

**JOS DE GRUYTER & HARALD THYS**  
**EMPEROR RO**  
**REPORT OF A COUP IN BELGIUM**  
September 10 - October 16, 2021

For their first exhibition at Maxwell Graham/Essex Street, Belgian artist duo Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys have restaged a large spatial installation from their early years, in which they explore and absurdly magnify the subject of political terrorism and civil war. In 1993, five years after the start of their collaboration, one year after the collapse of the Soviet Union resulting in weird popular uprisings like the Romanian Revolution or the war in Yugoslavia and almost ten years after the violent, unsolved crime spree of the Brabant killers, who sowed terror in Belgium and killed over 30 people, both artists made an exhibition about an imaginary coup in Belgium by the fictitious Emperor Ro. The Report of a Coup in Belgium starts on 12 December 1990, when the legislative and executive powers as well as the judiciary and the military came into the hands of the megalomaniac and media-usurping dictator Ro. The artists write: 'Innocent people were executed, deported, or tortured at length so as to extract ridiculous confessions. Anarchy reigned and anti-terrorist pockets of resistance surfaced here and there, but the collapse of communication channels and the widespread confusion meant they did not stand a chance. The speed and brutality with which Emperor Ro seized power characterised his downfall too. What remains are documents, furniture, an audio clip, videos and portraits of the coup plotters that can give us a vague idea of Emperor Ro's ideology and what the consequences would have been if a coup had succeeded.'

Jos de Gruyter (b. 1965, Geel Belgium) & Harald Thys (b. 1966, Wilrijk, Belgium) live and work in Brussels, Belgium. de Gruyter & Thys represented Belgium in the 58th Venice Biennale with MONDO CANE. They have also had institutional solo exhibitions at the Centre for Fine Arts (Bozar), Brussels, Belgium (2020); Kunsthall Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark (2018); Kunstverein München, Munich, Germany (2017); Milan Triennale, Palazzo dell'Arte, Milan, Italy (2017); Portikus, Frankfurt, Germany (2016); Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois (2015); MoMA PS1, New York, New York (2015); The Power Station, Dallas, Texas (2015); CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, California (2015); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria (2014); Museum of Contemporary Art (M HKA), Antwerp, Belgium (2013, 2007); Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland (2010); Frac Ile-de-France Le Plateau, Paris, France (2007); and the Middelheim Museum, Antwerp, Belgium (2002).

**MAXWELL GRAHAM/ESSEX STREET**  
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