



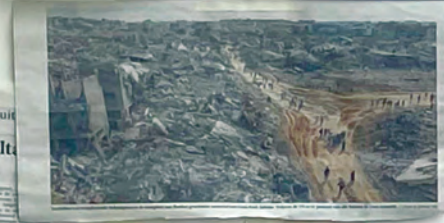
CASA para el Mundo

Migranten herontdekken levensgevaarlijke route via Canarische Eilanden

Wekend Afgelopen weekend strandden bijna 2.000 bootmigranten op de Canarische Eilanden. De route, levensgevaarlijke migratieleroute van West-Afrika naar de Spaanse eilanden is nu al acht keer zo populair als vorig jaar.



De overtocht van West-Afrika naar de Canarische Eilanden is de afgelopen jaren steeds populairder geworden. In de laatste week van het weekend strandden bijna 2.000 bootmigranten op de Canarische Eilanden. De route, levensgevaarlijke migratieleroute van West-Afrika naar de Spaanse eilanden is nu al acht keer zo populair als vorig jaar.



VN: elke maand rooft Rwanda 120 ton coltan en tin uit Congolees oorlogsgebied

Coltan is een zeldzaam VN-scheep blijkt dat het Rwandese leger van M23 rebellen elke maand meer dan 120 ton coltan en tin uit het Congolees oorlogsgebied.

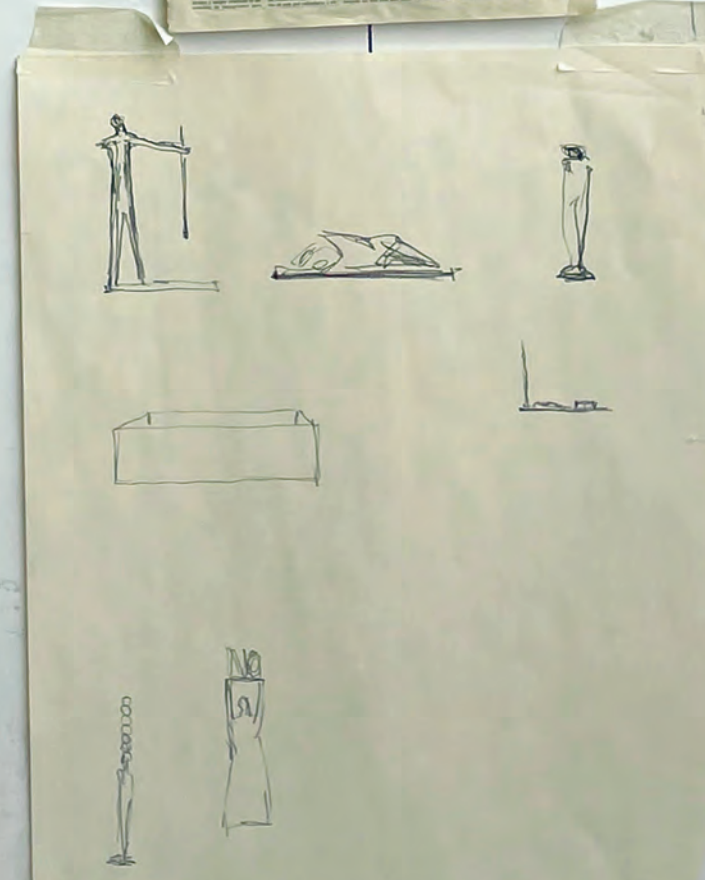
Gazanen keren terug naar wat ooit hun huis was "Ik heb er mijn hart achtergelaten"

La costa de los naufragios olvidados

El accidente de un cazavieja cerca de Cabo Verde eleva a más de 800 las muertes en la ruta canaria en dos meses.

Marlaska pide a Rabat control de los puntos de salida de pateras

La memoria de los inmigrantes que mueren al intentar entrar en España es un tema que se repite en los medios.



Philip Aguirre y Otegui

With contributions by

Annelien De Troij

Martin Germann

Jeroen Laureyns

Annelies Nagels

Otobong Nkanga

Rik Van Puymbroeck

Migranten herontdekken levensgevaarlijke route via Canarische Eilanden

uitgeverij Afgelopen weekend strandden bijna 2.000 bootvluchtelingen op de Canarische Eilanden. De oude, levensgevaarlijke migratieleroute van West-Afrika naar de Spaanse eilanden is nu al acht keer zo populair als vorig jaar.



De overtocht van West-Afrika naar de Canarische Eilanden is de afgelopen jaren steeds populairder geworden. Het aantal vluchtelingen dat op deze manier naar Spanje komt, is in 2014 met 80 procent toegenomen. Dit weekend strandden bijna 2.000 bootvluchtelingen op de Canarische Eilanden. De route is nu al acht keer zo populair als vorig jaar.



