



[illegible]

MARCEL  
BROODTHAERS

EN



## CONTENTS

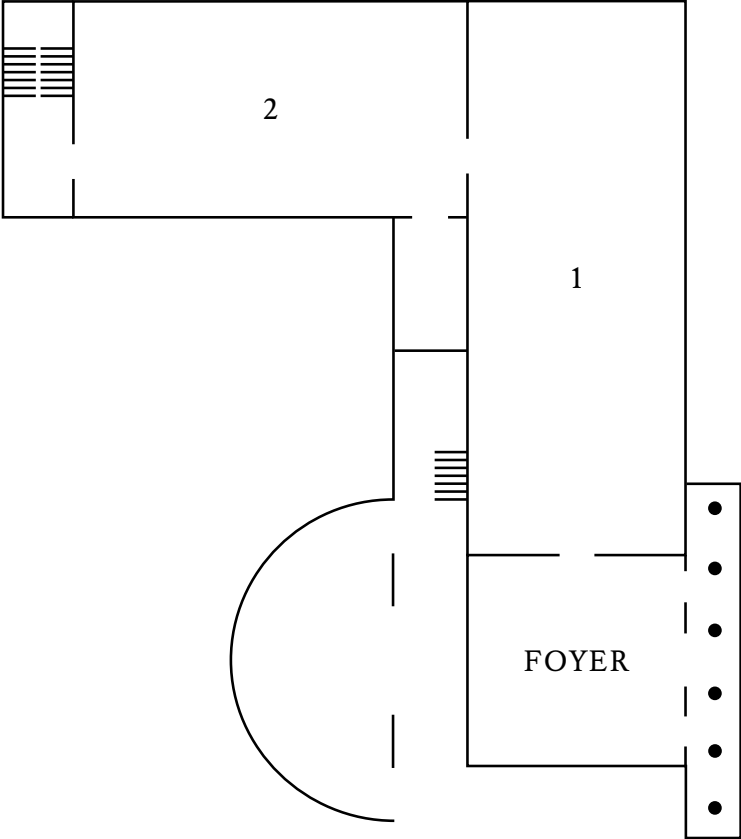
Biography .....	5
L'Entrée de l'Exposition (Room 1).....	7
Moules, Œufs, Frites, Charbon (Room 1 / Room 2) .....	9
Musée d'Art Moderne: Projection sur caisse (Room 2) .....	11
Le Corbeau et le Renard (Room 2).....	14
Objet (Room 2) .....	15
Un coup de dés (Room 3) .....	17
Dites partout que je l'ai dit (Room 4) .....	19
Éloge du sujet (Room 4).....	20
Peintures Littéraires (Room 4).....	21
Musée d'Art Moderne: Section Publicité (Room 5) .....	22
Plaques (Poèmes industriels) (Room 6).....	24
Décor, A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers (Room 6).....	25
Salle Blanche (Room 7).....	26
M.B. (Room B) .....	27
Bateau Tableau (Room B).....	28
Cinéma Modèle (Room C) .....	31
Jardin d'Hiver II (Room A).....	38
Colophon .....	40



**M**arcel Broodthaers (born 1924 in Brussels) was active as a poet and journalist before working as a visual artist. He published his first poems in 1945, at the age of twenty-one, and in subsequent years worked as an art reviewer and antique book dealer. He published his first volume of poetry, *Mon Livre d'ogre*, in 1957, and that same year made his first film, *La Clef de l'Horloge*, which he dedicated to Kurt Schwitters. In late 1963, Broodthaers decided to become a visual artist. He set his last book of poetry, *Pense-Bête*, in plaster and exhibited it as a sculpture, thus consummating his entry into visual art. He began to work with everyday objects such as mussels, egg shells, coal, and bricks, and soon created his first installations: in 1966 he presented his first slide projection, *Grandville*, followed in 1967 by the film *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, from which the later film installation and edition evolved. His first major exhibition *Court Circuit* took place at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.

In 1968, Broodthaers initiated the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* in his apartment in Brussels, which he opened with the *Section XIXe siècle*. He presided over the museum as director, organizing and presenting further departments in Brussels, Cologne, De Haan, Antwerp, Düsseldorf, and Middelburg. In 1972, at documenta 5 in Kassel, he closed the museum and its remaining three departments, including the *Section Publicité*. Between 1972 and 1976 he exhibited his work in several solo exhibitions, including at the Lenbachhaus in Munich, the Kunstmuseum Basel, the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, the Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, as well as at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. It was during this period that the rooms *Jardin d'Hiver II* (1974), *L'Entrée de l'Exposition* (1974), *Décor. A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers* (1975), and *Salle Blanche* (1975) were developed, the artist's own versions of a retrospective. Marcel Broodthaers died in Cologne on his birthday, January 28, 1976. His work has since been shown in Kassel, including at documenta 6, 7, and X.

# GROUND FLOOR





**L'***Entrée de l'Exposition* (1974) is the “entrance to the exhibition” in two senses. The installation, consisting of date palms, photographs, drawings, and silk-screen and offset prints, represents both the “doorway” to the exhibition at the Fridericianum and Marcel Broodthaers’s ambiguous staging of the entrance situation. The work was part of six “Décor” exhibitions, Broodthaers’s own version of a retrospective. According to convention, this exhibition format symbolizes the zenith of an artist’s career, the comprehensive presentation of all creative periods and their synthesis into a complete and coherent oeuvre. Thus as an “entry into art history” and a retrospective overview of Broodthaers’s practice, *L'Entrée* signifies both a beginning and an end.

Broodthaers employed the Décors to explore new forms of recontextualization, displacement, and elaboration of existing works. The artist insisted on an open-ended quality that is implicit in the work itself, developing its complex web of relationships in diverse references of literary, artistic, and philosophical origin. The French word “décor” denotes decoration as well as a stage set, film set, or scene configuration. With the aid of these motifs, Broodthaers investigated the relationship between his artistic practice and its historical and social points of reference.

The entrance in *L'Entrée de l'Exposition* is defined primarily by the decorative element of the date palm. Referencing the exhibition palaces of the world fairs of the late nineteenth century, they draw attention to the history and the institutional framework of presentation itself—a subject of central importance to Broodthaers’s art, especially his *Musée d'Art Moderne*. By incorporating different groups of works, such as his early arrangements of mussel- and eggshells or his “Peintures Littéraires”, into the ensemble of palms, Broodthaers underscored the retrospective character of the *Entrée*. Yet we do not encounter these early works in their original form as paintings or sculptures, but rather as photographs. Retrospective, after all, implies replication. And replication means photography in the age of mechanical reproduction.

Works also presented in the context of Décor exhibitions: *Éloge du sujet*, 1974 (p. 20), *Dites partout que je l'ai dit*, 1974 (p. 19) *Salle Blanche*, 1975 (p. 26), *Décor. A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers*, 1975 (p. 25), *Jardin d'Hiwer. I, II*, 1974 (p. 38).



