

## ON THE WORKS OF ART

*Nadia Sels*

### **Marina Abramovic**

#### *Spirit cooking*

Marina Abramovic (b. Belgrade, 1946) quite rightly describes herself as ‘the grandmother of performance art’. Although most performance artists dropped out in the 80s, Abramovic remained dedicated to this highly demanding discipline. She draws on an almost universal visual idiom from the rituals and symbolism of numerous cultures. In her often extreme performances, in which endurance and pain play an important role, she explores the boundaries of the body and mind.

Abramovic and Fabre have already worked together around the medium of blood. In her contribution to the Troubleyn/Laboratorium, entitled *Spirit Cooking*, Abramovic reverts to this medium: in the kitchen she has painted texts on the walls using pigs’ blood (the liquid most like human blood). Abramovic chose this space to work in with great conviction. In her view the kitchen is the heart of the home, the place where everything comes together. *Spirit Cooking* is about the conversion of matter into energy, of the material into the spiritual. Abramovic derives her inspiration from the popular belief that the spirits still need food even though it is no longer solid, but in the form of light, sound and emotions. This superstition is found in numerous cultures and there are even strict rules as to how this spiritual fare should be prepared. Here Abramovic presents us with her own version. In this paradox, in the material underpinning of something immaterial, the physical and spiritual worlds meet. Or to use her own words, ‘When you make something visible for something invisible, the invisible becomes visible.’

### **Guillaume Bijl**

#### *Composition Trouvée (time clock)*

The installations of Guillaume Bijl (b. Antwerp, 1946) belong to the Duchamp tradition of the ready-made. Although Duchamp raised found objects to the level of art, in Guillaume Bijl’s *Compositions Trouvées* it is whole environments, such as laundrettes, pool halls or driving schools that are lifted out of the everyday and placed in the world of art. In this way he touches on social themes such as the ugliness and banality of our social environment, but ultimately questions the distinction between hallowed cultural spaces like museums and the spaces of our everyday lives.

Occasionally, one carefully selected object is enough to evoke a complete space or situation, which in this case is the time clock. Bijl installed this object in the entrance to Troubleyn. The work has a history, however: at a group exhibition in 1992, Bijl installed a time clock for the participating artists. The time clock later became a part of a locker room installation (Offenes Kulturhaus, Linz, 1998, Witte De With, Rotterdam, 2005). Bijl regards the time clock as the best symbol of the control over and restriction of the employee, starting in the industrial age and continuing into the age of globalisation. In the context of a place where art is created, the work acquires an even greater, slightly ironic, charge. It could be a warning or an incentive.

## **Dirk Braeckman**

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The art photographer Dirk Braeckman (b. Eeklo, 1958) is known for his intimate, enigmatic photos in tones of grey. The anonymous human figures that characterised his earlier work have increasingly given way to empty space and the still life. Braeckman has already worked together with Jan Fabre: amongst other things he photographed Fabre's performance of Swan Lake and his work in the Royal Palace.

In the Troubleyn/Laboratorium, Braeckman sought a place that ideally linked up with the atmosphere of his own work: the massage room, a space that is somewhat hidden in the building. Just under the skylight, the dark print (inkjet with carbon pigment), which is printed on high-quality Japanese silk paper, is stuck to the wall with wallpaper paste and appears to merge with the wall itself. The image is actually the inside of a giant proa in the Royal Central African Museum in Tervuren. Although the materiality of the solid piece of mahogany from which the proa is carved is perfectly reproduced, it is also alienated from itself: in some places the pattern of the carving vaguely resembles a written text and in others reminds one of human skin. The physical quality the work exudes also links up beautifully with the motion of massage. And yet there is room for symbolism: if you observe closely, in a corner you will see a cross carved into the wooden hull, and this element was in fact the reason for choosing this image and literally and figuratively adds a new perspective.

## **Romeo Castellucci**

*Tellure*

The theatre-maker Romeo Castellucci (b. Cesena, 1960) has his roots in art. His principles are thus clearly interdisciplinary: with the foundation of *Societas Raffaello Sanzio* his aim was to transform theatre into a melting pot of every possible art form. His radical performances are sensual and physical, mythical and symbolically highly charged.

