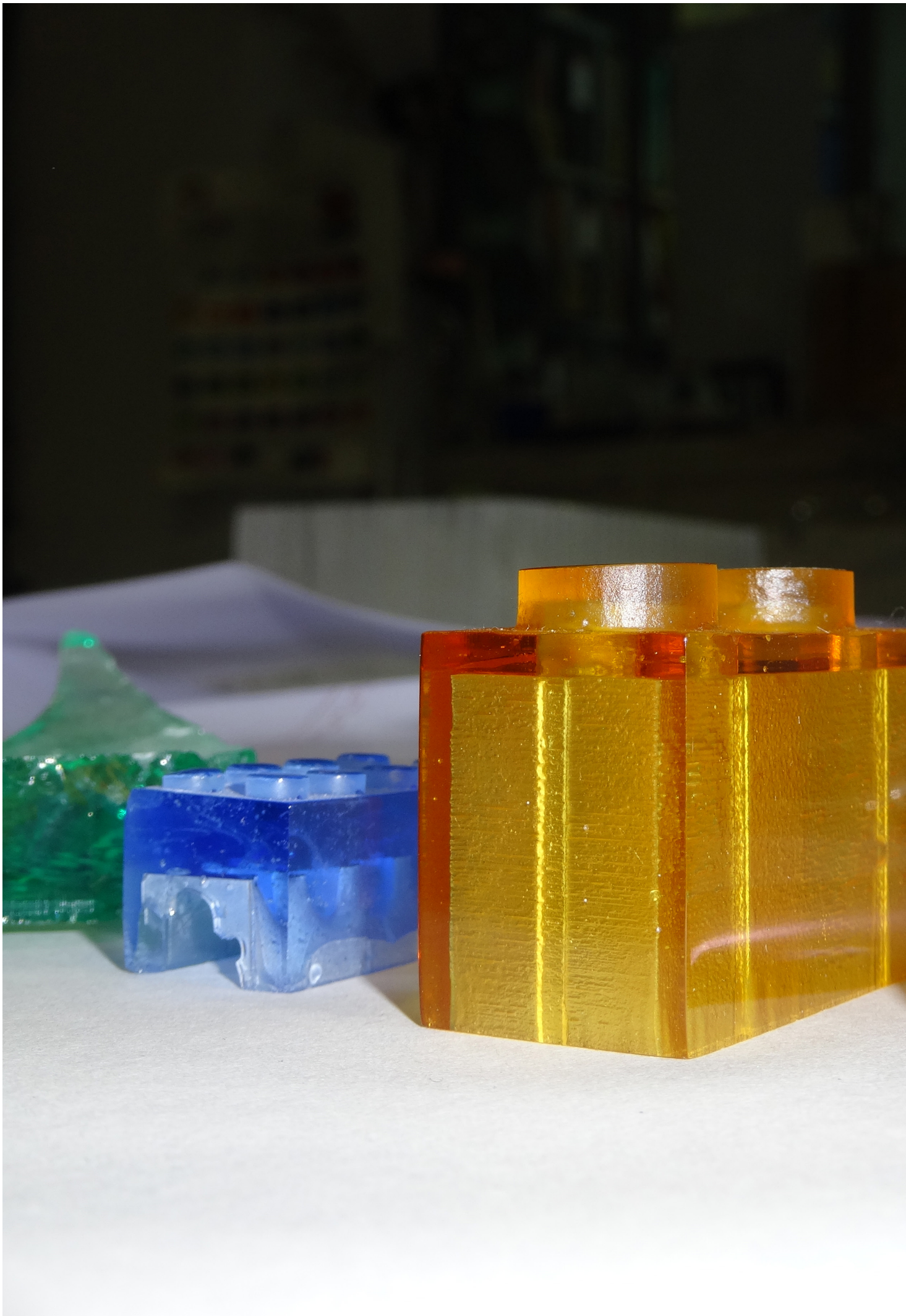


CAHIER # 1



STUDIO LDB



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Founded in 2014, studio LDB is a collaborative art practice exploring the œuvre of artist Lieven De Boeck. The studio develops and shares authorship through the concepts of reproduction, re-interpretation and conceptual research on forms of presentation. In order to show hidden aspects of the work, alternative ways of making the work public are explored.

Studio LDB has a changing setting. One of the tools of the studio is a series of free publications containing text written by invited authors, called cahiers.

