

# Palms Palms Palms in Z33

How did you experience the work?  
We'd love to hear your thoughts via  
[@z33be](#) [#z33be](#)

# Intro

The last few months have made it painfully clear how dependent we are on global production flows. For a brief moment, mass production in China, the mining of materials in Congo and assembly line work seemed to come to a standstill. As a user and consumer, you are caught in the middle. Our desire for the latest fun keeps global consumption flows going. That makes the work of artists Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen more relevant than ever. In *Palms Palms Palms*, you will get to know the artists' unique thought process on a large scale for the first time.

The duo's work is layered, and every detail contributes to a larger story. Animals as objects; the semblance of opportunity; leading and following; and geopolitical issues are just a few of the concerns raised by their work.

Z33 invites you to experience *Palms Palms Palms* with an open mind and to let the installation have its effect on you. That is why you will not find any captions on the walls of the exhibition rooms. In this brochure, we highlight a few works and themes within the oeuvre of Cohen and Van Balen. The issues are not listed in order, but they do give context to your visit. Are you looking for more information about a particular work? The works marked with an (1) on the map are discussed in this brochure.

Team Z33

# Meet



Revital  
Cohen  
&  
Tuur Van  
Balén

“We question who and what is produced in a process.”

Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen

Artist duo Revital Cohen (United Kingdom, 1981) and Tuur Van Balen (Belgium, 1981) are fascinated by production flows and systems that dictate daily life. In their work they extend everyday phenomena into a new reality. In doing so, they open questions about new roles for humans, animals and technology.

Palms Palms Palms brings together twelve years of research on a large scale for the first time. From the mining of minerals in the Democratic Republic of Congo to the political reality of the casinos in Macau, and from an exhibition rehearsal to the dance of conveyor belt work, Cohen and Van Balen's works of art are preceded by years of research.

In a world where everything is networked, the artists challenge cultural, political and economic stratification. They seek out boundaries, test and question logic, turn the prevailing system on its head. This makes their sculptures, installations and films as layered as reality itself. Every detail tells a larger story and as artists, they are right in the midst of it all. No work stands

alone. The artists do not take a stand or offer solutions to social problems. Rather, they uncover the glitches in the structures and in our way of thinking.

This exhibition is not the artist duo's first appearance in Z33. After graduating from the Royal College of Art in London, they had an exhibition at the Hasselt beguinage in 2011 with an alternative vision of nature. A selection of their works are included in the collections of the MoMA and M+ Hong Kong, among others. At the invitation of Z33 and Vlaams Cultuurhuis De Brakke Grond, the artists joined forces with curator Christina Li in 2017. In the theatre rooms of this Amsterdam venue, the duo reflected on the production process of their first retrospective exhibition. It turned out to be a pre-survey for *Palms Palms Palms*, the exhibition you are about to enter.

“How come if you lose your eyesight you get a lovely dog that keeps you company, but when your kidney fails you get connected to a cold computer that keeps you prisoner?”

MoMA R&D Salon 35: Dogs, February 2020

# Animal as object?

Pigeons washing the streets, horses as sculptures and greyhounds as respirators. For centuries, people have been breeding animals for entertainment, food or medicine. The big question is: Where is the boundary? When is an animal still an animal and not just a nice gadget? And how far can you intervene in the biological process? The duo investigates animals as objects and follows the logic of the prevailing system to its extreme.



