

MARIE-JOSE VAN HEE ARCHITECTEN

# *A WALK*

FLANDERS ARCHITECTURE INSTITUTE  
DE SINGEL ANTWERP

30.XI.MMXXII - 21.V.MMXXIII

## Foreword

*'It is an attempt to become aware of a "hunger" for the essential, for the detail, for the subject matter, and for the care in the profession, the concern for "making", and through that making to achieve more than merely that which is made.'*

Christian Kieckens, 2019

Since 2020 the Flanders Architecture Institute (VAi) has been exploring the meaning of care in architecture through exhibitions, lectures, excursions and publications. In the work of Marie-José Van Hee architecten, care recurs on several levels: care for the people with and for whom they work, care for buildings, and care for the profession. With this in mind, in January 2021 we wrote an invitation to Marie-José Van Hee architecten to make an exhibition around care.

### Care for People

The work of Marie-José Van Hee architecten consists of carefully configured domestic spaces that are subtly situated in their urban or rural context and of public spaces that invite people to celebrate together. The care for residents and users is expressed in the attention to precision in light, materials, colour,

dimensions and details. All aspects of this architecture require and reflect precision.

The special attention paid to the architect's relational sphere is personal and political at the same time, from one-to-one relations between clients and employees (such as office colleagues and advisers as well as craftspeople and manufacturers involved in the building process) to the broader scale of the architect's position in society. Care for people involves affinity, empathy and sensitivity as well as ethics.

### Care for Buildings

When we conceive of buildings as resources that we must take good care of, architectural practice itself becomes an ongoing work of care. Creating sustainable designs that last implies respect for the material and emotional labour put into buildings. On the one hand, the attitude of Marie-José Van Hee architecten creates spaces that allow appropriation, making users embrace the buildings and care for them. On the other hand, their approach to renovation and the appreciation of existing structures imply a committed relation with buildings, retrospectively, in the present and for the future.

### Care for the Profession

How architecture will develop in the future also depends on the exchange of knowledge between fellow architects. An architectural office can function as a school from which new and different ideas and approaches emerge. Like the branches of a tree, these ideas and approaches find their own direction in and around the profession. Exchanging knowledge between different generations and learning from each other follow naturally from the care architects show for their profession.

In our letter of January 2021, we expressed our wish for the exhibition to reflect Marie-José Van Hee architecten's approach to care, and make it visible and experienceable. They responded with a generous gesture to visitors to De Singel in the form of two paths through the building. *Marie-José Van Hee architecten. A Walk* became an occasion to care for De Singel's building and public space, its rich history and the experience of its users through carefully chosen interventions. Their own work appears alongside and among that of colleagues, friends and clients with whom she shares an attitude of care.

Sofie De Caigny and Hülya Ertas  
Flanders Architecture Institute

<sup>1</sup> Christian Kieckens, 'Cases and Ruins', in *Marie-José Van Hee architecten: More Home, More Garden* (Ghent: Copyright Slow Publishing, 2019), 173.

Next spread: House Van Hee  
photo: David Grandorge, 2008







## Introduction

*'From the beginning of my trek, I worked with the IGN maps to draw a sine line of those shortcuts. Not that I was on the run, but I sensed a wind of freedom blowing on those roads.'*<sup>1</sup>

Sylvain Tesson, 2016

Almost thirty years after her first solo exhibition, Marie-José Van Hee and her practice return to De Singel. Invited by the Flanders Architecture Institute within their theme of 'care', we encourage visitors to explore the arts campus designed by Léon Stynen and Paul De Meyer (1958–87) and by Stéphane Beel (1986–2012) through the lens of previous exhibition scenographies by Marie-José Van Hee architecten. We browsed through (un)realized projects and (un)finished works, paying particular attention to those that contributed to their ideation and (non-)realization.

Who makes architecture? Who makes architecture possible? Who still cares for architecture? And who cares for the architects? These were some of the questions we explored in relation to the engagement and responsibilities of the profession. We found that the rhythm of walking, one step at a time, could help to create a space in which to think ahead and look back. We ideated a *parcours* through the De Singel arts campus as an extension of the GR5A

(Grande Randonnée 5A). This long-distance walking trail stretches across the European continent and passes Desguinlei, bending around the arts campus onto Jan van Rijswijcklaan. A detour from this trail leads you to an exploration of artworks that have a permanent place on the campus ('On Sculpture') and to temporary additions selected for this occasion, engaging in a close dialogue with the building and its context.

Counter-intuitively, we focus less on the representation of the architectural production of recent years. Instead, we prioritize the bodily experience of spaces on site by installing a structure as a *temporary visitor* in the exhibition hall, the home and garden of Marie-José in Varkensstraat, Ghent. The exhibition hall, a *Petite Randonnée*, becomes an invitation to rest, pause, consider carefully and at length, but also learn and get a sense of the inner garden that Marie-José cultivates, in close relation with her friends and family, colleagues, artists, contractors and clients.

The exhibition taps into different temporalities. Firstly, that of De Singel's building history. We travel back to the time when Léon Stynen designed the Royal Conservatoire with great respect for the centuries-old landscape he found and over which he would let the arts campus hover if the ring road had not been

constructed. At the same time, this occasion is an invitation to stroll through the expansive arts campus and explore, at your rhythm, the layers added over the years.

Secondly, we revisited scenographies of previous exhibitions the office made, consciously reusing their form and adding new content. More specifically, those designed and made in 1993 (De Singel) and 2018 (Venice Architecture Biennale) reappear, materialized with large-format books placed on red lecterns.

We also look to the future and critically assess the present condition of the location, proposing and realizing two permanent interventions on the campus with the help of generous contractors and sponsors. The interventions resulted in a new perspectival view for one of the long cloister-like conservatoire corridors and a large perforation of the asphalted parking lot so we could plant a tree.

We hope these interventions might set in motion new dynamics for the future of De Singel. At the same time, the act of walking and exploring the campus can generate new memories and have a positive effect on the experience of its day-to-day users and varied visitor publics.

Marie-José Van Hee architecten

<sup>1</sup> Sylvain Tesson, *Sur les chemins noirs* (Paris: Gallimard). From the Dutch translation by Eef Gratama, (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 2017) blz. 38.



