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Project "Come Closer" in Antwerp

When the sculpture starts moving

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A double exhibition in Antwerp explores old genre questions about sculpture and performance – and does not escape its political context

When the "Come Closer" project began in Antwerp, Belgium, just a few days before the EU parliamentary elections, Sarah Weyns, director of the Middelheim Museum, said that the social position of art was particularly under question here in Flanders and Belgium. The extreme right spoke of artists as parasites, people who lived off the hard work of the rest of the population. "But they are an integral part of the fabric of a community," she said.

The group exhibition "Come Closer" aims to strengthen this position, although its concept sounds a bit awkward at first. The show is intended to explore the similarities between sculpture and performance, and it brings together two institutions that are cooperating again for the first time in ten years: the Middelheim Museum, a sculpture park on the southern edge of the Flemish city, and De Singel, a center for dance, performance, theater and architecture; located a little further north on the ring road that surrounds the city.

On that early summer day before the election, the director spoke not only about politics, but also about what connects the two institutions, given that sculpture and performance follow such different aesthetic standards. But when it comes to bringing sculpture into the present, terms like process and narrative keep cropping up. Later, I asked Weyns if she had a working definition of sculpture. "Everything that takes place in three-dimensional space," she answered without thinking twice.

Preserving the soul

In her work "Symptomatic Relief (Antwerp)", Monika Grabuschnigg also reflects on transience in a hidden way, but more in the sense of mortality and the preservation of the organic. Aluminium casts of egg holders from refrigerator doors are combined with baroque ornaments as modern vanitas figures. Then there is the confessional, which the Berlin-based artist has placed next to a park bench and which makes us think of the preservation of the soul. And of the almost neurotic-repressive relationship that Catholicism has with the body. The certain dissolution of everything organic is contrasted with the eternity of the soul - or so the promise goes.