

This unprecedented exhibition brings together two related groups of works by Marcel Broodthaers: his "industrial poems" (or plastic plaques) and his Open letters. Both were thought of as editions and were instrumental in the shift in understanding of what an artwork can be, and in the questioning of institutional authority over art.

The years 1968 to 1972 saw large protest movements calling for societal transformation and anti-conformist liberation. The claim for basic democracy at the centre of the May '68 student revolts saw the black flag prevail over the red flag. Simultaneously, the unlimited reproduction of multiples – reproducible artworks that undermine the notion of the original and thus of privilege – sought to grant the masses access to culture. Although Broodthaers's plaques are multiples, they are nonetheless limited editions of seven copies each and reveal a certain scepticism and irreverence towards the ideals of his time.

Reforming the institutions from the inside was a slogan that Broodthaers took to its conclusion by creating a personal museum in his house/studio: the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*. He developed some 12 Sections in all, most of which he promoted by the edition of a plastic plaque. This solitary action – in which he acted as director, artist, guard and visitor – was preceded and accompanied by Open letters, pamphlets of sorts, in which he hints at discussions that dominate current affairs, in art and politics: the commodification by the market, ideological polarization and manipulative rhetoric. Made before his first Open letter of June '68, the plaques *Académie* and *Téléphone* already question the standardized, elementary forms of academia and industry by contrasting them with associative and sensorial words, as the continuation of his earlier poetry writing.

The plaques feature rebus or puzzle-like graphics that elude the clear comprehensibility of road signalization or advertisements, the common function of such signs. An important ensemble of preparatory drawings presented here reveals clues to the artist's thought process around certain motifs.

Sound poetry, the system of music notation or vocal incantation with which Broodthaers plays – in plaques such as *L'oie, l'aile, Allegro Moderato* or *Le Sous-sol* – refer to the liberation of language from the restrictions of the printed alphabet or strict rules for reproduced text in print. At the time of their conception, discussions of semiotics (the study of texts) were increasingly popular. They employed an objective analysis of all images or words as signs, cutting them into signifier and signified, dividing subject matter from visual shape, or content from form.

Before becoming a visual artist, Broodthaers published poetry books and directed films, which explains why the use of language, writing, reproduction and specifically print is at the centre of his attention.

The technical procedure of the multiple follows the logic of uniformity, monotony, and standardization, yet Broodthaers introduces variations, permutations, and glitches within this seriality, playing with difference as his plaques become exercises in looking and interpretation. Produced in a socio-political context that sought to overcome conventions, norms and codes – including grammar and syntax – some plaques attempt to liberate the alphabet.

Modern art's rejection of imitation "after nature" and its development of abstractions or structures that go beyond the visible, found a pivotal moment in René Magritte's famous caption "This is not a pipe" inscribed below the representation of a painted pipe. Conceptual artists, departing from formal experiment towards linguistic proposals, propelled this work by Magritte to the forefront of their theoretical debates, incarnated by Michel Foucault's famous essay on the pipe. Broodthaers's play with the pictogram of the pipe and the alphabet

refers to and comments on these attempts to define the origin of all communication: the image or the word? Broodthaers also refers to the associative wordplay and typographic experiments of the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, investigating the isolated shape (plasticity or relief) or concept of a word, an alphabetic character, or a graphic symbol.

A wall featuring a dense ensemble of plaques – a restaging of the historical hanging by Broodthaers in 1969, which is since taken as the primordial way to approach this group of works – makes clear why they are mainly read as comments on publicity, mass media or propaganda. However, their variations, pictoriality and intentional avoidance of meaning render them inefficient as seductive iconic slogans of Pop art. Instead, they draw rather from Dada and its experimental poetics of the absurd and nonsensical.

Broodthaers was keenly aware of the theoretical foundations of his enigmatic games, which treat the fundamental problem of the inscription of subjectivity and subject matter into language. He avoided what he termed "theoretical inflation" – a term he used in relation to the Belgian painter Antoin Wiertz (1805-1865)- through humorous (self-) relativization.

