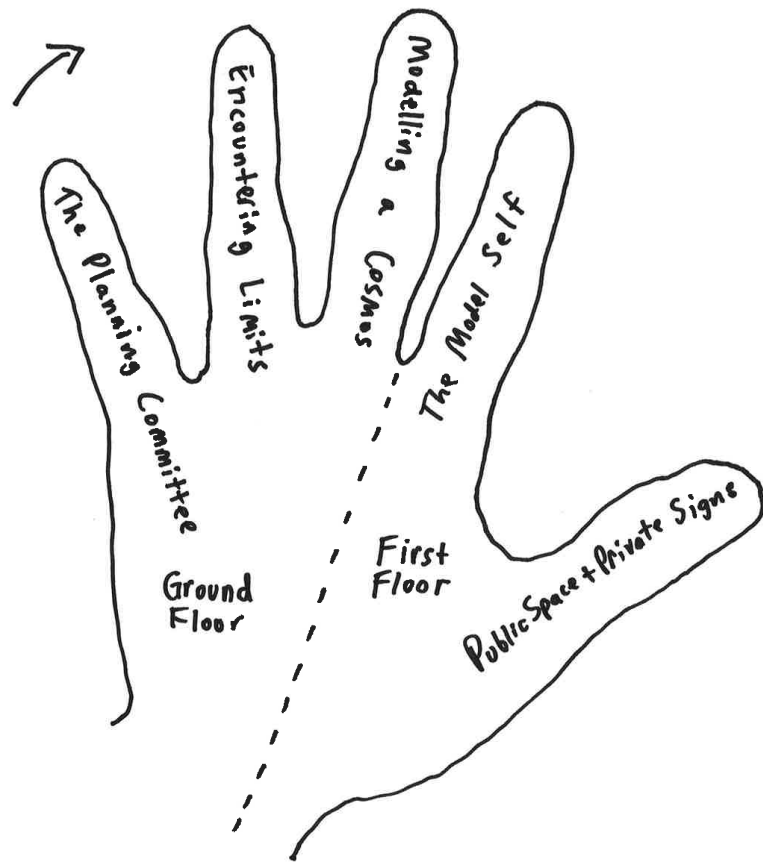




MODELLING LIFE

30.03 → 24.08.2025

Vleugel 19



Sketch of the exhibition floorplan by the curator.

The exhibition *Modelling Life* examines how models emerge in art and everyday life: as play-spaces to collectively explore forms, perspectives, and ideas. Just as a child builds with blocks or plays with a dollhouse, the process of modelling can become a way of learning, discovering, or making anew. Through media such as drawing, sculpture, and photography the exhibition proposes ‘modelling’ as a dynamic process of reflection and experimentation. Architectural interventions by artists such as Christiane Blattmann or Kasper Bosmans place the viewer in the model in a tangible way.

Whether through architectural structures, social archetypes, or conceptual frameworks, models offer us ways to express new realities. At the same time, such models can limit or confine us – much like an adolescent might feel uncomfortable in a world that doesn’t seem to fit. *Modelling Life* traces the contours of our built environment. At the same time, it asks how our identities are constructed. Whether architectural or psychological, the exhibition explores the tools we use to orient ourselves in the world.

Through installations and conceptual works, the artists in the exhibition highlight the role of the model as both mirror and blueprint of collective aspirations. *Modelling Life* emphasises the process of making spaces that accommodate diverse bodies, experiences, and dreams, ultimately asking of us: can we create a built environment as rich and complex as life itself?

THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Architectural tools like blueprints, models and plans are formats for envisioning future buildings. The artworks in this chapter playfully twist these conventions, challenging the dominance often implied by the traditional 'bird's-eye view'. These artists embrace ambiguity or irony and fantasise about architectural space as an extension of the self.

