

# Martin van Zomeren

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Yoko & John at the Amsterdam Hilton

Michiel Ceulers

(1986, Waregem - Belgium)



Yoko and John at the Amsterdam Hilton (Wann Gesten und Handlungen noch radikale Macht hatten)  
2022

Acrylic, oil, encaustic, spray paint, gloss paint, silicone, plastic foil, glitter and mirrors on wood, artist made frame; cardboard, wood, paint and glitter  
118 x 91 cm

Michiel Ceulers; "Yoko & John at the Amsterdam Hilton" Martin van Zomeren, Amsterdam  
12 March – 16 April 2022

Press release

There's a rat in mi kitchen and he knows what he's gonna do (\*) (A coincidence's coincidence is never a coincidence).

It feels awkward these days, writing about something as banal as painting, while it burns elsewhere, not so far from here. Perhaps Michiel Ceulers (b. 1986, Waregem, Belgium) must have felt something similar in his choice of title for his exhibition at Galerie Martin Van Zomeren: 'John and Yoko in the Amsterdam Hilton'. In his choice of titles, Ceulers often uses events and/or song titles from popular culture to inject his work with a broader layer of meaning, or to provide the viewer with additional space for interpretation. In this case, of course, the title refers to the world-famous protest by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, who held a six-day "bed-in" at the Amsterdam Hilton Hotel in 1969. The two had married shortly before and used the publicity surrounding their marriage to hold a pacifist protest action against the then fiercely raging Vietnam War.

The choice of this 'social' title for his exhibition is indicative of the intelligent painter that Michiel Ceulers is, and immediately makes it clear that he is the first to put his own artistic practice into strong perspective in light of important secular events.

By referring to the iconic protest action of Lennon and Ono, Ceulers paradoxically - as in most of his painting - spitefully avoids any kind of anecdotalism. With this choice of title he creates a kind of historical time capsule of protest for world peace, in which he makes it clear that this requires our constant alertness, and thus is not limited to the delusion of the day, but in one movement also historically indicates the city in which his exhibition takes place, Amsterdam, as a geographical protest location. Looked at from this angle, with 'John and Yoko in the Amsterdam Hilton' Michiel Ceulers seems to allude to a time cycle of protest, as something that always recurs, always will recur and to which we - even while looking at something as trivial as paintings - always have to be hyper-aware and relate. Ceulers thus has two feet firmly planted in contemporary (social) reality and he is therefore seldom too apprehensive to allow this reality to seep into his paintings 'ad hoc', as it presents itself to him at that moment.

It is thus striking that nowadays more (protest) text is sneaking into his work, while the rest of the picture plane is largely left untouched, something that can be called atypical in relation to Ceulers' (recent) earlier work, where the textual interpretation was mostly in the titles. Perhaps now, today, these paintings can literally be read as relevant protest statements, by analogy with the many protest songs - think: 'Imagine', 'Back in the USSR', 'Give Peace a Chance' 'Now or Never', etc.. - that Lennon and Ono wrote at the time, but in similar times? Another aspect that typifies Michiel Ceulers as a worldly conscious person and painter is his mentality and attitude to life in the studio. I have known Michiel for a long time, and since he tends to change studio spaces quite regularly, I have already visited quite a few of his studios. It is at least striking, not to say confrontational, to notice that with him there is virtually no distinction between his living and working space. More than that, it seems as if his studio practice literally parasitizes his daily living environment. In productive periods Ceulers behaves like an obsessive hunter-gatherer, constantly dragging in his 'nest', almost like a rat, various paraphernalia found on the street, garbage and trash as inspiration and working material for his paintings, in such large proportions that soon there is no longer any question of a living space tout court. I have always found this not only very fascinating, but also very committed on Michiel Ceulers's part: not only does he, by collecting all this 'street trash', literally bring everyday reality into his living environment, he even allows himself to be literally overwhelmed by it, which almost forces him to literally 'adapt' his life to this chaotic reality.

