

SILENT STORIES

Jan Lauwers

Intervention with new work by

Dirk Braeckman

1 April 2017 – 25 June 2017

BOZAR, Brussels





明当代美术馆

· 展览 ·

Silent Stories

Jan Lauwers

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SILENT STORIES

An exhibition by Jan Lauwers

Intervention with new work by Dirk Braeckman

In May 2016, Jan Lauwers became the first Belgian to exhibit at the brand new McaM in Shanghai, a museum of contemporary art headed by the Chinese artist Qiu Zhijie. Part of this exhibition will be on show at BOZAR in Brussels in spring 2017.

The exhibition 'Silent Stories' offers a wistful look at European art history and refers among other things to 'Feldhase' (1502) by the Renaissance painter, drawer and humanist Albrecht Dürer, to the lions depicted by the Flemish baroque painter and drawer Peter Paul Rubens, to the surrealist poet and artist Marcel Broodthaers, and to such artists as Joseph Beuys and Marcel Duchamp, as well as Walt Disney. On the basis of his lifelong archives, Jan Lauwers is building a monumental installation in which he reinterprets past works and materials and confronts them with art history. The artist creates landscapes that curve serenely and pensively question craftsmanship, virtuosity and emotion.

As a storyteller and a creator of images, Lauwers' motto is that art can no longer shock, and should communicate differently. Lauwers' visual idiom embraces humanity with pensive images concerning man and nature. This is why his way of making theatre is world-renowned.

Jan Lauwers: 'During my travels in China with *Isabella's room* and other projects, it became increasingly clear to me that, in whatever form of society, the relationship between art and society gives rise to extremely lively debate. In communist China, the notion of public space is interpreted completely differently from the so-called 'free' West. We have to try to communicate at another level, without changing the art.

Art in the West has deconstructed almost everything in the course of the twentieth century. Major changes occurred in the meaning and position of art. After Duchamp and conceptualism, art became almost an empty space. This evolution did not take place in China. With this in mind, I deliberately changed the presentation and communication of my work for this Chinese exhibition.

THE HOUSE OF OUR FATHERS

Jan Lauwers through Dirk Braeckman's eyes

In 2007, Jan Lauwers showed his visual art in the 'Restlessness' exhibition at BOZAR. At the same time he started building his installation 'The House of Our Fathers', in which every detail is a non-functional artwork that stands up in its own right. A hospitable house that hosted eight-hour durational performances by the core Needcompany performers, bringing together more than forty years of research in art, dance, theatre, literature, music and film.

For ten years, these installations/performances have been shown in a variety of museums, including BOZAR (Brussels, 2007), haus der kunst (SPIELART, Munich, 2007), Kunsthalle Mannheim (Internationale Schillertage, 2011), Museum M (PLAYGROUND, Leuven, 2011), Herrenhausen-gallerij (Kunstfestspiele, Hannover, 2013) and McaM (Shanghai, 2016).

In 2013, Dirk Braeckman was invited to become part of the installation/performance in Hannover. This resulted in a series of photos entitled 'The House of Our Fathers', which sheds new light on this installation and performance. It is a baroque interpretation of Jan Lauwers' work by Dirk Braeckman. "Braeckman does not photograph my work, he doesn't take a portrait of a Needcompany performer. He seeks out the truth behind a moment when light, movement and material become a self-portrait", as Jan Lauwers puts it.

A selection of Braeckman's photos are exhibited in confrontation with new work by Jan Lauwers. A juxtaposition of the two worlds. A larger selection of works is shown in the artist book that Dirk Braeckman and Jan Lauwers are publishing together in association with MER. Paper Kunsthalle.

SILENT STORIES

Jan Lauwers

Intervention with new work by

Dirk Braeckman

01 April 2017 - 25 June 2017

31 March 2017, 7 pm

Opening of the 'Silent Stories' exhibition, with a live performance

Launch of the book 'The House of Our Fathers',

Dirk Braeckman & Jan Lauwers, published by MER. (2017)

As from 9 pm

opening reception

a new installation by Lemm&Barkey

the world premiere of the OHNO COOPERATION video

an intervention by Kuiperskaai.

