

HEIRLOOM
center for art and archives

Heart on the Tongue
Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour

9 August – 26 October 2024

In the exhibition *Heart on the Tongue*, visual artists Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour turn their gaze towards the public broadcasting of the 1970s and '80s through a study of the work of Belgian film and TV producer Jef Cornelis (1941-2018). These broadcasts stem from an era and media landscape radically different from today, where debates branch out into countless smaller forums on digital platforms, drawing polarised lines and hindering collective discourse. Their revisitation of this pioneer of television culture seeks to both introduce his unique practice to a Danish audience and draw insights from his methodologies.

Edelgart and la Cour's exhibition centres around Jef Cornelis, whose films and TV programmes produced for national Belgian television challenged ideas of what the medium can and ought to be, in both form and content. During his time, TV was a public broadcasting medium which served to create a common frame of reference and unify the population – unlike today, where the individual can choose from a plethora of on-demand streaming services.

Cornelis used the television medium as a platform for his evocative, sociocultural investigations. This is evident, for instance, in his architecture programmes featuring essayistic meditations on the development of urbanism and urban spaces in the 20th century, as well as the impact on inhabitants' lives. Another one of Cornelis' recurring themes is the art world, and in his portraits of artists and art events he portrays a comprehensive cultural-political apparatus of capital and power.

The title of the exhibition is a direct translation of the Flemish expression 'hart up de tung', which the two artists came across during their research. A former colleague of Cornelis used this expression to describe the approach and tone of Cornelis' talk show programmes. The title captures the passion and directness of his productions, and in Flemish, the phrase can also be phonetically confused with 'hard op de tong', meaning 'hard on the tongue'.

Edelgart and la Cour feel particular kinship with Jef Cornelis' methodological approach and for the exhibition, they have created a series of new works in conversation with Cornelis' archive. Through interviews and staged conversations, Edelgart and la Cour highlight the collaborative nature of Cornelis' work and explore the relationship between communication and presentation, as well as process and production. Cornelis left behind a modest paper archive that sheds light on his working methods, but his television programmes have themselves become a unique archive of cultural and art historical documentation, and his productions have since been featured at various festivals and art biennials.

The exhibition presents two new film works and an installation by the artists alongside four TV productions by Jef Cornelis. In one of the films, Edelgart and la Cour visit Jef Cornelis' archive in Brussels. The film is not a traditional documentary about a significant cultural figure, instead reflecting on how to access the past, and who takes care of and controls access to a legacy. In another work, they explore some of Cornelis' television techniques, testing their effectiveness in contemporary discussions on the climate crisis.

Out of respect for the works, they are shown in their full lengths at the exhibition. Visitors are invited to navigate the exhibition at their own pace and guided by their own interests.

Works in the exhibition

Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour

Talkshow 1 (2024)

Video (94 min)

A bus winds its way through a bright-green Danish landscape. It's the 1st of May. Aboard the bus are a moderator and three panellists: a nature guide, a literature researcher and an author, who describes herself as a farmer's wife. During the journey, they discuss various views on agriculture. Intermittently, the scene shifts to a group of reporters, two of whom are the artists themselves. One of the reporters travels on the bus, which is equipped with a TV studio, hopping off at various locations to interview the people they encounter. Another set of reporters have been stationed at Fælledparken in Copenhagen, where International Workers' Day is being celebrated. Here, they approach a wide range of people, asking them about their opinions of and connection to agriculture. Throughout, conversation is at the heart of the talk show, and in its essence, the work explores the possibility for collective conversation when a diverse array of individuals is given voice.

This is the first instalment in a series of talk shows regarding the climate crisis which Edelgart and la Cour aim to produce. Outlines for the following talk shows in the series are displayed on a table in the exhibition.

