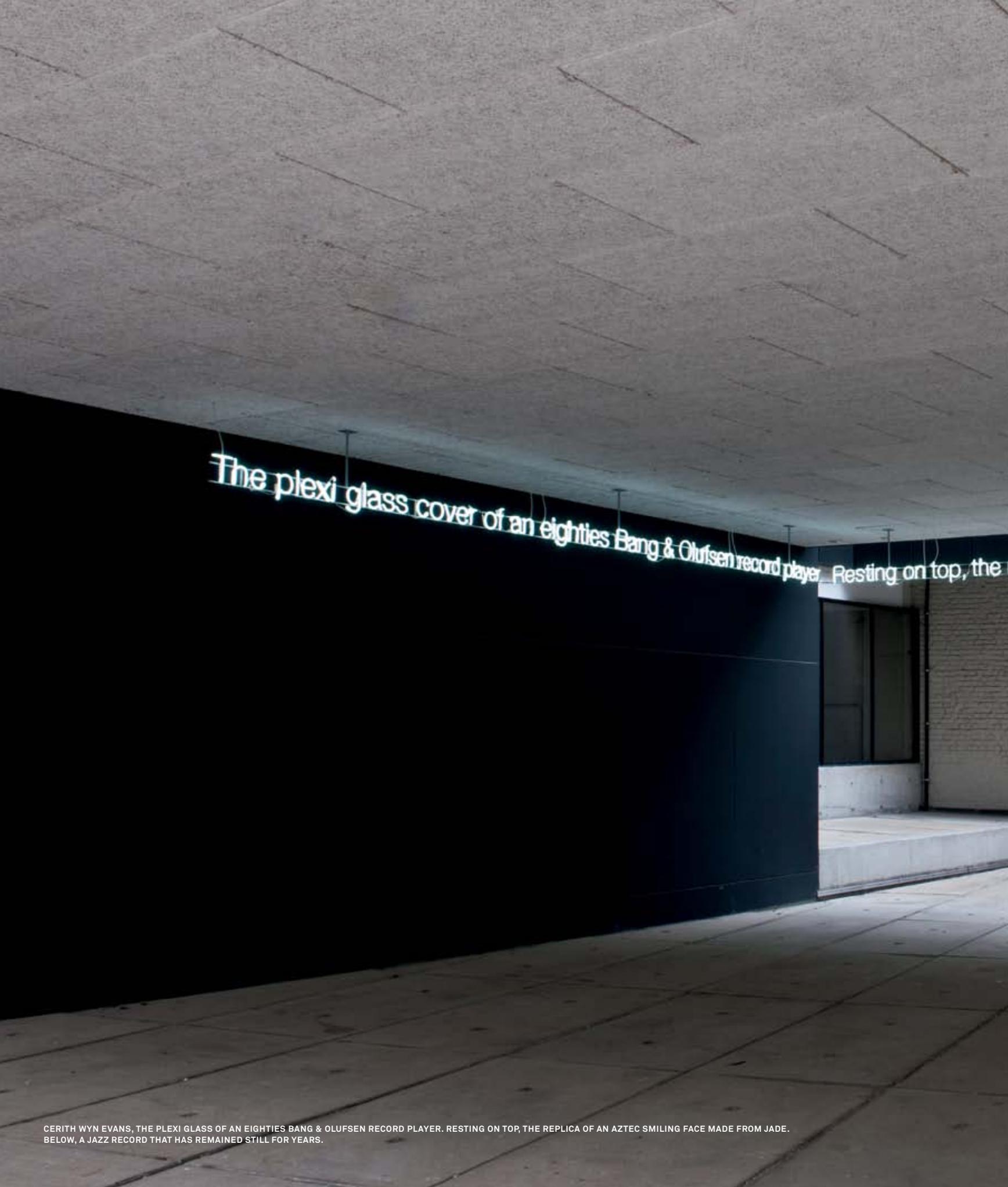


# MAN IN THE MIRROR

most eminent east

**MAM  
IN  
THE  
MIRROR**

VanhaerentsArtCollection



The plexi glass cover of an eighties Bang & Olufsen record player. Resting on top, the

CERITH WYN EVANS, THE PLEXI GLASS OF AN EIGHTIES BANG & OLUFSEN RECORD PLAYER. RESTING ON TOP, THE REPLICA OF AN AZTEC SMILING FACE MADE FROM JADE. BELOW, A JAZZ RECORD THAT HAS REMAINED STILL FOR YEARS.

... replica of an Aztec smiling face made from jade. Below, ...



# The Man in the Mirror

**MICHAEL JACKSON** — *Man in the Mirror* is one of the most played tributes to the late King of Pop, Michael Jackson. The song is an exploration of personal identity and expresses an individual's struggle to reconcile with society, his self-image and responsibility, although, notably, the words were written by a woman. At odds with its success as an upbeat pop song, *Man in the Mirror* is also sentimental, idealistic, sensitive, brilliant, socially conscious, and backed by nothing less than a gospel choir. The man Michael Jackson saw in the mirror in 1988 may have been the same. But *Man in the Mirror* anno 2009 tells a different story. After his tragic death, *Man in the Mirror* was the final song to be played at his public memorial. As the song played, a spotlight shined onto a microphone on an empty stage. But it still seemed like nobody knew who the man in the mirror – or, more accurately, the man in the spotlight – really was.

The act of looking in the mirror is a private moment. But for Michael Jackson, the contemplative, reflective, personal moment described in *Man in the Mirror* was never really an option. Everything he did was exposed to the public eye, and everything we say about him is based on that troublesome, distorted mirror of media attention.

**MIRRORS** — Who was the man in the mirror? Michael Jackson, who spent almost his entire life in stardom, said he hated mirrors and hated looking into them. Mirrors are traitors. They are inexorable. Is there someone watching you from behind, through the looking glass? If you sit in front of one in a restaurant you are confronted with your bad table manners, the grotesque movement of your mouth. If you are making love with your beloved in a hotel room with a mirrored ceiling, all your naked movements are registered, and your most intimate parts are displayed and multiplied. In front of the mirror in your bathroom all your imperfections appear: the spots, the folds of skin, the wrinkles, the bags under your eyes.

Mirrors are merciless and make you feel uncomfortable. That's why Rashid Johnson covers them with wax and black soap, Jeppe Hein makes them tremble so they become blurred, Michelangelo Pistoletto cuts them into pieces or glues immobile figures onto them, and David Altmejd smashes them with a hammer like exploding stars.

**MYSTERY ICONS** — Saul van Messel wrote: '*I would like to see myself once when I don't look into the mirror*'. It's hard to be a big media phenomenon. Many great stars have bowed out of life in clearly unexpected, mysterious and ghostly ways. It is as though they were predestined to die, abandoned to their loneliness, their medical needs inattentively followed up.