La costa de los naufragios olvidados



"Yo estimo la vida a un lado que al otro a la muerte", afirma Miguel. La costa ha perdido la memoria. "Cuando hace meses me fui me acordé."

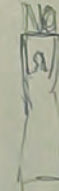
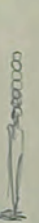
Marlaska pide a Rabat control de los puntos de salida de pateras

La ministra de los inmigrantes pide más control a los puntos de salida de pateras.

Hoe 23 migranten bij Melilla de dood ingegaagd werden

Op 24 juni stierven 23 migranten aan de hokken van de enclave Melilla. Volgens Spanje vond de tragedie niet plaats op Spaanse grond.

Een nieuw onderzoek trekt dat officiële verhaal in twaalf en geeft miljoenen...



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Annelien De Troij

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20–23

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Foreword

As a museum of fine art, the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA) encourages us – as individuals – to look, experience and engage with life time and time again. With this exhibition of Philip Aguirre y Otegui's work, we welcome an artist to our museum whose art is inextricably linked to the world in which we live.

Aguirre y Otegui's work spans a wide range of disciplines, including sculpture, installation, drawings and collage, with a unique commitment to public space. In his empathic and poetic oeuvre, he puts human figures and people's stories front and centre. At the same time, he is a keen observer of society. Social and political themes, including migration and the refugee crisis, are a common thread. His work attests to his lasting faith in mankind and the universal power of beauty.

This exhibition provides a retrospective of five decades, from the 1980s to the present day. Within it, monumental sculptures engage with smaller works, highlighting the diversity and evolution of an oeuvre that has always situated itself at the intersection of the studio, exhibition space and public space.

But this publication goes one step further. As well as providing an overview of the exhibition, this is the first time that the full scope of Aguirre y Otegui's work has been captured in a single publication. In so doing, it offers an insight into his diverse artistry, in which sculpture holds a special place and where beauty, tactility, humanity and engagement continually converge.

The KMSKA is delighted to showcase this body of work, and this book offers a panorama of Philip Aguirre y Otegui's artistry. We wish to thank the artist, all the employees and authors who contributed to this exhibition and book, and the lenders and partners who helped make this endeavour possible.

Luk Lemmens
Chairman of the Board, KMSKA

Carmen Willems
General Director, KMSKA





Zonder titel (Untitled),
1983, plaster, 31 × 10 × 10 cm,
artist's collection

Venus, 1983, bronze, 15.5 × 6 × 5.5 cm, Kris Van Zeebroeck collection





Studio View, Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp, 1985

Annelien De Troij

Shelter from the Storm

The world is on fire and we sit cosily inside. Outside, bombs are falling, but we chat pleasantly by the fireside. We give meaning to our domestic lives by surrounding ourselves with beauty, but as soon as we step out into the street, we are confronted with ugliness, violence and chaos.

How do we reconcile that longing for a private Eden with a world gone off the rails? That search for balance is something Philip Aguirre y Otegui evokes in his works, as in his most recent terracotta bas-reliefs. On the one hand, there is the peaceful order of a patio such as *Sculpture Garden* (p. 286); on the other, in *Courtyard and the Street*, a tank rolls by outside the walls of the safe ‘enclosed garden’ – *hortus conclusus* in Latin (p. 287).

A Witness to his Time

Like everyone, artists are born into a specific age and context. Pieter Bruegel and Francisco de Goya y Lucientes succeeded in giving their account of their era a wonderful universality. Or perhaps it is as Vincent van Gogh wrote during his stay in Antwerp to his brother Theo: ‘All the same, it’s *something* not to be taken in by the falseness of one’s time....’¹

That intense quest for an account of his time that is as truthful as it is universal characterises Aguirre’s work. Time

holds up a mirror to him, but the artist certainly holds one up to time as well. The historical documents present in his studio throw a surprising light on his view of humanity and society.

Among other things, his archive contains newspaper cuttings on war and refugees. A 2003 photograph of a Spanish soldier tending to an African boat refugee who had washed ashore is particularly telling. The caption beneath it reads, ‘A little warmth’ (fig. 2). That poignant photograph inspired the artist to create *Algeciras Acoge* (fig. 1), a sculpture that brings Goya to mind because the work depicts the best and worst of humanity.



(fig. 1) *Algeciras Acoge*, 2007, bronze, 7.5×20×8.5 cm, private collection



(fig. 2) Archive material, newspaper photograph from *De Morgen*, 2003

Beauty with Many Faces

From the start, art has been a matter of commitment for Aguirre, a vital necessity. His journey of discovery along the paths of beauty takes many forms.

