

Denicolai & Provoost

Hello, are we in the show?

(comment voir la même autre chose)

Simona Denicolai (b. 1972, Milan, Italy) and Ivo Provoost (b. 1974, Diksmuide, Belgium) have been working as the artistic duo Denicolai & Provoost since the mid-1990s. This solo exhibition offers a comprehensive overview of the artistic strategies they have developed as a way of questioning reality.

Denicolai & Provoost constantly move within diverse communities: from a Spanish fish market to a Dutch commune or a working-class neighbourhood in Ghent. The time they spend in these places teaches them volumes about how the social order is established and might also be rethought. Through their work, the artists activate these communities and the people, objects and stories that belong to them. The synergies thus created guide the artistic process and, from a local context, touch upon themes such as solidarity, identity and citizenship.

Denicolai & Provoost's process-oriented working method not only results in videos, performances and installations, but also in models or studies that may never be executed. This exhibition is an invitation to read these diverse forms in an equal way, since they all derive meaning by approaching art as an active concept. What can art do? How can art be used for sustainable change? Can an emancipated public also participate? The artists' answer is a participatory practice in which artworks are rarely an end in themselves and move effortlessly between the intimate, the public and the museum space. This is also true of the exhibition as everyone can play an active role. Whether we choose to look, eat or plant the artworks. Comment voir la même autre chose?

Denicolai & Provoost usually begin each artistic project by writing a scenario in which they focus intently on the individuality of a place. It unites people, objects and stories through intense collaborations, with the artists only assuming a mediating role. What happens during this process determines the final form of an artwork. Through this participatory method, the artists often explore the 'practical value' of art. It turns art into an active phenomenon. This translates into an engaged and expansive experience that can include eating a cake, a city walk or planting a seed. The community-forming processes that lie at the heart of Denicolai & Provoost's art also operate through the museum in the same way.

Earthworm since 2001, 2001

This earthworm is a leitmotiv within Denicolai & Provoost's artistic practice. It is a figure with which they strongly identify as artists. In order to survive and evolve, the worm must swallow, digest and excrete its surroundings. The environment thus literally passes through the animal. By analogy, Denicolai & Provoost's practice feeds on specific contexts – think more concretely of 'places' or more broadly of 'communities' – which the artists absorb and process to create something new. In the title of this work, the phrase 'since 2001' indicates that the duo rarely considers this process, or their artworks, as finished.

Eyeliners (Gent), 2020

Denicolai & Provoost have realised a new version of the 'Eyeliners' project for the exhibition. On this occasion, they have selected a range of objects found on the windowsills of Ghent, which they noticed on several walks around the city. With the owners' consent, the objects have been made available as loans to this temporary composition in the museum. Meanwhile, signs in the windows state: "The object usually shown behind this window has been loaned to another exhibition, at S.M.A.K., from 12 February to 30 May 2021. Our apologies for the inconvenience."

After this presentation, the loans will be returned to their permanent locations. From that point onwards, people can use Denicolai & Provoost's guide to visit the original 'exhibition' in the city. It will feature drawings of the objects, 'biographies' detailing the relationships between the objects and owners, and the addresses. In an earlier version of this work for The Hague, the selection only included model ships, while a version in Brussels contained numerous references to the colonial past. The objects from Ghent seem to betray a close connection with the arts. In this way, Denicolai & Provoost uncover, through random city walks and spontaneous conversations, shared values and interests that belong to a collective consciousness and become visible in places we usually overlook, namely windowsills.

On Thursday the 6th of May at 8 pm Moniek Darge (Logos Foundation) will give a sound performance on the 'Duchamp Harp' (realised by Godfried-Willem Raes, Logos Foundation), an object from 'Eyeliners (Gent)'.

