

Press release

Marc Camille Chaimowicz: *Nuit américaine*

February 17 – August 13, 2023

WIELS, Brussels

Marc Camille Chaimowicz is an understated pioneer, who has steadfastly sailed against the prevailing artistic winds since the start of his career in London in the 1970s. Resisting claims for art's autonomy, he early embraced the decorative arts and intertwined design, installation, painting, print-making, collage and his daily life into a highly personal vocabulary. He continues to be of great importance to younger artists, not least due to his constant yet subtle challenging of the role of art and in his development of a camp aesthetic.

Like his refined yet playful work, Chaimowicz himself defies easy categorization. He embraces ambiguity in his persona as an artist, adopting the position of a discreet dandy, and in the work he creates, which in many ways prefigures recent investigations into gender and identity. Born in Post-war Paris to a Polish Jewish father and French Catholic mother, then educated in England, he inhabits a singular position at the crossroads of two art-scenes, cultures and languages.

Chaimowicz has a long-standing connection with Belgium, taking part in a performance festival at the Beursschouwburg in 1978 and having a solo exhibition at MuZEE in 2008. One could also draw connections between his practice and that of Belgian architects such as Victor Horta (1861-1947) or Henry Van de Velde (1863-1957), who took an all-encompassing approach to the interiors they designed, from the wallpaper and fabrics to the coffee service or even items of clothing.

Folding together past and present, Chaimowicz's exhibition at WIELS brings together one of his earliest installations – *Celebration? Realife Revisited* (1972-2000) – with two new bodies of work: a series of collages inspired by the figure of Madame Bovary (2020-2023); and a recreation of his sitting room of the past 40 years (2023). All three work groups presented at WIELS examine intimacy, domesticity, and the need to create one own's context.

His installation *The Hayes Court Sitting Room* transposes a fragment of South London to Brussels. Created on the occasion of this exhibition, it is the theatrical evocation of a room in which Chaimowicz dreamed, worked, conversed, corresponded (and more) for over four decades. Encapsulating an extended moment of his past, it includes hand-printed wallpaper, furniture designed by the artist, and table-top assemblages of sentimental items. However, its recreation proposes a subjective, fragmented and provisional experience, rather than the static, authoritative "museumification" typical to preserved artist's studios and houses.

Another new body of work presented is a suite of 40 collages, begun in October 2020, in the depths of the Covid-19 pandemic. Chaimowicz continued making the collages throughout the two years of the exhibition's preparation, sending them every fortnight to its curator. Their starting point is Madame Bovary, the anti-heroine of Gustave Flaubert's 1856 eponymous novel, a figure trapped by the conventions of her time into a narrow existence, from which she seeks escape through consumerism, seduction and the world of the imagination. Using fragments from fashion magazines, literary prints and reproductions of works by other artists (often focused on the domestic, "female" domain), Chaimowicz connects the longings of Emma Bovary to contemporary imagery and desires, to recent experiences of containment, social isolation and escapism.

Flaubert's novel also makes an appearance in the earliest work presented at WIELS, the seminal work first realised in 1972: *Celebration? Realife*. As this immersive installation's title suggests, it embraces the both celebratory and the mundane. It features masks, mirrors, glitter balls, fairy lights and candles, with music by the Rolling Stones and David Bowie, among others. As Tom Holert argues in his 2007 book dedicated to this one work, Chaimowicz's post-Pop scatter environment owed as much to glam rock as to art practice. It raised questions about public/private dichotomies, art/design boundaries, and identifications based on gender, recasting the artist as an art director and stage designer.

Light plays a central role in Chaimowicz's exhibition and in its title. *Nuit américaine* is the French term for the cinematic technique of filming day-for-night. Here the title becomes a metaphor for presenting real life through the filter of art.

Curated by: Zoë Gray

Supported by: The French Embassy in Belgium and l'Institut Français in the framework of Extra, Ms. Sylvie Winckler and Maryam & Roger Diener.

Biography

Marc Camille Chaimowicz was born in Paris and grew up in London, where he currently lives. He was educated at the Ealing school of Art, Camberwell School of Art and then completed a master's degree in painting at the Slade School of Fine Art.

Since 1970, the artist has had many solo exhibitions. Those since 2000 include: *Zig Zag and Many Ribbons...*, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Saint-Etienne Métropole (2022-23); *Dear Valerie...*, Kunsthalle Bern (2020); *Your Place or Mine...*, Jewish Museum, New York (2018); *An Autumn Lexicon*, Serpentine Gallery, London (2016); *Forty and Forty*, Galerie Neu, Berlin (2014), *Marc Camille Chaimowicz*, Secession, Vienna (2010); *To Furnish...*, Musée de la Piscine, Roubaix (2010), *Some Ways by which to Live...*, Frac Aquitaine, Bordeaux (2008); *...In the Cherished Company of Others...*, de Appel, Amsterdam & PMMK, Ostend (2008); *Zürich Suite*, Migros Museum Für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (2006); *Three Works For The Ikon Tower*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (2002); *Celebration? Realife Revisited*, 1972/2000, Cabinet, London (2000).

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His work has also been featured in numerous group exhibitions at institutions including Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2019), Le Consortium, Dijon (2019), MAMCO, Geneva (2018), Centre Pompidou, Paris (2016), Tate Modern, London (2012), Mu.ZEE, Ostend (2011), Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (2009/10), Kunstverein, Munich (2006), South London Gallery, London (2006), MOCA, Los Angeles (1998). Chaimowicz's work was also shown in major international exhibitions such as: Manifesta 13, Marseille (2020); Milan Triennial (2016); Berlin Biennale (2008), among many others.

The artist is represented by Cabinet Gallery in London, Galerie Neu in Berlin, Andrew Kreps in New York, and House of Gaga in Mexico City and Los Angeles.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Press conference and visit: Wednesday 15 February 2023, 11:00

Public opening: Thursday 16 February 2023, 19:00

Press contacts

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