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Press release

Dirk Braeckman presents double exhibition at M-Museum Leuven and BOZAR Brussels

M-Museum Leuven: 02.02 – 29.04.2018

BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts: 01.02 – 29.04.2018

The 57th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia closed its doors on 26 November, marking the end of Dirk Braeckman's show in the Belgian Pavilion. The Biennale Arte 2017 drew around **more than half a million visitors**, which made it the most important international platform to date for Braeckman's work. The next chapter will be his double exhibition at M-Museum Leuven and BOZAR Brussels.

Flemish Minister of Culture Sven Gatz: *'Dirk Braeckman and Eva Wittocx brought serenity and powerful images to the Belgian Pavilion. Braeckman's unique analogue prints heightened our gaze and offered respite from today's overdose of fast-moving images. In that way, the Belgian Pavilion offered its visitors a moment of silence and tranquillity. I'm delighted that we will soon be able to see this wonderful ode to Belgian photography at M Museum in Leuven and BOZAR in Brussels too.'*

The Venice exhibition forms the starting point for a Dirk Braeckman double show at M-Museum Leuven and BOZAR Brussels. The new exhibitions will complement one another and highlight individual aspects of the artist's multifaceted practice. Braeckman will show 20 works at BOZAR of a scale in keeping with the architecture of Victor Horta. The focus in this case will be on his monumental prints – chiefly work from Venice, consisting of new work and a selection of earlier images. M, meanwhile, will concentrate on Braeckman's experimental side. Spread over two of the museum's galleries, the artist will offer visitors a unique view of his darkroom and also show examples of his smaller-scale work on paper. His experiments with new media will also feature, including a large projection tailored to M.

M-MUSEUM LEUVEN

'I can't oblige people to do anything, but I do invite them to look for a little longer than they're used to.'

In 2017, Dirk Braeckman presented a solo exhibition at the Belgian Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale. That presentation now forms the basis for a double show at M and BOZAR in Brussels. The focus at BOZAR is on the works featured in Venice, while at M the artist is showing his most recent work.

The exhibitions complement one another and highlight individual aspects of Braeckman's multifaceted practice. At M you can see the experimental side of his oeuvre. Spread over two of the museum's galleries, the artist offers you a view of his serial works from the same negative and examples of smaller work on paper. Braeckman's fascination for images had already led in the past to several special film works and he is presenting a new piece of this kind at M, as a monumental, room-filling projection.

EXHIBITION

Braeckman has been working in an increasingly serial way recently, as he did at the very beginning of his career, with several photographic works deriving from a single negative. The different prints highlight varying aspects of the same original shot and the image it contains. Larger series of three, five or even more prints are increasingly common, lending the ensemble a more cinematic character. The variations in the image heighten our own focus as we view it. Braeckman is showing serial works at M, both monumental and smaller, taken from the same negative, in which he repeatedly photographs an existing painting. The three large works on the wall in Room 2.A, for instance, are derived from the same shot of a detail from a painting by the Renaissance artist Paolo Veronese (1528–1588). Veronese made the composition for a public contest to win a commission for the main hall of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice.

The display case contains examples of the experiments Braeckman carried out in his darkroom. They are small-format prints, in which the composition, subject and material engage in a dialogue with one another.

In a second space (Room 2.B), the artist is showing a new monumental film installation. Braeckman had previously produced several films alongside his analogue images, each of which dovetailed with his dissection of an image and his interrogation of the duration of looking. The use of this medium with its explicitly temporal duration and the way in which the moving image embodies a number of different images and connects realities is a new strand in his work, which he intends to explore further in the future.

Braeckman showed 25 works at the Belgian Pavilion in Venice, mostly new prints supplemented by a selection of existing pieces from the past twenty years. The nucleus of the Pavilion exhibition forms the point of departure for the BOZAR show, supplemented by several new and older works. These are arranged spatially on a scale worthy of Victor Horta's architecture, which they engage in a dialogue. Since his work does not embrace themes and is not conceived in series, fresh combinations can be presented all the time.

STILLNESS

Dirk Braeckman's photographic work brings a stillness to the contemporary flow of images and information. He decided to study photography in the late 1970s in preparation for becoming a painter, immersing himself in the analogue technique and the development of images in the darkroom. Resistant to the standard way of doing things, he turned the medium to his own ends over the years, experimenting with the boundaries of the image and the possibilities offered by the silver gelatine print on baryta paper. In the late 1980s, he achieved his first signature black-and-white analogue prints with suggestive and somewhat enigmatic visuals. His artistic practice focuses on the act of viewing and reflects on the status of the image. Braeckman explores the boundaries of his medium and challenges photographic conventions. The camera's flash reflects off the surface of the subject, the texture of walls, curtains, carpets and posters.

