

MACS

Musée des Arts Contemporains
Grand-Hornu

Cento

James Welling

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PRESS RELEASE



Kore from the Kheramyas Group, 2020.

The Exhibition

Four years after *Metamorphosis*, the retrospective exhibition which the S.M.A.K. devoted to James Welling's work by revisiting some twenty series of his photographs created since 1970, the MACS has now invited the American artist to present his current photographic work on architecture and ancient Greek and Roman statuary.

The exhibition's title, *Cento*, refers to the ancient practice of assembling fragments of various poetic or musical works. This latest series began in 2018 at the MET (Metropolitan Museum of Art) in New York, when James Welling photographed the bust of a Roman empress of Syrian origin, Julia Mamaea, which he then printed in a range of colours based on the early photographic printing method of collotype. Moved by the fluidity of the dyes imbuing the portrait and the statue's stone and returning colour to the face, James Welling realised that this faded, translucent rendering achieved a twofold step back in time: to the polychrome statues of Antiquity and to the black & white photolithography of the first albums that documented 19th century archaeological missions.

These multiple prints from a single negative of *Julia Mamaea*, a seminal, matricial image, then led to several visits to archaeological sites and museums, notably in Athens and Eleusis, as well as theoretical research into the colours used in Antiquity, in particular by Aristotle. The philosopher's observation of coloured objects in nature, notably of plants, finds a strange and distant echo in James Welling's photographic process, through his description of the phenomena of fixation, rinsing and transformation of tints, for example of green foliage.

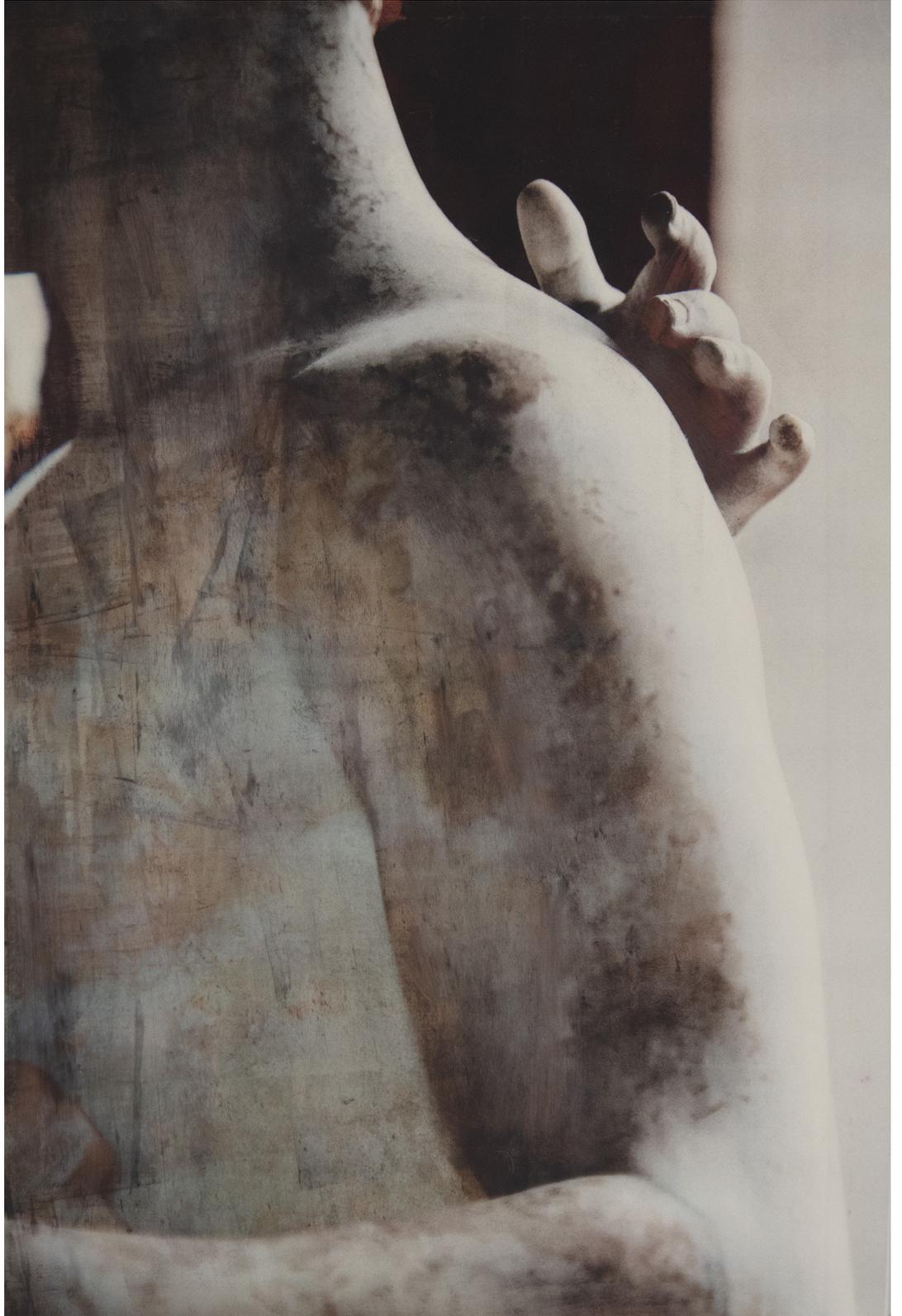
Yet this archaic conception of colour which the photographs of *Cento* lead us to poetically contemplate, not least owing to their place in the exhibition, facing a wall painting of a colour chart and the colours used by Aristotle, is only one destination of James Welling's time travel. Since 1998, Welling has turned to digital technologies and the colour palette of Photoshop, which offers the aesthetic advantage of "liberating colour" from the chains