For Fabre he installed a work called *Tellure*, which had already been displayed at the Avignon Festival in 2002, against the wall of the theatre. This object (110 x 103 x 5 cm) reminds us of Moses' stone tablets, but is made of steel and resin. It is inscribed not with the ten commandments but with a name, Onan. This Old Testament figure was put to death by God because he had disobeyed the law by which he had to conceive a child with his brother's widow and so provide the deceased with an heir. Instead of this he spilled his seed on the earth (Gen. 38, 6-10). These last three words are also a translation of the title, the ablative of the Latin word 'tellus' meaning 'earth'. Onan, the name which replaces the commandments, therefore becomes the artist's counter-metaphor. In this way Castellucci links art to waste, impurity and loneliness, breaking away from the natural order. The law of Onan charges you 'not to conceive, not to encounter the other. To be pure in the impure. To be impure in the pure. To be a rock of scandal, against which others stumble. To be ridiculed. And to weep.'

## **Luc Deleu**

### *Untitled*

In his contribution to the Troubleyn/Laboratorium, the architect and urban designer Luc Deleu (b. Duffel, 1944) was inspired mainly by the renovations done to the building by his colleague Jan Dekeyser. In a career that covers more than three decades, he has extended the boundaries of architecture, for example by introducing the concept of 'orbism' (architecture on a world scale) and studying the 'unadapted city', a city in which chaos and order are able to exist side by side, thereby optimizing the individual freedom of man.

As a starting point, Deleu selected several horizontal beams at the entrance to the Pastorijstraat which were retained as a support for the two adjoining buildings when the building was demolished. He painted them in striking colours, which is an element from his earlier work: black-yellow for the ones lower down, a combination that evokes gravity, and white-blue for those higher up, colours that link up with the sky. The combinations oppose one another, thereby creating a contrast: in this way the beams, which initially marred the appearance a little, become more and less conspicuous. In this way Deleu transforms a functional, necessary evil into an apparently useless, aesthetic object. By obscuring their function he gives the beams the freedom to be more than just beams, to be an art object.

## **Wim Delvoye**

### *Klopper*

Wim Delvoye (b. Wervik, 1965) needs no further introduction: with spectacular works like the cloaca machine and his tattooed pigs he became well known even to the general public. His creations, which do not avoid banal or vulgar subjects, ironically reflect on subjects like our modern commercial culture.

His contribution to the Troubleyn/Laboratorium was a bronze door-knocker that embellishes the entrance to the dance room. This work – which is obviously a sly reference to Fabre's own bronze work – pays tribute to the typical lion's head with a ring which, in Delvoye's opinion, is the only bronze object the average Flemish family possesses besides the crucifix. He gently mocks this somewhat intimidating guardian of the domestic front door, which in its turn is adorned with a wreath at Christmas time. However, this door-knocker is a somewhat deformed bronze image of Wim Delvoye himself with a ring in his mouth: in this way he ironically links up with the tradition of the atlantes and caryatids which made of the human body a design object and integrated it into architecture.

## **Braco Dimitrijevic**

### *Shoes for post-history*

In his installations, Braco Dimitrijevic (b. Sarajevo, 1948) constantly questions the image we have formed of history. He sees history as a construction based largely on coincidence, which definitely cannot be

reduced to an external objective truth. This mental background can therefore only shape our image of the present. The aim of his work is to take the self-evidence out of our perception of history.

His contribution to the Troubleyn/Laboratorium is *Shoes for post-history*, an installation in which the central element is a photographic portrait of Nicola Tesla. Despite his huge importance as a scientist, this brilliant electrical engineer, who has more than three hundred inventions to his name, including the alternating current generator, the transformer and the first neon tube, has been forgotten. The coat and men's shoes flanking the portrait suggest his presence but also refer to the reality of everyday life and its problematic relationship with history. The irregular edge of the glass sheet that forms the final element of the installation refers to the contingency of history and the randomness with which facts and people are remembered or forgotten. Post-history, the concept referred to in the title, points to an experience of time without this arrogant final judgement in which different visions and values can exist side by side. Tesla himself symbolises creative man, the scientist or artist who manages to recreate his own world.

## **Bruna Esposito**

### *Suonano alla porta/ Who's ringing at the door?*

The works of the Italian artist Bruna Esposito (b. Rome, 1960) are reminiscent of subtle metaphors. Her work, sometimes ironically and sometimes poetically, reveals new and unexpected layers of meaning and experience in the initially seemingly everyday objects she uses in her installations.

