

Edith Dekyndt

Unlike many of her peers, Edith Dekyndt evokes her art with disarming simplicity and straightforwardness, which somehow contradicts the complex nature of her work. Born in 1960, the Tournai-based artist has always had a following, but the past five years have been highly significant for her, marking her entry within the international art world. A believer in fate -as well as happy accidents- Dekyndt had already completed an extensive body of work before galleries starting showing her. This gives her a unique position within the art world, and a legitimacy that places her in a different league. Unpretentious and open, she takes the time to reflect upon her practices and discusses them in a generous way. Avoiding dogmatic forms and confrontational statements, her art raises central issues around the intricacy of science, and the relationship individuals have with their close environment. Having found success and recognition late in life, Dekyndt seems unfazed by the current excitement surrounding her work. She's devoted to her craft and keeps doing what she has always done, enjoying the pleasures of experimentation. We sat down in her peaceful atelier to discuss her passion for science, learning about the inner workings of the art world and the virtues of boredom.



Left: Coccyx Double
2011 / 50 x 35 x 25 cm
White marble

Below left: Trophy
(scale model 1:5)
2011 / 54 x 15,5 x 21 cm
patinated bronze

Below right: Heurtoir
2008 / 32 x 15 x 12 cm
bronze



What is your background?

I was born in Ypres in Belgium, and went to boarding school in the Mons region. I moved to Tournai eventually, where I received a grant twice from the Tapestry Foundation after completing my studies. I was a young mother and settled down here, buying my first home a few years later. My husband and I thought we would leave after the children were gone, but we felt comfortable and decided to stay. I travel on a regular basis, and it's pleasant to live and work within quiet surroundings.

Would you say that you are fairly private as an artist?

I'm not a person who likes to go to openings or events. Of course, social networking now is more important than it used to be -and this applies to the art world- but I work very slowly and regularly. I therefore need a significant amount of time and genuine concentration.

Do you know the people who buy and collect your work?

Yes, I do. Obviously, I haven't met all of them, but there are some I have a privileged contact with. Several people have been following my work for a while, and you naturally develop a friendship with them.

Is this important for you?

I like seeing how people live with my work and appropriate it within their own space. I am not a collector, and have never hung any of my own pieces at home, but seeing someone else doing this is highly pleasurable. In fact, it's an emotional thing for me, as I consider my pieces to be a part of myself. Selling them is not something I have a problem with, since I don't have any ownership issues. To be perfectly honest, when I have my own pieces at home, I don't even look at them afterwards, and I'd rather move on to the next thing. There's no nostalgia in that sense.

When did you start envisaging yourself as an artist?

When I was a child, I used to draw all the time. My parents encouraged me to develop my creative side, particularly my mother, who had been trained as a milliner. Going through my teenage years, I rejected this and wanted to ignore art. When I was 15 or 16, I thought

I would become an architect, but I went for Communication Studies instead. Later, I did Fine Arts in Mons and studied there for 5 years. I chose etching, as it was the department with the friendliest vibe. I was not able to draw during those years, because I was really focusing on the process and techniques that were used. The scientific aspects have always fascinated me. The fact that it was through chemical reactions that an image for an artwork slowly

materialized is a process that appealed to me. I still work like this today.

What did you learn when you researched tapestry?

A lot of it for me was finding out more about color and light. I was working on installations and paintings, taking into account our relationship toward space. At that time, I was offered to teach architecture in Tournai and accepted. ▷

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Above: Lessons of Darkness 07
2012 / 200x140 cm
Nails on cotton fabric
©

Lessons of Darkness 07 (detail)
2012 / 200x140 cm
Nails on cotton fabric
©

Right Above: Dump Truck
2011 / 117 x 38 x 56 cm
©

Right Below: Dump Truck
2011 / 117 x 38 x 56 cm
©

How old were you then?

I was 29, which is young to be teaching, I guess. My students were only a few years younger than me. I had children and needed to make a living. Teaching allowed me to support my family while leaving me enough time to develop my own personal work.

How did you start exhibiting?

I developed a friendship with Olivier Bastin from L'Escaut, an architectural practice in Brussels, who offered me to use his place as a studio. He sometimes opened its doors to visitors, who were able to see works in progress, instead of a finished show. It was during those years that I started showing my work in an independent way. Even after graduation, I had always had interest from people asking me to work on special projects or taking part in their shows. I was beginning to do personal projects for foreign galleries, which were often managed by artists, like OR Gallery in Vancouver, Themistocles in Mexico City or Plug in Winnipeg.

How did you get into the commercial circuit?

After L'Escaut, I started collaborating with a collective formed by 3 young art historians, called "Les Témoins Oculistes". They presented experimental projects within their space, and it happened that some pieces were sold. I kept a great contact with one of them, Christophe Veys, who knew some collectors. He was the one who started mentioning my work to them. In 2007, I met Lilou Vidal, who is still my gallerist today.

Does this mean you have only been working with galleries for a few years?

Yes. It happened late. In my mind, the gallery world was completely abstract. Institutions allowed me to exhibit on a regular basis. I did a lot of collective shows, which were on a fairly good level. Lilou showcased my work for the first time 5 years ago, and realized there was an interest from Belgian collectors who had already purchased my work before, thanks to Christophe Veys.

What was the turning point for you?

It was my first solo show at Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire in Brussels in 2008. The exhibition was very successful, and triggered some kind of chain reaction.

Was it frustrating for you not to work with a commercial gallery before?

Not at all. I was exhibiting in Belgium often, as well as Canada, where my work was always well-received. I met excellent curators there and never felt deprived of anything, but it's quite funny when I think about all the events that took place during the past 5 years.

