

RECLAIMING SOLITUDES

Hans Wuyts

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Text by Indra Devriendt, June 2020

Reclaiming solitudes

A city strives for a flawless image. This includes eliminating unwanted places and buildings on the basis of the illusion that unwanted people will also disappear. What we do not see does not happen. The artist Hans Wuyts (b. 1978), who lives and works in Antwerp, is interested in the hidden life of a city, more specifically in groups that usually remain invisible to others. He does not see these people as a problem, but as a starting point for linking the pleasant to the inevitable through his sculptures.

With 'Reclaiming solitudes' Wuyts presents three projects, specifically designed for public space in the city of Antwerp. The first project shows tools to break open the 'ghost station' at the Stuivenbergziekenhuis. This underground space belongs to the pre-metro network MIVA and has been vacant for 35 years. Wuyts wants to transform the abbreviation MIVA into the name of an artists' collective that uses the tunnel as an experimental exhibition space.

With the second project, Wuyts launches a social dialogue. When trees have to disappear on a square, he uses that wood to make chairs that he replaces with cast bronze. The chairs are connected to each other. When they stand as far forward as possible, they form a circle.

The third proposal is a sanctuary on a wasteland of 25 hectares, near the Maritime College in Antwerp North. Wuyts misses meeting places for certain target groups and designs sculptures for them. There is something for everyone: skate rooms, a covered car park for caravans and campers, a darkroom, a hotel pierced with glory holes or the sculptural quality of the creations themselves. His sculptures are multifunctional: use and enjoyment go hand in hand. Images that were once on display in Antwerp's public space, Wuyts reworks and places them in a new context. In this way, the French Furie, who stands orphaned on the parking lot of the Middelheim Museum, is given a new life by integrating them into his work.

For the presentation of his projects in mariondecannière, Wuyts also starts from the site. The former use of this art space was a hotel. How do you bring the public space into a domestic environment? The visitor can only reach the exhibition space through a narrow opening. We crawl out of a closet. This immediately sets the tone for the homely and scaled-down nature of his proposals. The way in which Wuyts presents his projects testifies to craftsmanship, knowledge of materials and versatility. A design is both a sculpture and a utensil, pedestal or transport case. Associated manuals visualise his concrete plans. Not only his sculptures themselves, but also their realisation triggers a social dialogue. This does not have to stop at models. Why shouldn't a sculpture be a sanctuary to satisfy the pleasure of different target groups, without compromising the image of a city?

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