Some of his sculptures allude to classical antiquity, but the motifs have been deliberately and subtly manipulated. Here, an imposing triumphal arch is transformed into fragile poetry (p. 45). There, a caryatid is no longer a pillar supporting a building, but a woman carrying a wounded man on her head (p. 217). Is that a *kouros* we see? Yes, but a mutilated one, and thus an anti-hero (p. 228).

Other works allude to the visual idiom of early twentieth-century Modernism. To the modern forms of the sculptors whom Aguirre admires: from Aristide Maillol (fig. 3) and Henri Laurens to Ossip Zadkine. Each and every one of these sculptors stylises the human body into a quasi-abstract interplay of form and volume. But the work also draws on such Italian Modernists as Arturo Martini, Lucio Fontana, Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrà. Their influence is evident in such architecture and landscape works as *Patio* (fig. 4) and *Ramallah* (p. 168).

Other sculptures bring to mind sculptors who were revolutionary because they had an eye for the everyday. Constantin Meunier, for example, did not create monuments for the elite, but for the workers he portrayed (fig. 5). This focus on ordinary, working people is also central to Aguirre’s *Man met borden* (Man with Plates, fig. 6). Not a top chef from a Michelin-starred restaurant, but a tribute to an anonymous dishwasher.

Poetry of Form and Colour

Yet there is something else at play in Aguirre's body of work. In his own pieces, he weaves together classical and contemporary elements to create a language of his own. He elevates and condenses diverse visual idioms into a poetry of the object. Just as language becomes autonomous in Modernist poetry, Aguirre lets the materials – forms and colours – engage in dialogue with one another in a language of their own.

Like Charles Baudelaire in his 1857 poem 'L'invitation au voyage' (from the collection *Les Fleurs du mal*), the artist invites his viewers on a journey through the language of beauty. He shows us the way to a place where everything is 'order, luxury and pleasure'. Or, in Baudelaire's words:

There all is order and beauty,
Luxury, peace, and pleasure.²

The trouble, of course, is that this beauty, this new language, is not to be absorbed smoothly; on the contrary, it has sharp edges. It seems to remind us of an Edenic state of which we are no longer a part, of a unity that we now know only vaguely but from which



(fig. 5) Constantin Meunier, *Het grauwwuur* (Firedamp), 1889, bronze, 151.5×212×108.5 cm, RMFAB (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels), inv. 3200



(fig. 3) Aristide Maillol, *Woman with Crab*, 1930, terracotta, 16×14×11.5 cm, KMSKA (Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp) – Flemish Community collection, inv. 2788

we are nonetheless alienated. Or, as Baudelaire described the relationship between humankind and nature in his sonnet 'Correspondances':

Nature is a temple in which living
pillars
Sometimes give voice to confused
words;
Man passes there through forests
of symbols
Which look at him with
understanding eyes.³

That fragile experience of beauty – the fragmentary memory of what might once have been – alerts the viewers of Aguirre's images to a human shortcoming. In his work on textiles, for example, nature and humankind are, as it were, loosely connected (pp. 278–279). As if both had been thrown into a world that is certainly beautiful but lacks coherence. Aguirre occasionally lets this universal yet vulnerable experience of beauty clash with the language of power.

Power and Powerlessness

Ever since classical antiquity, sculpture has portrayed and normalised authority and power, from Caligula to Saddam Hussein. Aguirre plays a subversive game with this age-old pragmatic function of his craft.