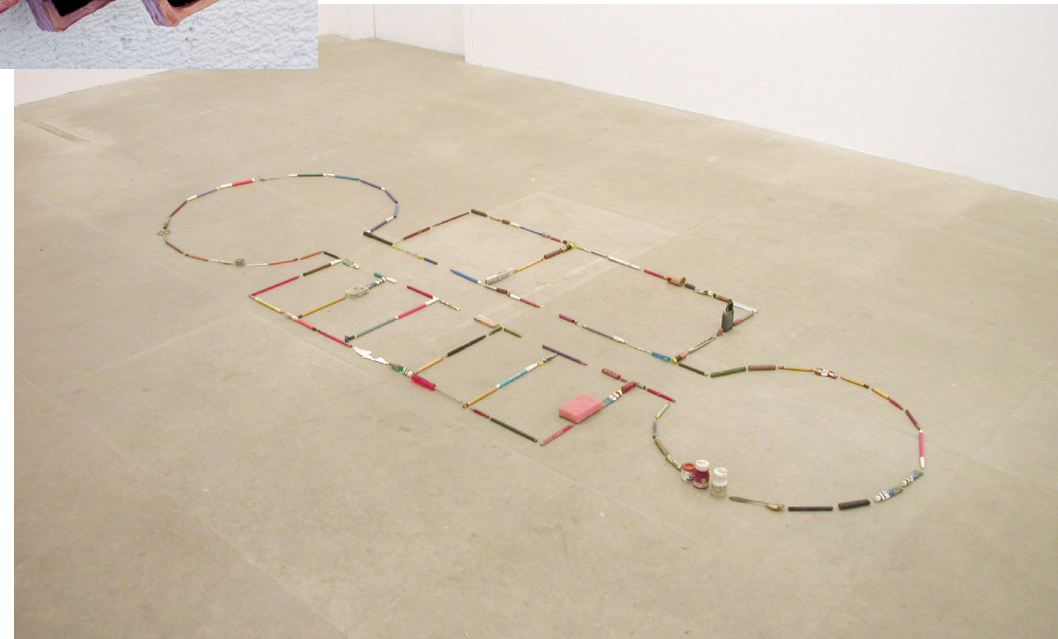
Christiane Blattmann, 'A New Balance' at mauer, Cologne, Photographer: Mareike Tocha. Courtesy Damien & The Love Guru, Brussels / Zurich.



1 Christiane Blattmann

In *Passage*, a new commission created specifically for the gallery of De Steeg, Christiane Blattmann has taken inspiration from the simple form of a key, a poignant symbol of access, as the basis for a new series of sculptures. Blattmann's installation employs materials taken from our built environment (metal, fencing, plastic) which are paired with softer modelling materials such as stitched cotton, cardboard, or pigmented wax. Passing through the gallery, we encounter forms that move between model and architecture, entry-point and obstacle.

Like a 'rite of passage' – a ritual defining the ending and beginning of a phase in life – Blattmann's installation becomes an enactment of growing into the world. True to life, *Passage* does not present us with a clear linear progression, but a room full of stops and starts, a non-sequential and textured narrative flow.



2 Mark Manders

'I became more and more fascinated by the physical manifestation of the floor plan: how I stood there before it as a human being... I could move over these objects, and they dictated my thoughts with their colour, language, form... I concluded that making a self-portrait in language was not the right thing to do. The world itself is more complex than the world of language which has been embedded in it.'

Mark Manders seminal work, *Self-Portrait as a Building*, transforms a floor plan into a meditative exploration of identity through everyday objects. Manders eschews linear storytelling, opting instead for an associative logic and open-ended interpretation. By embedding his self-portrait into an architectural form – made of simple objects such as pencils, clothes pins, or rulers – Manders challenges viewers to see identity as a spatial construct, part of the material world.

Mark Manders, *Inhabited for a Survey (First Floor Plan from Self-Portrait as a Building)*, 1986, Writing materials, erasers, painting tools and scissors, 8 x 267 x 90 cm, Art Institute of Chicago (gift by Donna and Howard Stone, Photo: Mark Manders.



Pablo Bronstein, *Pompeian Extension*, 2018. Ink and watercolour on paper, artist's frame, 83.5 x 93.5 x 4 cm / 32.9 x 36.8 x 1.6 in. Courtesy the artist and Herald St, London. Photo by Andy Keate.

