



NOME

TRACING MEMORIES
MAARTEN VANDEN EYNDE



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N O M E G A L L E R Y . C O M

Potsdamer Str. 72 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

“MEMORY MATTERS”

Ilse Roosens

From a distant future, Maarten Vanden Eynde trains his eye on the past — our current present. Future species will form an impression of today's world based on what we leave behind. Certain buildings, objects and written sources will still exist, others will be excavated and researched. Some will be impossible to find and the missing information will be a source of conjecture. Our lifestyles, choices and principles will be mulled over, in much the same way that contemporary historians reflect on the past. Maarten Vanden Eynde's artistic practice questions our current society from a possible future perspective, and the way in which we make choices today that influence the future.

Cave paintings, collections, footprints: remains of human presence offer an insight into the life of our predecessors. Stories are subsequently constructed on the basis of all the collected source material. And when this is lacking, historians delight in freely completing the gaps in the puzzle. Indeed, we look at history with a certain gaze and expectation, and it is tempting to project answers in the absence of clarity. For example, a patriarchal bias leads archaeologists to suggest that prehistoric biological men were hunters, while most researchers discount certain facts in this respect, or endlessly question them.¹ After Maarten Vanden Eynde broke a ceramic beaker in 2004 in Japan (*Genetologic Research No. 181*) and in so doing created a potential archaeological find, he decided to turn words into deeds by burying the most popular IKEA tea cup, as the most significant piece of crockery of our era, in the Roman forum (*Preservation of IKEA tea-cup, 2005*). A few years later, he let his imagination run wild when repairing

¹ WEI-HAAS, M. (2020). Prehistoric female hunter discovery upends gender role assumptions. National Geographic. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/prehistoric-female-hunter-discovery-upends-gender-role-assumptions>



an IKEA cup that had been broken in this way. He thought that the fragments would provide sufficient inspiration to allow a future archaeologist to assemble them into a true IKEA Vase (2011).

This series of artworks plays with the idea of an archaeological find. The majority of objects that are excavated were once buried beneath rubble by something like an earthquake or a volcanic eruption, and hence preserved. They were not deliberately conserved. In combination with all the objects that were consciously saved for the future, they form the basis for archaeological and historic research. As a result, organic materials that do not stand the test of time are often overlooked.² Perhaps the most valuable sources were therefore wiped out, and we overestimate the importance of those finds that we do have at our disposal. Today there is an even greater challenge for the preservation of knowledge via digital channels. Art historians who can currently still base their research on exchanges of letters between artists, will in the future be hindered by the transience of chat discussions and emails. The speed with which we switch from one channel to another and the fragility of digital archives are a future problem that should not be underestimated. In the work *A Chain of Events* (2020-2021) we see both organic materials and industrial objects that were utilised in human trade and communication. It starts with cotton thread and ends — temporarily at least — with wafer-thin fibreglass cables through which data is transported. It depicts a historical succession of global exchanges that run into and influence one another. Hence it represents a non-linear historical account in which clearly demarcated events are non-existent. Maarten Vanden Eynde thus questions the way in which we engage in historiography, because aside from all the coincidental finds that supplement the knowledge of the past, there is of course the conscious choice to record our history.

² HURCOMBE, L. M. (2014). *Perishable Material Culture in Prehistory: Investigating the Missing Majority*. London: Routledge.

By writing history, humans try to direct the information that will survive them. An ingenious selection of information finds its way into books, and attempts will sometimes be made to destroy certain publications. We choose which messages we send into space on the Voyager Golden Record and which statues we place in the public domain. History books teach us the most important events, or at least what the authors consider to be essential. Moreover, it would be troublesome to explain the principles of conflicting parties on the losing side in such a way as to prompt understanding in the reader, and so factual information is also selected from a subjective point of view. The curriculum for schools is purportedly fixed, and yet is regularly adjusted as a result of growing insight. A great deal of knowledge is not retained because it is considered unimportant or is not even visible. Scant attention is paid to crafts today, for example, meaning that these disciplines are at risk of being lost. Collectives such as The Black Archives devote themselves to conserving source material relating to people of colour. That is to say, choices around archiving and knowledge sharing say a great deal about what is regarded as relevant by a society and what is not.

