



you, tomorrow  
Emma van der Put  
October 19 – November 18, 2023

Written on a large window, in boldly printed letters, are the words 'many faces of change'. Lush vegetation is reflected in the window. As the image slowly glides onward, the camera evidently takes us to sunlit trees and bushes lining the inner street of a modern building. Further on, words appear on another window: 'let's change the way we live'. In her new film *Passage II (you, tomorrow)* Emma van der Put directs the lens at Tour & Taxis, originally a 19th-century industrial area, situated along the Brussels Canal. The district had long been marked by poverty and social problems, but it is now a place in transition. Developers use their flashy one-liners here to tempt people into renting commercial or living space in what they call 'A Covered City in the most upcoming neighbourhood of Brussels'.

Van der Put's film takes place at Gare Maritime, the repurposed freight station of Tour & Taxis, with its glass roofing. Shots of the current situation in and around the renovated building show inviting billboards alternated with historical photographs which, like the digital architectural renderings, have been printed on banners and posters. Van der Put records all this patiently, zooming in and out as the images change color, tonally for the most part, to black-and-white and back. As the entire environment is explored, from larger structures to details, everything is examined. New slogans keep on coming into the picture – 'Guide to better living', 'This is where we work', 'Places you prefer'. The slow and associative juxtaposition of images has an intense effect while the eye adapts willingly to the decelerated pace, and then – as if the veil is drawn back with a single tug – it suddenly dawns on us: this is the painful view of a clash between fact and fiction. Here we have the pre-programmed portrayal of a utopia, the result of unbridled, but also outdated neoliberal thinking. Van der Put exposes that type of thinking in the most unaggressive manner and arrives at a portrait of technocracy stripped bare, an indictment of its failure to remember that a city means 'life', being a living organism that cannot be ruled by systems thinking.

*you, tomorrow* is Emma van der Put's second solo exhibition in the gallery. The works shown reflect her interest in our way of dealing with history, and how the present and future become interwoven with that history via political agendas. If history, as has been said\*, is about becoming familiar with the poles of change and continuity, about gaining contextual awareness with respect to the world in which we exist and behave, and about the meaning and impact of fathoming form and space, then the work *Dweller* is almost a symbolic counterpart to the films *Passage I and II*, both of which can be seen in the exhibition. Here the camera follows, in close-ups, a beetle cautiously navigating around stones, leaves and branches while seeking its way with the utmost focus. This work relates to 'interpreting' one's environment, the experience of that environment as a living organism which continually sheds its skin, as it were. Perhaps that little beetle can also be considered a portrait of the artist who observes and records, and who holds up a mirror to us by way of what strikes her, what has not yet been seen or said: *you, tomorrow* asks us to realize that our surroundings belong to us, and not to abstract systems

\*Beatriz van Houtte Alonso, 'Sibyl Moholy-Nagy. Architecture, Modernism and its Discontents', in: *De Witte Raaf*, editie 225