BOZAR, Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Ravensteinstraat 23, 1000 Brussels

MILL, Needcompany, Gabrielle Petitstraat 4, 1080 Sint-Jans-Molenbeek

In the framework of: 30 years Needcompany

THE ART OF JAN LAUWERS

Luk Lambrecht

- following a visit to the new studio in Molenbeek, Brussels -

On all the visits I have made to Jan Lauwers in the course of time – in his successive secluded studios – it immediately became clear that he positions his art in such a way that the arrangement itself already gives an indication of his almost organic skill in presenting his drawings and abject-oriented sculptures, installations – in the form of constantly changing possibilities – as a ‘different’ reality. The imagination does not sneak like an autonomous virus into the individual works of art; as a boundless breeding ground, the imagination germinates in an unprecedented, exemplary visual language that is very expressive; a language that is a vocabulary with no grammar to provide it with rules. This is where the sting and the counterpoint in Jan Lauwers’ artistic attitude lie, in what the American artist Robert Smithson very quickly and precisely understood: that art was increasingly becoming (and is now probably entirely) an appendage that is alien to the studio in the sense that art ‘is being reduced to visual fodder and transportable merchandise’.

Jan Lauwers’ new, elongated studio is fascinating. It ‘is able’, not without nostalgia, to reveal itself to be a ‘factory’, located in the internationally troubled Brussels borough of Molenbeek, with which the very last thing the sensation-seeking world media link is art, let alone beauty. There are sculptures, installations, drawings and settings with plinths, wooden crates and objects which in their outlines evoke associations with such stage productions as ‘Isabella’s Room’ (2004) and ‘The Lobster Shop’ (2006).

It is this convergence of the recollection of objects that ‘lived’ on a stage and their combination with new works that arise out of a pressing urge to speak about the world and its deficiency of imagination and love, that makes up the unutterable power of Jan Lauwers’ art work. This work – which has by now become an oeuvre – is not concerned with depiction or representation, but with visualisation. On the basis of a mental capacity that is not distilled out of the concrete reality, uncommon and unknown ‘images’ see a concrete visual form which in a ‘worldly’ reality, in this case an exhibition, work their way to the top as if in a salutary reflection.

What is striking in the entirely ‘open’ artworks by Jan Lauwers is the visibly manual aspect of his rhizomatous artistic production. The drawings disguise a skilful ability to bring animals, skeletons, portraits and figures to life which at the same time are reminiscent of the craft and seriousness of the old Fine Arts to which Lauwers relates in a rightly unabashed way. A trace of the sublime lies concealed and remains in his sometimes abject, and senselessly and irrecoverably quoted iconic motifs from the rich and broad range of art history.

Quoting sets art in the present time and gives it a benchmark – as an enriching insinuation which maintains the past of art as still alive in our contemporary eyes. Jan Lauwers envelops his art with an aura in an intelligent way – a concept that cannot be misunderstood and which alludes to the fascination with images and not to mysticism or forms of idiotic idolatry. Lauwers keeps right away from any form of industrial production in his work, which means that he avoids the criticism (by Theodor Adorno *et al.*) that the means of production determine what is or is not produced. He produces.

Jan Lauwers draws quite a lot using graphite, in which this elemental black substance willingly and delicately clings onto supports, as in ‘Nature Morte’ on the wooden crates on which Lauwers draws splendid birds and other small animals as mythical traces which are waiting for transport(s) by way of these ‘symbolic’ freight crates.

Early art was painted on wooden panels and, closer to our time, in 1968, Marcel Broodthaers, in his temporary Musée d'art Moderne in Brussels, pinned postcards of iconic works of art to wooden crates used to transport art.

Do we, here in Jan Lauwers' studio, also find ourselves in a 'Musée Imaginaire'? The crates with those fantastic 'traditional' drawings stand higgledy-piggledy on a soft carpet, ceremoniously printed with lion motifs, which may symbolise power, identity or nationalism. It is a monumental work entitled Rubens, which refers to the painting 'Daniel in the Lion's Den' by the Antwerp baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens. The carpet dominates the room and at the same time acts as a base for the mythical transport crates of 'Nature Morte'. It makes an impression, just like other objects 'placed' as if in an installation, where, for example, right-angled accumulations of non-specific objects and pallets are vertically overshadowed by paradoxically enticing drawings of human skeletons. This is vanitas as an existentially insidious idea, subject to the gravity of plastic-material entropy.