The blackboard green that has regularly served as a backdrop to Maarten Vanden Eynde's works since the exhibition *Digging up the Future* (Mu.ZEE Ostend, BE, 2020-2021; La Kunsthalle Mulhouse, FR, 2022) thus refers to the role of knowledge and education. *Material Matters* (2018-2019) makes a case for knowledge sharing throughout the entire production chain: from the point that mining commences to the moment an end product is developed. Here too the artist plays with a formal language that catapults us into the classrooms. He collaborated with the artist Musasa, known for his educational painting style, and refers to old school maps. In reality, knowledge is less rigid than the way it is presented in the Western school system. The Lukasa, a kind of palm-sized memory aid, is an object that improves our receptiveness to new insights and yet builds on the knowledge that has already been acquired. Maarten Vanden

Eynde made a series of works that allude to this instrument. *Memory of Man* (2022) mimics a Lukasa and combines different enlarged computer elements with scratches in the marble surface. Computers are massive game changers when it comes to memory and processing power. Lukasa allow more room for interpretation and development, and the scratches — alluding to cave paintings — also refer to historical and more receptive tools for knowledge transfer. In opening up his work, Maarten Vanden Eynde also plays with different ways of sharing information. In his monograph *Digging for the Future*, curator and editor Katerina Gregos provided an encyclopaedic overview while curator Nav Haq contributed a science fiction essay. The audio guide to the accompanying exhibition offered interpretations from climate scientists, decolonial thinkers and activist artists, and for his PhD at the University of Bergen Maarten Vanden Eynde wrote a classic scientific text with references to empirical literature. All these forms of knowledge sharing can exist side by side, be complementary, and question one another.

Central to Maarten Vanden Eynde's work is this critical, open stance towards knowledge of the present, the past and the future. His gaze from a remote future helps him to question contemporary society. The knowledge that a distant descendant will study our lifestyles enables us to see both ourselves and contemporary society in a new light. We succeed in taking a little more distance and approaching our environment more critically. By zooming out, we see processes that are underway and changes that are taking place. Individual human concerns shift to the background, while other living species once again claim their role as protagonist and thus shake up assumed hierarchies: for example, coral is suffering from the presence of humans, yet the reefs are vital to the survival of marine life. Time is also transformed when subjected to a future gaze. The passage of a single human on Earth seems insignificant. What are impressive, however, are artistic, scientific and technological achievements and inventions. Humans have achieved a great deal in a short period. These achievements

will have an immense impact on the future. We rarely ask ourselves what future species will think of the actions we undertake today, or whether these deeds will have major consequences for subsequent populations. Maarten Vanden Eynde both depicts the possible negative consequences of our behaviour and issues a wake-up call by pointing to the positive impact that humans can have. Not only do we write history, but we also make the future.

Ilse Roosens

is a curator currently working at Mu.ZEE in Ostend (BE), the museum for modern and contemporary Belgian art. Post-colonial, geopolitical, ecofeminist and post-capitalist topics lay the groundwork for her work both inside and outside the museum. Ilse Roosens questions existing power structures and focuses on the social responsibility of institutions, governments and artists. Co-authorship and polyphony are focal points of her working ethic. She is actively rethinking the formats for presenting collections by experimenting with transhistorical and transcultural concepts.

At Mu.ZEE Ilse Roosens curated exhibitions such as 'Maarten Vanden Eynde — Digging up the Future' (2021) together with Katerina Gregos, 'Wintrum Frod. Orla Barry & Els Dietvorst' (2019), 'Frans Masereel and contemporary art: images of resistance' (2017) and 'Carsten Höller. Videoretrospective with Two Lightmachines' (2016). She published several catalogues and curated different public programmes accompanying the exhibitions. In 2018 she co-founded the MEER curatorial collective, focusing on artists working with video and performance art. Prior to Mu.ZEE she worked at S.M.A.K. Ghent and Extra City Kunsthal in Antwerp and as a freelance curator and mediator.



