

MACS

Musée des Arts Contemporains
Grand-Hornu

Angel Vergara
In the Instant

PRESS PACK



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Alucinación social,
extracts from the HD
video, 9'40", Parque
del Retiro, Madrid,
2014. Courtesy of the
artist.

Angel Vergara was born in Mières (Spain) in 1958. He has lived and worked in Brussels since 1964.

In 2011, he represented Belgium with his project *FEUILLETON* at the 54th Venice Biennale, curated by Luc Tuymans. Since the late 1980s, he has had several monograph exhibitions (*From Scene to Scene*, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, 2017; *Monday: Firework; Tuesday: Illuminations; Wednesday: Revolution*, Argos, Brussels, 2010; *Atención! Algunas vueltas mas para llegar...*, Espai d'Art Contemporani de Castelló, Castellón, Spain, 2007) and has taken part in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Belgium (MHKA, 2001; Middelheimmuseum, 2010; S.M.A.K., 2014; WIELS, 2018; CENTRALE for contemporary art, 2022) and beyond (Contemporary Art Museum, Buenos Aires, 2015; FRAC Picardie, 2016; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, 2016; Palazzo Fortuny, Venice, 2017; Manifesta 13, 2020).

His works are found in numerous institutional collections in Belgium, France, Japan and the United States.

L'exposition

Angel Vergara. *In the Instant*
23.04 > 08.10.23

Curator: Jérôme André

Fifteen years after the exhibition *El Pintor*, which notably revealed the series *Les Voisins, nos amis*, 14 animated portraits of Grand-Hornu's neighbours, that Angel Vergara created for the fifth anniversary of the MACS, the complex, unclassifiable work of this artist is once again presented in the broader context of an exhibition dedicated to his painting. Beginning with his 'tableaux', produced by a group of partially-sighted children during workshops devised by the artist, the show traces the evolution of his artistic practice from his first 'painted films' produced in Super 8 in the 1980s, to his video devices that recorded his painting in progress, along with a more classical gallery of large canvases. Through performance, installation and video, Angel Vergara has always placed 'the act of painting' at the heart of his works and asserted its presence in the public space by working under a sheet, which serves as a portable studio. In this way, the artist—alias *Straatman*—has for over thirty years brought painting 'out onto the street', saturating it with the constant flow of life, reproducing its syncopated rhythms like a jazz musician, and its movements like a film director. The fiction he introduced from an early stage into his practice established him as a descendant of Fluxus, similar to the poetic and political art of Marcel Broodthaers. His 'painted films' on the other hand, obtained through the combined use of the camera, glass plates and touches of colour, enabled him above all to reconcile art and life by synchronising painting and the world through a never-ending game of opacity and transparency. Because he remains above all a 'painter at work', Angel Vergara is forever chasing his dream of a constantly evolving painting, whose completion he is always delaying, whilst promising us its imminent emergence.

Les Belles Idées reçues, Bruxelles City acte 6, 22',
oil on canvas, 280 x 190 cm, 2022.
Courtesy of the artist and Axel Vervoordt Gallery. Photo: Jan Liégeois.



Interview with Jérôme André, the exhibition curator

The title Dans l'instant (In the Instant) immediately suggests a particular timeframe. Could you tell us why this is an important concept in Angel Vergara's work?

The exhibition title refers to the present time, what happens “instantly”, in short, life. Central to Angel Vergara's work and his particular way of painting, there is the notion of placing oneself in the very moment of the act of painting and therefore in the context when this took place. In general, it is an act carried out in the public, often urban space, by means of rather singular devices which he invented to bring the picture to life: the white sheet with which he covers himself to paint or draw, but also his technique of combining film and painting, notably with a glass plate. These two terms – “in” and “the instant” – combine to suggest this anchoring in the present, in a form of tangible reality of lived time. In *L'Intuition de l'instant*, the philosopher Gaston Bachelard says that “we remember having been and not having lasted”. It is a “Proustian” notion, according to which we weave a connection with memory, lived experience and living through the instant, and through the sum of instants one after the next.

