

Affinities#7

For each edition of the recurring exhibition format *Affiniteiten* ('affinities'), LLS Paleis brings together two couples of artists in a line-up with the premise to stretch across at least two different cities and generations. For this 7th edition, Johanna Van Overmeir (*1983, Duffel) and Messieurs Delmotte (*1967, Liège), living in Antwerp, meet Joëlle Tuerlinckx (*1958, Brussels) and Christoph Fink (*1963, Ghent) from Brussels.

Based on the conviction that works of art are not created in vacuo but are strongly influenced in emergence and final form by their surroundings – both the wider and, perhaps above all, the *immediate* environment – *Affiniteiten* draws attention to the latter. Accordingly, it focusses on the artists' personal, close surroundings, their proximal context, the neighbouring and immediate sphere of impact and inspiration.

While the design of the format's invitation card remains the same, varying only in colour for each edition, it is up to the respective artist couples to choose the font and the punctuation between their names. For this edition, both couples have opted for a rather classic typeface, reminiscent of a typewriter font. Van Overmeir and Messieurs Delmotte employ a wild mixture of upper and lower case letters, some bold, some regular. As punctuation, Christoph Fink and Joëlle Tuerlinckx chose a particular use of the comma: ' , ' – with a space not only after but also before it. With this change to the usual spelling, they democratise the distance between each of their names to the connecting symbol in the middle. Van Overmeir and Messieurs Delmotte chose an asterisk, a colon, a closed parenthesis, an open parenthesis, a colon and an asterisk, with no blank spaces: '*(:.*' The eye accustomed to mobile phone text messages might initially read this sequence of characters as two smiley faces looking at each other. But what are the asterisks? The artists attribute a different meaning to this choice of symbols: The brackets represent the backs of each of them, they shield one another's weak spot. They are partners, and they form a team. Similar to the image of two agents entering a room, back to back, protecting each other – the asterisks can be interpreted as guns they carry. For Messieurs Delmotte and Johanna Van Overmeir the image symbolises protection and support.

J.V.O.M.D.(.1)

Both performance residue and ephemeral print work in effect, one of the first pieces to be encountered at *Affiniteiten#7* has been applied directly onto LLS Paleis' large window front: For *Shape of Memories, 2025*, Johanna Van Overmeir has covered the whole glass in a pattern of mayonnaise, applied with a pomme frite. The piece is a reinterpretation of a performance from 2016 in which the artist had worked in a similar way with lipstick kisses. A framed photograph of this earlier work is on display alongside the artist's recent intervention into site for *Affiniteiten*. The respective materials chosen for each interpretation of the piece – lipstick and mayonnaise, refer to the specific histories of each exhibition space. At LLS Paleis, it is reminiscent of the space's previous use as a snack bar. It was during the original performance that Johanna Van Overmeir first met Messieurs Delmotte, who would later become her husband. It sounds made-up but is true that they met each other (partaking in the same group exhibition, and) simultaneously performing kiss pieces: While Van Overmeir was covering the exhibition space's window in kisses over the course of hours, Messieurs Delmotte was whistling the tune of *I Was Made for Lovin' You Baby* by Kiss into visitors' ears, topping it off with a kiss on the cheek. A video of this piece, titled *We Were Made For Loving You, Babies! You Were Made For Loving Us!?*, when originally performed in Warsaw in 2011, is now also part of the exhibition at LLS Paleis. Changing the 'I' from the song to a 'We' in the work's title apparently refers to the several 'Messieurs' (plural of the French 'monsieur') evoked by the artist's name. 'Babies' – altered to the plural as well – can be read as pointing to the several visitors. Or, it might also propose that every-one is various. That there are several, many in each and all of us.

Entering the exhibition space for *Affiniteiten#7*, the visitor is greeted by – or confronted with?, a pop diptych by Messieurs Delmotte: *Local Art, Regional Art, Provincial Art, National Art, International Art, Universal Art*. Presumably an ode of sorts, a humorous nod to the artist's hometown, the work features two large canvases that stand on easels (211 x 120 x 45 cm) and depict slightly abstracted interpretations of the famous *Sirop de Liège*'s branding in acrylic paint. One canvas represents the Dutch, the other the French language version of it. Both carry the traces of a performative live intervention on site – syrup. (*The syrup, in fact.*) Generously applied (slapped or smeared onto) the very centre of each painting, *Du Vrai Sirop de Liège / Echte Luikse Sirop* has run down their surfaces and seeped thickly onto the floor. The two paintings stand next to each other, side by side, like two individuals – like a couple?¹

While actions such as smearing, smudging and similarly hearty, tangible and symbolically charged gestures constitute integral moments in several of the works by artist couple Messieurs Delmotte and Johanna Van Overmeir, the '*C.F.J.T. works*' conceived for *Affiniteiten#7* by Christoph Fink and Joëlle Tuerlinckx consist of a completely different, almost opposing set of more seclusive, subtle and reserved approaches.

