

Frieze

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Sara Deraedt's Investigations into the Fabrics of Our World

Through her spatial interventions at Établissement d'en face, Brussels, the artist reflects on the layering between art and politics



Sara Deraedt's show at Établissement d'en face in Brussels (her first presentation in the city where she lives and works) opens with an obstacle: directly behind the entrance of the storefront space, the artist has installed a secondary glass partition, *Wall* (2020), alongside a poster for the show. The otherwise empty main space is visible, but accessible only through the basement via one of two staircases. If this intervention evokes American artist Dan Graham's notion of works being activated by the viewer's presence, it does so by nodding to the history of this artist-run space: *Wall*'s placement is based on the position of an earlier partition, built for the inaugural exhibition following the gallery's relocation to its current site in 2012.

To date, Deraedt's work has appeared to centre on photography. For her recurring, untitled 2010 series, presented at the Art Institute of Chicago last year, she photographed vacuum cleaners in boutique shops and department stores, turning generic consumer items into curiously anthropomorphic objects that literally suck up the dust of our capitalist reality. Yet, Deraedt's practice also extends beyond photography to encompass installation, through which she seeks to investigate the fabric of our world and forms of historical or spatial layering. In Chicago, for example, she modified the architecture of the exhibition space by changing the entrance, integrating an artificial vestibule which formally mirrored other museum passageways. The large gallery space was suddenly split in two.

In Brussels, it's a more direct architectural intervention: to see the show in its entirety, visitors need to enter Établissement d'en face's small office or a separate staircase in the cellar. In both the office and the cellar hang photorealistic pencil drawings, 'Avenue E. Ducpetiaux 106 – Saint Gilles' (2019), depicting the façade of the infamous Saint-Gilles prison, located on the edge of an upmarket district in Brussels. Based on photographs Deraedt took during walks around this area, the drawings are installed behind glass, squeezed between the space's infrastructural details: radiators, gas pipes and the office space.

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spaces in the cellar, atop a table, sits *Stove* (2020): an improvised version of a table-top food warmer, comprising a square of foil upon which sit cheap glass mayonnaise jars and a tin can containing a lighted candle topped by an empty plate. Deraedt transforms these unassuming objects into a makeshift fireplace. The question is: who or what is the artist seeking to warm?



Sara Deraedt, *Avenue E. Ducpétiaux 106 - Saint-Gilles*, 2019, installation view, Établissement d'en face, Brussels. Courtesy: the artist and Établissement d'en face, Brussels

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Instead of the artist's usual photography, completely absent here, it is glass that plays a major role. It is used to separate, to control as an invisible border, and also to protect the four drawings, presented as if they were documents. Through the peculiar coldness of glass, the exhibition's investigation of the expanded architectural and social history of this collectively-run institution culminates in *Stove*. Situated directly under the emptied main space, it might become a metaphorical gathering place to think about art's own institutional detachment both from the everyday and any form of utopic aim. Deraedt's precise, minimal interventions present us with a *mise-en-abyme* of art and politics that prompts the question: when, how and from where should art assume a political stance?

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