Collaboration seems to be an important aspect of Angel Vergara's work. What meaning do you see in it?

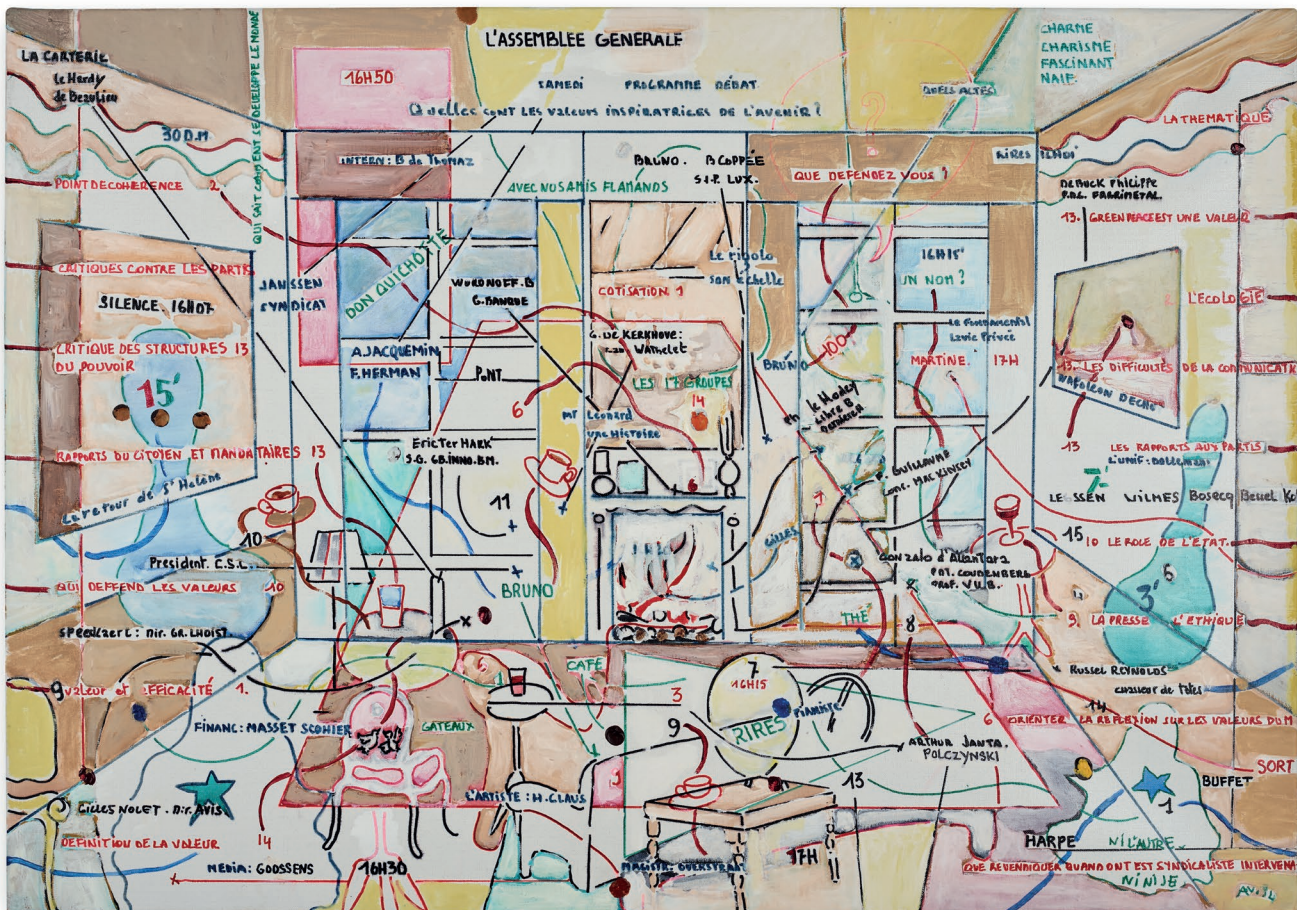
The questions of exchange and communication are fundamental for Angel Vergara. When *Straatman* (literally “street man”), his alter ego, performs actions or during his *Actes et Tableaux* under a sheet, he is connected with the surrounding space and interacting with the public, allowing himself to be influenced by the street, by “the breeze of what is possible”, as André Breton described in *Les Pas perdus* (a child who lifts the sheet, a word spoken to him, etc.). By confronting himself with others through performance, Angel Vergara does not consider art to be a practice at a distance from the world he is describing, but as an act of exchange, like a transaction. The public plays its part and the work takes the form of a collaboration. He thereby makes use of a group of children during a workshop, or simple passers-by during his urban interventions. He has also regularly organised “situations” so to speak, by opening real cafés for a certain duration, or “offices of prohibited moments” as he calls them. The public is invited to take part in the work of art, which is envisaged as a living painting, while drinking a beer, or by commissioning an instant of painting that the artist undertakes live upon request, sometimes in the form of receipts which fix the transaction in time.

