

I Left Before the Screening / M.B.

Vers Dor

March 05–14, 2025

curated by
Gritli Brüll and
Lovis Rosencrantz

Ersatz und Teile

Freilager-Platz 1

4142 Münchenstein, Switzerland

*Vers Dor (*2000 in Brussels) is a multi-disciplinary artist. Their work dissects the construction of Belgian national narratives. By juxtaposing the “Belgian Myth,” a blend of bourgeois surrealism and colonial history, with the rigid institutional structures of their adopted home in Basel, Dor explores how statehood is performed through aesthetic choices. Their practice spans painting, archival intervention, and installation.*

Works:

Vers Dor, Four Hours, Two Minutes, Six Seconds, 2024/25, wood, paint, pelt, jacket, inkjet cartridges, tape, dimensions variable

Vers Dor, Industrial Poem #23, 2025, found objects, 28 x 10,8 x 4,2 cm

BEWARE OF THE CHALLENGE!

Pop Art, Jim Dine, and the Influence of René Magritte

Let us first recall the

exhibition of George Segal's works that the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris presented last month. It was at the forefront of this "New Realism" or "Pop Art" that is so much in the news right now. Figurative art, perhaps, but of such a stripped-down character that it seems to fall into a special void. Segal's figures are vulgar casts of human beings caught in the movement of everyday life. Here, the man is leaning over the gleaming glass of an electric billiard table. There, he is sitting on a miserable bench. He is ^{Here,} holding a coarse earthenware cup. The billiard table and the cup are real objects. They do not come from an artist's studio but from a factory. There is nothing to ask of Segal's figures. Where do they come from, so menacing? From what strangely lunar world? I couldn't write that they express terror without expressing my own. We don't go beyond the level of discovery, or rather, that of invention. An invention so extraordinary that it either nullifies all the powers of the imagination or, on the contrary, liberates them. It depends on the viewer's inclination. The result is the same. It is impossible for them to observe any other point of comparison than themselves. It is the victory of Narcissus. It is with such dark humor that we are blinded. It is, indeed, a great deal.

Segal comes from the American world, like Jim Dine, whose work is being presented by Galerie Aujourd'hui in Brussels starting November 16th. The parallel between our city and an average American city is tempting. Boston, for example. Those towers that rise into the sky... We don't build them for the birds. I mean, this exhibition is very timely. Jim Dine is also a child of the absurd. He needed this narrow, perhaps too secretive, gallery.

Without specializing in this genre, Galerie Aujourd'hui has occasionally exhibited artists whose essential ideal is black humor and the absurd. For example,

the Italian Piero Manzoni, with his perfume tubes carefully arranged under glass cases and his paintings made of simple fiberglass. Manzoni is dead, physically dead. He was young. Is there a connection between this early death and the attitude he adopted artistically? It's certain that the humor he claimed to possess isn't a comfortable position. And if that's the reason, our questioning will be profound when faced with artistic events, with all events. Of course, Manzoni will be in the terrible book of the 20th century. And the Frenchman Arman, who, thank God, is doing well. We remember the latter for objects accumulated in glass cases: pressure gauges, doll heads, destined for some unknown industrial museum. Starting November 26th, it will be Jim Dine with large-format paintings equipped with a shelf, something like a mantelpiece. One of them depicts a bowler hat and, oh genius, on the shelf is a real bowler, a hat. Not quite, however; it's covered with a layer of (black) paint, and it seems to stick. Burlesque and relaxed, this is an American physiognomy reminiscent of comedy films. Means more than restrained, elementary means, yet still pictorial. This side of the border... although the infernal road knows no border.

A label covers American artists who defy harmony and good taste. It is "Pop Art." Pop is short for popu-lar. We are far, however, from an art that draws its strength from popular sources. Pop is as much the enlarged lemonade bottle as the tin can painted with photographic precision. Pop is akin to pamphlet, provocation, or poetry. It hurls curses and calls down insults and contempt. In a recent issue of L'Express, Pierre Schneider remarks about Pop: "The author of these paintings that make you sneer or feel nauseous, this man who has no other..."

by

Marcel BROODTHAERS

means to express his identity that the choice between the consumption offered to him is yours.

