

The Sea is an exhibition that, just like a wave, cannot be pinned down: it builds up, breaks on the shore and leaves traces that the next wave will wash away. *The Sea* is an exhibition in dialogue with Ostend, spread out across several locations – a museum, a fishermen’s church, an old cinema, a hotel with sea view and other inspirational places. *The Sea* is a *salut d’honneur* to renowned curator Jan Hoet, who wanted to share his own last ode to the sea... with grand gestures and little stories. Sadly Jan Hoet did not live to see the completion of the project, but his critical eye, his vision and his work are an integral part of it. The main outlines of *The Sea* were sketched out in the summer and autumn of 2013 by Jan Hoet himself, in close collaboration with co-curator Phillip Van den Bossche and assistant curators Melanie Deboutte and Mieke Mels. As Jan Hoet’s former right-hand man, Hans Martens joined the artistic team in February 2014. *The Sea* is Jan Hoet’s last exhibition. “It will be the future horizon that Jan Hoet wanted to offer one last time.”

The Sea – salut d’honneur Jan Hoet

The Sea looks back on Western art history from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, and the way in which it portrays and interprets the sea. *The Sea* begins where academic thinking is thrown overboard, where artists move beyond the dramatic, often narrative, maritime genre with its typical scenes of storms and shipwrecks. *The Sea* goes in search of the wide, free artistic vision of endless water that blurs into the horizon. Thus the exhibition in first instance manifests as a horizontal story, with *The Wave* by Gustave Courbet as the beginning of a presentation of “moments of crisis” or flash-points in art history, a sea of stories about globalisation and borders, the horizon as perspective, human storms, the sailing boat and the search for the wonder. Time and again, various artistic – and social – fault lines open the door for the renewal that results from questioning academic conventions. *The Sea* will not be a clichéd walk along a wall crammed with pictures: on the contrary, it is a quest for the moment, the “pause”. *The Wave* is not included as one seascape among many, but to emphasise a moment of crisis in art history. It asks us to stop and look, really look. This gives us the chance to break through historical chronology in *The Sea* by means of “vertical” encounters between modern and contemporary art – a basic principle that Jan Hoet applied to most of his exhibitions. When images are brought together, storylines emerge that can capture viewers’ imagination and make them pause to reflect. Works of art intertwine and reinforce each other. Sometimes they clash, challenging the viewer. Such encounters create waves throughout the exhibition spaces and in the different locations in the city where we will either exhibit a single masterpiece, giving it the space it needs, or create interactions between different works.

The Sea allows viewers to wander through the art history of the past and present, discovering the work of artists from the past that Jan Hoet believed would do justice to the brute force of the sea,

but also to its calmness, playfulness and incessant, irresistible siren song. We have also made deliberate use of public spaces. Lawrence Weiner has a special bond with the sea that he has shared with his audience in countless texts and spatial forms. We will use his work, in retrospect, as a thematic line woven through the exhibition, making it his personal ode to the sea whilst conversely giving *The Sea* the space to present Weiner's poetry.

The Sea – salut d'honneur Jan Hoet also implicitly tells an ocean of stories about Jan Hoet as a maker of exhibitions and a pioneer and champion of contemporary art in Belgium. *The Sea* has invited artists, curators and museum staff from Belgium and abroad to make extraordinary contributions to this exhibition that will also look back indirectly, through various approaches and undulations, on Jan Hoet's international career and passion for the arts. This tribute will become a contemporary story about the sea as told by art history. The exhibition brings together artists who share a fascination with the sea and whose new and existing work form the "memory" of Jan Hoet's work and passion.

The Sea in Ostend

From the museum spaces on the ground and first floors of Mu.ZEE, tentacles spread out to various locations in the city, all within walking distance in a fascinating art trail. From the pond in the Leopoldpark, the Capuchin Church and the west wing of the Thermae Palace hotel to a tower room at the De Grote Post cultural centre, the old Cinema Capitole and the boats in the Mercator Marina: these places and many more in Ostend will be buzzing with art, all close to the sea.

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