

Exhibition *EN QUELQUES MOTS...* (In a few words...) – La Maison des Arts, Brussels (BE) 2022

Curatorship and texts: Lucile Bertrand

Lucile Bertrand, Pierre Buraglio, Marcelline Delbecq, Eirene Efstathiou, Sylvie Eyberg, Barbara Geraci, Florian Kiniques, On Kawara, Daniel Locus, Stefana McClure, Chantal Maes, Godelieve Vandamme

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The exhibition brings together twelve visual artists (sculptures and installations, photos and videos, drawings, books, and performances) who have a specific relationship with words and with text.

If they each have their specific practice, words are certainly their favorite object, their research material; they question them, weight them, manipulate them...

In each case, conscious of the scope of words, they choose them with precision to reveal, in certain cases, their value and their strength, and in others, their weakness and their lack of consistency. While questioning what words can make the image say, some disrupt their use to provoke the gaze. For others, words replace images: the words themselves become images. Sometimes the meaning appears in a subtle equilibrium between text and image: the meaning of words as well as those of images is often at the intersection of the two. Finally, inversely, some images manifest the impotence of words, or even, in some cases, their disappearance.

One meets the art of absolute concision when just one word is enough, for the sake of discretion or, on the contrary, of assertion. One also comes across the art of borrowing, such as practiced by the poets Emily Dickinson yesterday, and Kenneth Goldsmith today, who construct new phrases from existing ones. The art of narrative is often shaken up or at odds with what one would expect. And the art of covering that sometimes allows to see better.

The texts below, in addition to the images of the exhibition visible on the site, follow the order of appearance of the works, identical to that of the exhibition

- **Daniel Locus – *Jérusalem* and *Roland*, 2019.**

Videos 6' and 2'13''.

With Daniel Locus words have a truly striking force, reviving memories of tragic events. The videos *Roland* and *Jerusalem* (2019) are shown side by side.

At the start of *Jerusalem*, one perceives muted sounds followed by echoes while one believes to see a battle plan. Then appear hands that are weaving: we assist to the fabrication of a high-warp rug. On top of it, arise in disorder, and at an increasingly crazy pace, dates and names of cities that have nothing to do with each other, except the fact that they were all under siege, at this or that moment in time. For example, who remembers that the city of Tournai, whose name reappears regularly, was the repeated target of such violence? Despite oblivion, some of these tragedies almost immediately gave place to the production of works that have been transmitted throughout the centuries, such as these so refined and yet so terrifying tapestries shown in the two videos and filmed in the Tapestry Museum in Tournai, or the *Chanson de Roland* that tells of a bloody betrayal in an exquisite language.

Precisely, in the video *Roland* we are bombarded with fragments of one of those battle-scene tapestries. There are but chopped off heads, bits of human bodies and fallen horses. Above this, as from a teletypewriter, an excerpt from the *Chanson de Roland* slowly scrolls, revealing a true catalog of horrors of which the protagonist is so proud, and who, just as Achille in Homer's *Iliad*, will, in turn, become the victim. The whole piece is accompanied by a worldly hubbub: wars are decided in other places than those where they are fought and by other people than those who fight.

• **Marcelline Delbecq – *Daleko*, 2008**

Sound CD 5'58", framed print 66,8 x 111 x 4 cm, bench 45,5 x 140 x 50 cm.

In *Daleko*, Marcelline Delbecq's installation, words reenchant the imaginary, inviting us to a promenade of the glance. Sitting on a wooden bench, facing a photo of a darkened landscape where only a circle remains clearly visible, we are invited to listen to a quirky story through a headset, told by the actress Elina Löwensohn. While the story slowly creeps into our mind, our gaze wanders on this obscured space and tries to reconstruct the whole picture, as if the luminous circle, like a telescope, was moving. Even though the story does not describe the image, it is nevertheless by the ear that the eye is set in motion. And even if seeing and hearing are solicited on different levels, they end up overlapping each other to create a scene that exists in our mind only. It is then that the author and the spectator merge.

• **Stefana McClure – *Silenced Voices: Forough Farrokhzad*, 2021**

Moleskine notebook, perforated archival inkjet print, pearls. 25 x 38 x 3 cm.