The cahier project proposes a composition formed out of critical texts addressing new aspects of the work and elaborates different concepts and research areas by pushing the boundaries of the traditional essay format.

In collaboration with different authors (writers, artists, architects ...) the Cahiers aim to open up a dialogue between the objects and the subject entering into relationship with it. By facilitating complete freedom of perception, each cahier and each author explores their own representation of thoughts, ideas and concepts, moving and approaching an open possibility of imagination and sensation of the work in question.

The Cahier is an ongoing project since 2015, promoting a collaborative practice as a new methodology to raise questions, discourse and research around art, its perception and imagination.

Lieven De Boeck



1. TEXT WIVINE DE TRAUX

DÉFENSE D’AFFICHER

An exhibition by Lieven DE BOECK for MAISON GREGOIRE
Curated by Wivine deTRAUX and Emmanuel LAMBION

Bn PROJECTS-Maison Grégoire are very pleased to invite you to the exhibition “Défense d’afficher”, specially conceived by Lieven DE BOECK for the space of Maison Grégoire. One of the highlights of the show will be Série bleue, an entirely new piece created by De Boeck during a residency at CIRVA* in Marseille.

Discussions of De Boeck’s œuvre frequently allude to his work as an architect. Without a doubt, one finds an engagement with form, as well as a high degree of spatial and visual rigour. Above all, however, De Boeck’s work reveals an ongoing questioning of everything that has to do with residing or being in the world.

“Size determines an object, but scale determines art.” This statement by Land Art artist Robert Smithson is particularly relevant to De Boeck, in that a fundamental part of De Boeck’s artistic idiom is concerned with issues of scale. This artist explores this aspect, which reverberates in the depths of our Platonic cave. By doing so, he provides us with another interpretation of time and space, a way of integrating imaginary space into the real. Smithson continued, “For me scale operates by uncertainty.” Isn’t this also what De Boeck is seeking? To be able to accept uncertainty, to defamiliarise what is known, to confront tabula rasa an environment burdened with instructions. To playfully explore the other side of the visible, “the missing dimension that drives our impulse to see.”

This is what is at stake in Série bleue, a construction of glass blocks whose arrangement evokes the Legos of childhood. In addition to the complexity of the blocks’ construction, their number and structure are meaningful. There are 25 in all: 5x5; the number five recalling the human form (the five digits on both hands and feet, the five senses, the five extensions of the body (arms, legs and head)) and its harmonious relation with the universe. Significant also is each single unit (1x1) which reflects the Fibonacci sequence and the golden ratio, which Le Corbusier used for his famous Modulor. The artist recasts the architectural experience through subdivision. Out of a single unit arises another, according to the rules of fractal composition, in which each element is identical to all others. The piece asserts De Boeck’s drive to imagine an architecture that precedes style. Unlike Legos, which come with instructions and rules, here the imagination is the sole architect of a poem whose script invents itself, as the world was once invented. The artist’s challenge is played out on the level of identity: the eye, the finger-print, the initials LDB, the flag and the house’s walls. But because of De Boeck’s attachment to paradox, the undertaking is not without constraints; it is subjected to chance, just as the person who has thrown the dice.

At the centre of the exhibition glows a blue neon sign consisting of two words, “Défense d’afficher” (Post No Bills). The message is unambiguous, and yet – accustomed as we are to seeing these words on city walls – in this space they take on a wholly different meaning. The Maison Grégoire, a flagship example of modernist architecture built by Henry van de Velde, is both a residence and an art space: a private space temporarily made public, or a public space temporarily made private.

The neon hung on the wall challenges the viewer, and its placement is called into question, as is the function of the “exhibition”. What impact does the image still have today? What does it ask of us? What is there left to display in an era that is saturated with instant, direct presentation? What can be exhibited, other than color? The prohibition is simple and irrefutable, but the context has exhausted language’s logical means, giving rise to paradox, the single procreative resource for the imagination. Meaning is eradicated.





1. TEXT WIVINE DE TRAUUX

Many of Lieven De Boeck's pieces feature erasure. Tipp-Ex covers over the map and topographic data in *The Danish Cartoons* (2006), *The Typology House* and *m.u.s.e.u.m.* (2004), the neutralisation of language via representation in *Red Story* (2010), *Blue Story* (2014), the deposing of reality by an equally illusory untruth in *I Lie* (2012), the dissolving of identity in the series *The White Flags* (2006) and in the neon piece *Le Corbeau* (2010). De Boeck's sculptural work draws on the embodiment of negation and disappearance.