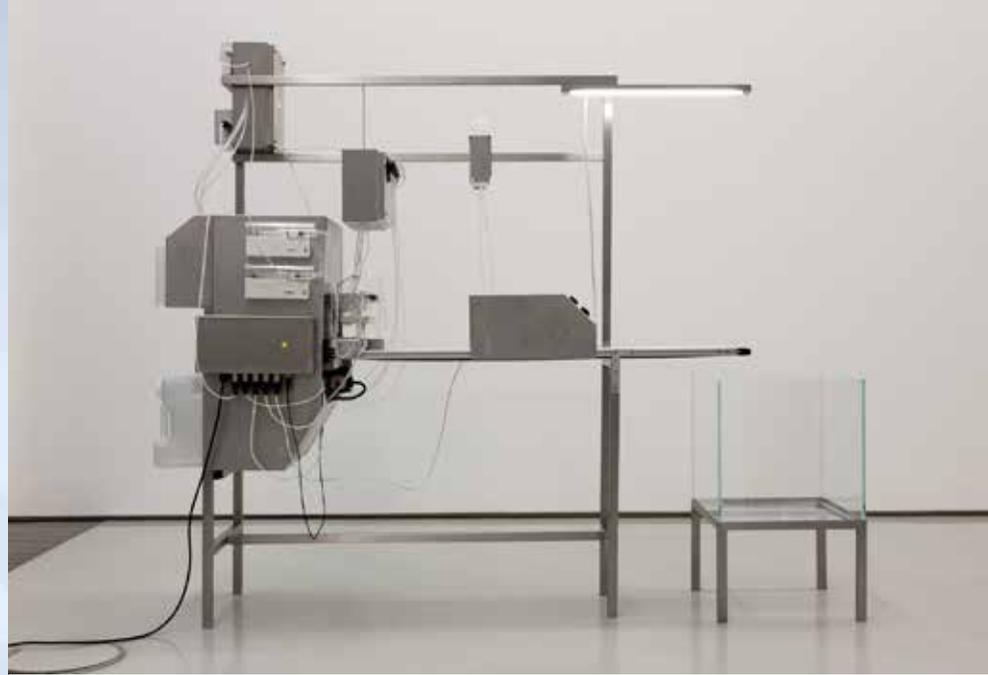
Film still, Pigeon d'or (2010)

## Pigeon d'or (2010)

From carrier pigeon to spy, with small adjustments to DNA and training, humankind creates a new variety of pigeon. If you follow this logic, the pigeon offers great opportunities in an urban environment. With small interventions to the bird's nutrition and bowel movements, it becomes possible to reprogram pigeon droppings as soapy water. The intervention is just as harmless for a pigeon as a bowl of yoghurt is for humans. A proposal for a cleaner streetscape and a powerful message about the limits of breeding.



Kingyo Kingdom (2013)



Sensei Ichi-gō (2014)

## Kingyo Kingdom (2013) Sterile (2014) Sensei Ichi-gō (2014)

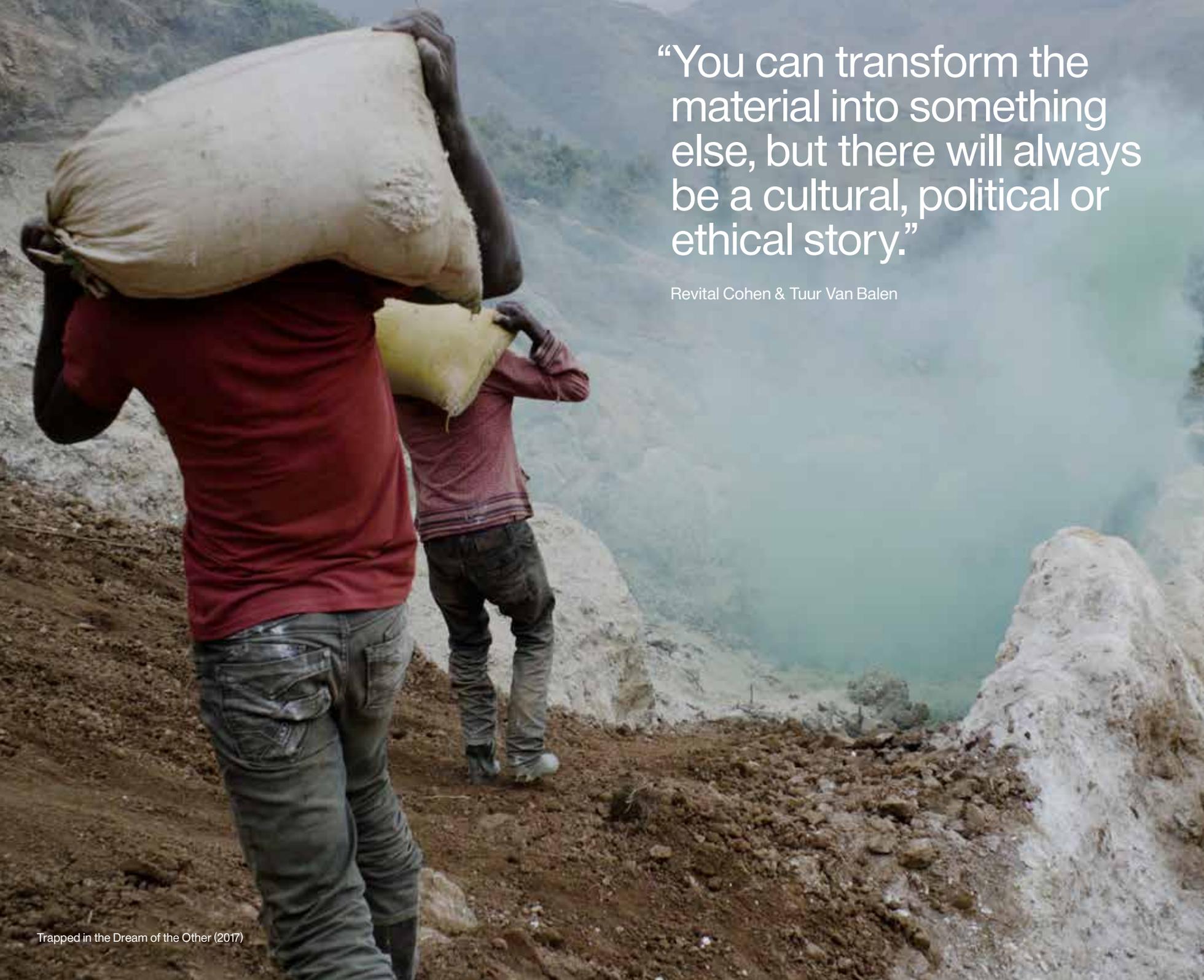
The goldfish is an animal whose main function is aesthetic pleasure. In Japan especially, the obsession with the perfect goldfish has taken on considerable proportions. The Ranchu variant, with its leonine mane and broad back, is known as the king of goldfish. The most beautiful Ranchu is chosen in annual competitions. The fish is specifically designed, bred and judged on a 2-D view: from above.