For Troubleyn, Esposito has designed a new door for the Edmond Fabre Archives. This room, dedicated to the memory of Jan's recently deceased father, will house Edmond Fabre's impressive collection of gramophone records. Esposito's work therefore also deals with the themes of music and sound: she has made a door that is completely covered on both sides with a coat of small round bells which make a different sound on each side. As one enters the room there is a soft tinkling sound which is supposed to remind one of the cricket, the insect whose sound marks the transition from day into night. The title of the work, *Who's ringing at the door?* therefore refers to *l'heure bleu* or the twilight zone which also plays a central role in Fabre's work. Esposito got the idea for the work in a dream. The door, an object we generally use without thinking, therefore becomes a symbol for the transition between two worlds, and of the boundary that separates day and night, dream and reality. It is a no man's land in which, in Esposito's view, art and music also belong because they can be everywhere and nowhere and belong to everyone and no one.

## **Alberto Garutti**

### *Every step I have taken in my whole life has led me here, now*

Liberating art from the museum – this perfectly summarizes the aim of the Italian artist Alberto Garutti (b. Galbiate, 1941). He tries as much as possible to integrate his wide range of work into the public space and community life. They must come into contact with their surroundings and the spectators because only then can there be a dialogue between the spectator and the work, so that the creation is complete and finds its true meaning.

This non-arrogant attitude, this love of interchange, radiates from the whole concept of Garutti's intervention. The stone inscription he donated to Troubleyn was not to be placed on a pedestal or behind glass but built into the stone floor of the inner courtyard. The precise location of the work was determined by coincidence: an innocent hand threw a rubber ball into the air and the stone was placed precisely where the ball landed. Fate and coincidence are also very important to the meaning of the inscription, which reads: 'every step I have taken in my whole life has led me here, now'. These words, which apply to anyone who reads them, express a love of fate, an *amor fati*. The twists of life lose their contingency and in retrospect acquire a purpose when they lead to a single sublime point in time, one marvellous encounter with a moment, object or person. Garutti's stone is therefore also an ode to the encounter and to the Troubleyn/Laboratorium as a place where encounters are possible.

## **Stefan Hertmans**

### *Tekens verdwalen* (Marks Get Lost)

Stefan Hertmans (b. Ghent, 1951) is the author of three novels, two collections of short stories, ten volumes of poetry and five books of essays including *Engel van de metamorfose*, in which he collected his numerous writings on Fabre's work.

Fabre's invitation to cross the boundaries that separate writing and art has resulted in a reflection on the link between the two disciplines. In his search for a suitable means by which to give a written passage material form, Hertmans chose the inscription, a genre that can boast of having a long history in conceptual art. For its location he chose the lean-to roof on the inner courtyard. In inscribing the text he considered it very important that the inscription also created a sort of space, an intimacy. To achieve this, the inscription was placed on the floor in such a way that it only becomes legible if you stand with your back against the wall. The title – *Tekens verdwalen* – already hints at what the inscription says. In Hertmans' view the inscription is about art's struggle with discourse, with the wilful marks that are of necessity its medium but which always devolve upon it from elsewhere and then also depart for somewhere else. For both the writer and the artist, the purpose of this struggle is to finally distil a truth, something enduring, from these marks.

## **Jan Lauwers**

### *Memory of a child*

Although Jan Lauwers (b. Antwerp, 1957) initially trained in the visual arts, he is now known mainly as a theatre-maker with Needcompany. Only recently has he attracted particular attention as an artist. Unsurprisingly, his work is characterised by a cross-pollination between the two disciplines.

Like several other artists Jan Lauwers too has been inspired by the Edmond Fabre Archives, the room dedicated to Jan Fabre's father, whose collection of music will be housed here. Lauwers' father was also a collector and his parental home housed display cases containing more than four thousand anthropological and ethnological objects. On the outer wall of the Edmond Fabre Archives Lauwers has hung an enlarged

photograph of these display cabinets, filled with fascinating objects such as a stuffed globefish, an armadillo and a kingfisher. The effect of the display case has been recreated by placing a sheet of glass and lighting in front of the photograph. Nevertheless *memory of a child* remains a tromp-l'oeil and this gives the work a melancholy undertone; one cannot remove anything from the case and a remembered past remains closed forever, except in the imagination.

