

This is an introduction to the exhibition *eye below*

ear (each word of the title is separated by a soft line break). The exhibition runs at Kunsthal Mechelen from the 22nd of March until the 6th of June. The artists Eleanor Ivory Weber, Ghislaine Leung, JJJJerome Ellis, Julius Pristauz, Lily Greenham & Andrew Walsh-Lister, P. Staff, Reinier Vrancken, Serene Hui, Slow Reading Club, and Wim De Pauw present their works, many of which were produced specifically for here. The exhibition is composed in a way where works of different durations occur at deliberate intervals and, at times, simultaneously. Some are continuous, some repeat several times a day, and some occur only once in three months. The exhibition space consists of two main galleries in a U-shape, with four rooms at the rear that form an enfilade. The exhibition circuit begins in the first gallery, approximately three metres in height, evenly lit by dimmed LED fixtures. It continues through the interconnected, smaller back rooms, and ends in the second gallery, the eponymous 'garage' with a nine-metre ceiling and enclosed with a glaze facade.

To the left of the first gallery's entrance, along the wall, there are three sets of white doors: a single door leading to a staff room, a double door leading to a storage room, and a single door leading to a toilet. The doors are secured open at various angles using metal drop bolts installed on their outer sides. The bolts are driven into pilot holes in the concrete floor and can be lifted and lowered with a handle, allowing visitors and staff to open or close the doors as needed. This setup is part of *To Hum and Haw; A Conjugated Silence*, a new work by Brussels-based artist **The Letter Space Department** which includes sound and alterations to all internal doors in the exhibition space. Three other iterations of this piece appear further into the gallery.

The angles at which the doors are fixed correspond to the mouth positions adopted when producing specific 'hesitation markers'—sounds that help listeners identify pauses and speakers gain time to think. The 13 degrees angle corresponds to the sound 'euh', 17 degrees to the sound 'uhm', 7 degrees to 'hmm', and 53 to 'ah'. The double door opened at 10 and 25 degrees represents the double sound 'uh-oh', and the closed door the sound 'mm'. These hesitation markers, also known as 'filled pauses', function as thresholds between words and thoughts.

The humming voice to your right has no visible source. Further into the gallery, the same voice can be heard again, echoing the first, its source also hidden from sight. Both humming and hesitation markers are examples of non-lexical vocalisation, that is, sounds of everyday speech that don't form words but contribute to interactions. People often hum in private, sometimes unconsciously, but humming also features in various musical genres. The music you hear is John Lee Hooker's *Moanin' Blues*, with the backing track erased by the artist. Humming is produced with the mouth closed, emerging through the nose and resonating in the body. This installation also works with the rhythm of opening and closing. Placing your hand on the wall, you can sense the vibrations sent out by the contact speaker on the other side. The sound originates from two rooms adjacent to the exhibition space, which had been permanently sealed off, yet outlined on the floor plan shared with the artist.

A few steps further, past the toilet door, you enter the field of two sound showers mounted under the ceiling. They are part of *polyglottes globe-trotten, konversations-texts*, a two-channel sound installation staging a conversation between

the practices of **Lily Greenham and Andrew Walsh-Lister**. Greenham, a Vienna-born Danish artist, composer, and trained opera singer, toured Europe in the 1960s and 1970s with a programme of 'international concrete and semantic sound poetry'.

The first channel plays Greenham's vocalisations of four concrete poems, each in a different language: *Le Travailleur* by British poet and percussionist Peter Greenham, *Laska* by Czech experimental poet duo Bohumila Grögerová and Josef Hiršal, *Schützengraben* by Austrian poet Ernst Jandl, and *Maskor*, written in Swedish by Finnish author Kurt Sanmark. Greenham often included her own compositions and 'lingual music' pieces in these recitals. This selection includes *Strike*, which was reproduced in her 1974 Writers Forum poetry collection, titled *Tune in to Reality!*.

