



Title

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Cover image: **Fig. 5** Detail of Miniature Moving Panorama (Hudson Valley), by Lucy McKenzie. 2024. Wooden structure, miniature train models, textile, motor, acrylic and oil on canvas. (Courtesy the artist, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin, Cologne and New York, and Cabinet, London; photograph Useful Art Services; exh. Z33, Hasselt).

Lucy McKenzie: Super Palace

by Kathryn Lloyd • 07.02.2025

This solo exhibition dedicated to the work of Lucy McKenzie (b.1977) opens with an entrance that cannot be entered. An approximation of a boutique window display, *Sports Shop* FIG.1 is installed against the wall of the long, narrow passageway that leads into the galleries of Z33, Hasselt. In the glassless bays on either side of the pseudo-door, clothes are animated not by mannequins, but by taut wires that pull the empty silhouettes into a semblance of action. Two figures are shown with their outer legs bent at the knee, arms extended, as though caught in a synchronised skip or run. Another clutches a tennis racket, a ball suspended nearby in mid-air; another handles a golf club and is clad in co-ordinating cashmere, nonchalantly preparing to swing. Although the display is in some ways a simulacrum – a front for something that does not physically exist behind it – it also showcases designs from Atelier E.B., the fashion label that McKenzie created in 2011 with Beca Lipscombe (b.1973). It is, therefore, both a reality and a fiction, adopting the aesthetic systems of consumerism while negating the possibility of exchange. It also serves as a fitting prelude to *Super Palace*, McKenzie's first major solo exhibition in Belgium, in which the artist continues her longstanding interest in private and public space, museological constructs and the intersection between art, design and commerce.¹

The real entrance to *Super Palace* is located directly opposite the false one offered up in *Sports Shop*. Here, the visitor is greeted by two unclothed mannequins, displaced from their expected home in the window display. For *Faux Verdigris Statue (Zoya) I & II* FIG.2 McKenzie has painted the fibreglass models with a *trompe l'œil* bronze patina typical of weathered, public sculpture. Their anonymous, characterless heads have been replaced with a likeness of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, a Soviet partisan who was executed by the Nazis in 1941, at the age of eighteen. Posthumously declared a Hero of the Soviet Union, Kosmodemyanskaya became a national symbol of resistance, and numerous monuments were erected in her honour. McKenzie's gesture collapses capitalist, communist, institutional and commemorative representations of women into a single, impossible form. Kosmodemyanskaya's head seems to outweigh the slight proportions of the body that supports it, the weight of her fateful history almost ridiculed by the fantasy of the delicate frame.



Fig. 1 Installation view of *Lucy McKenzie: Super Palace* at Z33, Hasselt, 2024–25, showing *Sports Shop*, by Atelier E.B. (Lucy McKenzie and Beca Lipscombe). 2024. Acrylic and oil on canvas, steel, wood, Perspex, aluminium and textiles, 700 by 100 by 230 cm. (Courtesy the artists, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin, Cologne and New York, and Cabinet, London; photograph Useful Art Services).

The figure of the mannequin reappears in the following sculptural installation **FIG.3**: a reworking of the imposing concrete flagpole structures that flank St Andrew's House, Edinburgh, the Art Deco building that is home to the Scottish government. McKenzie has transformed the design into an oversized, modernist streetlamp, painted it to resemble marble and adorned it with a series of line drawings depicting Lipscombe dressed as the mannequin that Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) exhibited at the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme in Paris in 1938. For the *Plus belles rue de Paris* – a street-like installation populated with fetishised dummies individually 'dressed' by the exhibiting Surrealists – Duchamp chose to clothe his shop-bought model in his own jacket, vest, tie, hat and shoes, but left her naked from the waist down. He placed an illuminated red lightbulb in the jacket pocket, the light of which permeated the 'street', evoking the crimson glow of sex work districts. Duchamp signed the mannequin with the name of his female alter ego, Rose Sélavy, on her smooth, featureless groin, using a dotted handwriting suggestive of pubic hair.²