Andy Warhol, the real king of pop art, an artist of many media, died on February 22, 1987, a day after having had surgery to remove an inflamed gallbladder, making the *Last Supper* images a fitting, if unintentional, conclusion to his art career. Many uncertainties surrounded Warhol's death. He was a figure who was famous for being famous, for knowing famous people and for serving as an avatar of fame, and nothing pleases the media more than an opportunity to celebrate one of their own creations. In fact, it looked as if Warhol himself had orchestrated it, which, in a sense, he had.

On August 5, 1962, Marilyn Monroe's body was found in the bedroom of her home in Brentwood. The investigation autopsy came to the conclusion that her death was caused by acute barbiturate poisoning. Had she been abandoned? Witnesses declared that a day earlier, John and Bobby Kennedy had come to visit her, and neighbours had heard screams and the sound of breaking glass. Does celebrity status make you more prone to criminal romance? The only thing we know for sure is that the living legend died in her prime, surrounded by mystery, scandal and uncertainty. Philippe Parreno pays homage to her, referring to the poetry she wrote. But where is the poetry of a life wasted as a tragic sex symbol?

Michael Jackson's death on June 25, 2009 was shrouded in mystery but finally explained as an involuntary homicide. He had been administered Propofol and three anti-anxiety benzodiazepines by his personal physician Conrad Murray, who had left him alone afterwards. With his influence on pop, near-alien physical appearance and unparalleled eccentricity, he was almost non-human and will be remembered as an irreplaceable persona in the music and entertainment industry.

**STEPPING OUT** — More humorous and distracting is *The Man in the Mirror*, a British film comedy from 1936 where Edward Everett Horton plays the part of Jeremy Dilke, a meek and mild-mannered, somewhat mousy businessman who allows everyone to use him as a doormat. That is, until he looks in the mirror one day and comes face to face with his more confident and assertive alter ego, who steps out of the mirror, comes to life and declares: '*I am the man you have always longed to be*'. Now ready to face the world with this newfound confidence, Dilke sets about doing the things he always secretly wanted to do, but never could. Let's end with some positive advice: if you want to change the world, you have to start with yourself. Don't just sit back and complain about the way things are, but take a look in the mirror. If you want to make a difference, look at the man or woman in the mirror.

Special thanks go to Emma Dexter, my co-curator, my personal assistant Vincent Verbist, and my whole family.





## The Nature of the Mirror's Truth

The process of curating a thematic exhibition is an exercise in uncovering links, differences, harmonies and disparities in a selection of works – in this case those collected by Walter Vanhaerents over a forty-year period. In this regard, the exhibition, which almost exclusively draws on that collection, is a map of the collector's interests and passions within the contemporary art field at any given moment, and therefore affords the opportunity, however subjectively, to analyse shifting trends over the same period.

*Man in the Mirror* brings together works that emphasize the interaction of the spectator's body and senses in relation to it, and how the artwork inhabits the exhibition space. This mode of thinking about art began in the sixties, when artists in both Europe and the Americas, influenced in part by the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty on the phenomenology of perception, and by the revolutionary spirit of the age, started to critique and dismantle the hegemony of painting and sculpture as dominant art forms. Painting in the fifties was still working through the pre-war trajectories of constructivism and expressionism, while post-war sculpture was dominated by the almost archaic medium of bronze as the vehicle for the angst-ridden existential and political art of the age. Artists seeking a radical break with tradition sought new materials or even a dematerialised art that could resist easy commodification. This resulted in a tumultuous decade of innovation, with new art forms such as assemblage, happenings and performance, installation and land art, and new movements and trends such as Fluxus, minimalism and arte povera. Artists seeking to disorient the viewer, or raise difficult philosophical, aesthetic and psychoanalytic concerns, understood the potential of the mirror and other reflective surfaces. Robert Smithson's comments in *Fragments of a Conversation* demonstrate his fascination with the paradoxical nature of the mirror: '*I'm using a mirror because the mirror in a sense is both the physical mirror and the reflection: the mirror as a concept and abstraction; then the mirror as a fact within the mirror of the concept.*'<sup>11</sup>

*Man in the Mirror* explores the resultant proliferation to the present day of works employing mirrors, reflective and other analogous surfaces, to examine questions of spectatorship, perception, reflexivity and space as well as psychoanalytical or identity-related content.

Before discussing the exhibition in detail, it is worth briefly exploring the historical role of the mirror in Western culture as a common object that has been at the heart of Western philosophical and aesthetic concepts since classical times, resulting in rich symbolic and metaphoric usage. The earliest mirrors were probably simple pools of still water, but some of the earliest known from Anatolia dating from approximately 6000 BC, were made from polished obsidian. Existing in most cultures and regions of the world for thousands of years, mirrors fashioned from polished metal, stone or glass, accumulated widespread folkloric and even magical purposes alongside their practical use. Eventually the modern mirror, which combined both metal and glass, became a precision instrument used in numerous technologies from astronomy to photography and optics. The mirror's numerous paradoxical qualities and uses – scientific and decorative, truth-telling and illusory, instrumental and magical, a flat surface offering a potentially infinite view of depth, and many others – combine to make it a potent symbolic object.

The nature of the mirror's truth – giving a true likeness of something – means the mirror is often mistakenly used as an analogy for reality, when in fact it offers a chimera, a two-dimensional image only. This paradox, at the heart of Western thought and culture, stems from Plato's use of the mirror in *The Republic* as a metaphor for the inadequacies of mimesis in relation to truth and the ideal: '*Turning a mirror round and round – you would soon enough make the sun and the heavens, and the earth and yourself, and other animals and plants, and all other things of which we were just speaking, in the mirror... but they would be appearances only.*'<sup>12</sup> Ever since Platonism, the mirror has been a key symbolic referent at the heart of Western philosophy and aesthetics in relation to the nature of mimesis

or naturalism, definitions of the real, reality and our perceptions of it. This role was instrumentalised during the Renaissance when Brunelleschi discovered that reflections demonstrate the principles of Euclidean geometry which are the basis for the laws of natural perspective, paving the way not just for illusionistic drawing and painting, but for accurate means of measuring, constructing and depicting the world through technical drawings and scale plans.

The paradox of the mirror therefore is that it is a scientific tool, yet one that has profound philosophical and even religious and moral connotations. A key example is the myth of Narcissus, which long ago embedded the mirror's association with vanity and delusion in Western iconographic tradition, alongside the – from a Christian viewpoint – dubious honour of being the traditional attribute of the goddess of love, Venus. Countering these associations, Christian iconography established the mirror as a symbol of the Virgin Mary's purity, while the exhortation from the Delphic oracle to 'know thyself' has led it to be associated with wisdom and self-knowledge.

