

PRESS RELEASE

# SCULPTING BELGIUM

Sculpture in Belgium during The Glorious Thirty  
1945 - 1975



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Opening Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> September from 5pm to 9pm

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## Sculpting Belgium

### Sculpture in Belgium during The Glorious Thirty 1945 / 1975

Marcel ARNOULD  
Pol BURY  
Pierre CAILLE  
Gilbert DECOCK  
André DEKEIJSER  
Yves DE SMET  
Reinoud D'HAESE  
Jan DRIES  
Francis DUSEPULCHRE  
André EIJBERG  
Vic GENTILS  
Jean-Pierre GHYSELS  
Jo DELAHAUT  
Monique GUEBELS-DERVICHIAN  
Marie-Paule HAAR  
Pal HORVATH  
Oscar JESPERS  
Jean-Paul LAENEN  
Antonia LAMBELE  
Walter LEBLANC  
Jacques MOESCHAL  
Félix ROULIN  
Emile SOUPLY  
Olivier STREBELLE  
TAPTA  
Camiel VAN BREEDAM  
Jan VAN DEN ABBEEL  
Guy VANDENBRANDEN  
Hilde VAN SUMERE  
Marc VERSTOCKT  
Ferdinand VONCK  
André WILLEQUET

General Curators:

La Patinoire Royale, Valérie Bach and Constantin Chariot

An exhibition catalogue will be published and available in mid-September.  
Photographies and documentation available on request: [info@lapatinoireroyale.com](mailto:info@lapatinoireroyale.com).

Cover: Oscar Jaspers - Frieda, 1919 - Bronze - 79 x 23 x 23 cm © A.C.L, n° 116063A  
Oscar Jaspers is one of the founding fathers of modern sculpture in Belgium. His work greatly influenced Belgium's Post-War generation of sculptors. As such, he stands as a key figure of this exhibition despite belonging to the previous generation.

La Patinoire Royale brings together under one roof, one exhibition, one title « Sculpting Belgium », over thirty Belgian artists, mainly sculptors, from the mid 40s who have each in their own and unique way, sculpted the face of Belgium's Post-War art scene. Although one might find it hard to classify and describe the aesthetics of this multifaceted, heterogeneous movement dating back from the early 50s to the end of the 80s, one cannot deny its phenomenal creative power influenced by a postwar era where formal research exploded and resulted in the use of new innovative materials such as steel and plastic.

This explosive creative phenomenon in which artistic perspectives are intertwined with social and political interests, is characterized by a new found freedom, a reluctance for «traditional» art and, in some way, a desire for a clean slate. The war's impact on the aesthetics of Art Deco - associated with the fascistic regimes of Western Europe - is immediately apparent notably with the emerging desire and search for minimalism and abstraction, a subversion already embraced by Belgian Sculptor Oscar Jespers.

The Belgian and European uprising of the sculpting scene through the 50s and 80s was driven by young male artists - mostly born in the 30s - alongside a number of female artists such as Tapta, Hilde Van Sumere and Antonia Lambelé. Their sensitivity and desire to assert themselves would leave an imprint on an eminently masculine world dominated by marble and steel. This generation frequented schools of Fine Art and taught the aesthetics of traditional art before challenging and rejecting its conventions and norms.

At that time, Belgian institutions, galleries and the then united Ministry of Culture were all dedicated to promoting and advertising their compatriots worldwide. Public commissions and acquisitions were not uncommon. At that time, new museums are emerging and established provincial and national museums were expanding and assembling their permanent collections. By doing so, they were supporting, encouraging and stimulating this generation of upcoming artists and as well as their patrons, private as much as institutional. Together, they created a large network of sincere friendships, inviting one another to visit their workshops or openings.

« Les Glorieuses Trentes » (The Glorious Thirty) refers to the thirty years following the end of the Second World War, distinguished by a transition to a consumer society and a strong economic growth. Forty years after the United States of America, Europe discovers the commodities of mass industry, the transistor, the television and the automobile.

Looking at it more carefully, and in order to synthesize the spirit that prevails in this society of young artists, it can be remembered that nothing seems impossible to them. They have in their hands a new destiny for this abstract, constructivist art which has already known some great figures before the war, but which they seek to push still further.

In 1958, the Brussels World Expo - more commonly known as the « Expo 58 » - and the international architecture coming from all over the world, symbolize this incredible conviction in a progress that will bring hope just after the destructions of war. Europe was ready to set its sight on the future with the emergence of Modernism influenced by Bauhaus and the development of new technologies of construction. Architects admired steel for its tensile strength, reinforced and pre-stressed concrete for its resistance and drawn glass for its ability to admit light. They sought innovative and expressive ways to reveal these properties, and used aluminium and glass to create visual transparency, transforming and decorating building façades.

Influenced by its urbanism, Brussels followed in the continental United States' footsteps and commenced its own urban planning, « Brusselization », often destroying its architectural heritage in favour of a modern building ... not always a wise choice.

