



ENGLISH

VOICE OVER



BOHNEFANTEN



Featuring:

Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rhame

Lawrence Abu Hamdan

Yusra Abo Kaf

Effi & Amir

Shilpa Gupta

Domenico Mangano & Marieke van Rooy

Amir Yatziv

Katarina Zdjelar

Cover image: Effi & Amir, *Places of Articulation: Five Obstructions* (video still), mixed media, 2020
Courtesy of the artists

Left: Domenico Mangano & Marieke van Rooy, *Coral Graft, Mental Reef*, series of six sculptures, enamel on ceramics, 2019. From *The Dilution Project*.

Photo: Giorgio Benni. Courtesy of the artists and MAGAZZINO Gallery, Rome





The exhibition *Voice Over* attempts to listen to exiled voices, as they resonate via artworks from all over the world. From poetic sculptures and video essays, to participatory documentaries with displaced communities, the exhibition shows a range of works that explore the political power and potential of the human voice.

In recent years, extreme narratives of nationalism, xenophobia and isolationism surface around the world, resulting in individuals and communities not being heard. Some voices claim to be speaking for others, leaving no room for different narratives. *Voice Over* deals with physical exile, imposed as a form of control and categorization, but at its heart lays a less visible form of exile - the silencing of voices. As limitations on freedom of speech often go hand in hand with limitations on freedom of movement, the participating artists explore the possibilities of protesting against these forms of violence and marginalization. They examine the ability of the human voice to infiltrate borders and alter preconceptions.

The artworks look at the global system to categorize and mark borders, and how it is confronted with the ever-changing hybrid character of human identity. As algorithms

become a tool to reinforce prejudice, define enemies and hide any subversion from mainstream narratives, the exhibition also touches on the role of technology and the media in the creation and the representation of violence. The Internet was once dreamt of as a utopian place of resistance, one without borders, but it has turned into another stage for the propaganda of governing entities, another sphere to be occupied by those in power. While some works explore these notions directly, others offer the power of real-life presence and intimate encounters.

The artists also use poetry as a powerful tool to take apart the ordering and monitoring regime of the gaze, through the more abstract power of the human voice. In his book *Lexicon of the Mouth*¹, theoretician Brendan LaBelle described the mouth as the place of creating oneself as a subject, as it is so radically connected to both language and the body – the place of constant struggle between the force of objectification and the demand for subjectivity. The works in *Voice Over* capture this place of tension, as they manifest acts of silencing and at the same time attempt to undermine them.

1 Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary*, Bloomsbury Press, 2014.

The artists in *Voice Over* reflect on their role as political agents. They question whether they, as artists, can give a voice to those who are silenced, and expose the fractures and impossibilities of representing another. Examining the reverberating sphere between speaking and silencing, they ask who gives voice to whom; how can we really listen, and is this enough?



1. Shilpa Gupta

These two works by Shilpa Gupta are part of an extensive project reflecting on the monitoring systems that penetrate, control and exile voices and bodies. The project involved researching instances in the present and past (going back to the eighth century), when regimes set out to imprison poets for their words. This has culminated in several works, among them was *For, In Your Tongue, I Cannot Fit*, a site specific sound installation with 100 speakers, microphones and printed texts (2017-2018), where the audience could walk among the poems, read out loud through the speakers, reincarnated into a multilingual choir.

In *Words Come From Ears*, the poetic words of the artist constantly interchange on a flap board, as if stranded in limbo in some unidentified border zone: "Do we need a permit to breath, eat, speak, think, dream?" *A Liquid, the Mouth Froze*, is a bronze cast of the inside of a mouth, as if frozen in time and not able to speak.



