

SISYPHUS



Stephanie
Gildemyn

Stephanie Gildemyn is an artist who has been exploring myths, art history and contemporary art through her drawings, etchings, photographs and paintings for the last 15 years.

Currently, her studio is situated in Ghent, Belgium.

All her pieces are united by a common thread: her exploration of society and its many complex identities.

She looks at contemporary issues and tries to make sense of them through the lens of mythology. In her practice, she narrows the gap between mythology, art history and modern society. She is particularly interested in how these three fields can inform one another.

Through her artwork, Gildemyn is able to get closer to understanding the world around her. She often finds herself asking questions about art history and contemporary art. And she isn't afraid to tackle the big topics head on.

Stephanie
Gildemyn



Gildemyn has been working on an art series called Sisyphus since 2019. The series currently consists of 10 sub-series, with more to come. Gildemyn started the series with smaller pieces and drawings, but the final output will be 12 large paintings on canvas. The 12 paintings in the series are each as large as a door, and there are a little over 200 pieces of art altogether.

Sisyphus today is relevant to anyone who feels stuck in a never-ending cycle of work with no tangible results. As Albert Camus wrote, "The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

Gildemyn's series captures this feeling of hope and resilience in the face of seemingly endless adversity.

SIZE OF THE SERIES

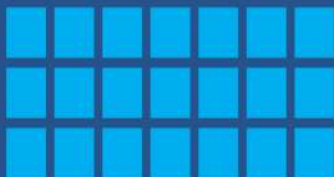
2019: 18 unique gouaches in an upright frame, 24 x 32 x 5 cm / 9.44 x 12.59 x 1.96 inch



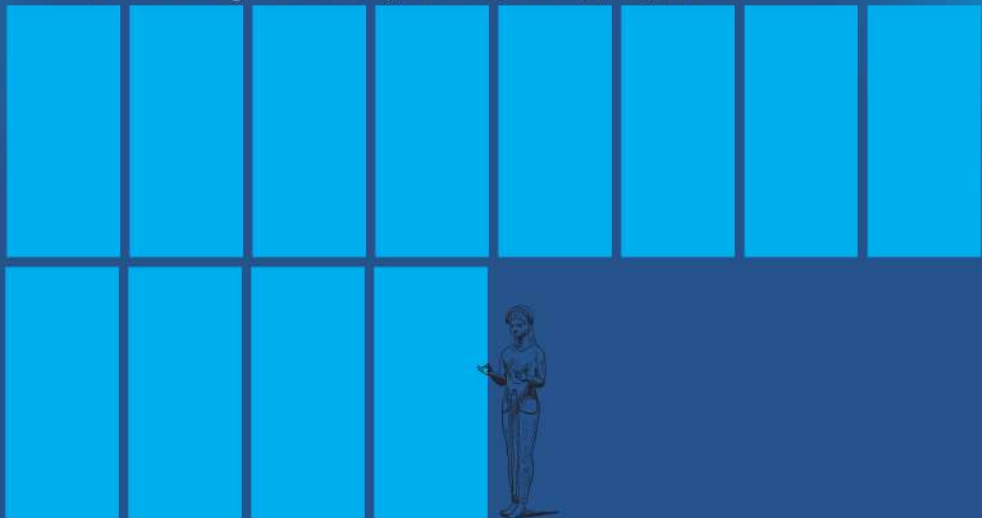
2019-2022: 30 paintings+collages, preliminary studies large canvases, various formats



2020: 21 unique gouaches in frame, Sisyphus Azure Series, 15,2 x 20,3 x 1,5 cm / 5,98 x 7,99 x 0,59 inch



2020-2022: 12 large canvases 190 cm x 85 cm / 74.8 x 33.46 inch



SIZE OF THE SERIES

2021: 12 collages in a folding frame, 10 x 15 cm / 3.93 x 5.90 inch



2021: 30 collages on paper, 42 x 29.7 cm / 16.53 x 11.69 inch



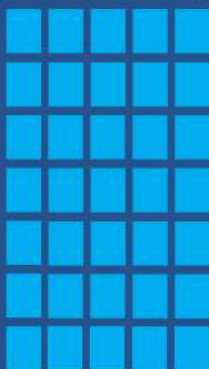
2021: 3 Sisyphus booklets, limited edition, 10 x 15 x 3 cm / 3.93 x 5.90 x 1.18 inch