¹ In addition to the dual appearance it makes here, the iconic Belgian syrup brand is featured in yet another work of Messieurs Delmotte in the last room of the exhibition.

C.F.J.T.

With wall/floor/ceiling display for presentation of works 'C.F.J.T.' in *AFFINITEITEN#7* cyclus LLS Paleis, 16. 02. - 30. 03. 2025, Joëlle Tuerlinckx designed a site-specific backdrop for the works of Christoph Fink and herself within the *Affiniteiten* arena.

The 'wall' element of this frame-like background setting is made in white pencil on several pieces of black butcher's paper. Assembled as a collage of sorts, it covers the entire length of the wall in the front exhibition space of LLS Paleis. Made on site by means of a frottage technique, copying – or rather translating, the tiling from the back of the space onto paper, it constitutes a reproduction of one of the room's most characteristic visual features.² For the 'ceiling' element, Tuerlinckx decided to provide the neon tubes that illuminate the exhibition space with a black cover. The tables used by the artist couple for the exhibition are regarded as the 'floor' element, employed to present their work horizontally ('exposition à l'horizontale'). For *Affiniteiten#7*, the tables are generously wrapped in fabrics which reach down to the floor. This wrapping might suggest that something could well be hidden, made to disappear or simply be stored underneath. With the installation of a loudspeaker under the rear table, from which a sequence of familiar yet unexpected noises can be heard, the work of Christoph Fink emphasises this suggestion. Ping-pong, it honks (or squeaks?) and talks and barks from under the table, somebody counts, a drum rhythm emerges, a siren sound – and several others – burst or fade in, and away. Together, they add another layer to the whole room, and blur even the lines to the outside: The chatting, the footsteps, the sound of a car driving past – did that come from the work under the table or from the street, behind the window?

It is probably primarily Joëlle Tuerlinckx who is known for her frequent use of the horizontal plane for exhibition presentations. Nevertheless, Christoph Fink has been working in this way for a long time, as well, e.g. when he was invited for Manifesta 4 in Frankfurt am Main in 2002 where he displayed his drawings on long tables. Two 'atlases' of Tuerlinckx are on display for *Affinititen#7*. Both artists share this vocabulary since a long time. Tuerlinckx's exhibition in The Power Plant in Toronto in 2008 was called *ATLAS of walls*. Fink published his *Atlases of Movements* in 2000, 2001 and 2003 and by today this title refers to and encompasses the whole of his oeuvre.

The exchange between and mutual influence among Tuerlinckx and Fink is visible but not integral to their oeuvres per se. Tuerlinckx's work, with its specific method of quoting, inherently undermines and denies the 'rules' which define the relation of original and copy. Her piece '*Beweging#61*' (*Christoph Fink*) – *Copie* is, as the title states, a very direct example of this — not only referring to, but actually copying a work of Fink's. In the set of '*C.F.J.T. works*', as conceived for *Affiniteiten#7*, the reciprocal connection between the two is deliberately put forth, carefully arranged, particularly staged and highlighted. Many references to and quotations from each other, repetitions and imitations of the other's work can be observed. In further addition to the purposefully interwoven display of their works, the interaction between the two oeuvres is also thoroughly and openly described on detailed wall panels written by the artists. Their shared story of developing artwork next to each other gets told through a subtle set of varying connections. One important engine of this interplay seems to be what Tuerlinckx and Fink describe as their shared 'pragmatics of work'. In other words: Common endeavours such as joint walks and visits to the same places – from which both then derive different ideas, according to their respective approaches.

Christoph Fink's work revolves around travelling and movement. It shows how complex the movements of a human being, or indeed of humanity, in time and space are. His gaze, as it emerges from his works, is mostly directed outwards, partly upwards – towards the sky, towards aeroplanes and into space – as well as towards fields or any landscapes that surround him on his bicycle tours and other travels. But sometimes, his work also references the closest surroundings, such as in *Les Liaisons du carré 43, kattenstamboom* – a genealogy of the Tuerlinckx x Fink's cat family over the years. Joëlle Tuerlinckx's approach seems to perform a related movement, in an almost opposite fashion. It draws the bigger world into the self, through which it then gets filtered, (re-)arranged, archived and retold. Mainly – but not exclusively, her focus is a realm closer than the sky. A decisive moment of her gaze being influenced by upward observation is the eclipse of 1999, during the end of August in Belgium. Since this event, circles, partly covering-, partly moving in front of each other make a more frequent appearance in her work. A direct example of this is *Disques d'exposition -série Meta neutral gris, 2002 (17 parts)*. With circles being a recurring element for both artists, her '*ronds*' on paper serve as auto-referential elements. They are, in a sense, the contours of her own work. When Tuerlinckx refers to Fink in her work, it is a way of including his work into her personal archive, in turn – and yet another circle is formed.

