

UNI

A reflection on the encountered possibility of an excess of meaning, disguised as surface: seduction as method, ambiguity as resistance

Sofie Van Loo

*I never fall apart, because I never fall together*¹.

Andy Warhol (1928–1987)

*When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am unafraid*².

Audre Lorde (1934–1992)

*Each person has the possibilities of being simultaneously several beings, having several lives. [...] You can't lie to yourself sexually*³.

Kathy Acker (1947–1997)

*The work that anybody does as an artist—if it doesn't reflect resistance then they're helping a system of control become more perfect*⁴.

David Wojnarowicz (1954–1992)

*Go where no meaning is to create meaning*⁵.

Robert Glück

*Everyone here is a work of art*⁶.

Madonna

*Never meet or never part*⁷.

Emeline Descreaux

*Raving to techno is an art and a technique at which queer and trans bodies might be particularly adept but which is for anyone who lets the beat seduce them*⁸.

McKenzie Wark

Introduction:

For the upcoming edition of Antwerp Pride, whose starting point is *Fearless*, visual artists Carla Arocha and Clara Lissens are collaborating on an ambitious artistic initiative that aims to build a bridge between Pride and the contemporary art scene in Antwerp⁹. Central to this project is the creation of a float for the parade, but the initiative deliberately extends beyond that single moment. The idea emerged after Arocha's experience at Pride last year. Although she has attended Pride events for decades, including in New York, Chicago, and later in Belgium, she observed that the art sector, unlike various political parties, is barely visible within the festivities, and she wanted to change that. Arocha wrote: [...] *Historically since 1984 [the first time she attended Pride] much has happened, most significantly for me the AIDS epidemic from the late 70s until well into the late 90s, which affected mostly the gay community along with drug users and women in the Western world and entire populations in other parts of the world. As a*

young person in the 80s, my life was deeply affected by seeing friends and heroes pass away from the disease and by the gross neglect of the crisis. The impact was so profound that I chose to write my thesis on AIDS as a graduating Biology student. Today the AIDS crisis is much more under control in the Western world, but the underlying issues that enabled such neglect—such as discrimination and fear—are still very much alive. It remains of great importance to support fellow human beings; a community cannot be excluded, discriminated against, or feared simply for being who one is¹⁰. Arocha has also frequently referred to the work of various icons and queer/ homosexual artists such as Liberace, Andy Warhol, and Robert Mapplethorpe, who have inspired her in the development of specific works, when she was still producing solo work. The treatment of perception not merely as a visual experience, but equally as a material and conceptual condition, or even a worldview, also appears, in her collaboration with Stéphane Schraenen, to resonate with the work of various LGBTQIA artists. Glitter, shimmer, sparkle, the ideas of glamour, sexuality, reflection, fragmentation, and sheen, as well as the play with optical illusion and camouflage, where seduction can be conveyed through both the body and a (self)reflective space or be reflected in a fragmentary manner, are strongly present in the work of Carla Arocha and Stéphane Schraenen. A certain form of ‘camp excess’ disrupts, even fractures, the formalist purity associated with minimalism they engage with: *it queers the grid, transforming it from a system of control into a vessel for contested memory*¹¹. Penis rings and glory holes alongside an artistic engagement with queer nightlife culture, have also sporadically appeared in their work in an indirect manner. It is, moreover, noteworthy that in the United States, opinion pieces have recently appeared in newspapers such as *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* under the titles *I’m Gay, but that doesn’t make me ‘Queer’*, with the subtitle *My sexuality doesn’t require me to reject all that is ‘normal’ and ‘legitimate’*, and *I’m Gay, not Queer. It matters*, which the online magazine *Advocate* has addressed: *They suggest we can have our rights so long as we reassure the broader public that we are not too political, too gender-nonconforming, too disruptive, too trans, too angry, too difficult, too visible, too queer. Every generation seems to produce a new version of the “good gay”: the one who is safe, usually white, comfortably masculine, eager to assure straight America that he wants the same things everyone else wants and that he is nothing like those other queer people making everyone so uncomfortable. [...] No one is asking these men to identify as queer. But there is an enormous difference between explaining your own relationship to a word and using one of the world’s most influential opinion platforms to suggest that queerness itself has become a political liability. Queerness was never simply another synonym for gay. It became a home for people whose lives resisted easy categorization, whose identities complicated inherited assumptions, and whose existence rarely fit comfortably inside institutions that preferred cleaner stories*¹².

Until 1973, homosexuality was listed in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) as a mental disorder, also categorized as a “sociopathic personality disturbance” or “sexual deviation”. The WHO only later removed homosexuality from its international classification. In 1990, it was officially removed from the ICD (*International Classification of Diseases*). This does not mean it is socially or legally accepted in all countries. Together with a group of artists and organizers, including Carla Arocha’s husband, painter Luc Tuymans, who, for example,

painted *The Audition* (2014), depicting the bisexual Judy Garland auditioning for *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), and in more recent works employs saturated chromatic ranges and combinations, a neon-noir combined with a fluorescent aesthetic, translated into more obscure cinematic painterly stills with unnatural, intense or almost tropical colour accents, reminiscent (at least to me) of American experimental queer underground cinema of the late 1970s and early 1980s (though not necessarily in a psychedelic or kitsch sense), as can also be observed in the unruly, elegant style of erotic photography by Veronica Pot (see below), Vanessa Van Obberghen (Tuymans' assistant and also an artist), Jesse Siegel (artist), and Tom Sanders (curator) (see below) a first concept was developed. The project originated from a single central artwork: a float designed by Clara Lissens for the Antwerp Pride Parade. For the float, she is developing an inflatable, air-filled, sound-producing sculpture described as an "*abstract self-portrait*": life begins with the ability to inhale and exhale oxygen without fear of suffocation. The abstract self-portrait also connects with Clara Lissens' broader artistic practice, in which she combines electronic, pop-inspired music, sculpture, and performance while exploring questions surrounding identity, abstraction, and the existential void within a late-capitalist society, or a neoliberalism reaching its endpoint, which she relates, for example, to "black holes" and the "quantum gap" (the energy gap/spectral gap) from a more cosmologically oriented perspective. Black holes and energy gaps are indeed difficult, if not impossible, to "colonize" or "occupy", which may also be the underlying idea of the work in question. Think, for instance, of Kim Gordon's song "Subcon" (album: *Play Me*, 2026), which addresses Elon Musk and other tech billionaires who seek to colonise Mars, which offers a completely different perspective from that of experimental avant-garde jazz musician and pianist Sun Ra (1914–1993), who precisely used science fiction to evoke the African dream of self-realization, making it conceivable again as a horizon through a projection into the cosmos. Kim Gordon's critical words are: "*Wanna go to Mars? They're not sure what they can do. But you wanna go to Mars? You wanna go to Mars and then what? Then what? Then what? Then what? Then what? Then what? Then what? And then what? And then.*" "By taking things away and abstracting them, you come closer to what remains," explains Clara Lissens, a statement that humorously appears to clash with the remark by the equally engaged artist and ally AMVK (Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven), who once stated: "*Art lovers are attracted to the abstract, but the abstract will never be sexually stimulating*"¹³ (see below). Lissens' inflatables function as performative objects in which participation and collectivity play an important role. The DJs on the Pride float include electronic musicians and visual artists such as Emeline Descreaux, also known through her music under the name Siuxsun, who is, for example, a fan of the Cologne-based cinematic minimal techno diva Cio d'Or, now 68 years old, as well as Hantrax/Han Swolfs, a prominent figure within the underground scene known for his live electronic music performances, and visual artist/painter Rufus Michielsen.

The "*abstract self-portrait*" by Clara Lissens can be seen as particularly compelling at a time when identity politics on the left is often accused of installing a self-satisfied moralism of correctness and of fostering cancel culture, while simultaneously being heavily attacked from (far) right-wing positions. As a result, any critique of identity discourse is often interpreted as support for the right (or, in an American context, for

Trump). This unfolds at a moment when approximately sixty countries worldwide still deny LGBTQIA+ individuals their identity or render it legally punishable, prohibiting sexual acts, relationships, or public expressions, where even solidarity to the LGBTQIA+ community can lead to prosecution (for example in Nigeria, Uganda, Somalia, Ghana, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and so on). Surveillance and denunciation societies are thereby literally instituted and deployed for the control and punishment of increasingly criminalized bodies. Due to a rather specific political hardening on both the left and right sides of the Western political spectrum, while processes of “branding,” “pinkwashing,” and “homonationalism” are simultaneously at play, identity discourse also increasingly appears to be able to be used or instrumentalized, or even misused, as a substitute for, or a neutralization of, for example existing solidarity with those who are oppressed or marginalized within society, or for a renewed, somewhat more clearly articulated class struggle, in which the actual socio-economic relations in our late-capitalist, neoliberal era have meanwhile become increasingly painfully visible and explicit, both locally and global perspective (cf. Catherine Liu)¹⁴.

