

Press Release



Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium

The Curators' Choice 2



Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1988

Copper and plexiglass, 304.7 x 69.2 x 61.4 cm

KMSKB, Brussels

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In the selection of paintings, drawings and sculptures from the museum's 20th century collection, emphasis is on the different forms and nuances of abstraction and on the gradual disappearance of the recognisable image. In the display, the two very different expressive styles of abstraction and non-figurative art are explored in their divergent alternatives and intermediate demonstrations.

The morphology of *abstract* art developed as separate from the world of experience. An aesthetic experience is created in the tension between the formal arrangements, the development of mostly geometrical forms and uniform colours on the one hand and the immaterial understanding of proportions, colour balance and tension and the overall structure on the other. The paintings are flat, without any illusion of space. The sculptures are three-dimensional, but are not part of an external narrative. Examples in the presentation are the works of Amedée Cortier, Luc Peire, Josef Albers, Blinky Palermo or Donald Judd. These artworks do not refer to any object in the real world. There is no story to be told. A rectangle is a rectangle and red is red. Of course, the viewer can attach a narrative meaning to the colour red, for example, but this is optional and external to the work.

In *non-figurative* paintings the link with the reality that surrounds us has entirely not been disregarded. The images are reminiscent of organic forms with ample space for associative interpretation. The works often communicate mental shifts or gestations that the artist wants to convey with his own expressive toolbox. The spatial illusion of perspective has therefore disappeared, but the shadow of space has not been entirely wiped out. We can observe this in the exhibited works by Jean Degottex, Gaston Bertrand and Jean Paul Riopelle. The experience of non-figurative art works is not generally reflected in the symbolic meaning of a visual element, which is sometimes possible in an abstract work. Here, the viewer is invited to project himself into the atmosphere of the work.

Fortunately artists tend to disregard single principles to guide their creative work. The qualities of their works lay claim to a much broader scale of interpretations and experiential possibilities. In *The Curators' Choice 2*, visual diversity and the external impulse towards classification are played off against each other in the presentation through an exploration of the affinities between the selected works. The observant viewer is thereby invited to discover the aesthetic continuity between Alberto Burri, Jean Dubuffet and Giuseppe Penone or the rupture between Louis Buisseret and Gust De Smet. The succession of formal paintings by Amedée Ozenfant and Alberto Magnelli lead to *Surface 327* by Giuseppe Capogrossi, in which the sign based language points towards Roman Opalka, Cy Twombly and Joseph Kosuth. The exhibition begins, however, with two works by Marcel Broodthaers that veer towards *nouveau réalisme* and introduce an ensemble of Pop Art.

In the selection of sculptures, the viewer will distinguish several gradations and types of affinities with the recognizable object or the familiar figure. In the wake of the tradition of antiquity, *Luco* by Charles Leplae represents the figurative bronzes that became popular during the Animism of the 30s. Some years earlier, the Cubist Pablo Gargallo constructed a three-dimensional *Dancer* out of several pieces of plate metal, a whirling rhythm of open and closed forms and frivolous lines. Oscar Jespers carved *The Young Woman* in exotic wood, in which the anatomy becomes essential through well-balanced, smooth geometric forms. Eugène Dodeigne, in contrast, chose a pronounced organic language. The elegance of his thread-like *Woman* is captured in the whimsical lines of the wood from which she is cut. References to the human figure decrease in number. Although Emilio Gilioli establishes a relationship with a historical iconographical motif, *The Warrior* has freed itself from corresponding references. Pol Bury's and Nicolas Schöffer's approach of space and movement is separated from a single narrative. While the kinetic poetry of Bury invites us to experience time in a subtle, intimate way, Schöffer captures the perception of time and space in one richly faceted monument of shining chrome. Within *nouveau réalisme*, the artist Arman brings a sudden end to all half-hearted references to reality: his accumulations are nothing less than stacks of real, concrete objects, borrowed from their daily surroundings. They are deprived of any artistic or cultural aura.

Two works by Henri Matisse, *Oceania: Sea* and *Oceania: Air*, make up the centre of the exhibition. The forms are recognisable as well as abstracted; without horizon, but not in an unlimited plane; a graphical portrayal (ideogram) and a recognisable image; a structural (all-over) construction but without a grid. In the works opposite, we see the dual approach of Matisse once again, in the works by Willi Baumeister and Victor Servranckx. A century of affinities between choices are finally bridged with the modernist pictorial analyses of Rik Wouters and Jules Schmalzigaug.

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