Stefana McClure practices a skillful balance between luminosity and obstruction to better highlight that which she wishes to reveal. On the open double page of a book in Persian, the artist has lodged pearls into holes drilled into the pages' thickness. The pearls, considered in the Orient as a source of knowledge, do not however give us access to the text. They alter it just as much as the holes made through the book. But their charm arouses our curiosity. Under the pearls lies *The Wind-Up Doll* by the Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad, (deceased in 1967 at the age of 32) who subverted the canons of Persian poetry with a language of great modernity. Perhaps the first poet in her country to openly express emotions from a feminine point of view, a committed feminist, she nonetheless hoped that her poetry would not be gendered. Known for her independence and her freedom of tone, she named desire and pleasure. Her poetry shocked and inflamed, and earned her all sorts of torments from some of her relatives, and even from intellectuals, all the while being revered, as she is, still today, by a great number of Iranians.

• **Sylvie Eyberg Asger Taiaksev – *the she*, 2014**

Two uncut books 21,6 x 13,6 cm – one bound and one unbound.

Sylvie Eyberg has a particular affection for Virginia Woolf, whose work has accompanied her for many years. On the three unfolded double-sided sheets of her edition *the she*, we discover reproductions of five pages from original editions of the short stories *The String Quartet* and *Blue and Green* and from the novel *The Years* by the writer, as well as reproductions of the corresponding pages in the French editions. The artist then compared two of the original texts with their translation. Of the short stories, she kept only the articles *the* in English and *le, la, les* in French, as they appear in the editions. Of the novel, she kept only the articles *she* in English and *elle* in French. In addition, she has taken two works previously executed in gravure (see below), for which she had cropped the image of a film set and kept a few snippets of text, all taken from an old issue of *Cinéma pratique*, and then processed them in different shades of grey and black – which she placed side by side or in mirror image.

Not only does Sylvie Eyberg proceed to a *mise en abyme* of the book and the text, she also makes texts and images of texts reflect each other in every sense of the word.

• **Florian Kinique – installation of six slats in glass**

Without title (NO-ON), 2022. Glass, sandblasting on both sides, gilding with 23 ¼ carat gold leaf. 96 x 3 x 0,6 cm.

Without title (MU-ET), 2022. Two slats: glass, sandblasting on the front side. 166 x 3 x 0,6 cm and 168 x 3 x 0,6 cm.

Without title (B-A-L-A-D-3), 2022. Glass, sandblasting on both sides. 168 x 3 x 0,6 cm.

Without title (FALLING), 2019. Glass, sandblasting on the front side. 166 x 3 x 0,6 cm.

Without title (FORT-TORD), 2022. Glass, sandblasting on both sides, paint. 166 x 3 x 0,6 cm.

Florian Kinique leads us into a subtle game of textual and visual exchanges and crossings that send us back to our human condition. It is with delicacy that the artist confronts the body. The physical body as well as the body of the letter. The power as the fallibility of bodies and words.

When the artist describes his installation, he speaks of slats. The word designates several things, including the flat and narrow planks of wood used in carpentry, as well as instruments, equally flat, used to measure distances between dots and to trace lines.

Florian Kiniques' slats are made of glass – fragile and precious but also straight and present – and they indeed correspond to measurements: those of his body, of his partner's, and of his young son's. Each one of these slats is engraved with a word, or the fragment of a word, on at least one of its surfaces, unless the word goes through the thickness to increase its reading's potential.

These slats, standing alone, or joined together, in a precarious equilibrium on the edges of the room's space, speak to us about ourselves, of our speaking bodies and of the speech taking shape. The very choice of the words and their disposition create a form of tension between them: menacing to fall, but still there, persisting in their secret presence.

- **On Kawara – *I Went*, 1968-1979, and *One Million Years: Past and Future*, 1999**

Series of 12 books, 4740 pages, wood bookcase. 21 x 14,8 cm each book.

Box containing two books, 2006 pages 15 x 11 x 4,2 cm each.

With On Kawara a form of secrecy also persists, despite what he revealed about himself throughout his series, edited under the titles *I Went*, *I Met*, and *I Got Up*.

As in repetitive music, time unfolds through tiny shifts observed from one word to another and from one sign to another through a length of time. During a decade, the artist recorded his daily movements on a photocopy of the map of the city where he was, stamping the date at the bottom of each one. The work is collected in twelve thick volumes: each double page presents a dated map on the left and the name of the town on the right. One imagines the artist going through this rigorous ritual every day to constitute, without discourse, with just a trace and a date, his presence in these places.

