

Gilles Hellemans (1996, BE) lives and works in Brussels. Through site-specific observations and walks, he flirts with architecture and public space. Unfolding the urban context piece by piece, permitting other readings. Model making, costume, wordplay, sound and found objects are processes he engages with that have resulted in installations, paintings, performances, drawings, video works and experimental pedagogy. The practice amplifies the disjuncture between a personal visual attraction to space and objects and the alienation they imply or enforce. This performed disjuncture ridicules its own seriousness- misusing, overusing and subverting the subject matter. Currently, the practice is exploring the mode of being 'always stuff', a coping mechanism through art practice that deals with the heavy desire to acquire, possess and immerse in objects and spaces.

He received an educational MFA at LUCA School of Arts (Brussels) in 2022 and the MA installation & performance at l'ERG (Brussels) in 2020. In addition to his own artistic practice he works as an artist for MUS-E Belgium, wherefore he organizes a variety of participatory ateliers with children. Ranging from walks in public space to installation and video work in their proper school environments. Hellemans has exhibited work in Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Including the solo exhibition Adhesive Exercises (2019) at Groelle Pass Projects/ Raum2 (Wuppertal, DE) and the group exhibitions FERMÉ 24/24_7/7 (2021) at Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles (Paris, FR) and Kelder Kamer Muziek (2020) at CCStrombeek (Grimbergen, BE).

Pdf of selected works
2023

I give you my blue word(s) (almost public exercises), 2023, Gilles Hellemans
—a platform for reflection on urban alienation and loneliness; it invites adaptation and public participation in its space.

Since 2018 Hellemans has been fascinated and working with metro benches. Especially in the city of Brussels where these seats have such specific aesthetic presence in contrast with what remains very alienating architecture. The stations are subterranean spaces with nasty smells, and are often accompanied by feelings of discomfort. He started by capturing them in language through poems and texts, imagining performative scores around them, and reproducing them in architectural models. Eventually, the maquettes expanded in size and became life-size structures that he employed to work on topics like gentrification, and the human body in relation to architecture where the bench became a human-extension and measuring tool. The tubes were reduced to a single blue (sometimes orange or black) line and implicate the continuation, alteration or immersion into architecture.

For his residency at Bizet Bizar, the grid of lines applied to the concrete parking lot by Dear pigs, inspired him to do a mirroring gesture with the blue tubes. After visiting the site and experiencing the floor shaking as the metro passes underneath, the importance of bringing the metro seat back to the tube structure became evident. By coincidence he discovered that the nearby metro station of Bizet houses a sculptural piece by playwright Tone Brulin with very similar blue tubes imagining a theater stage.



I give you my blue word(s) (almost public exercises), 2023, Gilles Hellemans. Sculpture and performance, Metal, blue metro seat and blue paint. Image: inauguration of *I give you my blue word(s) (almost public exercises)*, Bizet Bizar, 2023. Photography: Dániel Fülöp

The bench thus becomes a confirmation of the parking lot, a reference to the metro, but above all a platform (or stage) for communication and reflection on the isolating effects of modern-day society. The long stretched tube and the isolated chair illustrate the idea of alienation and solitude, while the vibrant blue of the sculpture radiates and marks its undeniable presence.

The artist has worked with the children of a nearby primary school, taking them on walks (a visit to the metro station, an urban art route,,...) and to Bizet Bizar. They reflected on public space and their school environment, asking questions such as: what does it mean to share a message with your community? How can we share such a message? Together, they built a prototype of the sculpture using cardboard and adhesive tape, becoming real participants in the creative process.

The sculpture has a minimalist aesthetic and seems to function like a bench, although it offers only one seat. The artist has chosen a simple, accessible aesthetic to encourage proximity and social interaction. As a functional design object, the sculpture remains open, undetermined and unfinished. It thus gives passers-by the opportunity to take hold of it and imagine new ways of using it. In this sense, the sculpture could be a skate grind rail in the afternoon, and in the evening a dinner table for a shared meal. From an aesthetic point of view, his tube sculptures often evoke fences or borders. They also raise the idea of "me" and "the other", of private and public. In a way, they reflect the growing privatisation of public spaces. But it also echoes the new boundaries within cities that are growing and gentrifying. The artist's aim with his work, on the contrary, is to create a space for inclusion and participation.



