

OMNIAS VANITAS
EILEEN COHEN SUSSHOLZ
PRESS KIT
25.06 > 26.11



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1. Introduction

The Erasmus House Museum has a long tradition of exhibitions linked to contemporary art. As early as 1945 the museum was already holding its first temporary exhibition of Belgian sculptures in the museum's beautiful gardens. After that, open-air sculpture exhibitions were held repeatedly until 1966

The garden became a permanent fixture of the contemporary art scene in 2000, as part of the "Brussels – European Cultural Capital" calendar of events. Dubbed a "Philosophical Garden", it now proposes a dialogue with the humanist's thoughts through the artwork of internationally-renowned contemporary artists.

Contemporary art remains central to our institution's policies of exhibitions, collaboration, and thought. In 2008, an exhibition of 16th- and 17th-century cabinets of curiosities called "Anatomy of Vanitas" was accompanied by pieces by Jan Fabre and Marie-Jo Lafontaine, amongst other things. Several other exhibitions of contemporary artists' works followed, including those of José Maria Sicilia (2010), Damià Diaz (2012), Fabienne Verdier (2013), Pierre Alechinsky (2014), and Philippe Favier (2016). Today the museum is giving the ceramics of Eileen Cohen Süssholz the place of honour in an exhibition entitled *Omnia Vanitas*. This latest exhibition continues, in a singular and resolutely modern way, the thinking that began with the 2008 exhibition.

Memento mori ("remember that you will die"), the timeless, universal theme tackled in this exhibition, reminds us straight off how fragile life is and echoes Erasmus's life and the power of his work, despite his fragile health. Erasmus wore a ring known as a *memento mori*. This ring was set with a small, carved stone representing the god Terminus, symbolizing death. However, for Erasmus, the presence of death was an invitation not to forget our allotted time on Earth. This attitude seems to resonate with the major upheavals that we are currently experiencing.

Eileen Cohen-Süssholz's sculptures take their places in this house devoted to the life and work of Erasmus in a series of *tête-à-têtes* with a mediaeval painting, a multi-period piece of furniture, a Gothic sculpture, and even a 16th-century book. They question, in an ironic, unconventional way, the themes of earthly pleasures and death that are human fundamentals.

Zahava Seewald,
Director of the Municipal Museums of Anderlecht
Curator of the Erasmus House and Béguinage (Beguine convent)

2. Press release

From June 25 to November 26, 2020 the Erasmus House and Beguinage Museum will honour the ceramic work of the artist Eileen Cohen Sussholz in an exhibition entitled *Omnia Vanitas*.

A drainpipe, tuba, hair dryer, and knife are but a few of the everyday objects associated with highly symbolic representations borrowed from traditional still-life paintings. This series of ceramic works takes its name from the Renaissance genre of still-life painting – *Vanitas* – that referred to the Christian notions of the vanity of earthly possessions, the superfluousness of pleasures, and the fleetingness of life; a solemn reminder of the *memento mori* (“remember that you will die”) etched into the face of life...And all that gives the artist and viewers justification for enjoying her representations of earthly objects, despite their futile nature.

The matter of which the sculptures are made – clay, a fragile material close to bones and the human skeleton – also refers back to death. However, the iconographic vocabulary and brilliant glazes contrast joyously with the announced theme. Whilst the objects remain recognisable, their status, monetary value, aesthetic value, and meanings in today’s world are highly disparate.

They are associated with *memento mori* torn from their original contexts to become part of a work that can become a symbol in turn, even if one is never quite sure of what. United with and melted into the clay and colour, they are reborn in compositions of flashy, eccentric beauty in which parody and irony have important roles. Whilst the artist also draws inspiration from poetry and literature, as certain titles indicate, she suggests that we not give specific meanings and interpretations to her works. Instead, we should give free rein to what this dissonance may engender in our hearts and minds.

3. Biography

Whilst painting has long been the primary focus of Eileen Cohen-Süssholz's artistic practice, today she has turned to ceramics, a medium that enables her to treat the subjects that gnaw at her "both seriously and playfully", as she puts it. Her fascination with psychoanalysis has led her to consider her creative approach to be the product of free association.

Eileen Cohen-Süssholz was born and raised in South Africa. She began her studies in Fine Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg but broke them off to pursue a career in advertising. Eileen moved to Belgium, where she resumed her studies, in 2001. She has a diploma in drawing from the Berchem Academy of Fine Arts (Antwerp) and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Psychological Studies, *magna cum laude*, from the Open University of England. She is currently studying ceramics at the Berchem Academy of Fine Arts.

Eileen's work was included in the "*Cent artistes en liberté*" (100 free artists) exhibition of the Jewish Museum of Belgium in 2016 and she was selected to create an *in situ* installation for the 2016 edition of "*Sporen*" ("Traces/Tracks") in Ypres. Other exhibitions include the individual exhibition *Omnia Vanitas* at the Pedrami Gallery in Antwerp (2018) and the group exhibition held by this same gallery in the Antwerp Art Pavilion in 2019.

4. Practical information

Omnia Vanitas
Eileen Cohen Süssholz
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Openingshours
Tue. To Sun. 10.00 – 18.00

Round the exhibition

Sun. 20/09 - 15:00: Meet the artist (Journées du Patrimoine – Open Monumentendagen)
Sun. 18/10 - 15:00: Meet the artist & the curator & drink
Thu. 12/11 - 20:00: Concert *Vanitas* La Cetra d'Orfeo & drink
Sun. 22/11 - 15:00: Meet the artist & the curator & drink

www.erasmushouse.museum

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