Circular shapes reappear throughout the oeuvres of both Joëlle Tuerlinckx and Christoph Fink, with different functions and effects. Generally, there is often a parallel in their approach, starting point, material or thought process, while the execution or direction of their work then takes different routes. For example, the use of

² Furthermore, Joëlle Tuerlinckx's frottage of the tiles can be read as a nod to the azulegios technique, a covering of ceramic tiles, used by Christoph Fink, in his public commission piece *Aardmantel* (2019) a monumental intervention in the station tunnel of Aalst.

carbon paper for duplicating texts, notes, calculations or drawings is something that plays a different role within Tuerlinckx's and Fink's interests. For Tuerlinckx it corresponds to her evident fascination with the relation of original and copy, and copy of copy (of copy, ...) – to her interest in multiplicity. Fink uses carbon paper in his self-developed writing pads. This permits him to superimpose all notations of a single travel onto one another, resulting in a layered concentrate, a blind 'copy' of the experience, a dense blue drawing. As such – besides the separate travel log with numerous entries, all movements feed together into one single, overall residue.

For *Affiniteiten#7*, as described, the couple of many years is referring consciously and clearly to each other's work. But, interestingly, many similarities – in both, form and execution as well as underlying philosophy and concept – seem to have already existed since before they met. An anecdotal, actually a bit magical example of this is Joëlle Tuerlinckx's *Ma table de nuit (archives d'atelier)*, ca. 1963, ('my bedside table'). The pretty little piece of furniture used to be a barrel of washing powder. Joëlle Tuerlinckx's mother (– herself not a trained artist,) had made these tables for each of her children. Joëlle's specimen is painted with red and blue spikes that extend towards each other from the barrel's top and bottom edges. By the side of her bed throughout her childhood – a manifest early memory – this pattern is thus already anchored in Tuerlinckx's primal imagery. One day, many years later, she is to find a small square painting in the 'rubbish' of Fink's studio. It dates from the time before he – temporarily – turned away from painting and to other techniques, and he held no real interest in it anymore. But Tuerlinckx recognises it. It depicts the same pattern as 'ma table de nuit'. Did the dual existence of this pattern already suggest that the two were to meet?

J.V.O.M.D. x C.F.J.T.

Many clear similarities, mutual influences and reactions to each other can be recognised and emphasised within the respective cosmoses of each artist pair, while the juxtaposition of both couples reveals above all a strong contrast and a clear difference in themes, methods, implementations and forms. Interestingly, the very different tones struck by the two pairs do not interfere with each other in a disruptive way within the exhibition, but rather merge into a strangely harmonious whole – not quite meshing or interlocking, but interacting complementarily.

One example of this is the soundscape created by the multiple, simultaneously playing audio elements of the exhibition, from several videos of Delmotte and Van Overmeir, plus Fink's sound piece. They merge into one another throughout the space without colliding, clash only playfully and serve as a common backdrop for the overall strongly divergent positions. The sound mixes everything together, enveloping one like the other, across contrasts and differences. "We let it become a cacophony.", remarks Stella Lohaus, head of LLS Paleis. She refers to the *Affiniteiten* format as 'gemengd dubbel' ('mixed doubles') – borrowing the term from tennis. The curatorial decision made for this 7th edition of *Affiniteiten*, to spatially separate the artist pairs, with each occupying one side of the room, seems to emphasise this metaphor. In between, in the center, a net can be imagined. "And the sound does not respect any net!", comments Stella Lohaus.

The imaginary net marks and serves as a kind of dividing line, but – to stay with the tennis comparison – it also allows for passing a ball over it. Even if the connections across the net are less obvious than those within each team, they can still be found if looked for. For example, Joëlle Tuerlinckx metaphorically extends her hand to Messieurs Delmotte by means of fruit. With a crate of Argentinian pears that she decided to bring into the exhibition space and include into the '*C.F.J.T. works*' ensemble – *22 boulettes noires, Argentine Pears*, she references the fruit that Sirop de Liège is actually made from. Tuerlinckx's grey circles of *Disques d'exposition - série Meta neutral gris* turn and turn; an analog movement appears in the chain carousel from Johanna Van Overmeir's video *I Swear to the Lord*.