“By confronting himself with others through performance, Angel Vergara does not consider art to be a practice at a distance from the world he is describing, but as an act of exchange, like a transaction.”

Does the particularity of Angel Vergara's painting lie in a tendency to extend beyond the strict frame of the painting as we perceive it?

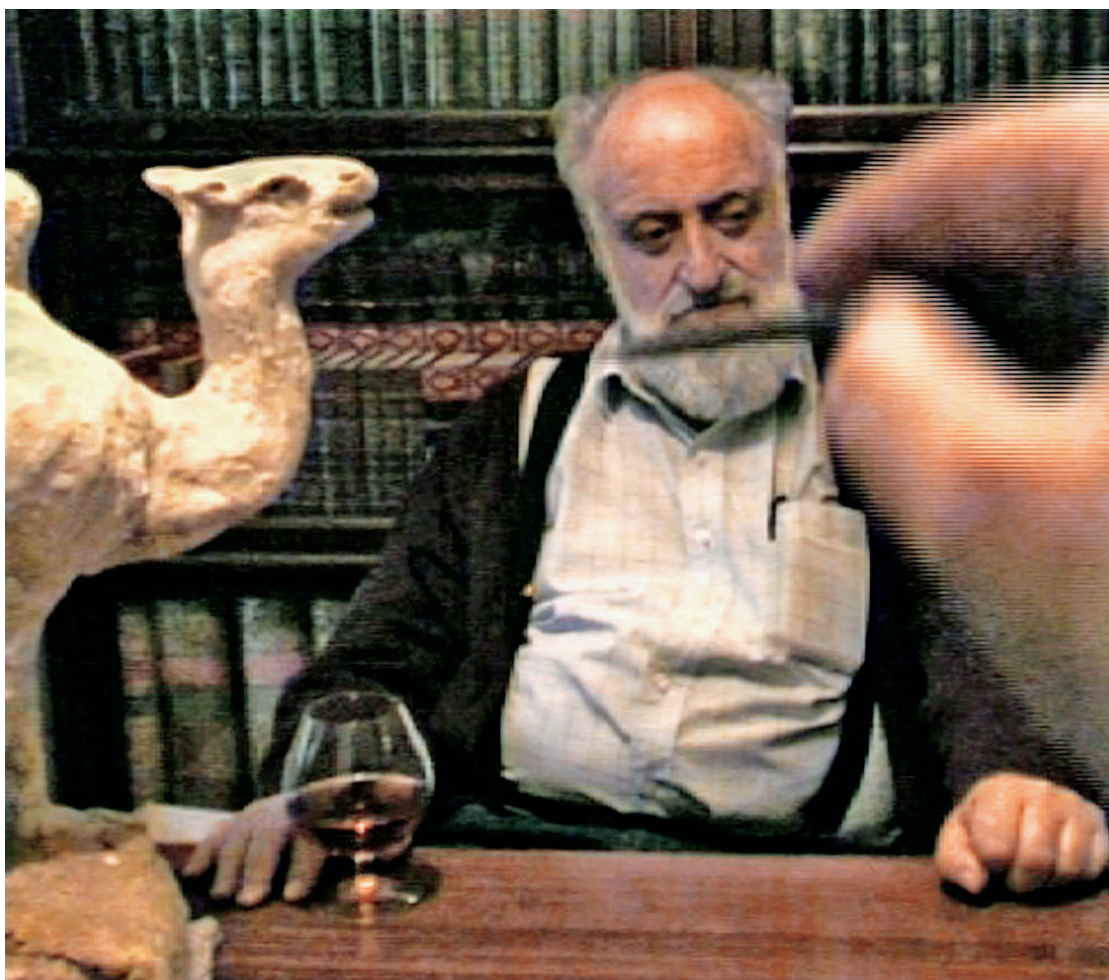
As we have just mentioned, his painting is both live, in the moment and in direct contact with life, and through this exchange, it is in connection with society. As a consequence it does indeed spill over. Spilling over the traditional two dimensions, it includes and surpasses a temporal dimension. We see this in the "situations" which Angel Vergara sets up. The temporal dimension can clearly be seen in the Actes et Tableaux which explore the representation of their own duration. It is also found in the way Angel Vergara contrasts painting and video. With his "video-paintings", it is not a matter of painting movement, but of moving. The videos reveal an "autonomous" painting that takes place before the spectator's eyes, during a shared, synchronous moment. Inhabited by their own temporality, these paintings take life and reflect it, to Straatman for example, as a living, dematerialised image of the artist.

