TREBUCHET

Something in Art is Always Disappearing

Edith Dekyndt on perception, skin and the politics of matter

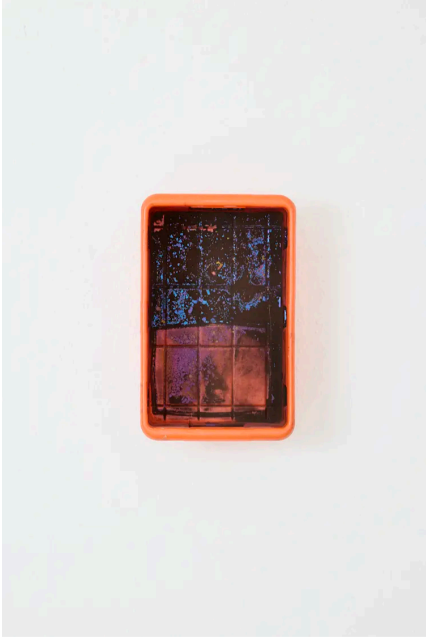
By Arthur Tonnerre (October 27, 2026)



Edith Dekyndt, *IT COULD BE SOME WIND FOR THE SAILBOAT* (Detail), 2024–26.
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. Photo credit: Barth Decobecq

Something is always on the verge of disappearing in Edith Dekyndt's work. Born in Ieper, Belgium in 1960 and living between Brussels and Berlin, she has spent three decades attending to the natural forces and physical phenomena that shape experience. Heat, condensation, gravity, time all encountered at precisely the moment they become perceptible. Her practice draws on a broad range of disciplines, from biology and astronomy to anthropology and geography, and moves across video, sculpture, installation, drawing, sound and performance. What defines her is not a medium but a sensibility: a sustained attention to materials undergoing change, to forces at the edge of visibility, and to the systems of thought that shape what we take as real.

Her work is held in collections including MoMA New York and the Pinault Collection, and has been shown at the Bourse du Commerce (Paris), WIELS (Brussels), the Hamburger Kunsthalle, the Fondation CAB (Saint-Paul-de-Vence) and the Teatrino di Palazzo Grassi (Venice). In 2017 she participated in the 57th Venice Biennale, *Viva Arte Viva*, curated by Christine Macel, with *One Thousand and One Night* at the Arsenale, a work described at the time as one of the purest statements of how to define form and space in the entire show (Betsky 2017). Her most recent institutional solo exhibition, *Tell Us Something That Nobody Knows*, opened at Kunsthalle Bielefeld in 2025. She is represented by Marian Goodman Gallery (New York), Galerie Greta Meert (Brussels) and Konrad Fischer Galerie (Berlin).



Edith Dekyndt, *A BUTTERFLIES BOX*, 2025. Plastic box, butterfly melanin.
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. Photo credit: Barth Decobecq

A decisive rupture in Dekyndt's formation shapes everything that follows. After graduating she worked in architecture, a practice she came to see as implying a form of power over how people inhabit space, determining, over time, the conditions of others' lives. That discomfort turned her towards more unstable, more fragile forms: works conceived not as fixed objects but as things capable of evolving, transforming, or disappearing entirely.

Three works give a sense of her range. In *Animal Methods* (2024), a performer moves through the gallery chewing fruit and vegetables whose toxicity depends on preparation, spitting them onto glass vitrines, while snake sheds are held to the wind like flags. The work is a meditation on violence, territory and the animalistic within the human, rendered viscerally physical. In *Song to the Siren* (2024, Teatrino di Palazzo Grassi), a young woman tends to the partially submerged Monument to the Partisan Woman in the Venice lagoon, enacting gestures of care toward a bronze body that cannot receive them. The work draws the viewer's attention, as Dekyndt puts it, to 'our ability to preserve memories, with some measure of dread over their recurrence' (Dekyndt 2024). And then there is *Ombre Indigène* (2016): a flag of human hair filmed in Martinique that, eight years after its making, was adopted as a symbol during protests in Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini, an outcome, Dekyndt says, that 'went beyond anything one can anticipate or achieve as an artist' (Dekyndt 2022).

Speaking to *Trebuchet* for our Beyond Bodies (Trebuchet 19) issue Dekyndt discusses her work and the roots of her practice in a broad curiosity.

Edith Dekyndt: I would say that what I do is first and foremost driven by a very broad curiosity about both the natural sciences and the humanities — from biology to astronomy, including anthropology and geography. What interests me are the different ways in which the world is formed and transformed.

When I develop a project, I accumulate elements — observations, materials, sensitive data related to a site. This includes both the history of the place and its physical conditions (climate, humidity, light), as well as the forms of life present there. From this, I construct a kind of "narrative," even if the term is imperfect, since it is not a discursive narrative. It is rather a bringing-together of materials and phenomena that produces a form of experience. My work is therefore deeply connected to an attention to materiality and physical processes. It is not about representing the world, but about bringing forth situations in which certain properties — heat, condensation, gravity, time — become perceptible.

In this sense, one could speak of a proximity to phenomenology, since the question of perception is central. But I do not situate myself within a theoretical approach. What matters to me is to produce forms that are sufficiently open for the viewer to project their own reading onto them, without being constrained by a closed interpretative framework.

Experiences of modernism and minimalism play an important role: subtracting rather than adding makes it possible not to saturate the object, and to allow more subtle relationships between elements to emerge.

Finally, it is essential for me not to establish hierarchies between different forms of existence. This separation is largely inherited from modern classifications. I feel that today these distinctions are being reconfigured, and my work also belongs to this perspective, in attempting to think — and to make felt — a world in which these categories have always been and remain in perpetual interaction.