However trashy Ceulers' living and working mentality - and consequently his paintings - may seem at first glance, to my mind they do conceal a sophisticated sort of orchestration that seems to find an almost intuitive balance between wild painterly emotionality and strategic, almost 'curated' deliberation. This makes Michiel Ceulers - in addition to the aforementioned feeling for an urgent social reality - paradoxically also an outspoken 'painter's painter'. After all, his paintings can not only boast of wide public interest, but are also experienced by fellow painters and visual artists as exceptionally painterly intelligent. The precarious balance between orchestrated trash and trashy orchestration, without the artificiality that usually accompanies it, is in the eyes of many painters only attainable after thorough training in the artistic craft in combination with a thorough trial and error. Michiel Ceulers has reached a point in his painting practice where he achieves this difficult balance as if it were nothing: his seemingly random, trashy visual attacks are pure, sincere and wild, but also painterly flawless, gifted and to the point. Not only in his paintings as such, but also in his exhibitions, Michiel Ceulers demonstrates this combination of intuition and reasoning.

Besides being a painter, I also know Michiel as someone who researches thoroughly, not only other artists who inspire him, but also the developments in the contemporary art field and exhibition practice. I suspect that he is a strong curator of his own work, something that can be called exceptional among painters, who are used to a relatively solitary studio practice. Ceulers' exhibitions effortlessly find the balance between the (theoretical) awareness of the white cube or the modernist grid within which many contemporary exhibition spaces are constructed, and the seemingly coincidental, intuitive ad hoc accrochage decisions he takes while building them.

A coincidence's coincidence is never a coincidence, enjoy the (guided) trip!

Thibaut Verhoeven artistic researcher SMAK  
Ghent, March 2022

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Monkey Sorrows / Gunter Forg Nostalgia (Cry me a River)  
2020 - 2022

Acrylic, oil, encaustic, gloss paint and mirrors on canvas  
161 x 121 cm

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Sick Puppy in Window (after Kate Burkhart)  
2019 - 2021

Acrylic, oil, encaustic, spray paint, gloss paint, permanent marker on canvas  
53 x 75 cm

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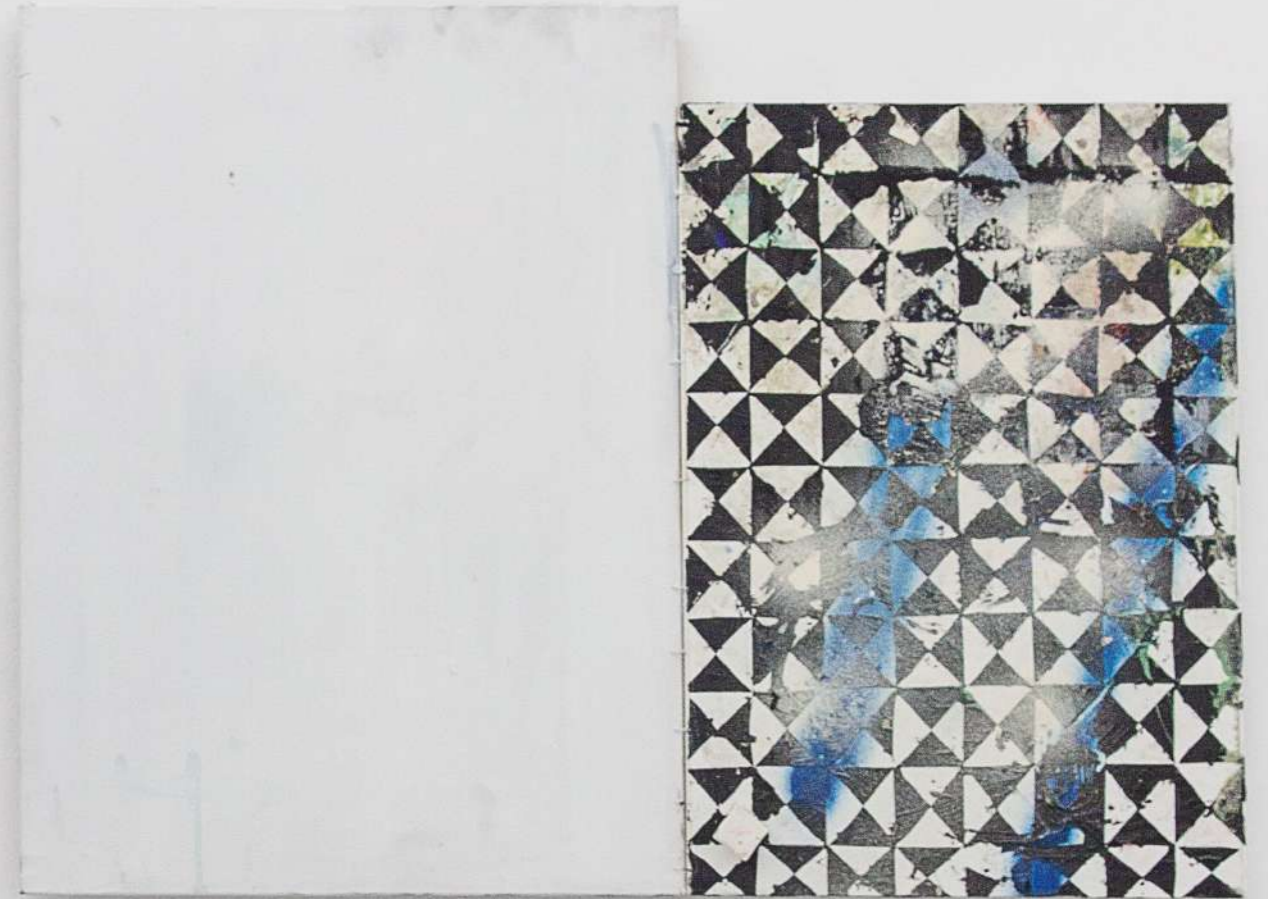


