

An architecture for the anti-museum

During the first week of the seminar, Grayson Perry's lecture was studied, in which he questioned the contemporary conception that 'anything can be art'.¹ Even though one could dispute if Perry's question 'what is art?' really needs answering (is it not up to the viewer to define what the boundaries of art may be?), his motivation to bring more agency to the viewer within of an elitist art context is highly valuable. Artists in the during the 1960's-80's reacted against the elitist (and capitalist) 'nature' of the art context, by making diverse sites-specific work outside the market and directly into the urban or rural landscape. By dealing with what is directly apparent to the senses and mind, they established an engagement with the immediate relations between subject and object, viewer and art work. These artists extended the significance of art beyond the conventional art audience by making significant contributions to discussions of social and political issues and used the capacity of art to encourage a dialogue. They worked in anti-institutional contexts in which the work was able to speak for itself and in which there was no interference between the viewer and art work by incomprehensible and intimidating curatorial texts. In these 'anti-institutions', like the New Museum and M HKA, there was an encouragement of more contact between artists and visitors and that the conventional boundaries between art and life would be criticized. But as has become especially apparent in the history of the New Museum, these 'anti-museums' have changed over time, and its once radical organizational structures have given way to a 'a more ambitious program' which focusses on creating 'a higher public profile'.² And to create this higher public profile, the institutions need a new building. In the project description in the brief for the new Flemish Museum of Contemporary Art, one of the main motivations to construct a new museum is stated as followed: 'The creation of a new Flemish Museum of Contemporary Art (VMHK) offers the exceptional opportunity to further expand the museum as an institution and to better position it internationally.'³ So, how will this influence the structure of the current institution? Can the qualities of a former 'anti-museum' be established in a new internationally oriented museum? In the construction of a new Flemish Museum of Contemporary Art, it will be a great challenge to create the framework, in which artists were able to establish a direct engagement with the public that would extend beyond the traditional art context, from which the M HKA is originated.



Marianne Berenhaut - *Poupées-Pouelles*, The New Museum - 'Art/Life Counseling, Ten Years Later', 1995⁴
in Warsaw, 1986⁵



NYT article on New Museum, 2020

¹ Grayson Perry (2013), 'Beating the Bounds', Reith Lecture.

² Phillips, L. (2008). Past Present Future. In *Shift: SANAA and the New Museum* (1st edition). Lars Müller Publishers.

³ Het Facilitair Bedrijf. (2019). *All-inclusive study assignment for the construction of a Flemish Museum of Contemporary Art*. Vlaamse Overheid. p.6.

⁴ *Art/Life Counseling, Ten Years Later*. (1994, September). New Museum Digital Archive.

⁵ Pogrebin, R. (2020, 5 October). The New Museum Is World Class, but Many Find It a Tough Place to Work. The New York Times.

⁶ Osieka, L., Cuglietta, B. & Melzacka, A. (2022). *Marianne Berenhaut - Mine de rien*. CIAP, C-mine & Dvir Gallery.

Something is off

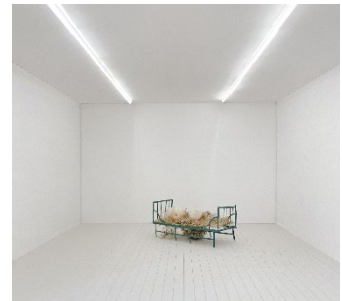
The work of Marianne Berenhaut either suggest the absence of a human figure, or establishes a new figure constructed out of objects as remnants of human activity. Since the sculptures in the ensemble appear to be related to the private interior (the context in which the art works are created), the house seems like a suitable context for the work. However, these rather fragile works ask for a room which provides maximum visibility. Therefore, this project aims to create an environment that in terms of scale and intimacy relates to the house, in which the art works in relation to the rooms form an environment in its own, but simultaneously lets the work speak for itself. The five sculptures are displayed in a sequence of three white rooms with a grey painted wooden floor, in which the placement of the doors supports relations between the work that cross through the three rooms. The scale of the rooms (slightly bigger than the domestic), the size of the doors, the thin walls with the thickness of one plank and the use of just artificial lighting ensure that the rooms withdraw from the mundane of the house: this is something else.



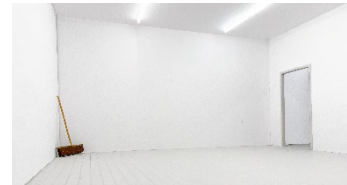
Marianne Berenhaut in her house, surrounded by art, 2022⁸



Top view of the rooms, 2022⁹



Le Lit (2002) in the back of the room, 2022⁷



Enlève-moi ça (1999) in the corner, 2022¹⁰

⁷ Photograph by author, 2022

⁸ Photograph by author, 2022.

⁹ Photograph by author, 2022

¹⁰ Photograph by author, 2022

Bibliography

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