Thus the mirror is central to our understanding of ourselves, not just through metaphor but in actuality, to examine faces, hair, bodies and clothes. The wider availability of mirrors coincided in the early modern period with the development of the notion of the individual, a coincidence that gathered pace in the nineteenth century when mass production became possible. Intriguingly, John Berger observed that perspective itself is related to the notion of the individual, being a system of representation that structured reality to address a single spectator from a fixed position, further contributing to the development of Renaissance humanism. The mirror was also to some extent the subject of the great self-portraits by Albrecht Dürer and Rembrandt; the intense self-scrutiny shown in these works would not be possible without the use of a mirror. A mirror is also a central device in two of history's most enigmatic paintings – Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait* and Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, in which the central mystery of the painting is the game of mirrors, which forms a philosophical, optical and abstract puzzle for the viewer.

Given its primary and common function as a means for individuals to view themselves, the mirror also gives its name to a psychoanalytical term for the significant moment when, at around eighteen months, the infant is able to identify their own reflected self, the 'mirror stage' becoming a key term in Lacanian theory for the description of the formation of the ego.

Mirrors that appear in paintings have been seen as a mechanism that undercuts the illusionism of the image. Edouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882, is credited with being one of the first paintings to undermine and expose illusionism by creating a dialectic of real and unreal space. The huge mirror in the painting gives an illusion of depth, but because it is a depiction of a reflection, it is not true illusionary space, so the image is perhaps better understood as an illusion of illusionism. The mirror demonstrates that depth in the painting is purely superficial, thereby establishing the painting's own optical reality. Mirrors are therefore at the core of our understanding of realism and naturalism, and offer the means to dismantle that same aesthetic tradition. Manet's painting is widely regarded as the first modernist painting, when a painting became a referent to itself rather than simply attempting to represent reality, thereby effectively becoming an autonomous art object.

Modern art is defined by this turning away from illusionism towards what Meyer Schapiro dubbed 'internalism': a self-reflexive system of reference not to reality as such, but to the reality of the painting or sculpture's own surface and materials. This reflexive quality in modern art is again analogous to the mirror since it is itself a form of mirroring.

The works in *Man in the Mirror* demonstrate how reflection as a practice has defined some of the most notable trends in recent artistic discourse, and reveals a huge variety of modes, materials and mechanisms employed by artists who use or allude to reflective surfaces, windows or screens. In the sixties, artists associated with minimalism, such as Robert Morris and Donald Judd, incorporated mirrors and reflective surfaces into their practice, thereby retaining a powerful referent to the history of painterly illusionism whilst creating an object that was resolutely autonomous and reflexive. For

Judd, this led to the development of his 'Specific Objects', which were neither sculpture nor painting, and paved the way for the hybrid forms of practice that are prevalent today. However, it must be stressed that the use of mirrors and reflective surfaces at that time was also part of a general trend, simultaneous in Europe and North and South America, in search of ways to change the materials of art and the relationship to space and the viewer.

The exhibition reveals how contemporary artists have taken some of the key formal tropes of minimalism, such as industrial materials or unitary form, and infused that austere aesthetic language with expressionism, metaphor, symbolism and even metaphysics. The exhibition shows how much contemporary practice functions as a *détournement* of these original minimalist and materialist principles as artists add to them references to popular culture, politics, race or religion. On the other hand, *arte povera* and allied European trends from the sixties and seventies, never possessed the inherent puritanism of minimalist art, and regularly infused works made from ordinary or industrial materials with metaphor and symbolism, alongside a concern for physical engagement with the spectator. An exception to this rule is American artist James Lee Byars who created his very own personal brand of baroque and gorgeous minimalism, evident here in the glittering gold leaf cube with funeral bier, which is his 1994 installation *The Death of James Lee Byars*.

The exhibition consists of five clusters of works that form thematic and material groupings. Firstly, there are works that literally incorporate mirrors or other highly polished surfaces; others depict or reference water and other naturally reflective materials such as crystals or gold and which, due to their elemental and natural associations, are redolent with symbolism, narrative, and questions of belief and redemption. Some works cluster around the notion of the screen, as in projections or in reference to the history and culture of cinema, or the digital – another mesmerizing screen that has become an extension of the human body and mind in the twenty-first century. Other works are grouped around questions of space and the political, examining how architecture and other built structures both create or reinforce social behaviours and concepts. And finally, the last subset of works uses text, another tool used by artists in the seventies to dismantle traditional media, to move art into new linguistic, cerebral and philosophical zones.

The large mirrored work by Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Divisione e moltiplicazione dello specchio (trittico)*, 1976, is a key work at the conceptual and historical heart of the exhibition. Consisting of a huge mirror leaning against the wall, it reflects a partial, fragmented and disorientating version of space in which viewers are only partly seen while new and unusual views are revealed. Pistoletto acknowledges the metaphysical interpretations of the mirror, fully aware that it encapsulates time and space itself. Yet he also alludes to historical and cultural antecedents: the triptych form as a conscious reference to the traditional format of altar paintings, or even a reference to the Trinity itself. As such, the work is a perfect example of how *arte povera*, as a very European phenomenon, imbued industrial and everyday materials with associations of shared mythological and cultural histories, reflecting on the present through the vehicle of the past, and embracing their metaphorical and symbolic power. Mirrors need an object to reflect and so the positioning of David Altmejd's impressive giant *Figure with Black Arms and Strawberry*, 2013, made from clay, resin, metal and quartz, confronts Pistoletto's mirror, providing a bizarre and surreal surrogate for the human figure within the space, as well as continuing the classical and European references. Altmejd's giant seems like some absurdist version of Michelangelo's *David*, a hybridised mutant that speaks of fragmentation, decay and vulnerability.

The exhibition includes several other examples or versions of mirrors or indeed anti-mirrors: Ugo Rondinone's blank and black-filled window offers no hope or escape, and certainly no view to another world. Alternatively, the work can be read as a metaphor for the dead end of illusionism, since the window, like the mirror, is a common analogy for realist painting. Concerned with the minimalist attention to how work is placed in and interacts with the surrounding space, Meuser's *Auf Wiedersehen*, 1989, an accrochage of heavy industrial materials, provides us with a mirror surrogate in the form of a large steel plate.

The exhibition shows how younger artists at times make oblique yet pointed cultural and political references in their work, often suggesting that the grand traditions of American modernism should be overwritten with contemporary meaning and interpretations. Gregor Hildebrandt constructs another mirror substitute in *Rückseitiger Spiegel des Spiegels*, or *Rear Mirror of the Mirror*, 2011. Fashioned from strips of blank videotape, the reflective surface is composed of a material that thirty years ago was used to allow the proliferation of images across the world on an unprecedented scale, before the digital revolution. Rashid Johnson's *What Comes Funky*, 2012, formally acknowledges both Mondrian in the grid, and Barnett Newman in his wax zips that bisect the mirror tiled painting, while the content specifically points to the rise of a cultural renaissance amongst African Americans in the seventies in Washington.

Mirrors can be disorienting and misleading, tricking the eye and the mind. Jeppe Hein's wobbling *Mirror Wall*, 2009, reminds us that we are always testing and discovering the nature of our own perceptions. Iván Navarro's *Untitled (Twin Towers)*, 2011, uses repeating mirror images to create a sense of infinity: his floor-based neon and mirror constructions create the effect of an infinitely receding space which appears to descend deep into the floor. Starting with the footprints of the world's most famous skyscrapers, and chosen by Navarro in this instance for its geopolitical and historical significance, this work is based upon the form of New York's Twin Towers. Despite its melancholy and elegiac associations, it also inspires awe and wonder on the part of the viewer.