These are works that cut to the marrow, they are artworks that 'touch' by their simplicity and, in their interrelated manifestation, are reminiscent of 'heavenly constellations'. In 1928, Walter Benjamin managed to compare ideas – which I would here like to replace by artworks – with signs of the zodiac, heavenly constellations. 'Ideas are related to things as constellations relate to stars'. This is the methodology, Jan Lauwers' way of doing things, making, dismantling, assembling, setting up images and then placing and moving everything in an absurd order with the cloak of charity. As an artist, Jan Lauwers makes art on the basis of his history, entwined with his experiences as a man of the theatre – who *a priori* works independently and alone.

The French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy claims that a good artwork shows up the absence of any form of conclusion. This idea runs like a fine thread through Jan Lauwers' visual oeuvre. There is no finality in his work; the work will never be finished and it is precisely the desire for interpretations that will keep the artwork topical and relevant 'wherever and whenever'. In Jan Lauwers' art, lots of things are on wheels, on pallets or on carpets in which lies the notion of mental transport of transition, from a place to a spot. Jan Lauwers' studio is the location and the place of action for try-outs using imaginary artworks that are to be moved and changed, put together using various object, patched up, cast 'drawn-on' objects that are loosely part of a sort of mental construction kit.

The thinking shifts uncertainly towards art that remains hesitantly upright, which bears within it the feast of being, with a raw, regretful side.

The feast of association by way of visual insinuation signifies the ability to continue looking undisturbed at the freedom the artist claims in order to produce art founded on mental authenticity without pressure from the art market.

By giving works titles, Lauwers is doing no more and no less than giving a 'context' to the viewer, whose urge for decoding ends up at a fork in the road. 'Donald' is a compact sculpture, but internally complex in its composition, which in its extreme forms is reminiscent of the Minimal Art of such people as Donald... Judd. It is a superb sculpture that provides another form for the minimal, an internal composition that alludes to unpretentious do-it-yourself. The title of the image takes a form to which prejudiced ideas – derived from standard art history – cling inaccessibly and puts it at a serious disadvantage. The same sort of strict sculptural composition appears in 'The Kitchen', in which the undecorated outlines of a whitish sculpture bear the traces of a building and the orderly stacking that was usual in the practice of the Minimal artists. Another work that belongs to this 'family of formal simplicity' is 'Touch me, come sleep with me'. Once again it is a sturdy sculpture with, in the white beam 'on top' the words (imperative?) 'TOUCH ME', clearly pressed in by hand.

On several occasions Jan Lauwers plays with the paradox between language and material and frequently transforms our frame of reference into a knot. Works such as 'Little girl with little hand in a little deer's ass' relate diametrically to 'Donald'.

On a pallet – as the primal plinth – with on top of it a duplicated plinth in expanded polystyrene, stands a white deer whose head is partially coated with an organic layer of clay. This arresting, fragile sculpture stands against a wall with numerous patches of colour and traces of paint that provide an 'entourage' for a delicate drawing of a girl in a short

dress running, with her hand playfully twisting in the anus of the deer in its graceful pose. What an image and what a mystery, tacking between human and animal!

'The art of entertainment' and 'The entertainer's private room' are the ambiguous titles of artworks that 'provocatively' put the artist's resilience into words and images. These complex, dense works cannot tolerate any lightness; they are images with weight, which even literally bear the letters of the notion of 'entertainment' which, for a contemporary artist, today brings the attraction towards the society of spectacle painfully close. And amidst the bustle of materials lies the head of a white duck as a still life – as an accentuated 'thing' of peace.