EEEEEE... Ø, 1967

**A**t the end of 1963, the writer Marcel Broodthaers decided to become a visual artist. From then on, the object in its spatiality and materiality became a focus of his poetic investigations. As it is primarily the image of its shell, and less its content, which we associate with the linguistic term “mussel,” Broodthaers turns to “la moule,” the mussel, in order to engage with “le moule,” the form. Broodthaers’s sculptural work explores the relationship between the shape of natural objects, their inscription through language or cultural use, and their inaccessible independence as things. In *Grande casserole de moules* (1966, Engl. *Large casserole of mussels*), for instance, the various shells of the mussels give form to one another. Although the mussel shells break apart the lidded pot as a formal whole, this occurs strictly along the shape of the vessel. Both pot and mussels *are* form and *give* form, yet they have absolutely no content. Broodthaers’s objects foreclose such fundamental distinctions as those between form and content, nature and culture. What becomes apparent instead is the hidden divide separating object, word, image and meaning.

We also encounter these questions in Broodthaers’s work with eggshells. Eggshells, too, are a natural-cultural relic whose designation by the term “œuf”—which denotes the entire egg—renders it a symbol of life and fertility, whose origin, the chicken or the egg, remains as unknowable as the eggshell remains empty. When Broodthaers confronts his objects with their photographic reproductions, as with *Moules Casserole* (1967, Engl. *Mussels Casserole*), this duplication reveals the symbolic character of his culinary environment, for example the national associations of mussels and fries. Broodthaers also deals with questions of national identity in *Trois tas de charbon* (1966–67, Engl. *Three piles of coal*). The pile of coal in the middle is crowned by Belgium’s national colors. In miniature, the triumphant symbolism of raising the flag, of national expansion and occupation, is exposed in its absurdity. Broodthaers’s piece references the mountains of “Belgian” coal piled up in the early sixties during a strike that nearly paralyzed coal-mining activities and threatened the government and the national economy. With *Fémur d’homme belge* (1964–65, Engl. *Femur of a Belgian man*), Broodthaers adds a male bone to the mussels, eggs, coal, and fries whose painted exterior furnishes proof of nationality—satirizing the extreme essentialism of nationalist ideology.

## CHRONOLOGY

### *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, 1968 – 1972*

- 1968 Brussels, *Section XIXe siècle*, Rue de la Pépinière  
September 27, 1968 – September 27, 1969
- Brussels – Cologne, *Section Littéraire*  
1968 – 1970/1971
- 1969 De Haan, *Section Documentaire*  
August 1969
- Antwerp, *Section XVIIe siècle*, A 37 90 89  
September 27 – October 4, 1969
- 1970 Düsseldorf, *Section XIXe siècle (bis)*, Städtische Kunsthalle  
February 14 – February 15, 1970
- Middelburg, *Section Folklorique / Cabinet de Curiosités*  
Zeeuws Museum, Folklore Departement  
1970
- 1971 Düsseldorf, *Section Cinéma*, 12 Burgplatz  
January 1971 – 1972
- Cologne, *Section Financière, Musée d'Art Moderne  
à vendre, pour cause de faillite, 1970 – 1971*  
Galerie Michael Werner at Art Cologne  
October 5 – 10, 1971
- 1972 Düsseldorf, *Section des Figures*, Städtische Kunsthalle  
May 16 – July 9, 1972
- Kassel, *Section Publicité*, Neue Galerie, documenta 5  
June 30 – October 8, 1972
- Kassel, *Section Art Moderne*, Neue Galerie, documenta 5  
June 30 – August 15, 1972
- Kassel, *Musée d'Art Moderne, Galerie du XXe siècle*,  
Neue Galerie, documenta 5  
August 15 – October 8, 1972

**B**roodthaers presented *Projection sur caisse* (1968, Engl. *Projection on box*) in the *Section XIXe siècle* (Engl. *XIXth Century Section*), the first section of his *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*. Between 1968 and 1972, he had set up a museum of eagles consisting of twelve sections at various different locations.

The *Musée d'Art Moderne* opened in Broodthaers's apartment and workplace in Brussels in 1968, in the context of the anti-authoritarian discourses and political upheavals of the late 1960s. In the nearly empty rooms he exhibited roughly forty borrowed art shipping cases bearing printed words such as "fragile," "Keep dry," "sculpture," and "painting." These were accompanied, among other things, by some seventy-five postcards showing primarily works by French masters of the nineteenth century, a slide projection featuring drawings and paintings from the same period, and a work by René Magritte. Characteristic of *Projection sur caisse* is Broodthaers's critical analysis and pastiche of the institutional frameworks of modern art, on the one hand, and his in-depth engagement with the nineteenth century, on the other—concerns that were also reflected in other sections of the museum of eagles. In presenting the studio and the museum within the same space, the *Section XIXe siècle* combined the primary setting for the production of art with that of its reception, the definitive separation of which into public and private realms accompanied the ascendance of bourgeois society. Broodthaers traces the autonomy of art vis-à-vis social reality to its origin in the nineteenth century, and thus identifies it as the result of historical and political processes. The autonomy of art does not derive from art itself, but from the institutional and economic conditions of the modern art system, of which the studio and the museum constitute integral components.

The *Section Publicité* of the *Musée d'Art Moderne* is on view in Room 5 on the 1st floor (p. 22).

Perched on a treetop, Master Crow  
Was clutching in his bill a cheese,  
When Master Fox, sniffing the fragrant breeze,  
Came by and, more or less, addressed him so:  
“Good day to you, Your Ravenhood!  
How beautiful you are! How fine! How fair!  
Ah! Truly, if your song could but compare  
To all the rest, I’m sure you should  
Be dubbed the *rara avis* of the wood!”  
The crow, beside himself with joy and pride,  
Begins to caw. He opens wide  
His gawking beak; lets go the cheese; it  
Falls to the ground. The fox is there to seize it,  
Saying: “You see? Be edified:  
Flatterers thrive on fool’s credulity.  
The lesson’s worth a cheese, don’t you agree?”  
The crow, shamefaced and flustered, swore—  
Too late, however: “Nevermore!”

