

HUIS VOOR  
ACTUELE KUNST  
DESIGN & ARCHITECTUUR



## PRESS FILE

### Colour. Seeing beyond pigment

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Dyes and pigments are everywhere. From paint on walls to ink in pens, and from cosmetics to clothing—pigments quite literally bring life to colour. They are used in the food industry to make products more appealing and in the pharmaceutical sector to code medications or make pills look more appetising. Naturally, the production and use of pigments are also deeply intertwined with the worlds of art and design. Colour contributes to the allure of both everyday products and artistic creations.

Yet, the pigment and dye industry is among the most polluting sectors worldwide. To mitigate its environmental impact, it is crucial to develop alternatives. *Laboratorium*, the biolab for art, design, and biotechnology at KASK & Conservatorium Ghent, specialises in sustainable colour production. Using nanotechnology, they are developing a new colour palette. Based on synthetic melanin, they create a colour film applied to materials such as paper, metal, ceramics, glass, and more. In this exhibition, seven artists and designers work with melanin-based structural colour for the first time.

#### Structural colours as a sustainable alternative

Structural colours represent a key step forward in developing alternatives to conventional pigments. While traditional and alternative pigments physically alter a material's colour, structural colour achieves chromatic effects optically. However, this biological approach remains relatively unknown.

Structural colour is created through the interaction of light with microscopic structures in a material—an optical effect produced when light refracts on the nanoscale. This results in vivid colours that shift depending on the viewing angle and lighting, as seen in butterfly wings or peacock feathers. These nanostructures are often made of basic biological materials like cellulose, chitin, keratin, or melanin. These substances are abundant in nature, biodegradable, and non-toxic. Among them, research into synthetic melanin—a natural pigment found in human skin—has advanced to the point where it can now be explored in artistic experimentation.

What if, in the future, we no longer need to seek less-polluting pigments but could do away with pigments altogether? What if an object could be created with colour embedded in the structure of its surface, instead of being painted afterwards? Are we talking about a technology with the potential for “super” sustainability—given that structural colours have even been found in fossils?

### **An inexhaustible colour palette**

These new melanin-based structural colours are now, for the first time, placed in the hands of artists and designers. *Colour. Seeing Beyond Pigment* is therefore more than a response to an environmental issue. The exhibition rewrites our relationship with colour, material, and sustainability.

The works in the exhibition explore what colour can be—not only as an aesthetic component but also as a story, a material, and a reflection of our ecological and social challenges. Craftsmanship is central, resulting in a wide range of material and formal experiments with aluminium, rubber, glass, paper, ceramics, parachute fabric, titanium, and steel.

This creates a paradoxical experience for visitors. Through the interplay of texture and contrast, the artworks almost beg to be touched—though that would be disastrous, as even a single touch can destroy the colour. At the same time, the works must be viewed from multiple angles to fully appreciate their pictorial power. The colours only truly come alive under changing light and perspective.

## **The exhibited works**

### **Bram Vanderbeke**

Bram Vanderbeke combines craftsmanship with a fascination for materials such as concrete and aluminium. *Ridges 1, 2, and 3* are three-dimensional wall pieces that invite sensory exploration of space, form, and material. The surface appears cast but is intricately shaped through precision milling in aluminium sheets. The resulting texture reveals intuitive, manual motions from days of rhythmic labour. From different angles, new details emerge: the shimmer of light in the grooves, the interplay of colour, and shadow effects. The subtle accents of partially brushed-away structural colour continue to shift in intensity depending on your position.

## **Marlou Breuls**

*No Hard Peelings* evokes associations with a flayed female skin. The soft rubber texture heightens the work's tactile quality. Yet its colour, inspired by insect wings, introduces an uncanny sense of alienation. The pins used to display the piece resemble those in taxidermy, intensifying the tension between tactility and distance. Viewers are drawn to observe the piece from multiple perspectives and confront the curious discomfort between the urge to touch and the object's implied demand for distance. Balancing playfulness and eeriness, the work raises subtle questions about the constructed nature of the female body: how we manipulate, preserve, or disconnect it from convention.

## **Dimitris Theocharis**

*A Geometry of Togetherness* is a kite inspired by the tetrahedral shape of Alexander Graham Bell's 1907 design. Made from fibreglass rods and parachute fabric, the piece radiates lightness and balance. Despite its delicate construction, it is fully functional and capable of flight. The structural colours on its surface change with the light, referencing starling murmurations that seek safety in numbers. Playful at first glance, the piece delves into deeper reflections on natural, architectural, and technological patterns. The kite illustrates how individual elements combine to create new properties. Like molecules in nature, its geometric precision reveals hidden harmonies.