(fig. 4) *Patio*, 2012, bronze, 15×26.5×14.4 cm, private collection



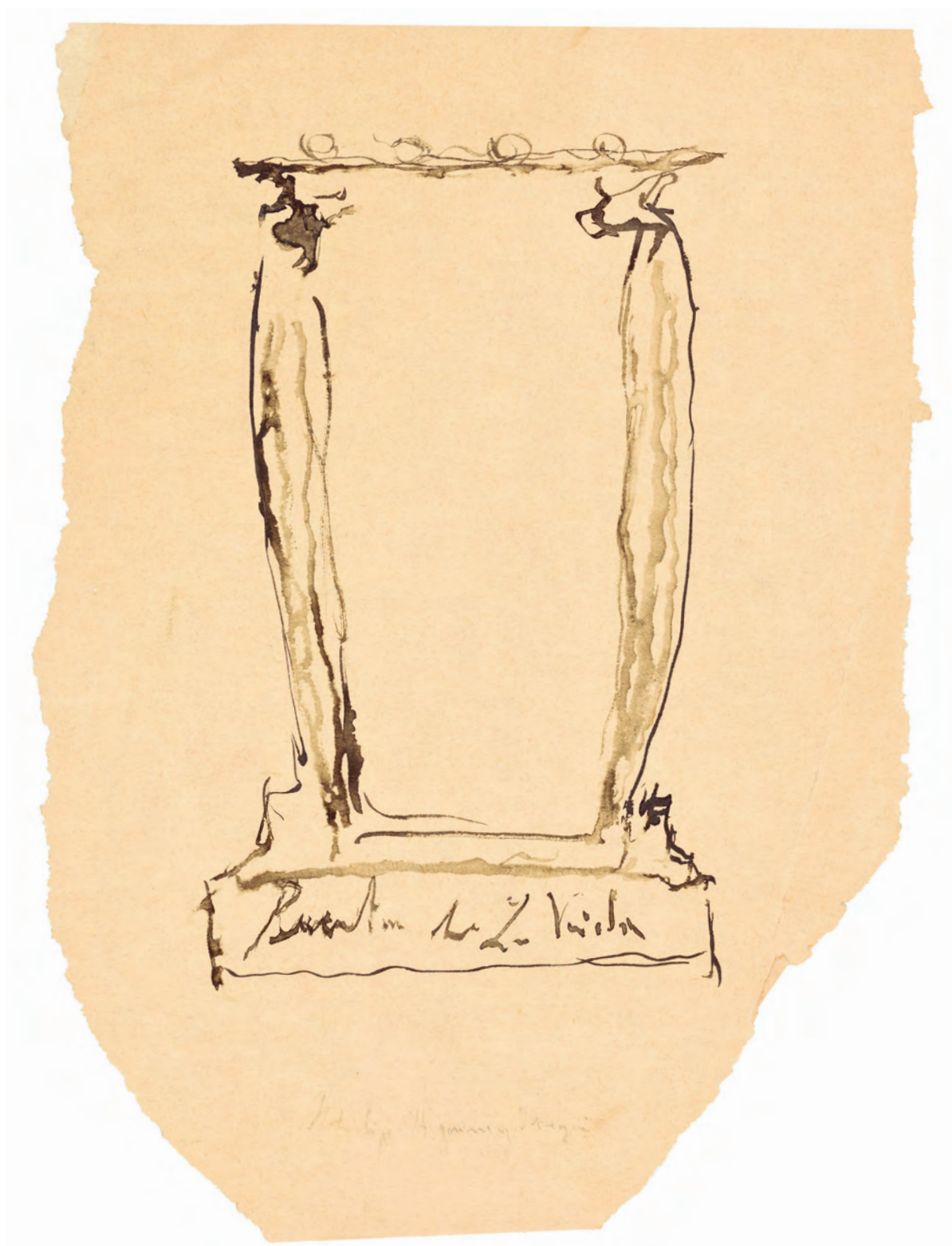
(fig. 6) *Man met borden* (Man with Plates), 2009, bronze, 40×diam. 20 cm, private collection



Studio View,
Antwerp, 1988



Zonder titel (Untitled), 1985, plaster, chalk and acrylic paint, 14.5×31.5×17.5 cm, De Schrijver collection





Triomfboog (Triumphal Arch), 1988, clay, iron wire and paint, 42 × 54.5 × 9 cm, private collection

Martin Germann

Textures of the World, or Universalism from Below. On Philip Aguirre y Otegui

As I was asked to give a personal take on Philip's work, I shall begin with an anecdote. I first encountered his work about a year after I started working at S.M.A.K. in Ghent. Admittedly, at the time I was preoccupied with various aspects of the many art worlds we inhabit and with the particular demands of the museum and its profile. Yet something happened in that encounter. Whenever I discover work that may become meaningful to me – even if that only occurs much later – I experience a slight dizziness, a sudden warmth. This was no different, although I did not know why. I remember archways, pillars, figures, vessels of all kinds, often in ceramics or clay; sculpture, installations, countless drawings. All of it felt strangely familiar. There was nothing radically new, and that is precisely what puzzled me. The least I could say was that I found the work *beautiful*, and that I was drawn to its extraordinarily tactile surfaces.

Fifteen years on, things appear somewhat different. Having become a little closer to the artist and his works, and perhaps also to myself, I now see

something new in his practice, though not the kind of novelty associated with the Modernist pursuit of perpetual innovation, or any Postmodernist quotation shift. The *new* lies not simply in the delicate and technically assured way Philip reworks inherited forms, deriving his inspiration from painting, sculpture, literature and many other sources. It also lies in the way he reconciles Western notions of the sublime with perspectives that emerged through post-colonial criticism and which has become an increasingly important force in his work since the 1980s.

