

OPENING: 23.03.2018. 19H
FIRST CHAPTER: 13.03 - 18.04.2018
SECOND CHAPTER: 24.04 - 26.05.2018
GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY TO FRIDAY, FROM 11 TO 19 H.
SATURDAY FROM 11 TO 15 H.

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It is an honor to present the first solo exhibition in Spain of artist Guy Mees (1935-2003), a leading figure of the Belgian avant-garde whose singular oeuvre escapes conventional aesthetic and discursive classification. The exhibition has been structured in two chapters, each focusing on different works and periods of the artist's development. The intention with this double presentation is, obviously, to offer a richer view of Mees' oeuvre but also, and not less important, to give the proper spatial dimension to the works selected.

The title of the exhibition **Espace Perdu (Lost Space)** refers to a generic concept that Mees used in two different moments of his development. He first used the term "Verloren Ruimte" in the group of works, panels and objects, made using industrial lace that he created between 1960 and 1967. Twenty years later, in the mid-1980s, he returned to the notion of lost space, creating a second series of "Verloren Ruimte" works. Bearing little physical relation to the earlier, homonymous series, this second group took the form of thin scraps of colored paper cut in varying shapes and pinned to the wall.

Mees barely made any specific statements on his work, but he took a text that Will Joris Lagrilière wrote in the early 60's based on some of his ideas. This piece of prose reads as follows:

"The Lost Space is an adjoining space. The Lost Space is complementary to present-day living space. The Lost Space does not have a clear-cut function. The Lost Space is space as utility object, in which bombast becomes more difficult, and tangibility easier. The Lost Space is simply the body defined by shape, colour, taste, smell, and sound."

Far from defining or categorizing Mees' work, this poetic "statement" touches on a few notions found in his work: the living environment, the vagueness and instability, essential features in his full oeuvre as opposed to the notion of space as a tool, as an object. The reference to the sensual experience and the idea of space as a "body". The expansion of the pictorial space into a real, tactile, sculptural space, inaccessible but present.

This first chapter of the exhibition brings together a number of works conceived mainly between the late 60's and the late 70's. We are presenting two of his early *Verloren Ruimte* (Lost Space) works. One of them is a wall-mounted monochromatic panel and the other a free-standing prism, with a neon light inside, both covered with a sensual membrane of white industrial lace, that creates a sort of visual vibrant organic grid. The use of the lace has a strong feminine connotation and sort of counteracts its reference to the powerful minimalism of the time. This is particularly true in the free-standing object with the light, where the neon blurs and dissolves the object. These works talk about ambivalence, immateriality and expansion.

For some time Mees dealt with film and photography. Two of his photographic works are presented in ProjecteSD's entrance room together with some archival material. Documents that link the works to the artistic context of the early 70's and to the entourage of MTL gallery (Fernand Spillemaeckers) and X-one (Marc Poirier), the two galleries of Mees at the time. *The Portretten (Niveaoverschillen)*, Portraits (Differences in Level), of 1970-71 are amateurish snapshots that show an arrangement of three people on three different levels of industrial blocks used as podiums. The position of each person is changed, top, bottom, or middle, in a sort of playful, senseless performance. Aware of the artistic context of the time Mees comments on power relationships and hierarchical organization in a casual, unpretentious, even humorous way. Repetition and seriality are also an element in these works. They also offer an interesting document on Mees' close social milieu, his gallerists, friends, colleagues and family who were the people appearing in the photographs. The two 123 works are connected to these pictures. They are collages in which Mees lays out contact sheets of the "differences in level" in a grid on a cardboard with pencil annotations of three numbers, 1, 2, 3 and its possible combinations. The grid is a duplication of permutations on the "level" series and highlights the absurdity of the mechanical changing of places.

