

Chambres d'Amis turns 40

30 May 2026 – 10 January 2027

S.M.A.K., Ghent



In 2026, S.M.A.K. celebrates the 40th anniversary of *Chambres d'Amis*, the groundbreaking exhibition in which Jan Hoet took contemporary art beyond the museum walls. Fifty-one international artists showed their work in the living rooms, stair halls, or bedrooms of private homes across Ghent. From 30 May 2026 to 10 January 2027, S.M.A.K. reflects on the past and looks to the future by inviting three artists – Heike Pallanca, Haim Steinbach and Susanne Kriemann – who will each develop a contemporary reflection on *Chambres d'Amis* within the museum walls.

What was *Chambres d'Amis*?

Conceived in 1986, *Chambres d'Amis* marked a decisive turning point in exhibition-making. Rather than presenting art within the neutral space of the museum, Jan Hoet dispersed it throughout the city, embedding artworks within private homes and everyday environments.

This gesture did not simply relocate art; it transformed it. The domestic setting introduced contingency, intimacy and unpredictability. Visitors encountered works one by one, in spaces shaped by lived experience rather than institutional display. The exhibition unfolded as a journey through the city – an accumulation of encounters that blurred the boundaries between public and private, art and life.

The exhibition at S.M.A.K.

How do you display works originally conceived for specific, non-institutional settings? This question lies at the heart of *Chambres d'Amis turns 40*.

In response to this question, S.M.A.K. invites three contemporary artists – Heike Pallanca, Haim Steinbach and Susanne Kriemann – to each design a museum gallery from within their own artistic practice, thereby creating a new in-situ environment. The three artists participated in *Chambres d'Amis* (1986, Heike Pallanca) or in *Over The Edges* (2000, Haim Steinbach) and *TRACK* (2012, Susanne Kriemann), two other exhibitions in urban space organised by S.M.A.K.

Their interventions do not reconstruct the original exhibition, far from it, but rather create new proposals to look at these works again in a contemporary way, back within the walls of the museum. By rethinking display, context and spectatorship, they give the works from *Chambres d'Amis* a contemporary resonance that echoes their original concept while speaking directly to today's visitors.

The exhibition is framed by an archival presentation that situates the historical importance of *Chambres d'Amis*. At the centre of this archival display, S.M.A.K. reinstates the iconic work 'Le Décor et son Double' by Daniel Buren, which was one of the most critical interventions towards the curatorial concept of *Chambres d'Amis*. In 1986, Buren created a copy of the guest room of collectors Anton and Annick Herbert and placed it in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, then housed in the Museum of Fine Arts. In collaboration with the Herbert Foundation, visitors will have the opportunity to visit the "original" at the Herbert Foundation at regular times during the exhibition.



About the artists

Heike Pallanca's (°1952, Düsseldorf) work for *Chambres d'Amis* (1986) remains one of the most conceptually precise articulations of the exhibition's ambitions. By staging a subtle displacement between representation and reality — an empty room mirrored by a constructed situation elsewhere — she challenged the viewer's perception of what constitutes the "real" site of the artwork. Her practice continues to investigate perception, spatial ambiguity and the fragile boundary between lived and constructed experience.

Haim Steinbach (°1944, Rehovot, lives in New York City) is internationally recognised for his rigorous exploration of display and value. Since the late 1970s, his work has examined how objects acquire meaning through arrangement, context and cultural framing. By repositioning everyday objects within carefully calibrated structures, Steinbach reveals the systems that govern perception and taste. His contribution resonates strongly with the foundational questions of *Chambres d'Amis*: how context produces meaning, and how the domestic space can function as a critical site of display.

Susanne Kriemann's (°1972, Erlangen) practice unfolds at the intersection of image, history and material processes. Her work investigates the latent narratives embedded in archives and infrastructures, often revealing what remains invisible or overlooked. In the context of *Chambres d'Amis turns 40*, Kriemann reflects on the photographic archive of the exhibition, in a contemporary display that balances between nostalgia and expectation.

Curators

Philippe Van Cauteren and Thibaut Verhoeven

The archival presentations have been developed in close collaboration with Angela De Roover, Beth Lason and Luca-Ray Rogiers (Ghent University alumni), and Sofie Frederix (Ghent University).

Image

Photo-souvenir: Daniel Buren, *Le Décor et son Double*, 1986. Long term loan of the Collection of the Flemish Community. Photo: Dirk Pauwels

Opening events

Preview for press: Thursday May 28, 2026, 11pm

Public opening with concert The Mudgang: Friday May 29, 2026, 7pm

Public programme of activities

- **Friday May 29, 2026, and the weekend of Saturday May 30 – Sunday May 31, 2026:** continuous screening of *'De Langste Dag*, more than six hours of live coverage of the opening day in 1986 on the then BRT
- **Sunday May 31, 2026, at 3pm:** artist talk with Heike Pallanca, Haim Steinbach and Susanne Kriemann
- **Sunday June 28, 2026, at 2pm:** debate with researchers Angela De Roover and Luca-Ray Rogiers about their master's thesis (written together with Beth Lason), "*Min of meer Chambres d'Amis*", completed at Ghent University under the supervision of Prof. Dr Wouter Davidts
- **Sunday June 28, 2026, at 3:30pm:** debate *The Art Summer of '86*, with Bart Cassiman (Initiatief '86), Jean-Hubert Martin (Initiatief '86), Wilfried Huet (Initiatief d'Amis), Piet Vanrobaeys (Antichambre), moderated by Sofie Frederix (researcher at Ghent University working on a PhD under the supervision of Prof. Dr Steven Jacobs and Prof. Dr Wouter Davidts)
- **Sunday October 18, 2026, at 3pm:** debate *Albrecht Dürer Would Certainly Have Come. They Were There. Memories of Chambres d'Amis*, with eyewitnesses involved in *Chambres d'Amis*
- **Sunday November 22, 2026, at 3pm:** debate *De Langste Dag*, with Chris Dercon (General Director, Fondation Cartier), Koen Brams (critic), Claude Blondeel (producer), moderated by Chantal Pattyn (Head of KLARA)
- **Several Sundays during the exhibition:** double visit *Le Décor et son Double*, group visit with a guided city walk from S.M.A.K. to the Herbert Foundation

Press Contact

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About S.M.A.K.

S.M.A.K. shows art from its own collection in dialogue with works of contemporary artists from all corners of the world. By means of contemporary art, S.M.A.K. seeks and gives meaning to this complex and fragmented world. In doing so, the museum makes every effort to be accessible and inclusive, because art is for everyone.

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