Featuring: Anne Fastrup, Kari Hald, Marianne Jørgensen, Åse Eg, Tinne Zenner, Aske Just, Suada Demirovic, Deirdre Humphrys, Anita Mathal Hopland, Lise Willemoes, Andrea Rygg, Ole Vang, Sara Sjölin, Sylvester Roepstorff, Julie Bezerra Madsen, Caro/ Det vilde bud and the students from the nutritional assistant degree programme, staff and children at Smidstrup Farm (Bente, Magnus, Diego, Isabella) and the people in Fælledparken.

Technique: Tinne Zenner, Anita Mathal Hopland, Julie Bezerra Madsen and Aske Just

Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour

Problems only got resolved when there was no more time left (2024)

Video (72 min)

In the film, visual artists Edelgart and la Cour visit the archive of film and TV producer Jef Cornelis in Brussels. They look back through his productions and speak to his colleagues, his close friends and his widow. Their approach echoes that of Cornelis himself: exploratory and inquisitive. They hope to gain insight into the heart of Cornelis' methods and, not least, his approach to discourse about art, culture and urban gentrification. Additionally, the two artists aim to explore the role of public broadcasting and its potentials during a fertile time of experimentation in TV media. In the film, Edelgart and la Cour also reflect on their own work, the inspiration they draw from Cornelis, and how they keep their own position intact in their interactions with Jef Cornelis' many former colleagues, all of whom offer distinct views on his body of work. The dialogue is self-reflexive and verges on the comical, performed as a kind of voice-over. The work consists of clips and stills from Cornelis' productions mixed with footage from the artists' visit to his archive.

Featuring: Kristine Kloeck, Bart Verschaffel, Paul Vandenbroeck, Pol Hoste, George De Decker, Guido Roy, Chris Dercon, Lieven De Caeter, Poul Nesgaard, people on the street.

Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour

It is fiction, because I see it on TV (where I see Bruce Willis too) (2024)

12 screens, glass, print on Clearview

On 12 screens of glass in assorted formats, Edelgart and la Cour present stills from various films and TV productions featured in the exhibition. The installation is an experiment which explores new encounters and interactions between the produced image materials – encounters which do not arise in a chronological order, as would be the case in the editing of films. The still images

are extracted from the narratives they are part of to break with the film productions and instead allow alternative constellations and new connections to emerge.

Jef Cornelis

Container 3: 'De punzak van Heine' (1989)

TV-programme (61 min)

Container was a late-night live broadcast series which assembled a panel of contemporary young thinkers to discuss issues the hosts deemed important. The discussion took place in a container – a mobile space which could be placed at relevant locations. This episode delves into interpretations of history, exploring how philosophers, writers and artists approach history in times of rebellion and revolution. Reflections drawn from selected letters by prominent European thinkers are read aloud and discussed by the panel. One of Cornelis' intentions was to examine whether television could create a space for intellectual conversation. The experiment failed, and it became Cornelis' most criticised series, even taken off the air early. The guests interrupted each other and spoke all at once, alienating the general audience, and the programme thereby ultimately served to expose the medium rather than its content.

Featuring: Bart Verschaffel, Lieven De Cauter, Rudi Laermans and Paul de Vylder

Jef Cornelis

Ijsbreaker 16: 'Lichamen – toonbeelden' (1984)

TV-programme (71 min)

This episode from the talk show series *Ijsbreaker* [Icebreaker] tackles the topic of 'body culture'. The live broadcast links three distinct locations: a gym, a fashion magazine photo shoot and a TV studio. In the studio, a female philosopher asks critical questions about a modern-day culture obsessed with ideal body standards, which she argues encourages self-absorption and unoriginality. The programme seeks to map out a comparative

study of various aspects of contemporary body culture, yet it also veers off, presenting clashes among unclear stances regarding the subject.