2022: 20 unique works on canvas, 30 x 40 x 2.5 cm / 11.81 x 15.74 x 0.98 inch



2022: 35 unique works on paper, 29.7 x 21 x 2.5 cm / 11.69 x 8.26 x 0.98 inch



About the 12 large canvases, her last series:

"As a viewer, you feel you can step into the 190 x 85 cm / 74.8 x 33.46 inch paintings, as if you were entering a gateway. Because the torso knows the size of a door: consciously or unconsciously, the body wants to step through it".

Gildemyn's canvases should invite you to walk in.

Hyperotomachia Poliphili, 1499



Sisyphus series in S.M.A.K., Ghent, 2021. ArtGhent@SMAK





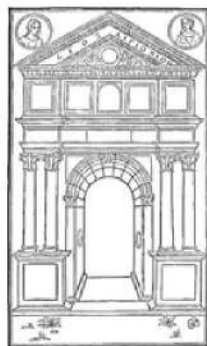
Rothko Chapel
in Houston, 1971

Think of the fourteen paintings in different shades of black by American artist Mark Rothko in The Rothko Chapel in Houston.

There, too, the interior is placed in function of the paintings with a mythical effect on the viewer."

Sisyphus series in S.M.A.K., Ghent, 2021, ArtGhent@SMAK

Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, 1499



INVERTED MYTHOLOGY

Why is Gildemyn working on that fictional character Sisyphus?

Firstly, mythology is one of the hobby horses in her artistic practice.

Secondly, someone told the artist about the terrills, the coal mines in Wallonia, Belgium, which were built by children, which you can actually see as disguised voluntary work, and more pointedly: as a parallel economy.

Sisyphus was a character from Greek mythology who was punished by the gods for trying to cheat death. Homer wrote about his adventures in the Iliad as early as the eighth century BC. Later, around AD 8, the Roman poet Ovid added him in his Metamorphoses

Sisyphus was punished by the gods for pushing a rock up a mountain until the end of time. Each time Sisyphus reached the mountaintop, his rock plunged down again, dooming the man to start all over again.

Even though this story is from ancient times, Sisyphus' experience is still something that many people can relate to today. The word 'sisyphus work' has become integrated into our language because of this.

Friedrich John after Matthäus
Loder: Sisyphus ubis G 0825 II



terril Le Boussu, BE, 2019



INVERTED MYTHOLOGY

Everyone has had moments where they feel stuck or unable to progress.

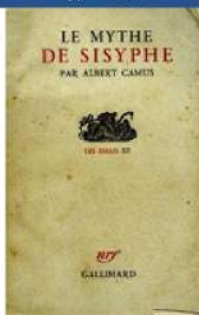
Albert Camus was the first to write about Sisyphus in a 1942 essay, entitled "The Myth of Sisyphus."

In this essay, Camus introduced the philosophy of the absurd with his retelling of the Greek myth. He is also believed to be the first person to speak of "the descent" of Sisyphus.

Just at the moment when Sisyphus begins his descent - without his stone -the artist Gildemyn wants us to zoom in and take a close look. No more physical force is being used here, but it is just as much a moment of contemplation, which can be just as heavy.

Artist Francis Alÿs also created a video about it that starts with a little guy working hard to roll up a car tire on the slag heap. Afterwards, he rolls himself down in the car tire and laughs. As viewers, we laugh along until we realize that those children playing in Lubumbashi are doing so on a trash heap.

Alber Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphes, 1942



"La Roue", by Francis Alÿs, Photography courtesy the artist, and David Zwirner gallery, Venice 2022



LANDSCAPE & EMOTION

In her series, Gildemyn gives the landscape slash route an emotion: 'Sisyphus is also us', is her motto. She could just as easily show a woman or man in a living room, but she chose the landscape, painted in a mix of figurative and abstract.