Jean de La Fontaine, 1668



*Le Corbeau et le Renard (d'après La Fontaine), 1967*

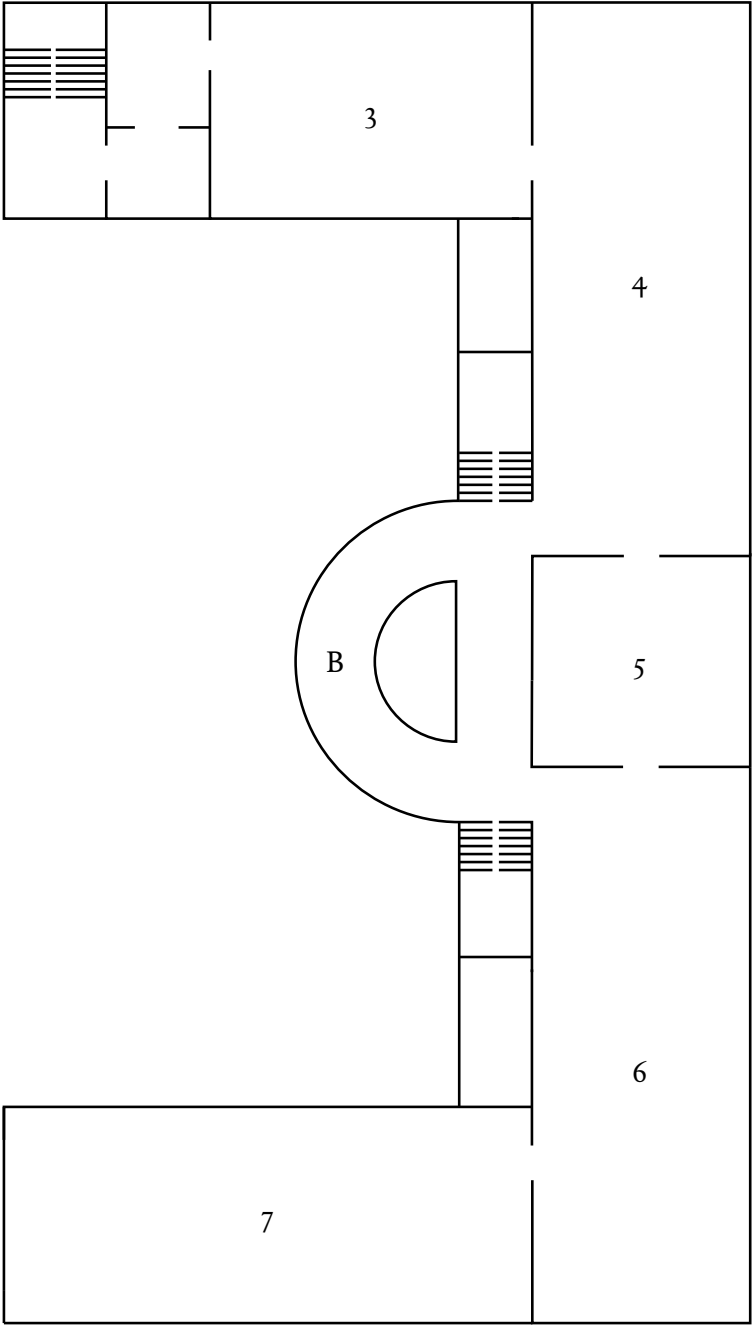
Neither a fox nor a crow appears in this film installation, which Marcel Broodthaers described as an “Environment” and which encompasses text, film, and objects. *Le Corbeau et le Renard* (1967–72, Engl. *The Crow and the Fox*) stages the relationship between language, object, and image. In the work, Jean de La Fontaine’s fable of the same title (1668)—the tale of the cunning fox that uses its rhetorical skills to flatter a crow into surrendering its piece of cheese—is turned into a lesson on reading. The point of departure for the edition was a street action advertising English Week in Brussels, for which Broodthaers wrote passages from La Fontaine’s fable on wallpaper (*Maître Corbeau*, 1967, Engl. *Master Crow*). At once commentary and poetry, his paraphrase of the fable, along with his earlier poem entitled *Le D est plus grand que le T* (1967, Engl. *The D is bigger than the T*), form the textual basis for the film. The film itself was first presented at the experimental film festival in Knokke-Le-Zoute, although not within the context of the competition, in part because Broodthaers had intended to use a screen printed with text for the projection. This specific form of media superimposition and repetition, in which texts and images often overlap and typography protrudes into objects, is typical of his work in film. The two poems, mounted on cardboard and photo canvas, are presented in the exhibition space, where they take on sculptural value in their own right. They also serve as background elements within the film, against which everyday objects and cut-out photographs (of René Magritte and Broodthaers’s daughter Marie-Puck, among others) are placed.

In *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, Broodthaers negates the two visual registers of the fable, offering a tableau which illustrates the absence of that which language speaks about. The words “fox” and “crow” evoke an image in our minds, but the story also has a symbolic moral that is the basis for its widespread use as an educational device. With the projection of the definite article “le” (Engl. “the”) at the beginning, the film cites a popular type of children’s book in which readers are taught that the picture of a fox, for instance, corresponds to the word “fox.” Broodthaers upends this logic: the definite article is not followed by a word, but rather by an object—a pair of womens’ boots. In this way, Broodthaers emphasizes the gap that separates the realm of our visual imagination from the symbolic realm of language. Words do not represent objects or images but are reduced to the material level of the letter. Broodthaers postulates a different kind of reading and seeing: *Le Corbeau et le Renard* emerges as a rebus (Lat. “rebus”—“through things”), as Broodthaers described it himself—a picture puzzle to be solved.



**I**n *Objet* (1967, Engl. *Object*) Broodthaers engages with the shifting reality of the artwork and the status of the object in the context of the visual arts. This film is based on Broodthaers's exhibition *Court Circuit* (1967) at the Palais des Beaux-Arts and was shot while the exhibition was being deinstalled. The words on a black ground, for instance the picture showing the word "picture," question the extent to which the museum context, with its language-based definition of works of art, even allows us to encounter objects as such. Because Broodthaers filmed the exhibits while they were being taken down, and at the same time stages this against a background of newsprint, his film makes apparent the specific temporal and spatial setting within which his objects are presented as artworks. In this way, the film highlights the power of the institution to bestow meaning on things and thus to constitute them as works of art.

1st FLOOR



**R**ené Magritte gave the poet Broodthaers his copy of Stéphane Mallarmé's graphic poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1897, Engl. *A throw of the dice will never abolish chance*). More than twenty years later, Broodthaers, who had by then become a visual artist, dedicated an exhibition to the poet Mallarmé, whom he presented as his role model in matters of art. Broodthaers took up Mallarmé's visual rendition of the poem—an arrangement of words printed in black ink, running across two-page spreads, and appearing to create structural lines rather than univocal content—and pursued it further. He transformed the lines of text from Mallarmé's poem into black rectangles, transposing the typographic modulations of print size and italics into the differing shapes and sizes of the resulting bars. Mallarmé's graphic volume of poems (*Poème*) becomes a poetic picture book (*Image*), with the image defined equally by the black rectangles and the white space that surrounds them. Mallarmé's idea of text as constellation is realized here in rigorous visual form. Printed on transparent pages, the black text blocks are superimposed in Broodthaers's work, and Mallarmé's spatial arrangement of words across two book pages is expanded to encompass an entire book.

In the painting entitled *Un coup de dés* (1969), Mallarmé's lines of text depart from the format of the book and assume the character of a painting. The opening lines of the poem appear with variations in typography and typesetting. On the top and the left-hand side, the text is set in handwritten black script on white canvas. On the right and at the bottom, two black fields painted in oil form the background for yellow capital letters; there, the opening lines follow directly from the letters of the alphabet, all arranged in a continuous grid. One word extends from the lower black field on the right to the upper field on the left. The text is transformed into image through the combined effect of the text substrate (the canvas), the absence of spaces between words, and the unmarked line breaks predetermined by the painting ground.

In *Étagère avec Portrait de Mallarmé* (1969, Engl. *Shelf with a Portrait of Mallarmé*), the last sentence of the handwritten text in *Un coup de dés* reappears, now in white and light blue chalk, across the entire surface of the work. Here the text has been altered as well: the sequence of words is changed, and letters are crossed out. The word "manœuvre" (literal meaning: "work of the hand"; figurative meaning: "maneuver") is abbreviated as "mano"—as in, for example, the Italian word for "hand." A small photographic portrait of Mallarmé hangs in the middle: an homage to the poet, one that alters his words in order to honor the literary master's work in visual form.