## **Kris Martin**

### *All Saints*

The work of the Belgian artist Kris Martin (b. Kortrijk, 1972) is characterised by a highly distilled formal beauty. In Martin's view this does not detract from the value of their content; on the contrary, through their visual appeal he invites the spectator to reflect further. The theme of emptiness plays a central role; all his life Martin has claimed that he is totally uninspired but it was precisely this mental vacuum that gradually became an endless source of creativity.

This is perfectly expressed in *All Saints*, the work Kris Martin made for the Troubleyn/Laboratorium. In the artist's kitchen he has attached 80 glass bell-jars of varying sizes to the ceiling. In the past, each of these bell-jars housed a saint, one of the religious dolls we used to see in so many living rooms; in this way they become a part of our collective memory. The saints have now been removed, though the remains of a paper border on the bottom remind us of the wooden base on which the glass jar used to rest. In this way the artist has set up a subtle game of presence and absence: the function of the bell-jars is to contain an isolated bit of nothing, like a spirit in a bottle. Now that the actual figures have been removed, the glass bell-jars above our heads may be associated with almost any form of religiosity. *All Saints* can be about all forms of holiness, or precisely about its absence.

## **Enrique Marty**

### *Ghost*

The sculptures and paintings of Enrique Marty (b. Salamanca, 1969) may repel some but no one will ever respond to them with indifference; the human figures he depicts in dirty smudgy colours tell a story of violence, sickness and perversion. His characters almost always have a childlike quality, but their innocence is irrevocably tainted with something lugubrious and this emphasises their grotesque nature. However, there is also room for something else; through their fragility and the detailed rendering of their suffering and powerlessness, they arouse our pity rather than our abhorrence.

In the Troubleyn/Laboratorium, Marty has combined sculpture and fresco, a technique he has used before. Two- and three-dimensional figures merge to form a single reality in which the wall paintings seem to be a mental projection of what is happening in the figure. In *Ghost*, Marty uses foam rubber, latex, clothing, and oil colours and watercolour paint. The first thing we notice as we walk along the corridor to the first balcony is a ghostly ribbon of human figures twisting along the wall and over the ceiling. If we follow the trail we finally encounter a girl in a nightdress at the end of the passage. Her face is weathered and there are holes in her body as if she is in a state of decomposition. Now we realise that the human

figures on the wall are all depictions of this one ghostly form. The whole, which links up with an age-old tradition of horror stories, makes a lasting impression on our retinas and minds.

## **Dirk Meylaerts**

### *Berkenbomenbankje* (Birch Tree Bench)

Dirk Meylaerts (b. Genk, 1964) has had a remarkable career. After completing his studies in Germanic philosophy he went on a world tour as a dancer in Jan Fabre's *Macht der Theaterlijke Dwaasheden*. At the age of twenty-three he finally found his calling as a designer and furniture maker, a profession he trained for at the *École des Arts et Métiers* in Brussels and with a German master cabinetmaker. He works mainly on the basis of private commissions. Recently he exhibited his first collection which mainly strives for spontaneous design that merges with the architecture.

The location he chose for his contribution was the terrace, which until then had been quite empty. The walls surrounding the terrace are connected horizontally by the trunks of three birch trees placed at right angles to an equal number of shorter, horizontal pieces of trunk standing on the ground. The smooth white bark of the birches required no further treatment. In other words, design does not always have to exude sophistication; in this urban environment, Meylaerts' *berkenboombankje* is a natural, almost rustic element.

## **Johan Muyle**

### *(No) more opium for the masses*

Johan Muyle (b. Charleroi, 1956) creates installation art that is suffused with a powerful social involvement. The style and theme of his brightly coloured, often large-scale assemblage sculptures are globally inspired. In his most recent works especially he increasingly uses ingenious powered mechanisms and sound montages.

This is also the case in his intervention in the Troubleyn/Laboratorium, which is situated in the cloakroom. Here he presents us with a painted portrait of one of his friends, the writer Jean-Pierre Verheggen. Here Muyle was inspired by the physical resemblance of this man to both Victor Hugo and Karl Marx. The pseudo Marx gives us an ambiguous message, namely 'no more opium for the masses'. The word 'no' at the beginning of the sentence flashes on and off. Is this line a wish or an observation? Marx's words 'opium for the people' referred to the numbing effect of religion on people. Through the secularisation of society we could say that the sentence with the negation is a correct observation. Or isn't it? After all, in his work Muyle regularly criticises the mass media, which we might regard as new opiates and whose effect is equally numbing. The negation flashes off once more. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the Marx referred to here was originally a poet; Muyle seems to be suggesting that art could be an alternative to this noxious addiction.

