

# The Omissions

An exhibition by  
Céline Huyghebaert

October 4 to December 14, 2024

# Foreword

In the summer of 2018, Céline Huyghebaert began a residency at Artexte in search of documents that could answer a recurring question in her mind: what is the status of women artists in the art world? In an interview with Héléne Brousseau,<sup>1</sup> she revealed that many other questions inspired her research, namely: how do we talk about women artists? Are some words used more commonly than others to describe their practices? While searching through the files of her peers, Huyghebaert remembered her own process of depositing<sup>2</sup> documents at Artexte. She recalled being selective about what to donate to the collection, which implies that other projects were excluded. These might have been projects that were less relevant to her practice, projects that received a lukewarm reception from her peers or had no media coverage, for example. Artists who donate to their files are free to choose which documents they want to make publicly accessible.<sup>3</sup> Huyghebaert became interested in what artists leave out of files, specifically, not the undocumented digressions or the peripheral projects of one's practice. This project addresses the silence that artists themselves leave in their files, and the question that all artists likely ask themselves: what do I want to leave for posterity?<sup>4</sup>

Artexte presents *The Omissions* as the final iteration of a project Huyghebaert began well before her research here. After two residencies—one at La Chambre blanche in Québec City in 2016, and one at Artexte in 2018–2019—and two exhibitions—one at Occurrence in Montréal in 2021, and the other at Caravansérail in Rimouski in 2024—Huyghebaert assembled found documents and fragments of other artists' stories. A good part of her project grew out of conversations with about fifty artists who agreed

1 Accessed August 2, 2024. <<https://bit.ly/3XYwn6n>> (in French).

2 Artexte benefits from the considerable support of the visual arts community, whose members donate documents that contribute to the more than 35,000 print documents in the collection to date.

3 However, other donors may counteract an artist's decision by contributing "missing" documents that will be included in the artist's file, without the artist's knowledge.

4 It should be noted that Artexte builds its collection from printed and ephemeral documents relating to existing projects (invitation cards, posters, press releases, leaflets, etc.). Artexte is not an archive, and does not preserve any personal objects from artists, such as sketchbooks, journals, or notebooks.

to share with her their phantom works, their unrealized, abandoned, and nearly forgotten projects. In her manuscript *Les suppressions*, which I was able to read ahead of its publication, Huyghebaert writes about the file of a fictional artist she calls a.:

In the beginning, a.'s file is thick and heavy. It forms an infallible image of the artist that makes me feel incomplete. It's as if each of her works were perfectly interlocked to form a remarkable trajectory. Afterwards, it changed. One time, I opened a.'s file and it was almost empty. Another time, it contained a letter in which she wrote that she was available for an exhibition. A letter explaining that she had not disappeared, that she would like to be remembered.<sup>5</sup>

This excerpt provides a glimpse into Huyghebaert's fiction, which she based on stories, research, and readings. Through text excerpts, quotations she either typed out or underlined in books, unresolved project ideas, drawings scribbled on paper, blurry or in-focus photographs, the artist reveals a creative process built on countless snippets of stories. Through these fragments, a fictional identity emerges that focuses on certain states of the creative process (fear, apprehension, judgment, and censorship).

Céline Huyghebaert's story grew out of a long process of research and reflection, one that has materialized in the form of writing and an exhibition on the life of an artist filled with remorse, silence, occasional long absences and temporary hiatuses, whether intentional or not. She invites us to rethink our own art practices, to set aside all forms of self-censorship and to share our own lived experiences, the failures and the successes, to give a more realistic image of the creative process and the practice of being an artist.

— Manon Tourigny

Translated from the French by Jo-Anne Balcaen

<sup>5</sup> Artexite will be publishing this book (in French), to be launched at the end of the exhibition and sold in select bookstores. [Our translation]

# The Omissions

*I wrote to a. I asked her to tell me about the things I couldn't find in her artist file. The abandoned projects. Those that never got past the draft stage. Those she deemed impossible. Those that weren't supported by an institution. Those she still dreams of making one day. Who will preserve these possibilities? What do we make of the things we leave unfinished? The unmet desires that never see the light of day? What are these gestures worth? What do we call them?*