When it comes to LGBTQIA+ rights and gender diversity (non-binary / gender non-conforming), it often appears that these are indeed placed under the umbrella of “identity politics”, whereby an intensified academisation and institutionalisation has, perhaps partly unintentionally, facilitated or enabled a specific form of “commodification”, “branding”, and “consumption” of LGBTQIA+ related topics. This in turn may also be understood as a form of “performative allyship” or at least as fostering the idea that cultural or symbolic recognition amounts to sufficient political progress, alongside same-sex marriage (which in some cases is again meeting resistance for example among American Republicans), and that advocating for more, or even something entirely different, can more easily be rendered suspicious in the current cultural climate. As philosopher and performance artist Luce deLire writes in response to her essay *The Queer Art of Hospitality: “If You can Fuck you can Dance”* the somewhat depressing words: *Queerness has been incorporated into global capitalism in various ways: for the production of marketable differences, the consumption of these differences, the pink washing of neoliberal imperialism, the maintenance of social hierarchies along the lines of race, gender, class, etc...*¹⁵. Does such an observation in the meantime trigger the concept of “post-identity” (of which both a progressive and a conservative variant now exist), or is “post-identity” rather the reactive or resistance-generating response to this? It is indeed remarkable that identity / diversity appears to “cooperate” particularly well with, or to fit within, neoliberal logic, as cultural theorist Catherine Liu observes. When an identity or diversity discourse can no longer challenge the underlying structures of a system, a discourse, etc., but how does one do that in a completely exhausted institutional critique, in a time when irony no longer carries the weight it once apparently had?, this merely amounts to a moral upgrade of an existing system. In a world of overstimulation, burnout and exhaustion, social, economic and political tensions and conflicts, aggression, scarcity or conversely indifference, alienation and apathy, sensitisation often also appears capable of producing the opposite effect. It is a fact that trans and queer relations, trans and queer bodies, trans and queer thinking, and trans and queer contexts are (still) more easily misunderstood, or represented in more stereotypical ways, or sometimes perceived

as somewhat more perverse than “the normal / the normative”, and have in the past (and even up to the present day) been stigmatised for precisely this reason (the original negative meaning of the term “queer” is in fact “strange”, “unusual”, or “odd”, and it was used as a derogatory term particularly for “homosexual men”). But how, in these more uncertain times, can one effectively continue to work, create, feel, connect, and think beyond exploitation, fear, and sensationalisation? The initiators of the artistic program for Pride Antwerp also wanted to go beyond mere participation in the parade. The project was therefore soon conceived as a broader artistic intervention before, during, and after Pride Week, in which various art spaces in and around Antwerp are activated. Individual artists, both local and international, are also invited to present work or develop temporary projects. This initiative is led by C A S S T L and BURO_ASAP, together with visual artist and organiser Lieven Segers and his VZW aaimachine, where Segers has previously invited and exhibited various artists from queer contexts, with the aim of strengthening solidarity within the artistic community during Pride. This initiative builds on earlier Pride programming, including the exhibition *FIXATIONS* by Bruce LaBruce at C A S S T L in 2022. This overarching initiative was further developed in close collaboration with Tom Sanders and visual artist Philip Huyghe, who previously co-curated the exhibition *Together* in 2020 at M HKA.

The artistic and conceptual practice of the erudite and multidisciplinary artist Philip Huyghe, inspired among others by Pierre Molinier (1900–1976), Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–1975), and Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957–1996), is particularly significant in relation to how identity is thought about today. His work revolves around a radical interrogation of identity, including that of the artist, which he long approached through a doubling “of the space of his own mother”, but also through, for example, his “*doppelgänger*” “P. Huyghe” (also recalling the artist Pierre Huyghe), through which the idea of a form of “super-symmetry” emerged, where in super-symmetry every elementary particle has a so-called super-partner, comprising a real and a fictional figure, which he integrates into himself and into reality. Here, techniques of assemblage, performance, drag, and collage are radicalised, while at the same time a rather “rarefied” (bourgeois) space is given an imagined architectural redefinition, which can temporarily be understood as a form of “*in-between space*” also a philosophical, anthropological, and literary subject that the artist later further developed in research-based and fictional form in a doctoral project in the arts (KASK, HoGent, 2014–2015). In his doctorate, he asked himself what it means if one’s identity is completely erased, a remarkably topical question, and replaced by another, and one thus becomes someone else entirely. The idea of the “*doppelgänger*” nevertheless originates from a positive desire to transcend experienced limitations and boundaries and to reverse them as a kind of identity in motion, somewhat reminiscent of both the life and work of his close friend and neighbour in Antwerp, AMVK, who has also frequently worked with homosexual artists such as choreographer/dancer Marc Vanruxt. According to AMVK (a non-binary or gender-nonconforming name), who appears to have been gender-fluid for almost her entire life (before the term became common), and throughout her life queer, experimental, and often highly subversive work has been introduced into the mainstream art world without breaking away from the experimental underground, was most strongly drawn to the art of homosexual men and, from a feminist perspective, also explored the non-binary. Her own

sexuality still needs to be added to the spectrum of sexual possibilities, although this might now, according to her, be understood as part of “the asexual spectrum” as if the “asexual” still occupies the position of a possible eroticisation that could follow. At least this is how it appears in AMVK’s formulation, since according to her own account her sexuality has perhaps not yet been sufficiently recognised as simply another form of sexuality than those that are commonly accepted. AMVK stated that she needed a man like performance artist Danny Devos in her life, because she, as she herself described, constantly fell in love with both men and women and could deal with this in a relatively obsessive way. Although in this context it is of course her artistic contribution to the contemporary art world that is at stake, such narratives remain inspiring in order to continue adopting less rigid or sterile positions toward “identity”. At the same time, they evoke the words of the feminist and experimental punk writer, the bisexual Kathy Acker (1947–1997), who, for instance, had an aversion to the term “bisexuality”. Acker often worked with what might be called a form of literary collage or “cut-up” (related to William S. Burroughs (1914–1997)). In addition, she was influenced by the work of figures such as Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), Georges Bataille (1897–1962), and Jean Genet (1910–1986). She reused, parodied, and rewrote existing texts, blending them with her own material. Her work contains abrupt shifts in perspective, diary fragments, pornographic scenes, and philosophical passages interwoven. She broke with linear narrative structures, and identities such as the “I” are unstable: characters merge or shift roles. For Acker, writing was not a neat representation of reality, but a way of dismantling language itself. Acker’s work was not merely “explicit”; it sought to render sexuality thinkable otherwise. She demonstrated that sexuality is not a fixed identity, but something fluid and constructed, which aligns with the findings of the feminist queer theorist Judith Butler, who argued that the way we experience, understand, and name gender and sexuality is strongly shaped by history, culture, language, social practices and norms, and by repetition and behavior (*Gender Trouble* (1990) / *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993)). This does not mean, however, that gender and sexuality would be “invented” or “without consequence.” By employing explicit and sometimes uncomfortable scenes, Kathy Acker exposed power relations (such as dominance, violence, and traditional gender roles). In Acker’s work, sexuality becomes a terrain of resistance against social norms rather than something that neatly fits within fixed categories¹⁶. The tension between art and life, reality and imagination, the actual and the virtual, appearance and reality is also explored by Philip Huyghe. He repeatedly attempts to shift the meaning of original, often photographic source material through a deep process of construction, removal, refocusing, and recontextualisation. Parallel to how our memory functions, working with recollections of the past while simultaneously dealing with perceptions, experiences, thoughts, imaginations, and emotions in the present, as well as projections and future perspectives, he meticulously constructs images that combine different temporal layers. In this way, something like nostalgia is countered by confronting the past with its tendency toward poetic reflex. For Huyghe, how a form once was is therefore not separated from its future possibilities, which can continue to be developed. He compares this intermediate level to a subject/individual in a transitional phase (cf. rites of passage). His method also creates space to engage in a new way with a rather elegant aesthetic and the uncanny/the unsettling (something situated between life

and death), which are still often interpreted as opposites.

For the exhibition *Together* (2020), Carla Arocha and Stéphane Schraenen, alongside Marijke De Roover and Stef van Looveren, were invited by Tom Sanders and Philip Huyghe as co-curators, resulting in an exhibition at M HKA with Arca (who recently collaborated on the film released for the launch of Madonna's new album *Confessions II* (2026)), Carla Arocha & Stéphane Schraenen, Kasper Bosmans, Jack Davey, Marijke De Roover, Nan Goldin, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Martine Gutierrez, Megan-Leigh Heilig, Donna Huanca, Philip Hughe, Aay Liparoto, Jack Pierson, Jacolby Satterwhite, Cindy Sherman, Victoria Sin, Jack Smith, and Stef van Looveren. Incidentally, the work of Arca and the multifaceted artist Jack Davey forms part of the collection of Carla Arocha and Luc Tuymans. Davey, who studied fashion and fine arts in Antwerp and was also taught by AMVK, is currently based in London, where he lives and works (see below).

In 2026, Stef van Looveren also presented the exhibition *Cosmic Body – First Incision* at M HKA, which consisted of both a site-specific installation and a performance that could be described as a hybrid, alchemy-based temple-laboratory centred on material transformation, raising the question of how “change” can be explored as ritual and embodied experience. As in earlier performances (for example at De Singel in 2022 and 2024), Van Looveren asked what happens when learned and transmitted roles and identities lose their meaning, consistently starting from a non-binary, queer, and fluid identity, which is likewise manifest in their sculptural works, while also regularly exploring connections with BDSM. Marijke De Roover had already addressed BDSM in her solo exhibition *Cum as your madness* (2024) at KIOSK in Ghent, which was also the title of a film she presented at the Centre Pompidou in 2023. This psychedelic, sadomasochistic/ (semi)pornographic, queer, and feminist performative exhibition was constructed as a horror experience, in fact a cinematic, theatrical, and both physically and psychologically intense performance that engaged the audience through interaction, suggestive themes around sexuality, violence, and power(lessness), and narrative tactics actively deployed against the current macho climate. BDSM was examined by the artist as a complex and layered ritual and somewhat religiously inflected theatre, in which the “frightening” is not purified, something that can also be observed, for example, in the most recent film *Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma* (2026) by Jane Schoenbrun, who has developed a queer affection for the eighties slasher genre, which could originally be described as a misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic genre. According to the artist, BDSM can contribute to transcending stereotypical gender roles, developing trust and negotiation skills, and practising a non-fragilising or non-fragmenting form of “vulnerability” by consciously exploring ideas of power/control and submission in dialogue. The lesbian painter Monica Majoli has already shown in a somewhat striking way that subjects such as BDSM, queer intimacy (primarily, but not exclusively between homosexual men), and marginal subcultures are just as worthy of representation as more classical themes in painting, and that it is a matter not only of broadening the art-historical tradition, but also of continuously questioning, shifting, and deepening it, but how can one ensure that precisely this dynamic of change in contemporary art itself is not regarded as an endpoint, which sometimes seems to be the case? From her broader multimedia and diverse artistic practice, De Roover also proposed a more “threatening”

or somewhat more “dangerous” form of feminism, instead of the current “empowerment branding” from which the consumer can in fact more easily escape. The question can also be raised whether this does not equally apply to topics associated with the LGBTQIA+ movement, as if through this a more embodied and intuitive way of engaging with, for example, intimacy/ eroticism could be rediscovered in the present time, in which “ghosting”, “bias-motivated violence”, “digital queer hunting”, and “targeted entrapment” appear more frequently on social media and dating apps oriented toward LGBTQIA+ users than previously assumed, often with real-world consequences of discrimination and fraud beyond the digital sphere. On another level, yet equally intertwined with everyday existence, it is striking that many queer bookstores and gay and lesbian bars, now expanded to include trans women for example, in various cities have in recent years been forced to close, a global phenomenon that is often presented positively from the perspective of the idea of a “(successful) integration into society” (in which case the necessity would no longer arise), or have had to secure additional funding in highly absurd ways in order to survive, making them not only vulnerable but also markedly reduced in public space, raising once again the question of where people can still meet, if not online, at someone’s home, at a (radical) Pride, or in that one remaining bar or club night, or by joining one of the relatively rare temporary initiatives such as a rave, pop-up bar (cf. *Mothers & Daughters* in Brussels), workshop, concert, or exhibition. Nevertheless, there are also positive observations to be made at the same time: Brussels will, for example, gain a new lesbian bar, Madrona, for which collective funds were raised. In Brussels, on 28 June 2026, also a Radical Pride was organised at Place de l’Albertine: *United against pinkwashing and homonationalism, against transphobic and racist imperialism*, which shows that the current formats of Pride are also being questioned by a part of the LGBTQIA+ movement itself. “Homonationalism” is a political concept that describes how LGBTQ+ rights and visibility are strategically appropriated by nationalist, far-right, or imperialist agendas. It highlights how states use narratives of sexual progressiveness to justify xenophobic, racist, or colonial policies, by portraying marginalised or foreign groups as inherently “backward”.

