

MARCEL BROODTHAERS: A RETROSPECTIVE IS THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF THE ARTIST'S WORK TO TAKE PLACE IN NEW YORK

Exhibition Explores Broodthaers's Critical, if Under-Recognized, Place in the History of 20th-Century Art

Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective

February 14–May 15, 2016

The Joan and Preston Robert Tisch Exhibition Gallery, sixth floor

Press Preview: Tuesday, February 9, 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., Conversation at 11:30 a.m.

NEW YORK, February 1, 2016—*Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective* is the first comprehensive survey of the artist's work to take place in New York, bringing together some 200 works, the majority made between the years 1963 to 1975. On view at The Museum of Modern Art from February 14 to May 15, 2016, the exhibition explores the critical if under-recognized place of Marcel Broodthaers (Belgian, 1924–1976) in the history of 20th-century art, and his extraordinary output across mediums that placed him at the center of international activity during the transformative decades of the 1960s and 1970s. *Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective* is organized by MoMA and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS) in Madrid. It is curated by Christophe Cherix, The Robert Lehman Chief Curator of Drawings and Prints at MoMA, and Manuel J. Borja-Villel, Director of MNCARS, with Francesca Wilmott, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Drawings and Prints, MoMA. The exhibition will travel to MNCARS in October 2016 and the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (KNW), Düsseldorf, in March 2017.

Throughout his career, from his early objects variously made of mussel shells, eggshells, and books of his own poetry; to his most ambitious project, the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (Museum of modern art, Department of eagles); and his distinctive Décors that set a precedent for what we call installation art today, the work of Broodthaers has had a profound influence on a broad range of contemporary artists, and he remains vitally relevant to cultural discourse at large.

In 2011, MoMA acquired the Daled Collection, one of the defining collections of American and European Conceptual art of the late 1960s and 1970s. The collection brought to MoMA an unparalleled grouping of over 60 works by Broodthaers and a rich archive of rarely seen ephemera and photographs, making New York a new center for the presentation and study of the artist's work.

Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective is organized in four sections within The Joan and Preston Robert Tisch Exhibition Gallery, but begins in the sixth-floor atrium with *L'Entrée de l'exposition* (The entry to the exhibition, 1974), a work composed of prints, photographs, and a painting displayed among leafy palm trees.

The first gallery is dedicated to Broodthaers's poetry, written from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, displayed alongside his earliest experiments in photography and film. Broodthaers came of age in Brussels in the 1940s, a time of enormous political and economic upheaval. He briefly served as a messenger for the Belgian Resistance during World War II and joined the Communist Party for a short period in 1943. Until the age of 40, he identified as a poet and earned a living by occasionally dealing rare books and by working as a journalist, documenting the rapidly changing landscape of postwar Europe in photographs and articles. During these formative years, Broodthaers began publishing books of his poetry and established relationships with leading figures in Belgian literature and art, including the Surrealist painter René Magritte. In 1956, Broodthaers shot his first film, *La Clef de l'horloge, Poème cinématographique en l'honneur de Kurt Schwitters* (The key to the clock, Cinematic poem in honor of Kurt Schwitters), in an exhibition of work by Schwitters at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. Broodthaers's film comprises a sequence of close-up shots of Schwitters's assemblages, paralleling Schwitters's own method of collaging together found materials. Although Broodthaers remained largely unrecognized during this time, he developed a distinct poetic language—characterized by puns, the spatial arrangement of text on the page, and recurring symbols (from the eagle to the mussel shell)—that would carry into his work as a visual artist.

In 1964, Broodthaers announced his entry into the visual arts by transforming the unsold copies of his last volume of poetry, *Pense-Bête* (Memory aid), into a sculpture for his first solo exhibition. Building on motifs that he had first used in poetic verse, Broodthaers's earliest artworks did not represent his turn away from poetry but rather his effort to extend its reach. As a self-trained artist, Broodthaers eschewed traditional artistic skill, often making sculptures by embedding found objects in plaster. His irreverent sense of humor and love of wordplay are visible in his use of mussel shells and eggshells, which he obtained from a local restaurant and which became his signature materials. In French, the word *moule* means both "mussel" and "mold"; in Broodthaers's hands, the discarded shells gave form to artworks with multitudes of poetic meanings. Ever skeptical of authority, Broodthaers made work that reflected his political concerns, and he harnessed Belgian associations with mussel shells, coal, and *frites* (fries) in order to confront his national identity. For the remainder of his life, he frequently returned to these objects, altering their presentations, creating photographic reproductions, and exhibiting them in new contexts.

In 1968, Broodthaers announced that he was no longer an artist and appointed himself director of his own museum, which he called the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (Museum of modern art, Department of eagles). Instead of being dedicated to the display of art objects, it often focused on a museum's supporting activities—such as documentation, publicity, and finance—which Broodthaers represented through announcements, publications, films, slide projections, and objects. Conceived in the aftermath of the 1968 student protests against the war in Vietnam and inequality worldwide, Broodthaers's project provided a richly layered commentary

on the role of art and the function of the museum in society. Assuming the role of an authority figure, he critiqued the museum from within. Over the course of four years Broodthaers rolled out 12 temporary presentations of the *Musée d'Art Moderne*, which he called "sections," in seven European cities. Dispersed geographically and largely ephemeral, the project was never intended to be viewed as a whole. It is represented in the exhibition by a selection of fragments and one section that remains intact, the *Section Publicité* (Publicity section).