Shilpa Gupta, *Words Come from Ears*, motion flap board, 2018
Photo: Pat Verbruggen. Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua

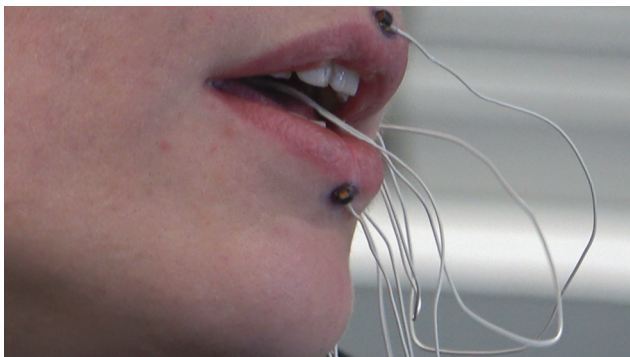
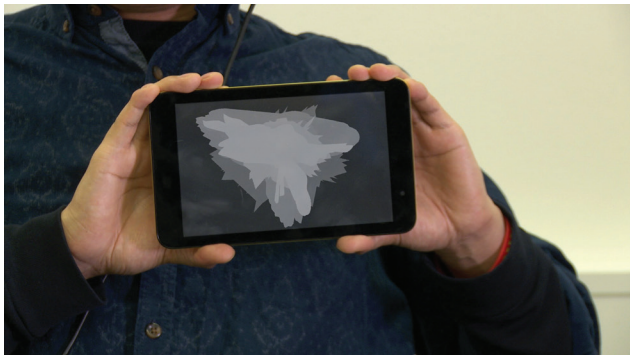


Shilpa Gupta, *A Liquid, the Mouth Froze*, cast of open mouth in gun metal, etched brass plate, 17.5x11x18.5 cm, 2018
Photo: Pat Verbruggen. Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua



Shilpa Gupta, born in 1976, India, lives and works in Mumbai. Her work engages in dialogues between territories and languages, between singularity and collectivity, between intimacy and public life and between signs and analogies.

2. Effi & Amir



Effi and Amir,
*Places of
Articulation: Five
Obstructions*
(video stills),
mixed media,
2020
Courtesy of
the artists

And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Shibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.²

Five Obstructions takes the spectator on a journey across borders, from Iraq and Tibet to Northern Ireland, Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. However, it explores a more deeply engraved border, the invisible border of our oral cavity, which marks and defines the sounds we can emit and the words we can pronounce.

Touring between territories – sonic, anatomical and political ones – the work brings forward contemporary manifestations of Shibboleth – a term that originates in a biblical episode and is used today in language tests to determine group belonging, as part of asylum request procedures in Europe.

The work examines the power of the voice and the role of the mouth, a sort of personal mobile checkpoint. Using different types of imaging methods and visualizations of the vocal apparatus, those check points are rendered visible, questioning the limits of identification and definitions, revealing blurred lines and zones of ambiguity.



Effi and Amir, born in Ramat Gan, Israel in 1971 and in Haifa, Israel in 1969, are visual artists who live in Brussels and have worked together since 1999. Their work involves video, performance and participatory strategies and often deals with the construction of collective and symbolic identities.

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3. Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rhame

A choir sings with a metallic voice, at times sounding like glitches in a synthesized pop song, at others like a computerized prayer. Characters appear and disappear, their body movements repetitive and erratic. In the background, documentary footage of the Separation Wall and other images of the injured landscape created by the Israeli occupation are visible.

Fragments of Edwards Said's text *After the Last Sky* also take their place on the screen. This poetic and personal text, written in 1983 about Palestinian refugees, is repurposed by the artists to reflect on what it means now to be designated as an 'illegal' person, body or entity.



Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rhame, *At those terrifying frontiers where the existence and disappearance of people fade into each other* (video still), single channel video, 2-channel sound, 8'06", 2017. Courtesy of the artists

The text starts with the words: “We have experienced much that has not been recorded. Many of us have been killed, scared, silenced, without a trace. And the images used to represent us, only diminish our reality more.”

The characters in the video are avatars of people who participated in the Great March of Return, the Gaza border protests that took place every Friday from March 2018 to December 2019. The march was a demonstration for the right of Palestinian refugees to return to Palestine, and against the violence and the ongoing siege of Israel on Gaza since 2006.

The avatars are constructed of still images found on the Internet and turned into virtual animated characters. The avatar software renders the missing data in the original image as scars, glitches and incomplete features on the characters’ faces. The impossibility to document personal trauma thus becomes an attempt to create a sort of fugitive, futuristic, collective voice.



Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme were born in 1983 in Nicosia, Cyprus and Boston, USA. They live and work in Ramallah and New York. Their work stands at the intersection of performativity, political imaginaries, the body and virtuality, resampling the past and reimagining a present not bound to colonial and capitalist narrative.

