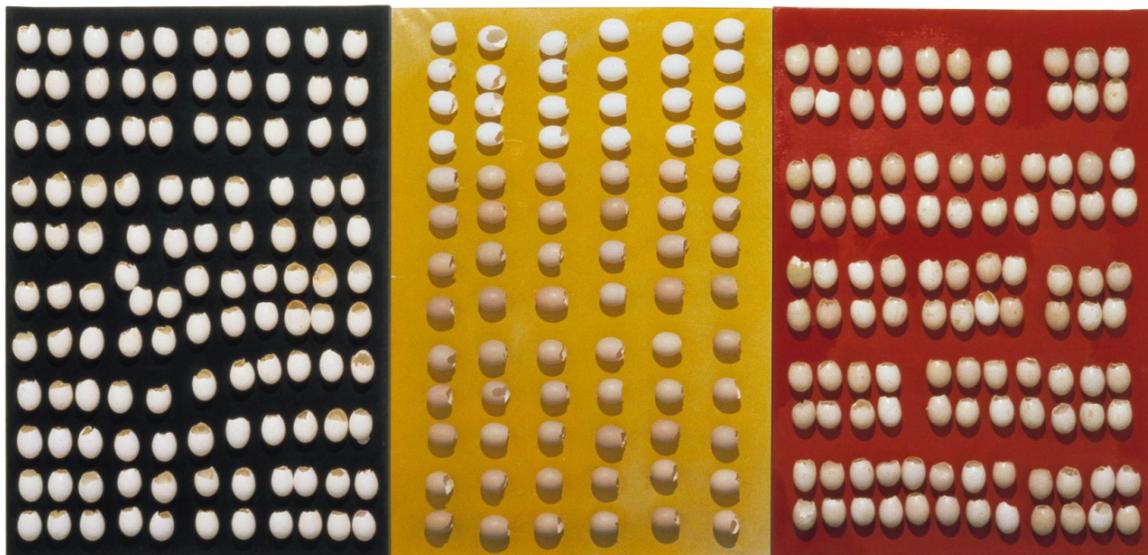


## Marcel Broodthaers. A Retrospective



MARCEL BROODTHAERS  
*Sin título (Triptico)*, 1965-1966  
Cáscaras de huevo sobre tres lienzos pintados  
100 x 70 x 10 cm cada uno  
Panel negro y amarillo: M.-C. & Ch. Firmenich-Guillissen / Pierre Huber, Art & Public, Ginebra; Panel rojo: Colección Sylvio Perlstein, Amberes  
Imagen cortesía de Maria Gilissen Archives of Marcel Broodthaers  
© The Estate of Marcel Broodthaers c/o SABAM Belgium – VEGAP 2016

*Untitled (Triptych)*, 1965-66  
Eggshells on three painted canvases  
Each canvas: 100 x 70 x 10 cm  
Yellow and black panels: M.-C. & Ch. Firmenich-Guillissen / Pierre Huber, Art & Public, Geneva; red panel: Collection Sylvio Perlstein, Antwerp  
Image courtesy Maria Gilissen Archives of Marcel Broodthaers

- ORGANIZED BY:** Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and The Museum of Modern Art, New York
- CURATORS:** Manuel Borja-Villel, Museo Reina Sofía's director, and Christophe Cherix, chief curator of Drawings and Prints at MoMa
- COORDINATION:** Ana Ara and Rafael García
- ITINERARY:** MoMA, New York (February 14 – May 15, 2016)  
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (October 4, 2016 – January 9, 2017)  
The Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, (March 4 – June 11, 2017).
- RELATED ACTIVITIES:** *Encounter centred on Marcel Broodthaers. What happened to institutional critique?*  
October 5, 2016 - 7:00 p.m. / Sabatini Building, Auditorium

With the collaboration of:

On 4 October, the **Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía** inaugurated **Marcel Broodthaers. A Retrospective**, the most comprehensive anthological exhibition held to date on this artist, who was born in Belgium in 1924 and died in Germany in 1976. The show is organized jointly by the Museo Reina Sofía and The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York.

After the version that was shown at the MoMA in New York earlier this year, the exhibition now presents about **300 exhibits, including artworks and documentary material**, demonstrating the **multiple facets** of Marcel Broodthaers' work throughout his career.