The origins of this work lie in an intention to revalue the Heilig Hart (Sacred Heart) monument, the war memorial per excellence in Genk. This was in the context of one of the open calls 'Pilot Projects Art by Commission' by the Flemish Minister of Culture, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media, Kunstenpunt and the Team Vlaamse Bouwmeester. Denicolai & Provoost responded to the call for revaluation with this project, which questions both the function and meaning of monuments. Why do we claim places within the public domain in an attempt to commemorate the past? And does the most typical type of monument – a static sculpture – have the capacity to communicate a unique event down the centuries? The artists entered into dialogue with a number of individuals and associations in Genk that had submitted a request for a monument to be erected. This led to the design of ten tarts devoted to the resistance, the deportation of Jewish refugees, the area's mining history and the closure of Ford Genk, among other things.

The cakes are not an end in themselves but can be enjoyed communally. They are a catalyst for gatherings and alternative ways of being together, through which the past can be literally and collectively digested. In this way, the project rethinks and commemorates the ritual of commemoration. The accompanying publication not only documents the artwork but also functions as a sales catalogue, thus allowing the 'monuments' to be reproduced and the memory to be kept alive.

Every Sunday morning from 10:00 to 12:00 Denicolai & Provoost offer a cake in the exhibition room:

Menu	
14 February	Cake for the Deportation of Jewish Refugees
21 February	Cake for the Resistance
28 February	Barbara Cake
7 March	Ford Genk Cake
14 March	Danielle Cake
21 March	DOVO Chocolate Spanner
28 March	RAF Crash Cake
4 April	Cake for the Deceased Without a Grave
11 April	Butterfly Cake
18 April	Dirty Cake
25 April	Cake for the Deportation of Jewish Refugees
2 May	Cake for the Resistance
9 May	Barbara Cake
16 May	Ford Genk Cake
23 May	DOVO Chocolate Spanner
30 May	Dirty Cake



Place Valladolid, 2018, en collaboration with Nord and Greisch

More, 2014

On a trampoline-like table, the artists present the seeds they collected in various Belgian forests and the Citadel Park in Ghent, in which the museum is located. Within the urbanised entity of the park, nature and culture enter into different relations. Denicolai & Provoost think further on this symbiosis and present a potential forest within the museum building. A forest, and thus an artwork that only becomes reality if you, the visitor, take some seeds and plant them.

Los pasatiempos para personas inteligentes, 2009

This installation, consisting of a video montage and a sculpture, offers a number of impressions of the Brussels Midi district. This neighbourhood is historically connected to the mobility and emancipation of citizens and, amongst other things, is home to the international Brussels Midi Station, the former Social Security Office (a cooperative insurance for workers) and the Federal Pension Office's South Tower. It is also where the annual high mass of local entertainment is held: the Zuidkermis (Midi Fair). In the video, the swinging attractions bathe the surroundings in the aesthetic of industrial entertainment, which is also echoed in the sculpture.

Uitburgeren, baby!, 2010

Denicolai & Provoost have written down the trajectory of this performance in the following scenario. An advertisement in a local newspaper announces that a professional diver will perform a diving action at a water zone in the vicinity of the museum. On the said date, the diver will fetch stones from the bottom of the water zone and bring them to the surface, after which he will remove his spoils to the museum. The stones will be displayed in a composition of his choosing on the empty plinth that has been allocated, where they will be shown for the duration of the exhibition. In the title of this work, the Dutch word 'uitburgeren' means the opposite of 'inburgeren' (to naturalise or settle down somewhere). 'Uitburgeren' thus implies *not* assimilating a new culture or way of life, *not* adapting to a new environment. This definition is also applicable to the stones which, as 'found objects', seem out of place within the museum, their new environment.

