



Guy Mees

The Weather Is Quiet, Cool and Soft

24.11.2018 – 10.3.2019

www.muzeeb.be

The exhibition and the publication are a co-production between Mu.ZEE, Ostend and Kunsthalle Wien.

The Weather Is Quiet, Cool and Soft presents works from different stages in the career of the Belgium artist Guy Mees (1935-2003) to shed light on his poetic, intuitive and conceptual approach.

The selected works range from early lace pieces generically entitled *Lost Space* from the 1960s to the last works on paper from 2003. It features the films and the photographs of the series of *Portraits (Difference of Levels)*, never before shown structuralist works from the 1970s, pastel on paper series from the mid-1970s and paper cut-outs from the 1980s. Together, these allow a study of Mees's practice who was able to preserve himself from the unilateral effects of aesthetics by countering them with a methodology of variability and sensitivity.

Borrowed from a barely readable note the artist jotted down on one of his works on paper, the title of this publication, and of the exhibition—*The Weather Is Quiet, Cool and Soft*—pays homage to the atmospheric impermanence, infra-ordinary, and relativistic poetic approach present in the work of Mees.

Beyond his stripping back of form, and the rigorist quality of his work, Mees was an artist of the perceptible. Nothing in his work is abstracted from what surrounds it, but shares the random rhythm of the phenomena and porosity of the world.

Mees chose the enigmatic title *Lost Space* to describe two major bodies of work whose origin and form were separated by a gap of more than twenty years: the pieces in lace created in the 1960s and the works he began in the 1980s featuring color paper cutouts pinned to walls.

Guy Mees' program can be read in a short, ambiguous manifesto that acts as the only textual definition given to his work:

The Lost Space is an adjoining space.

The Lost Space is complementary to present-day living space.

The Lost Space does not have a clear-cut function.

The Lost Space is space as utility object, in which bombast becomes more difficult, and tangibility easier.

The Lost Space is simply the body defined by shape, color, taste, smell, and sound.¹

As a member of the “New Flemish School” in touch with an international network of artists affiliated

with the neo-avant-garde from Europe, Japan, and North and South America (Spatialism, Zero, Nul, G.R.A.V, Azimut/h,² and Gutai, to name but a few)—which shared, among other things, a common interest in light, serial structures, movement, and monochromy—Mees quickly gained recognition among the transnational avant-garde of the early 1960s.

However, his non-authoritarian stance and singular conceptual approach that deconstructed all classification and hierarchy soon led him down an alternative personal path. With precision and discretion, the artist set out to free his work from the systems, structures, and supports in social and domestic spaces.

The question of authorship, prompted him to explore in the '60s and '70s, the amateur's approach to film and photography, in a series entitled *Portraits (Level Differences)*. These spontaneous recordings depict a group of three people on three different movable levels of a podium block of Ytong cellular concrete, placed in artistic or familiar environments—a gallery, street or garden—whose contextual or architectural banality contributes to the whole. The hierarchical positioning of the protagonists evolves following the rhythm of the six possible positions: 123, 132, 213, 231, 312, or 321. The series, protagonists, circumstances, and photographic formats are infinitely variable. This led to the annotated work on cardboard *1,2,3*, made from photographs taken from contact sheets and laid out in a grid, like an outline for sensory mathematics. Beyond the absurd aspect of these mechanical actions, the films and photographs featuring friends and family offer an interesting portrait of the avant-garde scene in Belgium within the entourage of the Galerie MTL (Fernand Spillemaeckers) and the X-One Gallery (Marc Poirier dit Caulier), but also internationally, as in the series of portraits with Nicholas Serota at the Museum of Modern Art Oxford in 1974.

Alongside this photographic and video work, the six-position principle led Mees to further formal explorations of combinations based on a six-color chromatic chart. These involved a series of lines drawn with felt-tip pens and arranged in columns on thin sheets of paper (like that used in newsprint) and grouped in multiples of three. While the overall composition, automatism and repetition of the pattern and gesture resemble a mechanical process similar to the printing press, the order of the sheets is lost, leading them to be read purely according to chance. Little by little, the lines give way to a sparse constellation of pastel-colored dots on a surface of fine paper whose elusive patterns at times almost coincide with the wall and punctuate its lining, opening the way to the painted baseboards and *Lost Space* paper cut-outs of the 1980s.

The *Lost Space* works also summon the idea of a deconstructed frame, and the shattering of the pictorial space. Support, form, and colour become fused in the concrete space and reveal the interstitial zone through which art can connect to reality, with the former as an emanation of the latter.

Whether it's the faux white monochromes made of lace at the beginning of the '60s revealing a diffuse interior space, or the works from the '80s featuring the more volatile forms of paper cut-outs pinned to the wall, fragments of colour that sculpt the density and voids of architecture, the *Lost Space* works recall the starting point and culmination of Mees's conceptual and poetic thought, "filled with that of which he is its outcome, filled with its loss." Dirk Pültau

This exhibition at Mu.ZEE is an extension of the exhibition from the show presented by the curator at Kunsthalle Wien (31 January - 9 April 2018). It pays special attention to additional archival materials from his estate and punctual actions or ephemeral installations and will include a new selection of works from a different period. It will provide further insight into the mind of an artist who, during his entire lifetime, preserved himself from any analytical discourse about his work in favour of its perceptive experience.

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication tracing the artist's path and following his gaze through a tactile and archival approach to his works. It includes unknown archival material from Guy Mees's estate, such as early photographs, slides, texts and notes and other documents. The publication is

edited by Lilou Vidal and published by Sternberg Press. A new publication of unreleased facsimiles dedicated to the writing process of the *Lost Space* text will be edited by the curator for the exhibition at Mu.ZEE.

Curator : Lilou Vidal

Publications

Guy Mees – The Weather is Quiet, Cool and Soft, 188 pp
Soft cover - €25

Guy Mees – The Lost Space, 24 pp
Soft cover - €16

¹ Text rewritten by Willem-Joris Lagrillière according to Guy Mees' specifications in the early 1960s, following a first version written by Wim Meuwissen.

² The magazine Azimuth and the gallery Azimut (without h) were founded in Milan in 1959 by Enrico Castellani and Piero Manzoni. Azimut/h, Continuità e nuovo. Ed. Marsilio, curator and editor Luca Massimo Barbero, 2014, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.