

**BROADWAY 1602**



**EVELYNE AXELL**



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Front Cover:  
*Valentine*, 1966  
Oil on canvas, gold leaf spray paint,  
with zipper and helmet  
133 x 83 cm (52 3/8" x 32 3/4")

# BROADWAY 1602

**EVELYNE AXELL**

**EXPERIMENTS IN ART AND**

**TECHNOLOGY (E.A.T.) ARCHIVE**

**SYLVIA PALACIOS WHITMAN**

**MARK ALEXANDER**

**BABETTE MANGOLTE**

**PAUL P.**

**PENNY SLINGER**

**ROSEMARIE CASTORO**

**DEVIN LEONARDI**

**NICOLA L.**

**MARGARETE JAKSCHIK**

**ANNA MOLSKA**

**XANTI SCHAWINSKY**

**ZOFIA RYDET**

**EDWARD KRASINKSI &**

**EUSTACHY KOSSAKOWSKI**

**LENORA DE BARROS**

**GINA PANE**

# EVELYNE AXELL



Evelyn Axell (1935-72) invented a genuine proto-feminist perspective on Pop Art in the 1960s and early 70s. Axell's work pioneered the art world of her time. Today she is regarded one of the most outstanding women in Pop Art, her work being a classic of the period.

Axell had started her career as an acclaimed theater and film actress in the New Wave and as a screenwriter in Paris and Brussels. In 1963 she was the female lead in *Le Crocodile en peluche*, directed by her husband, the filmmaker Jean Antoine.



*La Belle Endormie* ("Sleeping Beauty"), 1971  
Felt tip pen on cut paper and collaged on green paper  
57 x 81 cm (22 1/2" x 31 7/8")

Left:  
*Axell-Eration*, 1965  
Oil on canvas  
52.5 x 63.5 cm (20 5/8" x 25")



Film Still from *Le Crocodile en peluche*, 1963

The film presented a daring subject for the time: the problems of a couple in which one partner is white and the other black. Inspired by Jean Antoine's documentaries on the emerging Pop Art and the New Realism movements (e.g. his film *L'École de New York* including women artists Marisol, Lee Bontecou and Yayoi Kusama), Axell decided to give up her acting career to become a painter. She approached Surrealist René Magritte, a friend of the family, who became her tutor. Only a year later, in 1964, she emerged as a uniquely matured painter engaging strongly with Pop Art's tropes and style while introducing a distinctively female perspective.

**An early series of paintings of cars – with their suggestive ignition switches and gas pedals – shows Axell already equating active female sexuality with political and personal empowerment.**