## **Orlan**

### *Orlan MesuRage*

The French artist Orlan (b. Saint-Etienne, 1947) is her own medium. Her work not only makes a subject of the body, it also makes actual changes to it; one of her most controversial projects was her transformation of herself, by plastic surgery, into five models of feminine beauty found in art history, including Mona Lisa. In her other performances she also criticises or explores the modern attitude towards the body.

The intervention in the Troubleyn/Laboratorium will in the first place comprise a performance, *Orlan MesuRage*, which the artist has presented, or has had presented, on several occasions. The concept of *MesuRage* is based on the common idea, which has been held from Vitruvius through to Le Corbusier, that the ideal space must be in proportion to the human body. Orlan believes that in contrast to this each body also wishes to make contact with its surroundings: 'I have never created a work (a drawing, photo, sculpture, video or performance) which I did not see as a body seeking other bodies in order to exist'. In the original *MesuRages*, Orlan ritually measured the space with her own body. However, as she herself was unable to be present this time, the 'Orlan-corps' yardstick was used. This instrument, made of Perspex and metal and 1.64 m long, was designed so that the performance could also take place without Orlan. Jan Fabre, following Orlan's instructions, measured the dance room, marking each linear measurement and announcing it in a loud voice to the audience, after which it was repeated twice by two witnesses. The measurement was then immortalized on a copper plate.

## **Rob Scholte**

### *Achter de wolken schijnt de zon* (The sun is shining above the clouds)

Rob Scholte (b. Amsterdam, 1958) is an excellent example of a postmodern artist. Quotes and clichés are his favourite instruments. Rather than creating images, he reinvents them: a descendant of Warhol, he analyses and uses the stream of visual information that inundates us every day, extracts elements from it and gives them a new meaning and a new value by changing their context.

In the courtyard of the Troubleyn/Laboratorium, Scholte has attached a panel elegantly inscribed with the words 'achter wolken schijnt de zon' high up on an outer wall. The gold finish reminds us of nostalgic tin boxes, and the optimistic message of the 'Association Without a Name'. We might at first sight think that Scholte was rather noncommittally mocking the naiveté of pieces of wisdom as this. However, even though there is an unmistakable gentle irony here, the work goes deeper than this. Anyone who knows that Scholte lost both his legs in an attack in 1994 and went through a very dark period which he survived both as a person and an artist, will not interpret this motto lightly. In Scholte's hands these words, which have become so worn with use, regain their full, meaningful value. Scholte squeezes water out of a stone in that he manages to distil sincerity and authenticity from the biggest cliché imaginable. The poster is therefore not only monumental in its size, but is a magnificent expression of an indestructible life force.

## **Berend Strik**

### *Sky Church*

The work of the Dutch artist Berend Strik (b. Nijmegen, 1960) is extremely varied, a characteristic best expressed in his contrary choice of materials, which ranges from sandblasted mirrors and embroidery to stained glass. While a student at the Rijksacademie voor Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam (1986-1988) one of his teachers was Jan Fabre. He often brings high and low culture into confrontation with one another and creates a bridge between the two.

Strik also contributed to the Edmond Fabre Archives, the space that houses the extensive music collection of Jan Fabre's recently deceased father. His choice of a stained-glass window was inspired by the proximity of the St Willibrord Church. Between the luminous areas of red and yellow we see a portrait of Jimi Hendrix with the electric blue words 'When I die just keep playing the records', which were spoken by the legendary guitar player himself. The scratchy letters and bright colours evoke his music. The window links up with the Jimi Hendrix alcove that Strik set up in the Vredenburg music centre. In relation to the gramophone records in the Edmond Fabre collection, this work reflects on the relationship between art and collection and how the collection can make art an active experience. The window is therefore entitled *Sky Church*, a concept through which Jimi Hendrix tried to express that he did not just want to make music during his concerts but to bring people together by way of a special experience. Strik sees this as a task for the Troubleyn/Laboratorium. In this way, Jimi Hendrix, who achieved superhuman things in his guitar music, becomes a sort of modern saint, a conscience that prompts the artist to use his full potential.