Such a work is indicative of McKenzie's ability to stage alternative histories, distilling them into single objects that disrupt disciplinary conventions. Her practice is often concerned with surface, but refuses to capitulate to its dangers. She is fascinated as much by the machinations of design and illusion as by the objects and effects they generate. This is evident in the way that she plays with scale, often creating near life-size replicas of spaces or objects – a slight departure from exactitude that allows her work to exist in a territory between imitation and invention – as

well as reproducing them in model form. In the downstairs galleries at Z33 are two large-scale interventions, each of which is accompanied by a miniature counterpart. *Moving Panorama (TransSiberian)* FIG.4 simulates a historical train carriage, fitted with original components from a Belgian SNCB train. The visitor is invited to enter and sit inside, where paintings of a riverside landscape glide past the windowpane. The immaculately constructed environment evokes the apparatus of cinema, not only in the 'screening' of imagery in an enclosed space, but also in the inextricable technological and symbolic relationship between railways and film.

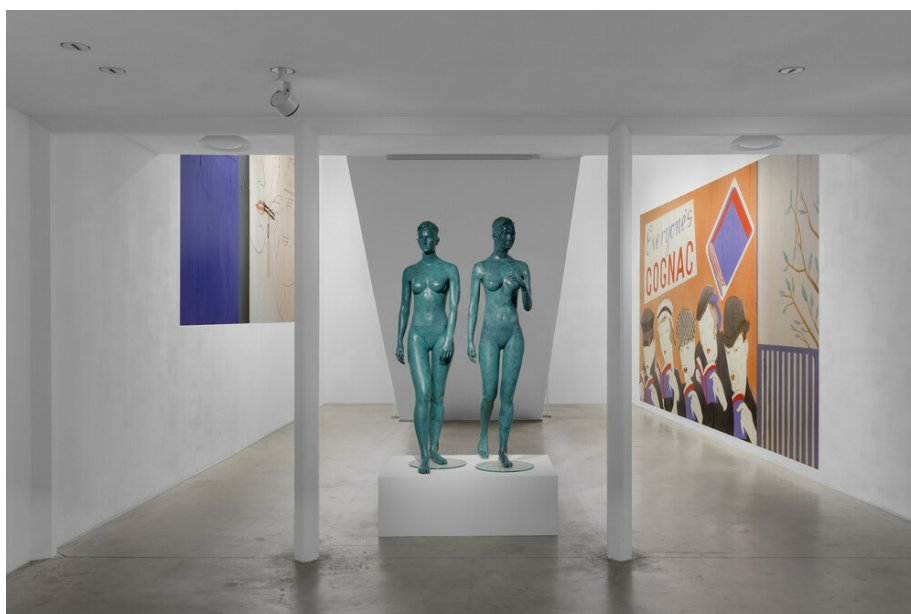


Fig. 2 Installation view of *Lucy McKenzie: Super Palace* at Z33, Hasselt, 2024–25, showing *Faux Verdigris Statue (Zoya) II & II*, by Lucy McKenzie. 2024. Fibreglass mannequins, acrylic and oil paint, wax and stand, dimensions variable. (Photograph Useful Art Services).

The work draws inspiration from one of two panoramas of the Trans-Siberian Railway that were exhibited at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris – the world fair format that was later subverted by the Surrealists in their exhibition of 1938.³ The two panoramic installations were a central component of Russia's *Pavillon de l'Asie russe et de la Sibérie*, presenting idealised depictions of an 'exotic' land that lay beyond the European domain. Next to the carriage, McKenzie has installed *Miniature Moving Panorama (Hudson Valley)* FIG.5, which inverts the scale of its neighbour. Here, four miniature train carriages are attached to a vast wooden structure that houses a rotating panorama of New York's Hudson Valley. The compartment is no longer a cinematic environment that one can inhabit. Instead, it becomes an aperture, mimicking the fundamental mechanism of the camera itself. Embedded with narratives of colonialist expansion and technological invention, McKenzie's train carriage installations seem at once to conjure specific histories and an imagined, nostalgic formalism.