The second channel plays a new spoken word rehearsal and mouth harp piece by Andrew Walsh-Lister, a typographer, writer, and co-curator of Greenham's 2024 retrospective at Badischer Kunstverein. This piece interprets score fragments of lines from *Relativity*—one of Greenham's most well-known electro-acoustic compositions from 1974, where voice recordings and tape looping create complex musical structures. The score was found in the Lily Greenham Archive at Goldsmiths, University of London during the cataloguing process.

On the floor, directly beneath the speakers, a constellation of four concrete poems is reproduced in white vinyl lettering, sized for readability while standing. *Laska* is set in a semi-bold sans-serif typeface. The Czech pronouns 'ona' and 'on' alternate line by line, forming increasingly longer verses that build into a right-angled triangle, with the pronoun 'ono' appearing once in the final line. *Schützengraben*, typeset in a lighter sans-serif typeface, unfolds as a list of short verses, where the title is repeatedly deconstructed and recomposed, with its vowels removed and colloquially slurred. Line breaks and hyphens underscore the poem's staccato rhythm and its onomatopoeic evocation of gunfire. *Maskor*, set in serif, follows an organic, undulating shape. Beginning with the word 'idealen', the composition splits into two columns, forming symmetrical arches before converging at the centre. The columns then diverge, arching outward before reuniting in an hourglass-like formation that tapers down, ending with the word 'mull'. This structure invites non-linear readings. In her performance, Greenham first follows the left path, then the right, repeating the words at the points of convergence. Greenham's partial score from *Relativity* is typeset in a custom digitised typeface based on the IBM Selectric typewriter she used. The phrase 'velocity of no body exceeds the velocity of light' repeats in a gradually steepening cascade, as if distorted by gravitational pull.

The gallery extends into a spacious central area, connecting the first and second galleries with the enfilade of smaller rooms at the far end of the exhibition space. Occupying a prominent, slightly off-centre position in this space is the installation *sketch for an assembly* by Berlin-based Austrian-born artist **Julius Pristauz**. Twelve microphone stands are arranged in a clock-like formation with a diameter of approximately four metres, their arms tilted at around a 45-degree angle, all facing inward. They are detailed with coloured tape, rubber bands and stickers, and their tripods are fitted with three caster wheels, in a makeshift manner. In place of microphones, twelve coloured light bulbs of slightly varying sizes are mounted in the following order: pink, white, soft pink, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, black, brown, and light blue. All bulbs are wired together, with the cables converging in the middle, where they connect to

a microprocessor. The bulbs light up at irregular intervals, performing a choreography inspired by speech rhythms and conversational dynamics: speaking to, over, against, and for one another. The emerging patterns hint at different power dynamics at play between and within groups, as well as between a group and an individual. The recurring patterns include: pink light pulsating in an irregular rhythm, the remaining lights joining, an exchange ensuing; two lights of random colours blinking alternately, one parroting the other; circle dividing into different fractions that flash rapidly; two half-circles signalling toward each other; random lights blinking harmoniously; all lights activating one after another in a clockwise order, as if performing ‘whisper down the lane,’ or lighting up one by one and staying on until the circle is complete.

The rightmost room of the enfilade measures about four by four metres. A light grey column stands slightly off-centre in the room. It is an iteration of *Surgery*, a work by London-based artist **Ghislaïne Leung**, which was produced based on the following score: ‘The portion of the artist’s body mass removed via hysterectomy as a portion of a room made unavailable. No reproductions may be made of this artwork.’ Leung’s works are scores—written instructions that inform their material and physical execution. Each performance of the score varies. Typically, the intervals between exhibitions define the intervals between the realisations within the same series. In this exhibition, the same score has been realised twice: in this room and in the largest gallery, on the opposite end of the exhibition space. The doubling of the score makes this mechanics more apparent and further de-particularises the body.

The addition of *Surgery* performs a subtraction, reducing the volume of available space. The works’ dimensions correspond to one percent of the volume of each space. A narrow structure with a square base of approximately 45 centimetres blocks a section of this room. Another structure, one metre wide and six metres tall, towers over the largest gallery, stopping about a metre short of reaching the metal grid ceiling. Their exteriors remain raw, with untreated plaster-board, exposed metal beading, and visible construction marks.