Jef Cornelis

Rijksweg N1 (1978)

TV-programme (42 min)

Rijksweg N1 is a principal route connecting Antwerp and Brussels: a road once bustling with traffic and a hub of life and activity. However, following the construction of a larger motorway, this main road is left largely deserted. In this TV documentary, Jef Cornelis and architecture critic Geert Bekaert explore the road as if it were a lost artery. The film comments on the impact of motor traffic on daily life when a road transforms from a meeting place to a neglected void.

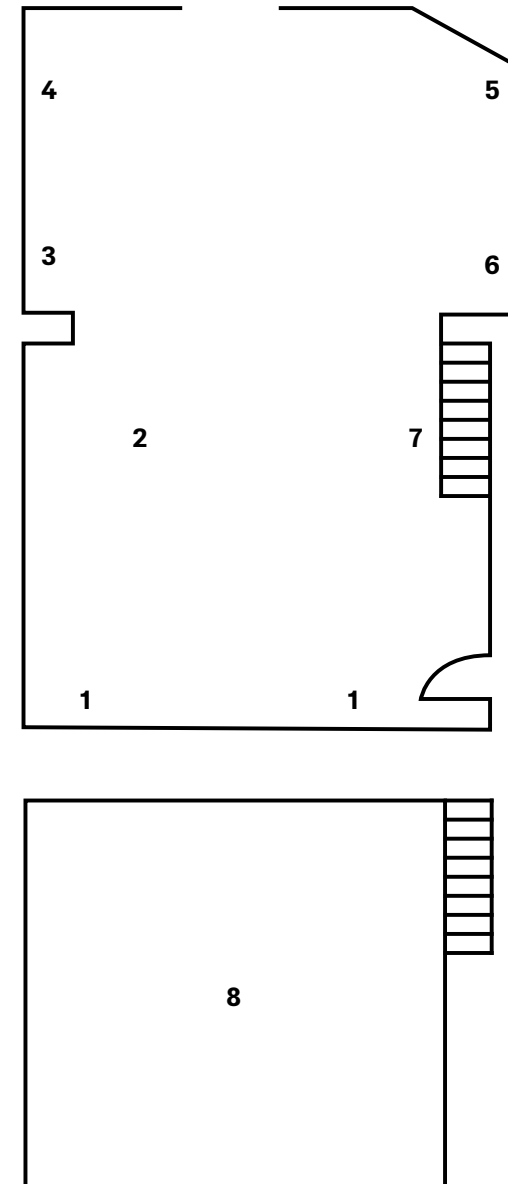
Jef Cornelis

Beeldende kunst in België (1986)

TV-programme (59 min)

The TV broadcast Visual Art in Belgium was conceived as a debate program about the state of Belgian art and, as is always the case for Cornelis, how art relates to TV. The occasion for the programme was the two major exhibitions, *Initiatif '86* and *Chambres d'amis*, which took place in 1986 and were the focal points for Jef Cornelis' most iconic work *De langste dag*, a six-hour-long TV transmission that covered the openings of the two exhibitions. In an exhibition hall with paintings by Rubens at KMSKA (The Royal Museum of Fine Arts), a panel consisting of museum directors, critics, and curators discusses current events in the Belgian art scene. The discussion is moderated by Chris Dercon (curator and later museum director), while an audience of artists, collectors and politicians listens on.

- 1 **Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour**
Problems only got resolved when there was no more time left (2024)
Video (72 min)
- 2 **Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour**
It is fiction, because I see it on TV (where I see Bruce Willis too) (2024)
12 screens, glass, print on Clearview
- 3 **Jef Cornelis**
Ijsbreaker 16: 'Lichamen – toonbeelden' (1984)
TV-programme (71 min)
- 4 **Jef Cornelis**
Beeldende kunst in België (1986)
TV-programme (59 min)
- 5 **Jef Cornelis**
Container 3: 'De punzak van Heine' (1989)
TV-programme (61 min)
- 6 **Jef Cornelis**
Rijksweg N1 (1978)
TV-programme (42 min)
- 7 **Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour**
Television is always pushing, steering, guiding (2024)
Paper, pencil
- 8 **Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour**
Talkshow 1 (2024)
Video (94 min)





Portrait of Jef Cornelis from the archive of ARGOS. Photo: Eva la Cour and Mia Edelgart, 2024

Film programme with Jef Cornelis at Cinemateket and Terrassen

Visual artists Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour have put together a film programme featuring a selection of Jef Cornelis' productions. It will be shown during the exhibition period in collaboration with Cinemateket, Terrassen, Copenhagen Architecture Festival and Art Hub Copenhagen.

