

PRESS RELEASE**Stevie Dix*****Magnesium*****2 October - 6 November 2021**

Stevie Dix makes paintings that are heavy and thick, composed in a personal language where figures and symbols are metaphors for intimate feelings and, at times, political perspectives. For her first solo show at the gallery, Dix presents a new body of work that continues her interest in the cold and hard-edged character of urban living, contrasted with an investigation into the legacy of craftsmanship and artisanal practice in post-war Belgium. Together with references to her family life and cultural upbringing in Belgium, *Magnesium* presents a surreal and uncanny exploration of cultural identity, at once deeply introspective, critical and passionate.

Born to creative parents on either side — her father, a musician and cartoonist, her mother, a sculptor and painter — Dix has long been inspired by the indefatigable spirit of artists. Having had no formal art education herself, the idiosyncrasies of her technique are immediately visible through their raw and visceral fidelity to the medium of paint. Using a combination of oil, wax and charcoal, Dix works in a distinctive impasto style, with dark and earthy palettes that create a pensive and melancholic atmosphere. The introduction of Flashe — a velvety acrylic paint with enhanced pigment intensity — is used by the artist to colour and accentuate the peaks of their interior landscape.

Certainly, the works of *Magnesium* are evocative of their exhibition's namesake — cold, industrial and bitter. They recall dark and solitary evenings spent navigating city lanes; or the torturous, restless nights of an insomniac. In their austere and quiet brutality, they represent the encroaching contrast of Dix's native region of Limburg — a remote and rural area of Flanders once known for the beauty of its landscape paintings — with its heavily industrialised and rebellious city of Genk, famous for its exhaustive coal extraction and burgeoning of extreme techno music during the '80s and '90s.

The darkness of these themes, bringing to mind the ominous and alluring works of Belgian Surrealists such as René Magritte, Rachel Baes or Jane Graverol, is countered by references to an extensive catalogue of glazed ceramic door handles, a typical decorative feature of Modernist houses built during the '50s and '60s in Belgium. These post-war embellishments were provided by household artisans employed by the Belgian Government to help re-establish the cultural heritage of their cities and remain prolific in urban environments today. For many, they represent the potential for socialist policies to help empower workers and enhance the beauty of their urban surroundings.

The duality of these objects — graphic compositions of line, intensity and colour reduced to a utilitarian ornament encased in a hard metal shell — is echoed in the artist's own hand-made frames, an enclosure and delimiting of space that both revels in and critiques the anonymity of their makers, celebrating the tireless resolve of artists in the face of adversity. Like shadows, each element of Dix's practice converges within this frame to create a shifting silhouette of cultural identity, memory and place; the door handles, like gateways that guard a secret or else offer a path to truth.

Stevie Dix (b. 1990, Belgium) lives and works in Genk, Belgium. She participated in the Turps Banana Correspondence Course 2016 - 2017, tutored by artist Phil King, and has recently been in residency at *superzoom*, in the South of France. Recent solo exhibitions include *Sad Girl Surrealism*, L21 Gallery, Palma ES (2021); *Belgian Techno*, Nevven Gallery, Gothenburg SE (2020); *The nearer the ground, the louder it sounds*, Galerie Chloe Salgado, Paris FR (2020); *The Devil's in the Details*, L21 Gallery, Palma ES (2018); and *Désert*, Nevven Gallery, Gothenburg SE (2018).