Photography: Gilles Hellemans



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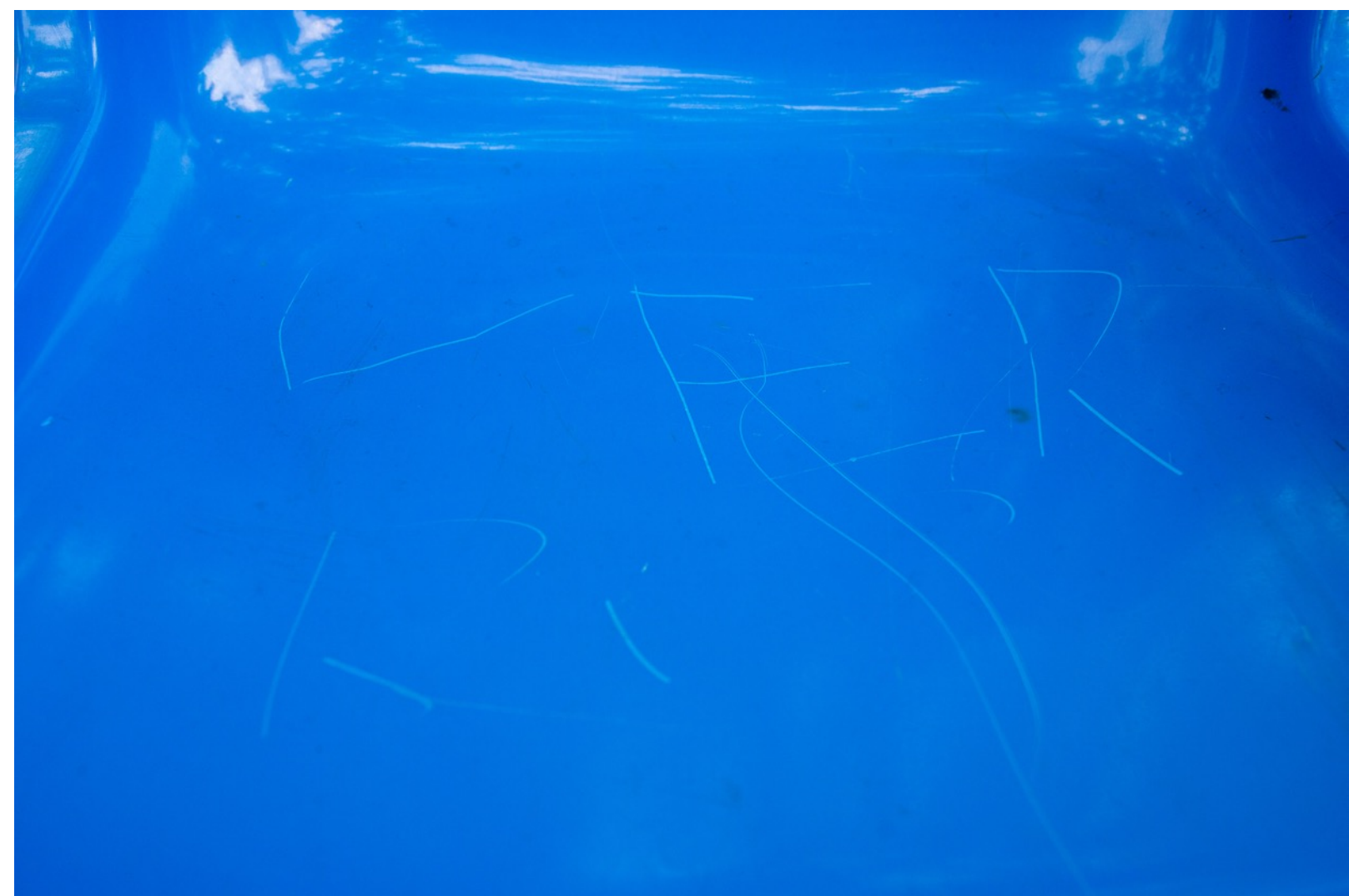
On the opening day of the sculpture *I give you my blue word(s) (almost public exercises)* the children from Veeweide primary school will be performing the ideas they have been working on with the artist. This will be the occasion for the students to share the messages they feel are important in public space. Children from other MUS-E Belgium projects will also be invited to leave their mark or simply visit the bench. In the afternoon, the sculpture will be used to gather participants around with an extra table and chairs to share a potluck-style neighbourhood meal, offering a first opportunity for a new use of the bench sculpture. Later in the evening, artist Gilles Hellemans and other guest artists will activate the sculpture with performative interventions. From now on, the work will continue to invite the public to participate at various times, under the name *blue-bench-sessions*, and will become an integral part of the urban landscape of Anderlecht, fully playing its role as a public artwork.



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Left and right: *I give you my blue word(s) (almost public exercises)*, 2023, Gilles Hellemans. Sculpture and performance, Metal, blue metro seat and blue paint. Image: inauguration of I give you my blue word(s) (almost public exercises), Bizet Bizar, 2023. Photography: Dániel Fülöp



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I give you my blue word(s) (almost public exercises), 2023, Gilles Hellemans. Contribution by Inga Gerner Nielsen at the inauguration of *I give you my blue word(s) (almost public exercises)*, Bizet Bizar, 2023. Photography: Dániel Fülöp



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