## **Luc Tuymans**

### *Bloodstains*

In an age when many regard painting as outdated, Luc Tuymans (b. Mortsel, 1958) has managed to give this medium a new dimension. His paintings, which he describes as 'authentic forgeries', are often aimed at creating a moral distrust of the visual information we get.

For the Troubleyn/Laboratorium he has produced a painting in one of the coffers of the dance room ceiling; it is an adaptation of a 1993 painting entitled *Bloodstains*. Round red shapes, large and small, are placed against a blotchy pale green background; what we are seeing is a microscopic image of red and white blood corpuscles. The work plays with the remarkable coincidence that the recognisable and sinister image of blood stains is repeated when we examine them through a microscope. The remaining coffers of the ceiling are left empty but as a result of the optical illusion that the painted coffer lies slightly deeper, we get the impression that they too are concealing something under their layer of paint. The decision to reproduce *Bloodstains* was motivated by Fabre's own work with blood. However, the ceiling painting also aims to link up with the spirit of experimentation and study inherent in the Troubleyn/Laboratorium.

## **Hans van Houwelingen**

### *Vera azula*

In his work, the Dutch painter Hans van Houwelingen (b. Harlingen, 1957) constantly enters into a dialogue with the public space. Sometimes he creates objects that are tuned into the context of the public domain, and sometimes he creates the space itself. Unsurprisingly therefore, the contribution by this ex-pupil of Jan Fabre (Fabre taught for some time at the Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam) is firmly embedded in the Troubleyn/Laboratorium.

Literally and figuratively: in the courtyard, Van Houwelingen has used the holes in the walls that remained after renovation was completed. He filled them with rough chips of lapis lazuli, the azure coloured stone that was ground to obtain ultramarine blue, particularly in the Renaissance period. The use of this rare and very expensive blue colour, used for example to colour the Virgin Mary's robe, requires exceptional skill; consequently lapis lazuli symbolised the highest realisation in art. In the Troubleyn/Laboratorium it naturally refers to Jan Fabre's bic blue. The ultramarine contrasts absolutely with the red brick but also has the same roughness; Van Houwelingen has deliberately left the lapis lazuli untreated to focus attention on the function of Fabre's laboratory as a workshop, a studio where art in its unpolished form is constantly being refined.

## **Jan Van Imschoot**

### *The first waltz of the lady-bull / Ladyboy, Curlie-man or the East in me*

The easy brushstrokes by the painter Jan Van Imschoot (b. Ghent, 1963) together form perfectly balanced compositions. But Van Imschoot's work is not only a matter of formal virtuosity; the story they tell is equally important. His paintings frequently refer to historical or social themes and comprise a healthy dose of black humour. However, the final interpretation of his highly narrative paintings is left to the spectator.

In the Troubleyn/Laboratorium he chose the corridor in the office area as his workplace, and there executed a mural in oils. It is a sort of diptych: in the corridor itself we see a scene from a bullfight, flanked by a seductive beauty, naked and wearing a pair of high heels. The scene is framed by the lyrics of a song, *A painter's lullaby*, written by 'Fucking Imschoot'. The raw poetry is about the corrupt relationship between a brother and sister, and about sexuality permeated with violence. As we enter the office door we pass a second nude figure seated in an electric chair. Only by his genitals are we able to identify him as a boy. The figure of this 'lady-boy' now reveals the androgyny of the other figures, the super-masculine matador with his feminine gestures and clothing, and the manly, provocative attitude of the woman. This mural deals with the link between sex and violence and gender confusion, but through the lady-boy also addresses the problem of sex tourism and the hypocrisy of moral judgements on it. Finally, the work is also about deception and seduction, so that to a certain extent it is also a reflection on art itself.

## **Koen Vanmechelen**

### *Ab Ovo*

The work of Koen Vanmechelen (b. Sint-Truiden, 1965) is inspired by the chicken and its product, the egg. Nevertheless the chicken is merely a vehicle for its true theme, namely hybridisation. In other words, the meeting of two elements which unite and so create new future possibilities. Through this theme he often addresses current ethical questions such as cloning.

