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Visitors question what they see at new Brussels show

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Liz Newmark

Ways of Seeing, a new exhibition in Villa Empain, proves that what you see is not always what you get



Taking its title from British artist John Berger's seminal essay, the Boghossian Foundation's new exhibition Ways of Seeing explores how art can change people's perception of the world.

The spectacularly diverse show is staged at the foundation's home in the Villa Empain, an Art Deco gem in Elsene. It includes work by 27 artists, including Salvador Dali, contemporary British artist Grayson Perry, Brussels' Thierry Bosquet and Antwerp-based David Claerbout. Media spans painting, sculpture, photography and film.

"This show is about the act of looking, so we're not putting much information on the walls," co-curator Sam Bardaouil says. "It's your point of view that's important."

The exhibition was also created with the villa and Belgium in mind, Bardaouil adds. It features mosque lamps designed for one of Baron Empain's collaborators, fascinating photos of schoolchildren visiting Tervuren's Royal Museum of Central Africa and Bosquet's "The Uprising in front of La Monnaie in 1830", commemorating Belgium's independence. (He painted it in 1980, though in Neoclassical style.)

'Looking is political'

Particularly striking are rare editions of Hergé's The Adventures of Tintin. "The art of looking is also political," Bardaouil explains. So while the 1931 Tintin in the Congo features a geography teacher emphasising Belgium's colonial past, a modern edition of the strip shows a diverse maths lesson.

In New Yorker James Casebere's wonderfully eerie photographs, the "houses" turn out to be models, while mundane



plastic soles in the late Dubai artist Hassan Sharif's "Slippers" are constructed into something beautiful. London-based Mona Hatoum's colander, "No Way IV", is deprived of meaning as its holes are blocked.

Other stand-out installations are Alicja's Kwade's time-defying backwardly rotating clock and Hans-Peter Feldmann's "One on One", which seemingly offers you a Milky Way Crispy Roll, but next to a sign that says "NO".

A series of guided tours, concerts, lectures children's activities run alongside the exhibition.

Until 18 February, Villa Empain, Ixelles. Photo: Danish artist Jeppe Hein's rotating mirror plays with how we see even ourselves ©Anders Sune Berg

R.Harris Oct 12, 2017 00:23

The Villa Empain is in Brussels, not Elsene.