

Charlotte

THING

Bouckaert

E “The greatest enemy of looking is that we think we know in advance what we are looking at.” *THING* by Charlotte Bouckaert (Brussels, 1983) challenges us to rethink our ideas about trivial coffee cups and fruit bowls. In her installation of still life, she explores the aesthetic qualities of everyday objects. Mondrian, Picasso, Cézanne, Warhol and Frida Kahlo, among others, preceded her. All these artists planted their easels in the living room and explored the myriad ways in which they could depict the accidental and everyday objects – often jugs, vases, fruit and bread. The recognisable and familiar elements lent themselves ideally to experiments with perspectives, colours and shapes. Bouckaert rekindles this wonderment of the banal and the homely. As in her previous works *11 seconds* (2020) and *Still life with chair* (2020), in *THING* she brings the stationary -a set table- into motion. The objects dance their choreography. The woman on the table follows them. The fixed becomes performative.

According to British writer Virginia Woolf, objects in a still life are seen differently by each viewer. The composition of jugs, bowls and glasses adapts to the viewer's thoughts and experiences and is therefore constantly changing: “Looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it.” (Woolf 1977, 84)

The choreography between vase, apple and body in *THING* depicts this incessant process of ‘recomposition’ and meaning-making, which is constantly going on with the attentive viewer. The objects dance across the table and interact with each other. Does the fruit seek rapprochement with the body? Does the body follow the step of the vase? The changing relationship between the objects and the body constantly raises new reflections on the coffee table we dress every Sunday. To what extent do the objects we surround ourselves with define space, our minds and experiences?

French writer and filmmaker Alain Robbe-Grillet wrote about the object: “l’objet prend sa forme par le regard.” Like Woolf, he argues that an object assumes a concrete form and meaning only in the viewer's interpretation. Thus, the audience is co-producer of the image and transforms the composition by enriching it with new meanings. Conversely, the composition also transforms the audience's viewing. *THING* urges us to revisit with imagination the small still lifes found in our living rooms, and to switch off the automatic and routine gaze from time to time. Bouckaert invites us to rediscover the small and the quiet.

During their choreography, the objects leave a paint trail. In this way, Bouckaert explores what remains of the movement when it comes to a stop again. For this, she was inspired by the traces on painter Giorgio Morandi's table. The circles and smudges on his worktop testify to the endless process of arranging and rearranging the objects from his still lifes. The temporary and ephemeral -the movement, the person, the objects- is thus permanently fixed and has a lasting effect. Not only is the kitchen table marked by the game of recomposition, but also our ideas about the objects and our way of looking at the everyday changed. The fruit bowl could also have counted an apple less. The coffee cup no longer has a clear front or back.

credits

concept Charlotte Bouckaert / performer Marie De Corte / artistieke medewerker Bart Van den Eynde / technische uitvoering Stan Wannet / muziek Nicolas Roseeuw / productie Platform 0090 / coproductie Playground (STUK & M,Leuven) / deze productie kwam tot stand met de Tax Shelter maatregel van de Belgische Federale Overheid en de Vlaamse Gemeenschap en met steun van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap