

Guy Mees—
The Weather is Quiet, Cool, and Soft

Guy Mees's (B. 1935–2003) photographs, videos, sculptures, and his fragile works on paper are characterized by a formal rigor combined with sensitivity and delicacy. A leading figure of the Belgian avant-garde, Mees left behind an outstanding body of work that transgresses conventional aesthetics and discursive classifications.

Mees quickly gained recognition among the transnational avant-garde of the early 1960s. As a member of the "New Flemish School" he was in touch with an international network of artists affiliated with the neo-avant-garde from Europe, Japan, North and South America (Spazialismo, Zero, Nul, G.R.A.V, and Gutai, to name but a few), who shared an interest in light, serial structures, movement, and monochromy. However, his non-authoritarian attitude and conceptual strategies soon led him down an alternative path. With precision and discretion, the artist set out to free his work from systems, structures, and supports.

The exhibition features emblematic works and unknown archival materials from the artist's creative phases spanning the 1960s to 2000s to shed light on his idiosyncratic, intuitive and conceptual approach. The selected works allow an overview of his ideas of mutability and fragility.

For Mees, the question of pictoriality was an underlying, not to say omnipresent feature of his work, despite his not having resorted to conventional ways of painting since the 1950s. He applied himself to its slow dissolution and shattering in ordinary and social space. Nothing in his work is abstracted from what surrounds it, but shares the random rhythm of the phenomena and porosity of the world.

The title of the exhibition, *The Weather is Quiet, Cool, and Soft* (borrowed from a note by the artist) pays homage to the atmospheric impermanence, infra-ordinary, and relativistic poetic approach present in the work of Mees.

Mees chose the enigmatic title *Lost Space* to describe two major bodies of work whose origin and form were separated by a gap of more than twenty years: the pieces in lace created in the 1960s and the works he began in the 1980s featuring colour paper cutouts pinned to walls.

His program can be read in a short text that acts as a deliberately ambiguous manifesto to define his work and to which he would have contributed no syntactic combinations as such. The explicit or unequivocal finality was eluded in favour of a poetic opacity specific to his work:

The Lost Space is an adjoining space.

The Lost Space is complementary to present-day living space.

The Lost Space does not have a clear-cut function.

The Lost Space is space as utility object, in which bombast

becomes more difficult, and tangibility easier.

The Lost Space is simply the body defined by shape, colour,

taste, smell, and sound.

One could be tempted to read these as the affirmation of a premonition of Mees' conceptual intentions, after a clear-eyed reading of the progression of his work. Despite undeniable stylistic freedom, Mees did not proceed in sudden bursts; his work and the pictoriality associated with it moved gradually towards a liminal space—ethereal yet still tangible.

Curator: Lilou Vidal

The exhibition and the eponymous publication *The Weather is Quiet, Cool, and Soft* are a co-production between Mu.ZEE, Ostend and Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna.