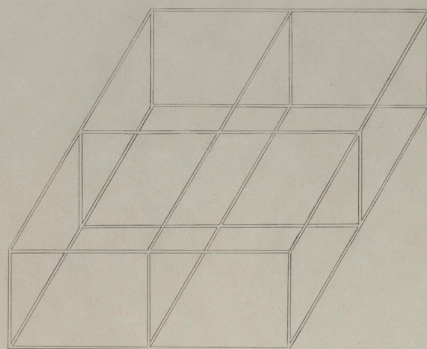


États d'espace

(en)



A project by Bertrand Cavalier

Curated by Olivier Grasser, Director of the Contretype Art Center

For Art Brussels 2026, with the support of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation

For the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles stand at Art Brussels 2026, Olivier Grasser and Bertrand Cavalier present *États d'espace* (States of Space). Neither strictly an exhibition nor an installation, *États d'espace* takes the form of an immersive dispositif in which photography, sculpture, video, and drawing intersect to question how individuals inhabit—or endure—the standardized spaces of contemporary society. In contrast to typical art fair booths designed to facilitate commercial exchange, this stand is conceived as an organic whole. It does not serve to showcase artworks; it constitutes their very body. Bertrand Cavalier has devised an environment in which different media extend, overlap, and reinforce one another, bringing together the registers of the sensory and the political. The visitor is thus invited to experience, both mentally and physically, the tension between a sense of freedom and structural constraint. The installation unfolds as a perceptual experience in which space—simultaneously material, language, and structure—is invested with political significance.

Two polished aluminum sculptures occupy half of the stand's surface. Nearly identical, they are based on architectural standards used in the construction of standardized housing. These parallelepipeds, joined lengthwise, define two volumes materialized only by the lines of their edges, whose reflective surfaces both attract the gaze and segment the space. Open in form, they allow the eye to circulate freely, yet their presence generates a sense of constraint that is difficult to evade. One can enter them, move within them, and experience them physically, but always with an underlying feeling of restriction. This ambiguity lies at the core of the project: a space that appears open, yet whose design and scale subtly prescribe ways of standing, moving, and situating oneself.

This primary structure engages in dialogue with another element: a storage space imposed by the competition, which Cavalier transforms into an essential component of the dispositif. Entirely made of plexiglass, mounted on wheels, and conceived at human scale, it can be freely moved. It becomes a mobile body that reconfigures the space through gesture, redistributes its lines, and introduces a performative dimension to the installation. Through its mobility and transparency, this utilitarian object underscores the possibility of disrupting established order and testing its limits, revealing the constraints inherent in space.

États d'espace aligns coherently with Bertrand Cavalier's artistic trajectory. While his work originates in photography, it now clearly moves beyond the act of image capture and a strictly photographic framework, approaching the image instead as a space to inhabit and as a field of forces. His early series already pointed in this direction: in *Concrete Doesn't Burn* (2020), the city emerges as a territory traversed by latent tensions, marked by a muted violence embedded in the very material of walls and urban strata. In *Permanent Concern* (2021), micro-situations and street details, isolated through tight framing, become sites of a familiar unease: constrained objects, compressed forms, and insignificant artifacts rendered paradoxically monumental. In these works, Cavalier explores an aesthetics of pressure, narrowness, and friction, in which reality symptomatically reveals invisible forces.

États d'espace extends these concerns into a more directly physical scale. The two main sculptures appear as three-dimensional counterparts to his photographic motifs: rigorous geometries, constrained forms, and structures that shape the body rather than simply describe it. They embody what

the images suggest—the way contemporary space exerts a discreet yet constant influence on how we exist in the world, how we stand, breathe, and move.

The other works presented in relation to these volumes reinforce this impression. On the back wall, a photograph from the Permanent Concern series—depicting two tires wedged into a shopping cart—intensifies the sense of compression. It echoes the aluminum volumes, recalling that constraint can be both structural and improvised, utilitarian and absurd. Three preparatory drawings for sculptures, showing closed, almost carceral volumes, extend this reflection on form as a tool of delimitation and control. Finally, a looped video presents a low-angle view of a building under construction, its façade covered with a tarp that the wind alternately lifts and presses against the structure, revealing and concealing its regular grid. This visual pulsation disrupts the stillness of the sculpture; its rhythmic movement accentuates rigidity and lends the installation an organic tempo.

États d'espace unfolds through a coherent language—a kind of formal grammar based on the repetition of lines, frontal composition, the superimposition of signs, and the tension between openness and closure. This language more broadly characterizes Cavalier's practice: a shift from a politics of the gaze—organizing, framing, selecting—toward a logic of sensation, in which image and volume become catalysts of affect. His photographs function as “blocks of sensation,” to borrow Gilles Deleuze's term, within which forms compress, weigh, disturb, and destabilize. His sculptures, in turn, give these sensations physical presence: they materialize in space what the image intimates, extending this process of densifying reality.

By bringing together these different media, *États d'espace* constructs a site of critical experimentation. The installation does not aim to produce a theoretical discourse, but rather to generate a physical experience that makes perceptible the tensions inherent in our environments: the weight of spatial norms, the normalization of standardization, and the promise of comfort that in fact conceals a logic of control. Space is never neutral—it shapes, organizes, conditions, and constrains bodies.

With *États d'espace*, Bertrand Cavalier proposes a work that brings photography, sculpture, video, and drawing into dialogue, amplifying perception and inviting the visitor—between image, volume, and movement—to experience the political dimension of everyday architecture.

Olivier Grasser

Director of Contretype / Center for Contemporary Image and Photography, Brussels

Bertrand Cavalier (born in France, lives and works in Brussels) has developed a practice that originated in photography and now extends to sculpture, installation, drawing, and video. His work explores ordinary forms in the urban and architectural environment—constrained objects, normative structures, functional devices—which he approaches as indicators of power dynamics and underlying tensions.

Through tight framing, minimalist volumes, and industrial materials, he develops an aesthetic of pressure, constriction, and friction. His work has been published by Fw:Books (NL, 2020) and Spector Books (DE, 2024). He is the winner of the City of Brussels Prize – Centrale for Contemporary Art (BE, 2025) and has exhibited at FOMU (Antwerp, BE), Photoforum Pasquart (Biel, CH), BIP – Biennale de l'Image Possible (Liège, BE), and FRAC Centre-Val de Loire (Orléans, FR). He received the Sébastien van der Straten Fund Award (2019) and was artist-in-residence at Artwell Amsterdam (NL, 2021) and the Cité internationale des arts (Paris, FR, 2023). His work has been published in Artpress (FR), Mouvement (FR), Camera Austria (AT), and l'art même (BE).

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Olivier Grasser has been the Director of Contretype, a center for contemporary image and photography in Brussels, since 2022. He specializes in the challenges of creating, producing, and supporting artistic projects. Trained as an art historian, he developed extensive expertise in the fields of contemporary art, performance, and contemporary dance before devoting himself to photography and the visual arts. Since 1998, he has served as artistic director of various public institutions (FRACs, art centers) in France and Belgium, where he built and managed a collection while also focusing on the role of audiences and the reception of art.

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