## **GR5A – Long route**

*Grande Randonnée*

Introductory Path  
Interventions

First Path  
Planting a Tree

Second Path  
Opening Doors

Third Path  
Curating the Campus

Fourth Path  
Curating the Library

Fifth Path  
Furnishing

Marie-José walking on the way to Santiago  
photo: Ivan Adriaens, 2000





## GR5A - Introductory Path Interventions

*'As we walk upon this earth, our hearts experience anew that rapturous joy we felt as children when we first discovered our ability to move in space – the alternating disruption and restoration of balance which is walking.'*<sup>1</sup>

Dimitris Pikionis

Marie-José Van Hee is a long-distance walker. She not only walks in her spare time, freeing up space to create the designs we know. She also walked quite a distance with her professional practice, slightly uphill, paving the way for younger generations of architects and steadily gaining attention abroad. Walk, reflect, draw. Repeat.

Upon receiving the invitation to make this exhibition, we walked the campus and wanted to use the opportunity to bring some permanent changes to the location. We wanted to make a lasting but subtle impact. First, we opened the asphalt near the main entrance on Desguinlei to plant a tree, installing a living landmark to highlight the arts campus. We then intervened on the border between Stynen's Royal Conservatoire and Beel's extension, bringing light at the end of a hallway and facilitating a connection while highlighting an artwork by René Guiette.

Thinking outside the exhibition box, we further explored the De Singel arts campus as the playground for this occasion. An extended route takes you along several paths on the network of cloister-like hallways of the Royal Conservatoire, meandering through a musical forest of practising student musicians and engaging with the artworks added over the years both inside and out.<sup>2</sup>

The guiding principle of this exploration is the 'Curating the Campus' initiative (now 'On Sculpture'), for which we selected additional temporary artworks placed around the campus. They are placed contextually in relation to the building, to permanently installed artworks in the context of 'On Sculpture', and to furniture designed by Marie-José Van Hee architecten (a bench, table and series of red lecterns).

Solo exhibition at De Singel  
photo: Marie-José Van Hee, 1993





## GR5A - First Path

### Planting a Tree

*'Seasons, cycles, constant motion, changes and processes are represented by trees, as living beings, and in turn these things embody the essence of trees. Experimenting with shapes, colors, textures, shades and sunlight through the foliage is the gift we can offer to the urban dweller when we create a space with trees.'*<sup>3</sup>

Teresa Moller, 2021

Trees are an inspiration to Marie-José. She draws around existing trees, as the housing projects in Boortmeerbeek and Koksijde illustrate. Also, her own house is nested around a tree she planted in the small courtyard of the small house she rented when a student. Suppose there are no trees on the site. In that case, Marie-José suggests that the client should plant one once the building is complete, reinterpreting the centuries-old custom of builders leaving a tree branch at the top of a chimney upon finishing a building.<sup>4</sup>

Books on landscape architecture have always made up an essential part of Marie-José's library. She shows an interest in the context and landscape in which she works with her team early in the design stage. She sees the landscape as integral to the design and continues to work on the design of public space, inspired by landscape

designers and gardeners like Vita Sackville-West, Teresa Moller and Marie-Luise Gothein. With her *History of Garden Art*, Gothein became the source of inspiration for Marie-José's 1974 graduation thesis on the history of European gardens.

To plant a tree is a symbolic and poetic act that establishes a relation between the ground and the sky, but to Marie-José, even more than that, it is an act that simply and pragmatically provides some shade and a place for birds to nest. Respecting Léon Stynen's idea that the old fortress landscape is preserved and pierced only by the columns of the Royal Conservatoire buildings, we chose to break the asphalted surface in front of the arts centre, allowing the earth to breathe again. We then planted a ten-year-old tree – *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* – to contribute in a lasting way to the experience of visitors, both human and non-human, of the conservatoire's immediate environment. Where Stynen contributed to the Antwerp skyline by building three towers as landmarks<sup>5</sup> within the historic fortress landscape, we wondered whether we could invite visitors and hikers along the GR5A route with a living landmark at the main entrance of his horizontal campus.

Tree planted by Marie-José in the 1970s  
photo: Peter Lorré, 2002





## GR5A - Second Path Opening Doors

*'Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.'*<sup>6</sup>  
Leonard Cohen, 1992

Walking the campus in preparation for the exhibition, Sofie De Caigny, director of the Flanders Architecture Institute, pointed out a repositioned fresco by Belgian artist René Guiette. Like a fresco by Guiette in Stynen's own house, located just across the front door entrance, the one Stynen commissioned for De Singel used to be in clear view when walking along the long glazed corridor of the conservatoire. Repositioned in 2012 – at the junction of a horizontal connection between the old and new building (a bridge) and a vertical one (a service lift) – the visibility of this welcoming gesture got lost. Two standard double fire doors connected – but obstructed visually – the passage between Stynen's conservatoire ambulatory cloister and the Beel extension.

As a second, permanent intervention, in order to bring closer the memory of the Guiette intervention, we replaced the (by now damaged) fire-door leaves with glazed ones, bringing perspective to the fifty-metre-long cloister hall and

facilitating a shortcut along the unique, repositioned Guiette fresco.

