



## Memymom

**EN |** Wunderkammer goes Wunderhaus. Since 2004, mother Marilène Coolens and daughter Lisa De Boeck have also been known by Memymom, an artistic alias that has turned their family home upside down. **KURT SNOEKX • PHOTOS: GAUTIER HOUBA**

In 2000, Mark Z. Danielewski published *House of Leaves*, a book to last a lifetime. A house on Ash Tree Lane appears to be bigger on the inside than on the outside, an anomaly Danielewski uses to compile a massive, labyrinthine work with a range of characters, genres, styles, fonts, and references to things both in and outside the book, which devours every scrap of its readers. Reading becomes a physical experience, fiction that palpably breathes down your neck. You can find another such house in the middle of a street in Molenbeek. Although this one does not house a roaring Minotaur, there is a fascinating interplay of life and fiction here, making the walls expand into a wondrous universe with theatrical clutches on reality. The house is home to the lives and works of the mother and daughter duo Marilène Coolens (1953) and Lisa De Boeck (1985), who since 2004 have also been known as the collective Memymom. Lives and works; the one is mute without the other. On the walls and stacked on the floor, the whole

house is covered with frames depicting the photographic memories of imagined, dramatised lives, roles rooted in the clustered manifestation of the past, present, and future. As though time unfolds here into a parallelism of dimensions. *The Umbilical Vein* is the title of the 2013 project in which mother and daughter shared a selection from their intimate family photo archive – photos taken between 1990 and 2003. These pictures are genuinely playful, of dress-up parties, dream-like and anxious visions of the future, of a child who looks mature. Lisa De Boeck: "Exhibiting these photos wasn't easy: you expose an incredibly intimate part of your life, and something that people might easily misinterpret. But I am happy that we

did decide to exhibit them. We know what they're about, and we know our core. You can't escape from that." These *are* sensitive images. Behind closed doors, the grown-up fantasies of small children (dressing up as Catwoman, dreaming of a cleavage or of being the future First Lady) remain in the right context; publicly, the state of the world matters too. Marilène Coolens: "I always spent a lot of time playing with my children. It came naturally since I was a teacher of physical education. I used the same creativity at home so they also learned to play with each other; it was magical sometimes. Lisa loved dressing up and being in front of the camera, and so we continued our dress-up parties all those years. But it happened without any artistic intentions, we never planned to exhibit them." When asked what did inspire them to exhibit *The Umbilical Vein* ten years after the series ended, the answer is uncomfortably clear. Marilène Coolens: "I guess it was your father." Lisa De Boeck: "Yes... Those photos were always displayed on a cup-

**BOROUGH:** Molenbeek  
**EXHIBITIONS:** "The Future = Beursscouwburg"; > 30/5, Beursschouwburg; www.beursschouwburg.be; "Occupied Emotions"; > 19/4, Broelkaai 6, www.bir-box.be  
**INFO:** www.memymom.com

board at home. My dad always supported us...well...he left us to our own devices. [Laughs] But at a certain point he said: 'You ought to make a book.' An epiphany! I never forgot that." Marilène Coolens: "After my husband's death in 2002 we stopped the series. We just couldn't do it anymore. We had other issues to deal with. The photos in *The Umbilical Vein* brought up much more stuff from the past. It was just too difficult." Lisa De Boeck: "For six years, I woke up every morning thinking about him. This is a completely different life now. I consciously made the decision to start something new. But you can't erase your past. I prefer to disseminate the inheritance of *The Umbilical Vein* by pursuing the beauty of that irreverence. That's more interesting than building a shrine or going to live at the graveyard." Memymom is exactly what it says: though the project might test the blood-tie, it can only ever make it stronger. Lisa De Boeck: "Our relationship is automatic and unconditional. We sometimes have a different vision, but we always engage with and tackle the resulting discussions openly.

**LISA DE BOECK:**  
 "I WOULDN'T WANT TO DO THIS ALONE; IT JUST WOULDN'T BE RIGHT"

That always takes us exactly where we need to go. We do bend, yes, but we never break. And I wouldn't want to do it alone; that just wouldn't be right." Their collaboration results in photography and video projects like *The Baby Blues* (a revisiting of *The Umbilical Vein*, a parody of the gimmick, of the idea that artists always repeat themselves) or *La gloire fanée* (a trick with simulated time in which Lisa De Boeck adopts the guise of a child star who has grown older). These are projects in which, in staggering mise en scènes, art and life become intimately entangled, where reality paradoxically shines through all the acted roles because they have been given enough time to get the image to that pulsing level. The pictures unfold as though they were veritable theatre or

opera stages, containing so much symbolic and intimate expressiveness that it grabs you by the throat. Humans are more than one emotion, more than one history. The fact that Lisa De Boeck often inhabits the same image in various guises is closely linked to her penchant for the narrative aspect. Rather than making a series, Memymom wants to imbue a single image with a whole story. This necessarily makes the details very significant. Details like décor (pretty much every floor and room in the house) and costumes (which Marilène Coolens makes herself in her sewing room or which they go and pick out together on the Vossenplein/place du Jeu de Balle) – often straightjackets or corsets, garments that restrain or trap people. No wonder the core of the collective is freedom, which both find at their house in Molenbeek. Lisa De Boeck: "I feel comfortable here. If I were to have to make a choice in life, I'd prefer to make one that I knew was real and that helped me to develop as a person. I want to die knowing that I chose my family, and that I wanted that love. Just to end with a real tearjerker..." [Laughs] 🗨



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