

The exhibition *The Ventriloquist* is the first individual exhibition by Matthew Brannon at Office Baroque Gallery and the first individual gallery exhibition of the artist in Belgium. Brannon has created a new body of works for *The Ventriloquist* including new sculpture, letterpress prints, wallpaper, hand painted signs and collage.

The exhibition features a radical complexification of themes that have guided Brannon's oeuvre until today. For a first Brannon takes psychoanalysis, of all themes the one that he has been obscuring and repressing most, as a direct “narrative thread”. Many of Brannon's works are built around filmmakers, writers, or art directors, their fates often dangling as an outcome of overspent creative energies. For *The Ventriloquist* they are played out against the position of the psychoanalyst, causing an exponential growth of potential plots and questions raised.

Firmly rooted in his signature style letterpress prints, in recent years Brannon has expanded his artistic practice to include painting, sculpture, tapestry and collage and furthermore he has produced a limited number of audio works. Brannon's work plays with notions of failure, misfortune, desire and emotional contradictions and features a monde of successful individuals skyrocketing to creative heights, crashing fatally as they are pushed into existential corners. To paraphrase Jan Tumlir, anything that gets in the way of productivity; drinking, sex, fame, jealousy, guilt, shame are made manifest in aesthetic form and substance. Satire, fiction and reality interweave in props and images animated and reverted by text.

The exhibition is structured over three different rooms. As one enters the first, a large “sofa and chair” sculpture, an iconic setting for an analysis session, sets the whole show in motion. Entering the space in the capacity of patient, the sculpture throws the visitor backstage into an analysts office where he/she enters the uncomfortable role of being a witness and of being audience. From a wall decorated with diplomas, hand painted signs describing dates, events or actions, lead into a champagne room with decorative wallpaper and collages. A third room is a painting gallery and includes an exit door to a coroner's office. Space and time become dynamic categories. The narrative plot is held in place by four letterpress prints, involving a documentary film maker who killed her husband and is responsible for her daughter's overdosing.

On a second reading, the show is divided in half, starting in the present and aided by hand painted signs flips into the past tense. Brannon's work is characterized by the use both of cinematic tricks (flashback, the sudden take back of narrative into time, the use of subtitles), and of strategies and parameters of other disciplines (theater, writing) introducing them into a fine art context. Many elements in the exhibition are visual double entendres. The exhibition underlines the importance of

language and visual elements, as a way to animate visual still lifes and take their meaning elsewhere. The “city posters”, much like the “diplomas” are part of the exhibition's past tense, referring to an earlier innocence/naivety, an unattainable state, in order to throw us all the more into a complex unresolved present

Throughout his practice, Brannon typically and largely operates within “third tier” media as printing on paper, tapestry or wallpaper. Within the exhibition, Brannon seems to be reserving more and more territory for “first tier” media (oil painting, sculpture) but wherever they appear they seem to be doing so in disguise. Several oil paintings are props assisting the development of an action or stage in a story, sculptures are designed as stage sets, with an illusionist facade and visibly constructed backgrounds.

With “The Ventriloquist” we are left in the dark about the true identity of the ventriloquist and his dummies. One could draw a structuralist graph to determine these positions both within the exhibition, within the larger framework of art production and reception, and within the framework of art and psychoanalysis, and doing so, define the position of the artist, of the artworks and of the spectator throughout the exhibition. But each of these positions could be interchangeable on a meta level if we follow Brannon's cue of adding the analyst to the story, marking the positions of analyst and analysand both in the center of the graph.

Matthew Brannon is an American artist living and working in New York City. Born in 1971, in St. Maries, Idaho, Brannon studied visual arts, art theory and psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles and received a Masters of Fine Arts from Columbia University in New York. Over 2010 and 2011, he presented *Reservations*, at Ursula Blicke Stiftung, Kraitichal, Germany, *Mouse Trap*, *Light Switch*, at the Museum M, Leuven, Belgium and a *A question answered with a quote*, at Portikus, Frankfurt, Germany a traveling exhibition with three adaptations. Other solo museum exhibitions include; *Where Were We*, Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, New York and *Try and Be Grateful*, Art Gallery of York University, Toronto. Matthew Brannon has exhibited at Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, Gio Marconi Gallery, Milan, *The Approach*, London, Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York and David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles among others.

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