

S.M.A.K.

PRESS RELEASE



SPLENDID ISOLATION **14.May.2022 – 18.Sep.2022**

With the coronavirus pandemic still lying dormant, *Splendid Isolation* explores the conditions of working in isolation. The exhibition brings together 22 international artists from a variety of backgrounds. They are living with social limitations within their own community, have chosen to isolate themselves, or were sometimes brutally cut off from their environment. How does a life in isolation feed these artists' creative impulses? Survival instinct, escapism or resistance leads them to create striking artworks that explore the boundaries of human freedom. Many of the artists are exhibiting their work in a Belgian museum for the first time.

It is fair to say that COVID-19 prompted this exhibition. We need to go a long way back in time to find an event that everyone underwent on a global scale. The hard lockdown of 2020, a forced temporary confinement, made us seek out artists who work in or out of various forms of isolation. Since we are obliged to live in state of isolation ourselves, as spectators we are closer that we will ever be to sharing these artists' experience.

The concentration and introspection that generally go hand in hand with a creative practice mean that some artists retreat from society. Living in silence can be considered an advantage or even a necessary prerequisite for creation. Yet a life in total isolation has today become almost unthinkable. In a globalised world, with its deeply anchored network structures, life is steeped in interaction, visibility and connectedness. In these current circumstances, personal retreat and escapist longings often closely paired with the decision to live sustainably or self-sufficiently. Although isolation can also be prompted by a fundamental dissatisfaction with an unjust political system.

Other artists are forced to create work in sometimes harrowing circumstances, as they are obliged to live in solitary or collective isolation due to geographical, political, cultural or biological factors. They have no choice but to rely on their personal skills and imagination to protest against inequality and oppression. Whether they are trapped in their own mental space, displaced, imprisoned by a political regime, or limited by socio-cultural or gender-related systems.

The exhibition has been curated by Tanja Boon, Ann Hoste, Philippe Van Cauteren and Liesje Vandebroek, the S.M.A.K. curatorial team. In preparation they held a series of discussions exploring different visions, which in the exhibition merge into a fragile whole. The after-effects of the pandemic served as a backdrop to the project's creation, but in the meantime the cruelty and tragedy of wars is festering day after day. These contours inevitably influence how we view things, and will again imbue the idea of isolation with fresh meaning.

With work by Adrien Vescovi, Asim Abu Shakra, Danny Bergeman, David Byrd, Derek Jarman, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Eugenio Dittborn, Forrest Bess, Frank Walter, Hélène Amouzou, Hervé Yamguen, Hessie, Irma Blank, Judith Scott, LucianoPerna, Majd Abdel Hamid, Louise Bourgeois, Nalini Malani, Salam Atta Sabri, Sheroanawe Hakihiiwe, Shuvinai Ashoona and Zehra Doğan.

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