In the spirit of this philosophy, Cohen & Van Balen developed *Sterile* (2014), a limited edition of 45 goldfish without reproductive organs. In Professor Yamaha's lab, they analyzed the process and actions of Yamaha-Sensei in the breeding process. These actions were also mapped out by the artists; the breeding of a living being is thus captured as an automatism. The machine *Sensei Ichi-gō* imitates Professor Yamaha's actions; the machine itself becomes the professor, as it were.

# Here and there?

From 2012 to 2017, Cohen and Van Balen investigated the ‘treasure’ hunt in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Congolese mining industry extracts coltan, a mineral that can be found in almost every mobile phone and gaming computer. In the former Belgian colony, other countries are still in charge. Where there is money to be made, battles are fought.

For the story behind our electronic devices, we are groping in the dark. In fact, we simply don’t give it much thought. Congo is in your pocket and on your laptop. With our digital devices, we unwittingly maintain the system of economic colonization. The artists turn this system on its head and dig the minerals and their stories out of our electronic devices.

A photograph showing two men from behind, walking on a dirt path. The man in the foreground is wearing a red t-shirt and grey jeans, carrying a large, full, light-colored sack on his back. The man behind him is wearing a maroon t-shirt and dark pants, carrying a smaller, yellow sack. They are walking on a dirt path that runs along the edge of a steep, rocky hillside. In the background, a wide valley with green fields and a river is visible under a hazy sky.

“You can transform the material into something else, but there will always be a cultural, political or ethical story.”

Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen



## Avant tout, Discipline (2017)

The theatrical backdrops suggest that you're in a video landscape, a virtual representation of a Congolese mine in the real world. The title is taken from a sentence on the walls of a house belonging to the Congolese secret service: "Discipline above all." This applies not only to the Congolese secret service, but also to society. One must be reachable 27/7 and always in search of the latest fun. What is far away is suddenly realistically close by in virtual form.



## D/AlCuNdAu (2015)

In front of you lies a mountain of distorted objects from computers: 25 hard disks from an Icelandic data center. Cohen and Van Balen transformed the hard disks back into their original mineral form. An artificial ore consisting of Aluminium (Al), Copper (Cu), Neodymium (Nd) Gold (Au) and Icelandic volcanic stone appear out of the geopolitical landscape. The aluminium (Al) hard disks – still full of ones and zeros – are melted and recast in sand moulds.