La douleur a ses raisons, le plaisir est totalement indifférent (Seeteufel Malerei)  
2017 - 2022

Oil, gloss paint and glitter on canvas  
70 x 60 cm

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American White (Tarnfarben)  
2021 - 2022

Oil and spray paint on wood an canvas  
56 x 76 cm

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A downtown scene at 9th street / a parody on Sesame Street (I always thought she was a singer-songwriter / a female object trouvé next door)  
2020 - 2022

Acrylic, oil, encaustic, gloss paint and mirrors on canvas  
180 x 138 cm



Si le même rythme de dégénérescence se poursuit, le Y chromosome n'a plus que quelques millions d'années avant de disparaître complètement (Fuck the pain away Peaches)  
2020 - 2022

Oil and silicone on wood & canvas  
136 x 100 cm

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Kohlebergwerk expeditione  
2020 - 2022

Acrylic, oil, encaustic, spray paint, gloss paint, silicone, plastic foil, mirrors and googly eye on canvas  
80 x 60 cm

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Monkey Sorrow (Cage VI)  
2020 - 2022

Oil, gloss paint, spray paint, encaustic, silicone, plastic foil, mirror mosaic and glitter on canvas  
70 x 110 cm

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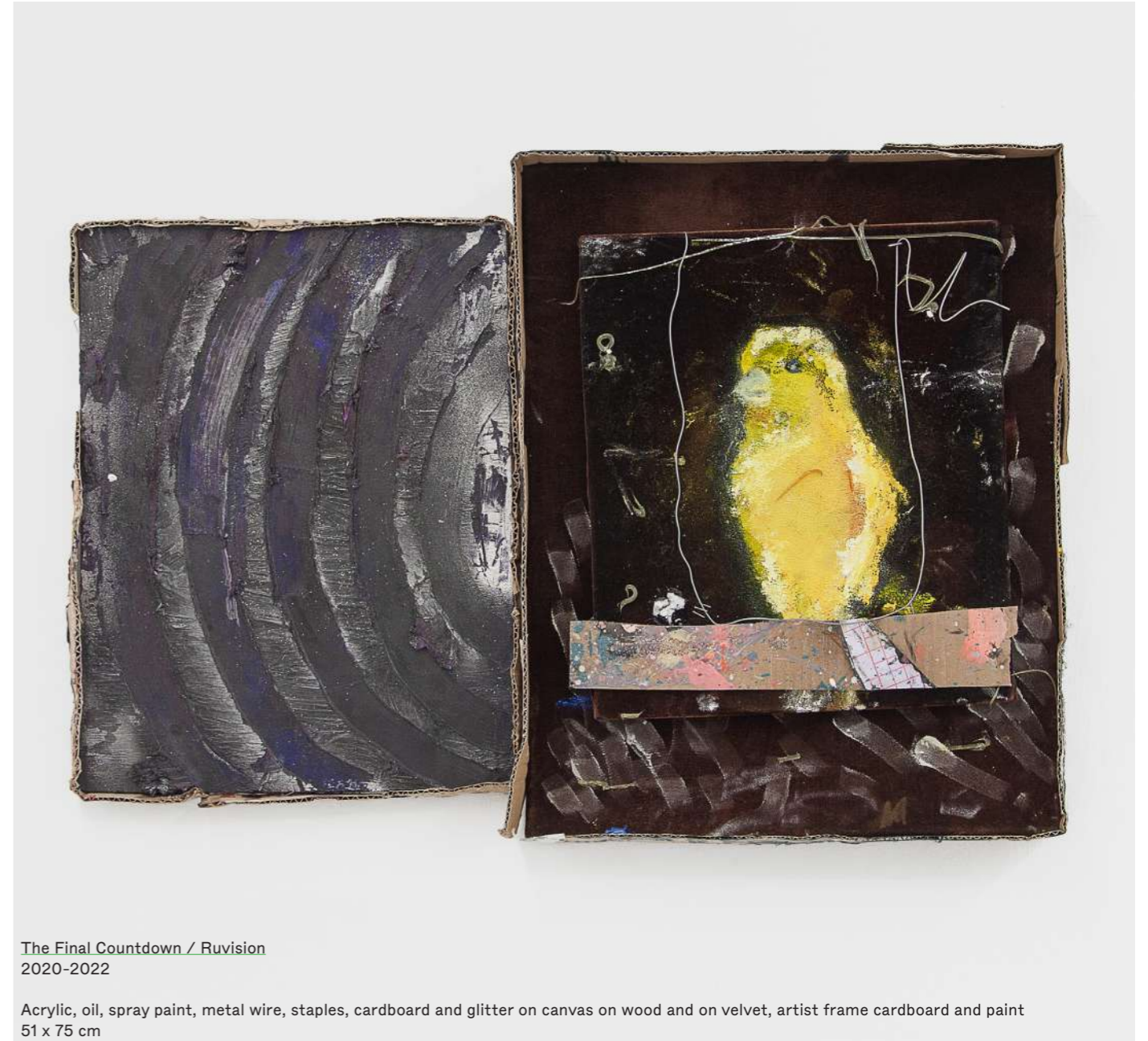


Some Prince joke someone told me on the phone  
2022

Oil, gloss paint, silicone, plastic, oil, mirrors, staples and Dymo strips on canvas  
70 x 50 cm

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The Final Countdown / Ruvision  
2020-2022

Acrylic, oil, spray paint, metal wire, staples, cardboard and glitter on canvas on wood and on velvet, artist frame cardboard and paint  
51 x 75 cm

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Dreilandenpunt  
2021

Oil, gloss and spray paint on canvas  
80 x 74 cm

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Erbarme Dich (the postman always rings twice)  
2020

Oil, gloss paint, spray paint, encaustic, silicone, anti-slip pad, google eyes in panel 5  
57 x 43 cm



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Installation View:  
"Yoko and John at the Amsterdam Hilton"