In the corner of this room stands a grey CRT- monitor, displaying *The Speech Kit*, which is the first in a series of three educational videos produced by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, and John Tracy Clinic in 1974. The video introduces different instruments used by speech therapists to teach speech to deaf children. It opens with a shot of an electrician repairing a computer, with an open toolkit in the frame. This image serves as a prelude to the introduction of the ‘speech kit’—drawing an analogy between technology and the body, signal and speech.

A studied shot of a light blue briefcase appears, set against a background in a darker shade of blue. The briefcase fades out, followed by a dissolve sequence of miscellaneous objects: a box of wooden applicators, a pencil flashlight with Lucite tips and extra batteries, a dental cast of the upper teeth and the Plastiflex model of the tongue, a box of tongue depressors, lollipops, blue Kleenex, a plastic container with a wide top, cotton, cake decorations, a funnel, blue feathers, matches, candles, and a candle holder embedded in Styrofoam, bubble liquid and the bubble ring, coloured balloons, a box of coloured chalk, a dark cardboard square, a chrome spatula, a magnifying mirror, a red and a brown paper square, food colouring, rubber bands, dental floss,

speech cards, a pair of dice, a market counter, an egg timer, a spinner, a deck of playing cards, disinfectant, and white Kleenex.

The instructor then uses these objects to indicate—by sight or touch—the exact position of mouth, tongue, and teeth needed to produce a given sound. For most speakers, these mechanics are invisible—but for those whose speech is considered non-normative, they become the subject of focused scrutiny and training. While this kind of training was believed to make trainees’ participation in society easier, at the same time, it represents an example of language’s institutionalisation, reinforcing dominant normative ideas about communication. The video is a document of its time, when oralism—an approach focused on oral speech—was the dominant method for educating deaf and hard-of-hearing children, before shifting toward approaches that prioritize sign language and total communication, where no single form of communication is considered superior.

In the passage leading to the next room you come across another iteration of Wim De Pauw’s work and a sculpture by the artist duo **Slow Reading Club** (Henry Andersen and Bryana Fritz), titled *Lyric Mediator (Sender)*. Two light grey plastic storage boxes are stacked, the top one facing open-side up and sealed with a plexiglass sheet. The stack measures approximately 35 cm in height. A radio transmitter, stripped of its chassis, is sunken into the plexiglass, with the antenna extending upwards. A warm glow on the surface comes from a chromed lightbulb installed inside the box, along with all the electronics. A corresponding sculpture, *Lyric Mediator (Receiver)*, featuring a radio placed atop three similar boxes occupies a prominent position in the tallest gallery, on the opposite end of the exhibition space. Both devices are tuned to the FM frequency 107.8, continuously transmitting the sound work *En la biblioteca / In the Library (Spanish to English)*.

The work is a recording of a live translation of *En la Biblioteca*, a poem by Cuban writer Virgilio Piñera, from his collection *Una broma collosal*, published posthumously in 1988. At the time of the poems’ writing, Piñera had been blacklisted from publishing in his home country and relegated to a technical translation job. During this time, he continued to organise informal readings of his works in bars and restaurants to a small circle of friends and protégés. For several years, in response to these poems’ unavailability outside of Spanish, Slow Reading Club has been leveraging various invitations as opportunities for translation, aiming for a complete, bootleg edition of *Una broma collosal*.

This simultaneous translation from a recording in Spanish into English is realised by Quim Pujol, a Barcelona-based poet and performer who works a money job as a live interpreter, most often for pharmaceutical companies. During the 20-minute turn time, Pujol repeatedly interprets the poem, using trained mnemonic and delivery techniques, for instance adapting his prosody to gain time and mask hesitations. The transmission traverses approximately 30 meters across the gallery space, whose qualities and surroundings, along with the visitors’ movements create occasional interference.