For the Expo 58, Belgian architects and sculptors designed the sparkling and iconic « Atomium » and the ephemeral « Flèche du Génie Civil », symbols of the glory days for progressive societies after the devastation of two World Wars.

It is during these hopeful and promising times, tinged with the naive thrill of progress that these artists embarked on an artistic path, experimenting with the new-found technologies and in search of novelty, singularity and beauty. Fullness and emptiness, stretching to rupture, volume massification, researches in the cantilevers or stacking of loads, interrogations on the volume and its faces , ... are the different categories of researches often cumulated that these artists are interested in.

This golden age for Belgian sculptors and artists was marked by a new artistic expression resulting in a skillful and ingenious reinvention of colour and matter combinations, in an absolute fancy which, however, doesn't lack of talent and technical mastery.

The 70s were a decade of many firsts. The world suffered its first oil crisis and Belgium, its first State Reform which leads to the establishment of three cultural communities, each with their own territory: the Flemish Cultural Community, the French Cultural Community and the German Cultural Community. The birth of the three cultural communities was, as the name suggests, a sign of a certain autonomy in relation to culture. However, the powers of those cultural communities were still extremely limited. Belgian artists were labelled either from Flanders, from Wallonia or from Brussels. In less than 10 years, the Belgian artistic art market was radically changed. The Federal State is in charge of no more than two Royal Museums, gallerists and institutions distanced themselves from Brussels (vibrant capital of the Belgian art scene) and the dialogue between teachers and students died down.

This reform marked the beginning of the a new cultural and artistic scene that took place during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Belgium was a witness to fewer commissions and its national ideal - in fashion during the Brussel's World Expo - became less popular. Ambitions were running low. Both Flanders and Wallonia participated to the Venice Biennial creating a sens of division in the country and the strong language barrier created tensions and disabilities for publishing houses, galleries, museums, etc. These misleading factors were the core of this incomprehensible indifference of the Belgian public and international collectors for the rich and powerful sculpture of « The Glorious Thirty ». Belgian art was no longer promoted and produced as it once was.

The names of the sculptors presented in this group-show « Sculpting Belgium » are today ignored by many and absent from the art market despite their popularity in the 80s and being present in the many public places, both in Belgium and abroad. With the exception of a few, most of these artists have long left the art world to take refuge, unnoticed, in the confines of workshops, slowly fading into oblivion and remaining unknown. « Sculpting Belgium » pays tribute to these forgotten and undervalued sculptors and artists, some of whom have passed away and sheds light on a lost pantheon of Belgian greats.

La patinoire Royale collaborated with enthusiasm with the beneficiaries, widows and widowers, heirs, children, relatives and friends of these sculptors who saw this project as a stepping stone in the revival and renaissance of a major and talented chapter of Belgium's History of Art.

Looking at how the rest of Europe and Western countries have defended and glorified their respective artists, one questions Belgium's deafening silence and indifference during « The

Glorious Thirty » and the following decades.

The group show will be accompanied by a largely detailed catalogue gathering important testimonies, texts and documents tracing back to the beginning of this vast and rich period of production.

In a fifties / sixties scenography, « Sculpting Belgium » showcases vibrantly coloured paintings and less-chromatic sculptures, highlighting the aesthetic research of Belgium's art scene of the 40s to 70s. It is thus a just return in time to propose it to the public which, we hope, will repair by his visit an long suffered and unforgivable absence...

Constantin Chariot

● A selection of artists



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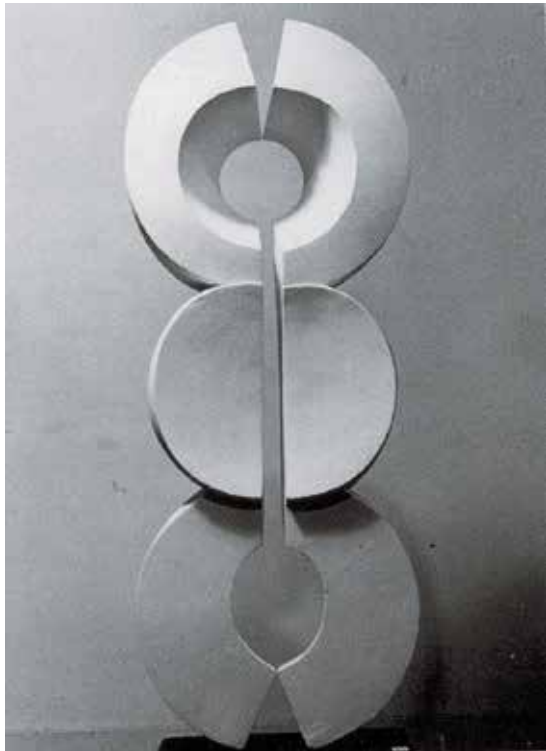
- 1 - Jacques Moeschal, Voie des airs
- 2 - Pol Bury, Monument n°2  
dédié à l'érection et autres mouvements
- 3 - Francis Dusepulchre, Buildong



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6

- 4 - Oscar Jespers, Perle Fine  
5 - André Willequet, Les Gémeaux  
6 - Hilde Van Sumere, Compositie in de ruimte I

## ● La Patinoire Royale



La Patinoire Royale, or « Royal Skating », as the Belgians used to call it, was built in 1877 in the heart of the Saint-Gilles district. The building was originally used as a roller skating rink, one of the first in Europe ! Before long, these small wheels made way for much larger ones when the building was converted into a Bugatti garage in 1900. Five years later, it became a depot belonging to the national war weapons factory located in Herstal. After the Second World War, the skating rink was used as a garage by Siemens before becoming an exhibition space for collectors' cars in 1975. The Patinoire Royale is a building comprised of two wings; the first of which formally housed the roller skating rink and looks onto rue Veydt, whilst the second is smaller, of more recent construction, and is situated on rue Faider.

The building is characterized by its neo-classical style. Its facade features columns adorned with ionic capitals that line the front of the building facing Veydt Street. Natural light floods into the building through semi-circular arched windows crowned with rosettes. Inside, a vast space unfolds under an impressive metallic Polonceau structure – named after the French engineer who submitted the patent in 1837, and who subsequently became designer of the imperial train for Napoleon III. True to the era, the frame is made of wood and metal; its structure is held together by a metal tie. The rafters are also metallic; resting on consoles of the same style, they are lined with painted wooden frieze discs that mirror the ironwork. The Brussels Region declared the Patinoire royale a historical monument in 1995.

This remarkable property complex located in the heart of Brussels, in the galleries district, was first acquired in 2007 by Philippe Austruy and Valerie Bach. The wing overlooking Faider Street was assigned to the work of the Valerie Bach art gallery in 2012, whereas the Patinoire Royale itself went under restoration works in 2011 and was subsequently assigned to displaying works of art. The restoration of the building was completed by the team at Jean-Paul Hermant Architecture, whilst the spatial arrangement and staging of the interior was directed by the French interior architect, Pierre Yovanovitch.



## ● Previous exhibitions



**La Résistance des images**  
Curated by Jean-Jacques Aillagon

Being deeply political and anti-establishment, the movement drew attention to, and became a continuation of, some of the great radical movements of the 60s, including the movement of May 68. Painting being the main mean of communication, the works showed resistance to public places, oppression, imperialism, as well as moral resistance. It became a form in which freedom of thought, and the reflections on freedom go hand in hand. It is these traits and attitude that distinguish Narrative Figuration from American Pop Art.



**Let's move!**  
Curated by Arnauld Pierre

Through this group show, la patinoire Royale explored the history of Kinetic Art from 1955 to the late 80s. It entrusted the exhibition commission to Arnauld Pierre, professor of Contemporary Art history in Paris-Sorbonne, assisted by Guillaume Picon, a historian, archivist and author of numerous scholarly works. Through a selection of over a hundred works - divided among thirty artists - the exhibition « Let's move! » offered a still image of this remarkable 20<sup>th</sup> Century art movement.



**Prouvé-Takis**  
In collaboration with François Laffanour

The exhibition presents an extraordinary construction by Jean Prouvé, from a more modern fabrication than his « emergency architectures ». This freestanding pavilion was designed in 1957 for the Institution Fénélon in Clermont-Ferrand, France. Entirely made of aluminium and glass panels, the facade allies modernity, lightness and transparency. A « forest » of Signaux by Takis is standing in a pool, shadowed by the parasol pine trees. This selection of masterpieces illustrates the diversity of the work of the artist, from Musicales to Télélumières including Télépeintures.



### **Joana Vasconcelos**

#### **Solo show : « De fil(s) en aiguille(s) »**

Joana Vasconcelos transformed a needle technique into a pure artistic expression, sometimes monumental, where lavishness meets quirkiness, in an approach not at all refuting eccentricity or excess, without foregoing delicacy and excellence.

The exhibition, of which several works have been especially produced by the artist's studio, intentionally titled "De fil(s) en aiguille(s)", invites the spectator to weave in and out between an giant octopus's legs - measuring over 25 meters long - and confront oneself with the curious assembly of textile sculptures, mirrors and everyday objects.



### **Hassan Sharif**

#### **Solo show : « Experiments »**

« Experiments » held in 2016 at La Patinoire Royale paid tribute to Hassan Sharif's unconventional and multidisciplinary artistic practice. Born in Iran in 1951, Sharif lived and worked in Dubai where he became a pioneer of Conceptual art in the Gulf and remains today a key figure of the Middle Eastern art scene. Playful and radical throughout his artistic career, a theorist, writer and educator in his own right, Sharif continued to support and inspire fellow artists.



### **Group show**

#### **« Summer in the city »**

To begin the Summer, la Patinoire Royale presents an exhibition untitled « Summer in the City » gathering the artists exhibited over the last years at the gallery. The artists were asked to showcase an artwork linked to the summer.