These artists continue | construction of the infernal road forged by Dada, the national movement. Well, Long Live Dada, Dadapop, Long Live Jim Dine. Marcel Duchamp and Kurt artists, particularly whatever their will, created a work defined within the rigorous framework of plastic laws. Also, in their work, nor in Max Ernst's, we will see the original source of this "harmful" tendency. One of our greatest artists, Magritte, a Belgian who, without leaving our small territory, influenced and determined this current of art which is in New York. Magritte rejects the aesthetics of painting. Nevertheless, despite this, he succeeded in creating some beautiful paintings. "It's not a pipe." A work as enigmatic as the Mona Lisa bears this title. He is famous in New York. All of Magritte's works are famous in New York. Magritte is famous. His initial biases, he co-developed a poetic language to undermine the one whose nature we see in Jim Dine's bowler hat is, I imagine, destined to salute. Is an explanation necessary? Is there another one than that of worlds devoted to current events, to the overproduction of horoscopes?

Beuys and Broodthaers: The Dialectic of Modernity between "Analytical Geometry and the Belief in an Incredible God"

Beuys and Broodthaers occupy singular positions in the modernism of the second half of the century, positions that, not by chance, rubbed against each other. Despite all their differences, the two artists are also comparable in many respects: not only do they share many collectors and patrons, such as Johannes Cladders, Anny de Decker, Isi Fiszman, Reiner Speck, Harald Szeemann, Paul Wember, and many more, but they also share an engagement with Marcel Duchamp, a critique of established institutions, the use of vitrines, the interweaving of pictorial and conceptual-analytical creation, and the dissolution of a materially defined concept of the artwork into a fluid creative process. This study will examine how similar approaches and means of expression sometimes point in different directions. To this end, the relationship between the two artists will first be reconstructed based on available data and facts, in order to then highlight structural similarities and differences through a clear comparison of individual works. Structural points of comparison include their respective relationships to language, politics, and history, particularly Romanticism, which, however, can only be touched upon in this presentation. The aim of this comparison of Beuys and Broodthaers is to attempt to define each artist's position more precisely from a historical perspective.

First, then, I will attempt to describe the relationship between Beuys and Broodthaers as it appears based on the historical data and facts, as well as the only known written sources to date: Broodthaers' two open letters to Beuys. It should be noted in advance that, due to the one-sided nature of the sources and within the context of this event series, Broodthaers will be given more prominence.

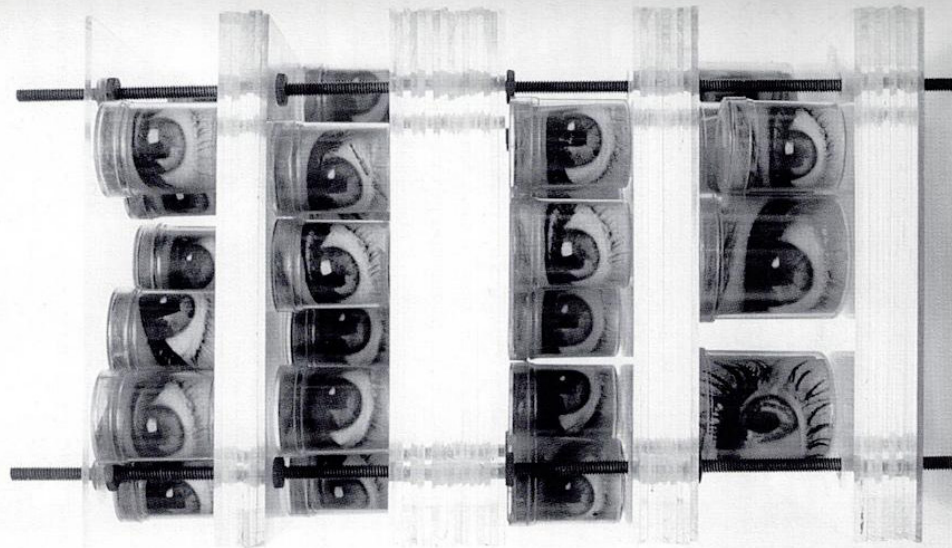


Fig. 24: Building, 1966

Marcel Broodthaers, along with Joseph Beuys, who was only three years older, was one of the most important and influential artists associated with the Wide White Space (WWS) Gallery in Antwerp, which, during its ten-year existence between 1966 and 1976, was among the leading avant-garde galleries in Europe.¹ A close connection between Antwerp and the Rhineland, particularly with the Düsseldorf Academy and the Fluxus artists around Joseph Beuys, had developed through Bernd Lohaus, an art student at the Düsseldorf Academy and partner of gallery owner Anny de Decker. The two artists likely first met in person around 1966/67 through Isi Fiszman, the WWS Gallery's most important collector and patron. Beuys had already been a professor at the Düsseldorf Academy for five years at that time, while Broodthaers had only begun his career as a visual artist in 1964.