## **Tiina Pyykkinen**

Tiina Pyykkinen plays with space, time, and perception. Her intriguing panels, created on mirrored steel, continuously shift based on light and viewpoint. During production, an adhesive layer protects the surface during the colouring process. This layer is only partially removed afterwards, revealing shadow-based forms. The result invites interaction: the viewer is literally reflected and merges with the image, transforming the painting into a fluid experience. Pyykkinen explores how a "moving image" can emerge—monochromatic yet multicoloured, stable yet elusive. Her work reflects the human condition: layered, fluid, and ever-changing. *Disguised Messages* invites a moment of reflection on our place in a complex reality.

## **Heleen Sintobin & Amandine David**

### *1548 Pennae*

*1548 Pennae* is a cloak of small ceramic pieces, each shaped like a turkey feather and displaying subtle iridescent hues. These individual parts are stitched together in overlapping formation, forming a blanket that references historical feather creations, such as those by the Maya. They bred turkeys specifically for their plumage. This work honours that tradition and pays homage to the structural colours found naturally in bird feathers. By translating a traditional source of inspiration into a contemporary object, the piece invites viewers to consider the potential of structural colour in everyday design.

## *Entomo Colours*

In *Entomo Colours*, Sintobin and David explore structural colour on paper by designing origami beetles modelled after endangered Flemish species. Mounted like a pinned insect collection, the beetles form an artistic experiment and a powerful narrative about biodiversity loss. While traditional beetle collections document the past, this project focuses on the present. The shiny, iridescent tones reflect their natural counterparts and provoke reflection: could we preserve more of nature's colour diversity by treating the environment differently? By combining the everyday and playful medium of origami with in-depth research and storytelling, this work offers a compelling perspective on what we risk losing.

## *Coral Colours*

With *Coral Colours*, Sintobin and David visualise the impact of climate change on underwater hues. Rising sea temperatures threaten the bright colours of marine life, which are crucial for recognition, camouflage, and reproduction. The work is inspired by scientific graphs about colour perception at different ocean depths—deeper waters mean less light and colour. This idea takes shape in a mobile made of vibrantly anodised titanium plates, among which a few blue-coloured fish swim—blue due to their migration to darker, cooler waters. *Coral Colours* highlights the importance of protecting marine environments.

## **Ann Veronica Janssens**

*09.04.23, 2023 & 04.10.23 #2, 2023*

Ann Veronica Janssens' *Structural Colours* series explores the boundary between perception and materiality. Each piece features a panel of transparent ribbed glass, coated with a thin film of synthetic melanin. The resulting works are vivid manifestations of light and colour, where chance and serendipity play a central role. Like their natural counterparts, these colours are extremely fragile: even the slightest touch can destroy the structure, requiring great care in preservation. These works highlight the promise and complexity of structural colour technology—as both experiment and experience.

# Practical Information

Curator: Annelies Thoelen

Scientist: María Boto Ordóñez

Scenography: Woman Cave Collective

Artists: Marlou Breuls, Amandine David, Ann Veronica Janssens, Tiina Pyykkinen, Heleen Sintobin, Dimitris Theocharis, Bram Vanderbeke

In collaboration with: KASK & Conservatorium (HO Gent – Howest), VUB (Sustainable Engineering Materials Research Group) en UGent (Evolution and Optics of Nanostructures).

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## About the research Ecology of Colour

**Laboratorium**, the biolab for art, design, and biotechnology at KASK & Conservatorium, specialises in sustainable colour production. The research project *Ecology of Colour* is developing a palette of structural colours through nanotechnology. Based on synthetic melanin, a colour film is being created for application on materials such as paper, metal, ceramics, glass, and more.

<https://ecologyofcolour.be/>

## About the artists and designers

### Amandine David

Amandine David is a designer and researcher based in Brussels. In her practice, located between traditional crafts and digital manufacturing, objects appear as material traces to a surrounding process of learning, sharing and collaborating. By working with craftspeople, programmers and architects and foregrounding what is usually considered as context, such as technical know-how, disciplinary traditions and social cultures, Amandine opens up possibilities for multidisciplinary dialogues. Because of its collaborative origins and open-ended nature, the work of Amandine is always self-consciously connected to the social structures of sharing which surround every design practice.

Amandine graduated from Social Design Master at Design Academy Eindhoven in 2018. Amandine is teaching at KASK, The Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Gent, in the Autonomous Design department. Amandine recently received the Henry Van de Velde Young Talent Award. Amandine received the Henry Van de Velde Young Talent Award in 2023. Her work is part of the collection of Design Museum Gent and CID at Grand-Hornu.