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In the contemporary art world and its surrounding environment, one frequently hears voices claiming that LGBTQIA+ artists and/or artists of colour, for example, supposedly have it significantly easier today than, say, “the white, heterosexual (cis) man over fifty years old”. Diversity and identity politics are often praised only when they effectively generate “profit” yet this does not automatically mean that it is therefore desirable to add “more difference” to an existing discourse from that position or to shift it accordingly. Nevertheless, there are indeed many queer artists and their allies whose work can no longer be denied today, including as an inspiration for the work of many others who situate themselves outside that identity spectrum. One may think here of the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini, Andy Warhol, Paul Thek, Peter Hujar, Robert Mapplethorpe, David Wojnarowicz, Nan Goldin, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Chantal Akerman and Donna Gottschalk, or more “recently”, for example, Catherine Opie, Wolfgang Tillmans, Monica Majoli, Julie Mehretu, Collier Schorr, Pauline Boudry & Renate Lorenz, Joshua Serafin, Katja Mater, Mona Filleul or Spyros Rennt, to name only a few examples. It is also not

the recognition of different identities, nor the inclusion of identity-related subjects or diversity within contemporary art, nor a historiographical correction of the canon or discourse that is (necessarily) being questioned here, although critical questions may of course always be raised regarding their development. It is also certainly not the case that every LGBTQIA+ artist engages with identity-related themes or, more specifically, with gender diversity and sexual orientation in a strict sense. At the same time, one can speak of a specific “trans and queer aesthetics”, perhaps even a “trans and queer mysticism”, alongside an inspiration drawn from “trans and queer theory” (Michel Foucault / Judith Butler / Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick / Leo Bersani / Jack Halberstam / Paul B. Preciado / McKenzie Wark, etc.). The question remains, however, how LGBTQIA+ identity and gender diversity can simultaneously be both depoliticised and, on the (far) right side of the political spectrum, precisely be construed as a radical or extreme (political) ideology with a specific political agenda or even a genuine manipulation plan. “Diversity as an asset” i.e. not merely the toleration of differences between people but the conscious deployment of diversity as a valuable resource, has to a certain extent also often been used in either academic or commercial terms, even deployed as a market strategy or almost “automatically” linked to progressive thinking, innovation, and wellbeing. This does not mean, however, that this has not at times been the case, but which, as a starting point, can be described as stifling or constraining in the development of an oeuvre, for example when it is automatically projected onto it. Concepts such as “queer”, “drag”, and “camp” are also terms and aesthetic categories that have by now become widely established, even appearing in the work of visual artists who do not belong to the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. Susan Sontag already suggested in *Notes on Camp* (1964) that “camp” with its love of style, the artificial / the constructed / the unnatural / the decadent, exaggeration, hybrid and impure forms, and specific notions of freedom and anti-moralism, cannot be reduced to a mere concept, but is rather a way of seeing, a mode of aesthetic consciousness arising from an aesthetic recoding of traditional norms. The drive toward “authenticity” which denies the idea of reality and its perception as a “construction”, something that currently appears to be desired once again, was successfully problematised by “camp” for example (cf. mannerism / decadence, etc.). These concepts and aesthetic categories also possess a certain (cyber)hybridity, a specific sensitivity, a particular engagement with corporeality, sexuality, and the erotic gaze, a different mode of thinking and imagining, or a multifaceted and fluid interpretation of object–subject relations. From these also emanates a certain danger or threat, which nevertheless can equally be experienced as “challenging / provocative / sexy,” or even as an intensified awareness or a contested, disputed, or hard-won memory, which in turn reflects on its relation to contemporary conceptions of time and space.

The group exhibition *UNI* (2026) at Galerie Annie Gentils can be described as the artistic offshoot of the project *Together* (2020) at M HKA, with several overlapping names such as Carla Arocha & Stéphane Schraenen, Kasper Bosmans, Jack Davey, Marijke De Roover, Philip Huyghe, and Stef Van Looveren, although this time Tom Sanders and Annie Gentils are the curators involved. The aforementioned Vanessa Van Obberghen, AMVK, Lieven Seghers, Clara Lissens, Emeline Descreaux / Siuxsun, and Hantrax / Han Swolfs also participate, alongside various other visual artists, such as Messieurs Delmotte and Juliet Jaspers. For *UNI*, an open curatorial approach was chosen, with a selection of

artists primarily from the Antwerp art scene or those who have maintained a connection to it, and whose work can also be seen as resistance against the current instrumentalisation and narrowing of “queer expression and/or queer meaning” but equally against a total controllability of “(gender) diversity or simply difference”. It is striking that “bisexuality” is still often seen as the “odd one out”. The London-based artist Jack Davey, selected for UNI and who is homosexual, has written that he does not wish to position himself as a spokesperson for “all” LGBTQIA+ persons, and that his work is also not directly concerned with the “objectification” of LGBTQIA+ persons (as an inversive form of marginalisation?) through their work. However, he has stated that the protection and representation of LGBTQIA+ persons is of crucial importance to him and remains a central concern. At the same time, he seeks to detach explicit political messages from his work. This does not mean, however, that these dimensions are not present in his work or cannot be found within it. Nor does it imply that every autobiographical dimension has been removed, but rather that it is addressed more implicitly and subtly. According to him, these are subjects that the viewer may discover themselves, provided they are open to doing so, by absorbing the different layers of the work, allowing them to settle, and reflecting upon them. Thus, themes such as anger, desire, lust, passion, frustration, and determination do indeed appear, but they are readable only through the more formal and psychological layers of the work (for a description of the work: see below).

The underlying idea of UNI is therefore to create the best possible conditions in which one can meaningfully engage with the versatility and artistic quality of the highly diverse works of both LGBTQIA+ artists AND their allies¹⁷, some of whom have since passed away, such as the multifaceted homosexual artist Andrew Webb (1966–2019), the French artist and natural scientist Paul Armand Gette (1927–2024), inspired by feminine eroticism, female genitalia, and lingerie, about whose work the renowned curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, himself homosexual, published a book, and the feminist Marc Rossignol (1954–2025), who over the decades developed a remarkable non-binary oeuvre. In UNI, which brings together nearly thirty artists, a field unfolds that is primarily, but not exclusively, shaped by a non-binary, queer, drag, and camp sensibility. This approach to contemporary art moves sensorially, aesthetically, and research-driven between the intensification of looking / the gaze, observation, and perception, also through the conscious engagement of other senses, between imagination, reflection, knowledge, and memory, and between the resistance of subject, object, all in-between forms, and matter. At the same time, it extends across a spectrum of emotion and affect, and directly or indirectly questions the mythical and manipulative constructions of reality and structures of power. From diverse personal perspectives or viewpoints and multifaceted, often interdisciplinary artistic practices, the artists explore boundaries and, above all, the ways in which these can be shifted within their work. They question existing systems of meaning and symbolic codes, the mental and cognitive domain, and phenomena such as lack, excess, decadence, and humour. Equally, they navigate the liminal spaces between abstraction and figuration, traversing realms of space and time, and moving through the layered terrains of (art) history, memory, and language. In this movement, they rethink traditional notions of subject and object, originality and copy, ornament and fetish, context and universality, as well as the handling of representation, image, matter,

technology, and media. Style, form, and meaning, as well as notions of culture, circular economy, and ecology, are also addressed through layered, daring, experimental, imaginative, and sometimes radical strategies that are simultaneously sensuous, intuitive, and incisive. A dialogue with the decorative and ornamental, with surface and appearance, with optical illusion, mirroring, and reflection, is not avoided. On the contrary: how things look, are experienced, and can be manipulated, and how the illusory and artificial operate within this, constitutes an active field of research for several artists. However, this in no way means that the philosophical notion of something like “truth”, or the question of the relation between representation and reality, is abandoned, although a degree of doubt is introduced, while simultaneously creating more space for imagination, without thereby entirely erasing alienation or the uncanny. At the same time, much of the work opens up an intimate inner space, even when situated in public or exterior space: an alternative architecture in which, for example, presence, corporeality, perversity, the obscene, eroticism, intimacy, sexuality, and gender frequently intertwine with forgotten or marginalised ritual traditions, futuristic accents, or future-oriented reflections, and a more opaque, mysterious approach to what might currently be considered overly transparent (this can, for example, be observed in the work of Veronika Pot, see below). These registers manifest both in a retro-synth-pop-like, cyber-hybrid, sometimes futuristic aesthetic and in dialogue with intimate environmental conditions, nature, and ecology, blending with ideas of the unconscious, consciousness, and image-, form-, and meaning-production. Echoes of bygone times and recent histories, as well as resonances of spirituality and the mystical, remain present and are not purified, although new media practices also find their place in this exhibition (AMVK, Marijke De Roover, etc.). Within this constellation, a distinctly queer and/or (post)feminist voice regularly resonates, sometimes infused with humour (AMVK, Marijke De Roover, etc.), and often sensitive to socio-political tensions. At the same time, this attitude remains connected to an expanded, playful contemporary understanding of the modern taboo of “beauty” which is rendered thinkable outside normative or purist frameworks, redefined as more experimental, queer and/or hybrid, and manifested both materially, aesthetically, and conceptually. What is considered attractive, what feels intimate, and what simultaneously unsettles has never deterred the queer-sensitive artist. As a whole, the group exhibition thus suggests a form of collective intelligence, a co-creation in which similarities and differences between works do not need to be resolved or smoothed into a single, clearly defined theme, but instead continue to resonate in their tension and polyphony.