L'Assemblée générale (Portrait of Bruno Van Lierde), 53', from the series "Actes et Tableaux", acrylic on canvas, 70 x 100 cm, 1991-2003. Collection Bruno Van Lierde, Brussels. Photo: Jan Liégeois.





El Pintor, Castellón, centro 2,
extract from the HD video, 52'8",
2009. Private collection.
Photo: EACC.



Isi Fiszman assis au bureau, from the "El Pintor" series, extracts from the video, 12', 2007. Museum of Contemporary Arts at Grand-Hornu Collection, donated by the artist in 2012.

La Peinture, c'est la vie qui s'échange

Project with partially-sighted children

Following on from the experience of *Belles Idées reçues*, initiated at Manifesta 13 (2020) in Marseille, before his exhibition at the MACS, Angel Vergara gave a workshop with partially-sighted children from a specialist school in Belgium (CPESM in Ghlin).

Taking place in several sessions, these workshops were held at the school but also in the museum and in the town. The participants experienced these various situations together and also explored the similarities between the practice of *Straatman*, who strives to perceive “without seeing” from beneath his sheet, and the tactics used by the children to compensate their limited vision of the world, notably by means of their extremely good memories. Nurtured by sounds, smells, colours and touch, this “shared painting” took the form of an exchange of viewpoints and reciprocal enrichment.

For *La Peinture, c'est la vie qui s'échange* (2023), an inhabitable “hut-painting” designed with material collected during the workshop was installed in the museum’s entrance for the exhibition. At the end of the visit, we once again find the evocation of the project *Les Belles idées reçues* through a series of paintings and a soundtrack created in Marseille during the project of the same name.

Project undertaken with the support of the Loterie Nationale





Interview with Angel Vergara

On La Peinture, c'est la vie qui s'échange

“By removing vision, I made way for other senses such as hearing or touch, but also for what was happening around me and my own reflection, which resulted in a succession of layers and timeframes.”

How did the idea of working with partially-sighted children emerge?