**Anne Doran  
Art in America  
2012**



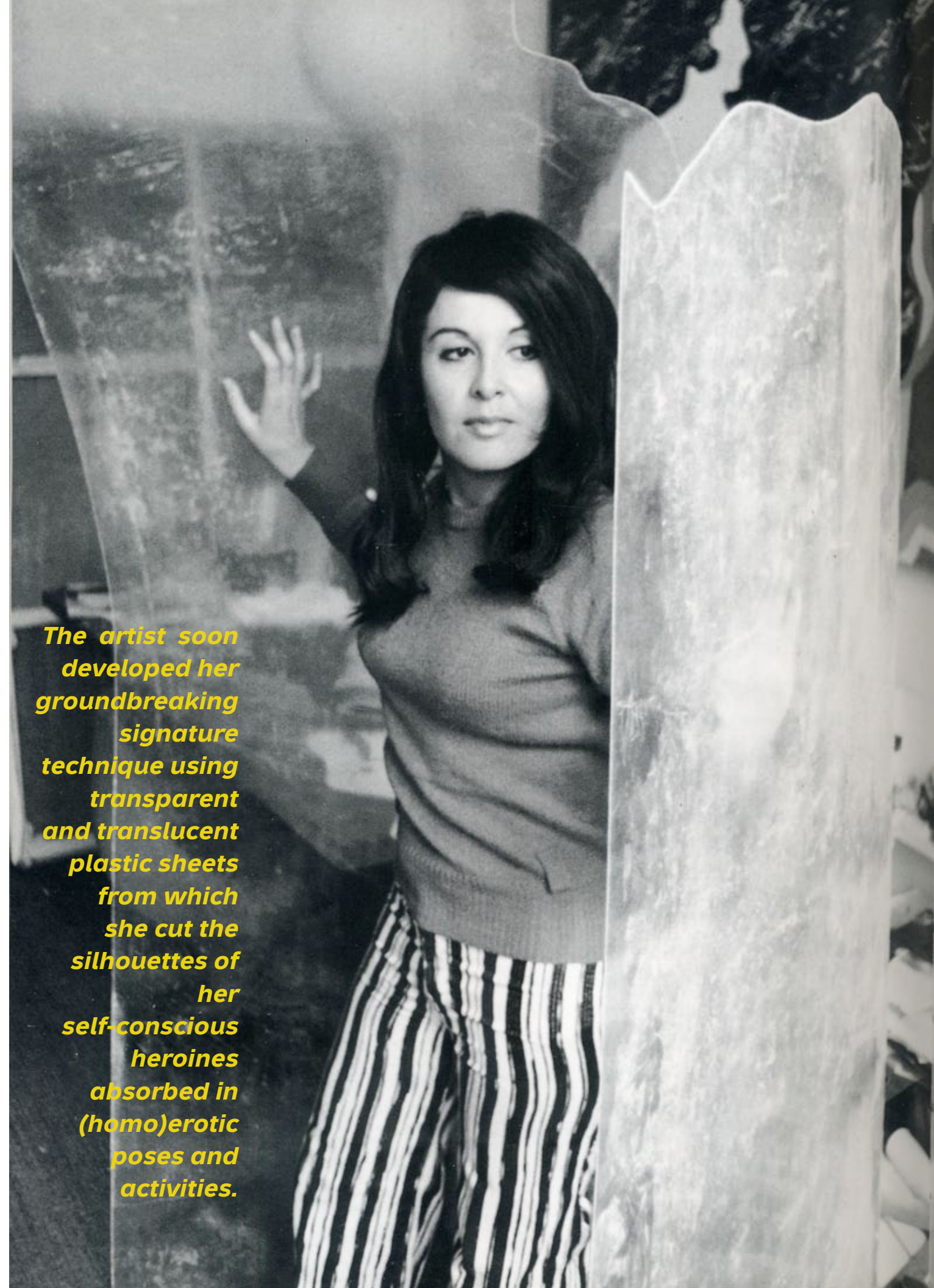
*La Clef de contact rose*, 1966  
Oil on canvas  
99 x 99 cm (38 ½" x 38 ½")

*Changement de vitesse*, 1965  
Oil on canvas and wood frame  
102 x 102 cm (40 ¼" x 40 ¼")

Axell developed a repertoire of erotically provocative motifs. Her central interest was already fully realized in her early oil paintings *Erotomobiles* (1964-65). By this time she had shortened her name to the gender-neutral "Axell".



**The artist soon developed her groundbreaking signature technique using transparent and translucent plastic sheets from which she cut the silhouettes of her self-conscious heroines absorbed in (homo)erotic poses and activities.**





*Auto-stop*, 1965  
Oil on canvas  
98 x 146 cm (38 5/8" x 57 1/2")

Axell painted enamel on these contour-cut sheets and mounted them on background panels to create low-relief images. With the bright colors, new materials, intense surface qualities and upfront sexual imagery, Axell's work met the immediacy of Pop Art.

There is a tender yet radical vision of surrealism in her work - opening a new dimension of style which still today is unparalleled. Her work has in recent years been coined Pop-surrealist.

***...in her paintings of women taking pleasure in their sexuality, Axell suggests that the freedom to do so might be related to the creation of a more sustainable, more egalitarian works order. This alone is a great reason to resurrect and celebrate her art.***

**A. Doran**



*Le Jour ou les homards...*, 1968  
Oil on canvas and board  
195 x 130 cm (76 3/4" x 51 1/8")



*Portrait of Yael Dayan, 1969*  
Enamel on Formica and wood frame  
60 x 51 cm (23 5/8" x 20 1/8")

Right:  
*L'Irlandaise (autoportrait), 1969*  
Enamel on Plexiglas fixed on  
aluminum board  
66.5 x 42 cm (26 1/8" x 16 1/2")

Axell was in close exchange with the critic Pierre Restany, advocate of the Nouveau Réalisme, Marcel Broodthaers, Pauline Boty, Alina Szapocznikow, Marcel Duchamp and Arturo Schwarz, among many others. In 1969 Pierre Restany had declared Axell's works icons of the "sexual revolution in art". The women portrayed in Axell's world are evocative and self-contained. Axell claimed female sexuality as her own to escape the mass media objectification of her male Pop Art contemporaries. While appropriating Pop eroticism she simultaneously transformed her nudes into images of the conscious yet ethereal presence.