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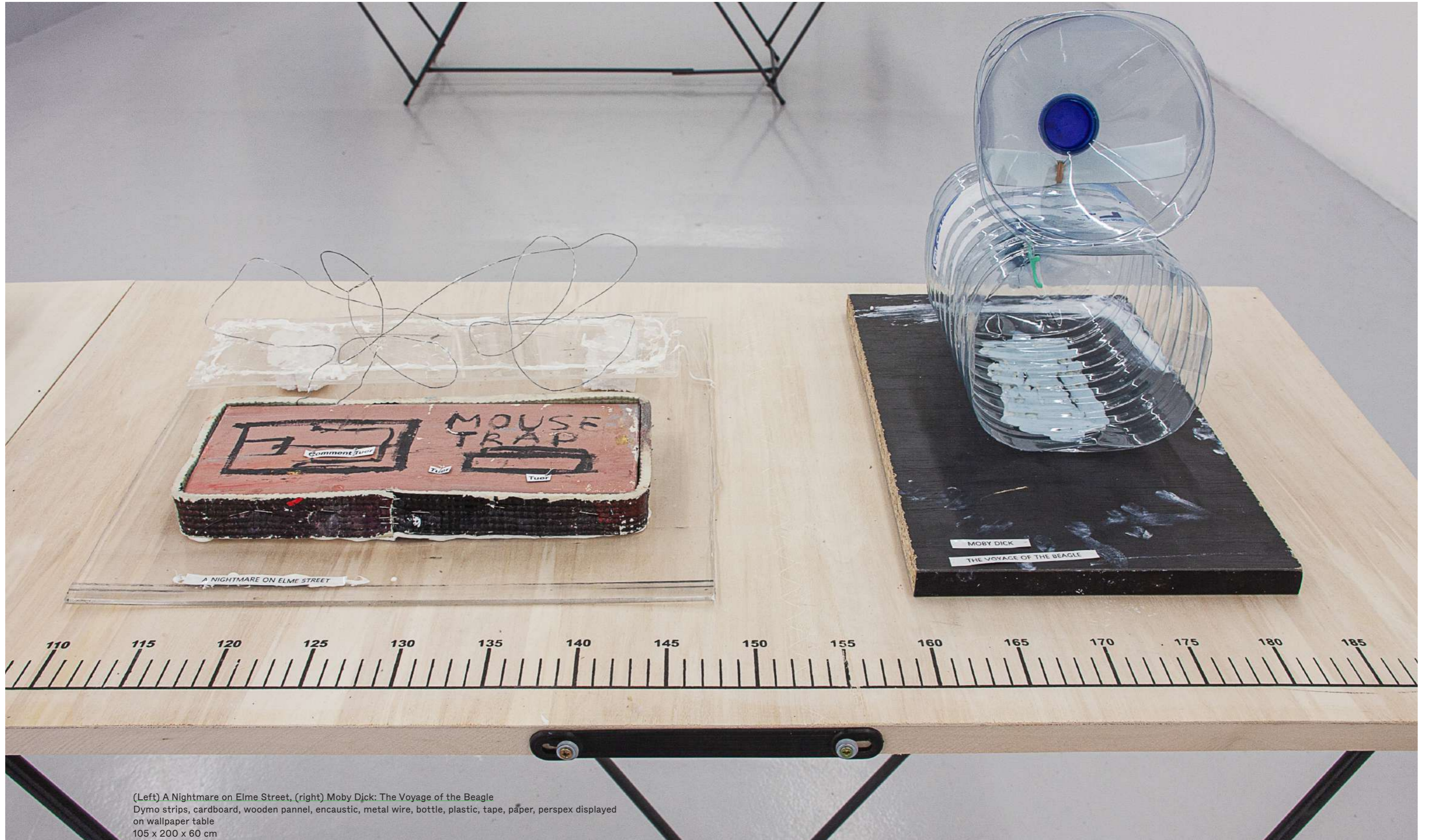


Gilbert and George  
2022

Cardboard, wooden panel, encaustic, metal wire, plastic  
tape, paper, 50m sound piece  
105 x 200 x 60 cm