His work has consistently remained close to the perspective of the 'common person,' while avoiding absorption into the perpetual identity battles of today's institutional art world. The 'man, free of a personal identity,' as Philip described him in a conversation in 2007 – today one would simply say 'person' – still hovers over his work. His engagement is not activist in nature, but takes the form of critical distance and a deep trust in art's capacity to register necessary change without severing ties with its predecessors. For Philip, the history of art might remain a history of openings and continuities. The form of rupture that his work creates is therefore not destructive but connective, particularly suited to a moment in which paradigms and expectations have shifted.

In his recent book *Post-Europe*, philosopher Yuk Hui describes a form of homelessness produced by globalisation: a condition in which technological systems flatten the cultural and spiritual frameworks through which communities understand the world. At the very core of Philip's practice, however, lies a relationship with the material itself.

'Essential for me is the handling of matter,' he wrote to me, 'a loving relationship with clay and colour and paper, tactile and sensual.' Clay, paper, found tins, small objects are worked with the patience of someone who believes matter has its own claims on attention, even a 'soul'. Not only do basic vessels, tools and other primary forms of representation appear repeatedly in his work, but so do places such as the courtyard, almost as a counter-space to this contact – an enclosed, domestic space where bodies, hands and materials meet without the pressure of an outside world.

Across his works, forms that carry memory find themselves placed within worlds that no longer fully belong to them, so that between belonging and displacement, protection and exposure, Philip locates a space in which art can still find meaning. This harks back to something the artist once described as a productive complication within his own practice: how not to create a *tabula rasa* with the past while still allowing the work to attain a degree of transcendence and autonomy. Here one arrives at another characteristic of his practice which might be called a 'universalism from below' – not a universalism grounded in abstraction, but one emerging through shared gestures, materials, forms of labour, memory and touch.

One of the many artists who continue to have an afterlife in Philip's oeuvre is Auguste Rodin, whose work anticipated the homelessness that Yuk Hui would later describe as a global condition. Yet another figure is just as important: Rodin's secretary and friend, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. Writing about Rodin's sculptures, Rilke observed: 'A hand lying on the shoulder or thigh of another body no longer belongs

completely to the one it came from: a new thing arises out of it and the object it touches or grasps, a thing that has no name and belongs to no one, and it is this new thing, which has its own definite boundaries, that matters from that point on.¹

This nameless thing returned repeatedly to my mind while looking at Philip's strangely familiar yet somehow new works: their arches and plateaus, the spaces between things or, more precisely, his tendency to model passages rather than objects alone. While art is primarily about seeing, it is also about touch. Perhaps when I first encountered Philip's work there was nothing *unseen* in it for me, but rather something *unfelt*.

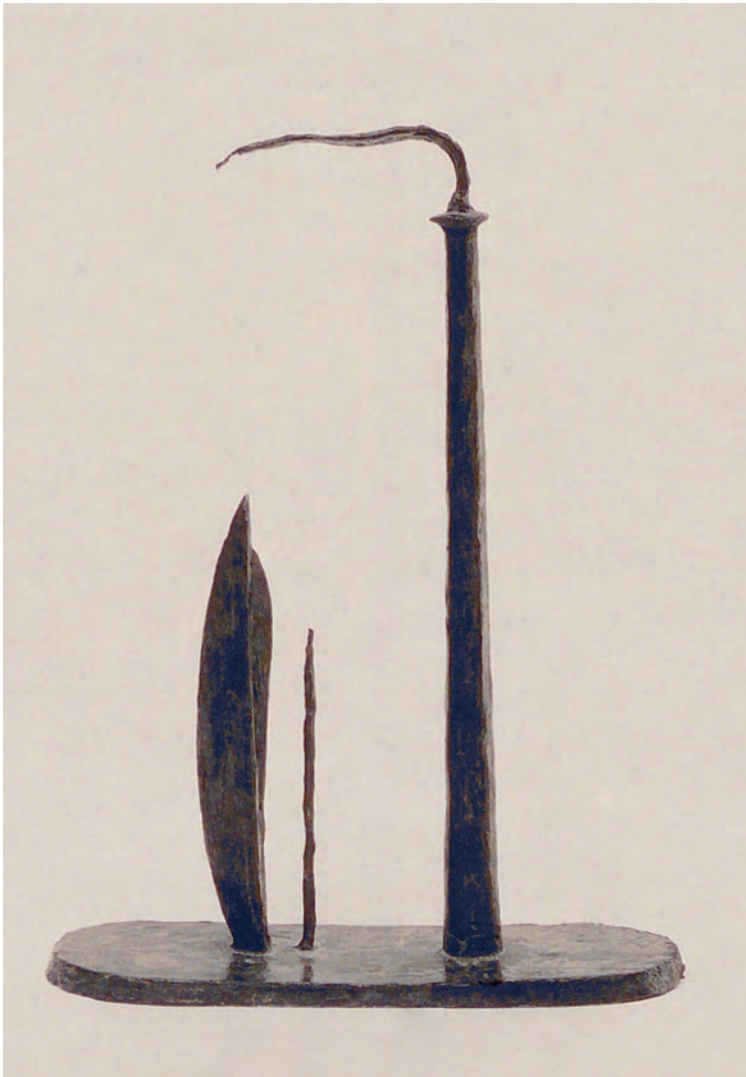
- 1 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Auguste Rodin, Erster Teil* (Insel Verlag, 1903), p. 164: "Eine Hand, die sich auf eines anderen Schulter oder Schenkel legt, gehört nicht mehr ganz zu dem Körper, von dem sie kam: aus ihr und dem Gegenstand, den sie berührt oder packt, entsteht ein neues Ding, ein Ding mehr, das keinen Namen hat und niemandem gehört; und um dieses Ding, das seine bestimmten Grenzen hat, handelt es sich nun." English translation Martin Germann.