This artist did not come into contact with the world of the visual arts until he was about forty, having dedicated himself previously to photography, literature, poetry and art criticism. He worked in several disciplines, including sculpture, painting and film, besides holding a series of exhibitions conceived as devices for presenting his own work.

His extraordinary production over the decades of the 1960s and 1970s made him **one of the most important artists on the international scene**, with an influence that remains today.

## The artist

Marcel Broodthaers decided in 1964 to become a visual artist. From those first years onwards, his whole production displays an urge to provide answers for the basic questions of the visual arts, constantly questioning the idea of representation and production.

From his early works made with mussels and eggshells to his later fictitious museum, the *Musée d'Art Moderne. Département des Aigles*, and his *Décors*, Broodthaers always maintained a unique position within the art world. Through a radical approach to the traditional focuses of poetry, film, literature or the exhibition itself, the Belgian artist found his own way to develop an oeuvre that allowed him to adopt a personal viewpoint toward Pop and Conceptual Art, both then nascent, as well as to critique the art system.

All through his career, Broodthaers questioned the form that could be adopted by an exhibition and the idea of what a museum should be, and his own shows, especially his last retrospectives, are works of art in themselves.

The Belgian artist always had a critical attitude towards contemporary artistic movements and the very structure of art, and this frequently led him to criticize Pop Art, Minimalism and Nouveau Réalisme as mere receptacles for avant-garde conventionalism. The facility with which the art market and institutions absorbed these movements was among his principal preoccupations.

Viewing artistic creation as fundamentally erroneous, Broodthaers proposed a critical focus that centered less on formal innovation than on the examination of the function of art in our society. The exhibition at the Reina Sofía scrutinizes this artist's decisive place in the artistic panorama of the 20th century and the importance of his message today. The Reina Sofía has



Marcel Broodthaers con René Magritte, Bruselas, 1966.  
Fotografía de Maria Glissen. Imagen cedida de Maria Glissen Archives of Marcel Broodthaers.  
© Maria Glissen. © The Estate of Marcel Broodthaers c/o SABAM Belgium - VEGAP 2016.

Marcel Broodthaers with René Magritte, Brussels, 1966.  
Photograph by Maria Glissen. Image courtesy Maria Glissen Archives of Marcel Broodthaers.

always paid special attention to this Belgian artist, dedicating a retrospective to him in 1992, and displaying his work almost permanently as part of its collection.

### An exhibition of exhibitions

The show now opening could be described as *an exhibition of exhibitions*, since it takes visitors on a tour of various presentations put together by the artist throughout his career, often including works of his own from different moments and so broadening their meaning.

The exhibition begins with ***The Exhibition Entrance*** (1974), a piece that simulates a sort of garden with palm fronds serving as an ornamental framework for a succinct display of editions and photographs by Broodthaers. From 1974 until his death in 1976, the artist organized large-scale exhibitions in which he showed examples of his earlier work, and also included new pieces and lent objects. Calling them **décor**, he made use in them of palms, carpets, 19th century display cases, and so on. In this way, Broodthaers summoned up ideas of decoration, ornamentation and theatre that contrasted clearly with the modernist slogan of “art for art’s sake”. In French, the word *décor* also suggests a film set (Broodthaers made a series of films of his retrospectives). The artist subverted the evolutionary logic of the museum retrospective by creating new presentations for works produced throughout his artistic career, showing how objects assume different meanings according to the context they are exhibited in.



MARCEL BROODTHAERS  
Moules sauce blanche (Mussels with white sauce) 1967  
Casseroles en céramique, coquilles de moules, persil et vinaigre blanc  
37,5 cm diam. - 48,5 cm alt.  
Collection particulière, Nueva York  
© The Estate of Marcel Broodthaers OP SABAM Belgium - VEGAP 2016  
Moules sauce blanche (Mussels with white sauce) 1967  
Faisandé por: mussel shells, parsley, and brandy  
37,5 cm diam. - 48,5 cm high  
Private collection, New York

Included together with his **first experiments in photography and cinema is poetry written by Broodthaers from the late 1940s onwards**. Also on display are his earliest artworks, which not only gave material form to his poetry but also generated a personal repertoire of symbols (the eggshell, the mussel...) that reappeared time and again over his life.