Edith Dekyndt, *Underground Millecamps Purple* (Detail) , 2026.
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

In some of your work, you play with the idea of skin. I suppose the skin is an exterior surface of animals and humans — and other things. It's a concept that applies to the biosphere of the Earth as well. All these skins have histories in them; they have different materials; they're aged or young — or in the case of snakeskin, they're shed. Do you work symbolically at all?

ED: I would not say that I foreground the notion of the symbolic, at least not intentionally. It is rather linked to specific contexts. For example, the piece *Animal Methods*, a video in which I hold snake sheds in my hand that appear to fly through the sky like a flag, was born from a stay in Ibiza, where there is a very specific ecological situation: the introduction of snakes, through imports of certain plants without a quarantine regime, has profoundly transformed the island's ecosystem in just a few decades. The snakes have caused the disappearance of certain local species, leading to cascading imbalances in the flora and fauna.

This type of situation interests me as a concrete phenomenon.

Islands constitute a kind of microcosm where one can observe, on a reduced scale, dynamics comparable to those of the Earth — ecological balances, disturbances, cycles. Staying on an island means observing a kind of reduced model of the world.

The snake is a symbolically charged figure, but that is not the only perspective I take into account. Depending on cultural contexts, the snake's shed skin is perceived very differently — as a positive sign in some African cultures for example, or conversely as something unsettling in Western imaginaries. I try to create situations that are open enough for these different readings to coexist. What matters is that each viewer can project their own understanding of the object, based on their experience, culture, and references.

It sounds like a lot of your work is about setting up the conditions in which the viewer can interpret or find a connection. To what extent do you calibrate the viewer's emotions? Do you try to direct them?

ED: I do not seek to direct the viewer's emotions through the works themselves. However, I attach great importance to the way the public circulates through the exhibition space. The starting point of a project is always the architecture: I walk through the space and observe how visitors will move within it — where they will pause, where their gaze will settle. The void created by the architecture is an essential element in the process of the projects. I work with the space as it is, without trying to overload it, by defining focal points and areas of breathing space.

I therefore see each project as a form of composition, close to a musical score, with variations in rhythm: moments of silence or restraint, stronger intensities, then calmer phases. What interests me is constructing a temporal and sensory experience through the viewer's movement, while preserving the readability of the relationships between the works, the space, and the visitor's body. However, once this structure is in place, I do not intervene in interpretation. Readings remain multiple, sometimes very distant from one another — and that is precisely what I am looking for: that each person can appropriate the experience according to their own subjectivity.

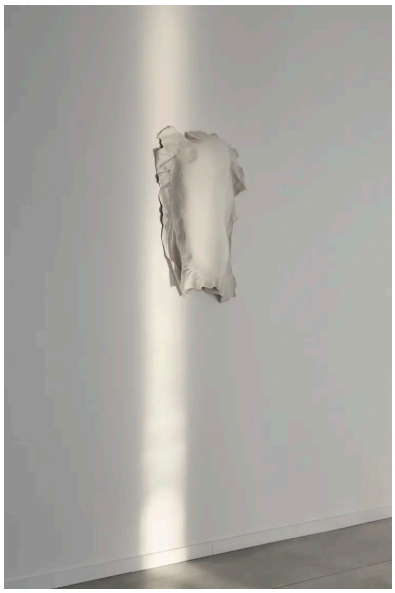
The idea of time, and impermanence, that is very important in your work. Could you explain that a little more?

ED: The question of time and impermanence is linked, for me, to a rather decisive moment in my trajectory. After graduating, I worked with architects in a context where the aim is to build durable forms, intended to endure over time and structure people's lives.

Later, I distanced myself from this experience. I felt that this practice implied a form of power over uses and ways of living — a way of determining, over time, how people inhabit a space. This led to a kind of rupture, which made me turn away from this idea of permanence toward more unstable, more fragile forms.

Since then, my work has largely been grounded in this acceptance of the ephemeral: the pieces are not conceived as fixed objects, but as things capable of evolving, transforming, or even disappearing. This process of disappearance is an integral part of the work — it is not a failure or a loss, but an essential dimension.

This relationship to time is also linked to a more sensitive, almost intimate experience. What is particularly striking in Marcel Proust's work, for example, is that he insists that the places, objects, and people associated with some former sensations have disappeared, yet the emotion returns with an intact intensity and precision. He thus describes a form of survival of the sensory, independent of the material presence of things. It is something that reading or listening to music can do wonderfully well.



Edith Dekyndt, *BOOLEAN MATRIX*, 2025. Animal skins, reshaped.
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. Photo credit: Barth Decobecq

I believe my work attempts, in a way, to approach this experience: to create experiences or situations that do not rely on their material permanence, but on their capacity to provoke a sensation or to leave a memory that can continue to exist over time.

I think that's a fantastic note to end on — but I have one more question, just because I'm curious. Do you see your work as political? Because I think there could be a political reading of it, but I wanted to hear your thoughts.

ED: As I mentioned previously, I try to operate on multiple levels of reading and to generate multiple interpretations.

One cannot live in the world without being affected by what happens in it. What does it mean to create in such a troubled world? These concerns are not directly visible, but they are present across multiple layers of signification.

When *Ombre Indigène*, in which we see a flag made of human hair filmed in Martinique Island in 2014, was used as a symbol during protests in Iran and around the world after the death of Mahsa Amini, it was very moving for me.

Witnessing the circulation and multiplication of the image of a work in this context went beyond anything one can anticipate or achieve as an artist. So yes, my work can be political, but this is not an exclusive intention. I am primarily trying to create situations in which the political can emerge, without being imposed.

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