I began this project during Manifesta 13 in Marseille in 2020. The question of blindness had preoccupied me for a long time. Ever since *Straatman* was created, I cut myself off from sight, the most important sense in painting. Being painted implies seeing, but what happens if I can't see? What do I paint? How do I paint? By removing vision, I made way for other senses such as hearing or touch, but also for what was happening around me and my own reflection, which resulted in a succession of layers and timeframes. In these layers of time, a sensitivity intervenes in relation to what is seen but also what is felt, touched or heard. The exterior elements disrupt the moment we are occupying. It is a joy to work with children. Their intelligence and the liberty they take to grasp things impress me. There is a great diversity among partially-sighted children; some see only laterally, but not the centre; for others it's the opposite; others see nothing at all or only 10%. Some are also deaf, mute or have a cerebral disability. The children I worked with, Alessandro, Casiana, Éméline, Kendji, Laura, Manolya, Marissa, Naélia, Rayan, Talha and Talya are between 5 and 11 years old, an ideal age for graphic expression.

What were the different phases of work with the children?

First we all visited the exhibitions devoted to Léon Wuidar and Tamara Lai together at the MACS. I then made plans of the museum to their scale. They were very focused and began to retrace the path they had taken and add elements to it, sometimes in the manner of *Straatman*, sometimes simply by colouring parts of the plan. When they then returned to the MACS, we changed medium to work on a very large model this time. They once again visited the rooms in the museum and discovered new exhibits, very different from the first ones. The model was so big that it took up the entire entrance space of the museum. They immediately perceived the difference in scale. This scale enabled them to go inside the model like a miniature museum. We then took the model into the town and installed it in the middle of Mons, on the Place du Marché aux Herbes. It was no longer about the children remembering their experience of the museum, but of acting like *Straatman* and noting what happened around them: there were cafés, terraces, passing lorries and cars... The important thing was being aware of the scale of the model and the town. The museum was in some way moved into the street so that the street could go inside it.

How did the children respond to Straatman?

When I met them at their school, I began to introduce myself and Straatman. I covered myself in a sheet to become Straatman and I let them do the same too, which caused a lot of laughter and joy. It's a children's game to hide under sheets and create one's own little world. They thought it was funny and wanted to try it over and over again, to play ghosts, and each one made up their own story.

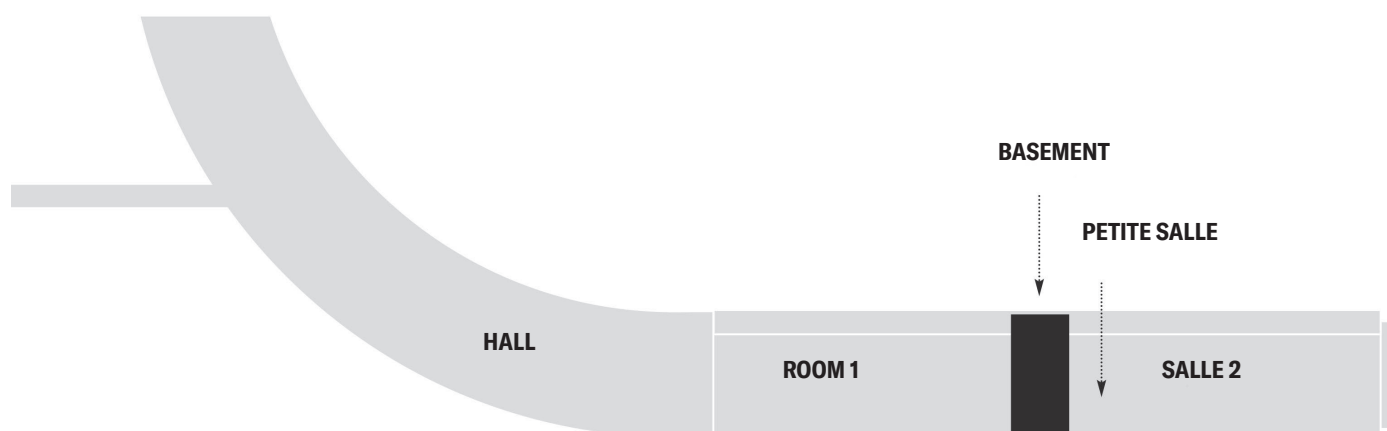
How did the children surprise you during this project?

