



JIMMY ROBERT

A clean line that starts from the shoulder

19.11.15 × 28.02.16

In *A clean line that starts from the shoulder*, Jimmy Robert (1975, Guadeloupe) explores how lines and movements can be interpreted. This question is the leitmotif running through the exhibition and the performance of the same name, which was presented exclusively on 19 November, the opening evening of the exhibition. The artist considers both to be complementary. The exhibition, which consists of a collection of individual works, can thus stand alone, but at the same time, the exhibited works can also become props in a performance within which the artist relates directly to the objects themselves.

Robert's work often starts from existing artworks, which he appropriates, adding layers of meaning to them. For example, in *A clean line that starts from the shoulder*, he starts from the work of Romanian-Belgian artist Idel Ianchelevici (1909-1994), the Belgian Lili Dujourie (1941) and the Dutch conceptual artist Stanley Brouwn (1935). He was also inspired by phrases from 1970s fashion magazines that refer to lines, movement and the body. He integrates all these influences into a series of new collages, prints, texts and installations, and does so using delicate materials such as silk and paper.

Identity, movement and vulnerability are the major themes that recur throughout Jimmy Robert's collages, photos, films and installations. His presentations consciously seek to underscore the ambiguity between the different media he uses. A collage or photo might thus be interpreted as an installation, or a video on a screen might become a sculpture in the exhibition space. *A clean line that starts from the shoulder* is Jimmy Robert's first solo exhibition in Belgium. For M he has designed a new comprehensive installation in Room 28, complemented by two older works in rooms 29 and 30.

ROOM 28

Silks, 2015 and Untitled (Smile), 2015

Untitled (Smile) and *Silks* consist of adaptations of line drawings made by Belgian-Romanian artist Idel Ianchelevici during the 1960's in the former Belgian colony of Congo. The drawings depict the local population – men, women and children – dressed in simple, draped robes. Jimmy Robert became interested in the work due to a thematic affinity with his own artistic practice: androgyny, the suggestion of movement in the simple lines and an interest in the vulnerability of the human body.

In *Silks*, Robert's intervention in Ianchelevici's work is limited to layering several individual drawings, which are then

printed on silk. In *Untitled (Smile)*, he used a line drawing from which he deconstructed the lines and added hand-drawn emoticons. The pencil-drawn smileys are symbolic of the way in which emotions can now be reproduced technologically, which couldn't be more remote from the timeless and classical character of Ianchelevici's drawing.

As with all the collages he created for this exhibition, Robert decided to scan the collage and then to print it on a large scale. This obscures the hand of the artist in the copy/paste process of ready-made photos or objects, which is so characteristic of collage.

"In Ianchelevici's drawings, movement is not paused; the lines are fluent, without ending."

Valerie Verhac

Untitled (Agon), 2015

The title of the print *Untitled (Agon)* refers to *Agon*, the title of a 1957 ballet by Russian choreographer George Balanchine (1904-1983). The piece went down in history as a radical choreography thanks to the inventiveness and the experimentation of the rhythm and the forms that Balanchine had used in combination with all the traditional elements of ballet. *Agon* is not a narrative ballet: the subject of the piece is movement itself; just as movement is also central to the work of Jimmy Robert. The print *Untitled (Agon)* is based on a collage composed from various sources by Jimmy Robert. The largest image is a fine line drawing by a Congolese woman with her child made by Ianchelevici.

The geometric patterns contain vintage photo fragments of the American ballet dancers Arthur Mitchell (1934) and Allegra Kent (1937) during their performance of *Agon* at the New York City Ballet. This 1957 performance was notable because it was the first time that an African American ballet dancer was permitted to dance the lead part beside a white ballerina. Indeed, until the 1950s, African American dancers were discriminated due to their physiognomy, which was purportedly unsuitable for the classical lines of traditional ballet. On the other side of the wall, you will find two original sculptures by Ianchelevici: *Adolescent* (1951) and *Dédée, young girl* (1961). Thanks to the colours of the materials, they echo the ballet dancers Mitchell and Kent as they appear on the print *Untitled (Agon)*.

Untitled (Brouwn), 2015

Untitled (Brouwn) consists of a hand-written letter that Jimmy Robert wrote to Dutch artist Stanley Brouwn (1935) in 2013. This letter remained unanswered, however. It formulates an open question to Brouwn to establish a dialogue, either artistically or merely verbally. Indeed, Robert sees an affinity between his work and Brouwn's, and more specifically in his interest in attempting to depict movement.