Blad (Leaf), 1988, bronze, 41 × 13 × 7 cm, artist's collection



Zonder titel (Untitled), 1989, bronze, 37 × 27 × 12 cm, private collection



Estrella (Star), 1989, bronze, h. 42 cm, artist's collection



Cielo (Sky), 1989, bronze,
31 × diam. 19 cm,
private collection



En mi taller (In my Studio), 1995, watercolour and pencil on paper, 20 × 34.7 cm, private collection



Studio View, Berchem, 1995



El Harhoura, 1994, wood, wire and shoe sole, h. 33 cm, private collection





Agnese



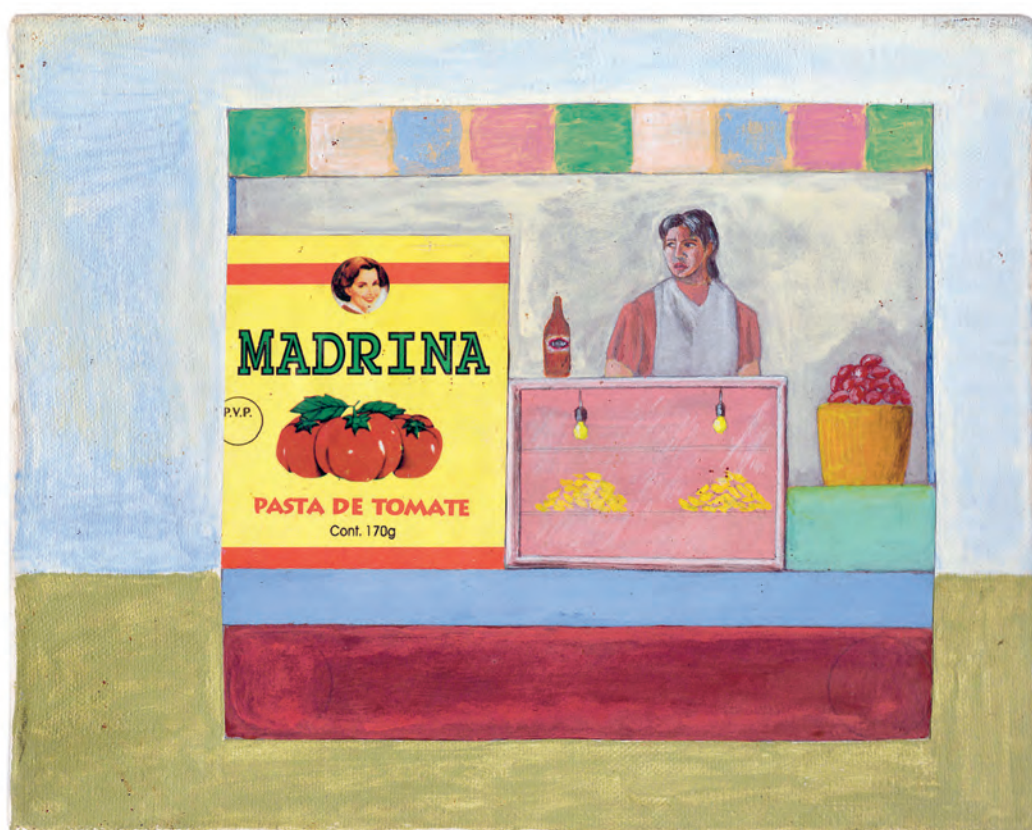
Installation View, Hamdallaye,
Senegal, 1996







Cocine (Kitchen), 1999, collage, pencil and acrylic on paper, 20 × 30 cm, artist's collection