Braeckman's images present anonymous themes from his immediate surroundings and his own everyday world. Stripped of anecdote, the stories they suggest are entirely open. The artist shows empty rooms, in which time seems to stand still, or elements of interchangeable interiors. You see human figures that stand only for presence, separate from any specific identity, place, time or emotion. Intimacy and distance combine in Braeckman's photographic works to make a private, secluded world whose meaning remains undefined. His portraits show people who avert their gaze, hide their faces, or are pictured unrecognizably, removing the anecdotal element. This approach lends his photographs an extraordinary, almost electrical charge. The rephotographing of existing images is more central in his recent work, and shots of exterior spaces have begun to appear.

'I want to stretch out time with my work, so that you can keep on questioning the image and locating fresh stories within it. That way, it continues to fascinate and to communicate with the viewer.'

Dirk Braeckman's work is created in the darkroom. Experiment is crucial to both registration with the camera and the subsequent processing. The exposure, manipulation and development of negative and photographic paper consistently results in new and unique images. Grain, spots and flattening of perspective resist an immediate reading and hence interpretation of his work. Over and underexposure and working in grey tones heighten the iconic character of his photographs. Braeckman's pictures are the result of a long and slow process. There is the instant of registration, that of printing in the darkroom and then the moment when a work is installed in an exhibition, where it truly comes to life, in dialogue with other works and with the viewer.

'I often set my negatives aside for a long time before developing, so as to distance myself from them, precisely to avoid submitting to the impulses and emotionality of the moment. It helps me judge whether the image has retained its vitality and whether it is still compelling. The work then continues in my darkroom – a big space I've had for a long time, where I mostly work on my own, and where I can make large prints. I have a physical relationship there with my medium, the same way that painters are physically involved with their paint and their canvases. For me, an image only exists once it has been printed on paper. That's when it gets its title and date.'

ANALOGUE

Braeckman's analogue photographic procedure distances itself from standard techniques. He manipulates the negatives in his darkroom and rephotographs not only his own photos, but also illustrations from magazines, artworks (his own and other people's) and the internet. The photographic paper too is manipulated as he develops it in the darkroom, to create a distinctive photographic surface with streaks and marks.

One concrete result of this approach is that every photograph is unique and, moreover, assumes an exceptional, painterly dimension. Although photography as a medium allows the production of multiple

images, Braeckman focuses on the manual manipulation of each print. In this way, he seeks to make images that are suggestive and compact, which both show and conceal information. Braeckman mostly makes analogue prints, but also uses digital photography and occasionally works in colour. These techniques are very different to him, in terms of both shooting and printing.

'I still create most of my work in the old, artisanal way, using a camera loaded with film and printing my photographs myself on paper in a darkroom. Not out of any sense of nostalgia, though, or because I'm too stubborn to accept new technology: camera, film and darkroom are simply my tools, the materials and instruments I have mastered, and with which I have developed my visual language.'

BOZAR – Visitor's guide

Dirk Braeckman decided to study photography in the late 1970s in preparation for becoming a painter. Ten years later, he achieved his first signature black-and-white analogue prints with suggestive and somewhat enigmatic images. They are recognizable, yet flirt with representation, abstraction and the reality of what is shown. Braeckman wants to stretch the moment of the photograph, he is interested in a certain tension or experience, free of any anecdote. His quest for powerful and compelling images relates to art history, especially painting.

Exhibition

The show in BOZAR picks up where Dirk Braeckman's exhibition in the Belgian pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale left off. In Venice, Braeckman opted almost exclusively for the most monumental format, with framed analogue prints measuring 180 x 120 cm. His exhibition at the Centre for Fine Arts includes 25 works in dialogue with each other, tailored to the dimensions of Victor Horta's architecture. The works you see provide tranquillity in today's rush of images and information. Through the use of analogue photography he has developed his own visual language.