'Pig Street' in Ghent  
photo: David Grandorge, 2008





## GR5A - Third Path

### Curating the Campus

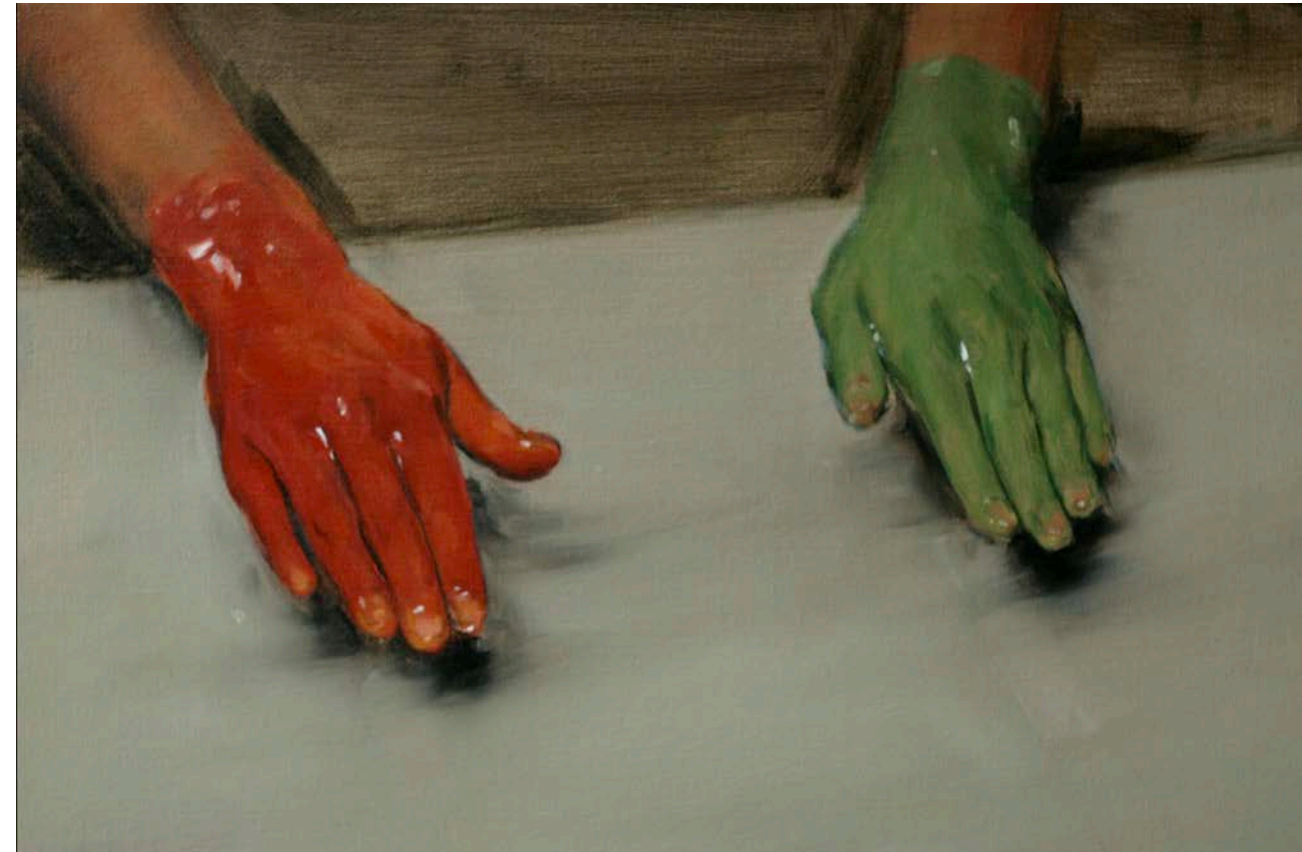
'Art is a guarantee of sanity.'<sup>7</sup>

Louise Bourgeois, 2000

Historically, the verb 'to curate' is derived from the Latin *curare*, 'to take care of'. How can we, as invited curators, look after the arts campus of De Singel? On our exploratory walk, we took a slight detour. We followed the path of former and present curators Moritz Küng and Heidi Ballet, who looked for ways to integrate artworks on the campus carefully.

Could we, in an associative way, temporarily add artworks to the campus and start a dialogue with the building, its surroundings, the other 'On Sculpture' interventions, and the architectural production of the studio? As a starting point, we looked at our previous collaborations with artists and searched the visual archives of Marie-José's lectures, revealing her sources of inspiration.

To substantiate how artworks, cultural artefacts and their creators can, in turn, take care of architects and nurture their mindsets, we arrived at a selection of about ten pieces that we temporarily included in the *parcours*. They are located both on the extended paths of the campus and in the home and garden of Marie-José that have been recreated in the exhibition hall.



Michaël Borremans, *Red Hand, Green Hand*, 2010  
courtesy of Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp  
photo: Peter Cox



## GR5A - Fourth Path Curating the Library

*'By travelling to Italy throughout the 1970s, my interest in Italian literature grew. The description of the landscape and the walk up to the house have opened up my way of looking and experiencing architecture placed within the landscape.'*<sup>8</sup>

Marie-José Van Hee on *The Dust Roads of Monferrato* by Rosetta Loy, 2020

When designing, we draw upon experiences accumulated over the years. 'With each exhibition, we build further on the previous ones', says Marie-José, reiterating the importance of tradition and the refreshing effect of reinterpretation.

We sought to illustrate this adage by recreating part of the 1993 Antwerp exhibition scenography in the lobby area behind the Blue and Red Concert Halls, placing an enfilade of the seven sturdy, original red lecterns with large-format books at the exact location they occupied in 1993.<sup>9</sup> The scenography of the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale is then recreated at the entrance of the exhibition hall, which we transformed for this occasion into Marie-José's home and garden.

Next to producing the visual material for Marie-José's lectures, in-house bookmaking has been a constant activity in the office. For the exhibitions with red lecterns, the studio produced large-format, hardcover and handbound books containing carefully composed pages with a selection of photographic images and *black drawings* describing the atmospheres and essential themes in an oeuvre spanning nearly half a century.<sup>10</sup>

Being close to books is vital to Marie-José. When still a student, she would travel to Amsterdam, Paris and Cologne or ask people travelling abroad to acquire books on and by her favourite designers, builders and gardeners. Not only architecture books but fiction also inspires Marie-José. She piles books on the steps of the stone staircase leading up to her library. On the way to her bedroom, she passes her book collection in the library she placed above the kitchen. Though there's always a warm meal on the kitchen stove for visitors, *food for the mind*, in this case, literally sits above *food for the body*.

Large format books made over time  
photos: Sam De Vocht, 2022





## GR5A - Fifth Path Furnishing

*'Van Hee's sketches illustrate the way she designs interior and exterior all at once, while the section is developed in tandem with the spatial sequences and interior paths through the building. Walls and partitions are not just structural supports and boundaries. Rather, they act as substantial parts of the interior, often combined with a utilitarian function: cupboard, stair, library, or alcove. And in this way, the inhabitation is already incorporated into the first lines of the design.'*<sup>11</sup>

Katrien Vandermarliere, 2018

Throughout the De Singel arts campus, you will find furniture and objects designed by Marie-José Van Hee. The verb 'to furnish' comes from the West-Germanic *furnir*, 'providing what is necessary'. When a client moves to a place designed by Marie-José Van Hee architecten, they only need to bring some cherished pieces of furniture.