Jan Lauwers sacrifices beauty on the block of art. In the sculpture 'Lyberti', a figure in an unsustainable pose, marked on the skull with an earthly motif of a delicate bird, lies like a fallen angel on white paving. It is an emotionless image that contrasts sharply with, for example, the drawing 'Happy Beggar' – a sunken portrait of an eternally laughing Chinese beggar. His art keeps on coming as if in a clear, babbling mountain stream and, on the basis of an expressive primal force (as in the work of Joseph Beuys), asks for dialogue; a conversation about the 'why' of this complex flux of images. He manages to convert his images in a solidified way into motionless sculptural images that bring about a mental voyage.

The meaning of Jan Lauwers' art circulates as if in a vortex, where thoughts, as if in a Fibonacci spiral, cleave their way to new substantive perspectives and to renewing, expanding thoughts that turn the present cultural pessimism into an amalgam of 'worlds' where the thoughts become the most vivid colours.



Detail 'Happy Beggar', Jan Lauwers © McaM

STARTING WITH A SMILE

Interview with Pieter Van Bogaert, H ART, May 2016

Jan Lauwers in Shanghai

This summer, Jan Lauwers will be the first European artist to exhibit at the McaM – the Ming Contemporary Art Museum – in Shanghai. The Chinese artist Qiu Zhijie converted an old paper factory into a private exhibition space a good three thousand square metres in size. Which is big. A big honour and a big space. Lauwers is using this opportunity to create a gigantic still life for which he has delved deep into his own archives. It is to be a solo exhibition in collaboration with other artists. Naturally including some from his cherished Needcompany, which is presenting a three-day opening performance.

Jan Lauwers receives us in his temporary studio in Molenbeek, a week before his work leaves for China in a container. We find a well-ordered chaos: as if the container with all his work has fallen open on the spot. Jan Lauwers works on a monumental scale. He does the same in the museum as an artist as he does as a director in the theatre. Clusters – assemblages – appear scattered around in this chaos. And in these assemblages details appear. Lots of objects, but lots of drawings too, such as the head of a Chinese beggar on a piece of felt. The beggar is smiling at us: 'I want to start with a smile,' says Lauwers. The piece of felt lies on a board resting on glass feet on a table. It says a lot about this exhibition in the make: a fragile collection of images and objects from all over the place, a delicate balance, a confrontation between cultures and, on or amongst them, that personal view, that of the artist and of his subject.

Dialogue of contrasts

The beggar's smile is the first fragile image, which in itself already represents a precarious balance. It opens an exhibition of paradoxes. This is how Jan Lauwers talks about China: a country of contrasts, of relentless capitalism and incredible poverty. But he talks about the exhibition in terms of dialogue. This dialogue starts with the image of the beggar. It is about the Chinese dictatorship. It is about cultures, about here and there, about China and Europe, about Brussels and Shanghai. And about history. Jan Lauwers refers to Rubens, to Dürer, to Beuys, to Disney. He combines modernism and postmodernism, craftsmanship and handiwork and of course the monumental and the detail. Flight-cases stand around in the room. They too play on that sense of art that has fallen out of the cupboard. These cases no longer contain art on the inside, but on the outside. What is normally hidden in the depths of these cases is here brought to the surface. Together with Benoît Gob, one of the performers with Needcompany, Jan Lauwers uses the cases to draw on. They use charcoal, in a restrained, academic style. It is impossible to detect who drew what. It displays skill, but at the same time there is something impersonal about it. It questions the individual and also says something about transport, relocation, the participation with which every dialogue begins. It demonstrates a European tradition in the art of drawing, but at the same time is also reminiscent of the tradition of copying in Chinese painting factories.

Lauwers: 'Today's best painters are from China. They combine skill with a political vision, a good sense of networks and a feeling for career-making. Because the meaning of public space is different there, an artist is still able to do things that are genuinely dangerous. This is a major difference from the West. An artist here can no longer be dangerous. He is simply set aside and ignored.'

Another copy, a dialogue, a relocation, a monument, a contrast. On the floor is a gigantic carpet of twenty by thirty metres: a woven reproduction of Rubens' painting Daniel in the Lion's Den. Here too there is an inversion, as with the flight-cases, whereby the painting becomes a carpet and at the same time the support for the exhibited work.