***De langste dag* (1986) (376 min). Eng. subtitles**

Saturday, 7 September at 16:00

Location: Terrassen c/o Film studio at SDI Media, Birkedommervej 25

De langste dag [The Longest Day] is an experimental television report from the opening of two large international exhibitions in Ghent, Belgium. Broadcast on national public service TV (VRT) on 21 June, 1986, as a six-hour live-show on the same night as the semi-final of the World Cup in Mexico, *De langste dag* presents and examines contemporary art and its institutions in a humorous and sophisticated way. The programme mimics the broadcasting of the football match through advanced media technology with live commentary, helicopter reporting, street interviews and panel discussions about contemporary art.

The Gentrification of the City and the Settlement of the Street

Sunday, 15 September at 16:45

Location: Cinemateket

***Brussel, scherven van geluk* (1995) (57 min). Eng. subtitles**

Directly translated, the film's title means 'Brussels, shards of happiness'. This is not a traditional documentary about the Belgian capital, but a film essay that attempts to understand the development of the city, where thousands arrive every day by train or car to go to work but leave again in the evening. Cornelis meditates on the question of how Brussels transformed from a

comfortable to an impossible city to live in. By blending archive material and contemporary footage (from 1995, the year of its production), the clash between vision, change, and reality is revealed.

***De straat* (1972) (40 min). Eng. subtitles**

What is a street? A traffic artery or a place where life is lived? *De straat* is a study that is conducted both scientifically and artistically. Recognisable street noise, music and a clinical, explanatory voice-over are accompanied by stunning images filmed from a helicopter and sharp jump-cuts between street and market scenes in Belgium, Italy and elsewhere. The focal point is how streamlining and increased control over traffic infrastructure in the 1970s affected not just existing residential areas but also fundamentally changed the conditions for social life.

Art in an Expanded Field

Tuesday, 24 September at 18:45

Location: Cinemateket

Sonsbeek Park in Arnhem, Netherlands is internationally known for its public sculpture garden exhibitions, a tradition that has taken place since 1949. The sixth edition took place in 1971 and was a turning point, as it exhibited new art with a special emphasis on land art and minimalism. After a fifteen-year hiatus, the seventh edition took place in 1986, where a new generation of artists took over Sonsbeek Park. Both in 1971 and 1986, Cornelis covered the exhibition for VRT, and together the two reports function as a representation of the visual art field's rapid evolution during the period.

***Sonsbeek buiten de perken* (1971) (46 min). Eng. subtitles**

Sonsbeek buiten de perken [Sonsbeek, Beyond its Bounds] is a documentary that takes the public sculpture exhibition Sonsbeek from 1971 as a point of departure. The documentary examines the concept of art in an expanded field, more precisely

the move from sculpture to a variety of new forms of expression, including land art, conceptual art, process art, minimalism, performance and video art – a development that took place in the late 1960s and well into the 1970s

Spaziergaenger mit hund – Sonsbeek 86 (1986) (30 min).

Eng. subtitles

In the report from *Sonsbeek '86*, we follow a young Chris Dercon as a staged reporter, moving through the park in Arnhem. In this edition of the sculpture exhibition, most of the works – in contrast to earlier editions – are displayed in specially designed glass pavilions. Works by artists such as Robert Smithson, Katharina Fritsch, Marcel Broodthaers, Richard Artschwager, Michael Asher, Panamarenko, Luciano Fabro, Ettore Spaletti, Thomas Schütte, Bruce Nauman, Claes Oldenburg and Rebecca Horn are shown. The report meditates on how the park, not unlike the museum, is a delineated and defined area with cultural codes and norms for the space of art.