Sisyphus as the protagonist is figurative. Although for the artist, this is not necessary; in some paintings you see Sisyphus' route, in others rather the hardness of the block he is pushing or rolling back from the mountain.

The canvases represent the destructive thoughts that come again and again after someone is knocked down.

google image search engine: Sisyphus, 2022



Sisyphus gouache on papier



LANDSCAPE & EMOTION¹⁰

We can all relate to Sisyphus. The physical act of pushing the weight upwards- in this case, a stone- is only part of it. It's also the descent and constantly analyzing your psychological damage that takes its toll. In his 1942 essay *Le mythe de Sisyphe*, Albert Camus concludes that despite everything, Sisyphus is happy. Artist Gildemyn isn't yet sure about this, but he could be.

Every painting on canvas makes us think more deeply about ourselves and the world around us from a social perspective.

By giving in and accepting the status of her landscapes, the viewer's hidden questions become apparent. The artist is constantly battling to pry something loose or keep it together- a physical and emotional story that is personal yet recognizable. For Gildemyn, she knows she has done well if you feel that, as a viewer, you (already) know the image.

Sisyphus series at S.M.A.K., Ghent, 2021, ArtGhent@SMAK

Sisyphus series- detail

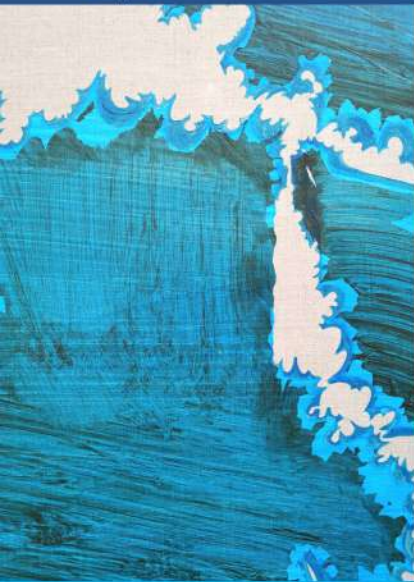


12 CHAPTERS

Stephanie Gildemyn doesn't believe the order of paintings in her series "Sisyphus" matters; rather, each individual work should be experienced as if it were a scene in a movie. You shouldn't feel the need to see all twelve pieces at once--they are their own little worlds that can stand strong on their own.

The works could easily be divided into chapters: three works of four, two works of six... However, the artist deliberately chose 12 paintings. Why twelve? It is an interesting number that can be divisible by everything: 12 months, 12 hours, 12 inches,... In terms of content, the story is divided into twelve (hi)stories. It is one concept - though more paintings could be added - but these twelve are not all-important. For this Sisyphus series, she zoomed in on a series of three at a time.

Sisyphus series- detail



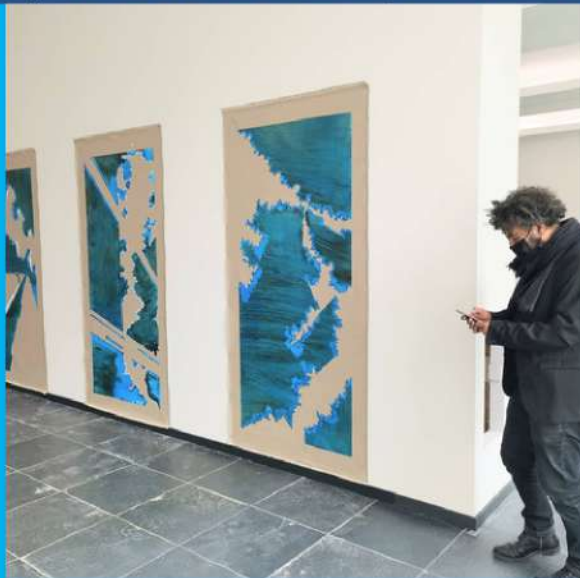
Sisyphus series at S.M.A.K., Ghent, 2021, ArtGhent@SMAK



Sisyphus series- preparatory works



Sisyphus series in S.M.A.K., Ghent, 2021, ArtGhent@SMAK • Ben Benaouisse



Apart from the Sisyphus legend, why does the viewer find her life-size pieces so captivating?