Displayed in the main exhibition room, together with the two early *Verloren Ruimte* works of the mid 60's, a number of extremely modest, delicate works on paper are displayed. They show different stages of Mees artistic practise and are indicative of his non-authoritarian attitude, his willingness to embrace mutability, fragility, his evolution to the expansion of the work into real space. It is fascinating to see the transition from the work *Untitled* (1970), the drawing in nine small sheets with marker pen colored lines arranged in columns in a sort of coded system to the incredibly subtle silk paper works. The patterned lines have mutated to pastel-coloured dots scattered over the surface of sheets of fine transparent colored papers. These pastel works on tissue paper were a turning point in the evolution of Mees' oeuvre. Mees escapes conceptual art to enter the territory of perception and tactility. On the thin, colored papers, sometimes the pastel dots are clustered in

groups, concentrating in specific areas or at the edges of the picture plane. Only approaching the wall can the viewer see these spots of color and discover, in some of them, words handwritten by Mees. They are titles, references to seasons or colors such as *Blauw met Eucalyptus* (Blue with Eucalyptus) or *Het weer is rustig, koel en zach* (The Weather Is Quiet, Cool and Soft). Interestingly in this drawing, the sheet of paper has been given rounded, irregular edges. The same happens in *Untitled*, a later work of 1983. Here two papers of different qualities and colors are combined. This is something that Mees will repeat in a number of similar works and that in a way anticipates his cutout paper series of the 80's-90's, in which the residual pastel traces disappear to become fragments broken off from the pictorial space. These will be the subject of the second chapter of our presentation. "Lost space"...to be continued.

This text have been written based on the reading of a few important writings:

Dirk Snauwaert. *In Spite of Painting REconstructions of Pictorial Space* in *Guy Mees*, Ludion-Cera, 2002

Dirk Pültau. *The Lost Space Facets of a Concept* in *Guy Mees*, Ludion-Cera, 2002

Lilou Vidal. *Guy Mees. The Weather is quiet, cool and soft*. Booklet for the exhibition of the same title, Kunststahle Wien, 2018

We would like to thank Dirk Snauwaert, Lilou Vidal, Koenraad Dedobbeleer, Koen Brams, The Estate of Guy Mees, Nagel-Draxler galerie and most specially Micheline Szwajcer for their precious and valuable help in the making of this exhibition.

Guy Mees was born in 1935 in Mechelen, Belgium and died in 2003 in Antwerp. His work has been the subject of major institutions and gallery solo exhibitions. Among others: Ad Libitum, Antwerp (1960–1966); Galerie Orez, Den Haag, (1968–1977); Galerie X-One, Antwerp (1969–1971); MTL, Brussels (1970–1976); Galerie Micheline Szwajcer, Antwerp (since 1982); Academie Waasmunster, Waasmunster (1990); Palais de Beaux-Arts, Brussels (1990 and 1993); Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp (2002); and Museum Leuven, Belgium (2012). The artist's work has been featured in numerous international group exhibitions including Zero Avant-garde, Lucio Fontana's Atelier, Milan (1965); Wide White Space, Antwerp (1967); Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, (1974); The Sixties: Art in Belgium, Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK), Ghent (1979); Betekende Ruimte II-Plaats van Handeling/Designated Space II-Space as Scene, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium (1993); A Story of the Image: Old & New Masters from Antwerp, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp (traveled to Shanghai Art Museum, followed by National Museum of Singapore, 2007-2009), Museum M, Leuven (2012) among others. In 2012, Mees's work was included in the 9th Shanghai Biennale: 50 Days at Sea. Most recently, the artist's work was featured in The Gap: Selected Abstract Art from Belgium, curated by Luc Tuymans, which was first on view in 2015 at the Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art, London and traveled to the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp in 2016. Recent solo shows include Bureau des Réalités, Brussels (2016); Galerie Micheline Szwajcer, Brussels (2016); Galerie David Zwirner, London/New York (2017); gb agency, Paris (2017); Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne (2017) and Kunststahle Wien (2018), exhibition currently on view.

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