This incarnation of absence should not obscure the importance of what occurs within and around De Boeck's chosen materials. Glass, which the artist favours for how it interacts with light and for its unpredictability, is both the container and the conveyor of the image. The sculpture presents the contrasting and multi-faceted orientation of glass vis-à-vis light. In this work, De Boeck's materials are associated with the color blue – the blue of spatial ambiguity as advocated by Yves Klein, the blue of a blank screen, of infinite space, but also of blue movies, adult films in which everything is projection, desire and fantasy.

A sky is projected onto a wall of the *Maison Grégoire*, a sky straight out of a picture postcard that brings to mind faraway places. The sky of Los Angeles, the Hollywood city of appearances and mirages where De Boeck was in residence for several months. He photographed the sky over time at the same hour of the day, and the same color inevitably appeared.

"Image not found" – these few words appear across the film. There is nothing to see. The sea of projected desires has become disembodied, like a mirage. It dissipates with the mind at the outer edge of blue's atmospheric dissolution. *Image not found* is a sculpture without image, a tangible image that does not want to exist as such, that seeks deliverance from its role of image. An image that likely is found elsewhere, in another form, through a sleight of hand favoured by the artist.

De Boeck's use of projection is compelling. We accept that the projected image of a three-dimensional object (the sky in this case) is two-dimensional. Its "apparition" on the wall at a reduced scale is a projection of the "appearance" of the full-scale object. But how are we to distinguish apparition from appearance, when both resemble each other – the void and the infinite – producing a recursive effect? How can we tell the copy from the original, the negative from the positive?

This system of transposition, or re-creation, which explores the field of visual reciprocity, is examined in reverse fashion in *Blue Story*. In this piece, a poem by Laurie Anderson, a figure from the underground New York art scene of the 1970s, is rendered three-dimensional. The origin of the poem is also meaningful. It was produced during an artistic period we now look back on with nostalgia, a time when it was possible to emphatically reconcile the ordinary gesture with flashes of resistance. New York is also the city where De Boeck gathered his alphabet, an alphabet that treats language as a construction material, with its (memory) fragments and its (urban) defects. *Blue Story* functions like a rebus in the best tradition of Marcel Broodthaers. The sculpture is white, stripped clean by the transposition; situated in space, it is the embodiment of a narrative that wishes to be seen but cannot be read.

Matrixed in the geometric stability of a structure, the sculpture experiments with the void between the symbols, the white between the words, the silence that takes shape. Without a doubt, as with *Blue Story*, it is in interstitial spaces that De Boeck's œuvre most fully finds expression. These are spaces that connect his works to each other and to their environment: in-between spaces, spaces of discrepancy, spaces propitious for doubt – infinity's only potential mirror.

Wivine deTaux

*Centre International de Recherche sur le Verre et les Arts plastiques. Lieven De Boeck began his residency in late 2012, having won a call for projects earlier that year.





2. TEXT ZAC ROSE

INTRODUCTION

Subjectivity is especially important in considering Lieven De Boeck's art because he draws so freely on the events of his life and his body. Because his work, like a body, is itself quite fragile and difficult to conserve, many of the pieces will not outlast their creator and when and where we encounter them will ultimately shift their meaning. This context implies splits, fragments, and a questioning nature.

Nevertheless, within De Boeck's questioning there is a resistance to the kind of identity politics that outlines categories, defines separations, and devalues uncertainty. Instead, there is a poetic sensitivity to the constraints of materiality, of time, of history even, that repurposes ambiguity into a heightened state of awareness.

De Boeck's awareness, however, stands apart from knowingness. While his work is often witty, even ironical, it is a generous and sincere irony: not distant, but intimate. It literally moves us, demanding we stand up, walk around, look closely, and listen more closely still. Consequently, it's difficult to define the kind of art De Boeck makes: more an installation artist than a sculptor, more a photographer than a painter, De Boeck's work draws on all these established practices while winking at their history.