The next section is made up of works that were included in the various exhibitions Marcel Broodthaers devised in the **1960s**, starting with the one held in 1964 at the **Galerie Saint-Laurent** in Brussels, the first of his artistic career. The Saint-Laurent, a gallery and also a bookshop, was an appropriate framework for this artistic inauguration, since the visitors had to walk down passages formed by books in order to reach the exhibition itself, a pathway that reflects Broodthaers’ own interest in poetry and art. The exhibition opened with a declaration of intentions exhibited at the entrance in which the poet, now a visual artist, avowed his insincerity in creating the work inside. The text was printed on pages taken from popular magazines, underscoring the relationship between art and commerce, and it ended with a provocative claim that the artworks were simple objects.

The pieces in the exhibition, produced in the space of a few months, were made from objects that hung from the walls or were displayed in the room as independent exhibits. With subjects and media interwoven in this way, and with direct dialogues established among the works themselves, the Galerie Saint-Laurent show also anticipated the *décor* Broodthaers was to produce in the last years of his life, where he situated his works (regardless of medium) in unified arrangements, often mixing them with borrowed objects.

In the exhibition ***Court-Circuit*** (*Short-Circuit*), the work ***Le Corbeau et le Renard*** (*The Fox and the Crow*), and the show dedicated to the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, a clear shift is perceptible in the late 1960s in the career of an artist who had declared himself as such three years earlier. With ***Court-Circuit***, a solo exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels,

the Belgian artist started to distance himself from the production of artworks, a tendency illustrated by his use of photographic canvases with black and white images of earlier works. In 1967, on the occasion of the death of Magritte, Broodthaers paid tribute by rewriting La Fontaine's fable **Le Corbeau et le Renard**, and so opening a transition to cinematic and plastic montage. The 16 mm film was the centerpiece of Broodthaers' 1968 exhibition at the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp. Filmed in 1967 at Broodthaers' house on Rue de la Pépinière in Brussels, the film shows various household items (boots, flowers, bottles, jars) arranged on a shelf against a background of text. In a series of fixed shots and pans edited at varying rhythms, the film shows the objects enveloped in the letters that surround them, something which Broodthaers referred to as an integral "reading exercise".

In his 1969 exhibition dedicated to the poet **Stéphane Mallarmé**, during the inauguration, he hung up the black jacket shown in the exhibition on a wooden hanger that bore the inscription: "Costume d'Igitur". Igitur, a character from one of Mallarmé's works, incarnates the poet's solitary journey to his inner depths. In exploring Mallarmé's poems in such different ways (clothing, transparent books, aluminium plates), Broodthaers tried to take poetry off the page and into the physical world.



MARCEL BROODTHAERS  
*Chez votre fournisseur (à l'image des aigles) (En su proveedor habitual (Vitrage de aigles))*, 1968  
Panneau de plástico moldeado al vacío y primado  
81,8 x 119,5 x 4 cm  
Museum of Modern Art de Nueva York por donación parcial de la Colección Dalldorf y adquisición parcial gracias a la generosidad de Maja Oeri y Hans Bodenmann, Sue y Edgar Wachenheim III, Agnes Gund, Martine Hees y James D. Zinn, Marie-Josée y Henry R. Kravis, y Jerry I. Speyer y Katherine G. Felny, 2011  
The Museum of Modern Art, Department of Imaging and Visual Resources  
Fotografía: Peter Butler  
© The Estate of Marcel Broodthaers on SABAM Belgium - VEGAP 2016

*Chez votre fournisseur (à l'image des aigles) (At your supplier (Vitrage of eagles))*, 1968  
Panneau vacuum-moldado plástico primado  
81,8 x 119,5 x 4 cm  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Partial gift of the Dalldorf Collection and partial purchase through the generosity of Maja Oeri and Hans Bodenmann, Sue and Edgar Wachenheim III, Agnes Gund, Martine Hees and James D. Zinn, Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis, and Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Felny, 2011  
The Museum of Modern Art, Department of Imaging and Visual Resources  
Photograph by Peter Butler

In 1968, Broodthaers declared that he was no longer an artist, and designated himself as director of his own museum. The resulting project, the **Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles** (Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles) pins the museum institution against the ropes, questioning its foundations and function in an unprecedented exercise of dissection. It kept him occupied almost full-time for four years. During that period, as though it were a traveling institution, he mounted twelve solo temporary exhibitions on his museum in seven cities around Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. These were devoted to different periods, artistic forms generally marginalized by institutions and collectors like popular art and film, administrative activities like

documentation and advertising, and specific subjects like the eagle or the bankruptcy of the museum itself. The exhibition includes several of these sections, such as the Section Publicité or the Section Financière.