4. Amir Yatziv

A virtual boat is sinking in virtual water, its condition affected by a live feed of the exchange rate of Bitcoin versus US dollar. The image of a sinking boat, which has become a symbol of the current refugee crisis, is complimented by a voiceover from *White Wilderness*. Disney produced this nature documentary highlighting life in the subarctic in 1958. The film, which won an Oscar for best documentary, is mostly remembered for the scene in which migrating lemmings jump to their death from a cliff into the ocean. Years later it has become clear that the scene was staged, and the lemmings didn't migrate nor commit suicide, but were pushed to their death by the film's production crew in order to create drama.

The conjunction of this voiceover with the image of the boat in its realm of live simulation, affected by the arbitrariness of political and economic empires, emphasizes the role of media manipulation – what has become known as 'fake news' – in establishing power relations. It also hints at the continuing role of those who produce and direct reality by inflicting terror and violence.



Amir Yatziv, born in 1972, is a filmmaker and visual artist who lives in Tel Aviv, Israel. Yatziv is interested in past narratives and their contemporary interpretation. In his work he creates a sense of estrangement, revealing the impossibility of a single coherent historical truth. Special thanks to Gilad Reich for his part in this text.



BTC/USD 8413.65 ▲

Amir Yatziv, *It's like being lost in a hall of mirrors (live simulation CGI still)*, 2020