Athens. Western Façade of the Erechtheion, 2019.

of the subject and its historical condition. “Intense colors and gold leaf emphasized textile, hair and skin,” Welling explains in relation to *Cento* and its homage to Greek statuary. “Modern approximations of this polychrome are startling to viewers still accustomed to the colorless neoclassic ideals of beauty. But I was not interested in simply recreating the colors of the Ancient Greeks. Using digital technology, I applied highly unnatural colors to the sculptures. My hope is that these colors seep into the ancient stone and take on a life of their own.”

Denis Gielen
Curator of the exhibition





James Welling

James Welling was born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1951. He studied visual arts at the University of Carnegie-Mellon and modern dance at the University of Pittsburgh. Until 1974, he studied at the California Institute of the Arts. He currently lives and works in New York.

James Welling's work can be defined by an unrelenting determination to experiment. In his early career, he tried his hand at painting, video, sculpture and performance, before focusing on photography in the mid-1970s. He is self-taught and began exploring the possibilities of this medium by experimenting with numerous techniques. He belongs to the Pictures Generation, acclaimed for its innovative approach to photography in the 1970s and 1980s. Interested above all in the unpredictable nature of photography, James Welling explores a variety of themes, confronting the material, abstraction, colour and space.

He has recently had several major monograph exhibitions at the S.M.A.K in Ghent in 2017, the Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington in 2016 and the Art Institute of Chicago in 2014. Two major exhibitions in 2012 and 2013 respectively, offered an overview of his work: his *Monograph* series, organised by the Cincinnati Art Museum and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and *The Mind on Fire*, held at the MK Gallery in Milton Keynes, England, the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea in Santiago de Compostela and the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver.

In 2014, James Welling received the Infinity Award from the International Center of Photography, New York and in 2016, the Excellence in Photography Award from the Julius Shulman Institute in Woodbury, California.

Artemision Bronze, 2019.



The Works

All works: oil and laser print on polyester
except *Head of a Goddess* : ink jet print.

