

*At first I displayed objects of everyday life - mussels, eggs, pots, advertising imagery. This point of departure inscribed me within the context of New Realism and sometimes to Pop Art, when I treat my subject with the intention of reducing it to a theoretical sketch... Today, when the image destined for current consumption has assumed the subtleties and violence of New Realism and of Pop Art, I would hope that definitions of art would support a critical vision both of society and of art, as well as of art criticism itself. The language of forms must be united with that of words..."*

Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter (Brussels, April 1968) addressed to the editor of Art International and published later in a catalogue from the exhibition Lignano Biennale 1 (Lignano 1968).

Sutton Lane is pleased to present a selection of work by Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers.

Over the years, Sutton Lane has presented exhibitions by artists who have played an important role in the history of art, including Pistoletto and Franz West in 2004, and Martin Barré in 2005. This exhibition of Marcel Broodthaers continues this tradition. Broodthaers is a major influence and reference for many of the contemporary artists represented by Sutton Lane. Like Broodthaers, these artists question the very practice of art and explore the depths of its possibilities.

Included in this exhibition are eight vacuum formed plastic and painted plaques that date between 1968-1970. These works come from a series Broodthaers called "Industrial Poems". Also on view is a sculpture from 1966 titled "Pools".

These plaques recall the first plastic-based works Broodthaers made in 1963 when he had sections of his series of poems titled, Pense-Bete, (Dumb thought), stamped into some leftover plaster casts. Through this action the text was transformed as sculpture, poetry became object and the poet a visual artist. For Broodthaers, poetry remains essential, but he also began to perceive a necessity to instigate a transition from language towards the visual object. He emphasized the importance of the technical process which allowed him to fully realize this project. He applied a mold to the back side of a sheet of plastic thereby leaving the imprint of text and image on the front side. It was a simple process which permitted him to produce a large quantity of work at one time, and as such, forced a dialogue about the uniqueness of a work of art and Walter Benjamin's theory about the loss of aura once a work has been repeatedly reproduced.(1)

By choosing to make these plaques in limited editions or conversely, in unlimited editions, Broodthaers critiques a dominant theme throughout the 1960s of democratizing the art object by creating multiple copies. These "poems" are to be understood like puzzles or enigmas whose reading

is laboriously deciphered in the relief..."from the appearance of the text and its opposite."

Broodthaers valued this method "of not giving the message entirely in either image or text... and also he refused to make any message straightforward."(2) Broodthaers appreciated the relative newness of a material which was not often used in art and as such carried, according to him, a sort of 'tackiness' rendered in the final stages of fabrication. Always one for paradoxes, Broodthaers referred to his "Industrial Poems" as signboards, which Benjamin Buchloh, in an essay devoted to Broodthaers, sees as being at the same time, "a poetic text, artistic object, discursive classification and institutional demarcation... literally made "of a piece," and of one material."(3)

The sculpture, "Pool", comes out of a lineage beginning with Marcel Duchamp's "ready-mades", to New Realism, and Pop Art. The eggs and the wooden casks which make up the sculpture are essentially removed from their usual context and given status as a work of art. At the same time this act elevates an everyday object into a work of art and serves as a form of de-mythification of the "sacred" museum space. By doing this, Broodthaers seeks to both affirm his artistic originality, so deeply layered with humor, and give proof through critical and ironic methods, of the blatant commercialism of the art market.

Marcel Broodthaers work is caustic reflection that highlights the nature and function of art, of the dialogues between artist and society, as well as within cultural institutions and museums.

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