Heart Lines, La Foret (2016)



Heart Lines (2016), production still

## Heart Lines, La Foret (2016)

For a long time, the stuffed gorillas, leopards and impalas of the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren provided an image of Belgium's colonial past. Using an x-ray machine, the artists literally illuminate this image. The result is a fascinating spectacle of the steel constructions within.

# Ghost of a chance?

Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen consider gambling as a state of mind, a gesture, practice, ideology – a sign of the times, both in politics and in the art world. It's about the feeling of taking one's chances, whether this is due to the current state of the world or one's position as an artist within it: both are characterized by uncertainty, ambiguity and inequality. The series of new works are the result of a lengthy investigation of 'gambling' in the broadest sense of the word.

# Gambling in the art world

Follow the trail of money – the lubricant of the world – and you'll find sensation, unstable structures and an unfounded belief in 'almost winning'. What does it turn out to be? There are often similarities between the gambling industry and the art sector. On the other hand, there is the life of the artist, which is seen as a conscious choice to live on a budget. Never a loser, but always almost a winner.



installation view *Luna Eclipse, Oasis Dream (2019), The Odds (Part 1)*



Film still, *The Odds (Part 1)*

## Learning Lessons from Las Vegas

The research project *Nearly Winning* draws inspiration from the books *Learning from Las Vegas* and *Inside the White Cube*. The architecture of art institutions and casinos seduces you into taking action and influences your experience. In a soundscape of gambling machines, you'll find the duo's work *The Odds (part 1)*. The video installation draws you into a world of exhausted racehorses; showgirls in Macau, China, property of the world's largest political financier; a performance by Steve Ignorant of the anarcho-punk band Crass in a bingo hall transformed as a church.



Installation view, The Odds (Part 1)

## Performance Mock-up series: Entertainment Row (2020)

The series of sculptures shows the absurd reality behind the newest luxury hotel of the Sands Corporation: the Londoner in Macau, China. The casino hotel presents itself as London in miniature. The owner of the empire, Sheldon Adelson, is the largest political financier of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and American president Donald Trump. While coins roll in the casino, the profits of usury flow back to new settlements on the West Bank.

## Blue Roan Series (2020)

Thoroughbred racehorses are indispensable in the ecology of gambling. Since the 17th century horses have played a role in economic, political and traditional power games. In old master painting, portraits of thoroughbreds feature regularly, an early form of brand management. The panels you see here are powder coated to form a material portrait of a thoroughbred horse.

Powder coating historically made use of bone ash. For this project, the artists used ash from the bones of a thoroughbred racehorse. The powder particles are exactly as thick as horsehair. The colour imitates the rare and sought-after colour of a horse's coat known as a blue roan, a white-black palette with a blue undertone. In this way, the work fits into a long tradition of equine portraits in art.

## The Restraint (2019)

The exhibition room is permeated by a special fragrance designed by a marketing agency briefed with creating a fragrance for a successful exhibition. You can smell a mix of musk, synthetic human pheromones and the scent of 'Dead Horse Arum Lily', a flower that seduces and catches female flies with its scent of rotting flesh.

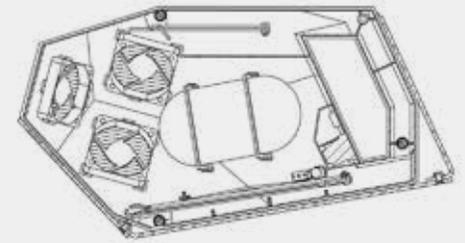
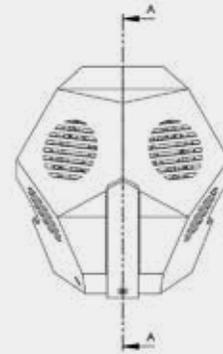
# Leading and following

Mass production, assembly line work and the transformation of materials are always reflected in the oeuvre of Cohen and Van Balen. They question the roles and desires of humankind in this system on various levels: from geopolitical context to the human body on the assembly line. The culture and by-products of 'Made in China' attract the duo's particular attention.