Naturally reflective materials, harking back to Narcissus's use of water as a looking glass, with their rich metaphoric associations, are another recurring motif in the exhibition. Bill Viola's two videos *Transfiguration*, 2007, and *Acceptance*, 2008, are moving testaments to the symbolic power of water, used in these films to form an immaterial curtain for the human figure to pass through, as in a rite of passage. In *Double Midnight*, 2002, Teresita Fernández has created a delicate pool of reflective water on the gallery floor composed of thousands of tiny glass beads, echoed by an equally delicate wall-based work, a fretted vinyl cut-out *Wisteria (Yellow)*, 2000, which repeats the shape of the pool on the floor.

Other works in the show explore questions of space and the body, interrogating our interactions with architecture, urbanism and the social and political realm: Tomás Saraceno's *Galaxies on Strings*, 2011, models the artist's utopian plans for an entirely mobile and mutable floating city in the sky, while in contrast Elmgreen & Dragset's dystopian *Social Mobility, Fig. 2*, 2005, is a form of psycho-architecture in which a broken and destroyed staircase taunts the hapless viewer with an unattainable prospect of escape. Danh Võ's *We the People (Detail)*, 2011-2013, a copper replica section of the Statue of Liberty commissioned by the artist to remain forever in fragmented form, with the pieces scattered in collections and museums around the world, acts both as a commentary on American cultural imperialism, and as a metaphor for the broken dream that democracy represents within a global political world view. In a very different manner, the main first floor gallery is entirely given over to an immersive installation by the British artist Haroon Mirza, whose *Digital Switchover*, 2012, uses abstract sounds generated by the switching of the LED lights in the space to create a landscape that appeals to stimuli other than sight, turning the gallery itself into a form of musical instrument. Haegue Yang's hanging sculpture *Drifting Tree House with Orangey Branches*, 2012, combines the banality of the built environment in its clustered Venetian blinds, with hints of an everyday poetry of the miraculous and marvellous.

The screen, whether cinematic, televisual or digital, is another object analogous to the mirror in its offer of a reality, based on a succession of technologies spanning a hundred years, allowing the depiction of all-enveloping collective narratives, fantasies, and magical worlds. In Philippe Parreno's remarkable film *Marilyn*, 2012, the artist uses a battery of new technological developments including robotics and computer-generated voice to recreate a ghostly, immaterial Marilyn Monroe, depressively haunting her New York hotel suite. Isaac Julien's *Glass House, Prism (Ten Thousand Waves)*, 2010, continues the ghostly theme in a work that takes as its starting point the tragic deaths of 23 Chinese cockle pickers who drowned in the sea at Morecambe Bay in Lancashire in 2004. The work is a photographic offshoot from a major film about the tragedy, *Ten Thousand Waves*. In *Substrat 17 II*, 2003, Thomas Ruff has digitally manipulated cartoons from cyberspace and enlarged the images to the size of monumental paintings, reminiscent of abstract expressionism in their all-over abstraction so that they become a site for the fantasies and musings of the viewer.

As part of a reassessment of the art object in the sixties, artists turned to text as a means of dismantling and disembodimenting the object. In *Four Colors Four Words*, 1966, Joseph Kosuth demonstrates his belief that all art should be tautologous in nature. His neon sculpture reads 'blue red yellow green,' each word written in the same colour as the word denotes. This profoundly solipsistic work reflects back at itself like a mirror confronting a mirror – a closed system of commentary on itself like André Gide's 'mise en abyme'. Mark Handforth's witty *NO*, 2006, combines the traditions of conceptualism and minimalism in the overbearingly large free-standing bent road sign which bears the bald exhortation: No. Reminiscent of Serra's propped or torqued metal sculptures, the work departs from minimalism to explore narrative and humour, as well as raise questions of perception, displacement and social control. This giant sign is a broken and perhaps vandalized object, unsettling in its imperfection. Glenn Ligon uses text in his paintings to create works that explore little known histories and experiences. In *Figure #64*, 2010, silk-screened coal dust forms the near illegible words of an extract written by James Baldwin describing his experience of being the only black person in a Swiss village in the fifties.

The mirror deceives us with its ubiquity and apparent banality. Its literal and metaphoric role is in such common currency that it is easy to disregard its central and lofty role at the heart of Western civilisation: an essential instrument in aesthetics and philosophy, technology and science. Aside from stimulating reflexivity and dematerialisation in recent and contemporary art, the reflections, mirrors, signs and screens that form the artworks on display in *Man in the Mirror* go considerably further, acting as environmental, transcendent or technological devices to help us meditate upon perception, space, linguistics, the body, the afterlife, the built environment or the computer screen, and the increasingly thin interface between them all.

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- 1 William Lipke (ed.), 'Fragments of a Conversation' in Jack Flam (ed.), Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings, University of California Press, 1996, p. 190.
  - 2 Plato, *The Republic*, book X, 596c-e.

