

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens is proud to present Karla Black's first solo exhibition in Belgium, opening just before her participation at the 57th Venice Biennale this summer. The artist creates abstract sculptures, consisting of plaster, pigments and paper that she lays on the floor or hangs from the ceiling to create fragile but also sensual spatial experiences. The final result is not as important as the intuitive process of creating the work and its evolution following the creation entailed by the light in the room and the movements of the visitors surrounding the work. For her exhibition at MDD, Karla Black will create a new series of works involving the whole museum area, allowing her to leverage the intense play of light in the exhibition space.

Scottish artist Karla Black (B. 1972, Alexandria, UK) loves powders, pastes, oils, creams and gels in forms that are available at the local drug store. Eyeshadows and face powders are chosen for their shades and material quality, not for their cultural associations. Her choice of materials with limited lifespan is a conscious compromise. Although Black desires permanence for her works, she feels that materials providing durability, such as metal or stone, are too static, lifeless and lack energy. As she says:

"I want to make abstract not figurative art; I want to prioritise material experience over language; I want formal aesthetics rather than narrative, autobiographical detail; I want the lived life to be primary, not the looked-at image." (*1*)

Muted, pastel colours are predominant in Karla Black's oeuvre. Primary colours are not used, they are always mixed with white, allowing for, as she formulated, "quiet" or "listening" works. Black prioritizes material experience over language, as a way to learn about and understand the world. Her sculptures are rooted in psychoanalysis, and especially Melanie Klein's, who recognizes the physical movement and play as a valid form of communication, kind of pre-language, as observed with little children. She is also inspired by early cave paintings and Abstract Expressionism. Further art historical influences are evident in her works, such as Joseph Beuys's social sculptures and Eva Hesse's organic minimalism and choice of material.

Formal aesthetics is at the centre of her considerations, searching beauty as a relationship between composition, form, colour and material. Although she constantly explores where the limitations of sculpture are, each of her works can be considered as sculpture as "it has edges and is autonomously individual". Black finds it essential to remain within the realm of sculpture to distinguish from the postmodernist art forms originating from sculpture, such as Land Art or Installation Art, which initially moved away from aesthetics.

For her show at the museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Karla Black will occupy the whole museum with

sculptures created for its particular exhibition spaces. The works are based on the specific architectural features of the museum, such as the size of the room, position of doors, and the intense play of light in the museum. Black will navigate through the places by filling rooms from ceiling to floor with pastel coloured powder, toilet paper, vaseline and eyeshadow, among other every day materials. Inspired by her previous large-scale floor works – such as her work *Nature Does The Easiest Thing* for Manifesta 10 – Black will create two new site-specific coloured powder and toilet paper floor works. Her nearly two-dimensional works hanging in front of the walls will investigate how far the concept of sculpture can be stretched before becoming a painting. Furthermore, influenced by Constantin Brâncuși's sculpture *Endless Column* (1938), she is experimenting with her first outdoor sculpture in the central patio of the museum.

*(1) Karla Black, "A Very Important Time for Handbags," in Karla Black: Mistakes Made Away From Home, 2008.*

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