Starting in the 1960s, Brouwn developed a conceptual artistic practice that centred on mapping walking distances. He thus attempted to measure distances and to make an inventory based on a personal system of measurement of linear units. Robert became familiar with the work in Amsterdam thanks to an art collector and an old friend of Brouwn's. He photographed several works in the *This Way Brouwn* series. Robert later integrated these photos into the collage that formed the basis of the print *Untitled (Brouwn)*.

Untitled (Wearing thin), 2015

Untitled (Wearing thin) is a direct reference to the performance *A clean line that starts from the shoulder*, which Jimmy Robert performed exclusively on the exhibition's opening night. He performed it along with a female dancer whose build and height mirrored his own. The performance was conceived as an interaction of movements towards the artworks at M. As a result, the prints and installations in the exhibition room were no longer autonomous artworks, but rather formed the props in the performance.

The print *Untitled (Wearing thin)* recalls the clothing worn by the artist and the dancer during the performance. The work thus shows different patterns that Robert conceived as clothing beforehand, in diverse samples of fabric that look like different skin tones. During the opening, the performers' bodies were covered only by white, oversized T-shirts, of which the collars fell down over their shoulders. They were thus reminiscent of the classically draped robes of the Congolese figures in Ianchelevici's drawings, which recur several times in the exhibition works.

Lili Dujourie, Madrigaal (1975) and Enjambement (1976)

Due to the convergence of themes (androgyny, movement, the human body), Jimmy Robert chose to integrate two videos by the Belgian artist Lili Dujourie in his exhibition at M. Both works are part of the Cera Collection that is managed by the museum, to which it has been given in long-term loan. *Madrigaal* and *Enjambement* feature two tense, clothed figures on a bare wooden floor. It is not clear if the figures are male or female. Their faces are rarely on screen. The figures appear to be in a state between waking and sleeping. Their rolling movements, alternated with breaks, appear automatic.

While Dujourie filmed herself in *Madrigaal*, in 1976 she used a man as the model for *Enjambement*. In the latter video, she approaches the man in his vulnerability

instead of in his power and virility. In this way, the borders between the man and woman in both videos appear to be closer together.

ROOM 29

Untitled (Ompdrailles), 2013

Untitled (Ompdrailles) consists of a large black and white photo print that covers a wooden beam that is anchored in the wall. The photo depicts the sculpture *The Death of Ompdrailles* (1892), a work made by Belgian sculptor Charles Van der Stappen (1843-1910) for the Brussels monument erected in honour of the French author Léon Cladel (1835-1892). The monument refers to his novel *Ompdrailles, le tombeau des lutteurs* (1879), in which Cladel tells the story of Albe Ompdrailles, a wrestler of androgynous and virile beauty who falls in love with an unattainable woman. This elicits both hate and desire in his immediate surroundings. In his sculpture, Van der Stappen depicts a deceased Ompdrailles, who is being carried away by his trainer after a match. The trainer had an almost amorous fascination for his dead pupil. The sculpture thus refers to the concealed homoerotic undertone in Cladel's novel.

The artist himself can also be seen in this photo. He lies at the foot of the plinth on which the monument stands, as though he has fallen there after being defeated. The vulnerability of the artist's body contrasts with the carefully sculpted muscles and heroic nudity of the bronze figures. The position of the photo, hanging from a wooden beam, echoes the downward movement of the photo. Through this simple intervention, Robert adds multiple layers of meaning to the monument, which converge with the themes in his own work: not only LGBT or queer identity, but also his interest in the human body and how the body can itself be a medium in visual artistic practice.

"The images and objects are calling for an interaction. The performance can thus be perceived as a stylized tour proposing a reading of the works."

Jimmy Robert

ROOM 30

Paramètres, 2011

In the video *Paramètres* (2011), Jimmy Robert attempts to fit cut-out geometric drawings against the contours of his own face. A line of his own text accompanies each of the ten attempts and movements he performs. Robert's words are about language; parameters and textual structures. They are about speech itself and about the way in which the body performs a choreography of movements. The geometric drawings that Robert holds up one by one are two-dimensional representations of 3D figures. Cut out and held up beside the artist's face, they become sculptural forms, which is further emphasized by the artist's meticulous movements.