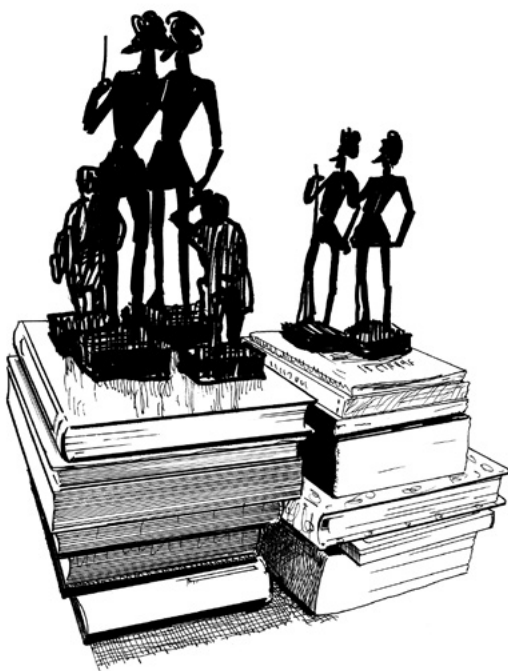
The performance takes place on Saturday the 24th of April at 15:00 at the Stropkaai in Ghent, near the Sint-Lievenslaan.

A dream called macba, moca, moma etc., 2010

This installation is linked to everyday life in the Mercat Central, a fish market in Castellón, Spain. The video depicts the catching, cleaning and trading of the fish, touching on the tactile, the economic, the banal, as well as the exotic. It is a cross between documentary, animation and slapstick comedy, in which the exaggerated effects of the soundtrack alter our perceptions. By aestheticizing the socio-economic reality of the Spanish fish market, Denicolai & Provoost render it more attractive and make us reflect on the impact of visual language.

This reflection is carried throughout the entire installation, in which an interplay between different media, styles and genres develops, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. On the floor, for example, we recognise the rubbish from the video, while the sound seems to belong to the scenes on the wall, the animation of which is non-existent. Moreover, the cut-outs in these scenes refer to the central information board in the fish market, which the artists hung up for a period of nine weeks. During this time,

the market traders also received plastic bags containing two key scenes from the non-existent animated film: the cleaning of the fish and the plane that discharges waste.



Drawing *The Don Quixotes for Eyeliner* (Gent), 2021

II

Denicolai & Provoost's practice is underpinned by a very particular vision of what constitutes public space. An early artistic action, entitled 'Workshop Agenda' (2004), played a pivotal role in helping them arrive at a broad interpretation of public space, which they describe as: "Any space which someone might visit. An audience exists when something is happening there, but it is not essential. A single person can also be an audience. One person is sufficient to bear witness. In the same way, the 'conjugal bed' is also public space." The artists are intensely active in this domain: they organise (un)announced performances and regularly submit proposals, models and dossiers in response to calls for projects for the public space.

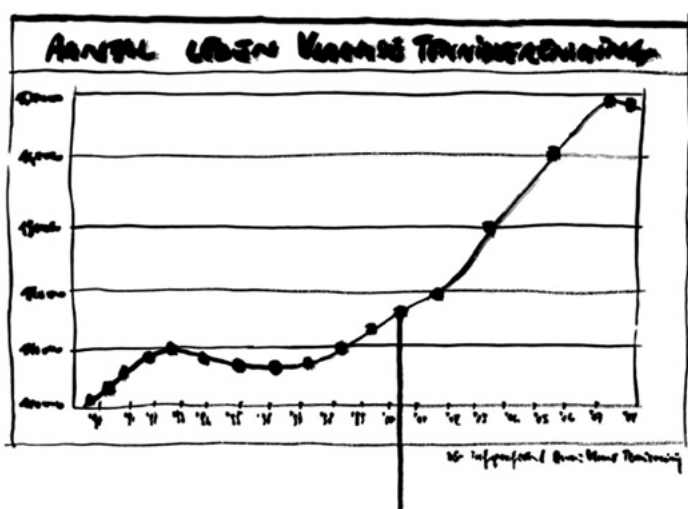
Denicolai & Provoost often refer to their artworks as 'sculptural actions'. This means actions that intervene with the elements in an existing situation and which disconnect, rearrange or shift them. The new forms thus created usually expose the norms, values and boundaries that regulate our everyday lives and try to disrupt the routine behaviour they elicit.

