




ENGLISH

This visitor's guide is available in six languages. Dutch, French and English you have found already. Bulgarian, Turkish and Arabic can be found via this QR code.




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Then please ask for a printed version at the ticket counter.

About the
Exhibition



Welkom, welcome, bienvenue, добре дошли, hoş geldiniz, كَبَّ أَلْهَسْ وَ أَلْهَأْ to *Alternative Narrative*: a story about how things in a museum could be done differently. This exhibition was curated by us, Schoonvolk!, MSK's youth collective. With Ghent being the European Youth Capital in 2024, we were given free rein to build an exhibition within the walls of Belgium's oldest museum!

Our plans are ambitious. By providing an 'alternative narrative', we want to break through the classic outlook. We think this narrative can be a step forward for museums. A narrative where there is room for critical thinking and open debate on social issues, room for both questions and exclamations! One where we blur boundaries between front of house and backstage. One where boundaries are pushed towards a more equal society. We have summarised our plan in a manifesto of 10 general rules that we believe can make a contemporary exhibition 'fruitful'. The manifesto explains why the works of art were chosen, but also what emphases we consider important when creating upcoming exhibitions. In our two halls, you will encounter themes such as women artists, religion, gender, pets, multiple media and politics. You will also find the 10 lines of our manifesto on the walls of *Alternative Narrative*. You can find our manifesto in the space provided below.

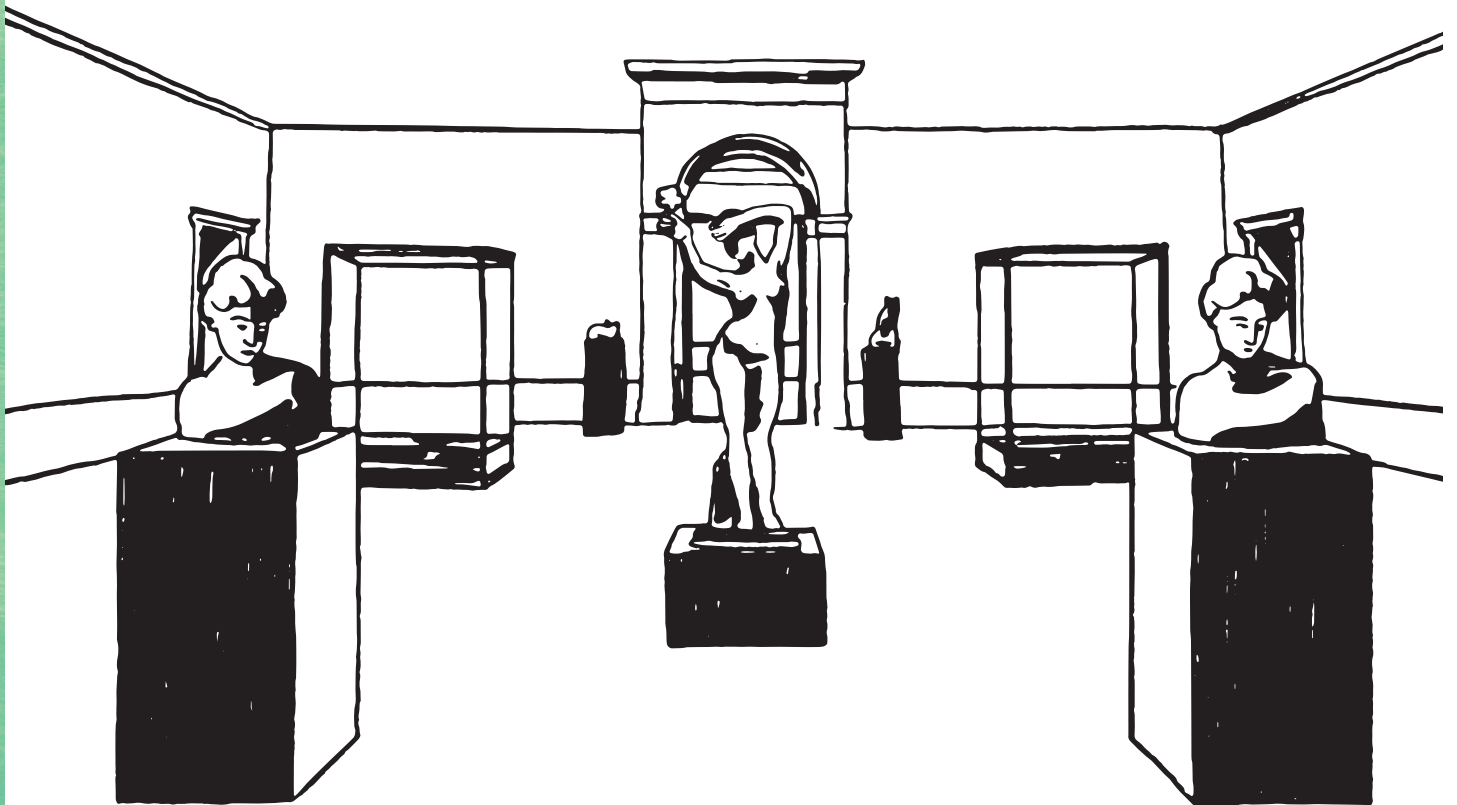


In this visitor's guide you will find more information about the set-up of this exhibition, who and what Schoonvolk! is, a ground plan with the placement of the works, and additional explanations per theme as linked to our manifesto.