Jimmy Robert (1975, Guadeloupe) lives and works in Bucharest (Romania). His visual work has been shown in solo exhibitions at The Power Plant, Toronto (2013), 1857, Oslo (2013), MCA, Chicago (2012) and Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris (2012). Robert has presented his performances during Playground at STUK, Leuven (2008) and more recently at Migros Museum, Zürich (2015), Teatro Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro (2012), Kunsthalle Basel (2011) and South London Gallery, London (2010). His work is represented by Galerie Diana Stigter in Amsterdam and Tanya Leighton Gallery in Berlin.

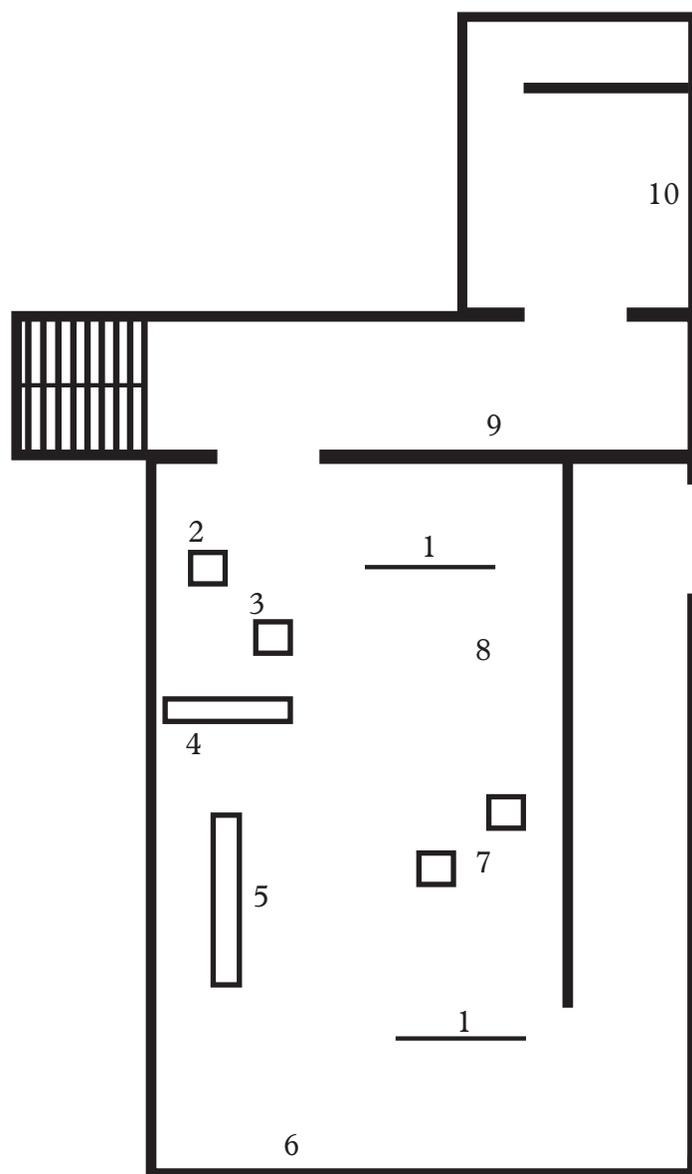
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The following publications by Jimmy Robert are available at the M shop:

Jimmy Robert, Langue matérielle, Jeu de Paume Paris, 2012

Jimmy Robert. Vis-à-vis, MCA Chicago, 2012

Jimmy Robert. Draw the Line, The Power Plant Toronto, 2013



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| 1. | <i>Silk</i> , 2015 | 6. | <i>Untitled (Wearing thin)</i> , 2015 |
| 2. | Idel Ianchelevici, <i>Adolescent</i> , 1951 | 7. | Lili Dujourie, <i>Madrigaal</i> , 1975 & <i>Enjambement</i> , 1976 |
| 3. | Idel Ianchelevici, <i>Dédée, Jeune fille</i> , 1951 | 8. | <i>Untitled (Brouwn)</i> , 2015 |
| 4. | <i>Untitled (Agon)</i> , 2015 | 9. | <i>Untitled (Ompdrailles)</i> , 2013 |
| 5. | <i>Untitled (Smile)</i> , 2015 | 10. | <i>Paramètres</i> , 2011 |