According to Marie-José, one doesn't need a lot: a table, bed, bookcase, lamp and some chairs suffice. Users and inhabitants can store other essentials in the walls upgraded to built-in cupboards. Over the years, she has designed several objects following a question, primarily out of necessity. The first was a red lectern (*lezenaar*), designed for the 1993

exhibition. This was followed by a bed (*bed-bed*, House Van Hee, 1997, made public as *bed-bank* for Maniera in 2017). Then a table for House HdF (*huis-werk-tafel*, 2013, research with Frank Ternier and made available for Maniera in 2017) and a lantern for House HdF (*tuin-straat-lamp*, 2013, first issued for House V-C in 2021). In 2017 Maniera commissioned Marie-José to create a storage box (*dien-blad-koffer*). This was the last in a series of ambiguous objects with different uses according to their placement or constellation, making it possible to blur the boundary between in- and outside. For this occasion, she drew a second bench to gather guests at the table (*huis-werk-bank*).

bed-bank for Maniera  
photo: Filip Dujardin, 2017





## GR5A - Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> 'Dimitris Pikionis, 'A Sentimental Topography', in *Dimitris Pikionis, Architect 1887-1968: A Sentimental Topography* (London: Architectural Association, 1989), 68.

<sup>2</sup> See 'Curating the Campus', 'On Sculpture' and 'Curating the Library' by curators Moritz Küng (between 2004 and 2014) and Heidi Ballet (since 2020) as well as the Third Path.

<sup>3</sup> Jimena Martignoni, *Reflections in the Landscape: Teresa Moller* (Mexico: Offset Rebosan, 2021), 34.

<sup>4</sup> Sam De Vocht, 'Undrawing', *a+u* 21:10, 613, Feature issue: Marie-José Van Hee architecten: 10.

<sup>5</sup> The three towers are De Singel (1958–87), Easo Motor Hotel (1969–75) and BP Building (1960–63). See Sofie De Caigny and Bart Decroos, 'Epilogue: Engaging Léon Stynen. Contemporary Interventions in the Royal Flanders Music Conservatoire', in *Léon Stynen: A Life of Architecture 1899–1990* (Antwerp: Flanders Architecture Institute, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Cohen, chorus of the song 'Anthem' from *The Future*, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Publication excerpt (No. 9 of 9) from Louise Bourgeois, *What is the Shape of This Problem?* (New York: Galerie Lelong, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Marie-José Van Hee, 'The Dust Roads of Monferrato', <https://womenwritingarchitecture.org/>.

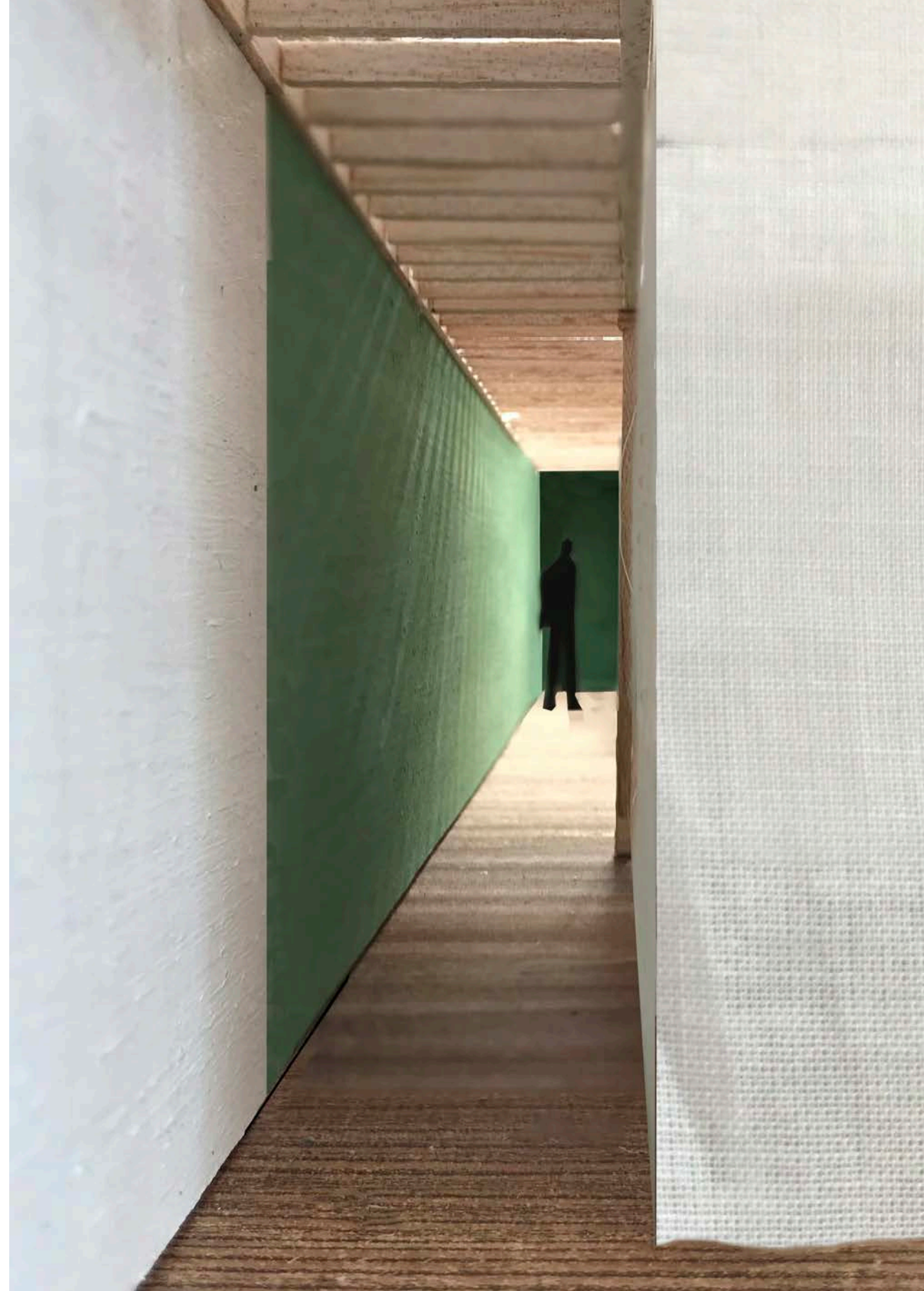
<sup>9</sup> A reprise of this 1990s interior landscape draws attention to the contextuality and strong relations of the lobby area and the terrace to the Wezenberg landscape, which in the late 1950s still existed as a green and hilly landscape, a *terrain vague* around the remains of the ancient ramparts of the medieval Antwerp fortress forming at the time of the design the scenery for ice skating in winter. This water-oriented landscape was the