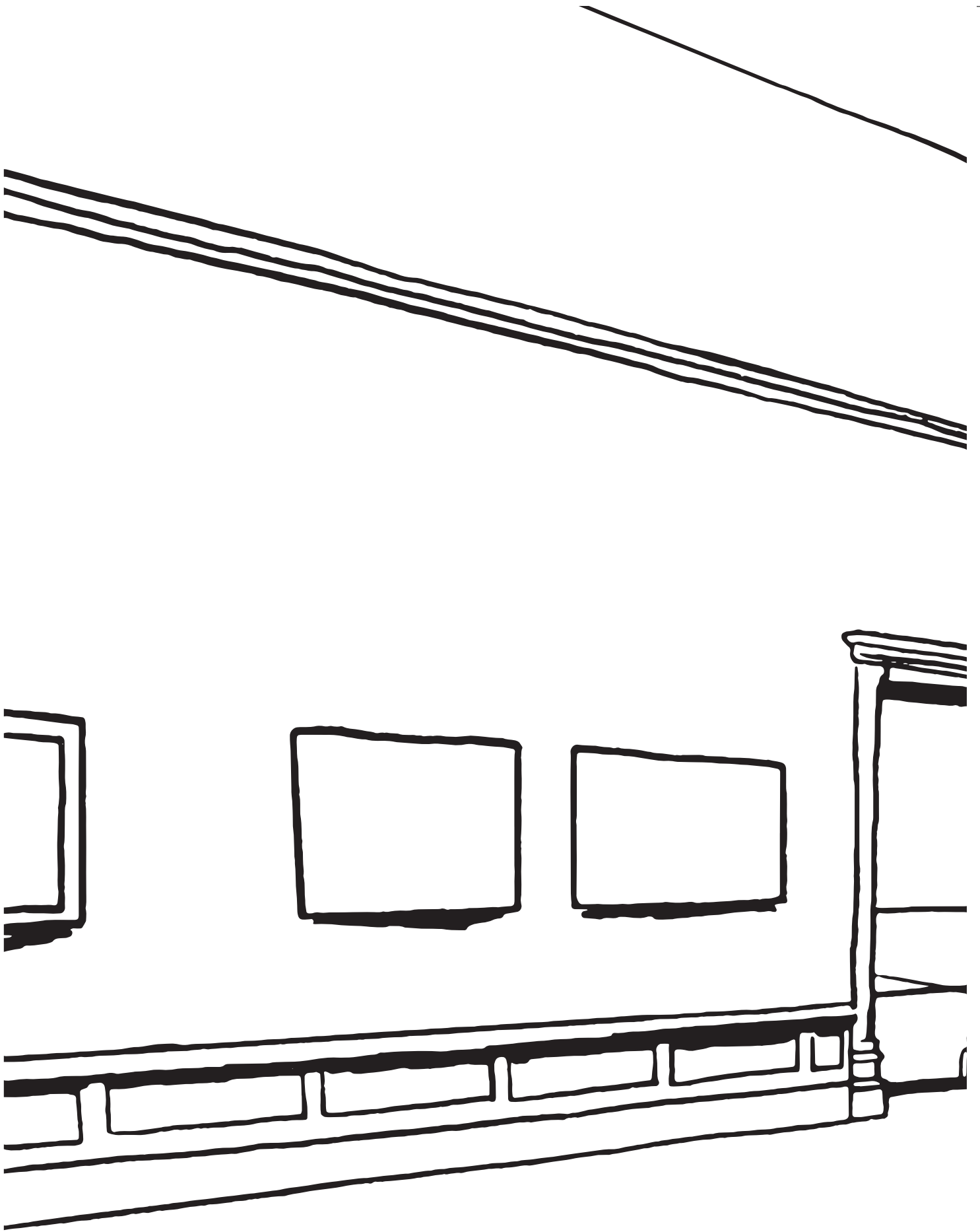
In our exhibition as well as in our activities, we do not tolerate homo-, queer-, transphobia, sexism, racism, ageism, ableism, violence, theft or vandalism. This exhibition deals with sensitive issues. Should you feel uncomfortable in any way or have questions following your visit to the museum, we welcome your feedback.



Different Themes



Linked to the manifesto, some recurring themes that we as Schoonvolk! consider important. That is why we are providing some additional words of explanation in the middle of this visitor's guide. You can also find the themes in each of the highlighted works.



Hélène De Reuse

Wachtebeke 1892–
Mariakerke (Ghent) 1979

Self-portrait



1. The MSK owns an impressive collection of 1343 works by Hélène De Reuse. Despite this large body of work, she is not very visible in the museum. Her artistic talent blossomed at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent, where she won prizes for her draughtswomanship, especially life drawing. Despite her success, she remains relatively unknown today. With our exhibition, we want to draw attention to forgotten female artists such as Hélène De Reuse and their unique outlooks. She drew a lot of female nudes, for instance, and with her feminine gaze she provides a refreshing view on this art form.

We highlight for you 7 art objects by Hélène that illustrate her incredible talent!

*FEMALE
ARTISTS*



2. Although rather unknown today, the versatile artist Charles de Coorde created mostly expressive and melancholic works, including this drawing. The title *Female Nude* was chosen later by art historians, not by the artist himself. This raises the question whether the gender of the depicted figure is all that clear-cut. Judith Butler, a well-known gender scholar, says gender is a kind of construction, something we realize daily as a performance, and which is influenced by society. This challenges us to rethink traditional views. Is a figure's gender really that important to us? Perhaps a more neutral title, such as *Recumbent Nude*, would better suit the openness of this work of art.

3. Migration divides and connects people worldwide and is often assigned negative connotations. Jos Verdegem's work *Refugees* highlights the World War II refugee crisis and the emotions associated with it. He lends a human face to the crisis and calls for empathy and struggle for peace and equality. His art reflects the tension between people's strength and vulnerability during humanitarian crises. Verdegem does not glorify anything, but shows us a raw representation of reality. *Refugees* opens the debate on protracted crises of war and highlights the need for basic human rights.