Fig. 3 *Monumental Streetlamp/1938 Duchamp Mannequin Sketches*, by Lucy McKenzie. 2017–24. Oil on wood, metal, glass and lamp, 131 by 95 by 250 cm. (Courtesy the artist, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin, Cologne and New York, and Cabinet, London; photograph Useful Art Services; exh. Z33, Hasselt).

The visitor soon encounters the ‘back’ of *Moving Panorama (TransSiberian)*: the rotating mechanism that cycles the scenic landscape past the train window. This conceit – whereby McKenzie meticulously devises objects that rely, in part, on spectacle, only to then reveal their mysterious inner workings – is a characteristic of her wider practice. A similar dynamic is at play in the following room, which is dedicated to the automatic dance organ popularised in 1930s Belgium by the firm Gebroeders Decap Antwerpen.

McKenzie has installed an original organ **FIG.6** in the space, which erupts periodically, blasting out carnivalesque arrangements of such songs as Abba's 'Waterloo' (1974). The visitor is given enough space to walk behind the monumental instrument, where the usually hidden array of pipes, wires and switches is visible. On the large spool that contains the perforated music scrolls, one can identify hand-written annotations determining the placement of each song, which seem to jump from decade to decade: 'Sixties Medley', 'La Vie en Rose', 'Enjoy Yourself' and 'La Camisa Negra'. Installed on a plinth on the opposing wall is a scale model of the organ, borrowed from the Decap archives. Yet another version is shown nearby: an exacting oil painting in which McKenzie reimagines the organ in the modernist style of the Flemish architect, designer and politician Jozef De Bruycker (1892–1942), a complex figure to whom she often returns.⁴

Super Palace is installed across two floors of Z33's recently completed Vlugel 19 ('Wing 19'). McKenzie has utilised this architectural distinction to divide the exhibition into two realms that operate on traditional classifications of space. While the works in the downstairs galleries are reminiscent of public environments – the shop, the train, the dance hall – upstairs, they turn inwards to more domestic spaces. The mannequin, a figure that conflates the public and private, display and concealment, reappears here **FIG.7**. Three female figures are shown in languid, reclining poses that would seem to negate the self-conscious presentation of commercialism. Their heads are again based on Kosmodemyanskaya, and their differing skin tones are intended to represent three art-historical styles: 'the terracotta of a classical Greek vase, the eggplant hue of a Roman marble statue and the pale cast of a medieval European sculpture'.⁵ Although their presence, looming against the walls of a long corridor, is somewhat unsettling, these mannequin-sculpture hybrids lack the clarity of those shown downstairs. This is primarily due to the dense, uneasy colours, which are difficult to pinpoint and fail to impart their intended references.



Fig. 4 *Moving Panorama (TransSiberian)*, by Lucy McKenzie. 2024. Wooden and metal constructions, train furniture, glass, textile, motor, acrylic and oil on canvas, dimensions variable. (Courtesy the artist, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin, Cologne and New York, and Cabinet, London; photograph Useful Art Services; exh. Z33, Hasselt).

The final room of the exhibition, however, re-establishes McKenzie's layered acuity. Two large oil paintings **FIG.8** dominate the gallery walls, each untraditionally butting up against the floor and internal corners. Rendered in a muted, chalky palette, as though bleached by the elements, *Mural Proposal for Jeffrey Epstein's New York Townhouse (Filming of American Psycho)* **FIG.9** depicts a scene from the film-set of *American Psycho* (2000). It visualises an anecdote told in the film's commentary by the director, Mary Harron, who stated that during the opening scene, in which Patrick Bateman (played by Christian Bale) details his elaborate morning routine, the women on set stopped working to watch Bale in the shower. He is shown naked, standing under a showerhead that emits no water; behind him, eight women are arranged as though in a queue, each with a strangely impassive gaze that is nonetheless unmistakably trained on Bale's naked body. The women's observation of Bale, along with McKenzie's parodic title, suggests a reversal of the function of the apartment, where Bateman perpetrates extreme violence, mainly against women – although, any straightforward subversion is perhaps complicated by the fact that the cinematic vision was executed by a female director.



