

MARTHE WÉRY

March 16–May 12, 2018

We cordially invite you to our second exhibition of works by Marthe Wéry, whose art is currently undergoing a rediscovery. The Belgian artist made a name for herself with her monochrome paintings, although her ongoing relevance is based on her radically experimental engagement with color and “thinking-ahead” approach to painting in space. Ranging from her minimalistic stripe pictures, folded paper works, and monochrome painting groups to the colored floor pieces she created shortly before her death, in 2005, our exhibition offers insight into Wéry’s multifarious oeuvre since the 1970s.

After an early constructivist period, Wéry began making radically minimalistic black and gray compositions in the early 1970s. Employing India ink and acrylic paint, she cross-hatched canvases vertically or horizontally, lending them a dense texture. She subsequently took up chiefly handmade paper, which she first folded and then, using black ink and a straight edge, inscribed lines into its surface. Wéry regarded her folded and serially produced paper works henceforth as objects. She occupied space with them: in horizontal and vertical arrangements or stacked in bundles, she lined the papers up on the wall or spread them out, unframed, on the floor.

Invited to exhibit in the Belgian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1982, Wéry developed these ideas further, but nonetheless returned to color. In monochrome works, often red or blue, she began researching the different qualities and effects of individual colors. Wéry lined up several related-color paintings with the same format in architecture-specific installations or combined them with untreated wood panels, whose grain presented a lively contrast to the smooth colored surfaces.

In the 1990s Wéry experimented with paint media. From then on, she inundated her image carriers—mostly wood or aluminum panels—placed in large paint tubs with paint, pigments, and solvents. She allowed the result to emerge on its own, uncontrolled, until the piece had dried, or worked with broad scrapers and brushes up into the drying process. The paints formed various layers, at times translucent like a veil, and other times voluminosely opaque. Any notion of composition is dismissed here; the image remains open, endless, unbounded.

Along with featuring large-format pieces, our exhibition presents an ensemble of late small-scale works as a large wall tableau that occupies the exhibition space in an unusual fashion. A particular highlight is a tilted aluminum work that we are displaying—on a fragile wooden pedestal—as a floor sculpture together with a series of paper works. The show thus draws attention to the diverse, open presentation of works that Wéry practiced throughout her career and references the radical, boundless character of her painting.

Marthe Wéry (*1930, Brussels) studied at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris. She was professor of painting at the Institut Saint-Luc in Brussels, and as an instructor, influenced a young generation of women artists, such as Ann Veronica Janssens and Joëlle Tuerlinckx. Among her most important exhibitions are *Fundamental Painting* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (1975), her participation in the Venice Biennale (1982), and a large retrospective at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels (2001). In 2004 the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Tournai (whose Art Nouveau building was designed by Victor Horta) devoted a large solo exhibition to her. Wéry passed away in 2005 in Brussels. The following year the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen organized a comprehensive retrospective of the artist’s work. In 2011 the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag presented a retrospective and in 2017–18 a survey exhibition of her works on paper. In 2017 her works were on view at the BPS22 – Musée d’Art de la Province de Hainaut in Charleroi.