What surprised me at first was their keen perception and phenomenal memory. Some were able to reconstruct their museum visit from memory. Aside from their freedom of action, they are really astonishingly intelligent and sensitive. I was also struck by the affection and solidarity they demonstrated to one another, but also to me. I tried to open up their field of perception by focusing on the image, be it physically or mentally. The title of the Marseille project, *Les Belles Idées reçues* (Beautiful received Ideas), emphasised the relationship of exchange and all of the marvellous ideas that the children gave me. At the MACS, it is called *La Peinture, c'est la vie qui s'échange*. We speak of received ideas, but also of exchange and life.

What was the impact of the experience of restricted vision with Straatman on your practice in general?

The exhibition is called *In the Instant* to highlight my determination to document and comment on reality "live" by immediately transferring it to a surface with a pencil and colour. This experience crystallises a potential for the truth that painting can contain, because there are things that we cannot avoid. I learned a lot by working like this. Restricting my vision has enabled me to develop all the other senses and to formulate all of these sensations through painting.

LAYOUT OF THE EXHIBITION



CAFETERIA
Painting on wood
't café

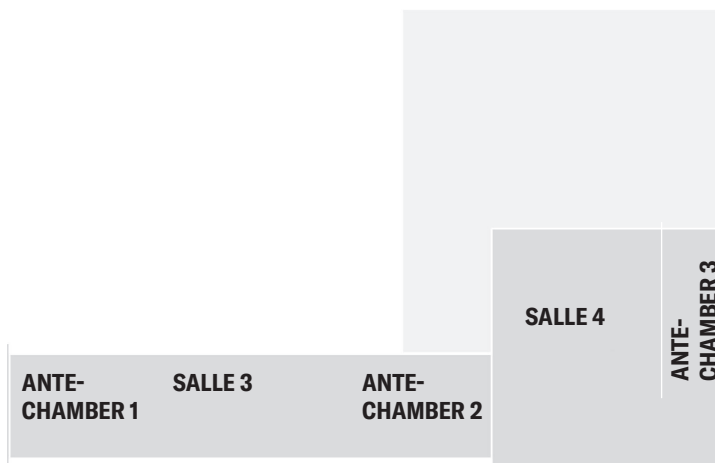
HALL
Installation
La Peinture, c'est la vie qui s'échange (2020-2023)
Painting
Portraits de jeune fille (Sylvie) (1982)

ROOM 1
Installation video
La Petite Fille et Marina (2023)

BASEMENT
Video projection
El Pintor, centro (2007)

PETITE SALLE
Drawing and video projection
Deux Corps amoureux

ROOM 2
Painting
Acts & Paintings (2017)



ANTECHAMBER 1
Projection - Films 16 mm

ROOM 3
Part 1
Installation
- Tarifs et documents
- Galeria del Año (1997)

Part 2
Mixed-media
Acts & Paintings
Partie 3

Video - paintings
- Nu descendant un escalier (2018)
- Art belge II (1988)
- Chevalet