Madrina, 1999, collage and acrylic on canvas, 20 × 25 cm, artist's collection

Es Sentir De Verdad
(A True Feeling), 1999,
Installation View and
Performance, Casa
Unesco, Quito, Ecuador,
artist's collection



Petit Monument (Small Monument), 2010, bronze, 76 × 36 × 13.5 cm, KMSKA (Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp) – Flemish Community collection, inv. 4160







Courtyard, 2024, cotton, 179 × 134.5 cm, private collection



Gaugui Shelter,
2026, polyester,
575 × 367 × 157 cm,
artist's collection,
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Courtyard and the Street, 2025, terracotta, 31×22×2 cm, from the series 'Courtyard and the Street', artist's collection



Pleurants (Mourners), 2025, terracotta, 32×22×2 cm, from the series 'Courtyard and the Street', artist's collection



Bomb, 2025, terracotta, 55×37×2 cm, from the series 'Courtyard and the Street', artist's collection



Field, 2025, terracotta, 43×30×2 cm, from the series 'Courtyard and the Street', artist's collection

BIOGRAPHIES

Philip Aguirre y Otegui, born in 1961, is a versatile artist known for his sculptures, drawings, installations and collages. He lives and works in Borgerhout, Belgium. Aguirre y Otegui studied sculpture at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and at the National Higher Institute for Fine Arts, both in Antwerp. Over the years he has built an extensive international career with solo exhibitions at, among others, the KMSKA, the Plantin-Moretus Museum and the Middelheim Museum in Antwerp, Mu.ZEE in Ostend and Gaasbeek Castle in Lennik, as well as at various galleries. His work has also been shown at international group exhibitions, including Documenta11, the Dakar Biennale, the Beaufort Triennial, the SUD Triennial in Cameroon and, in 2026, the Venice Biennale. He has also exhibited in countries such as Morocco, Senegal, Cameroon, Ecuador, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Luxembourg, Ireland and the United States.

Annelien De Troij is an art historian, researcher and curator. In 2013 she obtained a Master's degree in Art Sciences from KU Leuven, specialising in Art Criticism. From 2013 to 2019 she was part of the art-historical team at Axel Vervoordt Gallery, where she coordinated exhibitions of the work

of, among others, Günther Uecker, El Anatsui, Ann Veronica Janssens, Angel Vergara, Renato Nicolodi and Kimsooja. From 2019 to 2024 she worked as a researcher for the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (M HKA), where she led the project on the work of Jef Verheyen, which resulted in the 2024 retrospective exhibition *Jef Verheyen. Window on Infinity* at the KMSKA. Since 2024, De Troij has been working as a curator at the KMSKA, where she is involved in various exhibitions and publications.

Martin Germann is a curator who lives and works in Berlin and Japan. He is co-founder of 'No Centre', a new nomadic institution in Japan that will begin operating in autumn 2026. From 2012 to 2019 he was head of the artistic team at S.M.A.K. in Ghent, after which he worked for the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo from 2019 to 2025. He specialises in site-specific projects which in recent years he has organised for, among others, ACK in Kyoto, the Jewish Museum of Belgium, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens in Deurle and – as curator of the Art Class – the Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Künste in Düsseldorf.

Jeroen Laureyns is a teacher, lecturer, researcher and art critic at LUCA School of Arts. He studied art history at Ghent University and

obtained a doctorate at the VUB (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) in 2013 with the book and exhibition *Weg van Vlaanderen – Hedendaagse landschappen in de beeldende kunst 1968–2013*. The spoken and written word are central to his work: as an art critic on the radio programme *Pompidou* on Klara (VRT), as a teacher at LUCA School of Arts in Ghent, and as a reviewer for, among others, *De Standaard*, *De Tijd*, *rekto:verso* and *GLEAN*.

Annelies Nagels is a curator, writer and teacher of art history in part-time arts education (DKO). After completing her studies in Slavic philology, she went on to study art history and wrote her thesis on the Russian avant-garde artist Natalia Goncharova. She led the exhibitions department of De Warande in Turnhout for fourteen years, the last two years as head of the cultural centre. There, she organised solo exhibitions of work by, among others, Hans Op de Beeck, Jef Geys, Nicolas Provost, Peter de Cupere, Nel Aerts, Carole Vanderlinden, Femmy Otten and Nadia Naveau, alongside numerous group and thematic exhibitions. In 2022 she established herself as an independent curator.