From the aesthetically and conceptually rich, ambiguous, playful, erotic, and humorous oeuvre of the multidisciplinary artist Andrew Webb (1966–2019), full of linguistic play, visual peculiarities, and anagrams, who lived in Antwerp and Brussels with his partner, art historian and visual artist Jon Thompson, before returning to the UK, several collages from the series *Unfolding Leaves* (2006) are shown. In these collages, the artist confronts the striking similarities between the representation of the male body in religiously inspired Renaissance painting and devotional images, and its representation in the (post)modern tradition of homoerotic erotica and pornography (including various images drawn from his own life), which Webb compellingly juxtaposes with images of flowers, leaves, and decorative ribbons. Other collages show Webb’s early engagement with the question of the unrecognised state of “Palestine.” His poetic paintings of ejaculations

rendered in gold paint on paper are also remarkable in their subtle sharing of homosexual intimacy with the viewer (*Lip*, 2006; *Untitled*, 2011). The American conceptual and performance artist James Lee Byars (1932–1997), who frequently used gold leaf or performed in golden lamé suits and was shown at Wide White Space in Antwerp in 1969, was a significant source of inspiration for Webb. Although Andrew Webb was honoured with a posthumous exhibition at M HKA in 2021, organised in collaboration with his gallerist Annie Gentils, and is represented in the museum collection, it remains somewhat surprising that his oeuvre is not more widely known internationally.

Perhaps it is primarily Ria Pacquée¹⁸, who was close friends with Webb and Thompson, who provocatively demonstrates in her work—previously exhibited in 2025 at Pizza Gallery—that both the LGBTQIA+ movement and its allies within contemporary art must continue to dare to position themselves with sufficient radicality or at least sufficient resistance, without attaching a self-satisfied moralism of one’s own righteousness: on the contrary. One photograph by Pacquée shows a self-portrait in which the warmly dressed Pacquée, her hood pulled over her head, looks out of frame in a simultaneously challenging and almost affectless manner while holding a wooden “dildo-like” form in front of her crotch. In this image, she confronts (and potentially refutes) the long-standing idea that women were considered carriers of meaning but not makers/creators of meaning themselves, which was displaced through (the phallogocentric gaze upon) their bodies and which they were expected to “meaningfully” reflect back toward the “genius, intellectual, creative man”, later also linked in psychoanalysis to a double-sided “castration anxiety”. Feminist artists such as Hannah Wilke (1940–1993), Carolee Schneemann (1939–2019), Valie Export (1940–2026), and the younger Sarah Lucas, for example, have confronted such issues through radically sexual gestures directed at the crotch, breasts, or face, in which the body and its artificial extensions are allowed to “speak”, and in which the phallic connotation, including that which may emanate from the vagina itself, is used inversely or subversively, carrying the underlying meaning that even the (androgynous, butch-appearing, etc.) woman also “produces” knowledge. Here, the phallic object is no longer understood as an externalisation or manifestation of male or patriarchal power, but is instead deployed as a possible instrument of self-definition (cf. *As I walk I resist. Bang the drum and Fuck the gun*, Pizza Gallery, Antwerp, 2025), an evolution that appears to have developed from her sustained artistic research into the minimal meaning of near-invisibility in public space. The subversion of binary gender roles has also consistently been one of the focal points in Pacquée’s oeuvre. Perhaps her best-known photograph is that of the naked Lynda Benglis holding a double-ended dildo in front of her pubic area, published as an advertisement in *Artforum* magazine, November 1974, resulting in at least two editors resigning and sending shockwaves through the art world, which at the time struggled to interpret its meaning. Pacquée has also, in earlier works (early 1980s), reflected on pornography and voyeurism (like AMVK) in various performances combined with painterly enlargements of pornographic cartoons, often performed naked by the artist. Must one not continually develop a language of desire, surrender, and resistance that relates to how “the gaze” “(late) capitalism / consumption” and “fascination” are actually constructed, deployed, and operationalised in contemporary imagination and its real-world applications? Pacquée refuses, also in earlier works, to be reduced to the “non-condition of the l’informe”. In

her series *Madame and It*, she confronted the near-total dissolution of a person-without-many-qualities, performed by herself, into the environment, later reappearing in her depictions of faceless figures, while consistently focusing on the almost invisible or near-impossible resistance and camouflage required from such a non-position. It also appears that she approaches the “subject” in a manner comparable to her approach to the “(ritual) object”, attempting to sustain a spiritual energy capable of reconnecting Western and Eastern, as well as Southern epistemologies. As a specialist in colours, Ria Pacquée is also said to be familiar with all shades of grey present in reality. One of the most striking sentences she ever wrote on a mirror, photographed with herself reflected in it, reads: *One morning I looked into the mirror and couldn't recognize my face.*

Is it not also the case that artistic quality and layeredness are increasingly rendered invisible or inaccessible in a world that constantly insists on visibility, representation, and presence, in which identity/diversity is projected as a recognisable label onto the work of LGBTQIA+ artists, as if a double visibility, inside and outside the image, must be maintained, often monitored through social media, as if one must constantly drive or chase one’s own self(-es) in order to keep things livable and workable, but is this actually the case in social and economic reality? Although fascination with androgyny and the queer body has permeated art, fashion magazines, zines, and (auto)fiction for decades, identity, as cultural theorist Mark Fisher (1968–2017), alias k-punk, already suggested, can also become a filter that narrows the artwork insofar as it is read as an illustration of a single identifiable identity, rather than as a layered personal expression, a singular stylistic mode of resistance or subversive thinking, or a creative and experimental articulation that opens imagination, even if it may at times produce recognition, but not necessarily genuine recognition. In this manner, a form of explicit or implicit social control also takes place (as if asking: “are you sufficiently integrated into society?”), which may in practice reinforce surveillance. Self-regulation, or adjusting one’s thoughts, feelings, actions, or expressions, is to some extent necessary, but can become suffocating and censorial when excessive, as if one becomes colonised by a self-imposed totalising gaze that renders everything and everyone similar, without thereby producing universality.

Meanwhile, we live within a degree of social and cultural conservatism, with even eruptions of right-wing populism (some speak of “a new form of fascism”), still driven by a late-capitalist and neoliberal model that appears to be continuously drawn toward its (endless?) endpoint, in which an extremely critical stance toward, for example, gender diversity, alongside transgenders, has begun to shape news discourse. From this perspective, gender is again increasingly reduced to biology (male/female sex), seemingly out of fear of losing clear social frameworks. What AMVK has continuously done within the context of her own work is to reintroduce what had the tendency to (potentially) recede into the background or become forgotten, and what in the past was regarded as abnormal or perverse, or approached with incomprehension, in the fields of scientific knowledge, literature and philosophy, and in relation to consciousness, mysticism, occultism and sexuality. She has always brought these elements into relation with her profound investigation into the logic of the rational brain, artificial intelligence and technology, repeatedly reinserting or incorporating them into the folded image until a

seemingly embodied cybernetic construction emerges, which is therefore not detached from language, and which can be perceived and conceived as a collective erotic intelligence. Menno Grootveld wrote in 2018, on the occasion of her solo exhibition at M HKA: “*AMVK states that mystics [for example Marguerite Porete and Giordano Bruno, who ended up being burned at the stake] were actually the first perverts in our society. They withdrew themselves from the control of the system and from the suppression of our desires imposed by the Church. She establishes a connection here between the Latin concepts ‘pervertere’ (to overturn) and ‘subvertere’ (to undermine). These two forms of rebellion run like a red thread through the history of Western underground culture, and also through AMVK’s personal life. [...] At a young age, she was already interested on the one hand in everything related to technology (for example, she read Walter Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*), while on the other hand she was fascinated by the writings of figures such as de Sade and the films of figures such as Pasolini. [...] All these people have in common [including Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Kierkegaard, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Gilles Deleuze and the many other thinkers and writers she incorporates into her work, etc.] that they were or are independent thinkers who did not wish to be manipulated, but instead searched for what AMVK calls a new, unified attitude toward reality*”¹⁹. For a long time, one of her favourite books was, for example, Roland Barthes’s anthology on *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971), because it functioned as a confirmation of her own thoughts. AMVK is always concerned with the subversive force that can break through limits, restrictions and the process of dulling or desensitisation. In other words, the “abstract” (thought) is provided with a naked female body, a model, and often also an interior or mental space, from which perception, feeling and thinking are once again electrically and energetically charged and connected with one another, so that they can continue to become thinkable and speak to the imagination from their new embodied, hybrid and cybernetic form. It sounds like a solution to many problems that arise today, primarily because many people seem to have been made to feel ashamed that there is no longer time for such an exercise (even within the academic world). In addition, she also investigates, as becomes clear for example in the *Biennale of Painting* at the Raveelmuseum in Deurle, how female stereotypes are constructed, reproduced and potentially also undermined. The point is that she profoundly analyses the projection of woman, who is indeed simultaneously an object of desire, a bearer of a certain form of mysterious power/attraction, and can be understood as a peculiar kind of figure of resistance. Since her work challenges fixed roles and hierarchies, causing them to shift, and since she refuses to present unequivocal identities, various LGBTQIA+ people, including many artists and experimental musicians, feel addressed by the radicality of her oeuvre and by the work she has developed in this field over the past decades. AMVK also relates this to the complexity and layered nature of the process of meaning formation itself, in which nothing can ever be reduced or limited to only one meaning. Ana Teixeira Pinto wrote about AMVK in her text *antiTuring/acquis-Sade* (2018): “*Like de Sade before her, for AMVK these socially accepted forms of being are identical to ‘being imprisoned’*. A man does not have ‘that’ sexuality and a woman ‘another’, as Klaus Theweleit argued. ‘It is entirely wrong to distinguish these sexualities according to “male” and “female”’. The sexuality of the patriarch is not so much “masculine” as it is