A R T W O R K S

A CHAIN OF EVENTS (MAQUETTE), 2020

Various materials
20 x 40 x 4cm



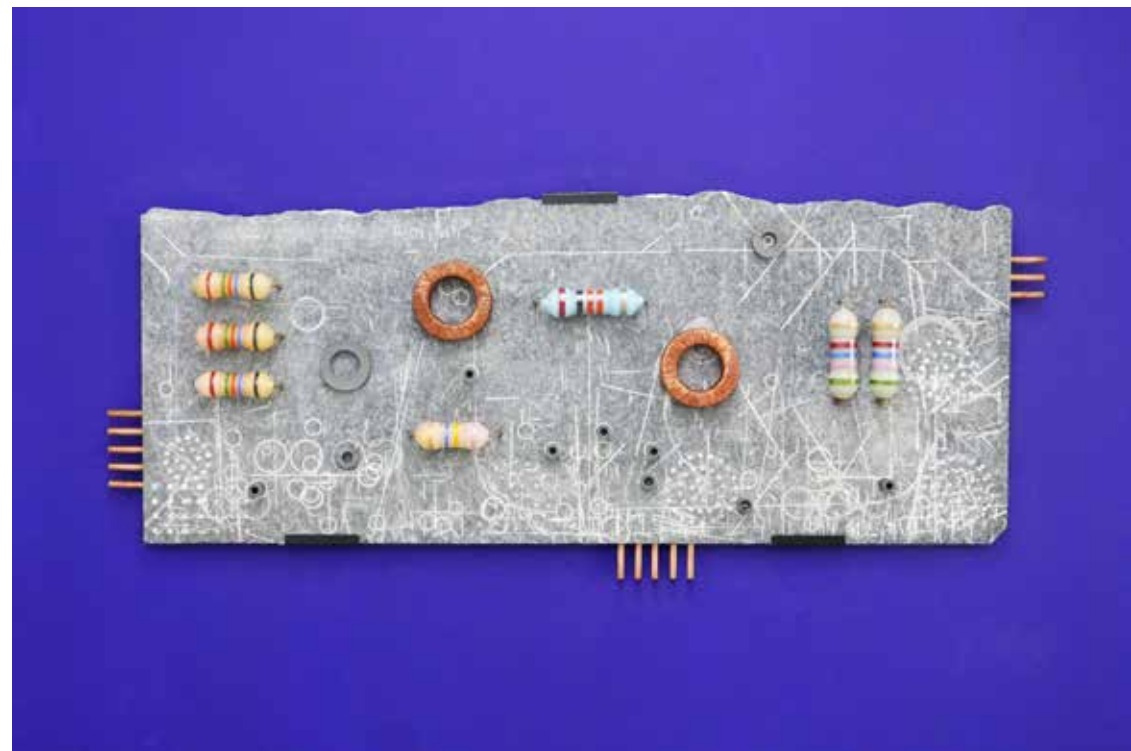
FUTURE FLORA: MANONO IV, 2022

Printed circuit boards (PCB), various seeds
162 x 162 x 6 cm



MEMORY OF MAN, 2022

Marble slab, copper, glass and ferrite rings
80 x 190 x 20 cm



CHIHUAHUA FOOTPRINTS DISCOVERED!, 2021

Concrete, Taxidermic Chihuahua, furcoat
8 x 165 x 90 cm



COMMODITY CHAIN II, 2022

Sawfish, chainsaw
30 x 100 x 30 cm



GAME CHANGER I, 2020

Copper circuit board, ferric chloride, varnish
70 x 50 x 5 cm



GAME CHANGER III, 2022

Copper circuit board, various stones and minerals
70 x 50 x 5 cm



FOR CRYING OUT LOUD, 2019