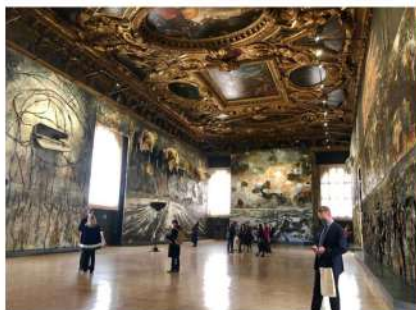
It's not just because of the story behind them, but also the way that they're painted.

The Sala della Scrutinio space held the great works of master Anselm Kiefer at this year's Venice Biennale 2022, which were squared in scale and overwhelming in nature. These paintings were specifically designed for the given space with the intention of Kiefer to promote reflection on universal issues within contemporary art.

This way of thinking and acting artistically is very recognisable for artist Gildemyn. All of her landscapes are chosen deliberately and with care, down to the smallest detail. This is also evident in her newest series of paintings.

Anselm Kiefer at Doge's Palace. Photo Andrea Avezzu, Courtesy Gagosian, Courtesy Fondazione Musei Civici Venezia

Sisyphus: first series 2019



Sisyphus series- preparatory works, studio images



COLOR & COMPOSITION

In this series, the artist deliberately chose to limit her number of colors, as opposed to in the past when she used magenta, yellow and cyan from printing. In contrast, her most recent paintings in the Sisyphus series are drenched in blue light. Blue is a dominant color in these later works because it's rarer in nature and it meets the artist's standards artistically.

In addition, we see the colours: brown and white.

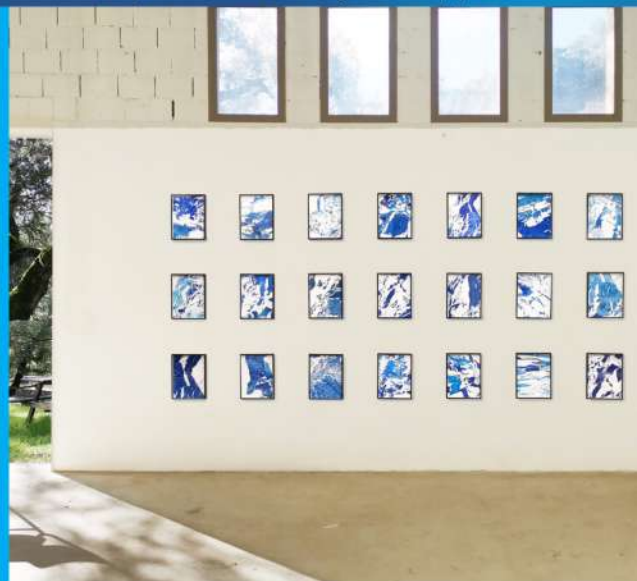
It is Gildemyn's way of making it clear that these 12 large canvases, and in addition: the whole series of 200 pieces, have a sense of cohesion and unity.

The artist is toying with the viewer's eye by situating the pivotal figure in various locations within the landscape - sometimes off to the side, and other times right in the center. The fact that we recognize the golden ratio is no accident.

Sisyphus: first series 2019- detail



Sisiphus Azure series 2020: 21 gouaches on paper



COLOR & COMPOSITION

Sisyphus 2020: gouache on papier



GESAMTKUNSTWERK

The artist exhibited these paintings at regular intervals when she felt the artwork was 'loaded' so that she could communicate with viewers about what she had created.

She has exhibited the works in several temporary exhibition spaces, initiated by ArtGhent, as well as in Contemporary Art Museum, the S.M.A.K. in Ghent, Belgium. The first display was under the wings of ArtGhent@SMAK, and the second time in "The Biennale of Belgium 2021" at the S.M.A.K. She has shown parts of her series in KUNSTHAL, Ghent, and in other venues as well.