*Marcel Broodthaers  
à la Deblioudebliou/S*

*Exposition littéraire  
autour de Mallarmé*

Vernissage dinsdag 2 december 1969  
Tentoonstelling van 3 tot 20/12/69  
Wide White Space  
Schildersstraat 2, Antwerpen  
Open 14-18 u. - Tel. 03 / 38 13 55



*Marcel Broodthaers à la Deblioudebliou/S. Exposition  
littéraire autour de Mallarmé, invitation card, 1969*

**I**n *Dites partout que je l'ai dit* (1974, Engl. *Say everywhere I said so*) Broodthaers presents a taxidermied parrot under a glass cover, injecting a sarcastic commentary into the format of the retrospective. What does artistic practice mean under the conditions of the art market? The parrot is Broodthaers's self-satirizing response to the demand to repeat past interventions in order to enable the entry of his art into the annals of history. Broodthaers's taped voice ceaselessly announces, "Me I say I Me I say I / The King of Mussels Me you say You." The presentation of the lifeless bird at once embodies the gesture of repetition and that of "musealization." The conditions under which an "œuvre" is established in the form of the retrospective are those of taxidermy, the lifelike presentation of a dead thing. Yet frozen in the parrot are the brilliant colors of a bird that is no longer conceivable apart from its material and symbolic limitations—captivity, domestication, and constant mimicry.

**B**roodthaers's "Praise of the Subject" is in fact directed towards both the subject and the object. In addressing the relationship between word, image, and object, the work takes up a question of central importance to the artist's oeuvre. *Éloge du sujet* (1974) was developed in dialogue with *La Clef des songes* (1927, Engl. *The Key to Dreams*), one of the best-known paintings by René Magritte, Broodthaers's key artistic reference. While every painted object is confronted with a painted word in Magritte's work, in *Éloge du sujet*, we encounter a variety of objects, each of which is provided with a handwritten sign. Yet the words are not used literally, as definitions of the corresponding objects, but rather in a figurative sense. A hat, for instance, is labelled with the word "subject", which refers to the hat as the subject of Magritte's painting as well as to the painter's trademark article of clothing and thus to him as a human subject. The identification of things by words gives way to a song of praise for the impenetrability of the object, whose meaning can never be fully and exhaustively grasped through language—and a song in praise of the artist-subject, who imbues everyday objects with meanings that differ from the definitions sanctioned by social convention.

Yet *Éloge du sujet* also refers to *In Praise of Folly* (1509), a satirical essay by the Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam. With this additional twist, Broodthaers gives his song of praise an ironic touch, as Erasmus's "praise" was above all a strident defense of the rationalist concept of reason, the symbolic authority against which his art rebels.

Between 1972 and 1975, Broodthaers realized a series of “*Peintures Littéraires*,” each of which was composed of nine canvases with printed typography. The central role played by language and writing in Broodthaers’s oeuvre is developed with respect to painting and literature in these works. Each panel is configured in accordance with a different, strictly regulated system in which the individual elements are declined as in a linguistic exercise. In *Peintures Littéraires — série anglaise* (1973, Engl. *Literary Paintings — English series*), for example, the names of English poets are coupled with a genitive noun—“Mind,” “Turpitude,” and “Dimension”—to which the corresponding dates of birth and death are added. In employing this device, Broodthaers makes use of a convention in painting in which the depicted figure is made identifiable by an attribute, but also makes graphic reference to the front matter of a book and a memorial plaque. The equal status given to Charles Dodgson, the birth name of Lewis Carroll, ironically undermines the element of fame implied by the latter and the difference between the person and the name. As in other series, one of the canvases is blank except for a purely typographic symbol. Relieved of its function as a means of subdividing the space on the page of a book, it emphasizes the painterly aspect of the print images in the form of a rebus.

The series entitled *Série de neuf peintures en langue allemande, Die Welt* (1973, Engl. *Series of nine paintings in German, Die Welt*) is dedicated to some “great figures” in German cultural history, the context of which is evoked by the addition of the German words “*Die Welt von*” (“the world of”) before each of their names. In the absence of any exact indication of what is meant by “the world,” the names serve in one sense as representatives of the abstract concept of “Germany.” In another sense, however, they are stripped of all meaningful content and carried to the point of absurdity. The presence of any content whatsoever is negated, yet their visual similarity to book covers plays on the idea of the hidden realm of the viewer’s imagination, which opens in response to an evocative name, title, or allusion.

In the *Rubens* series (1973), the painter’s name appears on seven canvases along with his preferred painting subjects and accessory elements: “*Les Bijou*” (jewelry), “*Les Armures*” (armor), “*Les Femmes*” (women), “*Les Nuages*” (clouds), “*Les Chiens*” (dogs), “*Les Fleurs*” (flowers), and “*Les Tapis*” (carpets). Printed on an eighth panel is the name of the Dutch painter Pieter Jansz. Saenredam, another seventeenth-century painter, who represents a completely different approach to painting. Broodthaers juxtaposes the baroque abundance of detail that is typical of Rubens’s Flemish tradition with the purist architecture painting of the new Dutch tradition. The date of origin (1973) that appears alongside the dates of death and birth in every series is the only reference to the artist himself. With this notation, Broodthaers pays tribute—in the most impersonal way possible—to the tradition he cites in the form of the memorial plaque. Yet he turns its essential principle of repetition against itself by purging the tradition to the extreme in an ironic linguistic game.

**B**roodthaers presented the *Section Publicité* (1972, Engl. *Publicity Section*), one of the three final sections of his museum, at documenta 5. At the time, the *Section des Figures* (1972, Engl. *Figure Section*) was still on display at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. Broodthaers's "public relations" also promoted this most extensive section of the museum, which he advertised with numerous references in Kassel. In Düsseldorf, he presented a collection of over 500 eagle-objects "from the Oligocene to the present," including pieces on loan from many international museums as well as such items as comic books, advertisements, and matchboxes. Broodthaers exhibited eagle-objects representing various genres and styles from different historical periods and geographic origins, from ethnological and natural-history objects to everyday articles and military insignia, without reference to customary systems of classification. The overabundance of meanings brought to light in his collection pushed the representative function of the eagle as a symbol of power and political or military rule to the point of absurdity. Broodthaers's criticism at once addressed the power of institutions to establish definitions of supposed universal validity; the bourgeois system of knowledge that subordinates fundamentally different phenomena to the concepts of chronology and exhaustiveness; and the interdependence of the power of knowledge and the imperial power that also emerged in the nineteenth century, and which the eagle traditionally embodies.

With his *Section des Figures*, Broodthaers continued his pursuit of the museum—the object of his critique, in terms of both scope and method—more closely than in all of the preceding sections of his museum of eagles. At documenta, as Broodthaers remarked, it was "only logical that it is now frozen stiff in boredom."

