

DAUWENS & BEERNAERT
GALLERY

Alex Verhaest

"No myths for these countries of the mind"

OPENING MAY 13

19 - 21h

13 - 21 May 2023



Avenue de Stalingrad 26 - 1000 Brussels
www.dauwensbeernaert.com

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A decade of experimental audiovisual and cinematic work

Dauwens & Beernaert presents "No myths for these countries of the mind": A comprehensive exhibition of four three narrative audiovisual series by [Alex Verhaest](#).

The artist has been working in the experimental audiovisual and cinematic field since her debut in 2013. The exhibition shows a selection of a decade of work by the artist including the family drama; Temps Mort, The archive of unattained futures; a body of work that interrogates utopian tropes reuniting silk screen print, closed circuit video and a video game, as well as Society the artist's most recent short film. We invite you to discover her outlandish worlds and her consistently surprising ways of telling stories that matter.

Verhaest is a filmmaker investigating the possibilities of interactivity and responsivity within cinematic arts. The basis of each film is a highly narrative script, existing or newly written, around which she creates a cinematic installation consisting of objects, videos and interactive videos. Her work operates on the juxtaposition of painting, videogame and cinema extended. With each new film, Verhaest dives into what it means to make films in a multi-screen post-Nintendo society.

During her MFA year, Verhaest travelled to China where she discovered the Asian hacker subculture. She was invited to participate in a six-month residency at island6 Arts Center in Shanghai where she joined the former artist collective 'Platform for Urban Investigations'. She then travelled to Mexico DF, Eindhoven and Salvador da Bahia where she participated in group-shows of the collective at the Museo de la Ciudad de Mexico, the Van Abbe Museum and the Museo de Arte Moderna. In 2009 she decided to focus more on her own practice and to leave the collective, which resulted in participations in several group exhibitions around Belgium and the Netherlands. In September of 2013, her debut solo Temps Mort/Idle Times opened at Grimm Gallery, Amsterdam. Her work has been selected by several arts and new media festivals and competitions; i.e. the FILE electronic language festival in Sao Paolo, the New Technology Art Award in Gent, TAZ Oostende and Arts Festival Watou, and her work is featured in the Akzo Nobel Collection. She won the New Face Award at the Japan Media arts Festival.

Verhaest's work has been awarded with the prestigious 2015 Ars Electronica Golden Nica.

Front Room (Bureau) "Temps Mort / Idle Times"

The script of **Idle Times / Temps Mort** operates as the narrative backbone for a series of works on the suicide and character assassination of an absent pater familias, and the incapacity of the family members to communicate on, and to deal with this tragic event. The protagonists of Idle Times/ Temps Mort, the 'mourning' relatives (Hélène, Dolores, Peter and Madeleine) and the storyteller (Angelo) are introduced via a series of 5 Characters Studies: a series of portraits that visualise the internal emotional struggle and inaptitude of the surviving relatives to adopt an adequate attitude. Hélène is about to cry but she doesn't. Is she trying to cry because she needs to, or because society expects her to do so? Dolores is pregnant and about to give birth to the first grandchild of the deceased father. Her portrait suggests a mental state which balances between salvation, expectation and disappointment and fear.

The **Character studies** also operate as standalone works that investigate the pictorial, historical and psychological potential of portraiture. On the one hand the protagonists seem to operate in a timeless or even futuristic and parallel universe, on the other hand the aesthetics of the works refer to old master paintings (e.g. Cranach the Elder) and contrast with the technology and data carriers (Ipads) used for these works. The combination of these temporal aspects gives the works a universal and timeless yet very contemporary dimension.

This art historical dimension of the Character studies is also present in another series of 5 works: the **Table Props**. Each character study corresponds with a so-called Table Prop. At first sight, these works remind us of classic still lifes of Pieter Claesz and Willem Claesz Heda. A broken plate, a fallen glass, bread crumbs and leftovers suggest a hasty departure, or memento mori. Upon closer inspection, each Table Prop is literally a tableau vivant, a very subtle video loop without beginning or end. Table Props operate as allegoric representations of the protagonists of Idle Times and their mental states. Again, the combination of contemporary technology and classic themes results in an alienating visual anachronism.

The **Dinner scene** brings together all protagonists of Idle Times. The composition and setting of the work refer to a last supper scene. The relatives are represented twice on the left and right side of Angelo, the storyteller. The relatives are depicted before and after the suicide of the absent father. When the visitors call Peter (via a phone number stated on a business card handed out during exhibitions), they activate a conversation, or at least a series of monologues between / of the family members. The relatives do not communicate nor interact they are making small talk to break the awkward silence. Even though Alex Verhaest takes a neutral stance on the usage of social media or networked devices, the Dinner Scene does illustrate the discrepancy between the multitude of means to communicate and social platforms (which only allow for a binary state of mind : like/ dislike) on the one hand and our inability to communicate and interact on complex state of minds and tragic events on the other hand.

Grande salle: “Ad Hominem” and “The Archive”

The work is part of the narrative installation “**The Archive of Unattained Futures.**” The Archive of Unattained Futures displays ambitious new works developed by the artist for the past three years: *The Archivist* (2022), a 60- channel interactive video installation in which archival images from various public domains are transformed and composited, and **Ad Hominem** (2022), a video game, which philosophically interrogates utopian thinking. The script for both works is written by Verhaest in collaboration with GPT-3, an AI, which produces human-like text from deep learning. The works together elaborate a ludic cinematic space, an interactive science fiction film. Inter- weaving the multilayered epic is Change, the protagonist of the story, and the four utopias centered around either collective or individual protagonists with either progressive or conservative ideologies based on scholar Sofie Verreast's *Eutopia Unbound*.

Côté Cour (Upstairs): “Society”

In **Society**, a jackdaw tells the story of him and his four friends living together. It would be a peaceful life, were it not for a sixth constantly trying to join in. The five don't know her, but they don't really know each other either. But what is acceptable to the five is not to the sixth. How can they explain this to the sixth?

Society is a metaphorical fairy tale set in a post-climate disaster. It stars Norwegian Ingrid Liavaag (*Arctic Void*), Idries Bensbaho (*Cool Abdoul*), Valentine Dhaenens (*Sea Spark*), Anemone Valcke (*Aller/Retour*) and Andie Dushime (*Lamb of God*).

Alex Verhaest focuses on story and is influenced by cinema and video games. With each new film, Verhaest delves into what it means to make films in a post-Nintendo multi-screen society.

The film premiered at the *Kortfilmfestival Leuven* and competed in the national competition in the fiction category.