Copper circuit board, plastic nurdles
25 x 39 x 5 cm



HOX PARADOX, 2005-2014

Wood, glue, mahogany display cabinet
41 x 51 x 10 cm
Photo by Dorine Zelders



GENETOLOGIC RESEARCH NR.17 (GOLFBALL EGGS), 2004

Bird nest, porcelain and wooden box
16 x 20 x 16 cm



GENETOLOGIC RESEARCH NR.28, 2006

Sculpted pinewood
55 x 58 x 18 cm



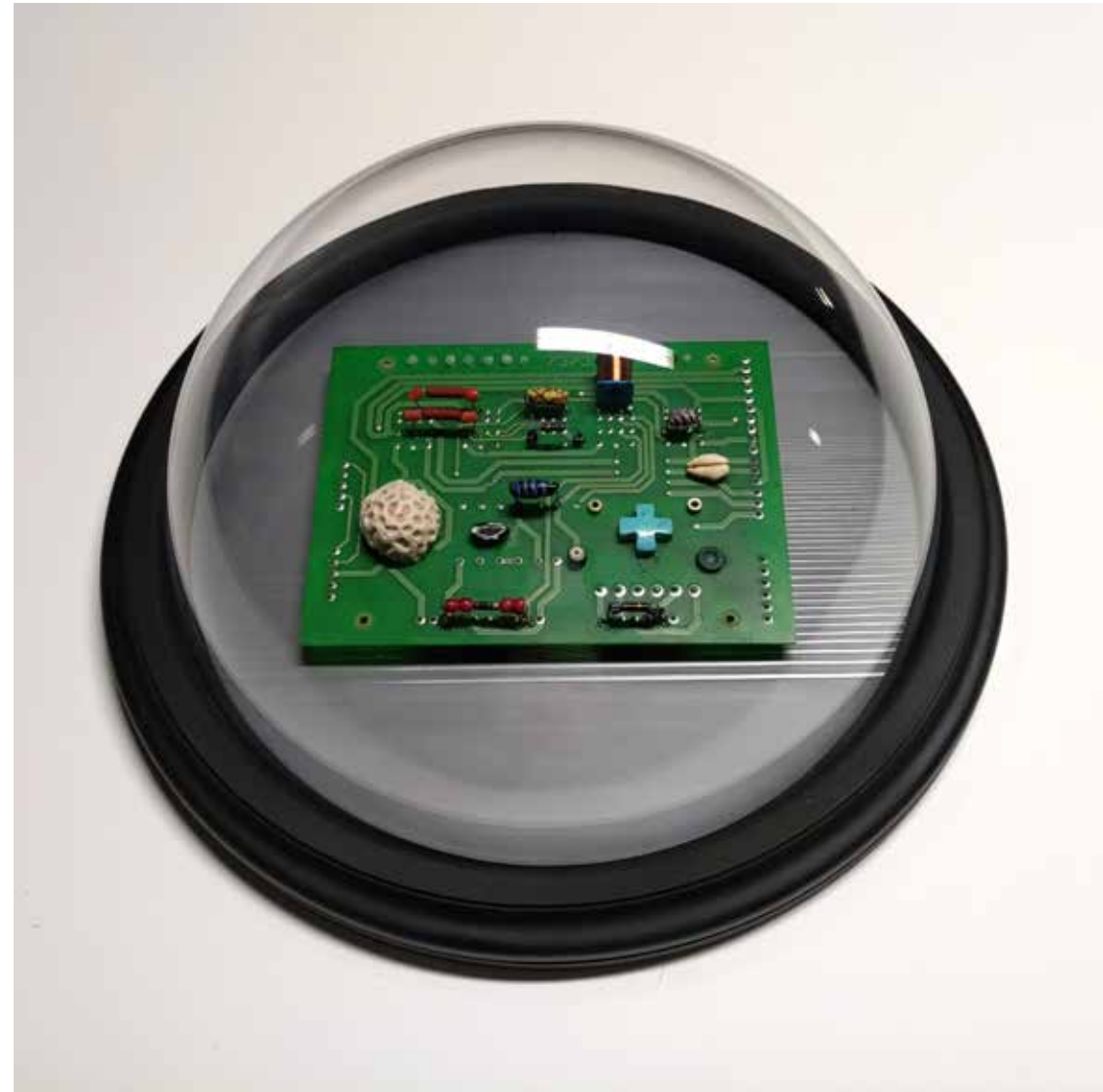
GENETOLOGIC RESEARCH NR.32, 2010

Sculpted pinewood
20 x 30 x 15 cm



HISTORIES OF MEMORIES, 2022

Silicon wafer, printed circuit boards (PCBI), brain coral,
glass trade beads, shells, resistors and various electrical
components under plexiglass CCTV dome
35 x 35 x 20 cm



