (31.03 to 25.08.2024) at Z33, Hasselt, Belgium.

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