Beyond some joint participation in various group exhibitions at the WWS Gallery, both artists likely followed each other's work with interest. For example, during preparations for Beuys's performance "Eurasian Staff" at the WWS Gallery in February 1968, Broodthaers suggested filming Beuys's appearance.² Shortly before, Broodthaers had filmed "Le Corbeau et le Renard" for the experimental film festival in Knokke-le-Zout, which was to form the basis for the subsequent exhibition at the WWS Gallery in March. He was thus able to quickly engage a professional cameraman for the Beuys performance. A few months later, Broodthaers addressed an open letter to Beuys, which is less well-known than his second open letter from 1972, but already contains a certain ambivalence towards Beuys.³ The letter begins with a declaration of friendship to Beuys:

My dear Beuys,

God, how difficult it was to call a German a friend when you were born in another world. Beuys, you are a friend and Dutschke is a friend. Beautiful Germany is alive again. These words are important because you are not alone.

Brussels, July 14, 1968

¹ Wide White Space. Behind the Museum 1966-1976, (Exh. Cat. Düsseldorf 1995: Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles / Kunstmuseum Bonn / MAC, galeries contemporaines des Musées de Marseille).

² Anny de Decker (ed.), Joseph Beuys, Eurasienstab, Antwerp 1987, p.

³ Marcel Broodthaers, "Mon cher Beuys", Brussels, July 14, 1968, facsimile in: Marcel Broodthaers, (exh. cat. Paris 1991; Galerie national du Jeu de Paume), p. 22. I thank Stefan Barmann from Cologne for his help with the translation.

you will read my letter. My son, who is curious, has the habit of deciphering my correspondence. He is ten years old. And he reads in a naive way. He believes that the sun hides behind the sun. Is he afraid of being blinded? Am I lying?

You Beuys, friend like your student-friends, like Lohaus and other Germans, like Cladders. Many Germans and foreigners, like Panamarenko, this Belgian, who taming crocodiles, or that fake soldier, a pilot perhaps. (He constructed a machine. Am I dreaming?) Like Christiansen, who speaks with his eyes. Beuys, poet of the concentration camp, with your copper tables, your magic sparks, your felts full of cemeteries, your plague-strewn beds, with your recent friends, South Americans, Jews, Yankees... Are we standing on the threshold of a new slaughterhouse? I can smell the meat rotting in the distance. But are we properly informed? They don't know much about your art here, no more than in France. Our journalists are strange

s. They're announcing the founding of a Museum of Modern Art in Brussels.

Nobody believes it.

I'll tell you about our press when we next meet. It's controlled, even if we don't know the name of our Springer. God, how difficult art is. You get your comeuppance 20 times before you finally finish the work

Beuys, see you soon. Many people are torn between analytical geometry and belief in an incredible God.

Marcel Broodthaers
M. B.

The starting point of the letter, which, like all open letters, was sent to a small distribution list of acquaintances and friends from the art scene, is the confrontation with the German past, which, after the economic miracle euphoria and the mechanisms of repression of the 1950s and early 1960s, was now being demanded by a new generation of the 1968 movement, for which Beuys and Rudi Dutschke stand here as representatives

⁴ Initial analyses of Broodthaers' open letters were presented by Birgit Pelzer, "Resource to the Letter," in: October, 42 (1987), pp. 157-181, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (ed.), Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs, Cambridge - New York 1988, pp. 67-100. See also Dorothea Zwirner, "Marcel Broodthaers - Je manifest manifestement," in: Manifeste: Intentionalität, Avant Garde Critical Studies, 11, (1998), pp. 141-160, esp. p. 150. From the perspective of intentionality, Broodthaers' textual forms of open letters and interviews prove to be not manifestations of an artistic position, but rather commentaries that elevate the artistic intentionality of the creative process itself to the actual object of study