FLOOR **3**



Exhibition starts here



Shilpa Gupta



Effi & Amir



Basel Abbas and
Ruanne Abou-Rhame



Amir Yatziv



Yusra Abo Kaf



Lawrence Abu Hamdan



Katarina Zdjelar



Domenico Mangano &
Marieke van Rooy



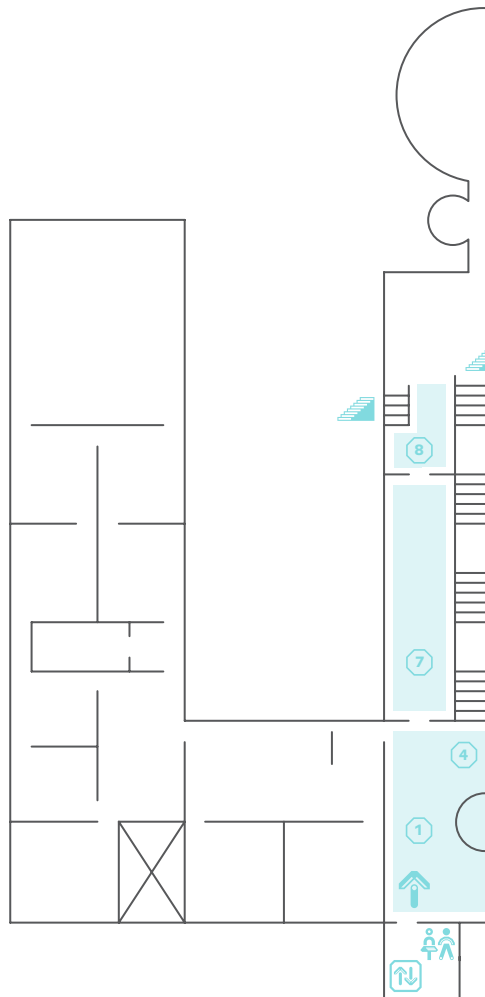
Lift to other floors

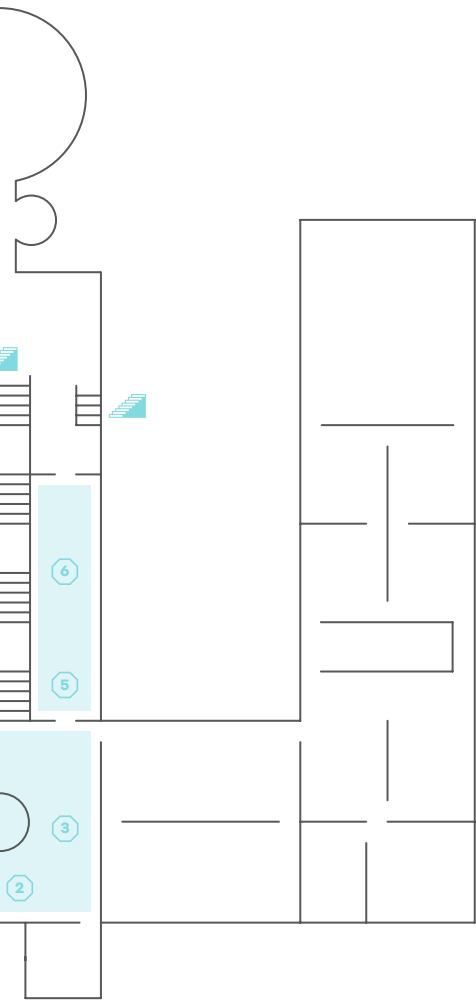


Stairs to other floors



Toilets





5. Yusra Abo Kaf

*Oh Nasser, I'll abduct you
We'll run east and cross the border to Jordan*

*Oh mother, time is lingering
From Egypt, goods are coming*

*Oh Nasser, oh my cousin
They beat me up, my blood is spilling*

*Oh lightning, fill up the skies
Oh Nasser, you water my thirst*

*Resting by the camel's beauty
Nasser told me he was lonely*

*I have sent him to be protected by the patron
Mother, I don't want any other*

A few years ago, Yusra Abo Kaf, at the time a film student at Sapir Academic College in Israel, was working on a feature documentary. In it, she was about to tell the story of Bedouin women, from her village and others in the Israeli Negev area, who disappeared and were found dead, allegedly victims of violence by men from their own families. The Bedouin communities tend to not talk about this, out of fear that they will suffer revenge, and many crimes are left unsolved. However, as Abo Kaf was talking with the women, some of them began to open up. She started to receive death threats, and was forced to go into protective custody. She left the film department, and began to study art.

Silence shows a choir of Bedouin women singing a song of love and fear, in the midst of a desert grove, a place where many women disappeared. This old song is a rendition of an even older love song that used to be sung at weddings by Bedouin women. Over the years, some of the words changed, as the

women inserted into this poetry verses about the violence that they suffer. This has become their own subversive tradition, passed on from one generation to the next, sung only in the women's tent at weddings, but meant for the ears of the men in the tent nearby. As the women sing in the video, they create the rhythmic music with the same tools used to make coffee, and make their own portraits from the soil with the same gestures that are used to make bread. With their voices and with their bodies, they are manifesting their freedom.



Yusra Abo Kaf, *Silence* (video still), single-channel video, 2'55", 2019



Yusra Abo Kaf was born in 1983 in Um Batin Village, Israel, where she also lives and works. The work was created as part of Abo Kaf's graduate project at the Art School of Sapir Academic College, Israel, and the artist wishes to thank all her teachers. Special thanks to Daniel Meir for his help with the sound design.

6. Lawrence Abu Hamdan



Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *This whole time there were no landmines*, 8 video loops on monitors with sound (detail), 2017. Courtesy of the artist and mor charpentier

The Golan Heights is an area illegally occupied by Israel from Syria since the 1967 war. Families and communities living on either side of the ceasefire line have been divided. In the Golan Heights there is a place called the 'shouting valley,' where the topography creates an acoustic leak across the border. Here families gather to hear each other's voices and wave to one another across the otherwise impervious divide. These are the sounds you hear.

The images you see are from May 15th, 2011, when protesters from all over the country gathered on the Syrian side of the shouting valley for the anniversary of the Nakba³. However, unlike during the usual gatherings in this valley, this time the voice was not the only thing to cross the border. 150 Palestinian protesters from Syria unexpectedly broke into Israeli territory. For the first time since 1967 the border was breached. Four protesters were later killed by Israeli soldiers, yet the majority managed to exercise, even if briefly, their right of return.

This border breach was captured by an anonymous source, filming on their phone from the Israeli side, where communities from the shouting valley gathered in solidarity with the protestors. On this video, among the loud protest chants of those breaching the border, we can just about make out the voices of the families of the shouting valley in the background. However, they are not shouting their usual salutations. Like the border itself their voices became overpowered by the noise as they shout at the top of their lungs:

3 The Nakba, in Arabic meaning disaster or catastrophe, is the dispossession and expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948 from land that became Israel upon its establishment as an independent state.