3 Pablo Bronstein



Pablo Bronstein's intricate paintings on paper invert notions of scale and style. Classical buildings grow whimsical extensions, while modernist apartment blocks spiral into ornate gardens. Bronstein's rendering skill asks us to imagine these as real spaces, or at least real possibilities. What could a queering of architectural space look like? Bronstein's watercolours function as models for alternative architectural histories, playfully confronting key architectural concepts such as proportion or ornamentation.

'Queer space does not confidently establish a clear, ordered space for itself. It does not partake in the competition for building the largest house, the tallest tower, or the straightest street... It is altogether more ambivalent, open, leaky, self-critical or ironic, and ephemeral. Queer space often doesn't look like an order you can recognize, and when it does, it seems like an ironic or rhetorical twist on such an order.' - Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (1997)

ENCOUNTERING LIMITS

These artists explore how boundaries shape human experience. They investigate the tension between personal agency and external constraints, between inhabiting and inhibiting. Where does our 'personal space' begin and end?



4 Diane Simpson



Diane Simpson's architectonic sculptures are based on decorative garments and adornments. Through a practice of drawing, Simpson remodels these pieces of clothing into schematic designs. What was once a soft and pliable form becomes rigid, constrictive, monumental. These drawings are rigorously translated into three-dimensional form using utilitarian materials such as fibreboard or aluminium. The surfaces of these sculptures are carefully treated with enamel or crayon. These works exist in a space between architecture and garment, between delineation and decoration. They speak to how both clothing and architecture remodel the body.

Diane Simpson, *Jabot (starched and hinged)*, 2018. Painted LDF, aluminum, crayon on linen canvas, rivets 144.7 x 62.2 x 35.5 cm / 57 x 24.5 x 14 in. Courtesy the artist and Herald St, London. Photo by Tom Van Eynde.



5 Helen Chadwick



Throughout the photographic series *In the Kitchen*, Helen Chadwick playfully inserts herself into a series of handmade kitchen appliances. Carefully constructed from fabric, metal and PVC, these once-rigid industrial appliances become pliable: a second skin. Like clunky garments, they are worn and handled by Chadwick across a series of performative photographs. Many of Chadwick's works take a satirical approach towards issues of the body and its socialised environments.

In the works of Helen Chadwick and Diane Simpson, the activity of 'wearing something' has varied symbolic connotations. Within Chadwick's work, the sexist model of a woman's role being *in* the kitchen is made humorously literal and physical. Chadwick is not working in the kitchen, but rather her body is embedded into the material of the kitchen itself. On the other hand, in Simpson's sculptures the decorative or frilly – feminine clothing styles often dismissed as superficial and unserious – becomes imposing, heroic, architectural. In Chadwick's work we see a reversal where the hard, industrial and machinic becomes softer and more accommodating, even wearable.

Helen Chadwick, *In the Kitchen (Stove)*, 1977.
Colour Archival Pigment Print, 59 x 39 cm.
Courtesy Estate of Helen Chadwick and Richard Saltoun Gallery London, Rome.



Sara Deraedt, *Untitled*, Human body size, steel, screws, paint. 2022-2023. Image courtesy the artist and Maxwell Graham gallery.

6 Sara Deraedt



Untitled is described simply as 'human body size'. Like a cell made for one, the sculpture stands near to the wall, looking outwards to face the viewer.

Sara Deraedt and Robert Gober's *Untitled* works stand together in the gallery. Child-sized, one may have to crouch or bend over to more closely examine them. Foregrounding scale, one may feel awkward or self-aware of one's own position towards the sculptures. Here the walls and the viewer's body may become material, too.

7 Robert Gober →

A children's chair holding a tissue box stands atop a floor drain: Robert Gober's sculpture evokes the familiarity of the everyday. His carefully crafted works conjure personal narratives of belonging and estrangement rooted in both memory and materiality. For Gober, the act of modelling has physical and psychological connotations.

'At the time that I made this sculpture my psychiatrist was a child psychiatrist. The waiting room [had] an equal number of adult-sized chairs and child-sized chairs, evoking an equanimity that frequently moved me... Sometimes the tissues were on a side table... but the chair, a small wooden one, was always there next to me... One time in San Francisco someone asked me what the piece meant. I responded that he should understand what it is physically before worrying about meaning. When you know that the painted tissue box is bronze, you know that it is unnaturally heavy and then the meanings start to flow from the physical thing itself.'



Robert Gober, *Untitled*, 1997. Cast plastic, painted bronze, paper, silver-plated steel, wood, 17,25 x 13 x 13 inches. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

MODELLING A COSMOS

Works within this chapter explore how cultural fragments can be reassembled into new forms and narratives. Between the personal and universal, these artworks invite viewers to consider how we construct meaning through our surroundings. These artists propose alternative models for seeing and being that foreground associative and poetic points of view.

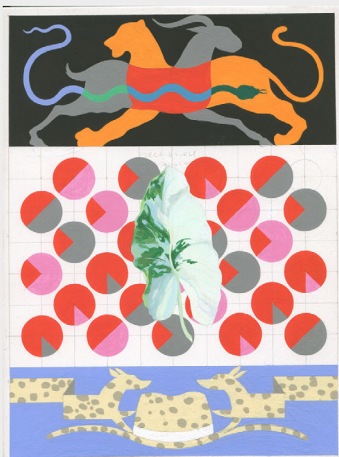
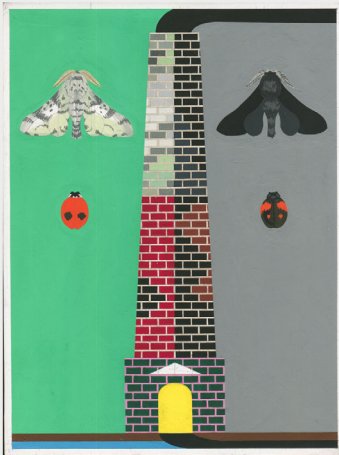


8 Caroline Van den Eynden ←

Caroline Van den Eynden employs the format of the architectural model as a sculptural material. Her small-scaled works are meticulously crafted by hand from precious and industrial materials. They are not representations of pre-existing buildings, but psychological spaces that hold memories, dreams, and desires. Her works, such as those in the nomadic series, contrast fragility and permanence: an atmosphere heightened by their enclosure in glass cases. Van den Eynden's sculptures use architecture as a metaphor for human psychology and development: *'For many, a staircase is functional, for me, however, it is fundamental. Without stairs, doors or passageways, one can never achieve a different or higher level.'*

Caroline Van den Eynden, *Albatross*, 2019
Oak, laquer paint, brass, glass
20,8 x 74,5 x 14 cm. Courtesy Estate of Caroline Van den
Eynden and DMW Gallery, Antwerp.
Collection Jelle Hofland

9 Kasper Bosmans



Kasper Bosmans, *Legend*:
A Mottled Coat and Industrial
Camouflage, 2022. Gouache and
silver point on poplar panel, 3 panels:
21 x 28 cm each. Courtesy the artist,
Gladstone Gallery, Brussels and
Collection Eechaudt-Delmotte.

Bosmans' small *Legend* paintings blend graphic symbolism with storytelling, creating a unique visual grammar. The paintings' contents are drawn from history, personal anecdotes and collective memory.

In *Modelling Life*, Bosman's new commission situates his *Legend* paintings within an architectural mural environment composed of painted duo-toned double beds. By evoking the domestic realm of the bedroom, a sliver of intimacy is introduced within the larger exhibition. As if inside the chrysalis of a colourful moth, the bed becomes a space for fantasy, self-transformation, reinvention. Speaking about the murals, Bosmans writes:

"They started off in a jokey way, but slowly but surely I started to see that they are an iteration of a forlorn, ridiculous ambition or point of view... Architectural historian Aaron Betsky argues that the self-construction of queer identity included "building up a fantastical world by gathering objects from all times and places". The domestic realm was a closet, featuring "a collection of artefacts that defined the individual by serving as an objective map of his passions, by evoking other worlds than the one in which he was imprisoned."



Joseph Grigely, *Untitled Conversation (I did a past life regression once, I was in the desert - I was low. Maybe a beetle.*), 2005. 11 sheets of paper, pins, framed, 45,3 x 60 cm. Photo Marc Domage. Courtesy the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville / Grand Paris.