Charles De Coorde

Sint-Joost-ten-Node (Brussels) 1890–
Etterbeek (Brussels) 1963

Recumbent Female Nude

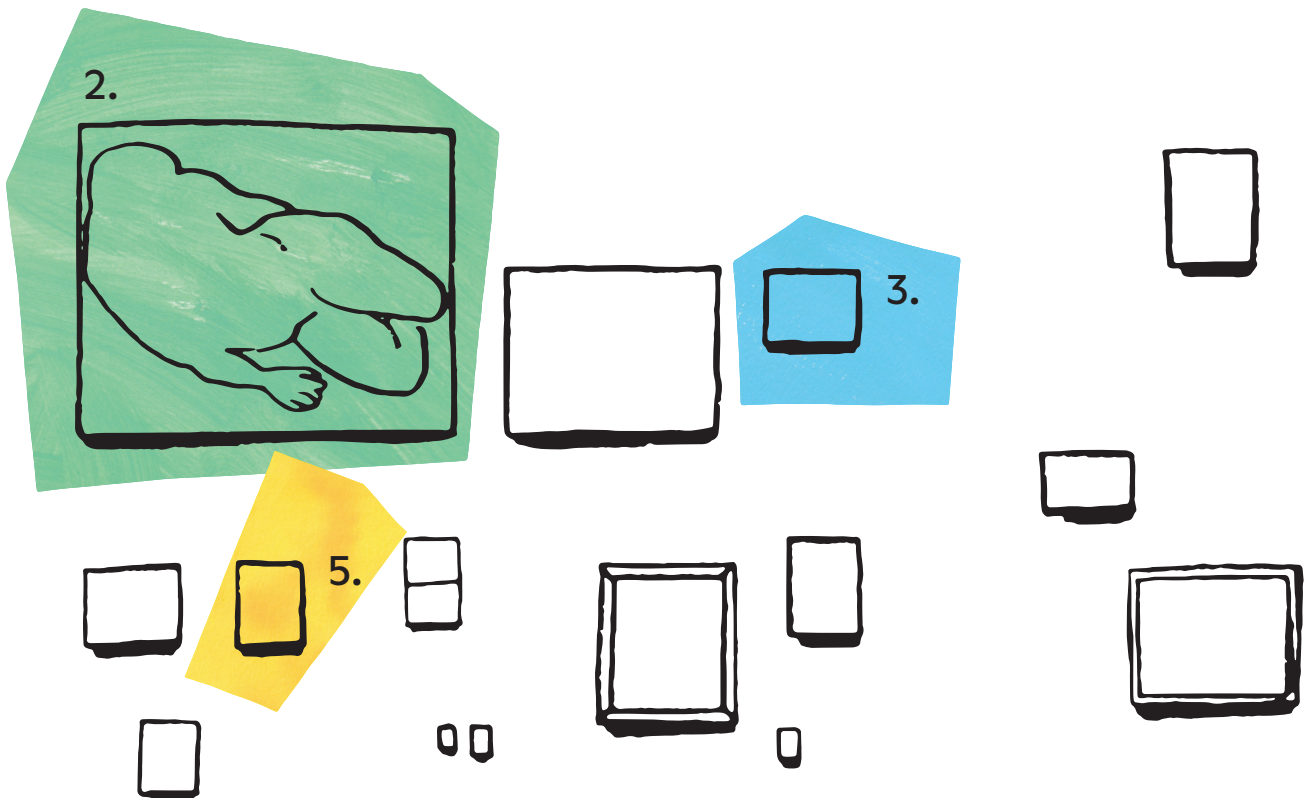


Jos Verdegem

Ghent 1897–1957

Refugees, 1940–1941

POLITICS



Anonymous

Southern Netherlands 15th century

Antiphonary of Oosteklo,
1498

RELIGION

4. This impressive manuscript is the result of a collaboration between several religious women. Philippine de Mastaing and Marguerite Wanzelee, two nuns of the abbey of Oosteklo, wrote the text at the time when the art of printing was emerging in Western Europe. Subsequently, they had it decorated with miniatures, perhaps by the Bruges nun Cornelia van Wulfschkerck. The manuscript shows how art is often a powerful result of collaboration. A solid counterpoint to the nineteenth-century notion of the individual 'genius' male artist.

For this exhibition, we contacted Ensemble Psallentes, a choir specialising in the singing of ancient Gregorian chants. Together with them, the *Antiphonary* was explored, and pieces were sung by the ensemble. Scan the QR code at the bottom of the page and enjoy their interpretation of pieces from the *Antiphonary*!