Alexander Pope's Copy of the Iliad, 2020
Amphora, 2019
Aphrodite, 2018
Aphrodite, 2019
Aphrodite, 2019
Aphrodite, 2019
Aphrodite and Pan, 2019
Aphrodite fastening her Sandal, 2018
Apollo, 2020
Athens. Akanthos, 2019
Athens. Aleppo Pine, 2019
Athens. Ancient Agora. Fig Tree, 2019
Athens. City Eleusinion, 2019
Athens. Corinthian Columns. Roman Agora. Library of Hadrian, 2019
Athens. Eastern Temple of the Erekhtheion, 2019
Athens. Erekhtheion. Kore A, 2019
Athens. Head of Priest, 2019
Athens. Hephaisteion. Inner Shrine from the East Porch, 2019
Athens. "the lush meadow...which earth grew as a snare...", 2019
Athens. North Temple of the Erekhtheion, 2019
Athens. Parthenon West pediment. Poseidon Fragment, 2020
Athens. Propylaia. Looking toward the Pinakotheke, 2019
Athens. Propylaia. Sunset. Saronic Gulf in Distance, 2019
Athens. Roman Agora. Library of Hadrian, 2019
Athens. Sacred Way, 2019
Athens. Western Façade of the Erekhtheion, 2019
Athlete, 2019
Athlete's Torso, 2019
Artemision Bronze, 2019
Avidia Plautia, 2019
Bronze Torso, 2019
Display of Ceramics from Cyprus, 2019
Eleusis. (Mixed Doric and Ionic entablature fragments), 2019
Eleusis. Column Ruins in Sacred Precinct, 2019
Eleusis. Kallikhoros (Well of the fair dances), 2019
Emperor Caligula, 2018
Emperor Caracalla (188-217 A.D.), 2018
Emperor Caracalla, 2019
Emperor Alexander Severus, 2018
Eyes, 2019
Forearm, 2019

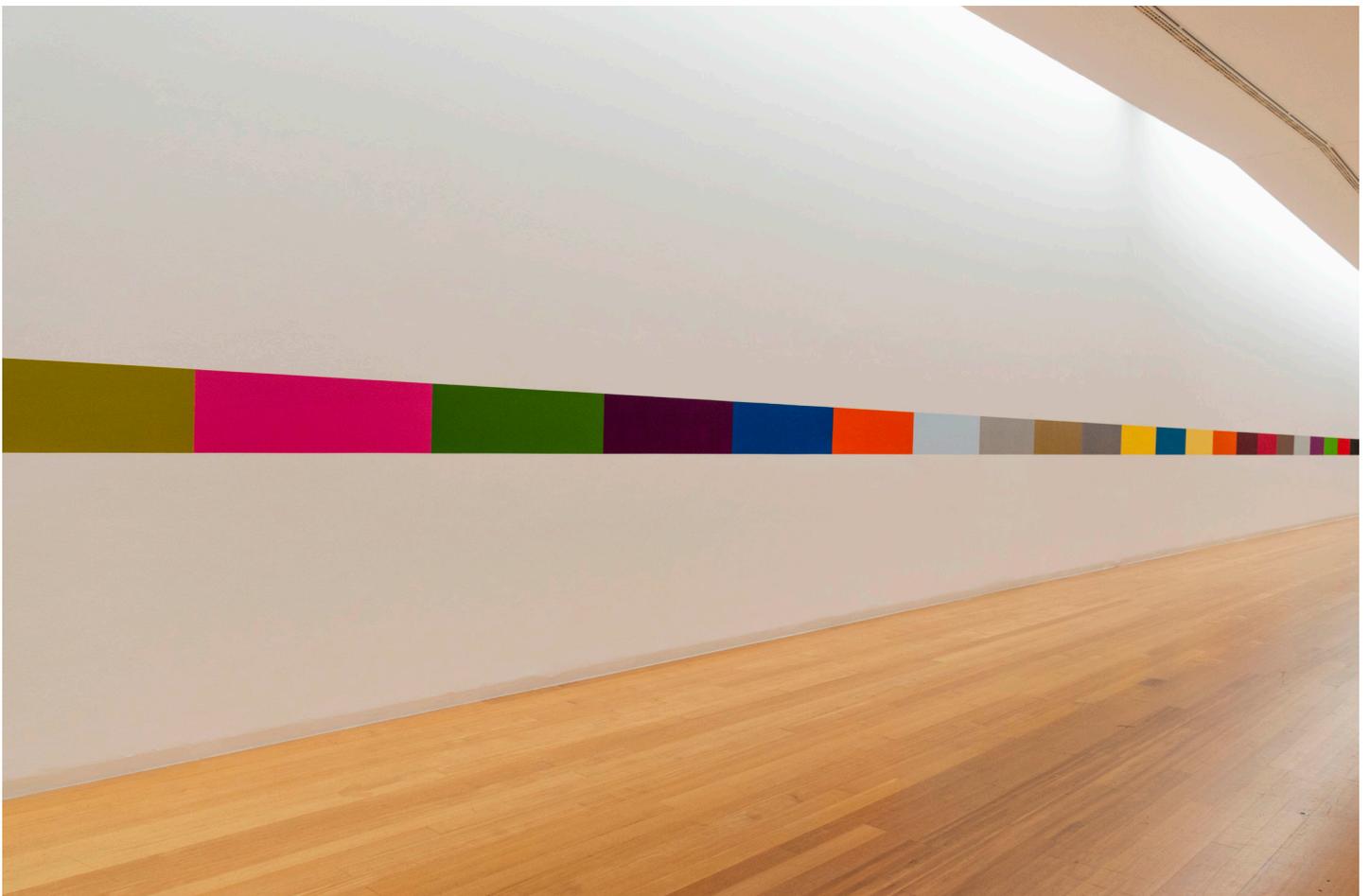
Glass Astragaloi (Knucklebones), 2020
Gold and Glass Diadem, 2020
Gold Wreath, 2019
Grave Stele with Family Group, 2018
Grove in the Shadow of the Akropolis, 2019
Head of a Girl, 2018
Head of a Goddess, 2019
Kore 674. Hairband and Tresses, 2021
Kore Fragment, 2019
Kore from the Kheramyas Group, 2020
Leda, 2019
Male Torso, 2019
Marble pyxis (box with lid), 2020
Marble shell, Aporrhais pespelecani, 2020
Mars and Venus, 2019
Niobe. Everlasting Sorrow, 2020
Old Fisherman, 2018
Paris. Jeu de Paume. Acanthus, 2020
Parthenon. East pediment. Head of the Horse of Selene, 2019
Parthenon. West Pediment. Crowning Akroterion, 2019
Peplos Kore, 2021
Phrasikleia, 2019
Potsdam. (Artificial pond adjacent to the Roman Baths), 2017
Potsdam. Roman Baths. Karyatides, 2017
Potsdam. Roman Baths. Tea Pavilion, 2017
Roman Foot Rules, Compasses and Set Square, 2020
Roman Glassware, 2020
Roman plate, 2018
Sleeping Hermaphrodite, 2020
Terra Cotta Figure, 2019
Terra Cotta Figurine, 2019
Venus and Mars, 2020
Vibia Matidia, 2018
Woman wearing a Himation, 2019