No Ice, 2002

Like a flash mob before the word even existed, this choreography of eight identical ice cream vans occupies a Brussels traffic roundabout. The vehicles seem to circle endlessly around the traffic junction. Their screeching (s-creaming) sirens herald the approach of the summer season. By playing up the formal qualities of this particular element in the urban landscape over and above the functional ones, the predictability of the traffic manoeuvre is magnified. The action creates space for a form of poetry that we often overlook in everyday life.

'Workshop Agenda' took place in the context of 'Legal Space/ Public Space', a research project on the construction of public space, curated by Eva González-Sancho. Denicolai & Provoost's workshop bore the subtitle: 'definition of public space through its temporary occupation'. As documentation, postcards were made with snapshots, a short description and the dates of the actions. These took place in a bus, via a public telephone and a telephone directory, in a bedroom, in a museum and on a building site – five free and broader interpretations of the term 'public space'.

Made during the early years of their collaboration, this work played a decisive role in shaping Denicolai & Provoost's vision on the concept of 'public space', which they consider to be 'any space where someone might visit'. Within their interpretation, the private and the public, the intimate and the shared, the hidden and the visible, are unusually close together. The public space becomes a porous one, a place in which the artists can constantly play with the boundaries, energies and rules.



Impressionism since 2006, 2006

Pannenberg, 2001 (not executed)

With this model, Denicolai & Provoost – in collaboration with artists Nathalie Mertens and Christophe Terlinden – formulated a response to the call for the creation of a war memorial in the rural surroundings of Pannendorp, a cultural-historical site that was once part of the Belgian army's line of defence during the First World War. The site includes a dairy field near the hamlet of Fortem in the municipality of Alveringem.

The artists did not propose a new creation. They wished to make the historically charged surroundings as visible as possible and to preserve their current function by simply elevating the section of land. This allows the current 'residents' and the new visitors to occupy the site together, and for past and present to coexist. The site becomes its own 'monument', as it were.

Place Valladolid, 2018 (not executed)

In the 1990s, Rem Koolhaas (Office of Metropolitan Architecture, OMA) and his fellow architect François Delhay drew up the master plan for Euralille, which aimed to anchor the city of Lille within the European continent. The plan connects different infrastructures via a complex network of passages, plateaus, passageways, living and office spaces, train and metro tracks and motorways, all of which respond to the model of the twentieth-century metropolis.

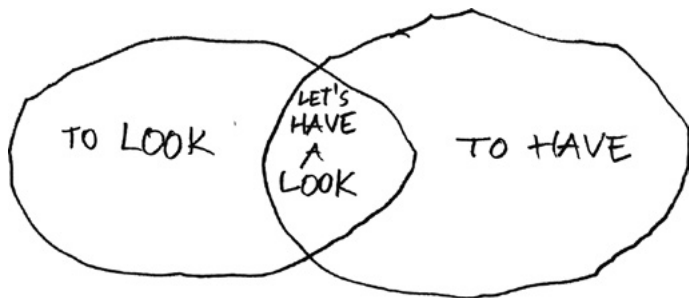
In 2018, a competition was launched for one of the follow-up phases: the reconstruction of Place Valladolid. In this context, Denicolai & Provoost, in collaboration with the Nord architecture office and Greisch engineers, designed a model that approaches the site as an ecosystem. Their proposal envisages a self-regulating effect that guarantees a balance between all forms of life: people who pass through the site in many diverse ways, animals that live off the waste that the passers-by leave behind, insects that temporarily settle and plants that have an enduring presence.

