JULIA MUGGENBURG ON MARCEL BROODTHAERS

It is a true honour to show an artist whose oeuvre has so formed my visual education, my emotional becoming, and whose work is still holding personal revelations. I recall the joyful bewilderment of chancing upon his sculptures within my fortunately frequent times with Museum Ludwig, the Von der Heydt Museum and Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, to cite a few.

Marcel Broodthaers' body of work constitutes institutional critique as art ad infinitum. Born in Brussels on 28th January 1924, Broodthaers began life as a poet. In 1957 Broodthaers produced his first film, *La Clef de l'Horloge*, a "visual poem" honouring Kurt Schwitters. Of course, my regard for Schwitters is immense and learning how formative his oeuvre was to Broodthaers intrigued me. Equally, with such shared sensitivities, learning that he befriended the brilliant Piero Manzoni in 1962, seemed natural. And during a show at the Palais de Beaux-Arts, Manzoni signed a certificate of authenticity declaring Marcel Broodthaers a "living sculpture".[1]

"I, too, wondered if I could not sell something and succeed in life," proclaimed Broodthaers. "The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind, and I set to work at once". *Pense-Bête* (1964) marks the transition of his poetry from purely textual to visual, poignantly encasing the last copies of his final poetry book in plaster — entombing the past, transforming words into a new, statement object.

Hereafter rose a twelve-year career with 50 films and 70 solo shows. Initially working with plaster, pots, mussel shells and egg shells, in 1968 his interrogation of the art-economic complex culminated in one of the twentieth century's most influential endeavours: the travelling Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles (Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles). Debuting in his Brussels home on 27th September 1968, rooms became galleries with mounted postcard reproductions of nineteenth century paintings (with artists such as Courbet and Ingres) adorning walls. The resulting transient, mock museum grew to twelve sections over its four-year run, and paved the way for artists to manipulate the power structures of the museum like a tangible material.

Simply put, the work of Broodthaers is a puzzle. The deep involvement with European history and thought, financial systems, power structures, exhibition making — as well as artistic reproduction — was visionary, and resonates still. And thus, Agnieszka Kurant felt the valid companion to sit alongside as a twenty-first century responding voice. I was fascinated to find out that Agnieszka had immense interest in Broodthaers, with several works a direct response to his. For this exhibition, Agnieszka and I selected pieces orientated to ideas around war and warfare. Indeed, the centre of this pairing is taken up by an element of *Décor*, the final UK show of Broodthaers, taking place at ICA in 1975. The exhibition thus becomes an occasion to open up a dialogue between the two, and continue the conversations of Marcel Broodthaers with great resonance.

1. "We met as if we're comedians. This encounter with Manzoni, on February 25, 1962, the date of the certificate declaring me an "art object", allowed me appreciate the distance separating a poem from a material work that engages with space (fine arts). In other words, the value of the message is reduced to the mere notion of the message as a commodity, identifying it with the commodity."

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