TAXONOMIC TROPHIES, 2005-2022

Branches, wood and metal name tags
Variable dimensions



DAMNATIO MEMORIAE, 2020

Copper circuit board, ferric chloride, varnish
21 x 21 cm



MATERIAL MATTERS: LI3, 2018-2019

In collaboration with Musasa
Wall chart painting, acrylic paint on linen canvas
126 x 96 cm



LA GRANDE BOUFFE, 2011

Silver and steel
ca 42 x 30 x 14 cm



MALACHITE MOBILES, 2015

Sculpted malachite from D.R. Congo

Variable dimensions

Produced in collaboration with Fillot Ngoyi Makelele and
Augy Ngoyi Twite



PORTABLE OIL PEAK, 2009-2010

Tar melted and shaped, metal bucket
77 x 30 cm



PRESERVATION OF IKEA TEA CUP, 2005

Photo print
50 x 70 cm
Photo by Arend Roelink



SILICON RECORDS, 2019-2020

Printed silicon wafers
30 × 30 × 2 cm



SYSTEM OF UNITS, 2019

Assembled silicon wafers
12 × 22 × 17 cm



TRINITY TEST, 2016

Thinner print on lead
66 x 100 cm



PLASTIC REEF, 2008 - 2012

Melted plastic debris from the worlds oceans
140 x 90 x 40 cm



1001 MERMAID TEARS, 2022

Glass Snow globe, wooden base, distilled water,
1001 plastic pellets
19 x 16 x 16 cm



MAARTEN VANDEN EYNDE

born 1977, Leuven, Belgium

Lives and works in Brussels

Taking the form of installations, sculpture, and interventions in public and urban space, Maarten Vanden Eynde works examine “the residues of human material practices, with special attention paid to the geological layer we will leave behind for future generations.” (Gregos, 2021) His practice centers on investigations into the materiality of objects that surround us, ranging from the origin of different materials to the contexts in which they are extracted, transported and transformed, to the remains after they are no longer in use. Vanden Eynde undertakes long term research projects in collaboration with specialists from other disciplines such as the exact sciences, sociology, ethnography and anthropology that allow him to focus on a specific topic for many years and generate multiple works and presentation opportunities. He is currently investigating the influence of the transatlantic trade of pivotal materials (like rubber, oil, ivory, copper, cobalt, cotton, lithium and uranium), on the evolution of humankind, the creation of nations, and other global power structures. His project *Triangular Trade* traces the origins of different materials, following their (revolutionary) path as they are processed and transformed into “world changing wonders.”

Vanden Eynde's work has been exhibited in museums and galleries internationally. His retrospective exhibition *Digging up the Future* will be presented by Mu.ZEE, Ostend and La Kunsthalle, Mulhouse. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at M HKA, Antwerp; Utrecht University; and Hordaland Art Center, Bergen, among others. He has participated in group exhibitions including *Beaufort 21 Triennial*; *Future Genealogies, #6 Biennale de Lubumbashi*; *Contour Biennial #9: Coltan as Cotton*, Mechelen; *RIBOCA, Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art*, Riga; *2050: A Brief History of the Future*, Palazzo Reale, Milan; *Realitiés Filantes, #4 Biennale de Lubumbashi*; *Slow Future*, CCA Ujazdowski Castle; and *Stardust in a Nutshell*, Savvy Contemporary, Berlin. He was the recipient of the Breakthrough Trajectory Grant 2018, Flemish Community; The Public Prize of the Belgian Art Prize in 2017; and the Art in the City Award 2010,

Brussels. With Enough Room for Space, an organization he co-founded in 2005, he was shortlisted for the Belgian Pavilion in Venice in 2020, as the first artist-run initiative ever to be selected. From 2020 to 2023 he is part of the Artistic Research project *Matter, Gesture, Soul* as a PhD candidate at the University of Bergen, Norway.









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NOME

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