

SALON VAN HORIZONTALLEN EN VERTICALEN

Each year, The Monography Series presents the work of a photographer who lives in Belgium. For its first edition, a multidisciplinary jury selected the work of Annemie Augustijns (1965°, Brasschaat).

The exhibition 'Salon van Horizontalen en Verticalen' is a compilation of different series of works by the artist. In 2000, Augustijns started making a number of trips to Eastern Europe and took photos in countries such as East Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Poland and Lithuania.

These photos show how architecture plays a symbolic role in towns and expresses the political and social beliefs that are prevalent during a communist era. Augustijns gives us a chance to witness the absurd buildings and interiors that were hidden for a long time behind the Iron Curtain. We see television sets in a Skoda museum in the Czech Republic, but they don't work. A strange arrangement of chairs in a sanatorium in Slovakia or a meteorite exhibited in a room tucked away in the Natural History Museum in Berlin.

This series from Eastern Europe is shown face to face with photos of architecture from the fifties and sixties in Belgium. After the Second World War, Belgium went through a period of calm and reconstruction. A decade later in the sixties, the economy exploded and the country became one of the most prosperous places in the world. And where there is a climate of optimism there is always living architecture. A playful form of modernism in which colours and decorative shapes bring alive the functional aspects and set the tone for the style of many new buildings. Augustijns went in search of architectural witnesses of this period and she reveals them to us in objective but definitely not rigorous photos. The photos of colourful student houses of the VUB (Free University of Brussels), built by the architect Willy Van Der Meeren are particularly striking or those of huge apartment blocks in Ghent, ice creams being served from an IJsboerke van.

By bringing a photo of a colossal cultural centre in Piešťany in Slovakia face to face with a playful, modern building for singles in Arteveldestraat in Brussels, the artist disorients us. European architecture continues to bear witness to a history in which Europe was divided, one part under a strict communist regime, another with the good fortune of being able to profit from economic recovery and social revolutions. The modernist architecture exists today in both systems - one deadly serious, the other hedonistic. But both are in a state of decay today. In the exhibition is a photo of immigrants looking for accommodation in a derelict building close to the North Station in Brussels - and yet the bright blue Eternit tiles of the facade are the herald of a carefree summer.

Augustijns' work is designed to encourage us to reflect on history and bygone utopic ideals, as well as on the fragile beauty of 20th century modernist architecture. Her work also expresses a sensitive love of this architecture. The modernist design buildings that continue to evoke a sense of joy, melancholy, hope and naivety today. They rise up like triumphant gestures or the symbols of a desire for design. Augustijns' objective in presenting these photos is to immortalise these disavowed places and to integrate them into a new story. Her work is about more than art, it is also a document, a history of architecture that tells us something about the style of these buildings and about the signs of wear and tear that announce their disappearance. A great future hopefully awaits the 'Salon van Horizontalen en Verticalen'.