Fig. 5 Detail of *Miniature Moving Panorama (Hudson Valley)*, by Lucy McKenzie. 2024. Wooden structure, miniature train models, textile, motor, acrylic and oil on canvas. (Courtesy the artist, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin, Cologne and New York, and Cabinet, London; photograph Useful Art Services; exh. Z33, Hasselt).

McKenzie's work is characterised by a material and conceptual rigour. She crafts objects that are embedded with historical and sociopolitical narratives, without losing sight of the codes and legacies that her chosen visual languages evoke. She is an exacting artist – in her decision-making, theoretical layering and in her technical skill and craftsmanship. For McKenzie, the 'surface-level', illusory and fleeting become sites of genuine inquiry. The works in *Super Palace* manifest this through a sustained negotiation

between simulation and invention, concealment and revelation. Although some elements, such as the false entrance in *Sports Shop*, may suggest deceit, there is no true deception in McKenzie's work. Instead, it is characterised by a critical generosity. She shows us not only the machinations of surface and spectacle, but the ideological – often arbitrary – systems that sustain them.



Fig. 6 Installation view of *Lucy McKenzie: Super Palace* at Z33, Hasselt, 2024–25. (Photograph Useful Art Services).



Fig. 7 Installation view of *Lucy McKenzie: Super Palace* at Z33, Hasselt, 2024–25. (Photograph Useful Art Services).



Fig. 8 *Mural for Cromwell Place (Francis Bacon's Studio)*, by Lucy McKenzie. 2024. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 600 by 300 cm. (Courtesy the artist, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin, Cologne and New York, and Cabinet, London; photograph Useful Art Services; exh. Z33, Hasselt).



Fig. 9 *Mural Proposal for Jeffrey Epstein's New York Townhouse (Filming of American Psycho)*, by Lucy McKenzie. 2024. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 507 by 302 cm. (Courtesy the artist, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin, Cologne and New York, and Cabinet, London; photograph Useful Art Services; exh. Z33, Hasselt).

Exhibition details

Lucy McKenzie: Super Palace

Z33, Hasselt

29th September 2024–23rd February

2025

Footnotes

- 1** It is notable that McKenzie chose to open a major solo exhibition with a collaborative work, devised not only with Lipscombe, but also with the artist and furniture maker Steff Norwood and the window dressers Barbara Kelly and Howard Tong.
- 2** See M.R. Taylor: 'The genesis, construction, installation, and legacy of a secret masterwork: chapter 3, installation', in *idem*: exh. cat. *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donné*, Philadelphia (Museum of Art) 2009, pp.128–89.
- 3** See L. Walden: 'From the rue des Nations to the rue aux Lèvres: the 1938 International Surrealist exhibition parody of the 1889 and 1900 world fair cityscapes', *MDCCC 1800* 6 (2017), pp.9–18, doi.org/10.14277/2280-8841/MDCCC-6-17-1.
- 4** In 2014 McKenzie purchased De Ooievaar, Ostend, a modernist villa built by De Bruycker in 1935, which is his most well-known work. McKenzie often wrangles with the relationship between De Bruycker's progressive style and extreme-right political ideologies. References to the house can be found throughout her installations, for example in the chairs designed for *Miniature Moving Panorama (Hudson Valley)*.
- 5** T. Roerig: exh. booklet *Lucy McKenzie: Super Palace*, Belgium (Z33), n.p.

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