The design is averse to grand architectural gestures or urbanistic interventions and instead delivers an economy of recuperation and optimisation. For example, an inventory was made of all the used and abandoned materials that could be found on the site. In Denicolai & Provoost's proposal, nothing is lost, nothing is created, but everything that is available on the spot is transformed. The design was not withheld by the jury.

www.eeeell.com, 2009

Artworks on roundabouts are a fixed value in the Flemish traffic landscape. Since the 1990s, more and more roundabouts have been designed and equipped with an artistic intervention, usually a monumental sculpture that decorates the surroundings like an ornament. The proposal submitted by Denicolai & Provoost takes an entirely different form. They welcome the users of the roundabout with a sign that reads 'www.eeeell.com', a word game that references our digital world. The website provides access to a video that shows the process of making this roundabout and the human investment involved. The film elaborates on the notion of a roundabout as a junction at which the paths of the workers' lives – those who built the roundabout and erected the sign – converge.

This proposal was submitted within the framework of calls for projects in Asse, Waregem and Leuven and will be realised in La Louvière this year, at the invitation of Emmanuel Lambion, director of the city's Centre de la Gravure de l'Image imprimée (Centre for Engravings and Prints).



Let's have a look, 2010

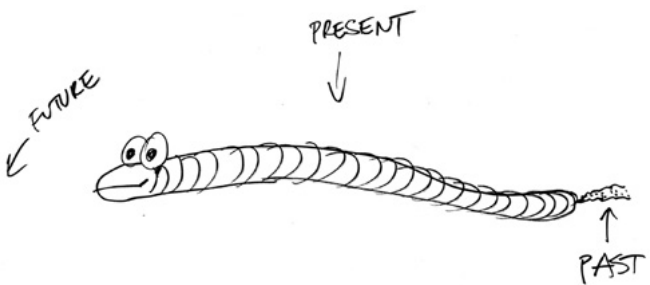
Play Mobils, 2002

A 'Play Mobil' is an assemblage sculpture that disconnects objects from their specific contexts and rearranges them, links them differently, or moves them around. The found materials charge the sculpture with a meaning that is connected to the economic, social and political reality of their place of origin. Denicolai & Provoost consider the 'Play Mobils' to be 'principle models'. They have a modest economy. They do not wish to create anything new but to transform reality by drawing on things that already exist. The 'Play Mobils' resonate profoundly with the actions and performances that Denicolai & Provoost set up in the public space. In this sense, they are the most material iterations of the concept of 'sculptural action'.

The history of the 'Play Mobils' dates back to the project 'Logos', which Denicolai & Provoost developed for Saint-Nazaire in 1999. For this project, the artists highlighted six local industrial products of the French city. They placed sculptures developed from parts of these products in neighbourhoods destined for urban regeneration. These sculptures bore the logos of the highlighted factories, which also presented themselves as cultural sponsors.

Citizenship, 2018

This sculptural collage follows the philosophy of the 'Play Mobils' (see above). It is made of materials found in the immediate vicinity of the original exhibition site, Maison Grégoire in Uccle, and the more personal belongings of the artists, their families and acquaintances. The collage sculpture bears the marks of circulation, consumption and relationships and thus sketches a portrait of contemporary citizenship.



Earthworm since 2001, 2001

Vaguement déplacer un arbre, 2009

This installation recounts Denicolai & Provoost's attempt to realise an artwork in the public space, in collaboration with Jörn Aram Bihain (V+), Thierry Decuypere (V+), Gauthier Dewez, Sylvie Eyberg, Pierre Huyghebaert (speculoos) and Diane Steverlynck. They submitted an application to move a single tree in the vicinity of the Bétonsalon art centre in Paris by one metre, thus diverting it from the existing row. The proposal played on Haussmann's concepts of urban organisation, but was also a pretext for exploring the less visible layers of reality associated with management and regulation. When they realised the proposal was destined to fail, the artists decided to rework their e-mail correspondence. The text was rewritten in the 'imparfait' (unfinished past tense) and turned into an operetta that cuts straight to the heart of the Paris administration's bureaucratic machine. A Kafkaesque world.