EVENTS

13-10-2021 _____ 19:00

Lecture by Denis Laoureux : *Broodthaers et le moule des mots* (FR)

10-11-2021 _____ 19:00

Lecture by Maria Elena Minuto: "*Ne pas situer le message entièrement d'un côté, image ou texte*". *Marcel Broodthaers et la matérialité du langage poétique (1924-1976)* (FR)

24-11-2021 _____ 19:00

Lecture by Margaux Van Uytvanck: *Marcel Broodthaers au "pied de la lettre"* (FR)

01-12-2021 _____ 19:00

Lecture by Joris D'hooghe: *Over M.B.'s Industriële gedichten en het Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (NL)

05-01-2022 _____ 19:00

An evening around *Pense-Bête* by Marcel Broodthaers in collaboration with Jeunesse et Arts Plastiques (FR)

07 & 08-01-2022

Symposium and film programme at Cinematek, Brussels, organized by Steven Jacobs and Raf Wollaert: *Marcel Broodthaers and Cinema: Filmic Poems, Moving Scripts*. With: Eric C.H. de Bruyn, Bruce Jenkins and Jennifer Wild (EN)

More events and updates: WIELS.org

In close collaboration with Maria Gilissen Broodthaers & the Succession Marcel Broodthaers
In collaboration with Marie-Puck Broodthaers

PUBLICATION

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WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED YOUR VISIT. THANKS!

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Curators: Charlotte Friling & Dirk Snauwaert, with the assistance of Selma Meuli.

Display for the Open letters by Richard Venlet.

Translations (FR/NL) by Marie-Françoise Dispa and Leen Van Den Broucke.

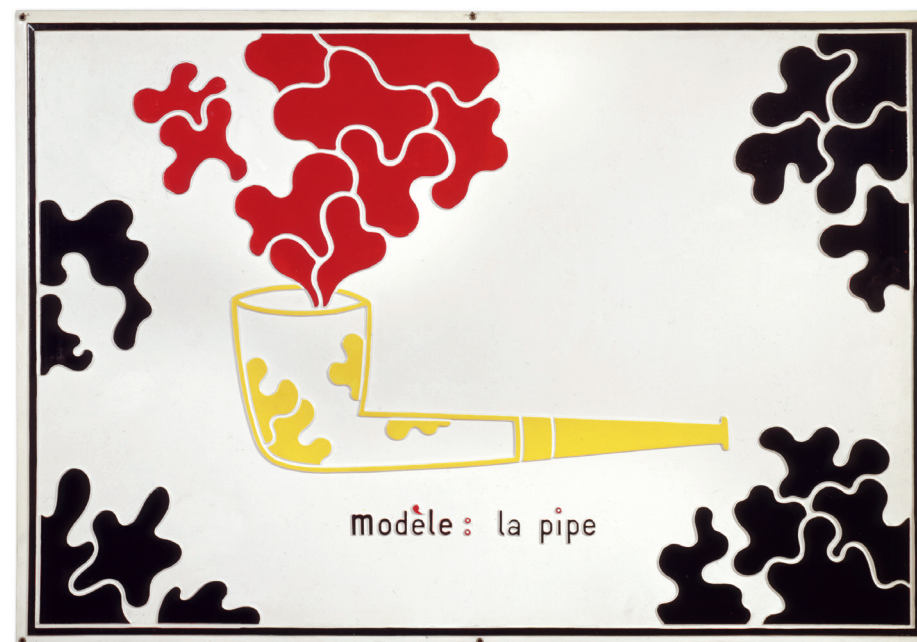
This exhibition will travel to MASI Lugano (CH) in 2022.

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Marcel Broodthaers

Industrial Poems, Open Letters

10 _ 09 _ 2021 _____ 09 _ 01 _ 2022



Marcel Broodthaers, *Modèle : la pipe*, 1968-69 © Succession Marcel Broodthaers - Sabam 2021

More info & events: wiels.org