In the following room, you come across the installation by Dutch artist **Reinier Vrancken**. A black speaker mounted on a tripod is bracketed by two walls, approximately 3 meters apart. The proportions of the equipment echo those of a body, with the speaker box roughly the size of a torso. It is powered on, as indicated by the lit-up control panel on the speaker’s back, but the recording remains paused. Inserted into the USB port is a metal flash drive, engraved with the work’s title—two capitalised i’s together guising as a caesura—a mark indicating

metrical pauses in poetry and music notation. The small LED screen of the media player displays the name of the paused track: *Ideale* by Alessandro Moreschi.

Moreschi, who died in 1922, was the last known castrato singer. Since the 16th century, generations of Italian youth were subjected to castration in the hope of preserving their prepubescent singing voice—and often lifting their families out of poverty. The practice was encouraged by powerful institutions of the time—castrati were a fixture in the Vatican's choirs and in Italian opera, which peaked in the 18th century with many attaining celebrity status. The prepubescent voice, thrown with the power of matured lungs, occupies the liminal space between typically male and female registers, yet resists fitting neatly into either category. Moreschi's is the only castrato voice to have ever been recorded. This performance is part of a series of recordings taken in the Vatican between 1902 and 1904, around the time when the practice became banned. However, some researchers claim Moreschi performed at Sistine Chapel until as late as 1913.

At the end of the enfilade of rear rooms, another iteration of De Pauw's installation shares the space with a new sound piece by Rotterdam-based, Hong Kong-born artist **Serene Hui**. Left from the entrance, at the far end of this room, two tape recorders are installed on opposing walls, roughly at the visitor's ear level, facing each other. Each recorder measures around 40 by 40 cm and is housed in a custom wooden cabinet of about 80 by 80 cm. This specific model, originally used by journalists for field recording, is equipped with two built-in speakers located on both sides and therefore can function as a portable player.

The sound piece, titled *Ingressives, Egressives, Echoes*, is a stereo recording by Jean René Toussaint, a French theatre director, actor, voice coach, and voice therapist with over 40 years of experience. Jean's authorial method foregrounds the bodily and psychological aspects of sound production. He guides his clients, including Hui, in embracing the limitations of their voice and understanding its strengths. In other words, rather than forcing the voice to conform to certain norms, the goal is to rediscover one's voice in relation to and through the body. In the recording, Toussaint repeatedly performs the same exercise, each time aiming to produce two variants of the same note in the highest and lowest register he can attain. To sustain the sound, he works with his breath, producing the high pitch while inhaling and the low pitch while exhaling. The left and right channels represent different attempts, with Toussaint's two voices converging in the centre. The produced sounds are imperfect echoes of one another, impacted by imprecision of memory and increasing fatigue—which sometimes find harmony. Over the duration of the exhibition, the reel will be played about 160 times, which is roughly the half-life of a magnetic tape, the point at which material wear becomes audible.

Back in the central space, heading toward the garage, you pass a video projection on your right. The video playing is *Hevn* by **P. Staff**, an artist and poet based in London and Los Angeles. The 3:4 ratio image fills the entire height of the wall and is also visible from outside, all the way across the gallery, through the glass facade. *Hevn* was originally commissioned by LUX and the University of Reading as part of the research project Legacies of Stephen Dwoskin. Dwoskin who passed in 2012 was an American director and a key figure British independent cinema movement, who became known for his boundary-pushing work on amongst other masculinity, sexuality, disability, illness, voyeurism and desire. *Hevn* was

produced using a mix of digital and analogue techniques, like painting over filmstrip, Letraset lettering, scanning, and green screening that account for its layered texture.

Yellow static crackles on a blue background, then numbers appear from 1 to 10. Punctuation marks follow, then word 'oh' emerges amid flickering letters. The background changes to green, then blue, and the word 'hevn' appears in bouncing black letters. Fast-moving black letters spell out 'debt', then bleached-out spots reveal footage of a light switch being turned on and a shower running, followed by footage filmed inside a driving car. The word oh appears again, in blue on a yellow background, followed by more words in quick succession: 'hot', 'evil', 'rig', 'cut', 'sleep', 'crying'. Then, the screen abruptly turns black. A reclining person appears in grainy inverted blue footage. Words 'me', 'my', 'axe' appear one by one. Then more letters in black flicker past. Purple-hued images of another person applying makeup. Splashes of colour and more letters and numbers in black. The word 'cry' appears, followed by 'rot'. Subtitles appear, white, all in caps, as the flickering, distorted images continue to flow:

'LITTLE DOMINION / LITTLE FLESH PRISON / AMMO AND DAMAGE / WHAT DOES HEVN DO? / I ASK A BOTTLE / ASK AN ENGINE, / IT LEAPS OVERHEAD / —LAST AT NIGHT. / I LIKE TO DREAM / I LIKE HOT AIR, / CURRENT'S RUNNING,, / BUT IT EXHAUSTS ME / LIKE,, CRIME AND DEADHEAD / —ASKING OVERHEAD,, / WHAT DOES HEVN DO? / [STOP] / AMERICA ASKS SO MUCH OF YOU,, / WHAT DOES HEVN DO? / CAME ALL THE WAY HERE / & I DIDN'T SAY A WORD. / I CAN'T KEEP YOU ALIVE EITHER,, / STUCK IN TRAFFIC / ALL DAY LONG / BIG METAL BOX,, / FUCK / DAMAGE / AN ILLUSION. / ASK THE QUESTION AGAIN,, / I WANT YOU TO— / SAY / I'M SORRY // I LOVE YOU. / BUT, WHAT'S PROMISED / IN PARADISE? / THE SWEETEST PLACE / SLEEPING— / REMIND ME / THE SWEETEST PLACE? / SOFT AND SLEEPING, / HERE WITH YOU. / IF YOU TELL ME / YOU WANT TO DIE / YOU CAN TELL ME, / YOU WANT TO DIE / IF YOU TELL ME / YOU WANT TO DIE / I WON'T STOP YOU. / HAMSTER BABY / FAN CLUB / PRISON / HOT HOT / PINK HOUND / WHAT DOES HEVN DO? / IS THERE LIFE / OUTSIDE? / DREAM A METAL TONGUE / PUSSY BOY / WHAT DO YOU DREAM OF / WHEN LIFE'S NOT GIVEN? / — LIKE A LOVER / FINGER FUCKING / LIKE,, / I LOVE YOU // I'M SORRY.. / HEVN ISN'T / BUT NATURE MIGHT BE / CRACKED! / I CAME ALL THE WAY HERE / & I DIDN'T SAY A WORD. / MY SPINE, ALL BROKEN / MY BIG BOX INJURY,, / CAME ALL THE WAY HERE / AND I CAN'T TELL YOU NO.. / CAN'T STOP EXPULSION. / WHAT DOES HEAVEN DO? / DOOM MOVE SO SLOWLY. I LOVE YOU, JOANNA. / STUCK IN TRAFFIC, / THINKING ABOUT MATTHEW. / TELL ME YOU WANT TO DIE,, / WHO AM I? / ALL THIS WAY— / —CAN'T TELL YOU NO.. / MY BIG BOX INJURY / SIX TYPES OF METAL,, / IN YOUR BODY / EVANGELION! / KISS YOU ONLY / — TELL YOU NO.. / P BABY. / TELL ME EVERYTHING— / WHAT'S A TIME MACHINE? / WHAT'S MARRIAGE? / WHAT'S EATING YOU? / WHAT'S DONE IT? / WHAT DOES HEVN DO?'

The gallery at the end of the circuit is elongated and taller than it is wide, featuring a glazed façade and large roof windows, set around nine meters high, which suffuse the space with daylight. Within this gallery, the second work by **Reinier Vrancken**, is presented alongside another iteration of Ghislaine Leung's score, the second sculpture by Slow Reading Club, and a work by JJJJJerome Ellis.