10 Joseph Grigely



Joseph Grigely is a conceptual artist who uses language and communication as central themes. Deaf since childhood, Grigely's long-term series *Conversations with the Hearing* archive years of written exchanges: a model that Joseph has relied on to communicate with those who do not speak sign language. Grigely's *Conversations* bring language down to earth, turning ephemeral exchanges into tactile models of speech. The *Conversations* depict a unique and challenging way of inhabiting the world, while simultaneously forming new and inspiring affiliations: chit-chatting together on brightly hued or neutral-toned scraps of paper, stained with words, scribbles, drawings and diagrams.

THE MODEL SELF

As young people become adults, they often search for 'role models' to help guide their path and build their identity. How do we use others as a mould to help shape ourselves? Through imitating, repeating and echoing we search for our own form. Generic and archetypal moulds, like a mannequin, reflect but also distort our conception of the human body.

11 Jakob Brugge →

How do everyday objects turn into uniforms or stand-ins for certain lifestyles and ideologies? Jakob Brugge uses sculpture as a tool to probe archetypal narratives and symbols of group identity. Are you on my team or not?

In Brugge's new commission for Z33 he employs the process of mould making and casting to reinvent clothing items such as baseball caps, belts or boat shoes. His installation is a sculptural interplay between positive and negative forms cast in pigmented rubber. Rubber is a flexible material, easily distorted and warped – Brugge plays its malleability against the rigidity of the imagined archetype. Do we conform to or resist the mould?

Jakob Brugge, *Untitled*, 2025, rubber.
Courtesy the artist and Gauli Zitter. Photo: GRAYSC.





Atiána R. Kilfa, *Rear window*, 2021-. Inkjet on aludibond, 128,5 x 85,7cm. Courtesy the artist, Cabinet, London and Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt.

PUBLIC SPACE AND PRIVATE SIGNS

As anthropologist David Graeber writes, ‘the ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently.’ Situated between the world as it stands and the world as it could be, these artists question how public space is shaped and accessed.

12 Atiána R. Kilfa



Atiána R. Kilfa’s nocturnal photographic series *You Look Lonely* shows a central figure engaged in mundane activities around her apartment: looking in the fridge, going for a shower, preparing for bed. At second glance, the photographic façade begins to crack as we slowly realise the subject is in fact a mannequin masquerading within Kilfa’s domestic environment. Interestingly, this specific mannequin was modelled from a living fashion model in the late 1960s. By taking the figure out of its intended commercial context and into an intimate and domestic setting, the manufacturing of the ‘idealised form’ becomes more apparent. Simple apartment lighting allows the artist to engage in an active process of modelling, as the camera senses for a subject lying just beneath her plastic skin.



13 Park McArthur



Park McArthur’s artworks model the constructed nature of public space, a space which reflects the expectations of those who navigate it. How often do these expectations misalign?

Private Signs is a collection of American disabled parking signs which have been removed of their ‘contents’ such as images or text. Instead, these signs communicate through a language of form, aesthetics, and even intuition. They communicate a plethora of necessities and points of access, but withhold the specificity of the request. They speak towards systems of navigation, and systems of inclusion and exclusion. To whom are these signs *private*: those who look for them, or those who look past them?

Park McArthur, *Private Signs*, 2014. UV-cured inkjet print on Dibond, 320,04 x 375,92 cm. Courtesy the artist and Antonio Dalle Nogare Collection, Italy.



Kinderspielplatz is an installation made up of eight different custom-built child-sized cars and an accompanying video. Each car expresses a kind of personality or characteristic: one is fluffy like a dog, another resembles a military vehicle, a third has neat piles of snowflakes on its hood and fender. The installation is loosely based on a painting by Pieter Breugel called *Kinderspelen* (1560), in which children crowd a town square playing games without an adult in sight.

In Trockel's video we see a world driven by children: one where play and curiosity take centre stage. The installation presents us with a microcosm of our own world through a child's eyes.

Traditionally, objects like dolls houses and toy cars present children with models to learn about adulthood. However, in *Kinderspielplatz* this logic is inverted: we see our world, made differently. The child's model of life becomes our own.

Rosemarie Trockel, *Kinderspielplatz*, 1999.
Installation with 8 children's cars. Variable dimensions. Courtesy the artist and De Pont Museum, Tilburg.



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