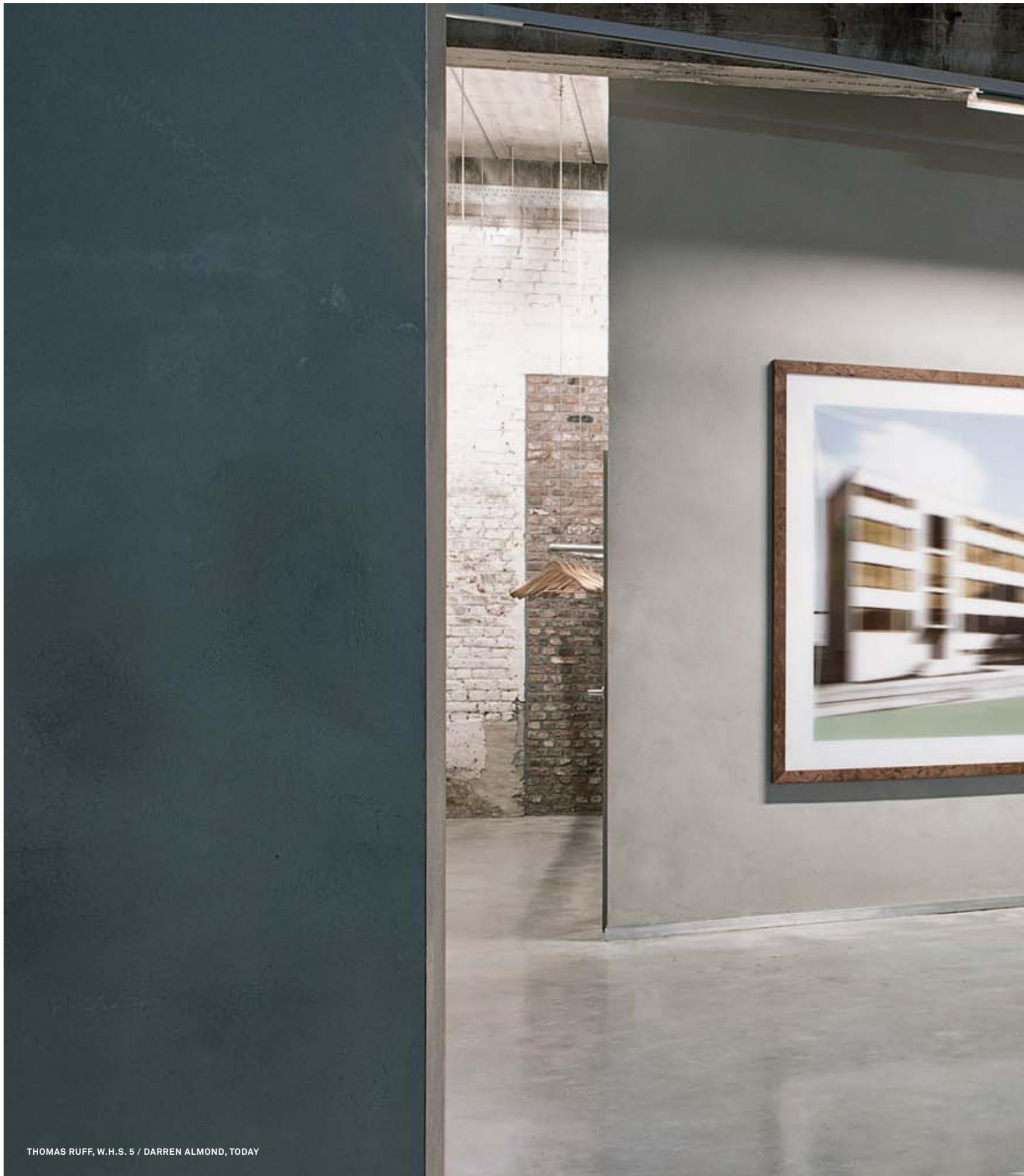
# exhibition — *views*

LEVEL 0



# MAN IN THE MIRROR

24.04.2014 — 28.10.2017





thurs



MEUSER, AUF WIEDERSEHEN / DAVID ALTMEJD, FIGURE WITH BLACK ARMS AND STRAWBERRY / MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO, DIVISIONE E MOLTIPLICAZIONE DELLO SPECCHIO (TRITTICO)



# exhibition — *views*

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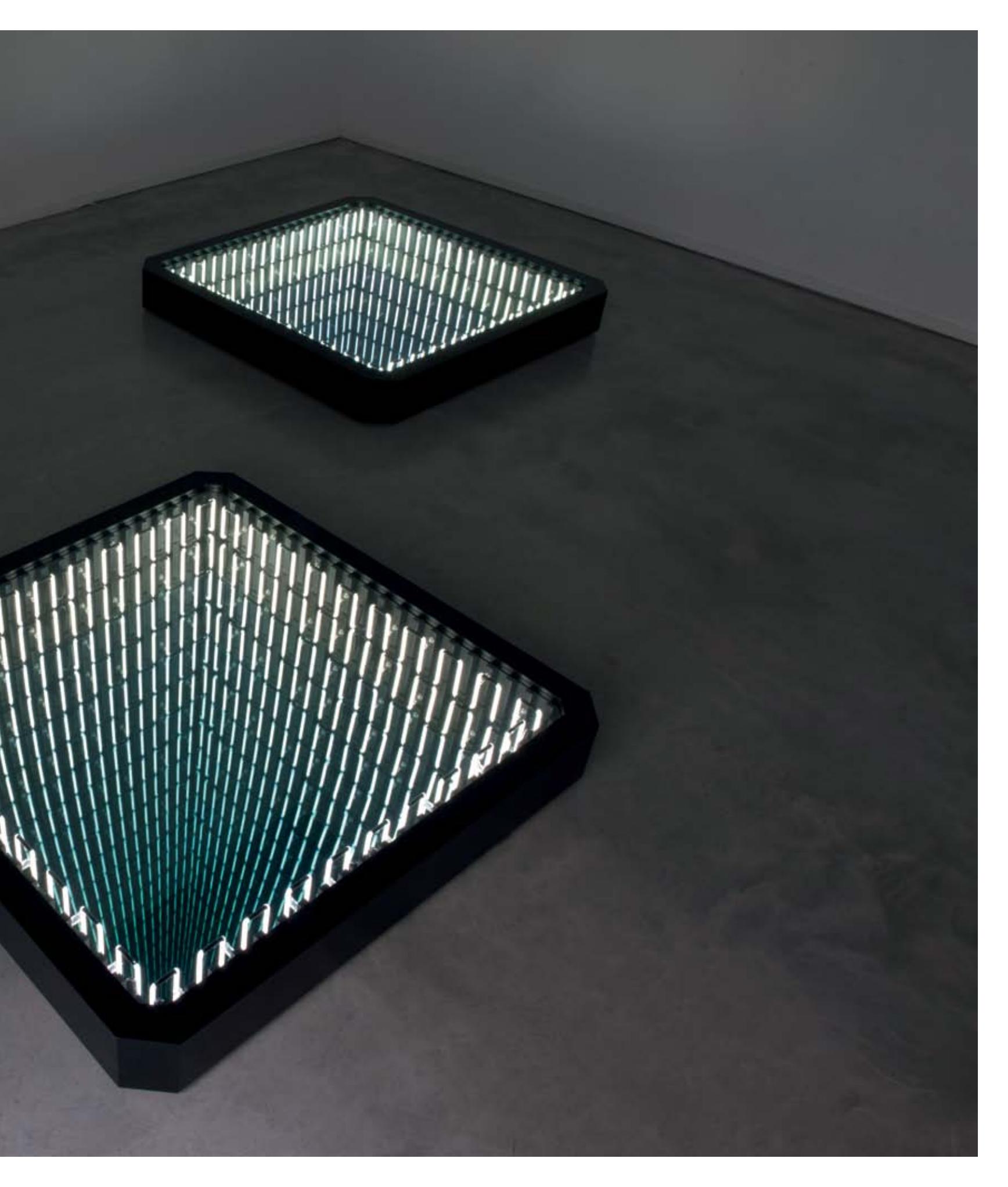




MATTHEW BARNEY, DRAWING RESTRAINT 9









TOMÁS SARACENO, GALAXIES ON STRINGS / IVÁN NAVARRO, UNTITLED (TWIN TOWERS)