Fred Deltor

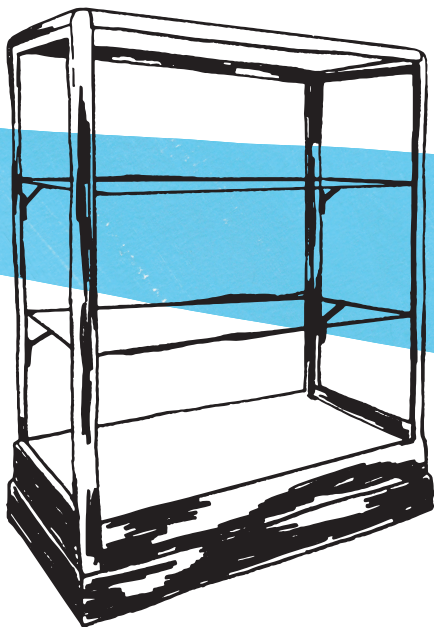
Carignano 1899–Amsterdam 1969

Jeu de massacre, 12
personnages à la recherche
d'une [balle], 1928

RELIGION

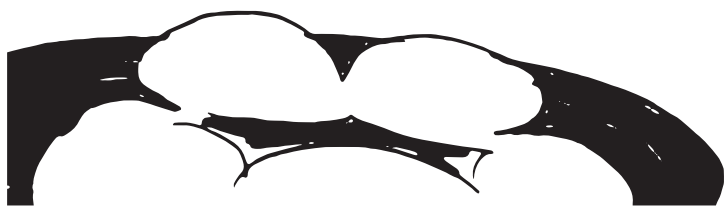
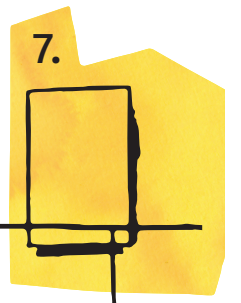
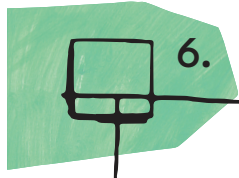
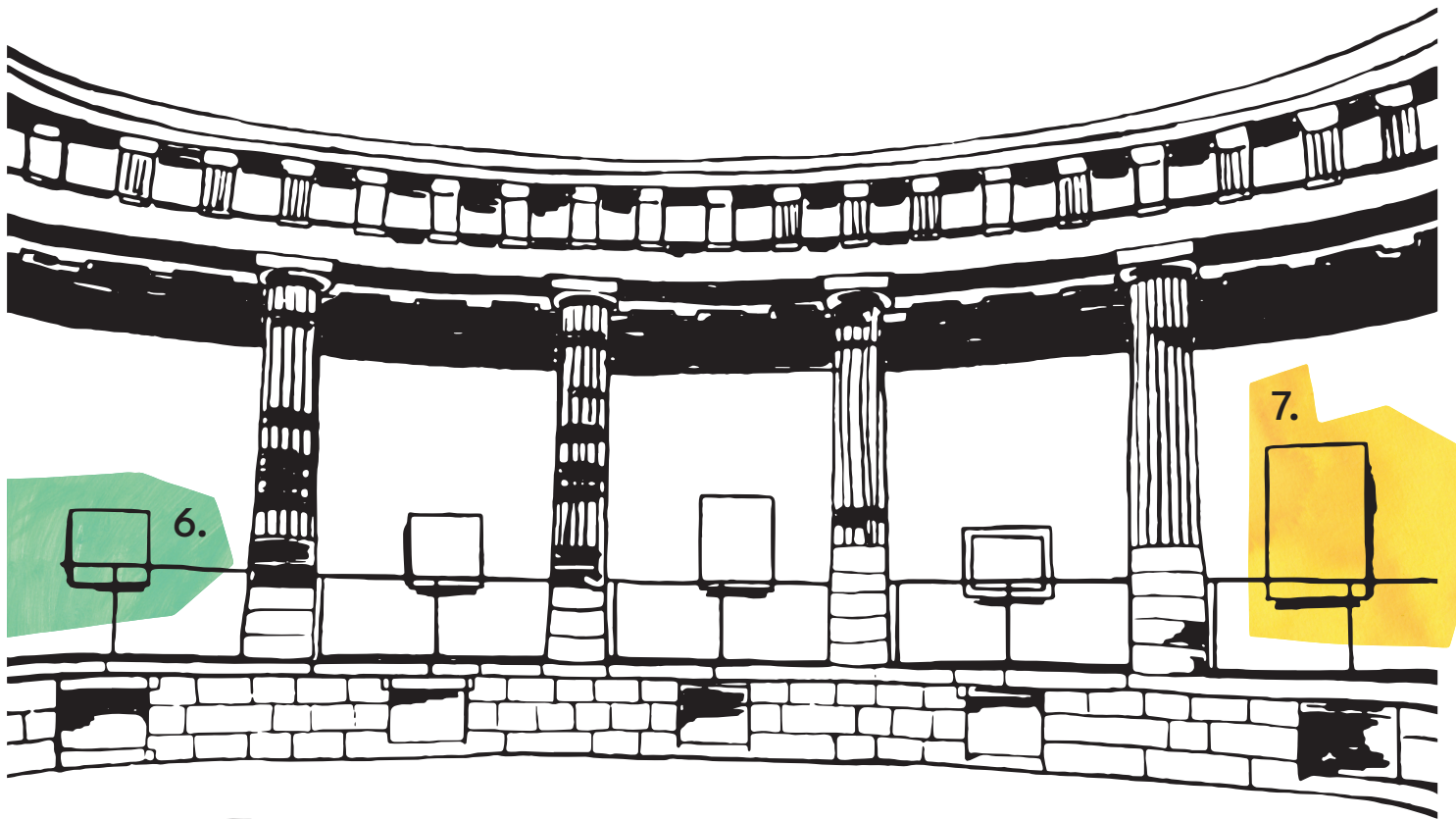
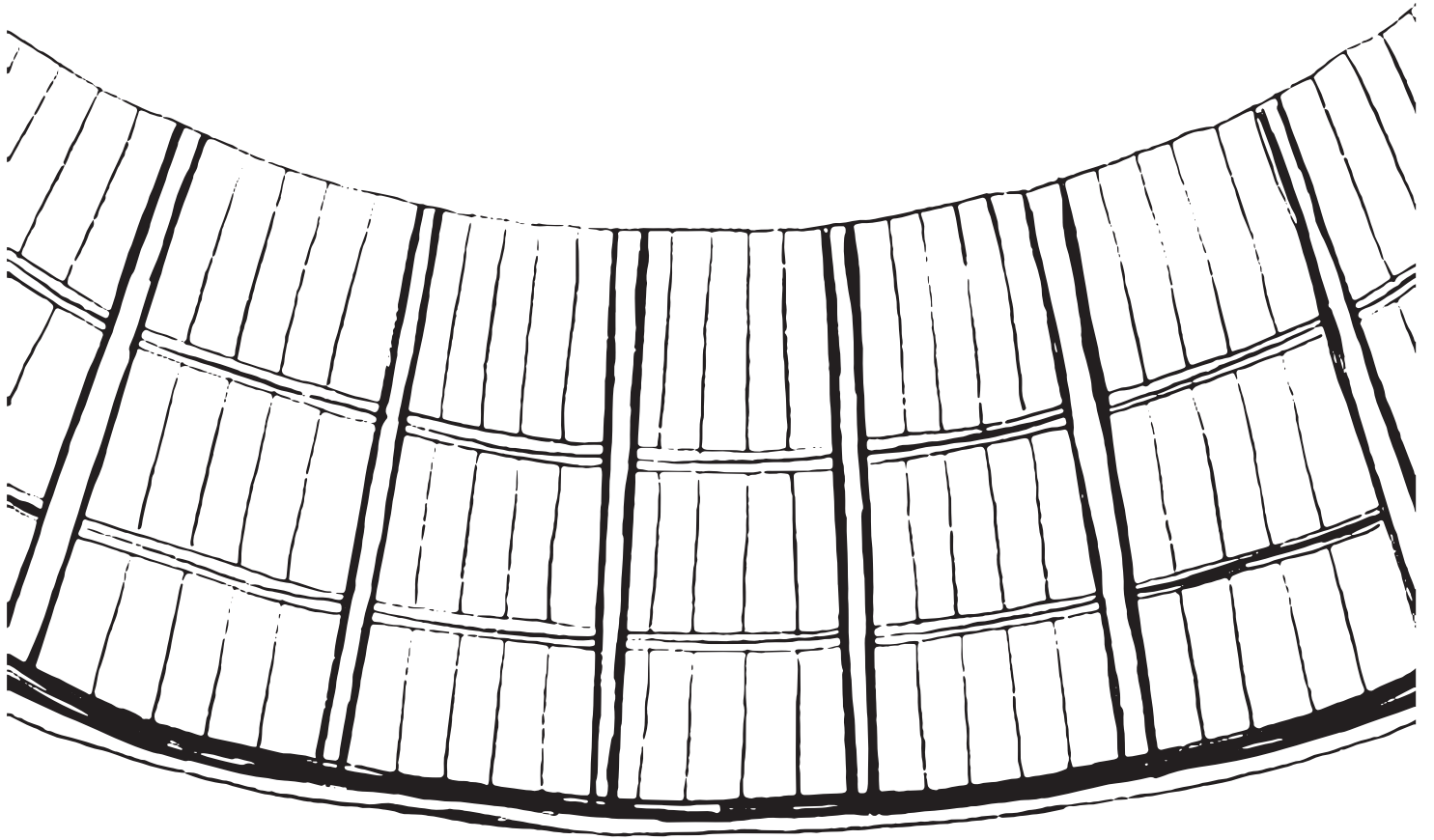
5. With *La Religion*, Deltor places the Church in the confessional. The ingredients of its (abuse of) power are highlighted. Does the pedestal filled with money symbolise the Church's role in society? The heart-shaped red mask with devilish features is, according to art critics, a 'demagogic heart.' Demagoguery is a way of convincing the viewer of an untruth. Through metaphor, Deltor thus confronts us with the Church's deceptive techniques to exercise its authority.

La Religion is part of a series of 12 prints, each representing an illustration of its own time. In each, Deltor denounces a specific aspect of society. Many of these prints can still be applied to the world we live in today.



4.





FEMALE ARTISTS



During the collection research for *Alternative Narrative*, we noted that in the MSK collection, women artists are sadly underrepresented. We felt it was important to pay extra attention to them. Why is it that there isn't an equal number of male and female artists in the collection? Let's briefly dive into history!

For a long time, women did not have access to higher art education. Women of the upper social classes sometimes received painting lessons, but this was more of a virtuous pastime than a professional activity. For a long time the work of women artists was considered less important and less valuable. Their works did not enter art canons or museum collections and, as a consequence, could not inspire new artists. Typically, women were in the minority at the art societies or salons that became very important from the nineteenth century onwards. These art societies provided opportunities to meet other artists, sketch together and exhibit works of art for sale. In Brussels, some women painters, including Alice Ronner, founded the *Cercle des Femmes Peintres de Bruxelles* in 1888. This allowed about 80 female members to exhibit their works to interested buyers and art critics.

And yet over the centuries, hundreds of women have been involved in art in one way or another. A number of women artists were also known and appreciated during their lifetime. Unfortunately, they often vanished from the collective memory afterwards. It is high time to retrieve them from the museum's reserves!

RELIGION

Throughout history, the Church has had a mixed reputation. Just think of beautiful buildings and rich art collections on the one hand and a School War, political influence and scandals on the other. There are some great examples in the MSK's collection of how artists worked with or in this context.

GENDER

Unknown but not unloved! Get to know the many artists we want to rescue from oblivion. We try to break the set thinking around gender by introducing some artists and works to you.