*In "Les Opalines", her group of female portraits from 1969, interlocking shapes of flat color look as if they have been roughly drawn, cut out, and then sandwiched between layers of Plexiglas.*



*The resulting pileup of milky polymer evokes the creaminess of skin and gives the entire series a kind of industrial-strength poetry."*

**Carrie Moyer**  
**ARTFORUM, 2010**



*La Fille de feu, 1967-1968*  
Enamel on wood and plastic-based resin (Clartex) board  
120 x 110 cm (47 1/4" x 43 1/4")



*Seule, une femme / Le Timide Embryon*, 1965  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 100 cm (39 3/8" x 39 3/8")



In 1966 she created the assemblage painting *Valentine*, - a homage to the first female cosmonaut and Communist hero Valentina Tereshkova. The idealized white female silhouette has a zipper on her body representing the space suit. Next to the Space nude the artist attached an astronaut helmet (a toy helmet of her son) on the canvas. (See Cover)

In 1969 Axell organized a happening at Foncke Gallery in Ghent bringing into the crowd a young woman wearing nothing but an astronaut helmet disguising her identity.

Against the background of languorous music Axell then redressed her model, starting with her stockings, panties, and bra, with a sensuality that sent the audience into ecstasy, divinely seductive like a reversed striptease. The evening ended with a stormy debate led by Pierre Restany on "Sexual Revolution in Art".



In the same year Axell started to experiment with new plastic materials to progress the possibilities of her paintings to an ultra modern futuristic level she coined "The Age of Plastic."

She cut canvasses in the shapes of nudes wearing helmets arranged as a chorus of females flying freely in space -reminiscent of Matisse's gouaches découpés. She sank these canvas sheets in a newly invented plastic matter in a factory in Belgium. The result was the translucent mural size painting *THE GREAT JOURNEY TO OUTER SPACE*, its composition transfixed in plastic. The piece was first installed outdoors in the artist's garden.



*Cercle Vieux / Sans titre*, 1969  
Enamel on Plexiglas fixed on board  
ø 100.5 cm (ø 39 5/8")