TOMÁS SARACENO, GALAXIES ON STRINGS

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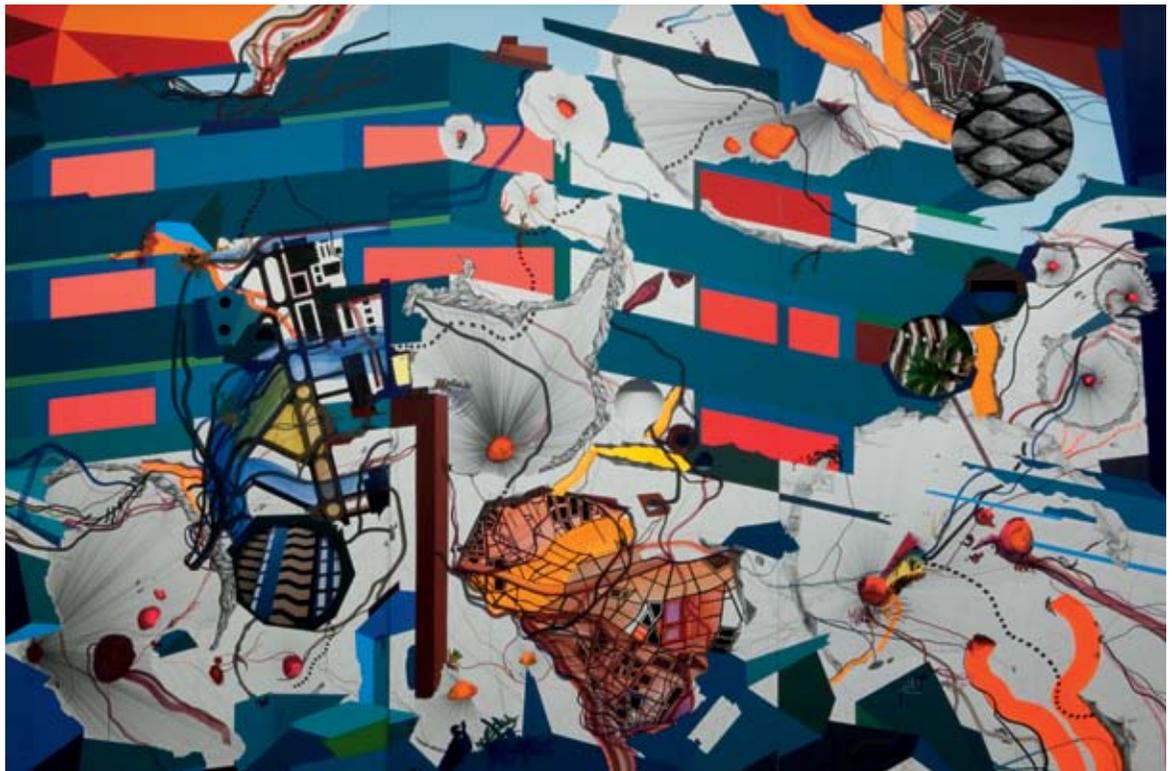
**Haegue Yang**

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# Franz Ackermann

BORN IN 1963 IN NEUMARKT-SANKT VEIT, GERMANY  
LIVES AND WORKS IN BERLIN, GERMANY

In the early nineties, after having temporarily relocated to Hong Kong, the German artist Franz Ackermann started working on a series of small watercolours. He called them mental maps, as they didn't just depict his physical route through the city, but also evoked his impressions and reflections on life along the way. Ever since, the contemporary metropolis has been the focal point in Ackermann's body of work, which, in addition to watercolours, comprises large-scale paintings and room-size installations. Inspired by having lived in a number of different cities, he declares his love for the metropolis in his work, but at the same time raises critical questions about intensive urbanisation. In *Haus im Sumpf*, a painting *cum* collage, the artist vividly articulates one of his urban experiences. Through an eruption of cartoon-inspired shapes and colours, Ackermann combines skyline details with routes and ground plans. Despite the chaotic battery of fragments, it is quite impossible to ascertain to which city Ackermann is referring: it could be Berlin, Tokyo, New York, or possibly London. Here, the artist suggestively evokes metropolitan dynamism, whilst illustrating that major cities have a generic rather than their own individual identity. In this way, his *Haus im Sumpf* echoes a lament that French philosopher Gaston Bachelard had already expressed in the fifties, namely that in these times of overpopulation and commercialisation, the soul of the city tends to dissolve. [BS]



## *Haus im Sumpf*

2007  
mixed media (gouache, photographs on  
Alu-Dibond, oil, gouache and pencil on Alu-Dibond)  
300 x 450 cm

# Darren Almond

BORN IN 1971 IN WIGAN, UNITED KINGDOM  
LIVES AND WORKS IN LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

Having started out as an abstract sculptor, laboriously pondering questions of shape and colour, Darren Almond switched to making photographs, videos and installations in the mid nineties. In these works, the acclaimed British artist, who is also a former Turner Prize nominee, foregrounds the concepts of time and duration, whilst addressing the issues of landscape, labour, personal history and collective memory. *Today*, presented in the entrance hall of the Vanhaerents Art Collection, is part of a series of monumental clocks that feature temporality as their overarching theme. Specifically, this installation alludes to the world of travel and commuting: harking back to the train-spotting days of the artist's youth, when he recorded the passing of public transportation in journey logs, the flip clock owes much of its appearance to the large signs hanging on railway platforms, informing passengers of their departure times. Both through the process of decontextualisation, and its elliptical nature in terms of providing information – *Today* tells us nothing more than the day of the week – the clock acquires a dramatic presence, with a slight nod to the iconic blow-ups by Claes Oldenburg. Hanging over ones head, it reads like a contemporary vanitas-motif, suggesting an impending doom. In a similar yet less uncanny fashion, the tension between past and present is underpinned by its retro look: the split-flap display raises the viewers' awareness of the here and now, but nonetheless draws them back to the analogue age of the past. [BS]



## **Today**

2000  
mixed media (aluminium, steel, Perspex, paint and motor)  
70 x 248 x 70 cm  
ed. 2/3 + 2 AP