Small Boats and Sheep Day, 2012

On a Thursday morning in 2012, a herd of sheep and a flotilla of boats were united on the Vrijdagmarkt in Ghent. Other than the care with which the owners tended their property, these two groups had not a lot in common. Denicolai & Provoost's experiment lay in bringing together two completely different entities. Moreover, the performance was deliberately poorly communicated, so that bystanders were barely aware of what was happening. Each group was forced to relate to the event and reposition itself in a space that was gradually losing its familiar atmosphere.

The Dadaist character of this performance was also a nod to the farmers of the French region of Larzac, who in 1978 marched on Paris with their sheep against the threat to their land from the construction of a military site. Under the motto "We don't come with weapons, we come with sheep", they stunned the police, who could no longer rely upon their standard interventionist manoeuvres.

The performance 'Small Boats and Sheep Day' was performed in the context of TRACK, the urban exhibition that S.M.A.K. organised in Ghent in 2012.

Cars Beat People, 2017

On the poster with which Denicolai & Provoost announced the performance 'Cars Beat People', we read the invitation and instructions to potential participants. The performance is inspired by the rave culture of the 80s. Rave parties belonged to a counter-culture that wanted to escape the rules of the neoliberal society. Electronic music, post-industrial spaces and mind-altering drugs were central to such gatherings. Denicolai & Provoost appropriated the spirit and symbols of this subculture to create this performance, which places the accompanying characteristic desire for freedom back in the centre of the public space.

Impressionism since 2006, 2006

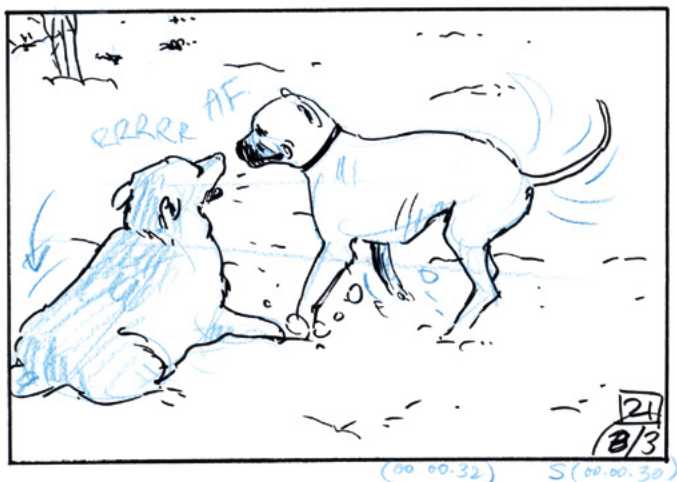
The series of drawings entitled 'Impressionism since 2006' adopts the graphic style of tables, graphs, diagrams and maps. These knowledge models are based on things that are quantifiable, and which can be expressed in figures and percentages. In a single summary image, they attempt to present statements about reality and to make abstractions of the exceptional, the anecdotal and the marginal. In Denicolai & Provoost's drawings, expressive lines compromise the presupposed clarity of the aforementioned knowledge models. Only the basic shapes of the models and their scientific aura are still recognisable.

Voor de achterkant van de saloncondities, 2006

In this video, an office is taken in hand by a cleaning crew before working hours. In the sterile room, the usual tasks are performed. Not only are the carpets vacuumed and the telephones dusted, but also the coffee cups and food scraps, which turn the desks into a personal space, are removed. The surprising plot twist makes it appear that work is literally and figuratively being done behind the scenes, thus compelling us to reappraise the whole as a routine choreography.

6:42 a.m., 2015

This set of four postcards shows fragments of an office during a clean-up session. It depicts the collective effort to uphold the respectable values of office life. The fragmented depiction refers to the almost invisible and impersonal nature of this labour.



