



CLEARING

René Heyvaert
Luckily I came from the right
March 4 – April 17, 2021

Luckily he came from the left.

But wait, who is René Heyvaert? Is he really this man that everyone—those who knew him and even more so those who didn't—talks about with so much conviction? Books have been written. Exhibitions have been organized. Houses have been renovated. Artists have copied him. Over and over, forever Heyvaert. Heyvaert the architect, Heyvaert the artist.

But what about Heyvaert himself? Did he know who he was? Or did he happen to be oblivious? Did he want to know? Can we actually ask this question? And even if we can, should we? It's probably better to forget it for now.

Maybe it's more relevant to wonder what Heyvaert was actually after. To know what his concerns were, rather than trying to find out who he was.

Maybe things are better this way. Heyvaert just wanted to know what the world was, what the world could be. And indeed, what that world could be was to be found in things both near and far.

René Heyvaert went on a journey. Because he wanted to see up close the things which were distant. Yet the things closest to him stayed close, even as he traveled afar. A little house on wheels, his much-talked-about little truck. Everything part of his little world was taken on a journey into the wide, wide world. His little world that was to be hit from the left.

Nothing slipped through his net. Obviously. It's fascinating to imagine what he managed to see back then. The exhibitions. The buildings. Heyvaert offers us a glimpse of them here and there, but never the whole picture. We'll have to make do with that.

But maybe, and perhaps most importantly, there's one thing Heyvaert didn't omit: life. Life, modest and simple, simultaneously simple and complex. Ordinary life in all its complexity. How things exist on a daily basis, how everything is a part of life. How things crop up in everyday life. Whether they are beautiful or ugly, source of pain or redemption, or more, or all of the above, all at once. Life first and foremost. Only then follows everything that is useful to life.

Even when travelling, ordinary life was more important to him than a life "of culture".

Architecture can be helpful for living. Heyvaert knew a thing or two about that. Art can also be helpful for living. Heyvaert's definition of life could well be what you call "art". But maybe art is something even greater. Or perhaps quite simply, art is just life, straightforward life.

Maybe sentences like "one can not plan cities if one does not believe in life." or "protect our environment" and

trying to guess whether Heyvaert was more of an artist or an architect can bring us closer to the person he really was, but then again maybe not.

These two elegantly written sentences allowed Heyvaert to get to the bottom of the question himself. Everything is life, and that's that. The only thing to add might be that life needs protecting. Simply believing in life is enough to make it better. Make it different. Make humans more humane.

By writing "100\$ fine for throwing trash on the Highway" Heyvaert may have been taking part in a contemporary discussion even before it started. Life. Concern for life. Concern for the world.

Heyvaert probably wasn't too concerned with whether he was an architect or an artist, and whether things were architecture or art. He built a house for his brother simply to create a place where life could take place in the best conditions possible. For Heyvaert, this was the same as looking at a box of cereal on a table. Putting the box of cereal down differently on the table is exactly what it was about.

He needed to know how life worked, he needed to watch it happening, and watch it some more. And not just life nearby. Really far away too. Travelling. With his little house.

And still, after all "It didn't work out the way I expected" ("Het heeft niet gegeven wat ik er van verwacht heb"). Was he talking about the accident? Or about his whole artistic quest—the trip—even though life itself was the most fascinating thing of all?

Maybe the sentence "you never saw that before" ("dat hebt u nog nooit gezien") is above all an appeal for us to look at things differently. To realize that other possibilities exist. He wanted us to learn how to see a puzzle as a puzzle rather than ignoring all things ordinary because we take them to be what they are and nothing more.

The other car came from the left. Perhaps Heyvaert also came from the left, on his way along the path of life.

Heyvaert visited Buckminster Fuller's dome and reported back on it. A few years ago I was able to visit the dome myself. The picture I took of it is printed here. You can see the entrance to a construction site with a building company's signage. Before I remembered that Heyvaert had been there, I saw him on those tarpaulins, the man who had stood there five decades ago. Those tarps. Today, that photo helps me look at his great gouaches and collages. It lets me guess a little about what really mattered to him.

When it comes to Heyvaert, maybe it's better to come at him from the left too, if we want to understand him. Bypass the art.

He said it himself: luckily they came from the left.

Jan De Vylder

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René Heyvaert (born 1929 in Ghent, Belgium) where he lived and worked for most of his life – except for brief stints in Congo and the USA – until he died in 1984.

His work was the subject of several solo exhibitions during his lifetime at Galerij Drieghe in Wetteren; Richard Foncke Gallery in Ghent; as well as a presentation with the Group IX at Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens in 1975. In 1986, his work was included in the major exhibition *Initiatief '86* co-curated by Kasper König in Ghent. Other post-humous exhibitions include M Museum, Leuven; Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent; S.M.A.K., Ghent; Roger Raveelmuseum, Machelen-Zulte; MAC's Grand-Hornu, Mons; Groeningemuseum, Bruges; Nadja Vilenne, Liège; Micheline Sz wajcer, Antwerpen. His work is part of the collections of CERA; Collection Flemish Community, S.M.A.K., Ghent, Groeningemuseum, Bruges, MUHKA, Antwerp, Mu.Zee, Ostend and FRAC Bretagne, Rennes.