Beauty

This exhibition is the result of years of work: years in Jan Lauwers' career. It goes back more than three decades into his archives, from when he had just graduated from the Academy, plus years of art history, from the Renaissance to the present day. As he himself emphasises, a work that involved years of struggling to obtain and retain subsidies. Years fighting on behalf of beauty. A beauty that we urgently have to interpret differently. Which is possible, if we question the metier, the ego, and individualism. The anonymity that arises out of this has a liberating effect. It is possible, by means of cooperation: it happens in the mixture of sixteen nationalities to be found at Needcompany, and it happens here through the mixing of European and Chinese influences. It is to be seen, for example, in the little leopard's heads, which are a reference to Chinese culture. Here they form the end-piece of some very fragile sculptures: if you tap it they will fall down.

Jan Lauwers finds beauty in the perfection of a shell. The death of David Bowie inspired him to create the image of a grieving girl on a grave. The letters that once spelt 'The art of entertainment' here lose some of their meaning. You no longer have to be able to read it, he says. They become autonomous works. 'I find something, I assemble something, and I make something myself. Each work involves an action and a reference to the past.' This turns all these works into one single overall image, a self-portrait.

Jan Lauwers likes chance, the moment itself, improvisation. While we are talking, a man with a large cart full of stuff appears from the depths of this warehouse in Molenbeek that Lauwers shares with a civil support centre for Brussels refugees. 'What an incredible image,' he shouts, 'it could easily be a performance'. For the opening of the exhibition, Lauwers plans a three-day, eight-hours-a-day performance that's full of chance occurrences. What about improvisation? 'That's not actually allowed. But I shall nevertheless be entering into confrontation with the other culture. We still have too much of a colonial attitude: but who am I to say that China should set Tibet free, while Leopold II still sits here on his horse? I take this seriously and will not be going there like a Jesuit viewing everything with his Bible in his hand. It's all about entering into dialogue.'

This exhibition in the make only reveals itself in bits and pieces. I see a puzzle with a huge number of pieces, spread around the room, in the form of various works. I see religious elements: a Mystic Lamb (Lauwers: 'I'm a Flemish primitive, aren't I?'). You may make links with major figures in art history, but you don't have to. You may look at it from a European or a Chinese point of view. You see what you have learned. 'I have been taught how to look at a rabbit by Disney and Dürer. This is what this exhibition is about: about everything I have learnt to see. Sometimes you try to suppress it and at other times it comes to the surface again. Just like the pleasure of simply drawing something, by hand, with charcoal. In that way things are constantly given different meanings.' The guided tour ends at a sculpture. It is a cast of the body of an actress at Needcompany. 'It fell over and broke, but if you leave it lying around in your studio for long enough, it gains a new purpose. I'm going to use it in the exhibition, and people will be able to write on it. But that first has to be approved by the Chinese authorities.' The question then is: how do the authorities view it?

JAN LAUWERS

Jan Lauwers (Antwerp, 1957) is an artist who works in just about every medium. Over the last thirty years he has become best known for his pioneering work for the stage with Needcompany, which was founded in Brussels in 1986. From 2009 until 2014 Needcompany has been artist-in-residence at the Burgtheater in Vienna. Over the years he has also built up a substantial body of art work which has been shown at BOZAR (Brussels) and McaM (Shanghai) among other places. Jan Lauwers was awarded the 'Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria' in 2012. In 2014, he was rewarded with the 'Golden Lion Lifetime Achievement Award' at the Venice Biennale. He is the first Belgian to receive this prize in the theatre category.

Jan Lauwers studied painting at the Academy of Art in Ghent. At the end of 1979 he gathered round him a number of people to form the Epigonensemble. In 1981 this group was transformed into the Epigontheater zlv collective which took the theatre world by surprise with its six stage productions. In this way Jan Lauwers took his place in the movement for radical change in Flanders in the early 80s, and also made his international breakthrough. Epigontheater zlv presented direct, concrete, highly visual theatre that used music and language as structuring elements.