inspiration for Léon Stynen to design the Royal Conservatoire as a volume on piles, preserving the fauna and flora of this unique condition. For a concise building history of the Royal Conservatoire, see De Caigny and Decroos, 'Epilogue' in *Léon Stynen: A Life of Architecture 1899–1990* (Antwerp: Flanders Architecture Institute, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> For Marie-José Van Hee's first exhibition in 1993, De Singel published an eponymous, thin blue book (graphic design by Gert Audenaert) and a large-format book (graphic design by Peter Derks). Seven years later, the so-called 'black book' followed (published by Ludion, graphic design by Griet Van Haute with Wim Voorspoels) and in 2019, the first English monograph, *Marie-José Van Hee: More Home, More Garden* (graphic design by Inge Ketelers). In 2018 the Flanders Architecture Institute published a scaled version of the large-format book made for the Venice Biennale (graphic design by Lennert Dejonghe and Peter Derks). In 2021 the office produced the content for the Japanese monographic magazine *a+u* (graphic design by Ayako Sato). On the occasion of this exhibition, a new large-format book was composed (by Peter and Viktor Derks).

<sup>11</sup> Katrien Vandermarliere, 'Prologue', in *Marie-José Van Hee architecten: More Home, More Garden* (Ghent: Copyright Slow Publishing, 2019), 10.

Model of the exhibition  
photo: Ben Rea, 2022





## **PR5A – Short route**

*Petite Randonnée*

Introductory Path  
Invitations

First Path  
Street Life

Second Path  
A Drawing Room

Third Path  
Jardin des Amis.e.s

Fourth Path  
Salon des Refusés

Marie-José walking in the 1980s  
photo: Ivan Adriaens





## PR5A - Introductory Path Invitations

De Singel's exhibition hall functions for this occasion as a temporary extension to the patio gardens central to Léon Stynen's design for the Antwerp Royal Conservatoire.

Here, we reinterpret and reconstruct the *Street Life* on Marie-José's doorstep, followed by her iconic *Drawing Room* and her patio garden or *Jardin des Ami.e.s*. We conclude the exhibition with the wild garden in the back, for this occasion labelled *Salon des Refusés*.

Léon Stynen intended to protect the context in which he was to design the Royal Conservatoire; the undulating, hilly landscape of the Wezenberg and former fortress walls were to continue underneath the building on pilotis. History decided another course, and the lower part of the landscape was transformed into a noisy thoroughfare with a ring road and railway line. From within the building, though, we can still experience today the courtyard around which the perambulatory glazed hallways and music rooms lie. Following this line of thought, Marie-José set out to transfer the idea of the courtyard to the exhibition hall by recreating, in an abstract way, the home and garden that she designed for herself between 1990 and 1997 on the plot in the Prinsenhof neighbourhood where she has lived since her studies in the early 1970s.

In January 2021 the Flanders Architecture Institute initiated a dialogue with Marie-José Van Hee architecten in the frame of their annual theme, 'care'. 'Who looks out for the architect?' is a question that has stayed with Marie-José ever since.

This section of the exhibition, called *Petite Randonnée*, draws the bigger picture of the context the office has been working in and is an expression of knowledge-sharing in the field of architecture and the varied environments it operates in.<sup>1</sup>

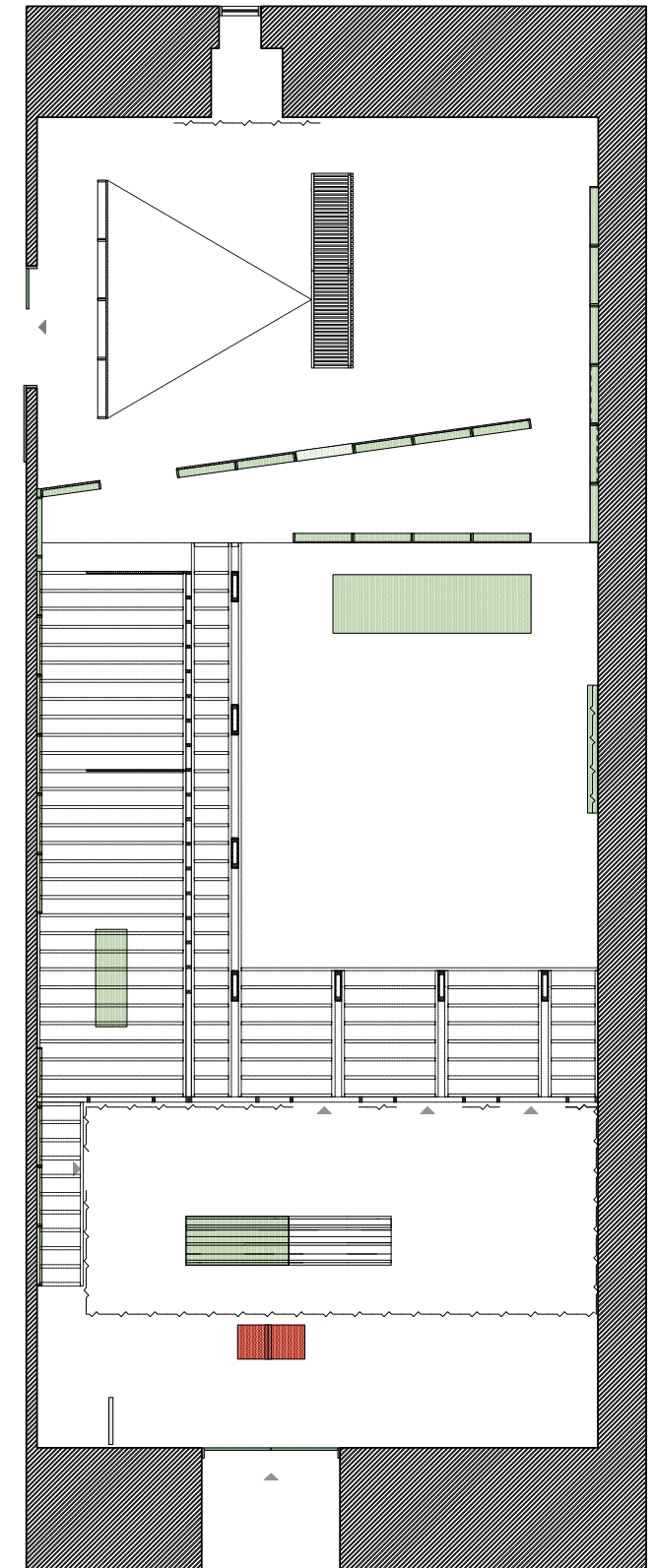
We have attempted to materialize a possible answer to this question by placing contributions from the friends and family members, colleagues, artists, contractors and clients that Marie-José has encountered in the course of her life. These contributions take on varying guises and start a conversation with the abstract representation of the street, home and garden where Marie-José lives. A varied group of contributions represent their makers and their memory of a short or long walk alongside Marie-José. The contributions become the very ingredient that turns a space into a place. Like various objects that Marie-José has collected over the years, they help to *create a place*, to make *more home*, *more garden*.