In place of a sign bearing the words "This is not a work of art," which he had placed alongside each eagle-object in Düsseldorf (a combination of the artistic strategies of Magritte and Duchamp), Broodthaers affixed a label that read "Musée d'Art Moderne, Publicité" to each picture frame of the *Section Publicité*. The slide projections inside the room juxtapose eagle figures from different historical periods with images of eagles from advertisements. In the lettering on the doorway arch and the presentation of exhibition catalogues in display cases, the *Section Publicité* invokes the conception of the museum as a whole. Broodthaers presented it in parallel to the *Section d'Art Moderne* (1972), for which he wrote the phrase "Private property" on the ground and cordoned it off with a museum-style barrier as well as signs that ultimately lead nowhere. The final sections of Broodthaers's museum presciently captured the merging of the exhibition format with that of public relations in support of an art restricted to the status of private property. By closing the *Musée d'Art Moderne* in its iteration as a publicity department, he also responded to the fact that the concerns of his museum had themselves entered the institutional world of art and become themes of exhibition events like documenta.

*Projection sur caisse* from the *Musée d'Art Moderne* is on view in Room 2 on the ground floor (p. 11).





“Let’s say rebus. And the theme, speculation about the difficulty of reading, that arises from the use of this material. Note that these plaques are manufactured like waffles.”

Between 1968 and 1972, Broodthaers produced a series of about thirty plastic plaques, mostly in editions of seven positive and seven negative copies, which he described not only as rebuses but also as “Poèmes industriels,” industrial poems. The plaques oscillate between relief-like object, picture, and “message”; pressed using the same process employed for books, they make reference to other elements from Broodthaers’s œuvre, such as the *Musée d’Art Moderne* or the artist’s open letters. By drawing on mechanical production processes and plastic, an everyday material that for Broodthaers’s generation still lacked historical perspective, the artist raises the question of the original. While the plaques undermine traditional requirements of originality, producing them in small editions can at the same time be understood to cite the tradition of limiting the casts of a sculpture to several copies.

The plaques act like display panels or direction signs, yet they lack an essential feature of these media—a clear message. Punctuation marks become images or break up words into their individual letters, illustration and description form a picture puzzle, and the *Plaque Vide* (1969, Engl. *Empty Plaque*) stages the absence of any label or instruction. Thus Broodthaers intervenes into the plaques’ conventional functions—to communicate and regulate behavior in public space, including that of the museum. In his industrial poems the artist confronts the bureaucratic aesthetics of the plaques with the verbal imagery of poetry. The plaques are clearly recognizable as a product of their time; however, they challenge the conventional use of plastic as a supposedly neutral carrier for equally neutral instructions. In *Académie I* (1968) for example, only several of the embossed words are in color and clearly legible, while others distinguish themselves from the black background only by their textured surface, demanding a great deal of effort on the part of the reader. Broodthaers directs attention to the materiality of language and turns the specific features of the embossed plastic plaque against itself. The deciphering of the world by means of designation and label is stripped of the supposed objectivity of its administrative tone. Broodthaers reveals this project instead as an instrument of interpretational sovereignty over the material world and our behavior toward it.

**F**irst presented at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1975, Broodthaers's *Décor. A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers* is an investigation of the motif of décor based on the relationship between war and comfort or leisure. The two rooms of the installation later served as a film-set for *La Bataille de Waterloo* (1975, Engl. *The Battle of Waterloo*) the shooting of which coincided with the so-called Trooping the Colour, an elaborately staged annual military parade. Both the film and *Décor* explore the disappearance of immediate experience as it relates to the horror scenarios of war. In a sober arrangement, Broodthaers combined historical furnishings and canons, a garden furniture suite and a modern arsenal of weaponry. The set-up and mode of presentation allow the aesthetic character of the weapons to surface, restricting the relationship between form and lethal function to its visual dimension. Broodthaers confronts the spectacle of war with the private comfort of viewership—a confrontation that culminates in the presentation of a Waterloo puzzle. Framed by the petit bourgeois furnishings of the twentieth century, the nineteenth century war becomes a game and a problem to be solved. *La Bataille de Waterloo* further alludes to the encampment from which Arthur Wellesley (later the Duke of Wellington), joined by his officers and their wives and mistresses, observed the battle from a safe distance on the day preceding the defeat of Napoleon.

With the period room, *Décor* makes reference to a form of museum presentation in which different types of objects are displayed within historically reconstructed interiors. However, the objects in Broodthaers's nineteenth- and twentieth-century rooms are all props or items from London furniture stores. The supposed "authenticity" of the period room and its promise to say something meaningful about the lives of past eras are revealed as illusions in *Décor*. It becomes apparent that the writing of history is characterized not by a neutral re-enactment of past events; rather, it is always a construction and thus shaped by the social relations of the present. The power of the museum as an institution is expressed above all in its ability to select certain aspects of the past and define them as historically meaningful or to ignore them entirely. Broodthaers, by contrast, offers no definitive interpretation for either his objects or the event cited in the work's title. In the Battle of Waterloo, his "conquest" of the institution as a by now acclaimed artist is also the setting for an inevitable downfall. Yet the established interpretation of Waterloo is also called into question: with the inclusion of Wellesley's perspective, its status as a synonym for defeat is undermined.

**S**alle Blanche (1975, Engl. *White Room* or *Cleanroom*) is a full-scale reproduction of Broodthaers's living and working space in Brussels. It was there that he opened the first section of his *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* in 1968. The postcards and shipping crates of the *Section XIXe siècle* were replaced here by terms from the art and museum world, written in neatly curved handwriting directly on the wooden walls. Just as Broodthaers opened his fictitious museum with empty shipping crates, he now declared its place of origin a shell—an empty box whose cultural significance consists solely in its designation and definition through language. Illuminated by spotlights, the social space, which Broodthaers enlivened with discussions about art and society, is transformed into sculpture and a motionless textual image at once. As a retrospective replica and work of art, it is no longer accessible—real space is frozen into a space of language and a visual image.

**T**raditionally placed at the edge of the pictorial surface, apart from what is being depicted, the signature itself becomes the subject of Broodthaers's work. For *La Signature Série 1 Tirage illimité* (1969, Engl. *The Signature Series 1 Unlimited edition*)—which, contrary to its title, was published in sixty unnumbered and unsigned copies, Broodthaers printed nothing more than his handwritten signature, the initials M.B. The choice of subject and the use of reproduction suspend the historically evolved power of the signature to account for the authenticity of the work and to serve as a necessary feature of identification and distinction. In its repetition and reproduction, Broodthaers empties the signature of its meaning and reduces it to lettering. In *Gedicht — Poem — Poème / Change — Exchange — Wechsel* (1973), he makes visible the context in which this lettering operates as a symbol, a numerical quantity that can be added. While part I sums up the copies of Broodthaers's poetry volumes that have been sold, part II, section c generates sums in different currencies out of the signatures. Juxtaposed with the poems, the latter might correspond to the monetary value that Broodthaers's visual art achieved on the market, as opposed to his poetry. Yet what mediates between artistic value and monetary value? By recording the signatures as measurable quantities, he calls attention to the economy of the art market, in which the value of a work of art is inseparably connected to the name of the artist. Yet a signature has no value in itself. Like money, it represents a value that only finds expression in relation and exchange.