The visual language of Dirk Braeckman focuses on the act of viewing and reflects on the status of the image. The artist explores the boundaries of his medium and challenges photographic conventions. Often the camera's flash reflects off the surface of the subject, the texture of walls, curtains, carpets and posters. Stripped of anecdote, the stories these images suggest are entirely open. The artist shows fragments of empty, anonymous rooms in which time appears to stand still, elements of interchangeable interiors or human figures that stand only for presence - separated from any specific identity, place, time or emotion.

Braeckman's photographic images combine intimacy and distance to create a private, secluded world whose meaning remains undefined. His images are like unexploded bombs, full of pent-up energy. The artist creates his images in the darkroom. The unique prints he makes there derive from negatives that the artist takes of his immediate surroundings and then stores in his archive. Braeckman does not stage, but selects and frames via the eye of the lens. The matt gelatin silver prints in shades of grey on baryta paper are highly tactile and are also fragile. Experiment is crucial to both their registration by the camera and their subsequent processing by the artist in the darkroom. The exposure, manipulation and development of negative and photographic paper consistently results in new and unique images. Graininess, spots and flattening of perspective resist an immediate reading or interpretation of his work. Over- and underexposure and working in grey tones heighten the iconic character of his images. Braeckman does not give the works informative titles, merely a code and a year, with the date referring to when the images were created in the darkroom rather than when the negatives were taken.

Although the artist primarily creates analogue prints in the darkroom, he also uses digital photography and occasionally works in colour. The two techniques are highly distinct to the artist, in both the taking of the photo and the printing. Braeckman's colour images are photos of existing pictures, in which a single colour dominates.

He uses the reflection of his flash as an element in constructing the image. The flash shows the materiality of what is represented while also creating a certain distance. Although the photographic medium allows images to be reproduced in large quantities, Braeckman concentrates on the manual manipulation of each print. The print is manipulated during the development process in order to create a unique piece of work. Braeckman strives to create images which are suggestive and powerful, revealing and concealing information.

BIOGRAPHIES

Dirk Braeckman has spent the past 25 years gradually developing an extensive portfolio. Working with the medium of photography, he occupies a distinctive place within the visual arts. He has taken part in at M — Museum Leuven, Le Bal in Paris, BOZAR in Brussels, De Appel in Amsterdam, S.M.A.K. (Museum of Contemporary Art) in Ghent. He is represented by Zeno X Gallery Antwerp where he exhibits since 2001. Recent gallery shows include Thomas Fischer Gallery in Berlin and RoseGallery in Santa Monica. Braeckman's works are part of private and public collections around the world, including in FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, Sammlung Goetz, FNAC Paris or Musée d'Art Contemporain et Moderne in Strasbourg.

Eva Wittocx is senior curator at M — Museum Leuven, where she develops the contemporary art programme focusing on solo exhibitions by both emerging and established artists. She also writes about contemporary art and curates the yearly performance festival Playground. She was a curator at the S.M.A.K. (Museum of Contemporary Art) in Ghent from 1997 to 2006, at the STUK Arts Centre between 2006 and 2009, and of the Belgian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017.

PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by a new publication presenting a selective overview of Braeckman's artistic practice, with a focus on his recent work for the Belgian Pavilion. It consists of 167 images and 3 essays in English by Douglas Fogle, Hubertus von Amelnunxen and Eva Wittocx. Published by König Books, Cologne (€ 39,80).

Curator: Eva Wittocx

ARTIST TALK DIRK BRAECKMAN: 14th of March

BOZAR cordially invites you to a meeting with Belgian artist **Dirk Braeckman**. He represented Belgium at the Venice Biennale in 2017. On Wednesday 14th of March he will talk about his exhibited works at the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels, that are both powerful and introverted.

Practical information and press contacts

M-Museum Leuven

Leopold Vanderkelenstraat 28, 3000 Leuven

0032 16 27 29 29 – bezoekm@leuven.be – www.mleuven.be

Open: Mo, Tue, Fri, Sat, Sun: 11 am > 6 pm, Thu: 11 am > 10 pm, closed on wednesdays

Tickets: € 12 entrance fee for the museum and Dirk Braeckman

Veerle Ausloos

Press Officer M-Museum Leuven

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BOZAR – Centre for Fine Arts

Rue Ravensteinstraat 23, 1000 Brussels

0032 2 507 82 00 – info@bozar.be – www.bozar.be

Open: Tue > Su: 10 am > 6 pm, Thu: 10 am – 9 pm, closed on Mondays

Tickets: € 8 (Braeckman)

Spring pass: € 25 (Braeckman, Spanish Still Life, Fernand Léger, Hugo Claus)

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