### Salon des Refusés

### Jardin des Ami.e.s

### Drawing Room

### Street Life





## PR5A - First Path Street Life

*'We often talk of the street entering the house, but not so often of how the interior can enter the street without compromising privacy.'*<sup>2</sup>

David Grandorge, 2018

In 2018, when invited to the Venice Architecture Biennale, we took the 1993 De Singel exhibition as a source of inspiration, reinterpreted its form and expanded its content. Returning to De Singel today, you can experience a variant of the Venice scenography.<sup>3</sup>

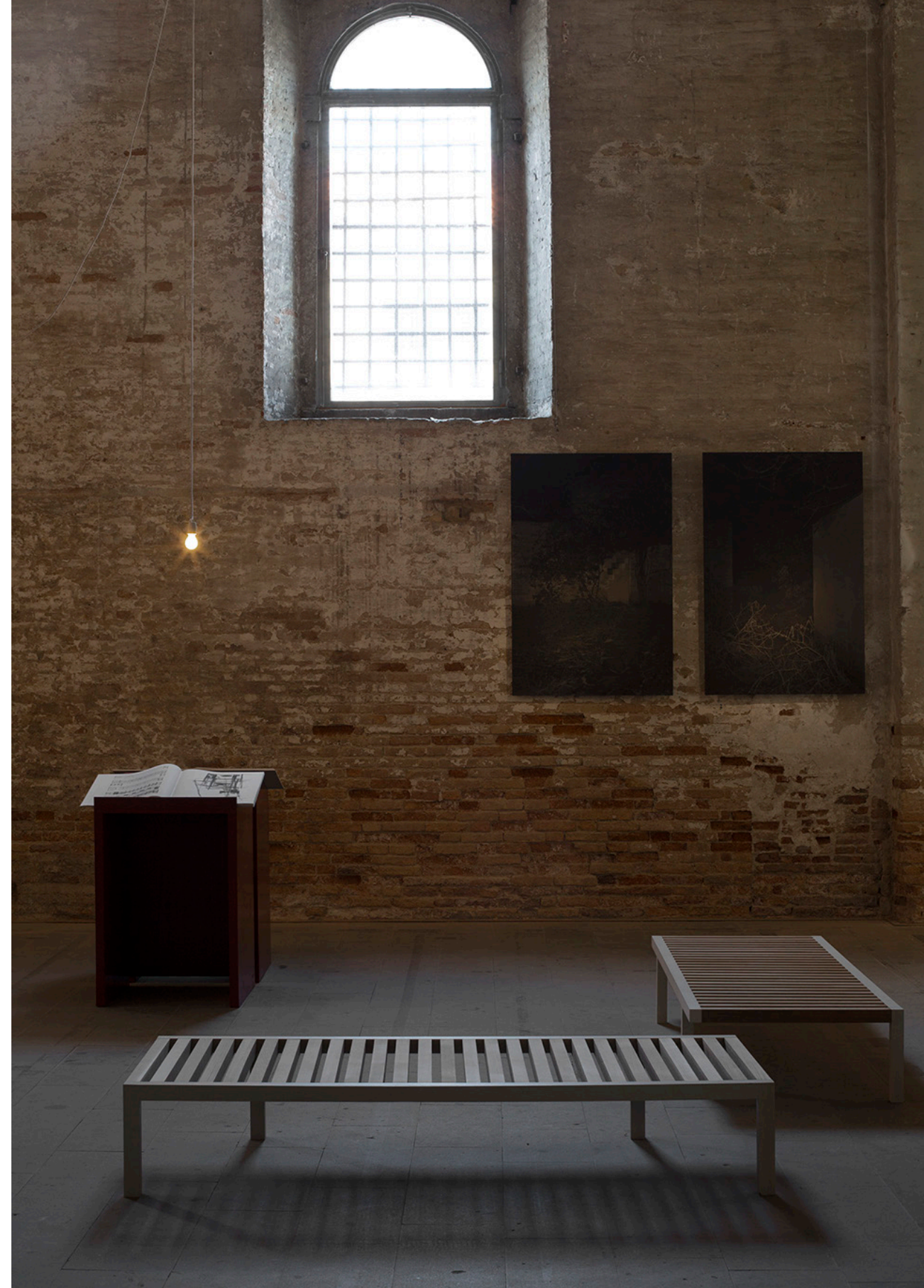
'Take a Seat' invited the visitor to pause along the street of the Corderie dell'Arsenale. When tired of walking among the exhibits, one could rest on a bed-bench and contemplate the photographic artworks of Dirk Braeckman or page through a large-format book on a red lectern.