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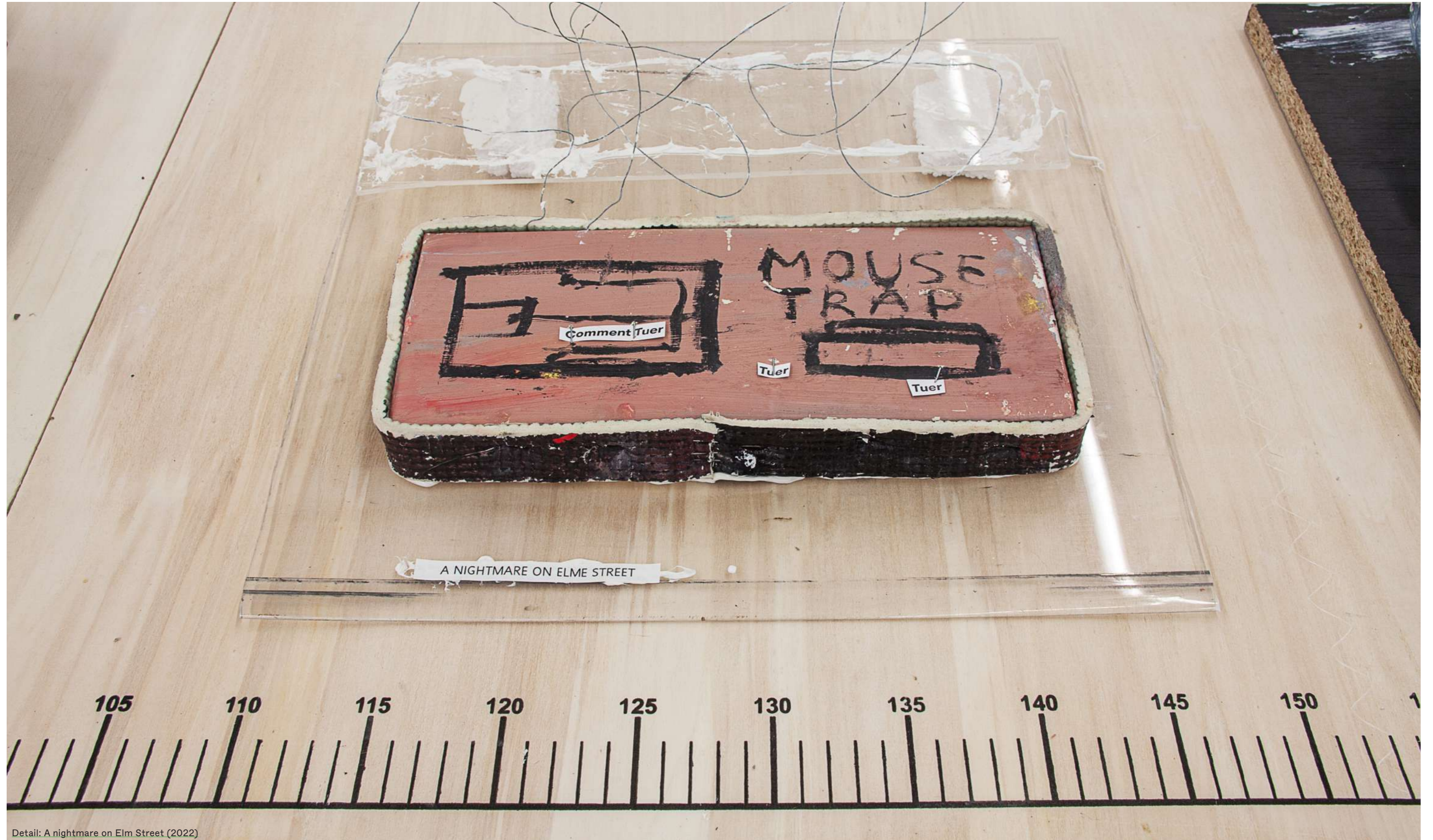
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(Left) A Nightmare on Elme Street, (right) Moby Dick: The Voyage of the Beagle  
Dymo strips, cardboard, wooden pannel, encaustic, metal wire, bottle, plastic, tape, paper, perspex displayed  
on wallpaper table  
105 x 200 x 60 cm

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Detail: A nightmare on Elm Street (2022)

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