



BRAM ELLENS

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*What rusts every time it rains? And the rain it comes and floods our lungs.
We're just orphans in a tidal wave's wake – Beck MODERN GUILT*

At first glance, Bram Ellens' *Orphans* appear like clusters of cairns or dolmens—mute, prehistoric markers left by an unknown civilisation. Their rough silhouettes recall the monumental stones at Stonehenge, their presence both solemn and strangely tender. But a closer look reveals something unexpected: these monoliths are not stone at all. They are stacks of second-hand canvases collected from flea markets, turned inward so their painted faces are hidden from view.

What we encounter instead is the unadorned reverse: bare wooden stretchers, frayed linen, rusted staples, stains of age. The simple inversion; hiding the front, exposing the back; transforms familiar objects into alien artefacts. It is as if the image, the story that once mattered enough to be displayed in a home, has retreated from the world, leaving only its skeletal frame as evidence of a past life.

Ellens' gesture is deceptively simple but quietly profound. These were once personal, cherished objects; portraits, landscapes, souvenirs of trips or milestones—that now sit in flea-market piles, their meaning eroded by time and circumstance. By turning them inward, Ellens stages a kind of funeral rite for memory itself. What we see is not the image that once mattered but the silent architecture that supported it, a reminder of how quickly the things we value can slip from intimacy into anonymity.

The title *Orphans* carries this sense of abandonment and displacement further. These sculptures are “orphans” not only because their makers and owners are gone, but because they have been severed from their origins—their homes, their histories, their belonging. Like children without parents, they are left to navigate a world that no longer remembers where they came from. In this sense, *Orphans* speaks of a deeper kind of estrangement: the feeling of being unmoored from one's house, one's country, one's culture, and even one's past.

The sculptures' monumental forms amplify this sense of estrangement. Stacked into towers that echo ancient ritual sites, the *Orphans* feel as if they belong to a civilisation we can no longer quite read. Like archaeological stones whose original function is lost to history, they evoke a distant culture's sacred monuments. This alienating effect becomes a bridge to questions of migration and displacement: how objects and people can be uprooted from their contexts and, in crossing into new places, become unreadable.

Here the *Orphans* resonate with the quiet tension found in stories of migration; such as John Crowley's film *Brooklyn* or Colm Tóibín's *Long Island*; in which characters carry invisible histories across borders. Migration is often imagined as a journey toward new opportunity, but it can also be a flight from the past, a conscious decision to hide what was once painted on the “canvas” of one's life. In Ellens' sculptures, that concealed narrative is palpable: we sense the weight of what is sealed inside even as we cannot access it.

The bare wooden backs of the canvases seem stripped of story, yet they still bear the presence of the lives they once adorned. They stand as witnesses to loss: of place, of recognition, of continuity. By transforming these discarded domestic objects into monumental forms, Ellens

shifts them from the realm of the overlooked into the monumental, where they become symbols of the human need to carry memory even when that memory is deliberately hidden. In a port city shaped by arrivals and departures, such as Rotterdam, *The Orphans* would speak with particular resonance. Their stone-like silhouettes echo the weight of journeys, of things left behind and things that cannot be translated into new worlds. They remind us that behind every discarded object, every uprooted life, lies a narrative pressing against the surface, sometimes visible, often hidden, yet always there.

Ellens' *Orphans* invite us to look not at what is displayed but at what is concealed. They ask us to consider the unseen stories that travel with us, the fragments of history that slip out of view but never entirely disappear. In doing so, these sculptures transform loss into presence and absence into a monument, silent yet eloquent in the weight they carry.





BRAM ELLENS

Orphan





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BIOGRAPHY

Bram Ellens (b. 1978, Netherlands) is a pioneering figure in robotic and conceptual art. After a decade-long career as an internet entrepreneur, he transitioned to the art world in 2015, developing a distinctive practice that merges sculpture, installation, and robotics.

His work has been exhibited internationally, including *Imagine Intuition* at Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden (Oct 2022 – Jan 2023), *Robots in Captivity* at Buitenplaats Doornburgh (2021) Big Art (2018), Object Rotterdam (2018, 2019), Lowlands Festival, Biddinghuizen (2021), Paleis Soestdijk (2022), and Kunsthall NORD, Denmark (2022–2023). He also participated in *Sculpture in the City*, London (2022–2023), *Chapter 3 HEM*, Zaandam (Jan – Aug 2020), and Floria, Belgium (2022).

Through his innovative use of robotics and conceptual strategies, Ellens has established himself as a leading voice in contemporary art, blending technological experimentation with poetic and thought-provoking installations.



GALLERY INFORMATION

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Opening times:

By appointment

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