“We cannot place ourselves outside the system as artists. You cannot film assembly line work and then edit it on a MacBook without considering your own role in the production process. We are inseparable from it.”

Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen





## 75 Watt (2013)

These objects were specially designed for an assembly line in China. The only function of the product is to create and choreograph the movements performed by the workers who assemble the object on the conveyor belt.



## The Immortal (2012)

An incubator, a heart-lung machine, a dialysis machine – these are the machines that keep a person in need alive. A web of wires pumps oxygen, artificial blood and electrical impulses through the machines in a meditative rhythm. The ECG device monitors the heartbeat of the system. While the fluids are pumped around, a mechanical breathing and slow, humming motor sounds.



CUSTOMERS  
ARE ALWAYS  
RIGHT



## It Is So Brightness (2014)

A by-product of Chinese mass production is a greatly simplified form of the English language: Pidgin. Visit a site like [Alibaba.com](http://Alibaba.com) and you will see words that describe materials and the situations around them... Cohen and Van Balen consider this language as a source of product poetry. The LED installations display words from the purchasing process of the LED strips used. The Pidgin words can only be read if the technology, light and construction work together.

# Talk to us

Z33 is a House for Contemporary Art, Design & Architecture. We reflect with you as a visitor on the social questions of today and tomorrow.

Did you see anything that could make your visit even more enjoyable? We value your feedback. Talk to us @z33be or send an email to hallo@z33.be

## Support

*Palms Palms Palms* is supported by the Flemish Government

*The Odds (Part 1)* was co-commissioned by Stanley Picker Gallery, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Walker Art Center and The Art Institute of Chicago.

*White Horse / Twin Horse* was made in collaboration between De Brakke Grond and Z33. Supported by Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst and Mondriaan Fonds.

*Forever* was commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art, New York

*Trapped in the Dream of the Other* was supported by the Flemish Authorities, MU Artspace, Dominator Fireworks and Starburst Pyro.

*Avant Tout, Discipline* was commissioned by Mu Artspace and Fotomuseum Winterthur

*Paradise* was commissioned for the exhibition *Verschwindende Vermächtnisse: Die Welt als Wald*, at the Zoological Museum Hamburg.

*Every Increased Possession Loads Us With New Weariness* was Commissioned by muf architecture/art and Stanhope Schrodgers.

*Dissolution (I Know Nothing)* was commissioned by Container Artist Residency. 8mm footage by Harrie Van Balen.

*Leopard, Impala* was commissioned by Cooking Sections for the Empire Remains Shop

*B/NdAlTaAu* was commissioned by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

*Frames* was commissioned by Rambert Dance Company for Alexander Whitley

*Sterile* was commissioned by Schering Stiftung and The Arts Catalyst

*Giving More to Gain More* was commissioned by Jerwood Visual Arts

*75 Watt* was Supported by Arts Council England, The Flemish Government, Ask4Me Group, Zhongshan City White Horse Electric Company, FACT, V2\_Institute for the Unstable Media, and workspacebrussels

*Kingyo Kingdom* was commissioned by The Arts Catalyst and John Hansard Gallery

*The Immortal* was supported by a Wellcome Trust Arts Award

*Pigeon d'Or* was supported by the Flemish Government

# Colophon

## Artists

Revital Cohen & Tuur Van Balen

## Curator

Christina Li

## Project coordinator

Geert Driessen

## Production

Jesse Bas, René Gilis, Ali Osman Tugla,  
Piet Snoeckx, Wim Van Gestel, Ronald  
Steegmans, Richard van den Reek,  
Sacha Vermeulen, Yellowstone

## Communication

Veerle Ausloos, Jennifer Van Och

## Public mediation

Sophie Meers, Willem Vrancken

## Text

Lotte Bloem, Veerle Ausloos

## Graphic Design

studio de Ronners

With special thanks to the whole team of Z33

Images © Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen

Published by Z33

This publication is published on the occasion  
of *Palms Palms Palms* (October 4, 2020 –  
January 3, 2021) at Z33, Hasselt, Belgium

With the support of



Vlaanderen  
verbeelding werkt



HASSELT  
HEEFT  
HET.



nationale  
loterij

dS De  
Standaard