deadly, just as that of subordinated women is not so much “feminine” as it is oppressed, suffocated’ (Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 1987)”²⁰. In *UNI*, AMVK presents a glitter-covered collage featuring two ‘queer bodies’, entitled *Frauen sind Kleiner Männer* (2011), through which what might conventionally be understood as ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ acquires an entirely different expression, resonance, and perhaps even meaning. Here, uncertainty is introduced regarding the sex/gender of the depicted figures, while an androgynous quality emerges that may be experienced as sensual, erotic, or sexually charged. Doubt is introduced regarding the sex/gender of the depicted persons; an androgyny is added that can be experienced as sexy/erotic. Additionally, she presents an altered mirror entitled *Sadisme Amoureux / Férocité Spirituel* (2026), translated into English as *Amorous Sadism / Spiritual Ferocity* or *Spiritual Cruelty*, in which a hybrid, more De Sade-inspired approach to an encounter with something resembling a queer subjectivity is articulated. In a plexiglass mirror, one looks at three separate fragments and one smaller fragment. The first fragment shows a skull merged with a female body that appears to have been struck by a gunshot, as cracks have spread around a hole, which could equally represent a fragmentation originating from within. The second fragment attached to the mirror is a black surface containing two abstract amorphous forms, in which the words “Sadisme” and “Spirituel” can be perceived. On the right-hand side of the mirror, one sees a chaotic-looking pink stain incorporating amorphous lines and forms that appear to represent a face. Technically and materially, the work consists of an imaki print on paper, varnished with acrylic, a plexiglass shard, acrylic and silkscreen paint, a painting with acrylic paint, acrylic marker, acrylic varnish, PVC letters and cut-outs in adhesive foil, attached to a plexiglass mirror. AMVK provides “sadism” in her title with a quality that the autonomous term/concept itself, named after the extreme sexual fantasies attributed to Marquis de Sade, usually does not possess or is not associated with, namely that of “being in love”. This raises the question of whether what is presented here (and which depicts neither sexuality nor, in a figurative sense, hardly any violence at all) can truly be regarded as a more extreme manifestation of ‘sadism’, or whether, through this very approach, ‘sadism’ is instead softened and rendered into something more palatable. Ultimately, “sadism” means that someone derives (sexual) pleasure or satisfaction from causing pain, humiliation or suffering to others, from which in most cases a feeling of power and enjoyment is obtained, but equally pleasure can be provided to the person who, with consent, assumes the role of the submissive/masochist, for example within a BDSM role-play. Here, however (as is usually the case in AMVK’s work), no explicit sex scene is shown either, meaning that one’s imagination is triggered differently when encountering such words. In any case, the new concept of “loving sadism” in AMVK’s work is connected to “a spiritual ferocity or cruelty”, suggesting that this may concern an even more powerful or intensified variant than the original concept of “sadism”, since there is here a (borderline) connection with *eros*. What if the sadist is in love, or could always already be described as being in love, but could not be experienced or thought in that way? Must such a person then surpass themselves mentally, appropriate a form of spiritual cruelty that channels their being in love, in order, for example, to still be able to overwhelm someone in a “sadistic” sense? Does the sadist then surrender themselves to the desired/desiring object through a certain kind of erotic attraction, which in this case equally exerts power over the sadist, and produces a spiritual cruelty/wildness within

them, or precisely within their partner, that carries them beyond the idea of exercising control, yet compels them to “give themselves over” to it? The mechanical, banal repetition of ‘original’ sadism, which, in a corporeal sense, is in fact impossible to realise in practice if one were to follow De Sade’s writings literally, as he himself humorously acknowledged, appears, through this approach, to be at least imaginatively disrupted. Does this, then, constitute a fundamentally different kind of relationship with the submissive/masochistic figure, one who may either resist or surrender, through which this figure is granted or acquires a form of power over the sadist (or over themselves), a power they seemingly did not possess before, or one that had previously been overlooked? It is clear that what is at stake here is a probing and testing of Bataille’s limits of erotic, artistic and mental imagination, which are situated visually between the ideas of “chaos/life” and “death”, “seduction” and “surrender”, yet at the same time seem to be endowed with an ethical dimension that precisely refutes any form of controlling or imposed morality. There is also a question here of a spiritual cruelty, as indicated, not a physical cruelty, which suggests that AMVK is here addressing the LGBTQIA+ person themselves (to whom, for example, a mirror is being held up in this way). Is it, for example, the case that a spiritual cruelty is more easily experienced by the heterosexual man/woman when confronted with an LGBTQIA+ person, and vice versa, and how does this manifest, or what are its consequences?

AMVK’s former student Jack Davey will present new work for UNI and has meanwhile developed a highly personal visual language, with numerous references to female, often feminist artists such as Louise Bourgeois and Sarah Lucas, but also Matthew Barney. Although Davey is primarily a sculptor, also producing site-specific installations and working with textiles and reclaimed wood, he next to that works with digital media, sound, performance art, and drawing. Visual documentation and photography play an important role in his artistic process. Likewise he introduces language and uses paint in dialogue with his own work or on the sometimes-visible reverse sides of his works. He is particularly interested in the complexity of the human condition with all its contradictions and tensions. One of his obsessions is (or was) excrement and the digestive system. Hence his inclusion in the overview publication *La Merde* (2026) by Aline Bouvy, published by Triangle Books. He is also fascinated by prehistoric human activity and archaeological sites, in particular how a “monolith” is charged with memory and historical context while remaining open to interpretation. From this he derives elements that he recomposes differently, almost as if an error in the past must be corrected in the present, and explores sexual frustration and desire, anger, ritual, matter/form, subconscious language, and hidden messages from a gay perspective. He presents emotionally charged objects and confronts viewers with tense, loaded atmospheres. He often speaks of the consciousness and memory of objects, or the specific energy they may emit. Several of his sculptures show a bulging, sausage-like form or a surface beneath which a buttock-like presence may be inferred. Although he refers to the body in an almost sensuous and even erotic, perhaps even sexual way, there is no literal figuration. His work is obsessive in its layering (and in this sense can be seen as a counterpoint to Clara Lissens’ work), and fascinating in its search for a hybrid form capable both of absorbing “all” information and of re-transmitting or transforming it back into the environment.

Veronika Pot confronts the taboo of “beauty” in an ambivalent way, comparable to how experimental painter Sigmar Polke approached it in his paintings, photographs, and films. Pot starts from analogue photography (taken with a normal camera or a pinhole camera), but does not use it as an endpoint. She frequently manipulates the photographs in the darkroom during long sessions, applying over- and underexposure. She also scratches away parts or adds elements with needle and thread. Afterwards she often works with collage and acrylic paint on these manipulated images, which she later digitises. Variation, disturbance, and a certain degree of uncontrollability or chance are thus invited into the image, although she simultaneously attempts to recognise recurring patterns within her oeuvre. Her intensive artistic method produces a disorienting aesthetic experience in which foreground and background, or the distance between the underlying image and the additions, constantly shift, as if the image were retrieved from memory and re-emerging in the present. Pot’s work indeed revolves around memory, reconstruction, and image transformation. She undermines the idea of photography as a pure registration of reality, as if adding a form of “intimacy,” even in her landscapes, which appear to have lost something from the image itself, or to have leaked out of it. Remarkably, she endows digital photography with qualities it does not inherently possess, although the saturated or fluorescent colours, she also works in black and white, where similar effects can be observed, recall the analogue era, which has meanwhile long passed: when light could still alter a chemical surface and traces of a physical process could be read as chemically registered presence. It is grain, also as matter, and the opaque or mysterious way in which colour operates in interaction with applied manipulations that produces a vibrating, tactile image structure in the transition to a digital image. Time in Pot’s work is experienced affectively: what is seen can be felt physically, as if time is explosively present in the image, indirectly offering a different conception of subjectivity, one less driven by consumption. Is the moment truly entirely past, as Roland Barthes claims in *Camera Lucida* (1980) and should one mourn this nostalgically (one’s own death)? The detail within the image that personally affects, strikes, or pierces you (Barthes’ *punctum*), as well as the gaze or atmosphere emanating from the image, is in Veronika Pot’s work consistently granted the possibility of displacement: something (else) can, at a later stage, continually acquire new “meaning”. It is as though she introduces an existential dimension into photography, one that carries it not only beyond the notion of mere registration, but also beyond anything like the simple conveyance of information or the straightforward communication of a personal opinion or testimony. Voices often speak through her work, which may be associated with people in war zones, with those affected by violence, or with those situated amidst unrest or revolution. She explores how language can be misused or how meaning can change over time. In confronting her work, whether her manipulated ruin-like landscapes, mountains, palm trees, a swimming pool, nudes, women’s legs, a doubling of a Bambi or fawn, or more abstract images, one is reminded of how intense and resonant a (travel) experience may have been, and how simultaneously “superficial” and “profound” it can be. Her images equally demonstrate how readily memories can fade and dissipate when they are not actively engaged with, preserved, or given renewed meaning. This gives her work a cinematic or literary dimension, as if she seeks to keep what was once fixed in constant motion and endow it with a fictional, poetic, or imaginative perspective, so that it can continue to resonate into

the future (which may be the opposite of what Philip Huyghe does in his work). Perhaps this position, as a (lesbian) artist, could be described as “radically romantic” (cf. Emeline Descreaux), a quality that is, moreover, remarkably prevalent within experimental electronic music, particularly among lesbians, bisexuals, and trans women. It is as though, through this sensibility, a profound necessity is articulated: the necessity for a world in which dreaming remains possible, in which desire can still find an object and a horizon, despite the fact that these very capacities appear to be continually eroded within contemporary existence. It evokes the image of a fire that consumes everything while simultaneously igniting and animating everyone in its vicinity, leaving us with the imperative to embrace and experience, above all, the unfolding of that very process.