Art Discourse on TV / Jef Cornelis

Sunday, 29 September at 16:15

Location: Cinemateket

XXXIII Biennale Internazionale d'Arte Venezia (1966)

(24 min) Eng. subtitles

In the humorous report from one of the world's largest and oldest art events, the Venice Biennale, Jef Cornelis and his team follow the official opening days of the exhibition and national pavilions, where only the press and VIPs have access. The film depicts both the exhibitions and the visitors in all their confusion through the exhibition halls and pavilions. 'Rumour has it that everything is decided at that very moment,' and, 'Indeed the crisis continues, but the show must go on,' comments the speaker.

documenta 4 (1968) (54 min). Eng. subtitles

When *documenta 4* takes place in 1968, the international art-world is in a crisis of authority. Arnold Bode, *documenta*'s artistic co-founder and artistic director, looks critically at the changes taking place at the time, and yet *documenta 4* is inevitably filled with controversies, generational conflicts and debates. The politicised society of the late 1960s clearly manifests itself in Kassel – red flags and crowds singing political songs drown out the opening speeches.

Jef Cornelis utilises a specific technique in his portrayal of the event – he and his reporter position themselves as naïve spectators on the sidelines and ask questions of the various actors: curators, artists, gallerists and visitors. With limited commentary, Cornelis thus challenges the viewer to judge for themselves.

documenta 5 (1972) (53 min). Eng. subtitles

documenta 5 in 1972 is regarded today as an epoch-making shift in *documenta*'s history. For the first time, the exhibition is single-handedly overseen by a curator who sets the thematic framework for the selected art. It was the Swiss curator Harald Szeemann who set the focus here on the relationship between image and reality under the title *Questioning Reality – Pictorial Worlds Today*. At a time where mass media gained more and more importance, Szeemann set out to examine art's relationship to visual forms of expression in relation to reality. The film gives insight into the period's trends such as hyper realism, conceptual art and kitsch, but also the entire phenomenon 'documenta,' the hype around the exhibition, and discussions around the role of the curator.

In the summer of 2022, we visited Argos, a centre for audio-visual art in Brussels, to explore their collection of Jef Cornelis' essay films, reports, talk shows and live TV experiments. Here, as we spent many days watching and listening, a central question emerged: How can we as visual artists critically and affectively engage and work closely with the legacy and archive of a deceased creator?

Through Argos, we connected with Cornelis' widow, Kristine Kloeck, and our meeting with her gave rise to the idea of contacting those who had worked with Cornelis in the 1970s and 1980s – camera operators, producers, sound designers, screenwriters, philosophers and researchers. Our aim was to illuminate the collaborative aspects of Cornelis' practice and to foster a less auteur-centric perspective.

We have since been to Belgium several times to meet with the people Kloeck helped us track down – all of them prominent men with a certain authority. Cornelis' collaborators in the past became our collaborators in the present. Our meetings in private homes, hotel lobbies, at university offices, cafés etc. have all in various ways influenced our extended engagement with Cornelis' practice and work. As is always the case with archival material, given conceptions of the past and future affect how the material impacts, inspires and provokes in the present.

In June 2023, we invited the collaborators to join us for a round-table discussion, which we filmed and live-edited. The technical setup was makeshift and the conversation unruly – most of those invited hadn't seen each other for decades; some had never met at all. The event was an experiment which initially felt like a failure and left us feeling doubtful, but it has since become meaningful to us as an instance of collective thinking that took on a life of its own.