She draws inspiration from preliminary studies, and sketches of photographs she takes on location. Some examples of her source material include le Fondry des Chiens (BE), the caves of Spy (BE), the Walloon terril(s) at Boussu (BE), the slates of Bois de Ronchinne (BE) and Le Caillou-qui-bique (BE), part of Emile Verhaeren's walks, and the gorge of El Segre (FR).

Her first series, which numbered eighteen drawings and gouache paintings, was released in 2019. Since then, the artist has

Sisyphus series- preparatory works



Sisyphus 2019: gouache on paper



GESAMTKUNSTWERK

completed nine sub-series--containing in total over two hundred unique art pieces--and a self-published book.

This is a Gesamtkunstwerk, an all-encompassing work of art.

After completing many sketches, the artist narrowed it down to 12 images for her last series of large canvasses. Why?

The artist's final plastic concept is the last mile in Sisyphus' journey, much like the final layer of paint. Every time you add something new to your artwork, you're also subtracting from it in some way, as art critic Jerry Salz points out.

As the paintings have been shown in a museum and independent art sales, the artist plans to exhibit them in different locations domestically and internationally.

The paintings are designed to be rolled up so they can easily travel with us, and then stretched out on stretchers when we arrive at our destination.

Whenever one, or more, of the 12 large canvases are exhibited, a selection of smaller pieces she calls her "satellite works" will be displayed alongside them.

Sisyphus 2019: gouache on paper



Sisyphus series in the S.M.A.K., Ghent, 2021. The Biennale of Belgium



WHY PAINTING?

Why paintings?

Paintings are appealing to Gildemyn because of their potential for creativity and storytelling. The materiality of the canvas is important, but it's the story behind the painting that really counts. Partly because of the poetic approach, she finds paintings to be incredibly powerful and moving.

The set-up is both simple and complex--subtle yet direct. She chooses painting because she can gaze at it for hours; it's her way of manifesting her own abilities.

The viewer's opinion is always at the back of her mind while she paints, because she wants to send a message with her paintings. For the artist, painting is a valuable medium that deserves an equal place to other media such as music or writing; however, it shares the same limitations.

Sisyphus 2021 collages in a folding frame, exhibition image



studio image



WHY PAINTING?²⁰

Sisyphus 2019: gouache on paper



studio image

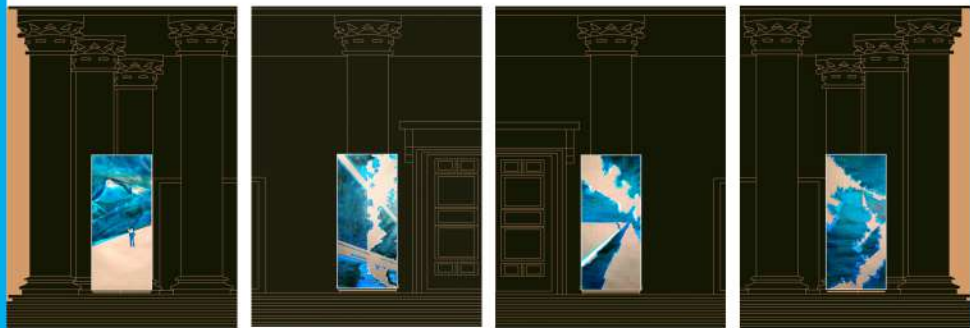


SISYPHUS IMAGINED

The artist believes that drawings are just as much of a "finished work" as any other piece. For her large canvases, she decided to cut up the majority of the story into twelve pieces. By doing this, she aims to show that you don't have to choose between abstract and illustrative art- both can be done together effectively.

Therefore, she has sought out the 'shadows' of Sisyphus: the path he/she traverses, the boulders that surround him/her.

Sisyphus 2021: 8 glycée prints



SISYPHUS IMAGINED

Stephanie Gildemyn purposely chose not to represent her subjects with a stone, to show that they are persevering and always starting anew.

Many paintings provide a view of the path while others create suspenseful scenes. The artist may want you to take your time looking for the main character who might be hiding in (a subtle) shadow, just like how trees leave shadows behind them. 'Who, what, where' is not always easy to answer at first glance because the artist purposely plays with our perception by adding contrasting images that are both static and dynamic.

