



Das Wunder des Lebens (The Miracle of Life) Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys 7/2 – 4/5 2014

Press conference: Thursday, February 6, 2014, 10 am

Opening: Thursday, February 6, 2014, 7 pm

For some years Belgian artists Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys have been present on the wider stage of the international art scene. They have been producing a unique epic-absurd theatre consisting of video works, photography series and sculptural installations. In February 2014 they will present *Das Wunder des Lebens (The Miracle of Life)* their first large solo show in Austria. Its main element is a large-scale installation which the artists describe as following: “We think of the big exhibition space as a place of stillness. You can only hear the noise of the water plashing from the fountain and you can see 400 (silent) drawings. There are no colours in the exhibition. Only black and white”.

Like in a pictorial encyclopaedia, the drawings will show almost everything the modern world has to offer from maps and city views to cars, airplanes and people; from laundry bags, men’s shoes, paint buckets and restaurant interiors to chocolate mousse recipes, dog training schools, underwater worlds and cheese trays. Unlike conventional pictorial dictionaries, there is no symbolic system. Everything is exposed to everyone, so everything is equal. Furthermore the ductus of these drawings lacks any emotional, compositional or distinctive expression. In contrast, the display on which the pencil drawings are presented is organised strictly: rank and file of ordered blocks form display walls in a rectangular structure. In every corner of the exhibition space one of four *White Elements* serves as a guard. The three-headed fountain with its mask-like faces *De Drie Wijsneuzen* (cast from styrofoam heads found in a German shop window) reaches up from the middle of the formation and has an overview of the overall silent and colourless setting.

Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys have been working together as an artist duo since the end of the 1980s. Their photographs, drawings, objects and videos, steeped in black humour, critical (self)reflection and overlapping reality, fiction and suppressed history, seem superficial and implacably banal and thus possess the potential to cause irritation to the visitor’s expectations.

The subtle subversion within their art is also alluded to by the exhibition title through the slogan *Das Wunder des Lebens* (*The Miracle of Life*) that once provided the title for a Nazi propaganda show on the subject of “German racial hygiene” (eugenics). Former Bauhaus teacher, Herbert Bayer, designed a poster and catalogue for this exhibition in a strictly modern style which, for those in power, was (still) welcome to the extent that it could be used for their own ideology.

Along with the installation at Kunsthalle Wien a film program will be shown, featuring selected works from the artist’s video oeuvre.

In cooperation with the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst / M HKA, Antwerp

Curators: Lucas Gehrman, Nicolaus Schafhausen

Jos de Gruyter (*1965 in Geel) and **Harald Thys** (*1966 in Wilrijk) live in Brussels, Belgium, and have worked together since the end of the 1980s.

Selected exhibitions: M HKA, Antwerp; 55th Venice Biennale; Mu.ZEE, Ostend; Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover; Neuer Aachener Kunstverein; Culturgest, Lisboa and Porto; Kunsthalle Basel; 5th Berlin Biennale; Manifesta 7, Trento.