SPOTLIGHT ON ALTERNATIVE THEMES AND MEDIA



Why are masterpieces like Auguste Corkole's *Two Dogs on a Couch* or Akop Gurdjan's sculpture of a Siamese Cat labelled as kitsch? At one time, fine art was the ultimate means of capturing affection for pets. Their portraits were seen as symbols of power and wealth. Schoonvolk! wants to counter this in an age when smartphones are full of pictures of our fluffy companions by showing more adorable pet portraits in museums!

We want to highlight different art forms, as the museum collection contains numerous other items besides paintings. Feast your eyes on medals, wallpaper, sketches, water-colours, etchings, sculpture, used studio materials, time-damaged and half-restored works that we have retrieved from depots!

Medals

Medals, comprised within numismatics, are small but enchanting works of art that play an invaluable role in art history. These metal miniatures are actually little history books, recording portraits of prominent figures, events and symbols from a particular period. In this way, we gain insight into social, cultural and political events of the time. A notable example is the *Honorary Plaque Medal from the City of Ghent to Alice Keelhoff*. Designed by local hero Geo Verbanck, this plaque serves as a tribute to the passionate female artist. Ghent, proud of her achievements, decided to honour her with this specially designed plaque of honour. In your opinion, which artist deserves a medal?

Sculpture

Sculptures also often have a specific purpose, such as honouring loved ones (funerary monuments) or marking historical milestones (monuments and medals). Sculptures of animals, such as Albéric Collin's leopard, are not uncommon in studios and living rooms. Sculpture also takes a variety of forms, from monumental sculptures to intimate portraits and functional objects such as medals and interior pieces. Artists use a variety of materials, from stone and bronze to wax, wood and marble. Each material offers unique opportunities for expression and creativity. In short, sculpture is an intriguing discipline with deep roots in human history, culture and craft traditions!

Female sculptors

The exhibition puts a spotlight on the crucial role of women sculptors in art history who bravely challenged boundaries. Although sculpture was long considered a male craft, women gained greater access to academies and model studies at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. We are therefore pleased to introduce you to the works of Yvonne

Serruys. Serruys' *Group of Figures* challenges conventions with expressive movement and emotional depth. In our view, the works invite reflection on gender inequality in art history and stress the importance of rediscovering and honouring forgotten voices. It is noteworthy that female artists occasionally display each other's portraits in their works, which we consider a form of silent mutual support!

POLITICS

One of the positions in our manifesto is that art is political. It is not that every artist wanted to convey a political message, but we believe that art can always enter into dialogue with political issues. Works can go along with or oppose politics and can always be framed in the larger picture of society that is politically driven.

Alice Ronner

Brussels 1857–1906

Rhododendrons, 1908

FEMALE
ARTISTS



6. Sometimes it is simply a matter of genes. Alice Ronner learned to paint from her mother Henriëtte Ronner-Knip, a great artist who gained fame for her animal portraits. Along with her brother and sisters, Ronner lived with their mother until she passed away. Theirs must have been an artistic household!

Despite her mother's influence, Alice developed her own specialism: still lifes with flowers. MSK bought this work just a year after it was finished. That is quite exceptional for a painting by a female artist. It just goes to show that besides talent, one's social network was also important, in this case her famous mother.

Ronner's works often have a dark background. Here, the contrast with the red flowers is striking, but perhaps the shiny pot will catch your eye even more.

Edouard Frederic
Wilhelm Richter

Paris 1844–1913

Judith, 1877

GENDER

7. If you could save an entire people by killing one person, would you do it? This biblical woman named Judith chooses to do just that. With courage and cunning, she managed to behead the army captain Holofernes to save her city of Bethulia. In art, she was initially depicted as an exemplary saint, but from the 17th century, male painters increasingly saw her as a femme fatale. They began to frequently depict her as a seductress, as in this painting. Although no lewd acts take place in her Biblical story, her figure is extremely sexualised.

In this painting, the knife and the bloodied floor hint at her narrative, but the emphasis is still on her seductive appearance. Her red-rimmed eyes allude to the moral conflict of her act: killing one person to save an entire people.



8. See how the light dances on these azaleas? This work is by Marie Antoinette Marcotte. As the daughter of a French diplomat, she received an extensive art education. Her education and talent made her quite well-known and successful during her lifetime. Like Anna De Weert, she was a luminist and pleinairist; sunlight was the source of her work, which she initially sketched in the open air.

In quite a few places, the unpainted canvas shows. This keeps the work light, despite the profusion of plants. Compare this work with Alice Ronner's *Rhododendrons*. There, only one plant is central, against a very dark background. Although they are both flower paintings, the atmosphere differs greatly. Both artists had quite a unique take on the genre of still life painting.

