Lies Caeyers
Kabinet

When an artist looks back on her body of work, there is always a starting point, the first artwork in an oeuvre. It is the point of origin from which all other creations flow. As an artwork, Opus#1 assumes a unique position. It is a work that is 'overdetermined' as Bart Verschaffel put it in an article published (in Dutch) in de Witte Raaf.[1]:

> 'This means that it occupies *multiple* layers of meaning that are not logically or narratively connected and can even be incompatible or contradictory, although each occupies its own position for specific reasons. Meanings are overlaid and crowded together until they cover one another and the whole becomes unreadable. The analysis of the work must therefore distinguish between the layers and neutralise the effects of their union.'

In 2006, Lies Caeyers had a hi-tech 3D body scan done of her own body, in collaboration with an offshoot of KU Leuven. The scan turned out to be a starting point for the artist from whence she would develop new ideas. At the core of the process was the idea that the body scan – ultimately a snapshot in the life of the artist as an adult (fully-developed) young woman – is a pure state of being, a pilot flame to spark an endless fire of reproduction. For Caeyers, this beginning also sparked research into the ways 'reproducibility' might be defined.

Which materials can be used? Which techniques? Kabinet presents a collection of studies, tests and insights in a semi-scientific, almost clinical context. Studying this collection of *objets trouvés* and creations, our associative faculties are stimulated, calling to mind our (private) memories, our obsessions and our sensitivities. Nothing of this is explicitly construed; it is simply shown. The artist uses contradictory methods; she is fascinated by both the hi-tech and the traditional, by both order and chaos. She finds perfection important, but at the same time remains open to the beauty of failure.

The beauty in deformation here brings to mind *Père Ubu*, a photo by the surrealist photographer Dora Maar in which a strangely scaly being seems to stare at us from a distant past. Is the being lost or coincidentally found? The photographer kept the identity of the photographed animal to herself to arouse the enthusiasm of the surrealists who would go on to adopt it as a mascot. The *Poupées* by Hans Bellmer also spring to mind. The Surrealist movement was fascinated by the doll, the mannequin, the model on to which artists could project their wildest fantasies. However, Hans Bellmer went a step further and manipulated the dolls, mutilated them, contorted their limbs and so created a fascinatingly sculptural and photographic oeuvre. Bellmer was working within a context in which the woman was normally seen as a muse. The surrealists worshipped woman – elevated her to the level of the supernatural – by which she in fact became 'reduced' to an object. Today, around eighty years later, Lies Caeyers uses her own body as the object. She manipulates it and distances herself from it. She herself becomes an object. Here, however, the male glance doesn't come into the equation.

Lurking in Caeyers' Kabinet is another thought that won't let go. When we talk about the artist's Opus#1, to what are we referring? Is it the digital 3D scan itself, which without a carrier cannot even be presented? Is it the very first cast made by the artist based on the scan? Or is it rather the binary translation of it? What is captivating about this exhibition is the fact that Caeyers has slowly grown into this Kabinet. I see the exhibition as a whole as being her Opus#1. Kabinet marks the beginning of this artist's oeuvre but also functions as *a mould* holding the promise of future creations.

Mieke Mels
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[1] Bart Verschaffel, *Kunstenaar zijn is ook een kunst. Over het 'eerste werk' en het 'oeuvre'* ('Being an artist is an art in itself. On the "first work" and the "oeuvre"'), in: De Witte Raaf, Edition 140, July-August 2009