Yet De Boeck's attitude is also averse to self-revelation. Although he inserts bits and pieces of himself (from thumbprint to thought-bubble) into every project, these clues remain gently hidden within the terrain he explores with his audiences. This terrain is sometimes about specific geographies and experiences (Brussels, Marseilles, Los Angeles), but more often about questioning everyday rules by highlighting the arbitrariness of "universal" principles. In this way, De Boeck shares something with performance artists (or performers like, say, Duchamp, who spent their careers performing as "artists"). Indeed, De Boeck's style, as we understand it, is always a kind of performance of himself and where he stands in the flow of natural life.

The works' general restraint as it explores this flow, its repetition and overall economy (despite what some may see as its pop dimensions) are visually pleasing, but again, their chief attraction is philosophical. The art is about the search for a system of self-inquiry, a system of (self-) measurement that combines the personal and the universal. Such questions absorb De Boeck. In the end, though, his work is not invested in answers, but in what questioning gives us, what we metaphorically risk and matter-of-factly gain in the asking.



2. TEXT ZAC ROSE

DÉFENSE D’AFFICHER

“Défense d’afficher,” more familiar to English-speakers as “Post No Bills,” is a commonly ignored imperative found on building façades and construction sites throughout the Francophone world. Lieven De Boeck was inspired by the graffiti and visual noise of Marseilles when creating his homonymous light sculpture, coyly appropriating this plea for civic tidiness while subverting its demands for graphic silence.

Collaborating with a commercial sign-maker for the piece, De Boeck developed a neon light whose gas would steadily deepen after forty-eight hours of illumination into the rich and famously static International (Yves) Klein Blue. Looped into cheery lettering based on his own handwriting, in this way quietly asserting himself as the artist, De Boeck’s Défense d’afficher—instead of disappearing into Klein’s solid, imageless, texture-free color—radiates out at us, unmissable from where it hangs. The work is thus distinctly Belgian in style, a Ceci n’est pas un questioning of materials, means, and message as well as a tongue-in-cheek statement about art’s ability to render them all absurd.

At the same time, Défense d’afficher is perpetually incomplete, and therefore ambiguous about its intentions: it will, tragically, never be switched on long enough in a gallery setting to reach its true bleu. As a result, De Boeck’s discourse on originality (hand-crafted versus workshop-commissioned; found verbiage versus unique compositions) remains half-finished since it will never be aired in full. Défense d’afficher in this way—like all those affiches never posted—assembles a collage of references—to the street, to Klein, to commerce, to De Boeck himself—which can only allude to the piece’s potential meaning.