Wall Painting

Wall Painting for Aristotle and Vitruvius 2021

In *Wall Painting for Aristotle and Vitruvius* I took the color terms found in Aristotle's *De Coloribus* and Vitruvius's *De Architectura* and transliterated them into a painting. Transliteration takes the alphabet of one language and maps it onto another alphabet. This slight mismatch between the languages is subject to adjustment and correction.

James Welling



Technique

The *Cento* Process

To make a *Cento*, I use a laser printer to print a highly saturated color image onto a polyester lithographic plate. In lithography, ink only sticks to the hydrophobic (water repelling) parts of the plate and here the carbon toner of the laser print repels water and attracts ink. I then dampen the plate with a wet sponge, and, using a small brayer, I roll layers of semi-transparent black or blue ink across the damp plate. These thin glazes of dark ink bring the high key colors of the laser print down to a normal range. Finally, instead of printing the plate on paper, I exhibit the inked plate as the work itself.

Although lithographs are traditionally printed with “litho ink,” a noxious smelling, stiff paste, I find artist oil paint more pliable and agreeable to work with. In some *Centos* I brush additional paint and powdered pigment on parts of the inked image, or I removed selective areas paint, which would have been impossible with thick “litho ink.” As I apply oil paint to the plate, imperfections across the image surface result - scratches, drips and rivulets of color - producing a unique image, as much a painting as a photograph.