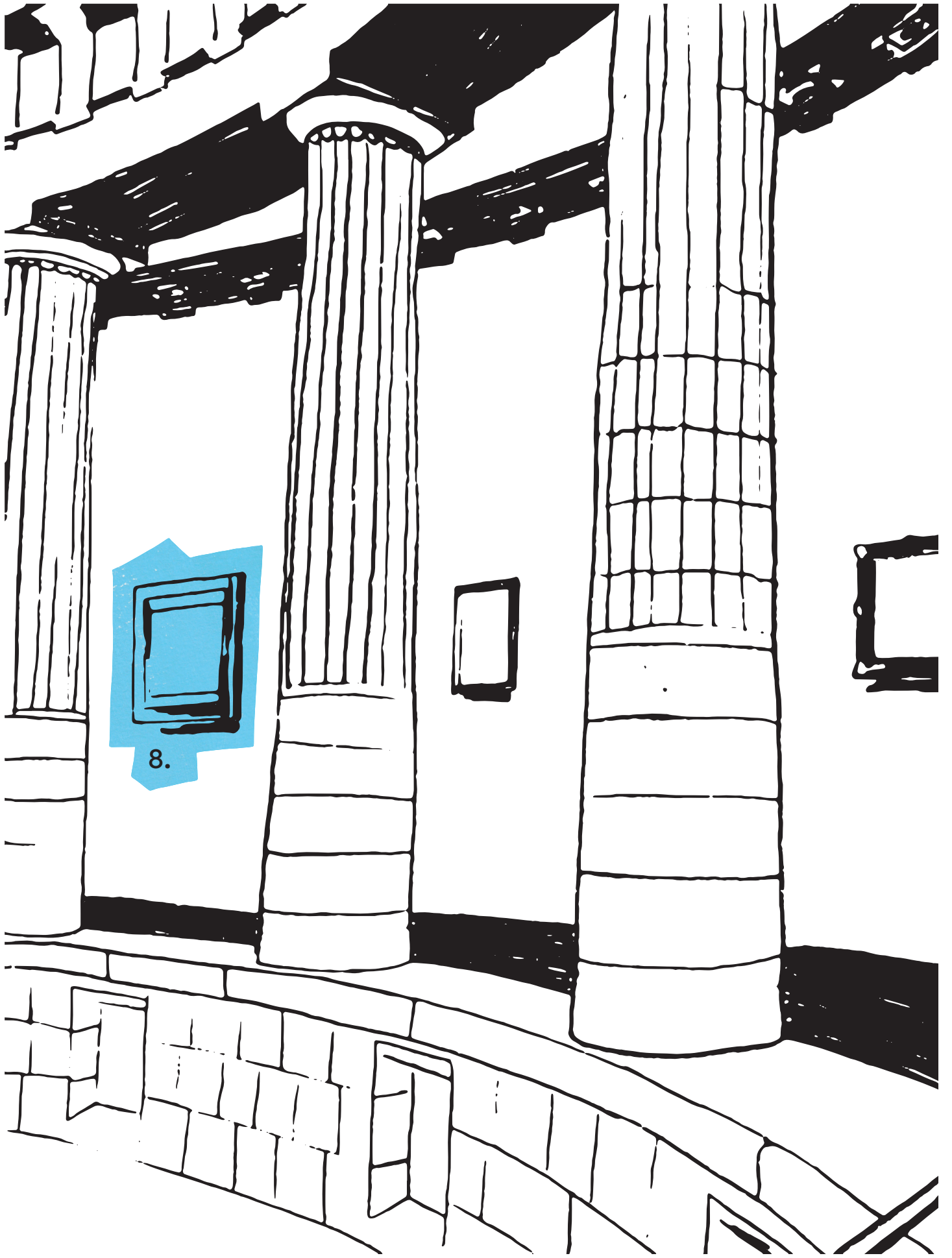
Marie Antoinette Marcotte

Troyes 1896–Paris 1929

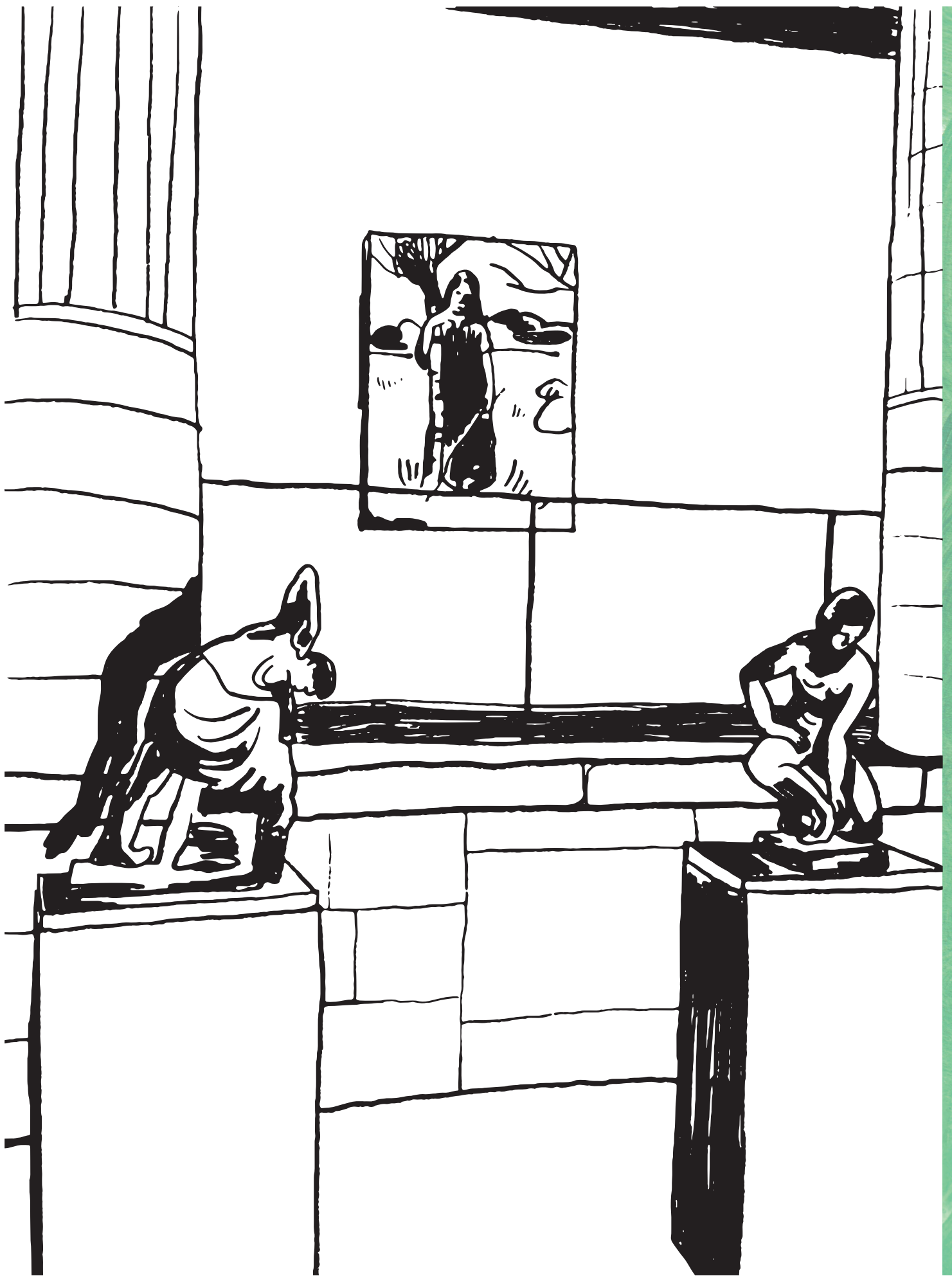
Greenhouse with
Azaleas, 1905

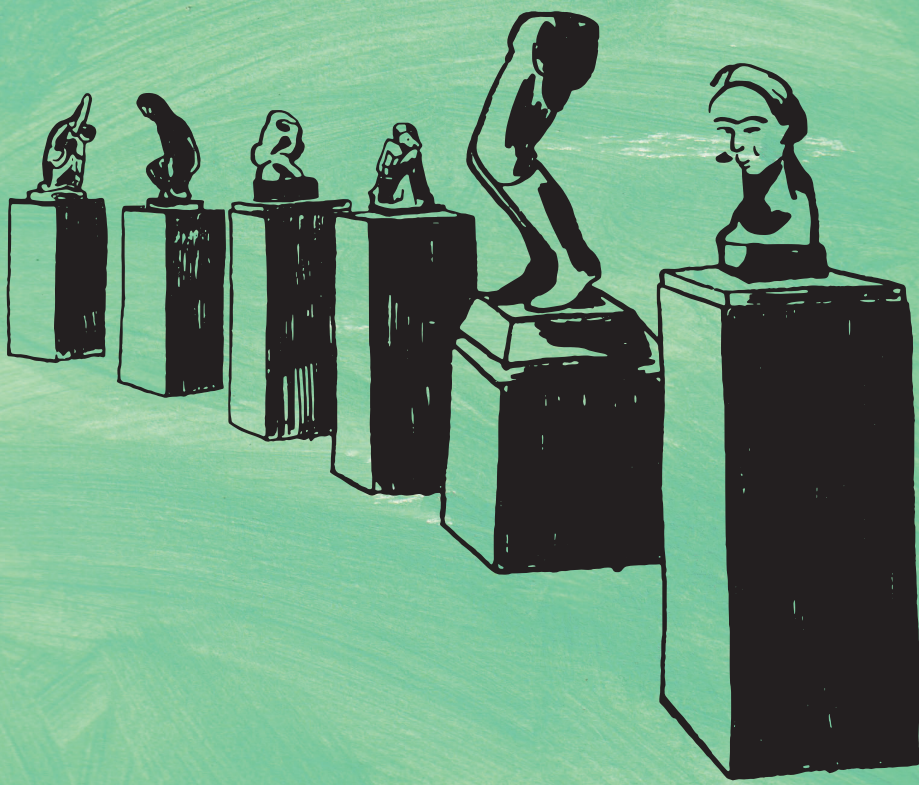
FEMALE
ARTISTS

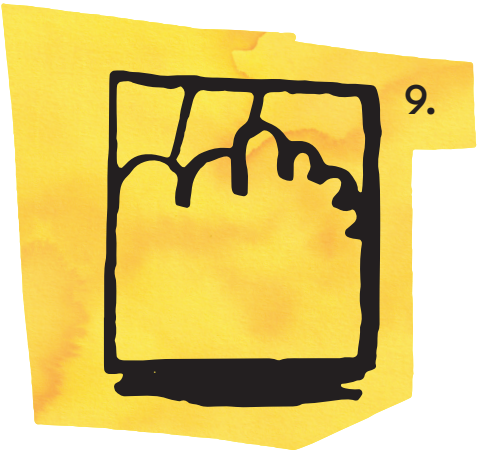




8.







9.

Anna De Weert

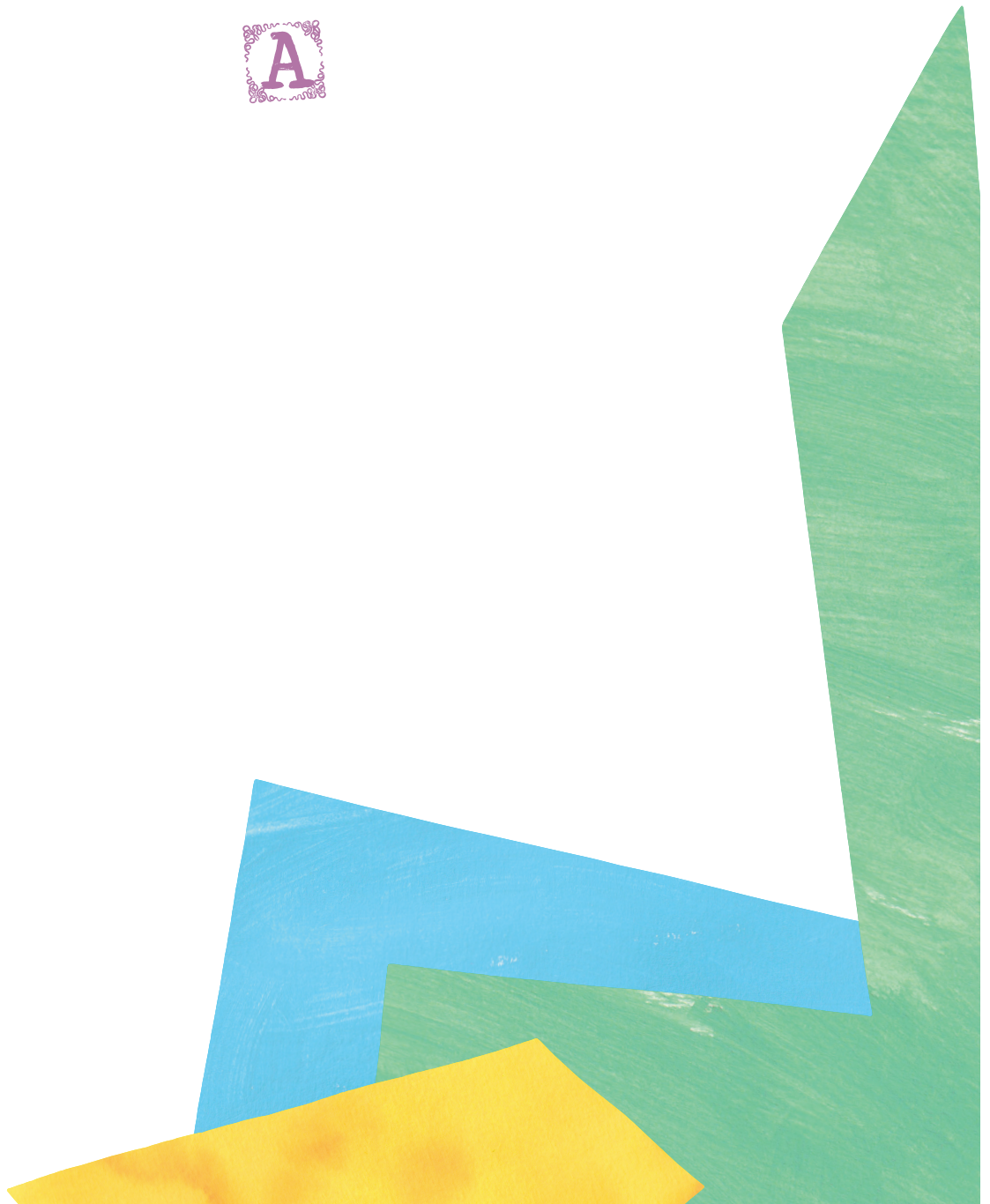
Ghent 1867–1928

Flower Market at Menton
(Côte d'Azur), 1928

FEMALE
ARTISTS

9. A well-to-do painter, Anna De Weert from Ghent enjoyed her summers in Menton in the south of France. There she painted natural elements with a particular attention to light. Against the brown-grey background, the bright colours of the flowers stand out. The woman is painted in the same shades. Her eyes, mouth or nose are not defined, as she is just a detail in the composition. What matters are the bright flowers.

For De Weert, her painting had religious significance: 'Working, painting, translating nature, it is my way of praying.' Until her death, she continued to paint in a luminist style with an eye for light and shadow, even when other artists had abandoned this art movement. We are proud to be able to highlight her expertise in our exhibition!



Schoonvolk!

Hello! We are the Youth Collective of MSK Ghent, a collective for and by young people aged 16 to 26. We are committed to opening museum doors and breaking down barriers, focusing on sustainability and inclusion. Our activities range from exhibitions and workshops to cultural events and lectures. We aim to engage young people in art and culture and offer them a platform to make their voices heard. We also collaborate with local artists and cultural institutions to integrate diverse perspectives and ideas into our operations. This is the only way we can grow sustainably along with the museum. Currently, our group numbers 17 members, mostly students and young workers in various fields. This group evolves year after year, in order to ardently keep a watchful eye on what is going on among younger art lovers and connoisseurs, and especially among younger museum visitors-to-be!