*Une Seconde d'Éternité — d'après une idée de Charles Baudelaire* (1970), *M. B.* (1970–71) and *M. B., 24 images/seconde* (1970) were conceptualized and exhibited together. In these works, Broodthaers examines the subject of the signature in relation to film. *One Second of Eternity — After an idea by Charles Baudelaire* consists of twenty-four individual frames on which Broodthaers has drawn his signature in twenty-four individual steps. In *M. B., 24 images/second* Broodthaers parodically reverses the paradoxical relation between duration and momentariness, static and moving image, by connecting the footage on the reverse side of the cardboard to form an endless loop. The two *M. B.* works (1970–71) present the twenty-fourth image as positive and negative reproductions on plastic plaques resembling the “Poèmes industriels,” the industrial poems. Because the film's plot consists entirely of the drawing of the signature, its completion and the ending of the film are collapsed into one another; the gesture of drawing is solidified in the lettering embossed on the plaques, which can be reproduced as often as desired. Instead of marking the ending of a work and constituting it as a work of art, the signature only displays its own completion and thus the absence of the artwork—and by extension, the emptiness of the myth of the artist.

**A**n older poster advertising the species of fish available on the North Sea coast in French and Flemish serves as the point of departure for *Citron-Citroen* — *Réclame pour la Mer du Nord* (1974, Engl. *Lemon-Lemon* — *Advertisement for the North Sea*). Broodthaers added the French and Flemish words “citron-citroen” to the bottom of the poster in lemon-yellow print on a black rectangular background. Whereas the illustrative poster combines the terms and images to create an ordering scheme (fruits of the sea), the words beneath it, unaccompanied by pictures, are merely linked to the poster by a number 2. No juice from Broodthaers’s linguistic lemons can be sprinkled on the fish. Instead, the didactic scheme of the illustration is unmasked by means of its own graphic devices.

With *Le Manuscrit trouvé dans une Bouteille* (1974, Engl. *The Manuscript found in a Bottle*), Broodthaers exhibits the subject of a tale by Edgar Allan Poe of the same title, as an object. The cardboard packing is inscribed with the work’s title, with wrapping paper that reads: “The Object: An ordinary bottle, used for white Bordeaux wine. [...] The Subject: It’s the tale of Edgar Allan Poe ‘The Manuscript found in a bottle’ [...]” The bottle itself is printed with the word “manuscript” while its interior is empty. By declaring the bottle a manuscript, Broodthaers reverses the order of content and vessel, playing on the bottle’s promise to deliver a message. This promise, however, is no more associated with a specific author than the message of the work, whose subject is neither Poe nor the narrator of his tale, but the narration itself.

*Bateau Tableau* (1973, Engl. *Marine Scene*) is based on a seascape by an unknown nineteenth-century painter. Broodthaers studied the structural configuration of the painting in a series of images, from the motif to the application of paint to the gilt frame. The slide projection exhibits a nearly cinematic structure: Detailed close-ups of individual parts, juxtaposed with the “total” shot of the painting, evoke a sense of moving images in the viewer’s imagination. Through the assonance of the titular words, motif and medium, representation and image-bearing material are intertwined. Broodthaers was amused by the fact that the pronunciations of the French words for ship — “bateau” — and picture — “tableau” — were so similar that, if one were to quickly repeat the words one after the other, one could “just as well talk about the newest ship as about the newest picture.”

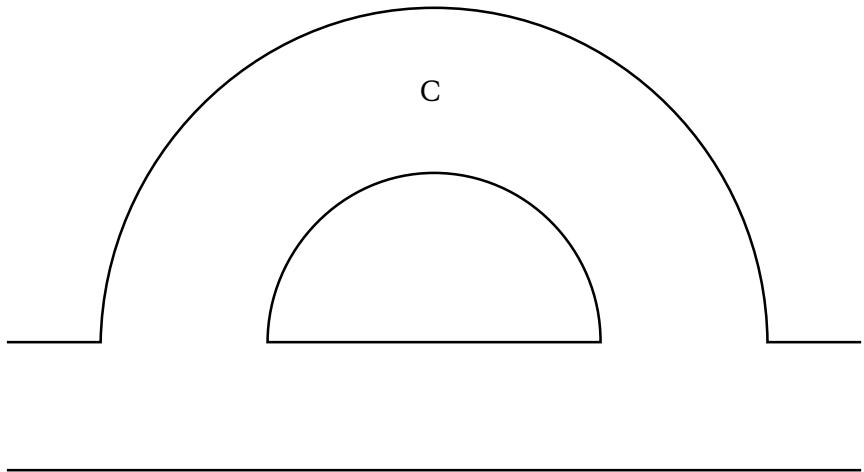
1.

2

**citron – citroen**

<p><b>PÊCHE AU FILET DIT : BAS-PARC. —</b></p> <p>1. Plie. — Pladijs.          2. Cabillaud. — Kabeljauw.          3. Rhod. — Terbot.</p>	<p><b>VISSCHERIJ MET STELNET.</b></p> <p>4. Sole. — Tong.          5. Rate. — Hog.          6. Barbu. — Griet.</p>	<p><b>PÊCHE AUX MOULES ET CRABES.</b>  <b>MOSSSEL EN KRABBE VANGST</b></p> <p>1. Crabe. — Krabbe.          2. Moule. — Mossel.</p>
---	--	--

# 2nd FLOOR





With the *Section Cinéma* (1971–72) of his museum of eagles, Broodthaers extended his consistent examination of the museum to the medium of film. He recognized the latter's technical innovations and institutions as equally decisive conditions in the production of modern culture and history. Contrary to classic cinematic conventions, his films are characterized by a liberal yet precise approach that includes the deliberate use of outdated film technologies. *Cinéma Modèle, Programme La Fontaine* served as a model for the *Section Cinéma* and the title for a film program in which Broodthaers presented five of his films, each of which was dedicated to one of his artistic or poetic role models: *Le Corbeau et le Renard* (1967), *La Clef de l'Horloge* (1957), *La Pluie* (1969), *La Pipe* (1969), *A Film by Charles Baudelaire* (1970).

His first film, *La Clef de l'Horloge* — *Poème cinématographique en l'honneur de Kurt Schwitters* (1957, Engl. *The Key to the Clock* — *A cinematographic poem in honor of Kurt Schwitters*) was produced during a Schwitters retrospective. Shot in the dark, a flashlight illuminates mostly isolated details from Schwitters's early Merz pictures. The beam of light breaks up the compositions of his pictures and treats their individual elements as cinematic objects: what was frozen in time in the Merz pictures (objects of various origins and time periods, such as pieces of wood, scraps of cloth, and old bus tickets combined to form collages) is explored in its objecthood, its individuality, and its historicity beyond the overarching composition. The changing status of the object in art over time was Broodthaers's constant subject. Here the object makes abstract, universal time—symbolized by the image of the clock—concrete and material; the object thus manifests as an aggregate of history, as archeological remembrance.