Having grown up in Denmark, we aren't familiar with Belgian public service TV from the 1970s and 1980s. Nonetheless, due to our age, the aesthetic of Cornelis' work resonates with the television

we remember from our childhood. As part of the last generation of children shaped by public service broadcasting (before it became increasingly ideologically commercialised by free-market forces), we see Cornelis' work through the lens of our own memories, particularly the children's programmes produced by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) in the 1980s. Former journalist and producer at DR's children's programming department, Poul Nesgaard, once shared with us an internal document from 1972 which emphasises a radical belief in children's ability to navigate and analyse multifaceted information. We have since reflected on how DR's experimental children's programming has influenced the response, resonance and longing that Cornelis' work evokes in us now, 40 years later.

A notable episode of Cornelis' talk show *Ijsbreaker* features a conversation between two theatre personalities. They debate whether theatre can be effectively translated to TV and what the implications would be. One of them argues that the pace of TV has become much too fast. Now, in 2024, their conversation from 1983 seems almost surreal in its slowness.

Our aim is not to construct a narrative of decline. Rather, we have been interested throughout in how our engagement with expressions from a past that is familiar to us can move beyond personal nostalgia for the material. By recontextualising public service TV today, we're able to examine our own historical context. The project has emerged from a wish to reflect on historical time and explore what Cornelis' archived visual work might offer in the light of current social and ecological crises.

Our work is in many ways informed by a tradition of artists interested in communication and cultural critique as both artistic form and content. Viewing Cornelis' productions at Argos did not inspire us to become Cornelis experts, but to bring his archive to life in a collaborative capacity as co-organisers, participants and witnesses.

Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour

Jef Cornelis (1941-2018) studied set design and film direction at the Netherlands Film Academy. After completing his education, he settled in Antwerp, Belgium and was hired as a director at the art department of BRT Television in Belgium (later VRT). He worked here from 1963 to 1998 as a producer, director and screenwriter, and over these 35 years, he created over 200 TV programmes – reportage, portraits, talk shows and documentaries, many of which were live broadcasts.

Mia Edelgart and Eva la Cour are visual artists and friends. They have collaborated on projects such as self-organised educational programmes in Siggalycke – a decommissioned school in Småland, Sweden – as well as teaching and workshop activities at institutions including Art Hub Copenhagen and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. For many years, la Cour and Edelgart have been occupied by methodologically oriented questions in relation to collaborative, experimental and precarious film practices.

Mia Edelgart is a graduate of the Danish Royal Academy of Fine Arts and currently works as an artistic researcher at PASS, Centre for Practice-based Art Studies at the University of Copenhagen.

Eva la Cour is a graduate of the Jutland Art Academy and holds a degree in Media & Visual Anthropology from Freie Universität, Berlin, as well as a PhD from HDK-Valand in Gothenburg. She is currently a postdoctoral fellow affiliated with the research centre Art as Forum at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at the University of Copenhagen.

HEIRLOOM – center for art and archives is a non-profit arts organization in Copenhagen dedicated to exhibiting and initiating projects with a focus on the artistic archive. HEIRLOOM is concerned with exploring artistic legacy and overlooked collections in dialogue with contemporary art. The program pays special attention to ephemeral practices and discussions around gender, identity and transnational exchanges. It is Heirloom's ambition to revisit and contextualize art practices through new curatorial concepts and formats. The organization is physically located in Copenhagen but operates internationally.

The exhibition has been created in collaboration with the research centres Center for Practice-based Art Studies (PASS) and Art as Forum at the University of Copenhagen, with which the artists are associated. The production of new works is supported by the two centres and the Danish Arts Foundation. The exhibition is supported by ARGOS, the Augustinus Foundation and the Ny Carlsberg Foundation.

The film programme is presented in collaboration with Terrassen, Cinemateket, CAFx (Copenhagen Architecture Festival) and AHC. The screening of *De langste dag* is supported by Bispebjerg Local Committee, Flanders – State of the Art and terrassen.bio.

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