# James Lee Byars

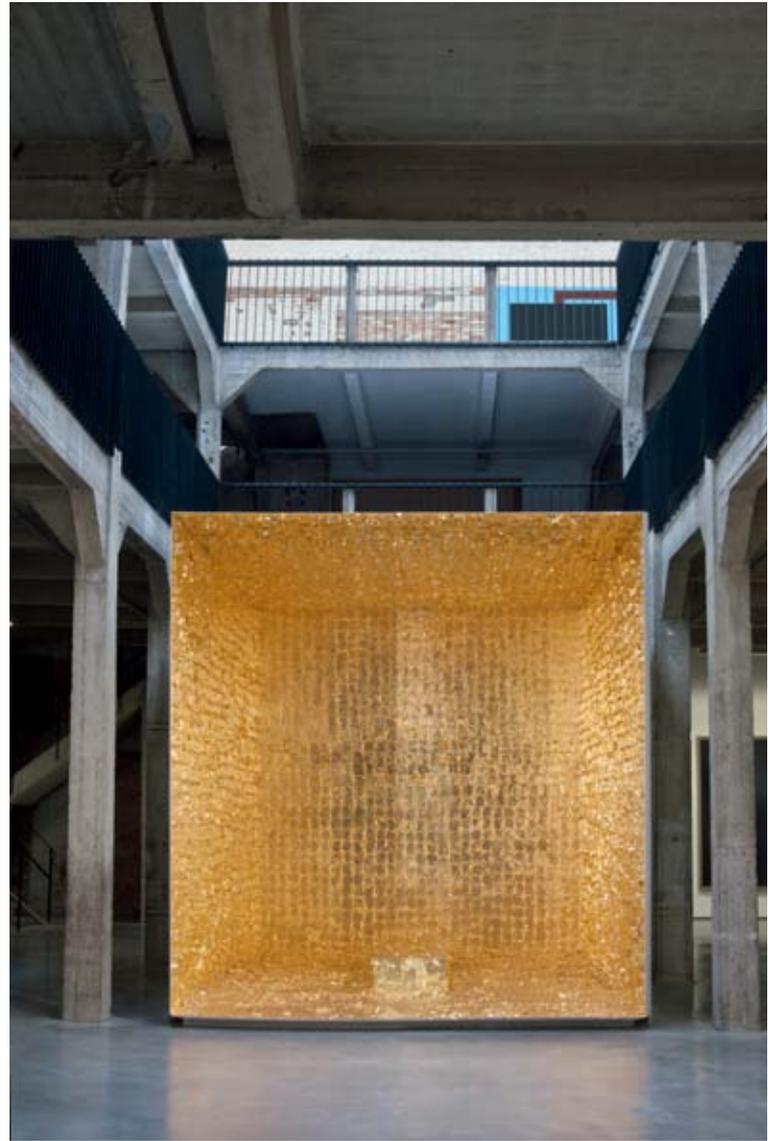
BORN IN 1932 IN DETROIT, U.S.A.  
DIED IN 1997 IN CAIRO, EGYPT

In 1994, when invited by Marie-Puck Broodthaers to exhibit in her Galerie des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, James Lee Byars confided to art critic Pierre-Yves Desai: *'I'm very ill. Normally, I should have died a year ago. Everyone, even the doctors, are surprised to see me still alive.'* The artist then decided to create *The Death of James Lee Byars*, picking up a theme that he had already treated in previous works. He thereby further explored the theatrical concept that he had used for *The Perfect Death of James Lee Byars* ten years earlier, and that had involved his lying down on a patch of pavement painted in gold in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, wearing a golden costume.

This time, one of the two rooms of the gallery was entirely covered with gold leaf, while a spotlight projected a burst of white on to the far end wall.<sup>1</sup> The whole of the installation was only visible from the exterior, through a windowpane. The entrance to the second room of the gallery, which was located next to the first one, was closed off by a heavy black velvet curtain. Byars lay down blindfolded on the floor of the room that was covered with gold leaf. Once the performance was over, the owner of the gallery, Marie-Puck Broodthaers, helped the artist to get up and helped him into a taxi, whereupon he gave her five Swarovski crystals. He asked her to throw them into the room. Those 'diamonds' were then deposited on the floor at the five points of the human body (head, two hands and two feet), thus encircling the traces left behind by Byars' body. [POR]

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1 We would like to thank Carlos Becerra for these details.



## *The Death of James Lee Byars*

1994  
gold leaf, Plexiglas and crystals  
378 x 356 x 491 cm

**Denkmal 9, Henry Van de Velde**  
**University Library, Rozier 9, Ghent, 2004**

2004  
C-print – aluminium light box  
181,5 x 301,5 x 16 cm  
ed. 1/2



## Jan De Cock

BORN IN 1976 IN ETTERBEEK, BELGIUM  
LIVES AND WORKS IN BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

Jan De Cock seeks to remodel reality and stimulate new ways of thinking. For over a decade, the Brussels artist has used fibreboard and chipboard to build his signature *Denkmal* pieces. 'Denkmal', the German for monument, is a compound word, made up of 'Denk' (think) and 'mal' (mould).

In 2004, the artist turned to the spacious reading room of the Ghent University Library, generally known as the Tower of Books. He brought in over 35 tons of wood, using it to convert bookcases, tables and racks into small museums or encyclopaedias full of knowledge. The artist did this in order to stress the art-historical importance of the building and its creator, the modernist architect, Henry Van de Velde (1863-1957). De Cock had already taken a keen interest in the building in 1998, when he chose the Tower of Books as the location for presenting his graduation work. When Van de Velde designed the library in the thirties, he intended it to be not just a centre of scholarly study and reflection, but also a home for art. The sacrosanct intimacy of installed artworks should reflect on the building itself and reinforce its quiet nature. However, Van de Velde's plans were not fully realised due to a lack of finance. With his *Denkmal 9*, Jan De Cock took on the architect's ambition, making a spatial intervention with an emphasis on functionality. He replaced the existing furniture with sleek bookcases and desks made of fibreboard tops. The artist regards these pieces as parts of a single, monumental sculpture. He states: *'This material is democratic and honest. It doesn't draw your attention away from the form. It is what is. It's simply there: a naked Heidegger on a table.'* [VV]

# Michael DeLucia

BORN IN 1978 IN ROCHESTER, U.S.A.  
LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW YORK, U.S.A.

*'Almost every sculptor now deals with found objects in one way or another. It is this generation's figure in clay,' Brooklyn-based artist Michael DeLucia stated a few years ago during an interview. 'In that sense, I guess I'm trying to use objects as a medium through which to learn and push off from, as some of the founders of the modern movement did with the figure. What is definitely unique about this time is that the acceleration of technology is steeper. This expands the field of artistic perception and leads to a widening of what we can consider reality. As an artist, my hunch is that there is great opportunity in that and I feel obliged to explore it with rigour.'*<sup>1</sup>

Seeking to push the boundaries of sculpture in the digital age, Michael DeLucia adopts computer-aided design as a fundamental part of his artistic process. Using 3D-modeling software, the artist constructs virtual objects that he then transfers onto plywood sheets with the help of a digitally driven cutting machine and the technique of low-relief carving. Partially coated with shellac or enamel in mesmerising tones of green, red, black and blue, DeLucia's routed panels attest to the perfection of the digital objects, as well as to the flaws of their sculptural translation. True to his view on artworks, which he philosophically defines as *'the shadow of an idea cast on to an object'*, the artist assembles his plywood sheets into wall and floor sculptures, whose outlines describe the trajectory of light rays from their source. [BS]

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<sup>1</sup> Luke Stettner, 'Interview with Michael DeLucia' in *The Highlights* [online journal], vol. V, <http://thehighlights.org/>, s.d. (ca. 2007).