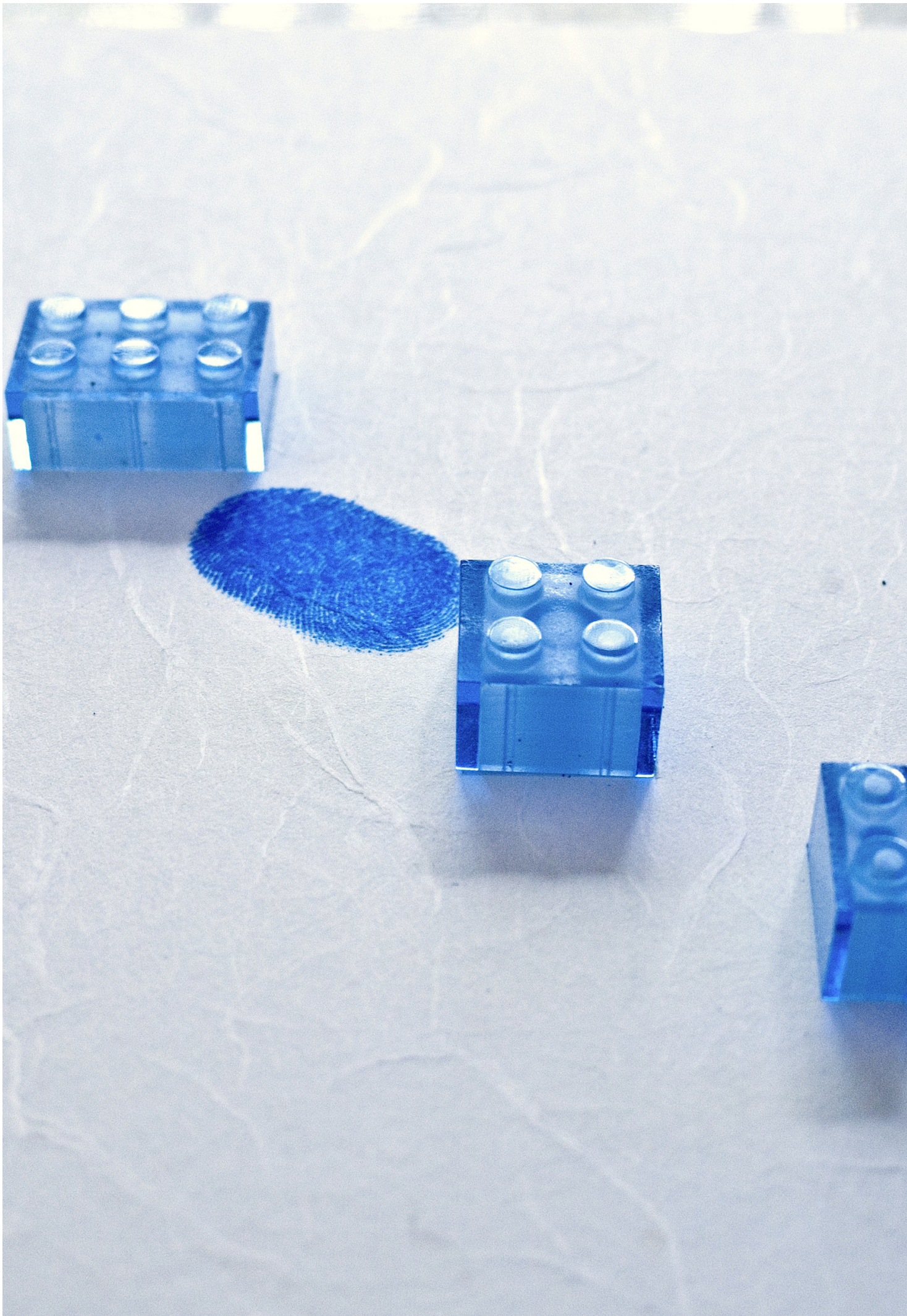
These allusions suggest the inherent incompleteness of art-making as a socially “useful” act. But by resisting the creation of “new” images, De Boeck’s work manages to distil their derivative chaos into the calm of glowing lights. These are lights that grow, like our minds, tranquil at night, their full energy deepened by being perpetually postponed until tomorrow.

IMAGE NOT FOUND

During a residency in Los Angeles, Lieven De Boeck was struck by the cloudless blue of the Southern California sky, so clear and luminous that it begged to be reached out and touched. Yet air is transparent, immaterial, incapable of being grasped by hand unless captured in a photograph (inevitably distorting the intensity of the colour and corrupting the intended message). Image Not Found is De Boeck’s reckoning with L.A., his investigation into light and air, into presence and absence: a non-linear search for an explanation to the childhood question “why is the sky blue?”

We often say “blue sky thinking” to mean that we should imagine without limits, ignore conventional boundaries, and chance the miscommunication that art typically strives to avoid. This is one reason artists go on retreats (for instance to L.A.), leaving familiar spaces hoping their thinking will likewise unleash itself. However, in the digital age that same deep blue is also a colour of disruption. When a computer crashes, or there is a lack of communication between video equipment, rather than a flashing red screen the result is a stark blue field with the text “image not found”—a deep irony for those whose job is to communicate through images. For De Boeck, this blue is a default code for blank slate, tabula rasa, start over and try again.

Image Not Found has appropriated these words of technical failure in order to reprint them across a photograph of the Los Angeles sky. It is a complex play on the nature of image-creation and image-preservation in the 21st century—with photography today as an obsolete niche or computer-assisted process. Reiterating this predicament, one version of Image Not Found is presented in the decidedly mid-century medium of a slide projector



2. TEXT ZAC ROSE

But unlike a typical slide show, De Boeck’s projector does not cycle and click. It gives us an unchanging picture materialized on a blank wall, a wall without which the static light, i.e. the image, would dissolve into nothing (and be “not found”).

The second version of Image Not Found goes one step further by removing the referential blue sky altogether. Instead, De Boeck presents a mirror silkscreened with just the text. A “through the looking glass” destabilization of form and function—and, once again, of medium and message—that would be immediately recognized by Wonderland’s Alice.

While a slide projector depends on light shining from behind to articulate its image, mirrors depend on light reflecting off their polished surfaces for effect, as well as the subjective angle of the viewer’s eye as the final arbiter of the mirror’s contents (which also places us in danger of not “finding” the “image” if we approach it the wrong way—for instance, by looking at the piece in a photograph).

