

HOUSE VAN WASSENHOVE:

SINT-MARTENS-LATEM (1974)

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Juliaan Lampens, house Van Wassenhove, Sint-Martens-Latem, 1974
(photograph ca 1974: Archive Juliaan Lampens).

(...)The Van Wassenhove house is located in a residential neighbourhood in Sint-Martens-Latem and has a bunker-like shape. Surrounding the house is an area of cultivated land that gradually turns wild. The driveway ends at the carport, where the entrance of the house is located. Due to the topography, the house is positioned 1.2 meters above the street level. Only the entrance area was excavated to bring it down to street level. The rhythm of the roof was determined by the topography of the land and the same principle was applied to the different levels in the house, which are connected by a staircase. Here, too, the living room, kitchen, bedroom, and offices are worked into one open space. The light enters through a large glass area on the east side, a skylight above the living room, and a vertical glass strip on the west side. There is a doorway in the large glass wall on the east side. From the house, one can look out on a massive spout that spills into a water feature. Although it is built of concrete, the house has pinewood interior flooring. The cabinet elements and sleeping hutch are also made of pine. The suspended table and the cooker extract are of concrete. All these elements counter the highly sculptural character of the structure.

Albert Van Wassenhove lived in the house until his death in 2012 when he bequeathed the house to the University of Ghent. The university in turn leased the house long term to the museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, thus giving it a public function. Unlike the Vandenhoute house (who only hung one painting on the wall), the Van Wassenhove house was full of the traces left by Van Wassenhove himself. For example, he placed a cupboard in front of the overhanging wall coming from the staircase and culminating in the hanging tablet. The alteration of the space caused by the cupboard was a point of friendly quarrel with his lifelong friend, Lampens. Lampens felt the space had achieved a high degree of architectural honesty that was diminished by the alteration. Van Wassenhove's style of living in the space was accumulative. There were paintings on the walls, paintings sitting on the ground against walls, partitions, books, piles of clothes, and interior design furnishings, among them a nice collection of furniture by Emile Veranneman and paintings and graphic work by Raoul De Keyser, Jozef Mees, and Roger Raveel. What's interesting about Van Wassenhove's way of inhabiting the house is that the traces and layers of accumulative human inhabitation did not compromise the sense of the building's integrity. Although Lampens preferred that it was not the case, he acknowledged that the house was capable of absorbing the mess of human life without losing its sculptural character. (...)



Juliaan Lampens, house Van Wassenhove, Sint-Martens-Latem, 1974 (photograph: Jan Kempenaers).



Juliaan Lampens, house Van Wassenhove interior, Sint-Martens-Latem, 1974, photographed in 2009 before the renovation (photograph 2009: Jan Kempenaers).



Juliaan Lampens, house Van Wassenhove, Sint-Martens-Latem, 1974, photographed in 2009 before the renovation (photograph: Jan Kempenaers).