Want to find out more about who we are and what we do? Follow us on Instagram and TikTok (@schoonvolk_mskgent) and Facebook (schoonvolk).

Schoonvolk! believes it is important to provide young artists with a platform. Therefore, for the visual identity and derivatives of *Alternative Narrative*, they have collaborated with graphic design duo Lauren Bouden and Karel Chanterie and illustrator Charlot Vael. For part of the scenography, the youth collective collaborated with Mirthe Tibos. She created a 'soft sculpture' that serves as a resting point in the exhibition.

In her installations, Mirthe Tibos plays with soft sculptures that evoke sensory immersion and physical presence. She designed this work specifically for our expo in order to create a peaceful and restful space and to lead visitors briefly to a state of tranquil awareness. Mirthe's sculpture was inspired by *Greenhouse with Azaleas* by Maria Antoinette Marcotte (1905, shown in our expo) and she collaborated for this with artist Fenia Proost (table) and family company Verco Carpets. People are invited to wander around the objects and make use of them. As in the rest of the exhibition, there are no rules or guidelines accompanying this work. The work of art is there to relax and phase out external stressors.

Yearning for more? In 2023, Schoonvolk! released its own audio guide in the MSK's permanent collection. Please ask for your guide at the front desk and look for the exclamation mark to hear our voice!

Together with Young Makers

Audio Guide

Acknowledgments

This exhibition was made possible by Schoonvolkers Matilde Bruneel, Lotte Wouters, Lana Rossie, Jakob de Smaele, Noé Lağaert, Kobe Cottyn, Jits Schoonacker, Delphine Hanssens, Charlot Vael, Mira Thielemans, Hannah Engelen, Maaïke D'Aes, Arwen Gryson, Aaron Leijssen, Candice Dalino, Mona Schockaert, Lotte De Broyer, Hasse Van Houcke, supervised by Madelein Descamps, Hannah Engelen, Maaïke D'Aes and Noé Lağaert and in collaboration with the MSK.

Colofon

General coordination and supervision: Maaïke D'Aes and Noé Lağaert

Exhibition concept: Schoonvolk! supervised by Madelein Descamps, Hannah Engelen and Noé Lağaert

Curator: Schoonvolk!

Text editing: Lisa Bracke, Johan De Smet, Lies Ledure, Bart Ooghe and Frederica Van Dam

Graphic design: Lauren Bouden and Karel Chanterie of Studio Sessions

Illustrations: Charlot Vael

Production: Lisa Bracke, Maaïke D'Aes, Lieven Gerard, Noé Lağaert, Lies Ledure, Jet Peters, Joost Surmont

Sculpture: Mirthe Tibos in collaboration with Fenia Proost (table) and Verco Tapijten

Texts: Maaïke D'Aes, Candice Dalino, Lotte De Broyer, Hannah Engelen, Delphine Hanssens Goemaere, Mona Schockaert and Jits Schoonacker

Translations: Catherine Warnant (FR), SamSamTranslations (EN), Plume Rouge (AR, TR, BG)

Vocals: Ensemble Psallentes

Schoonvolkers: Matilde Bruneel, Kobbe Cottyn, Maaïke D'Aes, Candice Dalino, Lotte De Broyer, Jakob de Smaele, Hannah Engelen, Arwen Gryson, Delphine Hanssens Goemaere, Noé Lağaert, Aaron Leijssen, Lana Rossie, Mona Schockaert, Jits Schoonacker, Mira Thielemans, Charlot Vael, Hasse Van Houcke and Lotte Wouters

With the cooperation of Museum Director Manfred Sellink; team Collection, Research and Exhibitions: Johan De Smet, Frederica Van Dam, Lieven Gerard, Jet Peters, Joost Surmont, Candice Van Heghe; Marketing, Communications and Audiences: Bart Ooghe, Lisa Bracke, Soetkin Bruneel, Madelein Descamps, Nora De Wit, Nele Du Bois, Lies Ledure, Melissa Melsens and Ruud Ruttens; Library and Archives team: Sofie Corneillie; team Shop and Front of house: Veerle Penninck, David Henry, Isabelle Heytens, Alexandra Becerra Lopez; Financial team: Vic Verhasselt, Séverine Baert, Brigitte De Vos, Peggý Hobbels, Karen Rodts, Pascale Van Lent and Annelies Valgaeren; team Facility Management and Security: Wesley De Smet, Els Antheunis, Boris De Bisschop and Ilja Vandenbroecke; team Security Guards: Annick, Bart, Carine, Carine, Cinderella, Dave, Geert, Gunter, Karin, Kenneth, Mike, Reza, Sam, Sven and Tom; the entire team of guides, friends and volunteers.

V.U. Schepen van Cultuur, Botermarkt 1, 9000



Vlaanderen
verbeelding werkt



De Standaard





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A

In any exhibition, half the works of art must be created by women to provide a contemporary response to historical inequality.

B

Language is power. To make an exhibition more accessible, the exhibition texts should be formulated in the city's most commonly used languages.

C

Some of the artists whose work we are exhibiting did not have a Wikipedia page. Their anonymity is no reason not to exhibit their work, quite the contrary.

D

To celebrate the diversity of works of art, at least 15 different media and art forms should be shown.

E

Anything can be art, but not everything has to be art. Sketches, unfinished and damaged works and used materials can also be exhibited here.

F

An exhibition is not static, but is a learning process for the creators in which the perception of the audience is conveyed to the conclusion.

G

An exhibition must be made in collaboration with the target audience. Only by involving the latter, we can lower the thresholds of institutional art.

H

To create an exhibition is to write history. We already know the Flemish canon. We are trying to write a different story.

I

A museum is a space of connectivity. The artistically illiterate as well as art lovers and art connoisseurs should be able to enjoy a stimulating experience here.

J

Art is always political. Art that seeks to be apolitical is equally taking a stance. The choice of works of art can therefore provide a new platform for those whose voices have otherwise been silenced.

C

E

D

J

Dear reader,

In 2024, we will be taking over the MSK's art collection with Schoonvolk! as part of Ghent as European Youth Capital. Our exhibition explores what a museum and an exhibition can and should look like in the present day. We experiment with our own manifesto, applied to the fine works from the reserves, in a bold fashion.

In our manifesto, we call for a new perspective: museum walls need to be knocked down, women must be brought to the fore, and diversity must be celebrated in every possible way. We aim to create a connection between creator, spectator and society.

This exhibition, for and by young people, aims to lower museum thresholds, to throw the doors wide open and to bring art out from under the dust (literally, at times). We want to create a space where everyone feels welcome and where art is a vehicle for dialogue and reflection.

We invite you to enjoy art with an open mind and a renewed focus. Together, let's discover how art can connect, challenge and inspire.

Warm greetings,
Schoonvolk!