

MASI Lugano

Museo d'arte
della Svizzera italiana,
Lugano

Via Canova 10
6900 Lugano

comunicazione@masilugano.ch
+41 (0)91 815 7962
www.masilugano.ch

Marcel Broodthaers Industrial Poems

01 May – 13 November 2022

Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano

MASI | LAC

PRESS RELEASE

Lugano, 14 April 2022

Marcel Broodthaers (Saint-Gilles, 1924 – Cologne, 1976) is one of the most complex, multifaceted artistic figures of the twentieth century. Viewed as one of the greatest exponents of conceptual art, with the eye of an artist, the mind of a poet and the gaze of a sociologist, Broodthaers critically explored not only the relationship between art, language and communication but also the mechanisms, including those related to financial aspects that underpin museums and art. MASI Lugano is dedicating the exhibition "Marcel Broodthaers – Industrial Poems" to this twentieth century master. The unprecedented event, hosted in the LAC venue, presents the main motifs featured on the famous series of plaques created by Broodthaers between 1968 and 1972. Inspired by the materials, aesthetic and production process of street signage, the artist's *Industrial Poems* are a series of plastic signs featuring enigmatic combinations of words, letters, signs and shapes. Belying their apparent resemblance to road signs, the plaques do not communicate a clear message but rather set out to disorient the onlooker. The way the *Industrial Poems* were produced, conceived and presented also highlights the contradictory relationship between reproducible industrial objects and original, unique works of art. The exhibition, produced by the WIELS museum in Brussels in close collaboration with the heirs of Marcel Broodthaers, features 72 plaques, including different versions and lesser-known variations. It also presents unique prototypes, as well as a large group of drawings and preparatory sketches for the plaques, three films and an audio work entitled *Interview with a Cat*, all in relation to a selection of the artist's 'Open Letters'.

The exhibition is organized in collaboration with WIELS, Brussels. Curated by Dirk Snauwaert and Charlotte Friling, the MASI Lugano presentation is curated by Francesca Benini in collaboration with Maria Gilissen Broodthaers, Marie-Puck Broodthaers and the Marcel Broodthaers Succession.

The layout

The show takes visitors on a fluid journey through various themes, periods and obsessions that characterized Marcel Broodthaers' artistic universe: from the first *Industrial Poems* to his fictional

museum, the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, from cinema to references to Magritte and Mallarmé, to experiments on the dividing line between the written word and visual arts.

Broodthaers created his first plaques in the spring of 1968, and they fully reflect the socio-political climate of the period, with its student uprisings. With *Académie I* and *Académie II*, the first subject in the series of 36 plaques, the artist opted for a deliberately incongruous, provocative title in an era of anti-academicism. Broodthaers' works devise rebuses, contradictions and oxymorons that play with language and perception. With titles that are conceptual riddles in their own right, the two plaques *Multiple (Multiplié) illimité* and *Multiple (Multiplié) inimitable* also explore the issue of the **reproducibility of art in multiples**.

Another famous project is *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, a fictitious museum he set up in his home in Brussels in September 1968. Appointing himself director and curator, though hardly ever exhibiting works of art, this work critiqued **the functioning and dynamics of the museum institution**. Several works on display are linked to this project, including *Museum, enfants non admis*. Here the wording in red, "enfants non admis", picks up on the conventions of street signage and the rules and instructions imparted to users of public institutions. The plaque *Musée d'Art Moderne, Les Aigles, Section XIXe siècle (Les Portes)* – the only one in such a large format – is the size of an actual door, and seems to suggest that the museum offers shelter from an imagined downpour. *Chez votre fournisseur (Le Vinaigre des Aigles)* refers to a poem by the artist and the figure of the eagle, a recurring subject in his visual work.

Many of the plaques and Open Letters reference **René Magritte**, a model for Broodthaers. The antithesis between real objects and their "translation" into words or images, which is at the heart of Magritte's practice, is also taken up by Broodthaers in the film *La Pipe (Gestalt, Abbildung, Figur, Bild)*, in which objects appear and disappear behind a cloud of smoke, highlighting the ambiguous, murky nature of the practice of representing objects by means of images. The pipe crops up again in the sound work of 1970 *Interview with a Cat*, in which the artist questions a cat on contemporary art (visitors can listen to the piece using the headphones supplied, or on their phones through a QR code).

Bringing poetry, language and writing into the visual arts is another key theme in Broodthaers' work. In this area, the poet Stéphane Mallarmé was a key point of reference for him, by virtue of having opened poetry to musicality, space and rhythm and giving it "visual qualities". Several works related to this strand focus on punctuation marks, such as *L'Alphabet* and *Modèle : la virgule*, with the comma expressing a break, standing in for silence. The words grouped together on the plaque *Société*, evoke associative and symbolist poetry: though intriguing and suggestive, they do not seem to express a clear meaning, but rather to be combined according to their sound and visual appearance. **Disorientation** appears to be the aim of the arrows pointing in opposite directions on the sign *Museum - Musée, Section Cinéma*, which refers to the section of his museum that opened in Düsseldorf in January 1971. The museum project, and his production of *Industrial Poems*, came to an end in 1972, when he received official recognition at documenta 5 in Kassel.