Moving towards the window, you come across two pieces of pottery enclosed in a vitrine: a cylindrical straight-sided ceramic jar and a round-bellied one, both with short collared necks and about 20 cm tall. The first is made of grey, stained earthenware with residual cement on its surface, while the second is light-coloured clay with visible wheel marks. They lie flat in the centre of the vitrine, their mouths almost touching. The vitrine has a base of recovered metal frames and a plexiglass cover. It stands directly on the concrete floor, reaching roughly knee height. Both ceramic

pieces are examples of acoustic jars, also known as sounding vases, which would be immured in walls, particularly in churches, to enhance the acoustics. In some cases, their openings were visually incorporated into murals or frescoes as gaping mouths to a body. Dating to around the 10th and 13th century, these vases were uncovered at the Sint-Truiden Abbey and the Bijloke site in Ghent respectively, and are currently on loan from the Gallo-Roman Museum in Tongeren-Borgloon and Archaeology Collection of the City of Ghent. The arrangement of the jars is inspired by 'rekuhkara', a now-extinct singing game in which two women—a giver and a receiver—face each other and form a tube with their hands, through which one produces a guttural sound, channelling it into the other's mouth cavity. The receiver then modulates the volume and quality of the sound, by closing her glottis and simulating articulation—as if speaking with the other's voice. Rekuhkara was performed by the Ainu, the Indigenous people of northern Japan, but similar games were also recognised among Siberian Chukchi and Canadian Inuits.

At the far end of the gallery, on the right, a minimalist turntable sits on the floor. Beside it, two simple black chairs with two pairs of noise-canceling headphones. The record playing is ***The Clearing*** by artist, musician, and poet **JJJJJerome Ellis**. *The Clearing* is a multimedia project that comprises a record and a book. The record features thirteen tracks that combine poetry, spoken word and music. Here, A and B sides are presented, featuring following pieces: *Loops of Retreat*, *Jede Krankheit ist ein musikalisches Problem*, *Small Baptism*, *The Bookseller*, *Pt. 1*, *Dysfluent Waters*, and *Stepney (feat. Milta Vega-Cardona)*.

JJJJJJerome Ellis, whose stage name is spelt with five j's, uses his glottal block (a type of stutter) as a compositional tool and means of expression throughout his work—the block becoming a clearing. In *The Clearing*, Ellis connects this embodied experience of stuttering with histories of Blackness and refusal through music.

The vitrine at the gallery's far end frames the installation ***Overseas (Majestic Fanfare, 1988 version)*** by Australia-born Brussels-based artist **Eleanor Ivory Weber**. Three contact speakers are attached inside, roughly at ear height, turning the facade into a loudspeaker. The installation is synced to Sydney, Australian Eastern time. A 9-second orchestral music piece plays every hour between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. AEST/AEDT, with an 18-second version at 7 a.m. only. This means that, for the most part, the piece is inaudible during gallery hours, becoming active in the evening and playing overnight and throughout the morning. Due to the opposing shift into summer time in Mechelen and out of it in Sydney, the work's time frame is pushed forward by an hour twice in the first two weeks of the exhibition, before settling on the cycle 10 p.m. to 3 p.m. CEST.

The music piece, titled *Majestic Fanfare*, was written by British composer Charles Williams in 1935, and since 1952 it has served as the radio news theme for the ABC—Australia's public service broadcaster. Australian composer Richard Mills was commissioned to reorchestrate *Majestic Fanfare* on the occasion of the Australian bicentenary commemoration in 1988. That year marked two hundred years since the First Fleet's arrival at Sydney Cove in 1788, and the founding there of the penal colony of New South Wales.

The work's functioning hinges on its displacement from a familiar cultural and temporal context. Announcing the hourly news elsewhere, it operates like a clock: no content, just structure. The title *Overseas (Majestic Fanfare, 1988 version)* points to this displacement, as experienced both on the level

of one's biography and national history. The window overlooks Mechelen's busy street and the monumental cathedral with its famous carillon—another time telling device. Broadcasted outward while also resonating inward, the piece interacts with the city's soundscape and its policies of public space.

This text is an abbreviated version of the audio description script produced by the curator following guidelines for AD practices in museum context. The full script will be used during guided tours for blind and hard of seeing visitors organised alongside the exhibition.

The paragraph on P. Staff's video *Hevn* incorporates an abbreviated version of the audio description produced by LUX, London.

Text: Alicja Melzacka and the artists
Dutch translation: Bureau Doove & Jessica Meuleman