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guillaume bijl

exhibition

curated by frederic montornés

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25.11.2017—28.04.2018

Guillaume Bijl was born in Antwerp in 1946 and burst into the art world when, after a short period in the theater, he decided to start his career in visual arts without having an artistic education, learning by himself knowledge and techniques in painting, jumping from one to another artistic style seeking for the language that best suited with the way he understands the world. Sick of the failure of this pictorial self-taught school that kept him obsessively busy between the ages of 15 and 25, Bijl abandons the dual dimensionality to consecrate himself, in the late 70s, towards the realization of an oeuvre that, in the wake of his scene knowledge but also of the conceptual art basis, manages to involve the spectator in a straight, immediate way and without necessarily realizing it.

Pushed by the artistic situation lived in Belgium in the 70s, Bijl writes in 1979 *Art Liquidation Project*, a sort of seminal statement through which questions those who consider that art is little functional, that the profile of new trends is less than degrading or that the anarchic posture held by some artists of the contemporaneity are a danger for the art orthodoxy and the creative conventionalisms.

Through this statement, pushed by the Belgium government's lack of interest in culture and creativity, Bijl anticipates to the existence of a society whose culture could be judged according to its profitability –does it remind to cultural industries?– and in which culture democratization perpetuates a sort of subsidy destined not to an investigation but to the encouragement of the expectations level of an increasingly wider public. Even though from this moment Bijl's work evolves to a conceptual level, his works are still considered ironical answers to the spectator participation within the artwork –so trendy in the 60s– as well as a complaint towards the art system and the economy that sustains it.

Consecrated for 40 years to the realization of installations that, placed between reality and fiction, are a provocation to the world of art as well as to our consumer society, Bijl makes and shows, being a mirror of our society, what tomorrow can be seen as still lives of our present.

First Bijl's installation, along with the publication of his statement and the determination of the direction of his works since 1979, is the driving school carried out in April of that same year in Ruimte Z Gallery in Antwerp. Recreated as a tri-dimensional illusion of what a driving school would be where a gallery was placed, what Bijl offers the spectator is the possibility of being an actor in the space or interspace where the real is inevitably united with the artificial or fictional. The paradox of this place demonstrably useful for the community was important because it was deprived of its value in use. Because springing from the idea of being a spectator on the street, this ready-made space provoked the confusion between the people who went to visit the exhibition and the people who went to ask for driving school lessons.

As the artist says, the ways the intervention could be interpreted were:

- the fictional situation approaching, meaning, showing a gallery's aim (for an art public) in front of the birth of a new driving school (for the pedestrian or a non-specific art public).
- the demonstration of a trendy phenomenon of an era (a driving school) shown with absolute banality and, among all, with a lot of irony.
- in the way that everything went on in a gallery space, the possibility of interpreting the driving school as a tri-dimensional image, a sculpture, a ready-made or, why not, a still life.

As a result of the readings derived from this intervention, Bijl started to make Transformation Installations in different places and moments. A production that, presented to the spectator under the way of any kind of “useful actions”, is what shapes the visual register that, of our present, this artist carries out.

To summarize the typologies of this visual epic through which Bijl questions our present and ordinariness, the artist himself qualifies very precisely his production in four categories and an appendix for subsequent works:

-**Transformation installations:** installations in which reality is reproduced within the non-reality, an art space. A kind of proposal in which, as this installation made ad hoc for ADN Platform, the space mutates.

-**Situation installations:** installations in which non-reality (art) inscribes itself within the reality, the public space. Proposals where the event echoes in a space.

-**Compositions:** Works conceived as archaeological or contemporary still lifes.

-**Sorry works:** little inconsistent and abstract assemblies made from existent objects and pointing out the most poetical and absurd dimension of his work.

-**Cultural tourism:** works made since 1990 and in which history and tourism are related.

Convinced that life is not fake, but the society that shelters it due to value's artificiality is, capitalism and its paradoxes, unstoppable contamination, all level exploitation and even wars, Bijl's work, in any of its categories, is a prehistory of our civilization at the precise moment that he depicts it. These are simulations or “contemporary sets” meant to explore the boundary between art and social reality inspired by the most ordinary, trivial and close to our everyday life. A production that, bringing the complexity of social processes as Duchamp did through the dialogue with the objects, more than creating an illusion of reality, points out the illusory character of what surrounds us.

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Guillaume Bijl, 1946

Guillaume Bijl lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium. Self-taught in painting, Bijl emerges in the International artistic scene after his outstanding first exhibition at Galerij Z in Antwerp in 1979 and the shift that it represents in his career.

Bijl has also participated in international events like **Venice Biennial** (1988 and 2009), **Documenta Kassel** (1992), **Sidney Biennial** (1992), **Lyon Biennial** (1993 and 2011), **Sonsbeek'93**, **Busan Biennial** (2006), **Skulptur Projekte Münster** (2007), **Istambul Biennial** (2013), **Manifesta** (2016), etc. He has been teaching in Münster Kunstakademie from 2001 to 2011 and awarded in 2012 with the **IV Fine Arts Award** of Antwerp. His works are part of numerous public and private collections all over the world.

After his participation in the **III International Contemporary Art Biennial, Edge 92**, which took place in Madrid in 1992, this exhibition is the first solo show that Bijl carries out in our country.

Web <http://www.guillaumebijl.be/>