## **Silver Screen**

2012  
enamel on gouged plywood  
244 x 365,5 cm

## **Projection (Green)**

2012  
enamel on gouged plywood  
240 x 120 x 115 cm



**Social Mobility, Fig. 2**

2005  
 mixed media (aluminium, wood, iron and concrete)  
 430 x 700 x 200 cm  
 ed. 1/5 + 2 AP  
 courtesy Thyssen-Bornemisza Contemporary Art, Vienna

## Elmgreen & Dragset

BORN IN 1961 IN COPENHAGEN, DENMARK  
 LIVES AND WORKS IN LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM,  
 AND BERLIN, GERMANY

BORN IN 1969 IN TRONDHEIM, NORWAY  
 LIVES AND WORKS IN BERLIN, GERMANY

The works by the Scandinavian-born duo Elmgreen & Dragset fit into the various categories of art, architecture and design. In installations and performances, they explore and redefine the numerous ways in which space can be defined and can function. Their approach is based on Michel Foucault's thesis that it is the acceptance of certain behavioural patterns within given structures, and not the structures themselves, which restricts human action and activity. Elmgreen & Dragset transfer space to new descriptive contexts, purposefully modifying its functionality and therefore facilitating the re-definition of the familiar.

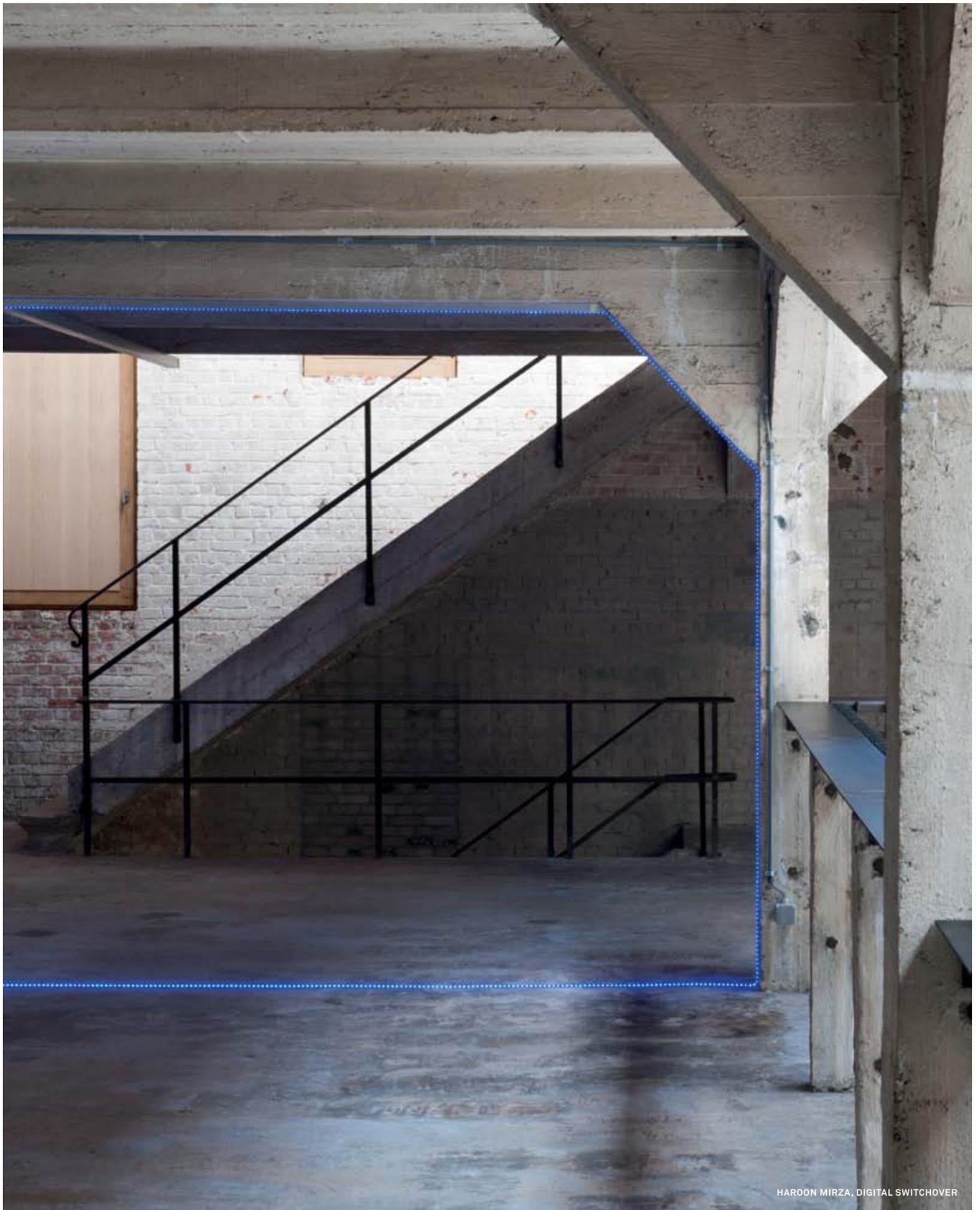
*Social Mobility, Fig. 2* was part of the itinerant exhibition *The Welfare Show* in 2006. The title of the work relates to the notion of social climbing, the desire for economic and social self-improvement, and the obstacles that get in the way. The installation consists of a door high up at the top of some crumbling stairs, with debris on the floor below. The less than accessible stairwell, perched high above the floor, leads to a doorway labelled with an illuminated fire exit sign above it. To examine the crumbling structure perched a few metres above the ground, receivers have to crane their necks with each step closer to the piece. The work is placed as bicameral spectacles in front of a viewer who is not allowed to enter, but has to view from the outside. The installation that at first appears as if it is meant to be interactive, does not in fact allow any kind of direct participation by the spectator.<sup>1</sup> [VV]

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<sup>1</sup> Shannon Jackson, 'Welfare Melancholia: Elmgreen & Dragset's Ambivalent Structures' in *Elmgreen & Dragset, Trilogy*, ZKM, Karlsruhe, p. 341.

# exhibition — *views*

LEVEL 2





PETER HALLEY, TERMINATOR 2 / PETER HALLEY, PARTIAL GROUNDING







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Man in the Mirror

April 24, 2014 - October 28, 2017

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Walter Vanhaerents

### ASSISTANT CURATOR

Vincent Verbist

## Project Room

Philippe Parreno, Marilyn

April 24, 2014 - January 30, 2016

### CURATORS

Philippe Parreno

Walter Vanhaerents

### EXHIBITION TEAM

Chokri Hamouda

Vincent Verbist

Bart Verschueren

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### AUTHORS

Emma Dexter

Mark Prince

Pierre-Olivier Rollin

Björn Scherlippens

Vincent Verbist

Walter Vanhaerents

### COPY EDITING

Bracha de Man

Victoria Morrison

### TRANSLATION

Scripto Senu

Björn Scherlippens

### IMAGE COORDINATION

Vincent Verbist

### PHOTOGRAPHY

Joost Vanhaerents

### GRAPHIC DESIGN

Sven Beirnaert

### COORDINATION LANNOO

Beatrice De Keyzer

Niels Famaey

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Iván Navarro, Untitled (Twin Towers)

Michael DeLucia, Silver Screen and Projection (Green)

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