### Dimitris Theocharis

Dimitris Theocharis (b. 1987) holds degrees in Mathematics and Fine Arts from Greek institutions and earned his MFA from the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam in 2020. His practice spans various media and focuses on connections across different disciplines and eras, delving into themes of time, materiality, and the migration of forms across art, nature, and science. He currently lives in Ghent, Belgium.

### Marlou Breuls

House of Rubber is an acclaimed cross-disciplinary creative studio based in Amsterdam, renowned for its bold approach that bridges the worlds of fashion, sculpture, and art. Under the visionary leadership of founder Marlou Breuls, the studio challenges and redefines traditional perceptions of these disciplines, blending their distinctive characteristics into one another. Valuing playful optimism and creative fun over formalism and minimalism, House of Rubber creates a wondrous universe where rules are meant to be bent, broken, or abandoned in favor of inventiveness and joyful expression.

Founder Marlou Breuls has become known for her distinct ability to merge fashion, art, and design in unexpected and exciting ways. With a highly intuitive and open-minded approach, Marlou lets each work unfold naturally, driven by a spirit of experimentation and material exploration. Her designs—characterized by rich textures, tactile surfaces, and an air of the fantastical—redefine the potential of everyday materials, transforming them into sensory, immersive pieces. Whether it's latex bodysuits, ball gown rugs, ceramic cabinets or rubber jewelry that drips from the body, Marlou's work consistently challenges expectations while

inviting personal engagement. Marlou has established herself as a leading force in contemporary design, seamlessly blending the worlds of collectible design and performative objects. With a growing reputation for pushing creative boundaries, her work ignites curiosity and offers fresh perspectives on the intersection of art and fashion. With a portfolio that commands both intrigue and admiration, House of Rubber is reshaping the future of design—one playful, provocative piece at a time.

### **Bram Vanderbeke**

Bram Vanderbeke is a Ghent-based, Belgian artist/designer. He graduated from the Design Academy, Eindhoven in 2016, completing a prior training in Design at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Ghent. His practice is diverse but consistent and stands out for its material, sculptural and monumental qualities.

Bram explores and transforms the possible interactions between an object, its architectural environment and its user, further challenged by raw materiality, form and functionality. His works are autonomous artistic manifestations and utile solutions, an ambiguity Bram deliberately aims for. He creates his Architectural Objects and rhythmic installations in varying dimensions, both in private and in public contexts. The works often influence the spatial perception of the environment they become part of, sometimes by extending an existing space through creating a new space within it. Bram Vanderbeke is one of the founding members of BRUT, a collective of emerging Belgian designers.

### **Tiina Pyykkinen**

Tiina Pyykkinen (b. 1983) is a Helsinki-based visual artist who works primarily with paintings and installations. Her practice is focused on the themes of communication, individual and collective memory, and time and its disorder as a bodily experience.

Pyykkinen uses various combinations of material and light creating multi-layered works that engage in a dialogue with space, movement, and the viewer's perceptual experience. Her works are temporal and spatial, in which visibility is in constant flux.

Pyykkinen graduated with a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in 2014. She was named as the Young Artist of the Year in 2017, an honor organized by the Tampere Art Museum and the City of Tampere. Her works have been exhibited in various exhibitions, for instance at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma (2024), Tampere Art Museum (2024), Serlachius Museums (2024-2023), among others museums and galleries in Finland and across Europe. Her paintings are part of the collections such as the Saastamoinen Art Foundation (EMMA, Espoo Museum of Modern Art), Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Serlachius Museums, Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation (Rovaniemi Art Museum), Tampere Art Museum and Maastricht University Collection in Netherlands, among others. Her latest site-specific work was completed in 2021 to the main façade of Nova, Jyväskylä Central Hospital

### **Ann Veronica Janssens**

Since the late 1970s, Ann Veronica Janssens has been exploring the realm of visitor experience through her artistic practice. Her work often results in intangible installations that play with light, reflection, transparency, and luminosity. Using ephemeral elements such as artificial fog, sound, and simple materials like glass and mirrors, she creates in situ environments that immerse the viewer in a fleeting moment, highlighting the subjectivity of spatial and temporal perception and its constant evolution. Her transformation of the material through the immaterial leads to a loss of reference points and evokes a sense of instability that shifts from the physical to the psychological.

Visitors become active participants in their experience—unique in each case—through movement, interaction, and perception, both of the work itself and of the surrounding architectural space.