Since then, the *Industrial Poems* have continued to stand as a tribute to Broodthaers' contribution to contemporary aesthetics: his playful, poetic manipulations of language, engaging with different interpretations and levels of perception, fly in the face of the universal, standardized, boringly unequivocal

messages of this era of technology and computing.

The catalogue

The exhibition catalogue, entitled "Marcel Broodthaers. Open Letters and Conversations", edited by Francesca Benini, is co-published by Casagrande and MASI Lugano. It contains the Italian translations of a number of Open Letters and conversations with Marcel Broodthaers.

Event

On Sunday 1 May at 11 am the LAC venue will be hosting a conversation in French with Maria Gilissen Broodthaers and Charlotte Friling, curator of the exhibition at the WIELS museum, Brussels.

Press contacts

MASI Lugano

Press Office

+41 (0)91 815 7962

comunicazione@masilugano.ch

For Italy

ddlArts+battage

Alessandra de Antonellis

+39 339 363 7388

alessandra.deantonellis@ddlstudio.net

Margherita Baleni

+39 347 445 2374

margherita.baleni@battage.net

Exhibition venues

MASI | LAC

Piazza Bernardino Luini 6

CH – 6900 Lugano

MASI | Palazzo Reali

Via Canova 10

CH – 6900 Lugano

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Press images

01.

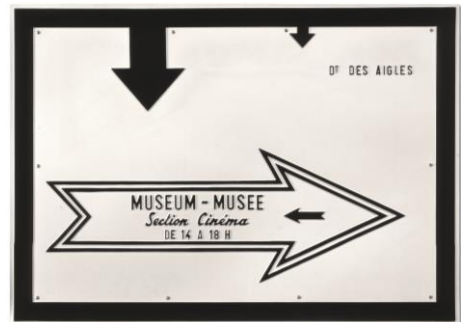
Marcel Broodthaers

Museum – Musée, Section Cinéma

1971

Painted vacuum-formed plastic

© Succession Marcel Broodthaers / 2022,
ProLitteris, Zurich



02.

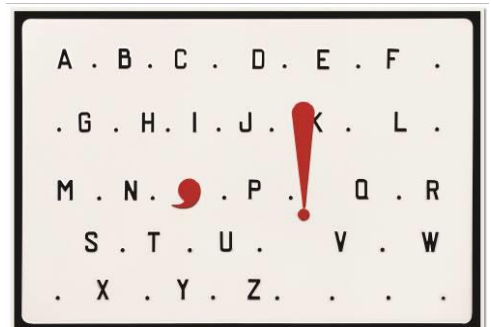
Marcel Broodthaers

L'Alphabet

1969

Painted vacuum-formed plastic

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ProLitteris, Zurich



03.

Marcel Broodthaers

*Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des
Aigles, Service Publicité*

1971

Painted vacuum-formed plastic

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04.

Marcel Broodthaers

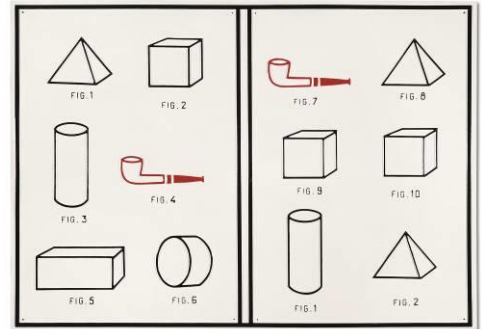
*Livre Tableau ou Pipes et formes
académiques*

1970

Painted vacuum-formed plastic

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ProLitteris, Zurich



05.

Marcel Broodthaers outside the Section
Publicité of the Musée d'Art Moderne,
Département des Aigles, Neue Galerie,
documenta 5, Kassel, 1972

© Maria Gilissen

© Succession Marcel Broodthaers – Sabam

2021



06.

Marcel Broodthaers

Puzzle (Triangle)

1969

Painted vacuum-formed plastic

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07.

Marcel Broodthaers

Porte A

1969

Painted vacuum-formed plastic

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08.

Marcel Broodthaers

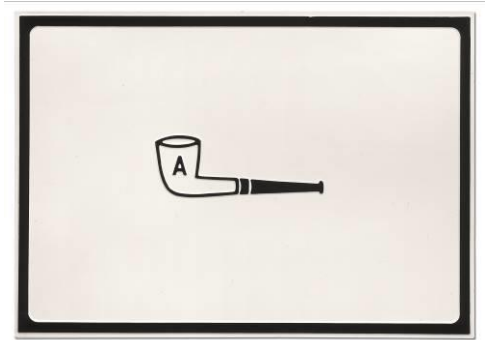
Pipe alphabet

1969

Painted vacuum-formed plastic

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09.

Marcel Broodthaers

1. David 2. Courbet 3. Ingres 4. Ingres 5.

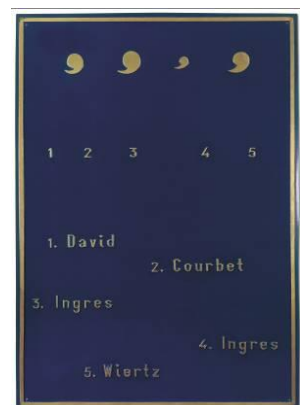
Wiertz

1971

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