For the volumes of *One Million Years: Past and Future*, On Kawara has listed the million years that preceded the creation of the series (in 1969) – “For all those who have lived and died” – and the million years that followed its completion (in 1993) – “For the last one”. Despite the protocol's apparent coldness, the subtle differences that occur upon the reading generate a humble look at our relationship to time and to our presence to the world. We are subject to a form of vertigo.

- **Daniel Locus – *Histoires d'histoire* (History Stories), 2009**

Canvas board bookcase, 28 x 24 x 3 cm closed + 20 unbound sheets, 27 x 46 cm open. 20 copies.

In his edition *Histoires d'histoire* Daniel Locus brings forth, on ordinary urban images, the names of places that are also reminders of battles or of great tragedies (Waterloo, Diên Biên Phu, Stalingrad, Hiroshima, etc.) To say “Hiroshima”, for example, is enough for some to conjure up the images and the feeling of horror associated with the name. In these places stamped by infamy, life has nevertheless resumed its familiar course. It is likely that the memory of past events is gradually fading, buried under the years and the new constructions.

- **Godelieve Vandamme – *Frontière visuelle* (Visual Frontier), 2004-2021**

Frozen Chinese ink on paper 300 x 150 cm.

Godelieve Vandamme's work *Frontière Visuelle* explores the limit of language through a metamorphosis. Letters made of frozen Chinese ink are fixed to the top of a large roll of paper to form the two words FRONTIÈRE VISUELLE. As the letters slowly thaw on the paper, we witness the transformation of the visible. Soon all that is left to see are long black streaks, flows and splashes of ink: the frontier is thus this moment of dissolution and passage from one form of the visible to another.

If we asked several persons to transcribe in words a landscape or a face, it would produce as many texts as there were people. And if what we see is not what we say, the opposite is just as true. Words produce images that in their turn are untranslatable into words without being distorted. The images escape and escape from us in their transposition to words, and inversely.

The detour through the words gives us nonetheless access to the invisible (or to the real) that stands between the two. Precisely, the frontier is both what opens and closes, a place of exchanges and of conflicts. Everything is played out in this in-between, where something is lost even as it reveals itself.

• **Lucile Bertrand – *Question de perspective*, 2016**

Pencil and felt pen on Steinbach paper 250 g. 73 x 110 cm.

Words are not neutral and can carry positive or negative prejudices. The meaning of some words can also vary and change over time, through successive shifts or under the pressure of events, political or other. In *LTI, the language of the III Reich*, Victor Klemperer kept track of the deviation of words, and thus of culture, during the Nazi regime.

Viewing *Question de perspective* by Lucile Bertrand, we realize to what degree the language dedicated to travel induces different representations, depending on where one starts from, but above all, from where one speaks. Words and expressions are exchanged in reversed paths through the detail of a mirrored satellite view, also reversed: “Expats” meet “Immigrant workers”, just as “Filles au pair” meet “Domestic workers”... Some words will lose their negative connotation only when the people they represent will gain a higher consideration.

• **Sylvie Eyberg – *to script (123)*, 2014**

Rotogravures grey level and black. Printed on engraving paper Somerset 300g. 43,5 x 35,5 cm framed.

Sylvie Eyberg works in the manner of a film editor. In dated magazines, she selects images that she has looked at thoroughly, and then crops them with precision. The text is submitted to the same operation: the artist preserves but a few scraps that she assembles to form new phrases. The words or the bits of phrases occasionally come to be placed on the image, or to the contrary remain outside. In any case, in each of the works, white has its importance, and the images and words refer to one another, provoking a coming and going of the glance. They hold us on the edge of an enigma, on the edge of desire. And, just as in film, something also happens in the interval and in the off-screen.

Facing *to script (1, 2, 3)* and *the she*, one cannot help but think of the writer’s last book, *Between the Acts*, in which, one summer day in 1939 a group of characters attend a performance in which the actors watch a play about the end of a historical period. A drama is also played out behind the scenes between the characters being themselves confronted by the end of an era. There is thus the question of staging, but also almost that of cinema, and of each one “playing one’s act”.

• **Barbara Geraci – *POUR REMONTER À LA SURFACE* (To get back to the surface), 2021**

Tilted wooden table 404 x 72 cm x 100 et 120 cm H and printed paper 404 x 72 cm; photograph in wooden box 87,2 x 62,2 x 9 cm on the floor; framed print 42, 8 cm x 29, 5 cm.