*a. wasn't sure she wanted to go down that hole, to dig up those failures, but in the end she accepted my request. Everything happened very quickly after that. I had a box of cards printed and left them outside of her studio door. On the front of each card I wrote the title of the project: "A collection of phantom works." On the back, an invitation to tell me about her abandoned works. How would she describe them? Had she given up on them? I gave her the option to also attach an artifact or draw a sketch.*

*For each card I got back, I assigned a set of key words and pinned them to my bedroom wall. For months, I lived among her collections, her colours, her flowers, her creases, her castings, her found objects, her landscapes, her renunciations, her silver salts, her waves. I tried to classify these scattered fragments, to give order or meaning to them. But the idea of labels worried me. Only dead things have a stable, easily definable identity.*

*At any rate, despite my efforts, there are still holes in the story. Marguerite Duras, in an interview with Xavière Gauthier, spoke about these holes, these gaps, as "omissions" ("suppressions"). I thought this word was perfectly suitable for this project, and it's no accident that it came from Duras. She has been with us from the very start of our exchange.*

*Today, I'd like to ask a. to turn her omissions into an exhibition.*

a.'s voice was shaped by the phantom works of Catherine Aboumrad, Shazia Ahmad, Maude Arès, Heidi Barkun, Judith Bellavance, Carol-Ann Belzil-Normand, Caroline Ariane Bergeron, Charlotte Biron, Caroline Boileau, Sarah Boutin, Barbara Claus, Annie Conceicao-Rivet, Julie Delporte, Cindy Dumais, Andrée-Anne Dupuis-Bourret, Rachel Echenberg, virginie fauve, Mathilde Forest, Maryse Goudreau, Angela Grauerholz, Nadège Grebmeier Forget, Julie Héту, Emmanuelle Jacques, Janie Julien-Fort, Sophie Jodoin, Pascaline J. Knight, Camille Lamy, Véronique Lévesque-Pelletier, Jenny Lin, Yen-Chao Lin, Mélissa Longpré, Jacinthe Loranger, Sarah Madgin, China Marsot-Wood, Helena Martin Franco, Geneviève Massé, Anna Jane McIntyre, Katherine Melançon, Nicole Panneton, Marion Paquette, Celia Perrin Sidarous, Maude Pilon, Anne-Marie Proulx, Marie-Laure S. Louis, Claire Savoie, Dominique Sirois, Marie-Douce St-Jacques, Stéphanie St-Jean Aubre, Jocelyne Thibault, Sandra Volny, Pavitra Wickramasinghe, and with documents from Artex-te's collection.

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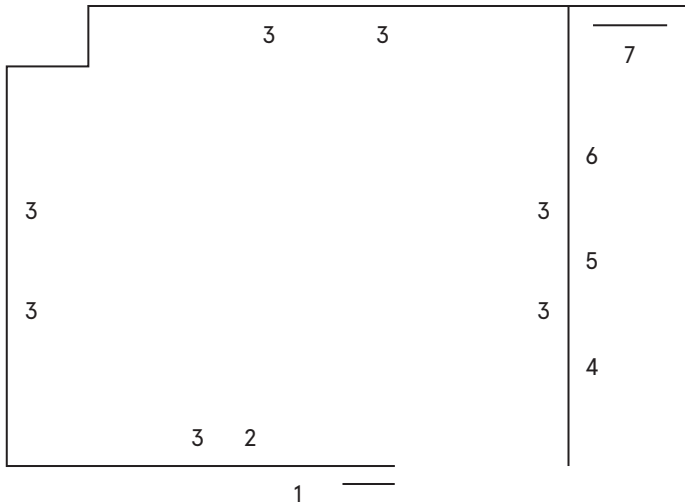
*The Omissions* are those missing pieces subtracted by history, the intentional or unintentional gaps, the voids, the holes in official stories. But they are also the omissions we impose upon ourselves: everything we keep quiet about, everything we prevent from happening.

This project outlines a fragmentary portrait of a fictional artist, a montage composed of voices, images, and documents gathered over the course of residencies in documentation centres—at La Chambre blanche (2016) and at Artex-te (2018-2019)—and a lengthy correspondence with contemporary artists. During my residencies, I spent hours browsing, compiling texts, photocopying exhibition invitations, artist statements, catalogue pages, and newspaper articles. I wondered if it was possible to describe a history of art that is not about success or productivity, but about what resides in the gaps of these documents, in what is left unsaid. This is the question that inspired me to reach out to artists to talk about their unrealized projects.