THEATRE

Jan Lauwers needs company. He founded Needcompany together with Grace Ellen Barkey. Together they are responsible for Needcompany's larger-scale productions. The group of performers Jan Lauwers and Grace Ellen Barkey have put together over the years is quite unique in its versatility.

Since Needcompany was founded in 1986, both its work and its performers have been markedly international. And since then, every production has been performed in several languages. Its first productions were still highly visual, but in subsequent productions the storyline and the main theme gained in importance, although the fragmentary composition remained.

Lauwers' training as an artist is decisive in his handling of the theatre medium and leads to a highly individual and in many ways pioneering theatrical idiom that examines the theatre and its meaning. One of its most important characteristics is transparent, 'thinking' acting and the paradox between 'acting' and 'performing'.

VISUAL ART

In September 1997 Lauwers was invited to take part in the theatre section of Documenta X (Kassel), for which he created 'Caligula', after Camus, the first part of a diptych called 'No beauty for me there, where human life is rare'. At the request of the curator Luk Lambrecht, Jan Lauwers took part in the Grimbergen 2002 exhibition together with 8 other artists (including Thomas Schütte, Lili Djourie, Job Koelewijn, Atelier Van Lieshout, Jan De Cock and Ann Veronica Janssens). In spring 2006 his work was included in the DARK exhibition at the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam. In 2007 Jan Lauwers had his first solo exhibition, at BOZAR (Brussels), curated by Jérôme Sans (former director of Palais de Tokyo, now at the UCCA). To accompany this exhibition he also compiled the first book to focus on his art work from 1996 to 2006. At the Artbrussels art fair (2007), Lauwers was invited to make a site-specific work for BOZAR. Luk Lambrecht has invited Jan Lauwers to take part in Down to Earth, a group exhibition of ceramics at Strombeek cultural centre, which includes work by Ann Veronica Janssens, Heimo Zobernig, Atelier Van Lieshout, Lawrence Weiner, Kurt Ryslavý and Manfred Pernice. In May 2009, Jérôme Sans invited Jan Lauwers to exhibit at Curated by Vienna 09. Curated by brought 18 Viennese contemporary art galleries together with

international curators. In September 2011, Champ d'Action and M HKA organised the 8th Time Canvas, during which Jan Lauwers' 'Last Guitar Monster' was shown. In May 2016, Jan Lauwers became the first Belgian to exhibit at the brand new McaM in Shanghai, a museum of contemporary art headed by the Chinese artist Qiu Zhijie. Part of this exhibition will be on show at BOZAR in Brussels in spring 2017.

'Deconstructions' were made by Jan Lauwers using disused museum material. These museum installations have already been shown at BOZAR (Brussels) and the haus der kunst (Munich) (2007). They formed the setting for an eight-hour marathon performance by the Needcompany ensemble on which the whole of Jan Lauwers' mental world converged. The basis for the follow-up project, 'The House of Our Fathers', a 'house' artwork that examines time, place and perception, was a house measuring 5 by 5 by 20 m. 'The House of Our Fathers' was shown at the Museum M in Leuven, at Kunsthalle Mannheim during the 16th Internationale Schillertage (2011), during Hannover's Kunstfestspiele Herrenhausen in 2013 and at McaM (Shanghai) in 2016.

FILMPROJECTS

Jan Lauwers also has a number of film and video projects to his name, including 'From Alexandria' (1988), 'Mangia' (1995), 'Sampled Images' (2000), 'C-Song' (2003), 'C-Song Variations' (2007) and 'The OHNO Cooperation Conversation on the O.H.N.O.P.O.P.I.C.O.N.O. Ontology' (2007). During summer 2001 Lauwers shot his first full-length film with the working title 'Goldfish Game' (2002). The script was written together with Dick Crane. 'Goldfish Game' is the story of a small community of people who are violently torn apart. The premiere took place at the Venice Film Festival (in the New Territories (Nuovi Territori)) category. The Kinematrix internet magazine (Italy) proclaimed 'Goldfish Game' the best film in the Formati Anomali (Unusual Forms) category. The jury report said: 'An innovative style of directing that surpasses the limits of the digital medium'. 'Goldfish Game' was selected for the Buenos Aires International Human Rights Film and Video Festival in 2002, the Ghent Film Festival in 2002 and the Solothurn Film Festival in Switzerland in 2003. At the Slamdance Film Festival (January 2004), 'Goldfish Game' was awarded the Grand Jury Honour for the Best Ensemble Cast.