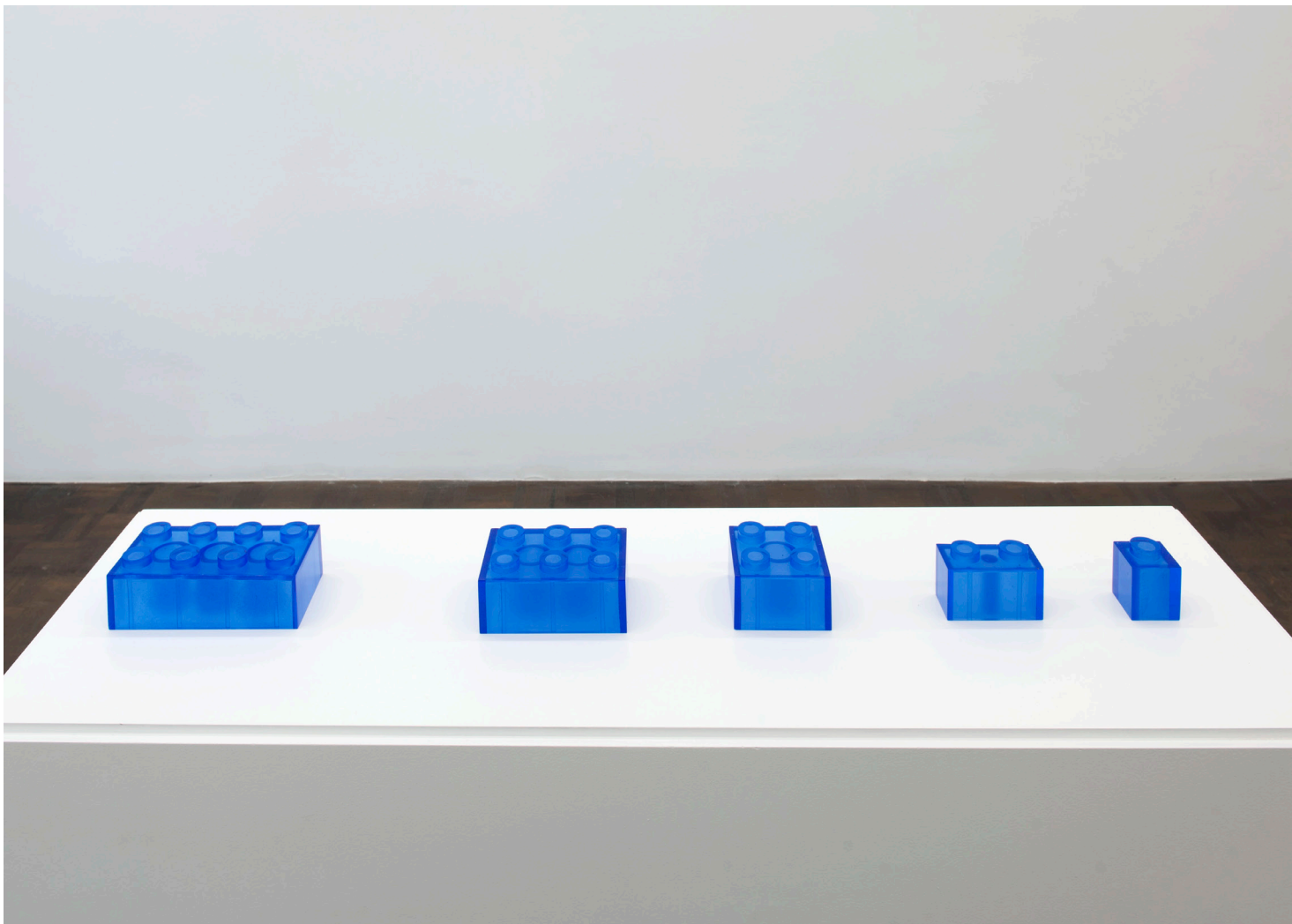
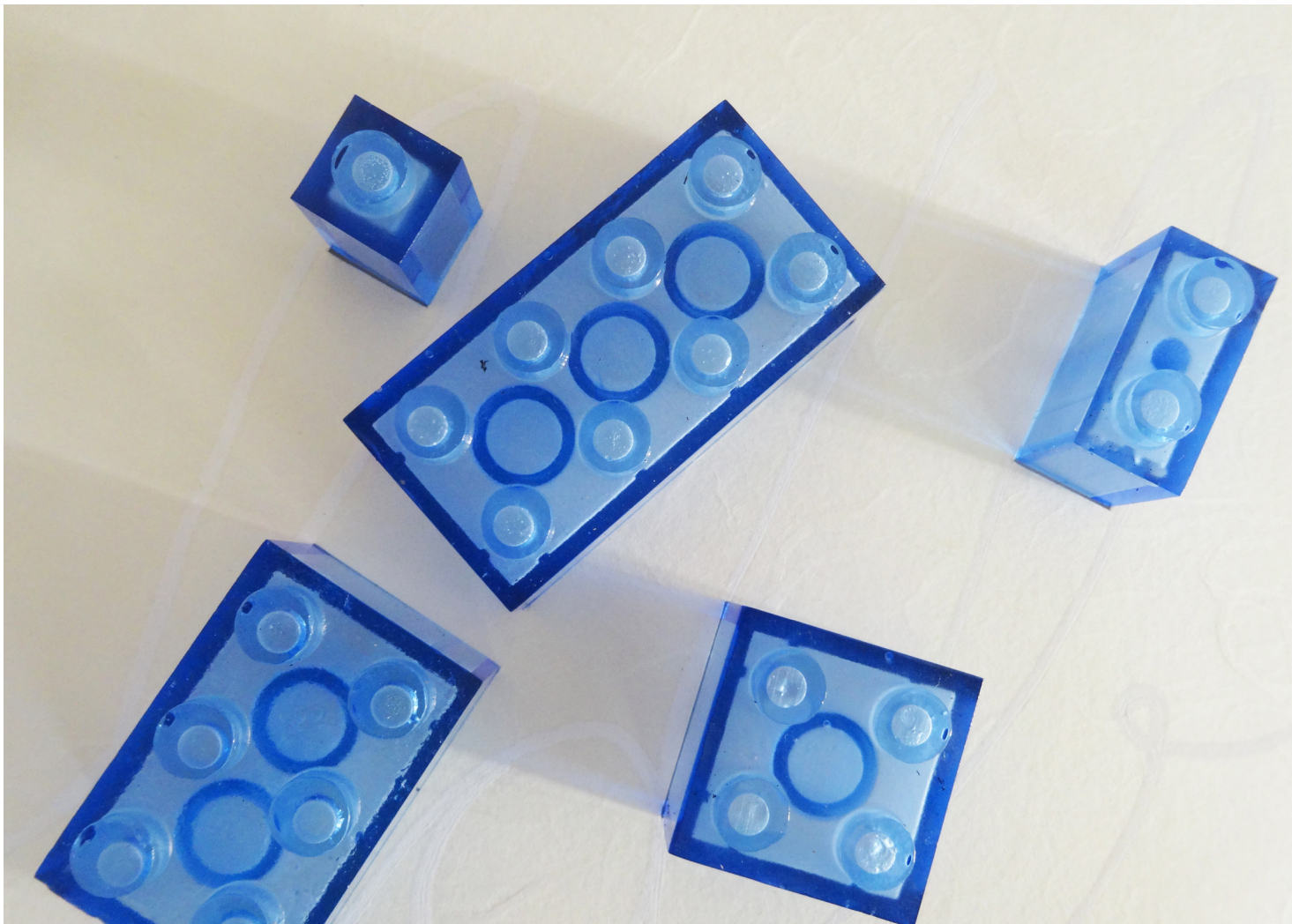
The mirror, however, tells the audience they are not there, that they cannot be found, that the mirror does not recognize them, that the software of who they think they are, of their visual identity, is not compatible with the mirror’s hardware. That perhaps the image they hold of themselves does not in fact relate to any interior state of being. That they must start over and try again. In the end, then, Image Not Found is weighing the implications of what it means to be both present and absent, transparent and opaque, to know and not know yourself—the dislocation of a Northern European in the California desert sun.

