

*The Weather is Quiet, Cool and Soft* presents works from different stages in the career of the Belgium artist Guy Mees (1935-2003) to shed light on his intuitive and conceptual approach. The selected works range from early lace pieces generically entitled *Lost Space* to the films and the photographs of the series of portraits *Difference of Levels*, never before shown structuralist works from the 1970s, pastel on paper series from the mid-1970s and paper cut-outs from the 1980s. Together, these allow a study of Mees's practice and his ideas of mutability, fragility, porosity and the expansion of pictorial space into social space. The title of the exhibition (taken from a note by the artist) is a reference to the atmospheric impermanence in Mees's work and his relativist poetical approach.

As a member of the Nieuwe Vlaamse School, which was close to many artists affiliated with the international ZERO movement that comprised a network from Europe, Japan and North and South America, and shared common interests, such as light, serial structures, motion and monochrome, Guy Mees gained recognition from the international avant-garde in the early 60's. However, his non-authoritarian attitude and conceptual approach to deconstruct any form of classification soon led him to take an alternative path where the liberation of systems, structures and media in order to create freedom and openness became both idiosyncratic and tangible.

The series of portraits *Difference of Levels*, the films and photo series with groups of three people spontaneously placed on different levels of three moveable concrete blocks are reminiscent of works by an amateur. Apart from the six possible positions (123, 132, 213, 231, 312, 321), the series can vary ad infinitum, thus demonstrating the changing nature of a phenomenon and the arbitrary nature of the norm. The subsequent works on paper 1,2,3 use photos from contact prints and place them in a grid, like the notes of a sensitive mathematician.

Apart from the absurdity of the mechanistic endeavours, these films and photos depicting friends and family provide a fascinating portrait of the Belgian avant-garde gravitating around the MTL (Fernand Spillemaeckers) and X-One (Marc Poirier dit Caulier) galleries, in addition to international views such as the 1974 series portraying Nicholas Serota at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford.

The principle of six positions brought Mees to a new formal exploration of combinations according to a chromatic chart that features lines in six different colours drawn by hand on thin paper (i. e. newsprint), which he then organised in columns and grouped in multiples of three. While the overall composition, its automatic nature and repetition of pattern and gesture belong to a mechanical process close to the printing press, the sheets' character detaches it from these initial references as we move toward a random reading. Slowly the lines begin to reveal a sparse universe of marks of

colour on thin paper whose design at times almost mirrors the wall and pierce its interior, thus paving the way for the paper cut-outs *Verloren Ruimte* (Lost Space).

With regard to the system of exchanges, it is interesting to note that Guy Mees and André Cadere were represented at the same time by Fernand Spillemaeckers, who founded the Belgian conceptual art gallery MTL in 1970. The mistake that was methodically introduced by Cadere in his *Round Bar of Wood* works and the system of notation in grids that became more and more unpredictable with Mees coincided—did they share a common desire to introduce errors in the thinking of both organized systems of objects and the system of society?

The works from the series *Verloren Ruimte* (Lost Space) emphasize the notion of a deconstructed frame, because here the space of the image itself is ruptured and reveals the inbetweenness of gaps and remainders. Whether it's the white faux monochromes made from industrial lace of the early 1960s that mix minimalist forms with sensual if not erotic textures and expose a varied interior space or the more volatile shapes of cut-outs pinned to the wall from the 1980s whose fragmentary colours sculpt the forms and voids of the architecture and transform the space into an image, the *Verloren Ruimte* represent the beginning and culmination of conceptual and poetic reasoning in Guy Mees's work. They are "filled with that of which he is its outcome, filled with its loss." (Dirk Pültau).

This exhibition at Mu.ZEE is an extension of the exhibition from the show at Kunsthalle Wien (31 January - 9 April 2018) and pays special attention to additional archival materials from his estate, and will include a new selection of works from a different period. It will provide further insight into the mind of an artist who, during his entire lifetime, rejected any analytical discourse about his work in favour of its perceptive experience.

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication tracing the artist's path and following his gaze through a tactile and archival approach to his works. It includes unknown archival material from Guy Mees's estate, such as early photographs, slides, texts and notes and other documents.

The publication is edited by Lilou Vidal and published by Sternberg Press

Curator: Lilou Vidal

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