Enough

Enough

Stop

Stop

Hey. Stop

Enough

Enough

Enough

Stop. Enough

Stop. Enough

Enough

There are land mines

Stop

Stop

There are land mines. Land Mines

Land Mines. Land Mines

Enough



Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *This whole time there were no landmines*, 8 video loops on monitors with sound, 2017. Exhibition view, mor charpentier, Art Basel Statements, 2018
Photo: Takeshi Sugiura. Courtesy of the artist and mor charpentier



Lawrence Abu Hamdan was born in 1985 in Amman, Jordan, and currently lives in Beirut. His audio investigations have been used as evidence at the UK Asylum and Immigration Tribunal and as advocacy for organizations such as Amnesty International together with fellow researchers from Forensic Architecture. He is one of the four collective winners of the recent Turner Prize.



Katarina Zdjelar, *Reading
'Europe Where Have You
Displaced Love?'* (video still),
single-channel video, 29'26",
2019. Courtesy of the artist



7. Katarina Zdjelar

Katarina Zdjelar often employs the rehearsal as a working method to explore the voice as a subject and substance. For this film she brought together four musicians for an improvisational interpretation of a text written by poet Athena Farrokhzad, *Europe, Where Have You Misplaced Love?* (2018). The aim of the improvisation is not so much to arrive at a final performance, but rather to keep the range of possibilities open. One by one, the musicians take control and then let it go again, just before arriving at a common melody, at which point doubts or another voice steer the process in a different direction. It becomes a continuous search in which a multiplicity of interrelating voices coexists. This approach adds a layered interpretation to Farrokhzad's impressions. And so the poem begins:

A Letter to Europe

*Europe, I've given you all and now I'm nothing. Europe,
260 Euro and 76 cents January, 2018.*

I can't stand my own mind.

*Europe, when will you end the human war? Go fuck
yourself with your Christ complex.*

*I don't feel good, don't bother me. I won't write my poem
till I'm in my right mind.*

*Europe, when will you retire? When will you take off
your clothes? When will you look at yourself through the
grave? When will you be worthy of your millions of guest
workers?*

Europe, why are your libraries full of tears?

It's been a long summer and the drought is spreading. Not a single store has a fan to sell. Soon you'll no longer have a liveable climate or any welfare. I fantasize about the walls that will greet you when disaster strikes.

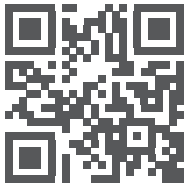
Europe, repeat after me: Football players can be French who are African who are French. It isn't complicated. Everyone seems to understand the consequences of colonialism, except you, the cause.

Europe, you are an avocado that rots before it ripens. You are a bomb shelter with room only for the landlord. You have a self-image made of Teflon, nothing sticks.

You are an oversized blot of shame on the map.

Europe, 63 years before Lampedusa, Césaire wrote that you were impossible to defend. How many dead in the Mediterranean this week? Each refugee who crosses your borders is a declaration of war.

Scan the QR code for the full poem.



Katarina Zdjelar, born in Belgrade, 1979, is an artist based in Rotterdam. Her practice consists of working with moving image and sound, performances, book projects and creating different platforms for speculation and exchange.

8. Domenico Mangano & Marieke van Rooy

When the Whistle Glares takes place in the Capriles clinic, a psychiatric institution in Willemstad, Curaçao. The artists participated in the artist in residence program of the Instituto Buena Bista, an art school for young people that is located on the clinic grounds. Together with patients and students, for the duration of four months, they investigated how one could imagine the clinic as a village. On the one hand, the film provides insight into the daily life at the clinic. On the other hand, it incorporates moments in which the patients were invited to initiate and direct their own performances, taking ownership of their representation. The result is a hybrid between a musical and a participatory documentary, reflecting on definitions of 'us' and 'others' in the constructs of a community. The physical borders of the clinic and the metaphorical boundaries between the filmmakers and their protagonists are blurred, in a work that brings up ethical questions in an empathic and compelling manner.

The series of interactive sculptures *Coral Graft, Mental Reef*, which can be played as musical instruments, invites the museum visitors to become part of the encounter and the community in the film. It further stretches boundaries between 'insider' and 'foreigner', artist and non-artist, spectator and participant.