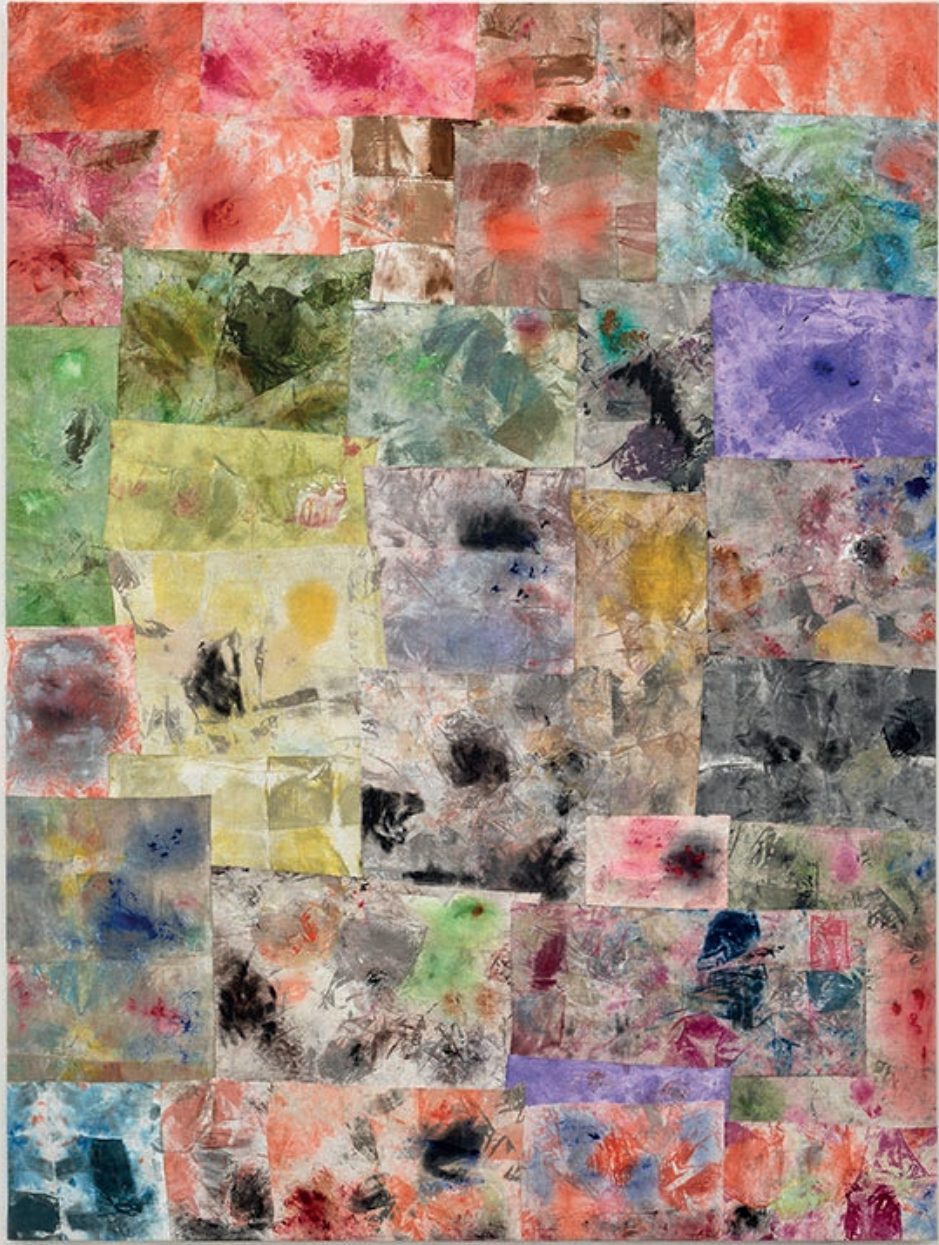
ANTECHAMBER 2
Video projection
El Pintor

ROOM 4
Paintings
- Les Belles Idées reçues (2020)
- City Acts (2022-2023)

Work in progress
Actes et tableaux - Propriété publique (2023)

ANTECHAMBER 3
Soundtrack
Les Belles Idées reçues (Marseille) (2020)

David, oil on cotton fabric,
224.5 × 168 cm, 2020.
Courtesy of the artist and Axel Vervoordt Gallery. Photo: Jan Liégeois.



Les Belles Idées reçues, work in progress,
Marseille, 2020.