LA SÉRIE BLEUE

For La Série Bleue, Lieven De Boeck collaborated with a traditional glass-maker in the South of France to create a series of Lego-like blocks in a nostalgic, vitreous blue at once as luscious as candy and as cold and brittle as the most delicate Murano vase. While the crafting of the bricks was complicated and highly technical—involving laser-printing of the cast to excise any logos—the idea behind their development was that of a return to basics, to a lack of pre-defined images, to the literal building blocks of an identity.

The various glass bricks were serialized and scaled according to a Fibonacci sequence (1, 1, 2, 3, and 5), which has its origins in the Golden Section found across natural ratios that form the stylistic basis for harmonious compositions in art, architecture, and music. The presentation of the scaled iterations, in turn, each express a fragment from the artist, his work and life, but never reveal his complete self. The smallest series, “Scale 1”, is placed in circle around a print of De Boeck’s iris reflecting his studio window (the eye, of course, being an age-old “window” into the soul, a portal between inside and outside). A second “Scale 1” is an arrangement in which the distance between the blocks conforms to a Fibonacci sequence based on the artist’s thumbprint in blue ink—the state’s measure of a man and a criminal’s I.D., but also a gesture towards the child’s carefree desire to finger the blocks and leave sticky traces behind. The interplay between print and block indicates that perhaps the glass piece is itself the best way to know De Boeck.

“Scale 2”, while looking haphazard, is in fact organized along the lines of De Boeck’s enlarged initials “LDB”, whited-out with Type-ex. The blocks define the letters volumetrically rather than linearly, indicating that a signature—unlike an eye-colour or a fingerprint—is designed by the artist himself, and moulded over a lifetime. The blanked signature also invokes the seminal 16mm film by fellow Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers, Une seconde d’éternité during which Broodthaers wrote his initials “MB” in one second. Whether initials (or a signature) can stand in for the eternal, here they capture an extrinsic aspect of a self, the longing for permanence residing in shared memory, time, community, and, less often, artistic celebrity.



2. TEXT ZAC ROSE

“Scale 3” is positioned on a white Belgian flag. The white flag is not a symbol of indifference to the artist’s nationality and the location of his artistic practice, but a reference to a much earlier work based on a sequence of worldwide flags all executed in white, denuding them of their specificity and ascribing them with a post-Cold War sameness. In this way, the white flag is a “surrender” to the forces of globalization that has drained individuality from regional identities, leaving only an allegiance to technical and technological conformity as possibilities for self-understanding. Hence the preciousness of De Boeck’s hand-crafted blocks, logo-free but associated with the “official” categories of corporate trademark and biometric data: eye-scans, fingerprints, signatures—a measure of ourselves that is at once universal and arbitrary.

“Scale 5” takes up the work of measuring the self, instigated by “Scale 1.” Unlike the previous scales, “Scale 5” blocks are not preserved in a showcase, but exposed: they are meant to be handled, their weight should surprise, the effort of grasping an individual, his identity, should be work, should carry the weight of real bricks rather than ethereal glass. Here, De Boeck himself functions as the “meter” along which the blocks are laid out. His own measurements coordinate the blocks according to a prearranged, yet self-chosen gauge. It is both architectural—a brick after all builds a building—and a deeply personalized quasi-portrait, giving us a sense of De Boeck’s own size, his own ability to take up the space around us, without ever actually showing us his “looks.” He remains imageless, but somehow fully material.

The subject of La Série Bleue is both Lieven De Boeck the artist and how he fits into the world (neatly, like one toy brick clicked into place; awkwardly, like a fragile bloom of handmade glass) and also “Lieven De Boeck,” Belgian citizen, resident of the New Europe, assessed and measured, filed and known to authorities, to collectors, to gallerists and to other artists by his body and its role in the democratic-creative state. This hybrid artistic form thus becomes an inherent corollary to a world where the rules are in fact no longer clear and where our self-determined principles of measurement have become the uniquely sufficient means of understanding who we are and where we stand. It is a world of fractures and divisions (like micro-cracks in a block of cast glass) where the events of recent history have undercut the certainties previously guaranteed by capitalist investment and empirical science, or—as in Belgium—nationalism and language, even.

Personal memory and the creative expression it gives rise to, La Série Bleue argues, might fill the gap somewhat. The various scales allow childhood toys to (literally) crystalize into usable images of the self, a made-to-measure matrix that drafts the conventions of identity imposed by schools, governments, offices—even our parentage—and reorders them according to our own internal desires, helping locate an individual within his or her own chosen contexts. Arbitrary and subjective still, but freer.

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