Otobong Nkanga is a multidisciplinary artist. She lives and works in Antwerp. Her practice is based on ecological themes and explores the

complex social, political and material relationships between bodies, territories, minerals and the earth through drawings, installations, performances, photography, textiles and sculpture. She studied at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ife-Ife (Nigeria) and the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and obtained her Master's degree in Performing Arts at DasArts in Amsterdam. Nkanga has exhibited at, among others, MoMA (New York), Tate Modern (London), Castello di Rivoli, Kunsthaus Bregenz and, more recently, the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris and the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne. She has received major awards, including the Sikkens Prize 2026, the 2025 Nasher Prize for Sculpture, and the Belgium Art Prize in 2017.

Rik Van Puymbroeck is a journalist at *De Tijd* and has been named *Meesterverteller* (Master Storyteller) three times by the Stichting Verhalende Journalistiek in the Netherlands. His books include *Thuis en ver van huis*, *Weduwen* and *Ergens onderweg*. In 2023, his literary debut *Treurwil* was published; in the spring of 2024 it was awarded the Confituur Boekhandel-sprijs and made the shortlist for De Bronzen Uil.

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The exhibition at the KMSKA was made possible thanks to the support of the partners



and many others

Dust jacket front
Gaalgui Shelter, 2026, bronze,
28 × 21.5 × 11 cm, artist's collection

Dust jacket back
Donna con bandera (Woman with
Banner), 1988, plaster and paper,
60 × 40 × 12 cm, private collection

Front cover image
Courtyard, 2024

Back cover image
Vrouw draagt man (Woman Carries
Man), 2017

p. 1
CASA para el Mundo (A House
for The World), 2017, woodcut on
paper, 66 × 45 cm, artist's collection

The artist sincerely wishes to thank:

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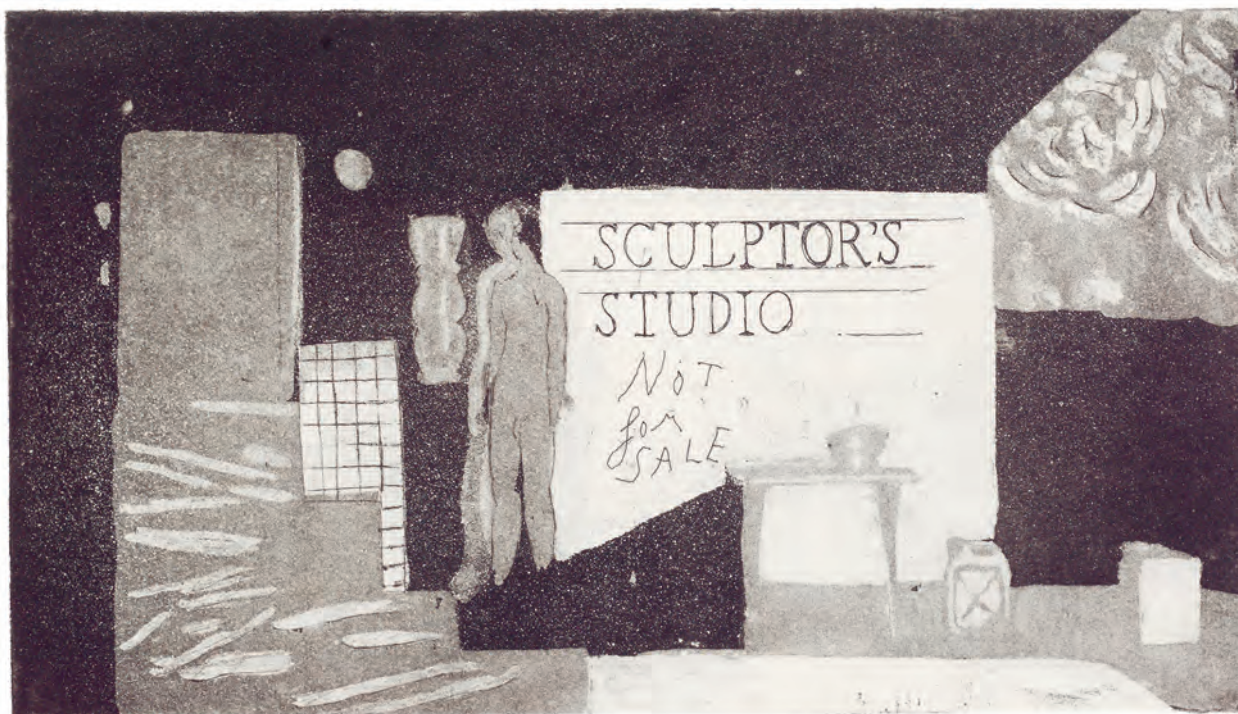
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SE VENDE PRODUCTOS INUTILES (For Sale Useless Products),
2010, woodcut on paper, 31 × 46 cm, artist's collection



Sculptor's Studio, Not for Sale, 2024, etching on paper, 20 × 34 cm, artist's collection