Today, two bed-benches invite visitors to take a seat and rest. The first space we enter represents the narrow Varkensstraat ('Pig Street') where Marie-José has lived since the late 1970s. We placed two newly produced red lecterns back-to-back, the constellation lit by one lightbulb and each holding a large-format book described earlier. In the Venice setting, one light bulb accompanied the natural light coming from the unglazed window set high in the brick wall, in this case, literally its etymological origin, *wind-eye*.

The lecterns instigate a standing conversation between the visitors paging through the 2018 and 2022 large-format books, engaging with the furniture, the paper and the person in front.

In the street setting, we are showing *tuin-straat-lamp* for the first time, a lantern designed in 2013 for the garden path leading up to House HdF and slightly adapted and manufactured for House V-C in 2021. Again, we confront Marie-José's adage that architectural research never stops and that no two things are the same.

'Take a Seat', Venice Architecture Biennale  
photo: Stefano Graziani, 2018





## PR5A - Second Path A Drawing Room

*“Sketching is the start point of architecture – the beginning of a story”, says Marie-José Van Hee as we look through the drawings that formed the basis of her own house in Ghent (1990-1997). “There’s so much evolution in this project – I had the time then; I could invent anything”.”<sup>4</sup>*

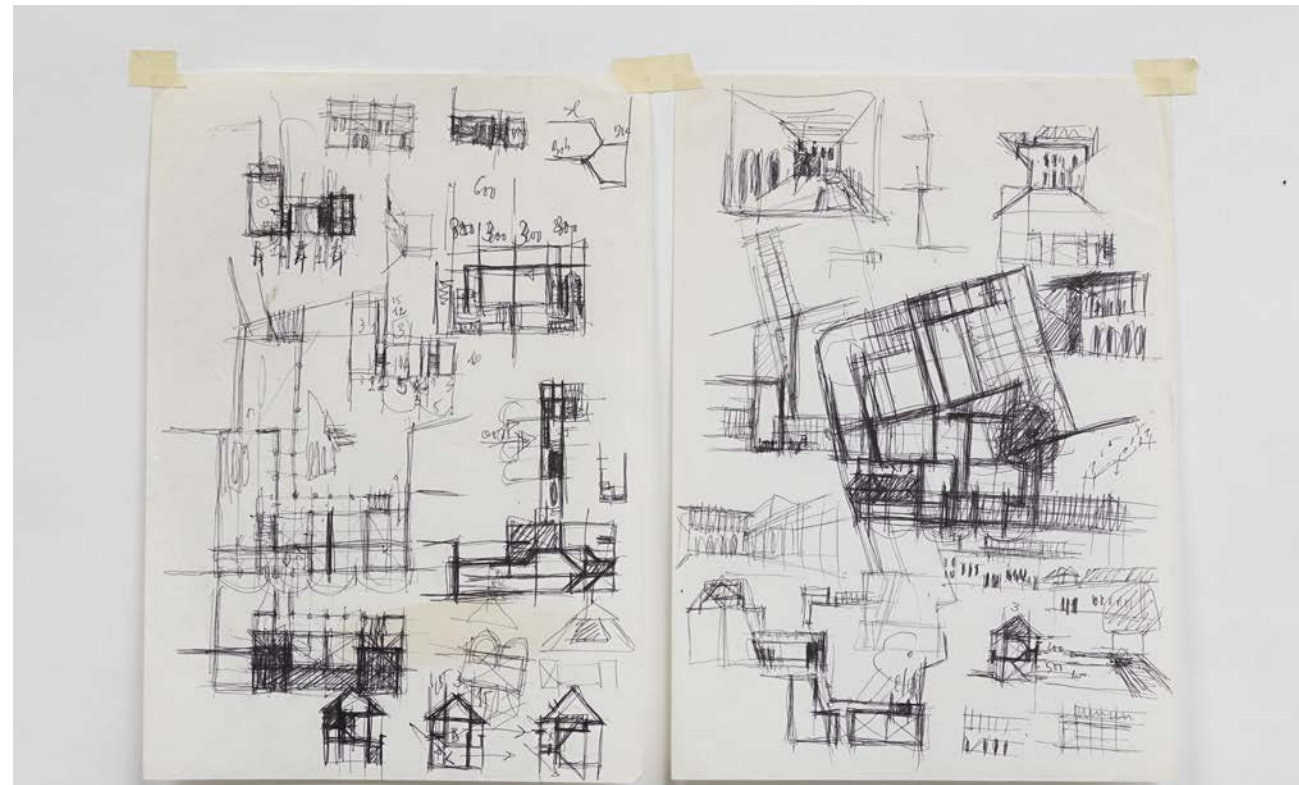
Louis Mayes, 2020

Marie-José ideated her home (1990–97) in the years around the 1993 exhibition in De Singel. Thirty years later, we have created an abstraction of the actual spaces, following their dimensions but not necessarily their materiality. We wished to provide a tactile, bodily experience of the heart of Marie-José’s universe, her *drawing room* and courtyard, visited by many architecture students and academics, architects and architecture amateurs.

Marie-José’s compositions are utterly humane, based on a sequence of contraction and release, allowing users to size up their body (and mind) against her carefully resolved environments. Entering through the narrow kitchen door, one arrives at an abstract recreation of the protagonist of her house, an interpretation of a ‘drawing room’ in the classic sense, a place to *withdraw* and entertain guests.

Next to eating in the company of friends and family, this is also the place where she spends time before going to bed, where she reflects, draws and ultimately *undraws* her designs. Sitting at the table with her back to the garden, Marie-José reads the newspaper in the morning light or, at night, draws in the dim light coming from some table lamps or three light bulbs hanging from the ceiling. A fire in the corner is a presence, as are the many books piled on the staircase or the objects gathered atop the street-facing cupboards.