Drawing storyboard HELLO, ARE WE IN THE SHOW?, 2015

Le Machin financier, 2014

This publication is an adaptation of a well-known comic book. The original name of the comic book was replaced by 'Machin', which means 'What's-His-Name' or 'Thingamajig'. The adaptation by Denicolai & Provoost recounts the intrigues and plight of an anarchist society as it tries to implement a monetary system.

Let's Have a Look, 2010

This Venn diagram shows two collections: 'to have' and 'to look'. Two ways of relating to art and the world. In the intersection of the diagram, the verbs are united in the 'we' form of the imperative. With this wordplay, Denicolai & Provoost make us think about freedom of perception in a capitalist information age.

Dancing Mice, 2016

This video explores the surroundings of the village of Taarlo, in the Dutch municipality of Tynaarlo. Here, the residents of a commune maintain the spirit of a collective and pre-industrial way of life. During a rare moment when all the villagers were absent, Denicolai & Provoost gained access to their homes. They allow the camera to wander through the deserted spaces and, in doing so, portray the dynamic and social cohesion in its negative form. The only inhabitants we see are a stork and a couple of cats. The slow and fluid interplay of colour and montage allows the individual houses to merge into one collective space.

HELLO, ARE WE IN THE SHOW?, 2020

This is the first museum presentation of the most recent video work by Denicolai & Provoost, 'HELLO, ARE WE IN THE SHOW?' Like a contemporary sequel to the sixteenth-century tapestry series 'Les Chasses de Maximilien' (The Hunts of Maximilian), the animation film takes us past several scenes in the Sonian forest: a bird landing on a snowy branch, a swan circling on water, a dog barking. The imperturbable rhythm of nature is maintained whilst the proximity of the city and the presence of man become tangible. Denicolai & Provoost play on the genre of the animated film and its conventional codes, thereby rupturing our patterns of expectation. Thus, nature is not idealised but placed in a critical perspective that highlights the interaction and interdependence between all life forms.

'HELLO, ARE WE IN THE SHOW?' is a co-production with S.M.A.K. that has been reworked into an impressive installation for this exhibition. The storyboard of the film has been part of the S.M.A.K. collection since 2016.

2d animation film – installation

Produced by S.O.I.L. – Geert Van Goethem & Linda Sterckx – with the support of Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris and Netwerk, Aalst; a co-production with S.M.A.K., Ghent and BPS2BPS22, Charleroi; with support from Flanders Audiovisual Fund (VAF) and Casa Kafka Pictures Movie Tax Shelter with support from Belfius; financing for art production through Solang Production, Paris, Brussels

S.O.I.L.   

Kisses, 2006

A government's informal farewell gesture.

Public programme

14.02.2021-30.05.2021

every Sunday between 10 am and 12 am

a cake is offered in the context of the project

'Tien taarten - Ten Cakes'

24.04.2021 at 3 pm

performance 'Uitburgeren, baby!'

on the Stropkaai in Ghent,

near the Sint-Lievenslaan

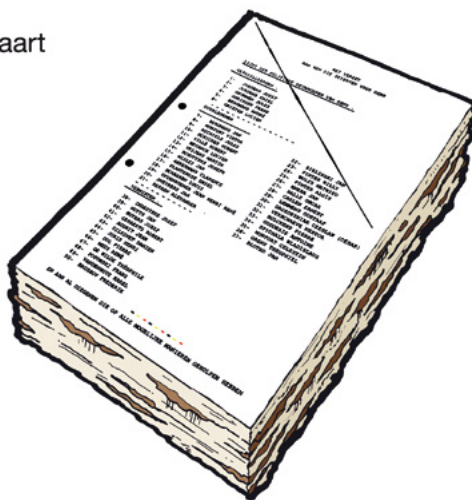
06.05.2021 at 8 pm

sound performance

by Moniek Darge (Logos Foundation) on

the 'Duchamp Harp', an object from 'Eyeliner (Gent)'

Verzetstaart



Verzetstaart, 2018

With thanks to

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