The sharing of a mother tongue is spread across the teams, with Messieurs Delmotte and Joëlle Tuerlinckx being natively francophone and Johanna Van Overmeir and Christoph Fink as native Dutch speakers. There is a certain dividing line between the two opposing halves of the room, but small bridges of encounter have been built to lead across. The contrast between the pairs – especially the way it is consciously handled, functions itself as one of those bridges: While Messieurs Delmotte and Johanna Van Overmeir work decisively with the element of strong colours, Christoph Fink and Joëlle Tuerlinckx retreat – for this exhibition – mainly into more restrained colours; mostly black, white, grey and pastel tones. The colour elements that prominently remain in their installation, pink and blue³, refer to those of the exhibition space and adapt to them, thereby resulting in a restrained almost-camouflage.

The first exhibition Christoph Fink saw of Joëlle Tuerlinckx is *Opus Operandi*; the first work Tuerlinckx saw of Fink is *ma 13 V 1991, 17.52u - do 13 VI 1991* – also on display for *Affiniteiten#7*. *I Swear To the Lord* is Messieurs Delmotte's favourite work of Johanna Van Overmeir's. With her smearing lipstick across her face in this video, it links directly to her favourite set of work of his: *MAKE UP a drawing on FACE*, and *PAINT on FACE* – two recorded performances during which Messieurs Delmotte let people paint his face.

³ The pink tablecloth of *Table Affiniteiten 'Double Vortex'* and blue tablecloth of *Table Affiniteiten Bleue*.

In their works, as well as in their contributions to developing the set-up of an exhibition, there is often immediate connections between Johanna Van Overmeir and Messieurs Delmotte. As performance artists they react from the affect to each other's gestures. When Van Overmeir decided to use mayonnaise as a site-specific material of sorts for example, it spontaneously reminded Messieurs Delmotte of a work of his from 1996. 'Nutritious fat' can be named as the link here which led him to propose his work *The Salami Tree* to be included into the exhibition. Delmotte referring to himself as 'Messieurs', thereby implementing the idea of being more than one, corresponds to the two faces of Johanna Van Overmeir's work *Janus*, originally performed at the Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2015. The costume that Van Overmeir was wearing for this performance is a gown made from what looks like hair. It covers the whole body and has a kind of back-mask attached to it, a silicone mould of the artist's own face that sits on the back of her head when worn.

Another two remarkable formal parallels within the set of works of Johanna Van Overmeir and Messieurs Delmotte for *Affiniteiten#7* both include liquid material. Firstly, there is a direct line between two video works/ performance documentations that are facing each other in the last room of the exhibition. Projected through window glass, Johanna Van Overmeir presents here five films, one of them called *Baptism* from 2015. It shows her sitting on the floor of a public building as people walk by, dipping her head into a metal tub full of water that stands in front of her, then pulling the head out again with a jerk, causing her long hair to fling the water behind her. On the opposite wall, a performance video of Messieurs Delmotte from the year 2000 is playing. It is the first work Johanna Van Overmeir ever saw of his (at argos, Brussels) and is entitled *Fountain*. It shows the artist, typically dressed in a suit, straight-faced and straightforwardly crossing a street in Liège in broad daylight, approaching a splashing water fountain and – confidently and seemingly purposefully, walking right into it. Secondly, there is Johanna Van Overmeir's work, a performance residue from *Lick thy wounds*, 2012, consisting of eight 'glass bottle[s] with sweat, floor dust, hairs & candy liquid' that seems to be in direct conversation with Messieurs Delmotte's *Dessin Liquide - 1000 ml + Crachat de l'auteur* ('liquid drawing' with 'spit of the author'), mocking the notion of a genius artist. The sweetness of the pink liquid from *Lick Thy Wounds*, a performance during which Van Overmeir lay down for hours in a candy liquid, furthermore relates to the syrup of Messieurs Delmotte's works.

In the last room of the exhibition, the famous Sirop de Liège which greeted visitors just behind the entrance already, appears again, in another form. The staging of this reappearance seems to suggest that the second form could perhaps be a further development of the first. At the least, it is a clear reference to it. A pair of 'klompen' (clogs), stands on a low, green-painted plinth, coloured like the canvases in the entrance, with the branding of *Du Vrai Sirop de Liège/ Echte Luikse Siroop* pasted onto them, and filled generously with said syrup. Traditional Dutch clogs, one bears the French label of Belgium's most famous syrup brand, the other the Flemish one. Filled, as if by a good-natured villain in a cartoon, with syrup. With a humorous wink, this work is intended as an allusion to the Belgian history of overcoming Dutch rule in 1830 through a proletarian revolution that famously began after a performance of the romantic opera *The Mute of Portici*.

Another possible reading might be the following: Again, a work of two pieces – like the two canvases in the first room – another pair. But this time, as a pair of shoes, the double-presence does not seem to suggest being a couple. Just one shoe without the other is rendered quite useless. In this sense, the pair rather evokes the idea of being one – a united? one. As if to say: Left leg, right leg; Flemish branding, Walloon branding – One cannot walk on just one leg. Together we might walk into the future.