The project concluded at the very moment it received institutional recognition, when it was included in Documenta 5 at Kassel, Germany, in 1972, an exhibition which put the strategies of Conceptual Art at the forefront of international artistic discourse. Thanks to the Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Broodthaers redefined his role as an artist. He was no longer a producer of artworks but a curator who addressed the status of art in society.

The next works on the exhibition itinerary are the **Peintures littéraires** (Literary Paintings). On October 29, 1972, at a collective exhibition in the Galerie Yvon Lambert in Paris, Marcel Broodthaers presented a new set of works. Each part in the series, created between 1972 and 1975, consisted of nine primed and unmounted canvases nailed to the wall in a grid pattern, none of them actually painted by the artist.

Like the industrially produced vacuum-formed panels that Broodthaers began in 1968 and entitled **Poèmes industriels** (Industrial Poems), also on show in the exhibition, the Peintures littéraires foregrounded text yet were presented as pictures on the wall of a gallery, an allusion to the favorable treatment accorded to language in Conceptual Art and the preoccupation of Minimalism with serialization and simple geometric forms. With this group of works, presented

less than a month after the closure of the Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles and his renunciation of his self-appointed directorship, Broodthaers announced his reappearance as an artist with the invention of a type of painting of his own, one which used the traditions of the medium but also created a new space in which to work.

The show continues with reconstructions of other exhibitions and décors by Broodthaers, like that produced in 1970 for the **Galerie MTL**, and some of his last creations, such as **Décor: A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers** and **Un jardin d'hiver** (A Winter Garden). In the last of these, held at the start of 1974, Marcel Broodthaers transformed a room at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels into an exuberant winter garden for a collective exhibition. He set up potted palms, folding chairs, display cases, zoology plates from the 19th century, and photographic enlargements of prints of elephants, hawks, dromedaries, camels, bees and beetles.

The end of the exhibition makes reference to the assembly of the fifth and final retrospective put together by the artist, **L'Angelus de Daumier** (The Angelus of Daumier), which includes, for instance, **La Salle blanche** (The White Room), a life-size construction of the interior of Broodthaers' dwelling at 30, Rue de la Pépinière, in Brussels, where he had first presented his Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles. Broodthaers had a sign painter cover the structure with words related to art and artistic creation, and then added lighting and cordoned off the entrance. He described the final result as "a perfect ground floor petit-bourgeois flat where words float".



MARCEL BROODTHAERS  
**La Salle blanche (La salle blanche)**, 1975  
 Madera, fotografías, bombilla, pintura y cordón  
 300 x 330 x 600 cm  
 Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle  
 Vista de la exposición Marcel Broodthaers. Una retrospectiva. The Museum of Modern Art, Nueva York, 14 de febrero - 15 de mayo 2016  
 © 2016 The Museum of Modern Art. Foto: Martin Seck  
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**La Salle blanche (The white room)**, 1975  
 Wood, photographs, light bulb, paint and cord  
 300 x 330 x 600 cm  
 Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle  
 Installation view of Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 14-May 15, 2016  
 © 2016 The Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Martin Seck

One feature of the show worth emphasizing is that some ten films by Marcel Broodthaers are screened all along the itinerary, giving a broader vision of the Belgian artist's important role as a **film-maker**. Although he did not describe himself as a film director (though neither did he consider himself a painter or sculptor), he used his cinematic creation as a modality of production and a mechanism for visualizing the spaces that interested him, referring to the cinematic medium as "the prolongation of language".

## Catalogue

The catalogue that is being published to coincide with the exhibition analyzes the artist's work and the theoretical and historical context in which it developed through texts by Christophe Cherix, Manuel Borja-Villel, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Jean-François Chevrier, Thierry de Duve, Doris Krystof, Cathleen Chaffee, Kim Conaty, Rafael García Horroillo, Christian Rattemeyer, Sam Sackeroff, Teresa Velázquez and Francesca Wilmott. It also includes new translations of writings by Broodthaers himself.

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