New
edition

Catalogue

Angel Vergara

Dans l'instant/In the Instant

Publishers: MACS and Fonds Mercator, Brussels

Authors: Jérôme André, Denis Gielen, Olivier Michelon, Bert Puype, Philippe Van Cauteren

Languages: French-English

Pages: 240 pages

Illustrations: 170 illustrations

Format: 28 x 21 cm

ISBN: 978-94-6230-342-3

Price: €45



‘Bothered by years of painting in the confines of his studio, he decided to join the spaces of his paintings, not to paint after the motif, or on the motif, but in the motif. The first photographers used a black sheet to protect their photosensitive material; Vergara uses a white sheet to protect himself from the glances thrown over his shoulder and to create a studio on the scale of his own body.’

Olivier Michelon

‘I chose *Isi Fiszman assis au bureau* (Isi Fiszman at his desk), a video from 2007 in the *El Pintor* series, which featured in your *El Pintor* exhibition at the MACS in 2014. In it we see an older man with a white, well-groomed beard sitting motionless behind a table, against a background of mostly green-spined books. A miniature camel functions as a repoussoir; a glass of cognac replaces turpentine as the painter’s medium. Like a painting, the video is static, the movement created by the action of a hand. Your right hand, holding a brush, imitates the gesture of painting, the eloquence of a brush-stroke, the virtuoso imitation of reality. Art history is evoked with playful seriousness: *Titian’s Portrait of Gerolamo (?) Barbarigo* or *Edouard Manet’s portrait of Emile Zola* or *Paul Cezanne’s Portrait of Victor Chocquet* all come to mind. A traditional genre like portraiture is questioned as to its current significance in the context of contemporary technology. Painting itself is explored in the digital membrane of a screen or in a projection in relation to its capacity to touch reality.’

Philippe Van Cauteren

Agenda of Activities

Info and reservations

Online: www.mac-s.be/fr/reservations

By telephone: +32 (0)65 613 902

By mail: reservations@grand-hornu.be

DAILY ENCOUNTERS (IN FRENCH)

Free guided visits from Tuesday to Friday at 2pm, Sundays at 11am and 2pm

ENCOUNTERS

GUIDED VISIT WITH THE ARTIST AND THE CURATOR

Visit the exhibition *In the Instant* in the company of Angel Vergara and Jérôme André.

PHILO AND ART DAY

Philosophy day for adolescents to consider questions in contact with the works.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN ANGEL VERGARA AND JEAN DE LOISY

ACTIVATION OF A WORK BY ANGEL VERGARA

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

FAMILY THURSDAYS

Every Thursday during the school holidays, discover the exhibition with the family followed by a short workshop when visitors can try for themselves: scratch card and painting in movement workshop.

Scratch card workshop

04.05, 11.05, 18.05, 13.07, 20.07, 27.07

Painting in movement workshop

03.08, 10.08, 17.08, 24.08

BAZ'ART WORKSHOP

Visit of the exhibition followed by a practical workshop every first Sunday of the month.

Painting

04.06

Street art

03.09, 01.10

PAINTING WORKSHOP

From 24th to 28th July

Painting initiation workshop. Learn different pictorial techniques with the help of a professional artist.

9 - 12 years

BLIND VISITS

In collaboration with Les Amis des aveugles from Ghlin, blind visits of the exhibition in order to discover the works in another way.

PAINTING WORKSHOP

A world to paint

From 7th to 11th August

Painting workshop for children, who are invited to represent the world around them through painting.

5 - 8 years

NEIGHBOURS' DAY

26.05

For neighbours' day, the inhabitants of the housing district are invited to share their memories of Grand-Hornu by bringing their photos of the historic site. The evening will continue with a potluck dinner.

21ST JULY

Day of festivities followed by a fireworks display. Guided visits of the exhibition, treasure hunts and creative workshops for children.

Workshops from 2pm to 6pm

Guided visit at 3pm

COMING SOON

Jochen Lempert
12.11.23 > 17.03.24

Lionel Estève
12.11.23 > 17.03.24

Orla Barry
21.04 > 22.09.24

Ariane Loze
21.04 > 22.09.24

Practical Information

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