Work that shares an aesthetic dimension with that of Veronika Pot, but departs from a completely different perspective, is that of Jesse Siegel. In general, the artist states, his works deal with concepts such as newness, placelessness, and what is considered standard or lacking. His underlying assumption is that universal uniqueness emerges from universal equality. His works often operate in a passive, non-confrontational manner, and their subject matter is frequently ambiguous, as it is readable yet does not communicate information. Siegel confronts us with something that can, in effect, be called taboo: “equality” and “what is considered standard”. According to the artist, this stems from his background: he lived for a long time in Cancún, where the idea of a new culture is strongly present, and also worked for more than ten years in a corporate environment in which the continuous launch of new products shaped professional life. For this reason, he often uses decontextualised objects that function as substitutes for emotionally charged subjects. With “placelessness” he also refers to Marc Augé’s notion of “non-places,” spaces through which people pass without forming a real bond. In modern developments such as globalisation and standardisation, places “without identity” can easily emerge. Siegel described Cancún as follows: “*Cancún’s outward appearance itself seems to be a ‘non-place.’ However, this constructed placelessness is only a perception created for capitalist reasons: the myth of the tourist destination requires the tourist to be kept away from the actual place, in order to prevent the enchantment of the journey from being broken. It is like Venice, when we leave the stage and go to the back, to Mestre, and there see the operational innards of the system required to sustain tourism*” (email to the author). The genuine enjoyment of and fascination with imitation form part of the starting point of his research. The separation of an object’s original history resonates for him with the way a person may become disconnected from their own history and familial roots. His highly diverse oeuvre displays a formal aesthetic in which decorative or ornamental elements, such as architectural features of façades, windows, ventilation openings, and doors, are often isolated. As a result, despite their “surface character”, they appear to function as projection screens or gateways to another world, often situated beyond utopian or dystopian frameworks, yet still related to the idea of the “new city”. Indirectly, through a hyperreal confrontation with the “product”, he investigates and demonstrates how expectation and desire are manufactured and consumed, a process he presents as extremely simple. In this exhibition he integrates the sound work *Ownership of Words (Perfect Cognates)* (2016). The concept behind the work is that he reads out perfect cognates in English and Spanish. Perfect cognates are words that have the same or similar meaning in two languages, yet are pronounced differently. His idea was to externalise

something already internal to him as a work: although he is fluent in both languages as native tongues, he is constantly shifting between two identities. He suggests that our fixed perception of ourselves may extend only as far as the words we speak. What is equally remarkable is that, when the English and Spanish words carrying the same meaning are heard consecutively, despite their subtle differences in pronunciation, it begins to resemble an exercise in which verbal description reveals an almost identical conceptual worldview. It is as though this process confronts us with the underlying relationships that genuinely exist between two distinct languages, exposing the deeper structures and affinities that connect them. Although his work sometimes contains a critical dimension in its handling of source material, the lightness with which it is presented feels almost unearthly yet simultaneously future-oriented, as if it reopens space where there is almost none. Engaging with the “superface of surfaces” need not be a numbing experience, nor does it inevitably lead to apathy, as Jesse Siegel demonstrates in each of his works. Instead, he introduces an alternative relationship to “ornament,” “object,” and aesthetics, one that diverges fundamentally from the prevailing approaches currently in circulation. I suspect that the time will arrive relatively soon when the contemporary art world, perhaps exhausted by the numerous culture wars presently underway, will once again open itself to this, something that can already be observed, for example, from a postcolonial perspective in the work of an artist such as Shaun Motsi.

Chris Gillis, who, together with her (almost-)husband Rufus Michielsen, is represented as an ally within UNI, likewise employs an elegant strategy for allowing aesthetics to enter her collages, which she has been producing since 2016. More recently, she has also begun working in painting. As a lecturer in graphic design at the Fashion Academy of Antwerp, she, for instance, collects the accidentally dropped, colorful paper scraps of students, which she recycles and integrates into her own collages. She also works with ready-made material and various textures derived from graphic design. Either she interweaves the material, or she abstracts it into planes of color. Her aim is to rearrange reality and allow it to settle into a new constellation, so that this reality can be viewed through a refreshed, more dreamlike gaze. Various impressions and perceptions serve as her guiding thread. It is as though she is searching for a desire within the image that resists its own consumption, something she also situates more in relation to an underground, a world not unfamiliar to her. From 2002 to 2014 she worked primarily with video, which occasionally becomes apparent in the cut-up montage technique she applies in her own work. In the collage presented here, it seems as though she displays an index of colorful fragments set against a striking pink background applied with a spray can. “Pink” was also the color of the triangle used by the Nazis to categorize homosexuals, a symbol that was reclaimed after WWII and subsequently came to signify resistance. It was also a color associated with gender-nonconforming expression. In the original rainbow flag (1978), “pink” stood for “sexuality”. It later disappeared from the flag, which, in a symbolic sense, might be called shocking, although this was primarily for practical reasons such as space constraints. The transgender flag, by contrast, consists of “(light) pink”, “white”, and “blue”, where “pink” signifies femininity. Chris Gillis, however, introduces a shade of pink that she appears to associate with the “underground”, a connection that can likewise be observed, for instance, in the exhibited work of AMVK. Naturally, pink, or the rainbow, which can be discerned in Gillis' other work, is not the

“property” of the LGBTQIA+ movement, yet it is fascinating how, within the context of this exhibition, it is subtly suggested here and there, without becoming didactic, that LGBTQIA+ art would do well not to detach itself from what can be understood as the “underground” or as “the best of itself”. In other collages, Gillis arranges the fragments either more wildly or more strictly into geometric figures on a variable ground. At times she works against backgrounds of landscape photography, urban and interior views, archaeological fragments, and geometric or abstract textures. Earlier works also feature human figures and animals. In one of her first paintings, also shown in UNI, she returns to the aforementioned “rainbow” in a hyper-colorful work, in which the surrounding splendor of color appears to have been switched off in favor of that rainbow, as though it were merely a light switch.

The aforementioned French artist Emeline Descreaux, the partner of Clara Lissens, confronts in her multidisciplinary work, within which painting also plays an important role, frequently with a certain form of estrangement or alienation, as though she were examining the present “condition humaine”. She has also long engaged in the study of medieval miniatures and the manner in which “perspective” was introduced into art history. She composes “images” in the same way she composes her own electronic music. Her works often feature “beings” that are clearly not bound to a single gender. After having painted for some time, she incorporated the medium of video, focusing on forging connections between cinematographic structures and painting. Although she has devoted herself primarily to experimental music in recent years, she has also recently returned to painting. She also expresses herself in other media, such as in her flag work *En lutte avec la surface*, in which a wave motion connects positive and negative spheres, or in her (video and sound) installation aptly titled *Unisson* (2021), in which it appears as though Descreaux seeks to reinvent “enlightenment” within modern darkness, which recalls the work of Spanish philosopher Marina Garcés titled *The New Radical Enlightenment* (2024), particularly for alienated, self-estranged, or entirely coinciding “couples” who, with their hands on the table, seem to be waiting for a “punishment” that could be administered at any moment. “Unison,” with one “s” refers to multiple voices or instruments playing exactly the same note simultaneously, or more broadly: doing, saying, and feeling the same thing at the same time. Descreaux also frequently plays with positivity/negativity or the “binary”, notably allowing something to be perceived or felt as both positive and negative simultaneously, without initiating a process of neutralization. In the painting *Entre* (2019), for example, a two-headed structure or form (more than a monster) both sticks out its tongue with eyes open and closes its eyes with lips pressed together.

Clara Lissens, Emeline Descreaux, and Sietske Van Aerde have collaborated before, for instance on *1000 Girls, A Place We Go* (2026) during a residency at STUK in Leuven. In her film *1000 Girls A Place We Go*, shown at a separate location within the framework of the UNI exhibition, Van Aerde takes the viewer through a series of playful transformations. Inspired by the nymphs in Ovidius' *Metamorphoses*, who constantly change form due to the harm inflicted upon them by the gods, the film narrates the story of several individuals seeking ways to exist in a world burdened by weight. Van Aerde films her immediate surroundings and presents friends, artists, and other passers-by who

speak about themselves, allowing a series of distinct interior portraits to emerge. These, however, do not appear to be understood as conventional forms of autobiography, nor as instances of autofiction. The narrative also originates from drawings of half-human, half-animal beings, figures in the midst of transformation. Due to Van Aerde's background in costume design, these resemble sketches for possible costumes: designs that enable the adoption of a new form. The film thematizes clothing, makeup, and hair as instruments of transformation means through which individuals shape their identity. A procession of colourful characters passes by, their outward appearances either reflecting or concealing their inner worlds. This evokes parallels with the work of the French artist Pauline Curnier Jardin, who recently presented a solo exhibition at M HKA and NW Aalst. They speak of childhood, deviation from norms, and how they have transformed themselves or remain in transformation, thereby destabilizing "narcissism". A central thread in the film is the story of two individuals, the artist couple Emeline Descreaux and Clara Lissens, who have each transformed themselves in their own way and find recognition and love in one another, as though society must be reminded that this remains possible. The film concerns the places, physical or imagined, to which we go simply in order to be. From this video work emerged an additional layer: a soundscape by Descreaux, further opening and deepening the theme of transformation. Simultaneously, Van Aerde and Lissens developed a performance functioning as a living echo of the film, featuring large textile drawings and costumes that gained spatial and physical presence. This resulted in a series of tableaux vivants further developed for a performance on May 7, 2026 in Hasselt. Under the name Sorry DJ's, the three artists have also collaborated previously, aiming to continually challenge both the music and art worlds to question themselves. Van Aerde also introduces humor into her work, shifting the focus of identity toward constructed appearance, emphasizing the hybrid, grotesque, and/or surreal, without this functioning as escapism. Her films *Mestra's (Everyone is One Cow)* (2026) and *Godin der Zee* (2026), referencing Léon Spilliaert, likewise function as dreamlike painterly tableaux vivants, introducing a "divine" dimension to "all persons", as though suggesting that such a protective layer of the "naked human" has disappeared in a world dominated by security, surveillance and defense politics, which somewhat calls to mind the work of Mona Filleul, who, within the context of her practice, approaches and represents the trans community, of which she herself is a part, as a rich universe populated by "cute" goddesses.

Sietske Van Aerde also presents several drawings at UNI, nearly all of which depict nude women, except for a double portrait that is hooked together by means of a plant-like form placed in between, and a woman's head with a scribble as its lower body. Her works have a surrealist inflection, although it could equally be argued that her women in no way appear to be ashamed of who they are, and that they simultaneously seem to reconnect with "their own nature", which, however, is not presented as a search for a "lost authenticity", but rather as a collective, partly intimate given that requires a certain imagination, an ability to displace oneself. They also appear to be connected to a form of corporeal, and potentially sexually charged, wildness, as though suggesting that these dimensions of existence are once again becoming subject to surveillance and regulation within a rather conservative, moralistically oriented bourgeois society, one that is deeply attached to rules and normative structures, yet simultaneously seems incapable of

confronting “perversity” when it emerges within its own domain. It is as though Van Aerde’s drawings interrogate the extreme degree of self-control that is expected of, or projected onto, women today, without transforming this tension into a paternalistic spectacle, melodrama, or tragedy. A certain playfulness and a lack of fear are added as layers within the image, as though “(sexual) liberation” need not necessarily be exclusively an illusion. Is there, in fact, a need for a new sexual revolution, or is that by now considered an “anachronism”?