In February 2003 Jan Lauwers made a silent short film on violence, called 'C-Song'. This film has been shown to a limited audience several times, during the 'Needlapbs' at STUK in Leuven and the Kaaitheater Studios in Brussels, and also in 'War is Not Art' at the Vooruit in Ghent. In April 2004 'C-Song' had its official premiere at the Courtisane short-film festival in Ghent. It was subsequently selected for the International Short-Film Festival in Hamburg in 2004 and in July 2004 was screened in the old water-tower at Bredene on the Belgian coast as part of Grasduinen 2004, SMAK-aan-Zee.

'C-Song Variations' (2007), a short film made in connection with 'The Lobster Shop', had a preview at BOZAR (Brussels) in April and its premiere at the Temps d'Images festival in La Ferme du Buisson (Paris) in October 2007. It was then shown at the haus der kunst (2007) in Munich.

For the SPIELART Festival in Munich (2007) he started an ongoing video project together with Maarten Seghers: 'The OHNO Cooperation Conversation'.

DIRK BRAECKMAN

Dirk Braeckman, 1958, Eeklo (Belgium), lives and works in Gent (Belgium).

After obtaining his Master's degree in photography and film at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent (1977 – 1981) Dirk Braeckman co-founded the renowned 'Gallery XYZ' together with Magnum photographer Carl De Keyzer. Between 1994 and 1997 Braeckman lectured at the Higher Institute for Fine Arts in Antwerp and in 2009 he started as a guest lecturer at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent.

Dirk Braeckman's oeuvre has been represented by Zeno X since 1999. His work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at S.M.A.K. in Ghent (BE), De Pont Foundation in Tilburg (NL), Le Bal in Paris (FR), Museum M, Leuven (BE), Fotohof Salzburg (DE), De Appel Arts Centre in Amsterdam (NL), Kunsthalle Marta Herford and many more. The Royal Family of Belgium commissioned the artist for a permanent installation in the Sphinx Room of the Royal Palace in Brussels. In addition to site-specific installations, the artist's work can be found in numerous public collections such as the Artothèque in Annecy (FR), Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris (FR), Centro Fotografía de la Universidad Salamanca (ES), De Pont in Tilburg (NL), Fondation national d'art contemporain in Paris (FR), FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais in Dunkirk (FR), FRAC Rhône -Alpes in Villerbanne (FR), Haags Gemeentemuseum (NL), MACs Hornu (BE), Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris (FR), Musée d'Art Contemporain et Moderne in Strasbourg (FR), Royal Palace in Brussels (BE), Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels (BE), S.M.A.K. in Ghent (BE) and Centraal Museum in Utrecht (NL), and at SFMOMA, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Braeckman's work is highly subjective and evades the conventions of documentary photography, yet remains highly autobiographical. Even though his images are often deprived of human figures, his own personality and thoughts are very present. His images are intriguing and evocative. Braeckman never searches for images, he simply notices things and finds images in what surrounds him. His darkroom is transformed into a field of experimentation in which the artist manipulates the paper, working with the materiality of the picture, revealing influences of chance and time. The artist avoids images that are over-reasoned and opts for the unpredictable. Freedom and spontaneity therefore become essential notions in his creative process. Braeckman expands the photographic medium to the point where it becomes rather akin to the practice of the sculptor. In his most recent work Braeckman elaborates on creating unique photographic images. What is particularly remarkable is his use of one of the most basic elements in the photographic process, light.



Nature Morte, Jan Lauwers, 2016 © Phile Deprez

The wooden cases used to transport other works of art become supports for new artworks. The drawings are academic and depersonalised. The hand of the artist is neutralised. This work refers to two of the most influential Western artists and personalities of the twentieth century: Marcel Duchamp and Walt Disney. Duchamp, the headstrong court jester of contemporary art, who wondered what the function of art actually was, as against the animated kitsch of Disney. The one changed the world with a urinal ('Fountain', 1917), the other with the capitalist 'Mickey Mouse' in 1928.