In 1972, Broodthaers concluded his tenure as the self-appointed director of the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (Museum of modern art, Department of eagles) and declared that he was becoming an artist again. He signaled his return to art making by developing a new form of painting, one that never required him to pick up a paintbrush. To create his *Peintures littéraires* (Literary paintings), Broodthaers printed words onto canvas, and in *La Salle blanche* (The white room), he hired a sign painter to inscribe a number of words, including *toile* (canvas) and *huile* (oil), on the walls and ceiling. From 1974 until his death in 1976, Broodthaers organized immersive large-scale displays in which examples of his past work were shown with new works and borrowed objects. He called these exhibitions *Décors*. By doing so, and by employing outdated installation tropes—palm trees, carpets, 19th-century display cases—Broodthaers evoked ideas of decoration, ornamentation, and theater that starkly contrasted with the modernist slogan "art for art's sake." In French, the word *décor* also suggests a film set, and, fittingly, Broodthaers shot a number of films in his retrospectives, harking back to his first film, set in a Kurt Schwitters exhibition. Devising new presentations of works made throughout his artistic career, Broodthaers subverted the evolutionary logic of a museum retrospective and demonstrated how objects take on various meanings in different display contexts.

SPONSORSHIP:

Major support for the exhibition is provided by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis, Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro, The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art, and Jill and Peter Kraus.

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PUBLICATIONS:***Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective***

Edited by Christophe Cherix and Manuel J. Borja-Villel. Text by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Jean-François Chevrier, Thierry de Duve, Doris Krystof, Cathleen Chaffee, Kim Conaty, Rafael García Horrillo, Christian Rattemeyer, Sam Sackeroff, Teresa Velázquez, and Francesca Wilmott.

Published to accompany the retrospective, the exhibition catalogue examines the artist's work across all mediums and includes new translations of many of his texts. Essays by the exhibition organizers and a host of major scholars provide historical and theoretical context for the artist's work. Hardcover, \$75. ISBN 978-0-87070-962-3. Published by The Museum of Modern Art and available at the MoMA stores and online at momastore.org. Distributed to the trade by ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the U.S. and Canada, and by Thames & Hudson outside the U.S. and Canada.

The Conquest of Space: Atlas for the Use of Artists and the Military

By Marcel Broodthaers

Atlas—measuring 1 5/8 by 1 1/8 in. (4 by 3 cm), with a simple black slipcase—is a miniature book by Marcel Broodthaers, made after the model of the 15th-century *incunable*. It was originally published in 1975 in an edition of 50 numbered copies, and is Broodthaers's last book, created shortly before his death, in 1976.

The object plays on language and functions in a manner characteristic of Broodthaers's sense of humor: it refers to the use of atlases by militaries pursuing territorial conquest—a task for which this tiny edition is absurdly unsuitable—in order to make artists aware of their own such victories. Broodthaers deepened the level of intrigue by not following any established geographical organization; instead, he chose to present a small selection of countries in alphabetical order, each represented graphically at the same size.

In conjunction with the exhibition, MoMA will publish a facsimile edition of the artist's book, making it available again for the first time since the original printing. It will be produced in a limited edition of 500 copies, each encased in a clothbound clamshell case. \$175. ISBN 978-1-63345-011-0. Published by The Museum of Modern Art and available at the MoMA stores and online at momastore.org. Distributed to the trade by ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the U.S. and Canada, and by Thames & Hudson outside the U.S. and Canada.

A deluxe version, published in an edition of 50 hand-numbered copies, will contain the book and an uncut 19 1/4 x 24 3/4 in. press sheet, as the artist himself included in the original publication, in a large clothbound clamshell case. \$500. ISBN 978-1-63345-015-8. Published by The Museum of Modern Art and available exclusively at the MoMA stores and online at momastore.org.

AUDIO TOUR:

The audio tour accompanying the exhibition is narrated by Francesca Wilmott and invites visitors to explore the work of Broodthaers through the artist's writing and poetry, read by Christophe Cherix. MoMA Audio+ is available free of charge at the Museum and is also available for streaming and download on MoMA's free app on iTunes, and on moma.org/audio. MoMA Audio+ is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

WORKSHOPS:

Marcel Broodthaers-Inspired Workshops

MoMA Books, second floor

March 15, 22, 26, and April 5, 12, 19, 12:00–3:00 p.m.

During the exhibition, poet Elizabeth Zuba leads visitors in an interactive workshop dedicated to Broodthaers's relationship to language. These drop-in workshops are free with Museum admission and open to all ages (children must be accompanied by an adult). Space is limited and offered on a first-come, first-served basis.

RELATED COURSE:

Marcel Broodthaers: Poet, Artist, Curator
Mondays, April 11–May 2, 2016, 6:00 p.m.
Instructor: Francesca Wilmott

On the occasion of the first New York retrospective of Marcel Broodthaers, this class will provide an in-depth investigation of Broodthaers's 12-year artistic career, contextualizing it within the broader artistic, social, and political moment of the 1960s and early '70s. Students will explore the curatorial process while studying Broodthaers's work in the exhibition galleries.

[Online Registration](#)

Non Member: \$325; Member and Corporate Member employees: \$275; Student/Educator: \$200

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