Did you find this overwhelming in any way?

I was pretty surprised at first. I feel fulfilled and happy now. I had produced so many pieces before, that some institutions argued that -for galleries- it was almost like inheriting from someone's estate after their death. There were so many of my works, which had never been shown before, and there are still many, ▶



"BEING BORED AS A CHILD IS KEY, BECAUSE IT HELPS YOU DEVELOP YOUR OWN WORLD. IN FACT, I WOULD SAY THAT BOREDOM IS ESSENTIAL WHEN YOU WANT TO CREATE SOMETHING. "



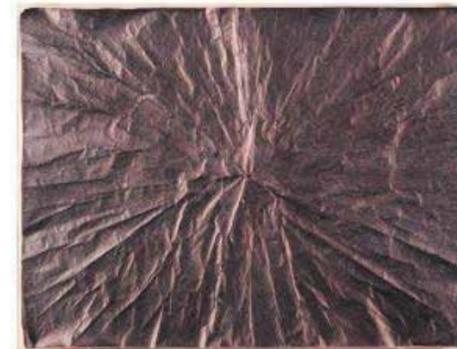


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which I haven't shown yet. My whole archive had to be structured and organized. We're still busy with this process today, even if most of my works are showcased in galleries now.

How long did some of your works stay in storage then?

Probably 20 years.

That's incredible. Did it feel like starting from scratch again?

Yes, it did. I got to learn about so many things I didn't even know about, like global art fairs for instance. It was like a brand new beginning, although I was almost 50.

How do you explain the fact that people respond to your work in such a spontaneous way?

I don't think I can answer this. It's always surprising for me, as my works are intuitive things, things that I notice and try to show the way I see them. It could be this personal gaze, being passed on from one person to another, which sometimes works.

Do people who purchase your pieces tell you how they feel about them?

Yes, they do. I really care about the way others share our intuitions, with their own subjectivity. Beyond the purely visual aspect, I think there is an awareness of what the work involves. Many things I do are rather time-consuming, and collectors understand that. My drawings take months to be completed. When it comes to my video work, everything is real, as there is no post-production. I sometimes wonder if it's not being in contact with things that are so simple and real, which actually intrigues and interests viewers. Working with substantial means is not something I find that appealing, which doesn't mean I would never do it.

Would you rather create something that feels imperfect or approximate?

Maybe. I guess it feels more human to me. Chance also plays an important part. I find it rather complex to define what is perfect or imperfect. These are relative notions, which vary according to a given context.

What is mundane and what is extraordinary for you?

For me, there is no boundary between the two. Waking up in the morning, simply being alive and having a body that functions -more or less well- is pretty extraordinary. The same applies to nature, language, colors, music and light. It's in everything our brain is able to comprehend and absorb that I encounter the extraordinary. Even gravity itself -the fact that



Kashan
2010 / 50 x 70 x 25 cm
Indian Carpet on polyester mould

I'm sitting down on this chair in front of you now and not falling over- is unique. In my work, there is also a gaze that goes back to childhood, and what happens when everything you look at is on a much smaller scale. You see things differently, being closer to the ground than adults. During your first years of existence, you witness things that they seem to ignore, or simply forgot about. Details are more important. Being bored as a child is key, because it helps you develop your own world. In fact, I would say that boredom is essential when you want to create something. Your imagination becomes a tool, and it doesn't need very much to grow and flourish.

You have taken part in several residency programs and like to travel. Do you enjoy being a nomad?

It's vital for me to confront myself to a new culture and experiment different surroundings than my own. I did residencies in Canada, New York, Mexico, Paris, Berlin, Iceland and the Reunion Island. You start questioning yourself and react to everything around you, even though it's not always conscious.

Do you find yourself absorbing influences?

Yes, all the time, but I'm also -for instance- very attentive to the climate, and the weather we have on a particular day. Is it hot or cold? How is the light today? You feel these concerns in my work, which are fundamental.

"OUR LIVES ARE JIGSAWS, AND I TEND NOT TO REGRET CHOICES I MADE IN THE PAST."

Do you like to experiment, too?

Definitely. A lot of things happen by accidents, or simply by wondering how things could turn out. That's often the starting point within my work. What if I did this or tried that? What would happen in this situation? And which results would I get? Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. Probabilities always play a major role.

You often use textiles in your art. What is your relationship with fashion?

When I was a child, my mother used to sew our clothes. She could knit as well, and was really into fashion. She is still the same today. I guess she taught us the value of craft and quality. Later, I got to model during clothing fairs, and found out more about fashion. My everyday style is fairly low-key, and I like the idea of a second skin. I like jeans that you've been wearing for a long time, and that are nicely looked after. The same applies to shoes,

which I love. I will wear some dark denim jeans with a cozy sweater and a pair of Converse. It's very classic in terms of attitude.

What do you think Bellerose stands for?

Easy fashion and laid-back styling. My London art dealer talked to me about Bellerose recently, telling me the brand was gaining momentum in England. Going back to my mother, she was the ultimate fashionista and shared her love of beauty with us. I even considered a career in fashion at some point, but it never happened.

Do you believe in destiny?

Coincidences exist, but you sometimes wonder how everything turns out so well -or so bad- in certain situations. There are so many elements you needed in order to make things happen, and they happen smoothly and easily. Whether you wish it or not, some events will take place, regardless of the circumstances. I just tell myself it had to be this way. Looking back at everything that happened, whether they be good or bad things, I have a sense that all the pieces fit together. Our lives are jigsaws, and I tend not to regret choices I made in the past. This is probably what gives me the willingness to take risks, day by day. □