For the viewer, the surrealistic feeling some of her works evoke is a key to understanding what (symbolically) lies behind her paintings.

Sisyphus 2021: at S.M.A.K.



Sisyphus 2022: image studio Gildemyn



The background was set up with broad brush strokes, but Gildemyn took a long time to put her final coating on the paintings. She wanted to make sure where she was and where she wasn't to paint Sisyphus white. The artist wanted to accomplish this last layer in one go.

Gildemyn's painting technique sought to evoke the emotion of Sisyphus' labor.

Applying her final layer, she drew white fine lines with a watercolour-like consistency in some places and a very pasty consistency in others.

Gerhard Richter, selection of images of his art pieces: from photorealistic paintings to installation and abstracts



Sisyphus 2019: glycée print



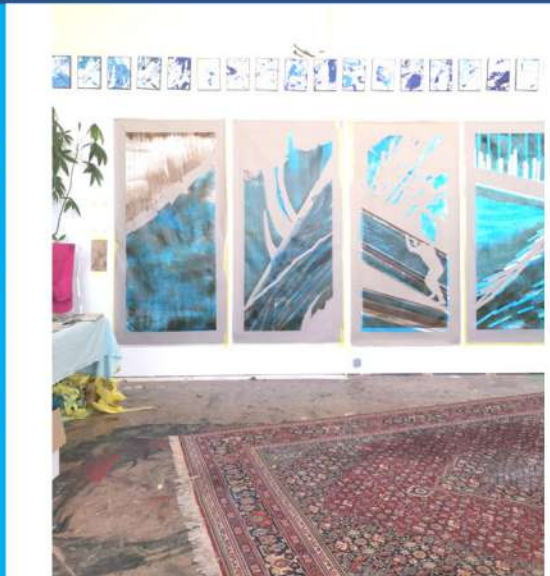
Why is she using surrealism next to abstraction? Even though this fact might not seem important, the layer behind the works is essential.

Just as Gerhard Richter presents it: his oeuvre includes photo-realist paintings, gray monochromes, garish abstract artworks, and installations. At first glance, his artworks (supposedly) do not seem to belong together. Yet his works 'glue' together well.

The reason is that his story hides behind the artwork like an invisible layer.

With the Sisyphus series, Gildemyn not only wants to break free from working on one painting at a time, but also develop each piece in such a way that the full story is expressed within the whole, rather than in an individual piece.

Sisyphus series- preparatory works, studio images

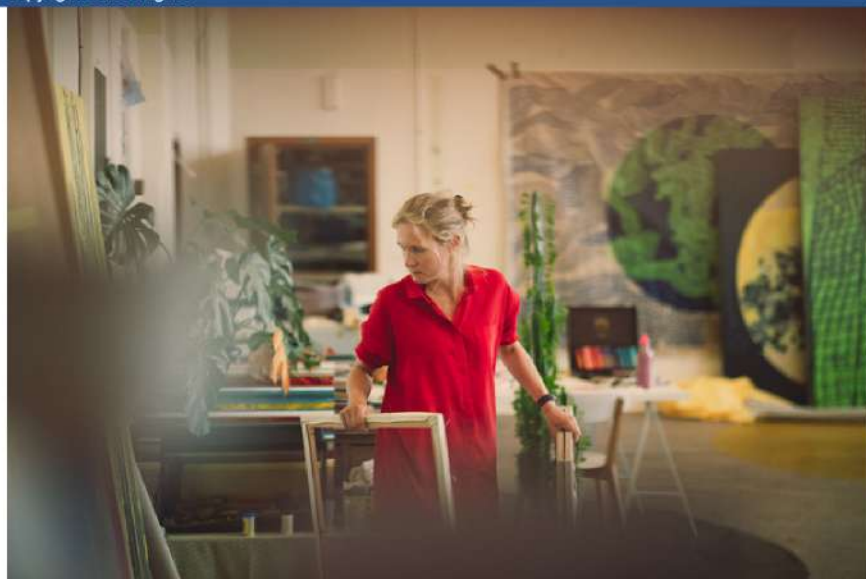


Stephanie Gildemyn's paintings and art practice have become richer over the years.