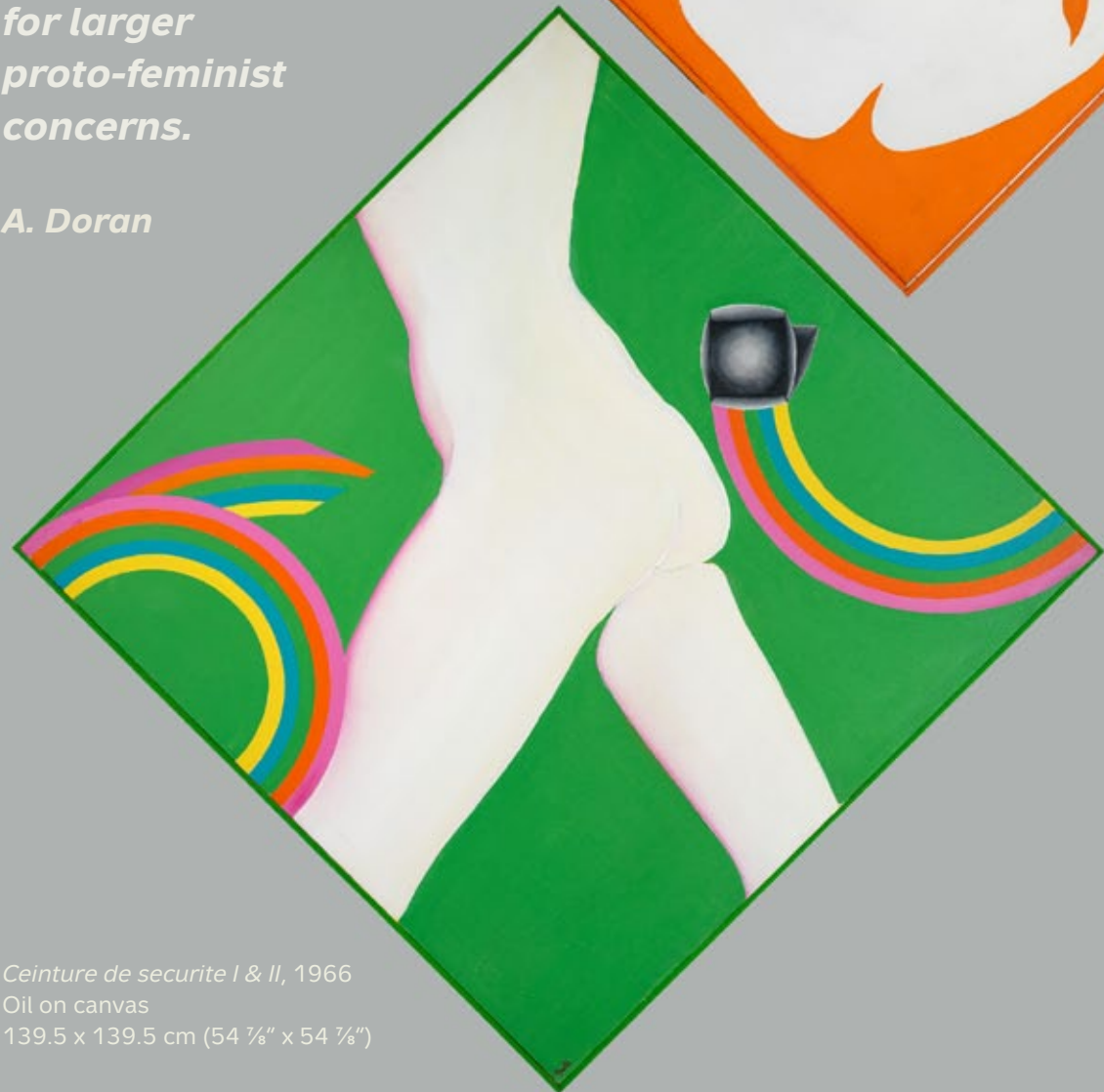


Axell in her garden, c. 1965

*...a tondo featuring a rare male figure, nude and sporting an erection, in free-fall, a consort, perhaps, for Axell's emancipated female psychonaut."*

...Axell evolved a version of Pop art that was both more interiorized and more politicized than that of male contemporaries. Her particular focus was sexual liberation, as a cause in itself and as a metaphor for larger proto-feminist concerns.

A. Doran



*Ceinture de securite I & II*, 1966  
Oil on canvas  
139.5 x 139.5 cm (54 7/8" x 54 7/8")



Installation views of *POWER UP! Female Pop Art*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria, 2010



*Seen within the context of Modernism, beginning with Gauguin's views of Tahiti and including Wesselman's Great American Nude series, Axell's views challenge the paradigm of woman as territory to be colonized or a willing subject of male fantasy... Her figures are in complete control and uncontrollable – the painted frames underscore this latter aspect.*

*John Yau, 2009*

*La Chute D'Eau (The Waterfall), 1972*  
Enamel on Plexiglas  
Formica fixed on wood panel  
102 x 82.5 cm (40 1/8" x 32 1/2")



Shortly before her untimely death in 1972, Axell reached a pivotal stage of her work with her 'Paradise Circle'. She began portraying her solitary females in a utopian setting of dense jungle landscapes with exotic vegetation, idyllic waterfalls and rare animals. The artist made this elegiac vision of nature untouched by environmental destruction a hidden realm for the free enjoyment of female desire.

*Le Val Vert (The green valley), 1971*  
Felt-tip pen on cut paper and collage on black paper  
67 x 70.5 cm (26 3/8" x 27 3/4")



*L'Appel, 1972*  
Enamel on Plexiglas and Formica  
104 x 128 cm (40 1/2" x 50 3/8")

*I was surprised and delighted, on a visit to the "Elles" exhibition at the Centre Pompidou...to find myself confronting a large and striking work, "Le Retour de Tarzan of 1972", by Evelyne Axell, one of the major artists figuring in the present show.*

*Linda Nochlin, in Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958-1968*

# EVELYNE AXELL

Born in 1935, Namur, Belgium

Died in 1972, Belgium

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 *The World Goes Pop*, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil  
*International Pop*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA
- 2015 *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Modern, London U.K.  
*International Pop*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and Dallas Museum of Art, USA
- 2014 *Femminilità Radicale*, Gucci Museo, Florence, Italy
- 2013 *GLAM! The performance of Style*, Tate Liverpool, UK - Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany - LENTOS Kunstmuseum, Linz, Switzerland  
*Pop Art Design*, Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK
- 2012 *EVELYNE AXELL. THE GREAT JOURNEY INTO SPACE*, BROADWAY 1602, NY
- 2011 *AXELLERATION*, Museum Abteiberg, Monchengladbach, Germany  
*La terre est ronde*, Kunstverein, Hamburg, Germany
- 2010 *POWER UP! Female Pop Art*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria  
*Evelyne Axell, images contestataires*, WIELS, Brussels, Belgium  
*Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958-1968*, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery, Philadelphia and Brooklyn Museum, NY
- 2009 *AXELL'S PARADISE. Last works (1971-72) before she vanished*, BROADWAY 1602, NY

## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Centre Pompidou, Paris  
Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgium, Brussels  
Musée D'Ixelles, Brussels, Belgium  
Le Plasticarium, Brussels, Belgium  
Le Provinciaal Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Oostende, Belgium

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