Drawing Room in Marie-José’s house  
photo: Crispijn Van Sas, 2016  
Sketches of House Van Hee  
archive of Marie-José Van Hee architecten, 1990s





## PR5A - Third Path Jardin des Ami.e.s

*'Van Hee creates scenes for things to happen. That is very important to her. She doesn't want to direct the possibilities of people interacting, only make room for them. The spatial design is connected to experience. No abstract concept, it is rather perceived in movement. She explains: "I care about transitional moments. From room to room. From indoors to outdoors." Mediating between one spatial condition and another, the threshold is a crucial element of architecture.'*<sup>5</sup>  
Hera Van Sande, 2021

A critical spatial configuration in Marie-José's oeuvre is the courtyard, which we renamed for this occasion *Jardin des Ami.e.s*. (Garden of Friends). We translated the environment of Varkensstraat 7 into a scenography, showcasing the thoughtful expressions of collaborators, friends, ex-students, architects, clients and acquaintances. How do they relate to Marie-José and the work she produces with her office? What impact did these relations have on their professional and personal lives?

Just as Marie-José's home is an accumulation of experiences and encounters, the contributions on this occasion have the agency to charge the abstracted spaces. They might be able to say something about the activities and conversations that have

helped to shape Marie-José's mental universe. They spark experiences or memorable moments relating to her work and life, draw a bigger picture of the studio's context, and express how knowledge is shared in the architectural profession while looking after the complex interaction between actors involved in the building process.

Celebration in Marie-José's garden  
photo: Marthe Vandenabeele, 2017





## PR5A - Fourth path

### Salon des Refusés

*'Architecture is a profession which normalises 'recovered memory syndrome' - for such is the psychology of the imagination: recalling memories of things which never existed, coming to the point where you believe your own fabrication with a sense of absolute certainty. So, when you lose a competition, as on occasion you inevitably will, the vividness drains from the building in your head. The translation from private hallucination to shared experience, the normal course of development for a project, is indefinitely deferred. The feeling of pain, a kind of "phantom pain" is proportionate to the palpability that the project had reached, in both a private and a public sense.'*<sup>6</sup>

William Mann, 2002

The *Salon des Refusés* or 'Exhibition of Rejected Works' is a nod to the 1863 Paris exhibition of paintings that the French official state jury refused. William Mann describes the phantom pain one experiences after becoming aware that a project one has invested knowledge and energy in will not become a reality.

When researching the archives, we arrived at 155 unrealized projects – of which 65 are public competitions – out of a total of 400 projects over forty-eight years.

Mann astutely remarks that the loss is more public than private. However, he may be right in his suggestion that these numbers bring forward not-so-well-known but genuine aspects of Marie-José's life. The distance she has walked over the past half century and the energy and care she has invested in the built environment have resulted in an average of five realized but also three unrealized projects per year. She then asks, and would like to extend the question to you, Who still looks out for the architect in contemporary society?

Competition for Textilmuseum Sankt Gallen  
image by Thomas Hick, 2020





## PR5A - Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> 'Conversation with Hülya Ertas (exhibition coordinator and curator at the Flanders Architecture Institute) and Juan Duque (independent curator).

<sup>2</sup> David Grandorge, quote from 'A House on Pig Street', in *Marie-José Van Hee architecten: More Home More Garden*, 109.

<sup>3</sup> 'Take a Seat', May–November, Venice Architecture Biennale 2018, participation at the invitation of curators Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara, Venice, Italy. Exhibition scenography Marie-José Van Hee architecten.

<sup>4</sup> Marie-José Van Hee, interview with Louis Mayes, in: 'Trace Elements', *Architecture Today* 309 (2020): 20. <https://architecturetoday.co.uk/trace-elements/>.

<sup>5</sup> Hera Van Sande, 'Spatial Poetry', *a+u* 21:10, 613, Feature issue: Marie-José Van Hee architecten: 150

<sup>6</sup> Quote from the original English version of William Mann, 'Fantoompijn', in *Marie-José Van Hee Architect* (Brussels: Ludion, 2000), 88–93.





## Marie-José Van Hee architecten. A Walk

30.11.2022 – 21.05.2023

### Exhibition

Curator	Marie-José Van Hee architecten
Scenography	Marie-José Van Hee, Sam De Vocht, Margot De Caster, Ben Rea <sup>Marie-José Van Hee architecten</sup>
Co-production	Marie-José Van Hee architecten, Flanders Architecture Institute (VAi), De Singel
Project coordinator	Hülya Ertas <sup>VAi</sup>
Production coordinator	Nino Goyvaerts <sup>VAi</sup>
Archival assistant	Gweny Dhaese <sup>VAi</sup>
Director VAI	Sofie De Caigny
Director DE SINGEL	Hendrik Storme
Technical director DE SINGEL	Paul Vermeir
Production DE SINGEL	Karl Kana
Coordination technical production	Guy Anthoni <sup>DE SINGEL</sup>
Press & communication	Egon Verleye <sup>VAi</sup>
Installation	Mark De Block <sup>DE SINGEL</sup> , Lorenzo De Brabander, Jurgen Claessen <sup>Zoomin'</sup> , Casimir Francken, Dirk Lesoil <sup>DE SINGEL</sup> , Karel Van Doren <sup>DE SINGEL</sup>

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Special thanks to the galleries and artists for lending the artworks.

### Exhibition guide

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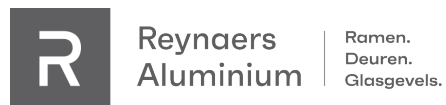


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Bulo





## PR5A - Side path

### Food for Thoughts

'An architect should also be a good cook, says Marie-José Van Hee, because there, too, proportions, colour, spices and shape matter. I remember the wonderful John Dory she prepared for us at her home. The beautiful sunfish became one with the background of the inner court, so I hardly dared to touch it.

And no, this culinary perfection is no coincidence. It follows her principle that you should strive to be very good at several things so that a career switch can go without saying. The row of cookbooks in the kitchen is not just a collection, but a real working library.'

Sylvia Van Peteghem, 2021



<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Van Peteghem, 'Food for Thoughts', a+u 21:10, 613, Feature issue: Marie-José Van Hee architecten: 54.