*Toutes les femmes sont Aphrodite [...] Aphrodite émerge de l'eau avec la puissance du volcan en éruption*²¹.

Although in an entirely different way, this is also comparable to the work of Paul-Armand Gette, who associated the nude woman with an almost divine, creative force, which he interpreted as “volcanically eruptive”, the way in which he himself wished to think as an artist, in dialogue with the women he photographed nude, or whose underwear he scattered throughout landscapes and interiors or hung in trees. Although his erotically tinged female nudes, with a focus on the female genitals, and his works involving lingerie were often labeled by French feminists as “anti-feminist / misogynistic”, despite the fact that his work was consistently represented by female gallerists such as Annie Gentils, who apparently felt more affinity with it, as can also be said of the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, Paul-Armand Gette appears rather to have been a “male” version of the Cuban performance artist Ana Mendieta (1948–1985), who reminds the woman of her own specific (erotic/spiritual) “(primordial) force/energy”. He was, of course, not the first visual artist to focus on the vagina or cunt; one might think, for example, of Lucas Cranach the Elder (*Le Nymph à la Source*, c. 1537), Gustave Courbet (*L’Origine du Monde*, 1866), and Marcel Duchamp (*Étant donnés*, 1946–1966). What is remarkable about Gette’s work is that, despite the fact that his photographs often focus solely on the vagina or cunt, the images nevertheless are not perceived or felt from a voyeuristic or pornographic perspective, as though the female model had merely taken a selfie to share with her lover, thereby indirectly calling into question the authorship of the artist (cf. Roland Barthes), or at least undermining it through the possibility of such an exercise or thought. It seems, at any rate, as though he, as a male artist, almost entirely effaces or thinks himself away (from the construction of the image), even though he was in fact present at his own performances, which likewise formed part of his artistic practice. According to the literature, Gette also granted his female models an extraordinary degree of freedom: they could always decide whether or not they agreed to the publication of a particular photograph or the exhibition of a specific work. As a viewer, one senses that all photographic material emerged within a context of mutual trust. In comparison with contemporary pornography, for instance, his work reveals a form of female eroticism that scarcely appears anymore in today’s visual culture, as though that particular innocent erotic “genre” (strongly reminiscent of the 1970s in style) has almost entirely disappeared in our time, seemingly devoid of meaning. One may of course also ask what such work is doing in a group exhibition like UNI, and it is not clear that Gette maintained much contact with the LGBTQIA movement within the contemporary art world, except perhaps with Hans Ulrich Obrist, yet his photography somewhat recalls the nude photographs

published in the lesbian magazine KUTT (recently republished, editor: Jessica Gysel), which possess a comparable elegance, sensuality, and intimacy, as though Gette had in some way appropriated a “lesbian aesthetics”. It is only when one is confronted with such more intimate erotic photography that one realizes it may have been a long time since encountering such images, as though the contemporary art world had to sever its connection with aesthetics/beauty in order to deploy its critical function, something that has in the meantime also become a kind of “commandment” within the art world. Here and there, similar erotic images surface in digital networks, indicating a lack or absence. Gette’s work may also be compared, for instance, to the erotic, sexually charged photography of the remarkable artist Marie-Françoise Plissart, whose work *Droit de regards* (1985), acquired by FOMU in 2021, was prominently included by the artist-curator Katja Mater in the group exhibition *No Longer Not Yet* (2025–2026), where the boundaries between visual art and the photo-novel are explored, and which was published in book form with a preface by the well-known thinker Jacques Derrida. Plissart employed techniques such as “mise en abyme”, whereby an image is shown within another image. In particular, her idea of deploying an “intellectual” photo-novel was an artistically innovative way of rendering “lesbian love” in an extremely sensual photographic manner, without resorting to the typical modes of seduction used by mass media. She introduced an erotic intimacy that one might later question whether it is still granted the right to exist “in the bedroom”. Although Gette does not focus on erotic scenes between sexual partners, nor on lesbian love, it is nonetheless fascinating that a somewhat comparable notion of “eroticism” could exist in the mind of this man. At times it even seems as though he adds a “penetrative” or rather “ejaculatory” dimension to the cunt/vagina, recalling the work of Kathy Acker: her volcanic eruptive force appears, at least symbolically, to be linked to male ejaculation. Although I do not wish to generalize this, it nonetheless still emerges in conversations that some heterosexual women may find themselves more easily attracted to the work of homosexual artists, and some heterosexual men more to that of lesbian artists, as though one seeks to recognize “something of oneself” in “that other sexual orientation,” even though such spontaneous observations have, over the past decade, expanded more readily (but for how long?) in terms of imaginative possibilities. At UNI, drawings of the vagina/cunt by Paul-Armand Gette are shown, which he produced in dialogue with his own photography.

The painter Luc Tuymans is an artist of an entirely different caliber, insofar as he fundamentally distrusts the image (even the images he himself produces). According to the painter, there is no such thing as an original image. For him, painting is not concerned with the reintroduction of authenticity or expression. His relationship to painting has always been shaped by an in-depth study of primarily historical subjects that have been significant for our way of thinking about the world in the 20th and 21st centuries (such as colonialism, the world wars, power structures such as the Catholic Church, and so on), in relation to other media such as photographic images, television images, cinematic images, art-historical images, or images taken with an iPhone. Tuymans dissects the illusory, constructed character of the image that can appear authentic and can present itself (or be perceived) as a testimony of reality, even of truth. He examines with precision the power structures in which the image, the representation, is embedded, yet what he returns is not necessarily a deconstructive image to which a critical layer has

been added, but rather often a ghostly presence, one from which it proves much more difficult to escape than was the case with the original images, without attaching this to a single fixed meaning, although almost every painterly image involves a distanced, discomfiting form of beauty. He employs photographic or cinematic techniques such as cropping, framing, and close-up. What matters to him is not, in the first instance, how images can be emotionally experienced, or how they might coincide with a particular experience, but rather what remains when that experience falls away and only the image, as a fragment, is “seen” without the context being provided (although it is usually “suggested” or “indicated” in the title). Through his painting, he offers, for example, the possibility of viewing the iconoclasm of Protestantism from an entirely different angle than its original meaning: namely, that there may never have been a complete “iconoclasm” (or destruction of images), but that through this act one was in fact primarily confronted with the violence inherent to the image itself. The image is intrinsically violent. Painting is thus also an act of violence. The recognition of the banality of evil is something to which, in principle, no one ever becomes accustomed in a universal sense, something that appears contradictory, because it also continually confronts one with one’s own banality, which, for instance, did nothing to prevent that evil. Tuymans approaches his image archive like a surgeon or an architect. The painter introduces the dimension of the “diagnostic gaze”, a detached, analytical mode of vision that can also be recognised, for instance, in surveillance camera footage, as an inherent quality within his paintings. In his earlier work, he employed a somewhat diseased or pathological visual language, characterised by desaturated, almost muddy or withdrawn colours, or by a restrained chromatic palette, through which the painted, spectral image itself appears to become, or to coincide with the illness. In doing so, he effectively places the (ill) viewer “within” the condition of the image, a gesture that can perhaps be approached through the concept of the *pharmakon*. However distant, detached, or even emotionally inaccessible his images may appear, they seem to demand, first and foremost, a physical response to this experience of estrangement, before any form of cognitive reflection upon the painted image can take place.

His images are nevertheless not intended to leave a vivid or lively impression on the viewer, nor to function, for example, as an illustration of a (past) reality, but rather confront one with the death of the image, including that of painting itself, which he has in fact circumvented precisely by continually declaring the image dead, delivering the death blow, before a representation can emerge that is capable of referring back to the past and being thought in relation to the future. Tuymans confronts us with the possibility that the right questions concerning (past) events may not yet have been asked, but must be given the possibility of being answered “correctly” in our present / near future, as though he has halted time itself, while simultaneously pressing the stopwatch to remind us that time is “running again”. There always seems to be something at stake in a painting by Tuymans. His interiors also often appear vacuum-sealed, closed off within themselves, as though all oxygen has been extracted from the space, which has literally affected the idea of perspective / a point of view in his work, as though the contours that define space or an object have been deliberately weakened to such a degree that this appearing “residual image”, without any process of actual abstraction or erasure, can be perceived outside the possibility of its own consumption. Something settles in our minds when encountering

his work that no longer presents itself as the “desired object” being pursued, and at the same time appears to have been stripped of any possible subjective connotation, without offering the viewer a painting “as object”. One always relates to painting as an event, an event that seems to be extended in time (perhaps due to his strong relation to film). One also always relates to an abstract dimension of reality. Since we are constantly addressed by mass media, particularly through “seductive” images, and as Andy Warhol already made clear, even horror images lose their emotional/affective impact if repeated often enough, thus acquiring the capacity either to numb us or render us indifferent, Luc Tuymans confronts us with (archival) images introduced into painting that no longer allow any escape or escapism whatsoever to perception, even if one turns one’s back on them. Within this context, his mysterious presence in the group exhibition UNI does not appear strange at all, although it may be added, at least when he was asked about it, that he may have unconsciously referred to the AIDS crisis in his painting *Bloodstains* (1993), in which an enlargement of blood is seen in close-up through a microscope (situated outside the frame). This work also concerns the task of representation that painting, according to Tuymans, must continue to assume. Whether the painting *Bend Over* (2001) should be associated with anal sex and BDSM, or rather constitutes a fragment derived from a torture scene, generates tension within the already tension-laden field of perception. By sowing doubt as to whether the body depicted is male or female, and by simultaneously placing every viewer in a position that affords them the possibility, at least imaginatively, to anally penetrate this sexually undefined body, seen from the back, the “aggressive” gaze of the viewer toward the painterly image is likewise called into question, or at least confronted. The depicted body still appears to be wearing its underwear, which, strangely enough, seems to make the image even more confrontational. In Tuymans’s painting *The Audition* (2014), based on an image of the bisexual Judy Garland auditioning for *The Wizard of Oz* by Victor Fleming, a remarkable historical moment just before the outbreak of WWII is recalled. Rumors long circulated that Fleming was pro-Nazi and opposed to an American intervention in occupied Europe, claims that have been as often disputed as confirmed. In more recent paintings, Tuymans’s recognizable saturated color gradations and combinations increasingly appear in a neon-noir style combined with a fluorescent, more or less electrically luminous aesthetic, translating into more obscure, almost cinematographically constructed painterly stills illuminated by unnatural, bright, or almost tropical color accents, which (at least to me) recall certain American experimental, queer underground films from the late 1970s / early 1980s (though not necessarily in a psychedelic, nostalgic/anachronistic, or kitsch sense). This can be observed, for example, in one of the two paintings he showed at the Santa Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, namely the enlarged depiction of heat lamps in *Heat* (2025), replacing one of Tintoretto’s works, but also in *The Frame* (2023), *Creature* (2023), and *Eternity* (2021). In this group exhibition UNI, Tuymans presents the short animated film *Seconds II* (2020), whose drawing also served as the promotional image for the successful Ercola auction in Antwerp, demonstrating that when efforts are combined, positive results can be achieved, such as securing studio space for artists in Antwerp. Several drawings (2020) of the same flower also exist, depicting different stages of its growth process. In *Seconds II* (2020), one sees a blue-colored flower, in a style reminiscent of Léon Spilliaert, which opens and grows in an upward movement,

