

## M HKA & Paul De Vree

Paul De Vree is very indirectly connected with the genesis of the M HKA. The history of the M HKA starts with the founding of the ICC, the International Cultural Centre, which under the direction of Florent Bex became the first public institution for contemporary art in Belgium. From the late fifties onwards, over the course of a decade, there were various attempts to create a place for modern art in Antwerp, because it received little or no attention from the generally conservative museums. The establishment of the ICC was a by-product of these protest movements, the socio-cultural energies and Antwerp-based cosmopolitan-style dynamics, which had already surfaced with the establishment of G58/Hessenhuis and, in 1958, the Modernistisch Centrum of which Paul De Vree was the co-founder and chairman. It was here that several avant-garde groups came together. The aim of the centre was to champion the interests of the most recent artistic trends. In the early sixties, together with Karel Geirlandt, De Vree organised a number of meetings and exhibitions. In the mid-sixties, together with architect Renaat Braem and painter Jef Verheyen, he attempted to set up the Museum of Modern Art in Antwerp. However, all these initiatives failed to persuade the museums of the time to focus their attention on more recent artistic developments.

De Vree is also indirectly linked to the collection building that took place at the M HKA. The basis for the M HKA collection comes from the ICC period, via the Gordon Matta-Clark Foundation. Firstly, when this foundation was set up in 1979, De Vree was elected chairman of the board of directors. Secondly, when the ICC was disbanded, its extensive archive and documentation centre was handed over to the M HKA. In the seventies, the ICC had dedicated several exhibitions to concrete and visual poetry, and to De Vree's artistic activities, so the archive contains masses of documentary material, as well as several of his publications, including collections of visual poetry, and issues of *De Tafelronde*, *Lotta Poetica* and *Factotum Art*.

In the 70s and early 80s, the Ministry of National Education and Dutch Culture had already acquired a series of works that are now in the M HKA collection. These works include the photo canvas *Honger* and the edition entitled *Love*, published by the Society of Friends of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, some original works including the remarkable 1976 series called *De Brandwonden*, which was done using the so-called smoke technique, and 15 magnifications on canvas. These canvases are replicas of works that are also included in various Italian collections and that were made following De Vree's retrospective exhibition in the Provinciaal Begijnhof in Hasselt in 1981, to save on high transport costs. In 2002, in consultation with the beneficiaries, the M HKA also acquired a selection of 53 newly reproduced magnifications on canvas of works from various periods between 1966 and 1981. The institution also acquired the lion's share of the graphic work and editions, including *Een Roos is* from 1965, *Cocienza* from 1975, *XX-Eeuwen* from 1981, and the folios of prints published by the Galerij De Zwarte Panter: *Poesia Visiva* from 1979, *Visueel* and *Ook Oppervlak ik* from 1981. This extensive ensemble was the first initiative towards the presentation of a collection, proposed by Bart De Baere when he took office at the M HKA in 2002. Since then, the collection has been regularly added to, most recently with the rare folio of prints called *Verbaal Gelaat* from 1969, published in-house by *De Tafelronde*.

It is principally with his *poesia visiva*, in which he touches on power relationships by making visible what is invisible, or what is hidden under the surface of images that occupy public space, that De Vree's work is represented in the M HKA collection, seamlessly connecting with a series of artists who subversively question the current systems, if not with a directly political focus then frequently taking an existential view of social commitment. Such artists included Vito Acconci, Alain Arias-Misson, Luc Deleu, Jef Geys, Barbara Kruger, Antoni Muntadas and Toon Tersas.