She loves experimenting with different perspectives, and adding her own spin to different literal and symbolic layers and structures.

Hilde Van Canneyt, Ghent, Autumn 2022

copyright: Jules August



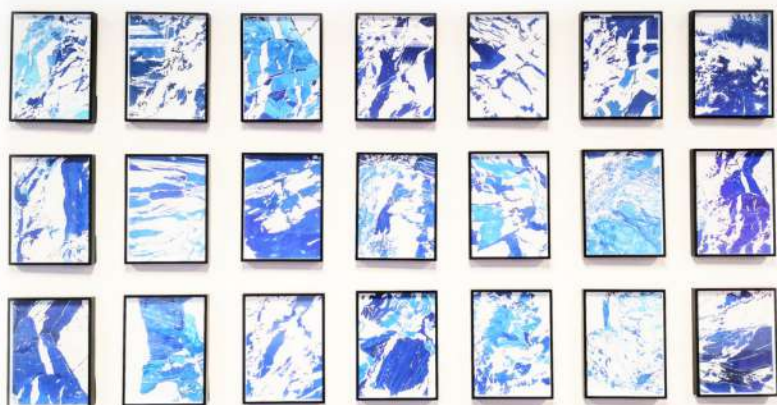
Sisyphus 2020: gouache on papier



Sisyphus 2022: image studio Gildemyn



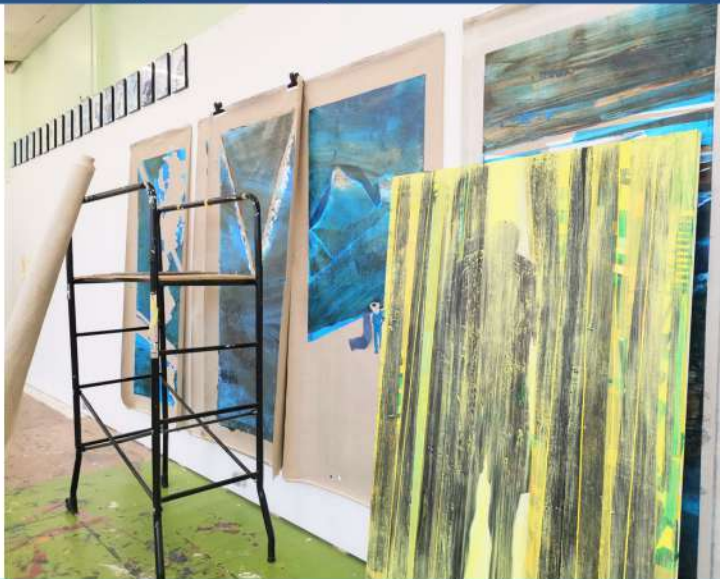
Sisiphus Azure series 2020: 21 gouaches on paper



Sisyphus Azure series 2020



Sisyphus series- studio images



Sisyphus series- details



This edition was created as a result of the finalization of Gildemyn's Sisyphus series.

2019-2022



text for edition:

the english text for this edition is based on the dutch article by Hilde Van Canneyt, art journalist, autumn 2022
<https://www.hildevanconneyt.be/>

translation: Hilde Van Canneyt, Stephanie Gildemyn & Jasper De Bodt

concept, design and photography:

Stephanie Gildemyn

page 25: copyright Jules August Photography

page 01: copyright Sophie De Backere Photography

Special thanks to:

Pieter D'haeseleer, Anthony Bowman, Frederic De Meyer, Daan Rau, Hilde Van Canneyt, Nucleo vzw, Ben Benaouisse, Tom De Volder, Guy Gildemyn, Brigitte Rubbens, Echo, Linus and Thor D'haeseleer.

I am truly grateful for the early collectors who have shown their support by purchasing artwork from the Sisyphus series.

This second edition consists of only 25 copies, and is from November 2022.

www.stephaniegildemyn.com

www.instagram.com/stephanie_gildemyn

www.facebook.com/steph.gildemyn/

copyright: Stephanie Gildemyn