Janssens has represented Belgium at the Venice Biennale (alongside Michel François) and the São Paulo Biennale, and has taken part in the Istanbul, Sydney, Sharjah, and Beppu biennials. Her solo exhibitions include *Grand Bal* at Pirelli HangarBicocca in Milan (2023), the Panthéon in Paris (2022), South London Gallery (2021), Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (2020), Musée de l'Orangerie (2019), De Pont Museum, Tilburg (2018), Institut d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne (2017), Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2016), S.M.A.K. Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent (2010), WIELS Contemporary Art Centre (2009), Museum Morsbroich (2007), Musée d'Orsay (2003), and Neue Nationalgalerie (2001). In 2009, she co-initiated the *Laboratoire Espace Cerveau* with Nathalie Ergino at the IAC in Villeurbanne.

### **Heleen Sintobin**

Heleen Sintobin has a background in interior architecture and holds a Master's degree in Design Products from the Royal College of Art in London. In her current practice, she explores the future of craft in the digital age. As a resident of the InterActions research group at LUCA School of Arts, she experiments with mine tailings and 3D printing techniques. Heleen also works as an artistic researcher at *Laboratorium*, the biolab for art, design, and biotechnology at KASK & Conservatorium. There, she collaborates with scientist Maria Boto on *Ecology of Colour*, an interdisciplinary project focused on the future of sustainable colour production.

### **Annelies Thoelen**

Annelies Thoelen (BE, 1986) is the coordinator of the Design Expertise Centre at Design Museum Gent. She obtained her Master's degree in Art History from KU Leuven in 2008 and completed a PhD at Hasselt University in 2015. Annelies began her career in 2013 at Design Flanders, where she was responsible for European design projects, curated *Rabbit with Prunes* (2015), and contributed to the selection and catalogue of the 8th Design Triennial in Ghent (2016). She also served as editor for the design magazine *Kwintessens*, published the handbook *Public Service Design* (2015), and sat on several Flemish arts funding committees.

From 2018 to 2023, she was curator at Z33, House for Contemporary Art, Design & Architecture in Hasselt, where she organised exhibitions such as *Fitting In* (2022) and *Healing Water* (2023), and led initiatives related to Flemish design policy.

She currently serves as an international adviser for design in the Creative Industries Fund NL in Rotterdam and is on the editorial board of the *Journal of Interior History and Design* in Ghent. Since 2015, Annelies has also been teaching design history and contemporary design at various programmes within LUCA School of Arts. As an independent critic, she has contributed to publications such as *this is tomorrow Contemporary Art Magazine*, *HART/Glean*, *Kwintessens*, *DAMN magazine*, and *New Ceramics*. She is also chair of Platform 0090 and a board member of organisations including Flanders DC, deBuren, and the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA).

### **Woman Cave Collective**

Woman Cave Collective is an art and design studio founded by architect Chloé Macary-Carney and artist Léticia Chanliau. Since 2019, they have been working around themes of gender and inclusivity within built environments. Their practice includes the publication of their biennial *Woman Journal*, the development of participatory workshops, and the creation of spatial installations and design objects under the name Cluso Studio.

Woman Cave Collective participates in exhibitions and biennials as part of cultural programming that sits at the intersection of contemporary art, architecture, and design. They are part of the architectural incubator SANA at ENSA Clermont-Ferrand.

Their work seeks to revalue craft, artisanal practices, and DIY methods in a multidisciplinary spirit, with a strong focus on reuse and sustainability.

**María Boto Ordóñez**

María holds a degree in Food Technology from the University of León (Spain) and a PhD in Life Sciences from the Pharmacy School of the University of Barcelona (Spain). After completing her PhD, she began a journey into the intersection of science and art at the Waag Society in Amsterdam, where she worked as a lab technician for artists and designers in the fields of bioart and biodesign. Since 2016, María has been a researcher at KASK/School of Arts of University College Ghent (Belgium). Her main research interest is in sustainable colour production and application within the arts. In her first project, The Colour Biolab, she explored sustainable alternatives to synthetic inks and dyes, including using bacteria and microalgae as colour sources. Her current research project, Ecology of Colour, done jointly with Heleen Sintobin, aims to bridge nature and art by dissecting the bases of structural colour generation and translating them into applicable and sustainable materials. Both projects have been done in close collaboration with professional artists and designers, such as Ann Veronica Janssens or Tiina Pyykkinen, to explore the aesthetics and sensoriality of the colours generated. In parallel to her role as researcher, she is responsible for Laboratorium, the experimental lab for art, design, and biotechnology at the School of Arts KASK, where students and researchers can explore materials and methods from the scientific field in their artistic practices.