*A Film by Charles Baudelaire* (1970) is the fiction of a nineteenth-century film portraying the poet's memory of a trans-Pacific crossing in his youth. The voyage becomes an exploration of imagination, of memory, and of film's power of representation. The stations of Baudelaire's journey are alternately marked by indicating the date and by presenting pictures of a world map. A narrative arises from individual words which cumulatively generate powerful images: "shark," "Musée-Museum," "knife," "cook," "silence," "death," "torment," "noon," "famine," "scurvy," "midnight," "darkness," "mystery" appear on the screen. Among them, "Musée-Museum" sticks out, creating another narrative between disparate contexts. Against the backdrop of the world map, the museum appears in its relationship to cultural and colonial history. It designates a place where objects and ephemera from a wide range of locations, periods, and histories are shipped and assembled to form new meanings. And to which, as the subtitle indicates, "Enfants non admis" (Children are not admitted). Broodthaers's other version, *Un film de Charles Baudelaire* — *Carte politique du monde ou système de signification* (1970, Engl. *A Film by Charles Baudelaire* — *Political map of the world or system of signification*), was screened in cinemas simultaneous with the exhibition of *Section Cinéma* in Düsseldorf.

For Broodthaers, the medium of film represented an extension of language, as it unites writing (poetry), object (sculpture), and image (film). Often based on a particular painter or poet, his films frequently examine questions concerning the picture and painting or literary techniques. Thus *La Pipe*—*Gestalt. Abbildung. Figur. Bild* (1969–72) makes reference to René Magritte and his painting of a pipe. In the film, Broodthaers combines the static image of a smoking pipe with the terms “Gestalt,” “Abbildung,” “Bild,” and “Figur.” He draws attention to the movement of the object—the smoke, its impermanence in time. At the same time, the film stages the twofold absence of the object: it is absent because we see it only as a depiction, and it is absent in the image recorded on film, as the terms in the sequences “Bildung/Figure” and “Bild/Figure” only refer to the projected image itself, the image of the pipe having disappeared. Broodthaers employs the specific properties of the medium of film to further pursue Magritte’s painterly reflections: the German terms “Figur” and “Gestalt” appear to reference the pipe as a material object and not as filmic image. Their translation into French or English, however, renders them “figure,” meaning both “guise” and “figurine” but also “picture” or “illustration.” As such, the terms designate different relationships between object, image, and language. In Broodthaers’s linguistic game, they say “(As a pipe) this is a figure,” yet at the same time “This is an image (and thus not a pipe).” In this multilingual ambiguity, the terms first and foremost refer to themselves as words.

*La Pluie*—*Projet pour un texte* (1969, Engl. *Rain*—*Project for a text*) shows Broodthaers sitting in the garden writing on a sheet of paper while the rain falls on it, blurring the words. The writer’s failure is reminiscent of silent slapstick movies and takes up an important poetic technique employed by Stéphane Mallarmé, whose poem *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* (1897) transforms the spatial arrangement of lines and words into graphic structures. The act of reading no longer takes place in one direction; rather, meaning develops through the relations of words among one another and in their interplay with the white space of the page. As is also the case in other films, Broodthaers produces his very own movement and temporality without the use of cuts or changes in perspective. Reduced to a single shot, the film recalls the sequential conditions of writing and reading, its plot determined in real time by the apparent forces of nature. The visual experience is similar to that of watching an early film. Yet the important innovations of the medium stand out all the more clearly: the overlapping of image, soundtrack, and text, but also the difference between simultaneity and succession. The incessant movement of the rain and the image sequence result in the perpetual failure of the artistic project. The writing melts away without taking on form while the writer stoically continues his activity. Who is the author of the text here? And does the projection of the recorded image onto the screen remain a project—a draft—or is it a work?



*La Pluie, 1969*

*Interview With A Cat (C) by Marcel Broodthaers (MB), 1970*

- MB Is that a good painting, that one there? ... Does it correspond to what you expect from that very recent transformation which goes from Conceptual Art to this new version of a kind of figuration, as one might say?
- C Miaow
- MB Do you think so?
- C Miiaw..mm..miauw..miauw
- MB And yet this color is very clearly reminiscent of the painting that was being done in the period of abstract art, isn't it?
- C Miaaw..MiaaW..miiaw..miaw
- MB Are you sure that it's not a new form of academicism?
- C Miaw
- MB Yes, but if it's a daring innovation it's still a contestable one.
- C Miaw
- MB It's still...
- C Miaw
- MB Er... It's still a matter of markets...
- C Miaauw
- MB But we will have to sell these paintings.
- C Miauw
- MB What will the people who bought the previous things do?
- C Miauw
- MB Will they sell them?
- C Miiaww..mia
- MB Or will they continue? What do you think?... Because, at the moment, a lot of artists are wondering about that.
- C Miaauw..mm..mii..miAuw  
..maaw..Miaauw..miaw..mm  
..Miauw..miauw..MiAUW
- MB In that case close the museums!
- C MIAUW
- MB This is a pipe.
- C Miaouw
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C Miaouw
- MB This is a pipe!
- C MiaOUW
- MB This is not a pipe!
- C Miaouu
- MB This is a pipe!
- C MiaOUUW
- MB This is not a pipe!
- C Miaouuw
- MB This is not a pipe?
- C Miaw
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C Mm..
- MB This is a pipe!
- C Miaouw
- MB This is not a pipe!
- C MiaO..miAOUW
- MB This is a pipe!?
- C Miaouw
- MB This is not a pipe!
- C Miaou
- MB This is a pipe!
- C MiAOU..miao
- MB This is not a pipe!
- C Miaou..miaw
- MB This is a pipe.
- C Miaou
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C MiAOOUU
- MB This is a... This is a pipe!
- C Miao..
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C Miao..
- MB This is a pipe.
- C Miaouw
- MB This is not a pipe.