though not necessarily toward the light, which can be related to the “nihilism” of “dark modernity” in Tuymans’s painting, but at the same time evokes the suggestive idea that it may precisely be possible to escape from it²². Through the repetition of this upward movement, strength/energy seems to be granted to what might otherwise be considered fragile or short-lived, such as the blooming of a flower, a process that is likewise accelerated in this animation, which can be related to the supposed acceleration, and possibly political and/or philosophical accelerationism, in our society, while everything simultaneously seems to stand still or even stagnate (economically, for instance), as though an implosion of the imagination were being suggested. This is not necessarily a still life with the symbolism of a “vanitas life”, nor a focus on the mnemonic idea of a “memento mori”, yet it does center on the idea of life and death as a universal given, as was also the case in his solo exhibition *Seconds* at Zeno X in Antwerp in 2021. That exhibition indirectly addressed the lockdown of the COVID crisis, comparing the universality and “monumental presence” of that disease to the universality of numbers, figures, and statistics that likewise govern our lives and constantly confront us with the undeniable possibility of life and death. For Tuymans, what matters is that these numbers appear sculptural and luminous in his paintings, while simultaneously seeming to sink into a background initially perceived as black, but subsequently discernible as indigo, purple, and red, producing a visual effect of discoloration on the sculptural numbers within the painterly image.

In an oil painting featuring a smiling four-leaf clover or a smiling flower by Juliet Jespers, who here appears to enter into a painterly dialogue with the deceased visual artist Walter Swennen (1946–2025), yet deploys “his” style, in which figurative imagery and text are often combined, for her own “development/emancipation”, the energy and motif employed here seem to serve to convey something emotional, though not excessively burdened or heavy, to the viewer. With Jespers, the viewer is always given the possibility of mirroring themselves in what is depicted. There is no trace of ostentation or compulsion in her work, as though she seeks to respond to an excess or heaviness that can be felt. In this work, for example, she indicates that “she” and/or the viewer find themselves in a fortunate situation or state: *I’m Lucky*. It does not read *I’m Happy*, but *I’m Lucky*, which may seem a subtle difference, yet in fact indicates a difference in position and awareness thereof. Since 2024, after an abstract period, she has returned to figurative painting. Jespers is often inspired by the words of songs, more recently also by those of punk music. It is as though she seeks to reintroduce spontaneity and wildness through the medium of painting, often establishing a tension between what can effectively be expressed as movement and what instead appears to possess a static or rigid “nature” that resists being expressed. It is notable that the “ironic, critical aspect” so characteristic of Walter Swennen’s work has here given way to a Stoic acceptance of the situation, without lapsing into indifference or apathy, instead actively choosing to sustain a curiosity that engages with what is experienced as overly routine, everyday, or banal, as though she proposes, through her work, a mode of perception that seeks to provoke wonder, for example at the fact that we are still alive, among the living: *I’m Lucky*.

In this sense, the horizon does not lie before us as an endpoint, but as a permeable zone in which different times, perspectives, reflections, and imaginations intersect without ever

fully coinciding. This is a place where the unresolved functions as a necessary condition for thinking, feeling, resistance, and creation, rather than being treated as a lack or deficiency. Perhaps it is precisely there that meaning begins to leak, where forms and images take shape and where desire resists discipline or depletion, through which another form of individuality, collectivity, and coming together may become conceivable. Ultimately, it may always, to some extent, concern the development of a capacity to be affected by what cannot (yet) be fully understood, but may already be reflected upon. Or, as Wayne Koestenbaum humorously wrote in *Stubble Archipelago* (2024): “*The lamp competes with the moon. The moon bears responsibility for what the lamp neglects*”²³.

1. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston, MA, 2014 (1975), pp.93.
 2. Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals, Special Edition*, Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, CA, 1997, pp. 13.
 3. Kathy Acker, *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990), Pantheon Books, 1992, p. 92, pp. 265.
 4. David Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*, Vintage Books (Random House), New York, 1991.
 5. Robert Glück, *Jack the Modernist*, introduction by Rob Halpern, published by New York Book Review of Books, New York, 2025 (1985), pp. 57.
 6. Madonna, track: *Dancetaria*, album: *Confessions II*, Warner Records, (2026).
 7. This is part of the title of a work by Emeline Descieux: *Camera Walk. (Never Meet or Never Part)*, video and sound installation, stones, 4:3 monitors, black box with embedded system, field recording (stereo sound), loop, 2025.
- Technical specifications (original file): 16:9, 4K, stereo sound.
8. McKenzie Wark, *Raving*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2023, back cover.
 9. The introduction to *Pride* is based on a text written by Wilfried Eetezonne in response to an interview with Carla Arocha & Clara Lissens, and a text written by Carla Arocha about her own relationship to *Pride* and the LGBTQIA+ movement, although these have been further elaborated by the author.
 10. Carla Arocha, unpublished text.
 11. Barbara Vanderlinden, Carla Arocha and Stéphane Schraenen: *Monograph as Project*, with essays by Mónica Amor, Marc Donnadieu, Philippe Pirotte, and interviews by Helen Molesworth / Hans Ulrich Obrist, Mercatorfonds / Yale University Press, New Haven–London, pp. 19.
 12. Josh Ackley, “Why are America's largest newspapers stigmatizing queer people?”, in: *Advocate* (July 1, 2026): online.
 13. *AMVK*, critical edition by Anders Kreuger, Museum Abteiberg–Kunstverein Hanover, M HKA, Koenig Books, London, 2018, pp. 6.
 14. Her next book will be published on 29 September 2026, but several introductions to this new publication and interviews with the author conducted in connection with it are already available online: Catherine Liu, *Traumatized. The New Politics of Public Suffering*, Verso Books, 2026: “*In Traumatized, Liu exposes how an idea born from genuine suffering has been weaponized into a tool of social control. This is the story of how shell shock became PTSD, how Oprah turned pain into profit, and how ‘authenticity’ became the ultimate brand. It is a history of surveillance capitalism’s greatest coup: convincing us that our wounds define us, that vulnerability is strength, and that we must endlessly accommodate each other’s trauma while the powerful remain untouched [...] Sharp, provocative, and urgently necessary, Liu argues for what we can do to combat a politics of permanent victimhood that individualizes suffering, destroys solidarity, and leaves us defenseless against the very systems that harm us*”.
 15. Luce de Lire, “The Queer Art of Hospitality, “If You can Fuck you can Dance””, in: *LO: TECH: POP:*

CULT Screendance Remixed, Routledge, London, 2024.

16. One of the most beautiful books about one of her brief relationships is: Kathy Acker–McKenzie Wark, *I'm Very Into You: Correspondence 1995–1996*, critical edition by Matias Viegner, Semiotext(e), 2015. In addition to Kathy Acker's own work *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula by the Black Tarantula* (1973), *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984), *Empire of the Senseless* (1988), *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990), *Hannibal Lecter, My Father* (1991), *My Mother: Demonology* (1994), *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (1996), *Eurydice in the Underworld* (1998), and so on, many interesting books on her work have also been published, including, for example: Chris Kraus, *After Kathy Acker: A Biography*, Penguin / Semiotext(e), 2017 and McKenzie Wark, *Philosophy for Spiders: On the Low Theory of Kathy Acker*, Duke University Press, 2021.
17. Allies: these are individuals who, for example, actively use their position in the art world to combat discrimination and exclusion and/or individuals who connect with queer artistic expressions and/or queer experiences without necessarily embodying them themselves, although that also falls within the realm of possibilities. In the case of 'ally', one thus thinks beyond the notion of 'tolerance' and more in the direction of 'appreciation'.
18. See for further information: Ria Pacquée, *Slamm, Ramble, Perform. A Monograph*, with texts by Antony Hudek, Jean Fisher, Michael Taussig and Michael Curran, *Occasional Papers*, London, 2018. Ria Pacquée, *AS I WALK I RESIST. Bang the drum and Fuck the Gun*, Pizza Gallery, 17.10–09.11.25: text by Michael Curran (2025).
19. Menno Grootveld, "Coincidence Does Not Exist" in: AMVK, Museum Abteiberg (Mönchengladbach) / Kunstverein Hannover / M HKA (Antwerp), critical edition by Anders Kreuger, with texts also by Anders Kreuger, Ana Teixeira Pinto, Kathleen Rahn, Suzanne Titz, and Travis Jeppesen, Koenig Books, London, 2018, pp. 184 (Dutch text).
20. Ana Teixeira Pinto, "antiTuring/acquis-Sade," in: AMVK, Museum Abteiberg (Mönchengladbach) / Kunstverein Hannover (Hanover) / M HKA (Antwerp), Koenig Books, London, 2018, pp. 192 (Dutch text).
21. Paul-Armand Gette, *Aphrodite & Diane/ Christine Dolbeau*, La vitrine de la Ville Saint-Clair, Sète, 2001, pp. 28.
22. Jonathan Crary, "Dark Modernity," in: *Nice*, with texts by Joshua Cohen, Jonathan Crary, Éric de Chassey, Su Wei, and Lynne Tillman, David Zwirner Books, 2024, pp. 7–17.
23. Wayne Koestenbaum, 'Stubble Archipelago', *Semiotext(e)*, 2024, pp. 83.