James Welling

Publication

Edition of 8 postcards

JAMES WELLING. CENTO

Editor: MACS / Museum of Contemporary Arts at Grand-Hornu

Author: James Welling

Language: French

Pages: 8 large postcards and a text in an envelope

Illustrations / Documents: 8 colour illustrations

Format: 15 x 21 cm

ISBN: 978-2-930368-78-8

Price: €15



Extract

« Dès le lancement du projet, j'ai décidé de l'appeler *Cento*. Un centon – du latin *cento* – est un poème qui emprunte des vers à d'autres poèmes et les combine pour créer une œuvre nouvelle. »

James Welling, "About *Cento*", extract from the book published by the MACS to coincide with the exhibition.

Agenda of Activities*

* These activities may be postponed or cancelled in accordance with health measures.

Reservation essential

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

By phone: +32 (0)65 613 902

By mail: reservations@grand-hornu.be

GUIDED VISITS

Guided visits in your bubble are organised by reservation (payable).

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Opening

22nd May - 3pm to 6pm

23rd May - 10am to 6pm

Discover the exhibitions *Comme le mur qui attend le lierre* and *Cento*.

Children's guided visits:

22nd May: 4pm to 5.30pm

23rd May: 10.30am to 12pm and 2.30pm to 4pm

Reservation obligatory by telephone or mail.

Free day

Neighbours' Day

28th May

The MACS and the CID cordially invite you to a day for neighbours.

6-7pm: Information session about the actions of the not-for-profit association, ASBL Rivière Haine and joint actions with the municipal administration of Boussu.

All evening: Tai chi with Eric Caulier

Free day

Family Thursdays

1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th July and 5th, 12th, 19th and 26th August

10-11.30am: guided visits in families of the exhibitions *Comme le mur qui attend le lierre* and *Cento*. (MACS)

11.30am-12: discovery of the raised vegetable beds. (MACS)

1-3pm: Sylvotherapy initiation on coal tip n°9 (CID)

Night at the Museum

20th August

Come and enjoy the museum for an evening that is entirely reserved for you. Try your hand at life drawing in the rooms to bring the works of James Welling to life and make the most of a good meal and a film before going home for a good night's sleep.

9-12 years

€15 (meal included)

6pm to 9.30pm

Reservations essential by phone or mail.

Courses

Archaeologist's Seeds

12th to 16th July

9am to 4pm

In the footsteps of our artists, join us this summer and find out about some mysterious techniques: drawings and photographs of traces of the past; archiving stories and collecting old documents; 3D reconstruction based on fragments; visiting ruins and many other fascinating experiments.

5-8 years

€60

Reservation obligatory by phone or mail

Memory Hunters

9th-13th August

9am-4pm

Silver gelatin or digital photography, photography lab, collection, safari photos, excavations... come and discover the various means of recording images and investigating places, questioning the past and sparking your imagination inspired by the approaches of the artists currently presented at the MACS.

9-12 years

€60

Reservation obligatory by phone or mail

FESTIVITIES

Summer Grand-Hornu

1st July to 31st August

National Day

21st July

9.30am-6pm

The MACS and the CID invite you to meet up at Grand-Hornu to celebrate the National Day.

9.30am: walk on Coal Tip n°9. (CID)

11am: "Optimal Experiences" by the Taiji on Coal Tip n°9. (CID)

11am - 1pm - 2pm - 3pm - 4pm:

guided visits of the exhibitions *Comme le mur qui attend le lierre* and *Cento*. (MACS)

2pm: rendez-vous with words as part of the exhibition *Après la sécheresse (After the Drought)*. (CID)

4pm: Let it Rain! Initiation in dance with *Danses et Compagnies* by Xavier Gossuin. (CID)

Open Space (11am to 5pm): undertake various activities on the theme of light, colour and photography. (MACS)

Treasure hunt (10am to 6pm)

Free day

Botanical Apero

15th August

11am

The MACS invites you to an encounter between contemporary art and vegan cuisine on Sunday 15th August (guided visit + apero)

€25

Reservations obligatory by phone or email.

ENCOUNTER

Webinar

Date to be decided

Practical Information

Site du Grand-Hornu
Rue Sainte-Louise, 82
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