*La souris écrit rat*



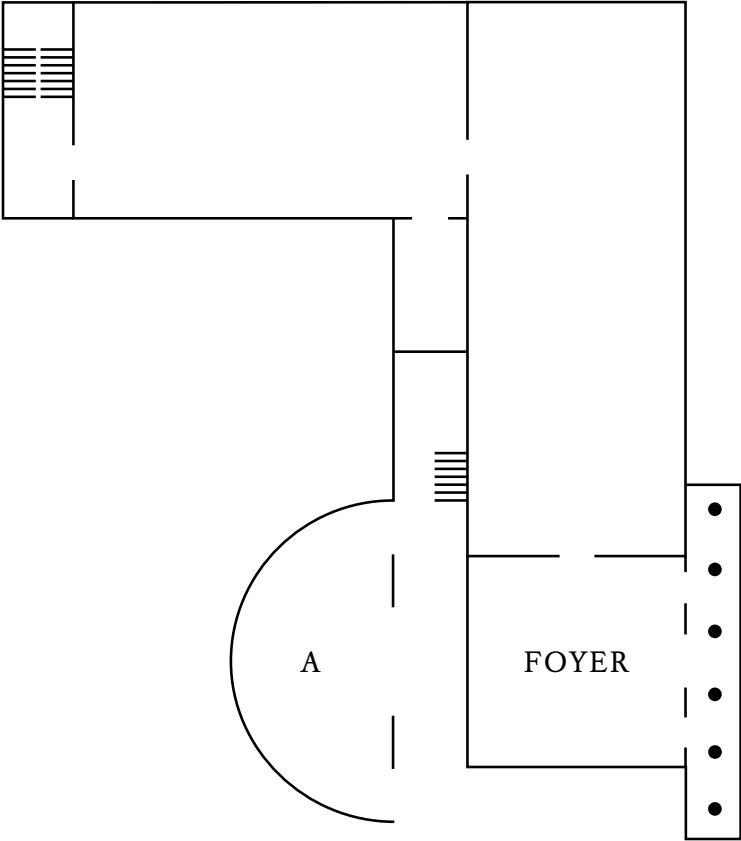
*à compte d'auteur, 1974, 10 p.*

*La souris écrit rat (à compte d'auteur), 1974*

- C Miaouuu
- MB This is a pipe?!
- C Mm..
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C Mm..mm..
- MB This is a pipe.
- C Miaow
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C MiaOUW
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C Miao..
- MB This is a pipe.
- C Miaouw
- MB Pipe is not.
- C Mmi..
- MB This is a pipe.
- C MiaOU
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C MiAAOUW
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C MiAou
- MB This is a pipe.
- C MiAAOU..mm..
- MB This is a pipe.
- C Miaaou
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C Miaao..mmi
- MB This is a pipe!
- C MiAAOUU
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C MiAAOUUW
- MB This is a pipe!
- C MIAAOU..MiAAOU..  
MiAOUW
- MB This is a pipe.
- C Miaouw
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C ..mm..Miao
- MB This is a pipe.
- C MiAOU..MiAOU..MiAOU  
..MiaouW
- MB This is not a pipe.
- C ..MiaOUW
- MB This is an interview given at the  
Musée d'Art Moderne, Départ-  
ement des Aigles, 12 Burgplatz,  
Düsseldorf.
- C MiAAAOUU..MiAAOU  
..MiAOOU..MiaOOUW  
..MiAAOU..MIAOU..  
MIAAOUW
- MB This is an interview given at the  
Musée d'Art Moderne, Départ-  
ement des Aigles, 12 Burgplatz,  
Düsseldorf.
- C Miaou..Miaouw

Transcription of an interview with a cat recorded at Musée d'Art Moderne,  
Département des Aigles, Düsseldorf, 1970.

# GROUND FLOOR



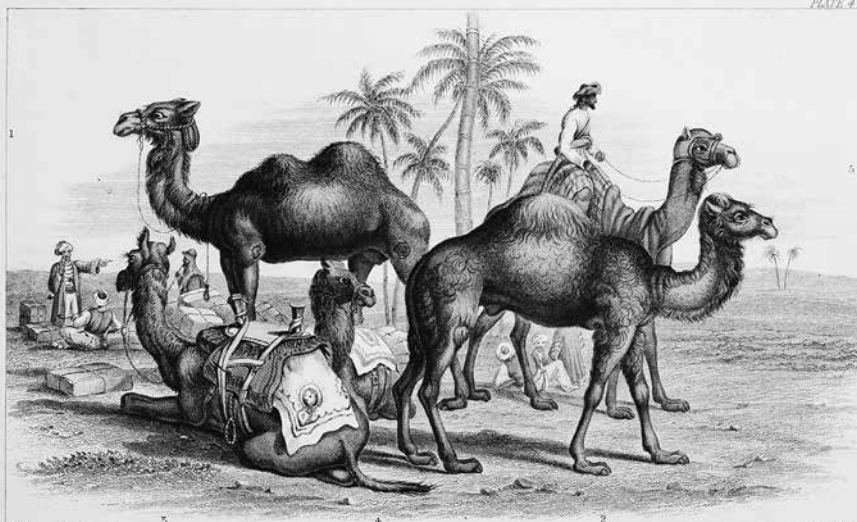
**L**ike *L'Entrée de l'Exposition, Jardin d'hiver II* (1974, Engl. *Winter Garden II*) also features an expansive arrangement of palm trees. In contrast to the palms in *Entrée*, they do not constitute an exhibition space within the exhibition, but instead form a “winter garden”: a setting of bourgeois leisure, which the artist furnished with photographic reproductions of nineteenth-century animal engravings that reflect the encyclopedic ambition of natural history and early universal museums. The winter garden is likewise defined by the modern principle of a radical distinction between nature and culture as opposites. Yet the strangeness and wildness of nature are above all the products of its domestication here as well. The redefinition of the palm as “exotic” interior decoration conceals the exploitative relationships and profit-seeking that underlay the process of colonial expansion, which played an instrumental role in the emergence of both the winter garden and the museum.

Broodthaers shot the film *Un Jardin d'Hiver (A B C)* (1974) in an earlier version of the winter garden. In addition to various views of the first *Jardin*, it shows the artist entering the museum in the company of a camel from the Antwerp Zoo: a desert animal in a palm-lined winter garden. He alternately presents the camel on a television screen, as the subject of historical prints, and finally in a direct camera shot, further visualizing the absurdity of its exotic attributions. Is the animal at all conceivable apart from its cultural representation? That is the question Broodthaers appears to ask in his film. His silent interaction with the camel, however, bears the possibility of overcoming the modern division between nature and culture, at least for a moment.



*au Jardin d'Hiver*

PLATE 47



*J. Stewart Del.*

*J. Macgregor Sc.*

1 BACTRIAN CAMEL. 2 ARABIAN CAMEL OR DROMEDARY. 3 & 4 DROMEDARIES CAPARISONED.  
5 POST CAMEL OF INDIA

Blackie & Son, Glasgow, Edinburgh & London

This guidebook is published  
on occasion of the exhibition

*Marcel Broodthaers*

Curated by Susanne Pfeffer

Fridericianum, Kassel

July 17, 2015–November 15, 2015

Opening hours

Tue–Sun 11–18 h

Editor

Susanne Pfeffer

Editing

Anna Sailer, Anna Weinreich

Texts

Ann-Charlotte Günzel,

Anna Sailer, Nina Tabassomi,

Anna Weinreich

Translations

Rebecca van Dyck, Arthur Lochmann,

John Southard

Proofreading

Ann-Charlotte Günzel, Dana Kopel,

Dorett Mumme, Dana Schütte

Graphic Design

Zak Group, London

Cover

*Portrait de Maria Gilissen (avec statif),*

1963–67; *La Signature Série 1 Tirage*

*illimité*, 1969

The exhibition is significantly supported  
by Maria Gilissen Broodthaers and  
Marie-Puck Broodthaers. We are deeply  
grateful for their support.

The exhibition is supported by  
Hessische Kulturstiftung

hessische  
kultur  
stiftung

Förderverein R.D. e.V.

Ariadne and Stefan Schreiter

Thanks to

Caroline Bouchard, Bernard Debluts

Responsible for the Fridericianum is the  
documenta und Museum Fridericianum  
Veranstaltungs-GmbH, a non-profit  
organization owned and financed by the  
documenta City of Kassel and the State  
of Hesse.

© 2015 Estate Marcel Broodthaers/  
Archiv Maria Gilissen/VG Bild-Kunst,  
Bonn and documenta und Museum  
Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH

© Photo p. 29: Dirk Pauwels/S.M.A.K.

Fridericianum

Friedrichsplatz 18

34117 Kassel

T +49 561 707 27 20

info@fridericianum.org

www.fridericianum.org

[illegible]

# MARCEL BROODTHAERS