Barbara Geraci’s installation, *POUR REMONTER À LA SURFACE*, tackles another type of silence: that of the vanished gestures of workers and thus of the vocabulary that was specific to their knowledge.

Many traces still testify to this revolved past, such as the notebooks of her Italian grandfather who came to work in Belgium, and at the same time learned French as well as the specific terms and rules of a foreman at the mine; it is almost as if he had to learn two new languages at once. The notebooks were controlled, parts crossed out, and other parts corrected. The foreman had to control the state of the mine as well as the miners’ work, to avoid accidents. The notebooks are filled with these types of instructions. The artist has broadened her investigations to the steel workers who by sight and by hand inspected the quality of the slabs – those long plates of steel, 12 meters by about 1,30 meters, that had to leave the steel mill without any defects – until the human control was replaced by machines. But these machines are not infallible and can also make mistakes. New forms of control must be created.

Using original documents (personal and administrative), photos and reproductions that she assembles and reinterprets, Barbara Geraci evokes both the discarded knowledge and the scraps of materials – which, piled up, look strangely like huge sheets of crumpled paper – as well as the complexity and mechanization of jobs – which, in the name of security and order, generate even more controls and

hierarchization. We are facing a dark and crossed out landscape, from which humans would have disappeared.

• **Chantal Maes – *Take A Look From The Inside : Lecture poétique, Christian Dotremont, 2004***

Video Black & White 4' 25''.

Roland Barthes writes “The spoken word is irreversible, that is to say: one cannot *take back* a word, except to say precisely that one takes it back. Here to cross out is to add” (*Le Bruissement de la langue. Essais critiques IV*, Seuil; *The Rustle of Language*, 1986, B. Blackwell: Oxford).

Of the video *Take a look from the inside* by Chantal Maes, Francis Smets said that it is “a plea in favor of stammering”, a reflection on the “zigzagging character of life and of thought”*. The stuttering reading of a poem by Christian Dotremont, *Qu’il nous arrive de bredouiller (That sometimes we stammer)*, “is reflected in the uneven stammering and jerky movements of the camera’s recording”. This is literally coupled with the body of the reader, inviting us to take a part in this vision from the interior of the speaking body.

The reader takes us farther with her voice, tense and monotone, and by the image that jumps at the same time as the word stumbles. A word shies away, is regained and repeated. Another word makes her stumble. Ultimately the general meaning of the poem is dislocated in the attention given separately to each word. It is as though one were walking on such a rocky path that one hesitates at each step and cannot embrace the view of the surrounding landscape.

Roland Barthes, again, also writes that “Anyone who is going to speak must be aware of the staging imposed by the use of speech”. A form of self-control, therefore, a priori learned and internalized, without being evident, to the point, justly, that one risks losing oneself as well as disorienting the listener. And yet we would like to promote disorientation – is not art one of its forms? – requiring patience and attention.

*Francis Smet, *Le Corps anarchiste, à propos du travail de Chantal Maes. (The anarchist body, about Chantal Maes’ work)*.

• **Pierre Buraglio – *Memento épigraphe WHAT’S NEW, 1990***

Serigraphy and ‘redaction’ on paper, 82 x 72 cm.

On the monthly page of an agenda well enlarged – *Memento épigraphe WHAT’S NEW* –, Pierre Buraglio has scratched and crossed out in black his appointments and various notes, leaving only a large blue WHAT’S NEW in the middle, like these reminders that everyone circles and underlines with insistence in their notebooks; this something that remains to be done and that one must not forget. Using just this one interrogation, we can question ourselves on the succession and accumulation of our day-by-day feats and gestures. We can also question ourselves on the resurgence of events that we had thought past and left to the oblivion of History.

• **Eirene Efstathiou – *When the Revolution Comes, 2014***

Installation. Día projection of performances on the bottom of the wall. Wall shelf, printed text, cassette-player.

The installation *When the Revolution Comes* documents a series of performances carried out by Eirene Efstathiou in 2014 in Athens in reaction to the resurgence of the far right. Inspired by the Greek resistants’ actions against the colonels’ dictatorship (1967-1974) in the early 1970’s – *Declaration Bombs* –, the artist adapted to the Greek situation the poem *When the Revolution Comes* by the Afro-American group The Last Poets, who fought for civil rights during the same years. She then recorded three voices reading the transformed poem in Greek – one voice per performance. Over the course of three days, the poem was broadcasted in three public squares in the city, using cassette players posed on the ground. Each time, disguised as a partisan of the resistance, the artist came and “exploded” them with hammer blows.