The first chapter of this enquiry took the form of a row of photocopies circling the walls of the gallery at La Chambre blanche (Québec, 2016). A horizontal narrative composed of texts and images drawn from the documentation centre. The second chapter, on the walls of Occurrence (Montréal, 2021), presented my correspondence with this fictional artist. The third, at Caravansérail (Rimouski, 2024), further described its phantom-like, plural identity. In this fourth iteration here, I'm looking for gaps. These absences I so often came upon in artists' files. I wonder what an exhibition or a book of repressed, interrupted, or failed gestures might look like.

— Céline Huyghebaert

Translated from the French by Jo-Anne Balcaen



1. **de poussière, de plâtre, de fantôme**  
Céline Huyghebaert  
2024  
Plaster, inkjet print, shelf  
33 x 24.4 x 3 cm
2. **there is nothing**  
Céline Huyghebaert  
2022  
Embossed clay, black pigment, wax  
14.5 x 20.5 cm
3. **Les suppressions (excerpts)**  
Céline Huyghebaert  
2024  
Laser printed texts and photographs on paper  
138 x 190 cm
4. **Les suppressions (excerpt)**  
Céline Huyghebaert (image) and Jocelyne Thibault (letter)  
2024  
Photocopy and carbon transfer on Stonehenge paper, anti-reflective glass  
20 x 25.5 cm
5. **Je t'envoie cette image de la mer**  
Céline Huyghebaert  
2023  
Inkjet photo print of an unexposed polaroid, laser print, anti-reflective glass  
10 x 13 cm
6. **But you don't remember \_ the word \_ that is supposed to fill \_ the holes**  
Céline Huyghebaert  
2014 - 2021  
Inkless etching on grey Stonehenge paper  
20.6 x 27.9 cm
7. **J'ai longtemps attendu qu'un souvenir d'œuvre jamais aboutie refasse surface**  
Céline Huyghebaert  
2024  
Video-letter comprising fragments from the voices of the 51 artists who participated in the project  
9:02 min

# Biography

**Céline Huyghebaert** develops a grammar of silence at the crossroads of literature and the visual arts. In her books, exhibitions and collaborations, text blends with print, collage, photography, ceramics, video and installation. Most of her projects are long-term investigations, unearthing fragments of what has been lost or neglected, and organizing them into a narrative. She weaves together a plurality of voices – real and fictional, intimate and scientific – to recreate connections where they have gone missing, to give shape to what has been erased or forgotten. She has been awarded several major recognitions, including the Bronfman Fellowship in Contemporary Art for her artistic practice (2019), the Governor General's Literary Award for *Le drap blanc* (Le Quartanier, 2019) and the CALQ Artist in the Community Award for *from our bodies to your heart*, a book produced with people diagnosed with cancer (2023).



# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the entire team at Artexte, past and present, for their invaluable help over the years, and for their guidance during my residency in 2018 and 2019, especially Manon Tourigny, Kaysie Hawke, Joana Joachim, Mojeanne Behzadi, H el ene Brousseau, Jessica H ebert, Jonathan Lachance, Anabelle Chass e and Sarah Watson. I am thrilled to be able to conclude this project in their exhibition space. My sincere thanks also to La Chambre blanche, who welcomed me in 2016. Thank you to Mark Lowe for his precious help with installing the work, and to Jules Lasalle for the plaster casting of the book.

My deepest thanks go to the 51 artists who lent their phantom works and fragments of their voices to a. I am grateful for their trust, their time, their epistolary presence, their openness and vulnerability, and their desires over the past six years.

I would also like to thank the Canada Council for the Arts and the Bronfman Fellowship in Contemporary Art for supporting the research and creation of this project.

Artex te supports artists, researchers and curators in a collective effort that involves our entire team, including external collaborators who participate in the success of each project. In alphabetical order:

Collaborators: Jo-Anne Balcaen (copy-editing and translation), Paul Litherland (photo documentation), Mark Lowe (exhibition technician), Marie-France Thibault (copy-editing and translation) as well as Vox, centre de l'image contemporaine.

Artex te thanks the Conseil des arts de Montréal, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec and the Canada Council for the Arts for their support.

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ISBN 978-2-923045-69-6

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