This film is the last part of a trilogy about the heritage of the anti-psychiatry movement in the Netherlands. The project began with an investigation of the Dennendal affair that took place at the psychiatric institution Willem Arntsz Hoeve in Den Dolder, the Netherlands, 1970-1974. Here, the psychologist Carel Muller and architect Frans van Klingereren promoted the radical emancipation of the patients, by envisioning opening up the institution's grounds to let patients intermingle with society outside. They named this principle 'dilution', the idea of adding 'normality' to

'craziness'. The artists re-enacted the 'dilution concept' through their participatory exchanges. As another layer of exposing constructs of inclusion and exclusion, the last chapter of the trilogy, filmed in a former Dutch colony, hints to the ghosts of a colonial past. It attempts to reclaim the unique voices of those who are often silenced or forced to merge with a culture foreign to their own, excluded by society in more than one way.



Domenico Mangano, born in Palermo (Italy), 1976, and Marieke van Rooy, born in Weert (The Netherlands) 1974, live and work in Amsterdam. They combine archival research, participation and educational projects in their process. Until recently they participated in a residency at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht. The film was developed during an artist residency at the Instituto Buena Bista, Curacao (2016), supported by the Mondriaan Fund. The clay sculptures were made during a residency at Sundaymorning@EKWC, Oisterwijk, supported by Fonds Kwadraat. Many thanks to the Jan van Eyck Academie and Gallery MAGAZZINO, Rome.



Domenico Mangano and Marieke van Rooy, *When the Whistle Glares*
(video still), single channel video, 50', 2019. From *The Dilution Project*.
Courtesy of the artists and MAGAZZINO Gallery, Rome



Epilogue, July 2020

During the making of this exhibition, the world has changed beyond recognition. The coronavirus pandemic has struck, and the response to it around the globe seem to enhance the issues that *Voice Over* deals with. Among these are the rise of dictatorships and right-wing forces, 'fake news' and propaganda, mass surveillance, lack of care and solidarity, the further silencing of communities that were already marginalized, increased border closures and additional limitations on the freedom of movement. Wide protests have spread globally, protesting governments' failure to deal with this crisis, and, among many other issues, against the increasing violence that is inflicted upon vulnerable communities.

In a recent article for The New York Times, titled 'The Coronavirus Is Us'⁴, Michael Marder interprets the coronavirus as a wake-up call, a figuration of the social and the political world; in a world which has recently seen the rise of nationalism, with walls built and borders closed, the coronavirus crisis can be used as an excuse by governments to enforce nationalist agendas. While there are local specific differences, it appears that in many cases those in power further limit citizen's rights, and give them a false sense of security while diverting their attention from poor governance and the inability to tackle burning issues, such as climate change, the ongoing migrant crisis and the state of public health systems.

This centralized governmental attitude, according to Marder, is symbolically reflected in the crown-like structure that gave the coronavirus its name. This virus, that does not obey systems of classifications and species boundaries, transgresses old borders. It reminds us that borders are

4 Michael Marder, *The Coronavirus Is Us*, The New York Times, March 3, 2020

porous, and as we will host elements that are alien to us, we must learn to live with them rather than “conjure up the specters of sovereign nation states.”⁵

As we all attempting to comprehend the constantly changing reality, bodies and voices continue to infiltrate and shift borders, and new alliances are rising. Social distance is not necessarily pushing us apart. The events are still unfolding; their outcome is yet to be seen.

Maayan Sheleff

Scan the QR code to read the article Maayan Sheleff wrote for the Independent Curators International Research Journal.



Voice Over

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Coming up:

Elements: Skin

30.03.2021 – 05.09.2021

More than an exhibition, *Elements: Skin* is a laboratory and an experimental place to explore together. The main focus is not so much on the physical aspects of the skin, but questions the importance of skin in a philosophical sense. Visitors investigate the value we give to skin colour and learn how wonderful our skin and body are. With contributions by Jalila Essaïdi, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Bart Hess, Eline Willemarck, Margi Geerlinks, Carla van de Puttelaar, Celio Braga, Elke Lutgerink and Renee Verhoeven, alternated with artworks from the Bonnefanten collection.

This exhibition is part of the *Elements* partnership, in which contemporary art and cultural institutions in Limburg, Flanders and North Rhine-Westphalia create a programme around an 'element' associated with the region.

This exhibition is made possible by:

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