

All the Residents' Men



Chambres d'Amis turns 40
30 May–10 January
SMAK, 1 Jan Hoetplein, 9000 Ghent

On 21 June 1986, Belgian national television broadcast six hours of live coverage to mark the opening of an art exhibition unlike any that had come before. Helicopter footage, reporters on bicycles and an audience phone-in: no effort was spared to inaugurate *Chambres d'Amis*, for which 51 international artists had been invited to produce work in private homes across the city of Ghent. The project was curator Jan Hoet's experiment in breaking art out of the confines of the Museum of Contemporary Art and into the 'real' world. It was ambitious, audacious, and boasted a roster of prominent artists including Daniel Buren, Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham, Jannis Kounellis, Christian Boltanski and Lawrence Weiner (alas, group

shows featuring a preponderance of white men were then the norm). For three months, visitors could traipse around the city and enter private homes to see fresh art, indulging voyeuristic impulses and soaking up the intimacies and idiosyncrasies of other people's bedrooms, sitting rooms, hallways and kitchens.

Chambres d'Amis influenced a series of exhibitions outside the museum, which was renamed SMAK in 1999. In 2000, Hoet curated *Over the Edges*, which placed sculpture on street corners across the city centre. In 2012, Philippe van Cauteren, now SMAK's artistic director, elaborated the gambit with *Track*, a collection of works installed on a route linking the city's train stations through peripheral areas usually bypassed by tourists more likely to head straight to the illustrious St Bavo's cathedral, with its exquisite altarpiece by Jan and Hubert van Eyck.

On its 40th anniversary, SMAK is revisiting *Chambres d'Amis* with an imaginative, if convoluted, show featuring 're-activated' archival materials from the exhibition and new commissions by three artists – Heike Pallanca, Haim Steinbach and Susanne Kriemann – one from each of the gallery's extramural exhibitions. They have been invited to imagine new settings for the original works. Thibaut Verhoeven, the collection specialist, explains: 'We have 18 artworks from *Chambres d'Amis* in our collection, which have a peculiar status as "ghost works", conceived for a specific situation that no longer exists. We thought: how can we reactivate these remnants in the museum today?' Each artist addresses a central theme or problematic of the 1986 show: Pallanca questions its purported democratic nature, given that the open call for residents willing to lend their homes attracted mostly high-status

Daniel Buren, *'Le Décor et son Double'*, 1986

EXHIBITIONS

Ghentians; Steinbach indulges his abiding passion for display, presenting elements from various 'ghost works' on his signature structures; and Kriemann's installation dramatises the anticipation of an empty interior awaiting its artwork.

Another taste of the original exhibition is found in Daniel Buren's *Le Décor*

et son Double, an installation featuring his signature striped *papier collé* in red and white, applied to the walls of collectors Annick and Anton Herbert's guest bedroom and en suite bathroom. The in-situ piece came with a replica, or 'double', for the museum, where it remains to this day, subverting the museological conceit

of showing exclusively one-off works of art. To complete the experience of revisiting 1986, there will be an immersive slide show of rare images depicting the original art-filled interiors. They provide the next best thing to the thrill of being there the first time around © Ellen Mara de Wachter is a writer and critic based in London



Jan Vercruysse, 'Sans Titre' ('Chambres d'Amis'), 1986