Borrowing elements from two past events to create a third, Eirene Efstathiou also makes them meet each other. If these struggles are not identical, they have in common to be both vain and essential. One assumes that the texts of the *Declaration Bombs* were not sufficient to obtain the fall the Greek colonels, nor that the Last Poets ones gave their rights to the Afro-Americans. Artists are aware of their incapacity

to change the world. And yet. There is an art of protest, that passes not only by gesture but also by words. These circulate, are exchanged and interpreted, and generate an indispensable voice, which is declaimed, sung, and even whispered, such as Anna Akhmatova's poems in Stalin's era. Artists can disappear, but their words remain, and can be taken up by others to support new struggles.

- **Stefana McClure – *A certain Slant of Light*, 2021; *Invisible, as Music*, 2021; *The stars about my Head I felt*, 2021; *I could not see to see*, 2021; *My business is circumference*, 2021**
Cut paper, five invisible hair nets, 7 x 9 x 3 cm each.

It's with humor and impertinence that Stefana McClure revisits the English injunction "To wear ones learning lightly" (understood to "be a well-informed person, without flaunting one's knowledge"). She invites us to wear on our heads one of those stretchable nylon nets – normally used to discretely hold one's hair – into which she slipped tiny phrases from Emily Dickinson's poems and letters. These literary hairnets, hooked to the wall, seem to whisper to your ears that if you wore them, only you would know. Pinnacle of erasure.

Although she lived withdrawn from the world, the American poet had at her disposal a very rich and eclectic library, from which she drew extensively. As Susan Howe, another American poet, says of her, Emily Dickinson "wrote in the hands of many other writers." "Using exaggerations, abbreviations, distortions, amplifications, subtractions, riddles, interrogations, and rewritings, she drew texts from other texts." (Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*. New York: New Directions, 1985, 2007; *Mon Emily Dickinson*, Ypsilon, 2017)

Emily Dickinson's works, so original and so passionate, continue to jostle our intelligence and make us shiver intensely. The fragments chosen by Stefana McClure bring forth images without images – *I could not see to see*. The meaning is lost in the desire to find the image behind the words.

- **Florian Kinques –)(2022**
Gold 18 carat. 2,2 x 0,7 cm and 1,8 x 0,7 cm.

Florian Kinques looks at his companion who looks at the world with concern.

He noticed that her preoccupations manifest themselves in a frown that creates vertical wrinkles above her nose. He, who likes to take the measure of things, made an imprint of them and had them reproduced in gold, in real size, by a jeweler. They are placed at the exact height of his companion's wrinkles on one of the white walls of the room.

One can guess that his companion is dear to him. We also find again the interest of the artist for the punctuation. These two fine lines between the eyes, which the artist sees as "parentheses that turn their backs to each other", instead of isolating information, open up to the world to question it. It is indeed her attention to what surrounds her that the artist wants to celebrate here.

- **Pierre Buraglio – 4 AOÛT, 1989**
Lithography, stencil and 'redaction' on tar paper, 124 x 91,3 cm.

On tar paper, postcards mailed in 1914-1915 from Cameroon and the Congo, then under colonial rule, are occulted in black. In the middle, Pierre Buraglio has stamped a huge red 4 AOÛT, night of the abolition of privileges and feudal laws in France in 1789. At the same time, the country possessed slaver colonies whose administrators prevented their special status from being challenged by the Revolution, leading to revolts followed by bloody repressions. Afterwards, the French Empire did not leave it at that, since a part of the Congo and Cameroon, notably, also became part of its colonies...

By what he calls his "redactions" Pierre Buraglio points out the omissions of History that change its reading, and which should not be ignored. And if the images that remain are those of their covering, the artist is nonetheless far from discreet: as in *What's New*, we can almost hear the stamping in their center.

• **Lucile Bertrand – *perpetratio*, 2008**

Series of 15 original collages and inkjet print on paper, 24 x 31 cm each.

In the series *perpetratio* by Lucile Bertrand there are no words left to say the unspeakable. Over the course of fifteen sequences, colored dots arise at the same time as a seemingly light-hearted and joyous image. By their chromatic changes and their movement on the image, that progressively darkens in parallel, these dots are enough to express various states and emotions, from joy to fear, from threat to aggression and to its outcome, while offering several possible readings of each sequence as well as of their whole. The image gradually fades away, leaving only the traces of a crime that was committed but was never named.