What the chicken and man have in common is that they are both 'domesticated' and this makes them marginal beings, wedged in between culture and nature. The aim of the work he installed in the Troubleyn/Laboratorium was to express this duality and therefore became an installation that was situated partly inside and partly outside the building. A large photographic print on Perspex, mounted on the workshop window, depicts an enlarged chicken's head which stares at us penetratingly, an effect Vanmechelen likes to compare with the panoptic gaze of the Mona Lisa. Outside, the window overlooks an iron cage containing an incubation light for chicks. The cage, the lamp and the title, *Ab ovo*, refer to the egg; the protected environment which facilitates creation is also a limitation from which man must escape. Vanmechelen believes that this process that leads from the egg to the chicken and back again, constantly escaping its origins only to recreate itself, embodies the whole task of art.

## **Peter Verhelst**

### *Ever*

The Flemish writer Peter Verhelst (b. Bruges, 1962) works in many genres: in 1987 he made his debut as a poet, and is also a novelist and theatre-maker.

For this project he crosses over to art – which he feels is but a very small step away. Nevertheless, his medium continues to be language. In the entrance hall of the creative section of the building he has placed a sort of white stone holy water font in the wall. The word 'never' is inscribed in the bowl. The letter 'N' is in high relief, however. The idea here is that anyone who passes the stone touches the bowl with his finger and runs it along the letter 'N'. In time this will wear down the medium-hard stone so that 'never' will finally become 'ever'. In this way Verhelst expresses what he believes to be the essence of art: attempting the impossible, failing a hundred times and finally succeeding. In this regard, Verhelst is aware of the fact that there is very little difference in both the meaning and the grammatical use of the two words. The difference is created by the patience and dedication of the person working on it: 'they only differ because you want them to'. The intention changes everything. The work is about longing. 'Which is why', says Verhelst, 'it will be at its most beautiful when the 'N' has almost disappeared. The longing will then be at its strongest.'

## Henk Visch

### *Mijn moeder was een aap* (My mother was an ape)

Even though Henk Visch (b. Eindhoven, 1950) works in various disciplines, he is mainly known as a sculptor. His slender, unreal sculptures often depict a still movement, like frozen dancers. The wide range of materials he uses includes language; the poetic, enigmatic titles of many of his works give the objects a deeper meaning.

The aluminium hare he made for Fabre is placed in the apex of the building and looks out from the darkness over the theatre like the ultimate director. Like the actor who empties himself and then fills himself with his role, it is hollow. The choice of material is also related to this hollowness, as Visch regards aluminium as having no properties, since it acquires no patina or character. The sculpture represents the magic of theatre; like Fabre's *Flemish Warrior of Despair*, this metaphysical being has long ears that pick up signals from another reality. Visch also sees the animal as symbolising an absolute, immanent presence that man can no longer experience but which he still carries within himself. The title, *Mijn moeder was een aap*, refers to this spiritual animality which, from the point of view of evolution, man still carries in him.

## Robert Wilson

### *Sound Well*

The American avant-garde stage director and playwright Robert Wilson (born in 1941 in Waco, Texas) is considered to be one of greatest contemporary innovators in the fields of theatre and opera. His productions are characterized by a distinctive, austere aesthetic. He has continually expanded the boundaries of theatre by experimenting with the use of time and space: His theatre is an un-interpretive theatre that asks questions rather than gives answers. Wilson puts great emphasis on giving all theatrical elements their independent space. While each element can stand on its own, when seen together they reinforce one another. This is true whether the performances are in an opera house, in an alleyway, or on a mountaintop. A man of many talents - Wilson is active as a painter, a sculptor, a designer, to name only some of his interests - he has always considered collaboration with other artists such as Philip Glass, Tom Waits and Allen Ginsberg to be one of the driving forces of his own creativity.

In his concept for the installation, Wilson compares the structure of the Troubleyn/Laboratorium with that of an orange or a fish, where the interior texture is different from the outer layer. One of his guiding concepts is to put a deep well of sound and text at the core of the installation, similar to the one at his Watermill Centre on Long Island, thus creating a kind of mental connection between the two buildings. Just like the Troubleyn/Laboratorium, the Watermill Centre provides young artists with opportunities to develop their work and encourages artistic innovation. For the Troubleyn/Laboratorium, Wilson proposes that this sound well should be placed in the entrance hall of the building. Excerpts from Heiner Müller's *Hamlet Machine* will be heard from beneath the grill that covers the well. Troubleyn will thus get its own 'omphalos', like the one at the antique oracle in Delphi, an earth-umbilicus through which messages from the deep will reach us. But above all, it conveys a message from another faraway place, a message of alliance from another world, where kindred spirits are fathoming the same depths.