The support for this work is the painting 'Daniel in the Lion's Den' (1615) by the Antwerp baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens, which has been transformed into a carpet. Here too, the function of the painting has been revised and the individual nature of the original work made superfluous. The public literally wipe their feet on it.

MY FIRST SILENT STORY

Jan Lauwers, Brussels, 9 March 2016

I was already a storyteller as a young boy. If I found a dead bird, I put it on my head and became an Indian. The stench of the bird rotting under my bed made my mother explode with rage. Before I buried the bird I made a drawing of it. On the blank back of a used envelope from my father's medical practice.

That drawing became my first silent story. The bird my first muse. The stench of death made the story tragic. The drawing found beauty in it. I want to tell you the story of that first drawing.

My old uncle, a Sunday painter traumatised by the war, looked at my drawing and said: 'You have a golden hand, Jan my boy'. He gave me my first book for artists, on the anatomy of the human body. I practised day and night. Observation, and the time for observation, became my deepest faith. By looking, I saw the stories revealing themselves in silence before my eyes. My father was worried about my silent seclusion, but he didn't hear how loud my heart beat when I discovered that there were no green feathers in a peacock's eye, only yellow and blue, which in sunlight combined to form all the green in the world. The peacock's feather contained the whole world! That was my discovery. I was now an explorer. I travelled across raging oceans and climbed the highest mountains in search of something I hoped never to find. Because if I found it, it would be over. Then I would be an ordinary little boy again.

I was eight when I started having drawing lessons at the village school. On the first day we had to take drawing paper with us. I took a couple of envelopes and laid them proudly on my desk. The others had brought drawing pads. The children from better-off families even had cloth-bound pads. The teacher looked at my envelopes pityingly, threw them in the waste-paper bin and gave me a drawing pad, asking me whether I didn't feel like drawing. It was at that instant that I decided to become the best drawer in the world. Just as I was the bravest Indian, and was unaffected by the stench of the bird. Just as I was the most courageous explorer, drinking his own pee in the searing heat on a sinking raft. I'll come back to that pee later. No art without excreta.

After a couple of days I secretly went and dug up the bird again. I was fascinated by the maggots filling themselves up on it and creating so much movement. The speed of their bodies, the contrast between the vivid white of their skin and the black rotting, the hysterical movement. I took the first drawing out of my folder. I drew as quickly as what I was watching. I drew over my first drawing. It turned into a lyrical construction of white and black strokes and dots. I didn't draw a decomposed bird or a fattened maggot. I drew movement. (Which is how the notion of abstraction entered my drawing. Art is the freezing of movement. After observation came abstraction, after the abstraction came the stench.)

The dead bird, this inexhaustible stream of silent stories, was a stinking, filthy blackbird. I didn't kill it. I never heard it singing. I don't know whether it was a good singer during its short existence. Whether it didn't die in vain. This blackbird may have been a bastard that pecked at the heads of the much smaller sparrows with his much bigger beak. It stank, and not just a bit! Maybe it had bad breath when it was alive. He may have abused his wife. Why in heaven's name was he more handsome than his wife? With his vain yellow beak and his gleaming black plumage? What would he have done if the much bigger magpie had chased him? He certainly wouldn't have sat down whistling fine tunes. The coward.

I stopped drawing and looked at what I had drawn. Something was missing. My drawing didn't stink. Without the stench, my drawing would be worthless. I panicked. My drawing was worthless. What I had drawn was no more than

a weak reflection of the dramatic events played out before my eyes in the open grave. I looked around me nervously. In desperation I took down my trousers and peed on my drawing. The marks and lines mingled and it became a mess. I lay the drawing in the sun and sat down watching it hopefully. The drying made the paper curl up. The drawing became a sculpture. I smelt it. It did stink. I had managed it. My drawing bore a secret! (Art is a secret)



Detail 'Jugglers', Jan Lauwers © Phile Deprez