



SUITCASE ILLUMINATED #6 EFFETTO TUNNEL



JOS DE GRUYTER &

HARALD THYS

CURATED BY DCM DIPARTIMENTO CURATORIALE MOBILE

(KATIA ANGUELOVA

ALESSANDRA POGGIANTI

ANDREA WIARDA)



26 MAY H 18.00: SCREENING + TALK

27 MAY - 30 JUNE 2009



KALEIDOSCOPE HQ MILANO





SUITCASE ILLUMINATED #6

EFFETTO TUNNEL / TUNNEL EFFECT

La prima mostra personale del duo belga **Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys**, è ospitata dal **project space di Kaleidoscope** a Milano. L'appuntamento fa parte di **Effetto tunnel**, a cura di Katia Anguelova, Alessandra Poggianti e Andrea Wiarda. "Effetto Tunnel" è un progetto che si articola a partire da una programmazione di proiezioni video in vari luoghi e momenti nella città di Milano ed è la prima tappa dell'attività del Dipartimento Curatoriale Mobile. *Effetto Tunnel* rappresenta una traversata dello spazio urbano come strumento di conoscenza e scambio, come atto percettivo e creativo per affrontare le pratiche artistiche.

La mostra personale di **Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys** è il primo episodio dell'*Effetto Tunnel* e presenta gli ultimi lavori video dei due artisti: *The Frigate* (2008), *Der Schlamm von Branst* (2008), *Ten Weyngaert* (2007), insieme a una selezione di opere precedenti, compresa la serie di fotografie *Untitled N° 1-9* e una edizione di sculture appositamente realizzate per l'occasione.

Il lavoro di de Gruyter e Thys è caratterizzato da atmosfere sinistre e spazi claustrofobici popolati da figure assurde e maschere impersonate da attori non professionisti. I dialoghi sono ridotti al minimo mentre suoni e gesti surreali catalizzano l'attenzione, dando vita a un mondo parallelo bizzarro e tetro, paradossalmente non così diverso da quello in cui viviamo. Questi film mostrano situazioni apparentemente triviali che ricordano la drammaturgia sperimentale e performativa, in cui lo humour nero diventa una chiave per ampliare il campo d'indagine e riflettere sui meccanismi di comportamento che caratterizzano la società contemporanea.

The first solo exhibition of the Belgian artist-duo **Jos De Gruyter and Harald Thys** takes place at Kaleidoscope HQ in Milan (May-June 2009). It is the first in a series of events and presentations entitled **Tunnel Effect**, curated by Katia Anguelova, Alessandra Poggianti and Andrea Wiarda. *Tunnel Effect* is the first instance of the activities of the Dipartimento Curatoriale Mobile. The project is articulated through a programme of video presentations in various locations and moments in the city of Milan. *Tunnel Effect* represents a crossing and a movement as an instrument of knowledge gathering and exchange, as a perceptive and creative act, a reading and writing of the urban territory as well as a format to address artistic practices.

The solo-exhibition of Jos De Gruyter and Harald Thys represents the first episode of Tunnel Effect, showing their latest series of photographs (*Untitled N°1-9*), three large video projections *The Frigate* (2008), *Der Schlamm von Branst* (2008) and *Ten Weyngaert* (2007) as well as a selection of previous video works. The artists have produced an edition sculptures especially for the (Italian) occasion.

The meticulous and slightly absurd work of De Gruyter and Thys is characterised by loaded atmospheres and claustrophobic spaces populated by strange figures, impersonated by non-professional actors, captured in no apparent relation with the 'real world'. With dialogue reduced to a minimum, sound and often surreal gestures drive the attention to what is left of a narrative structure. The singular and theatrical parallel world they create is however paradoxically not that much different from the one we live in. The films transmit apparently trivial situations in a way reminiscent of experimental dramaturgy and performance in which black humour becomes the key to extend our inquiry and reflection into behavioural mechanisms and routines in contemporary society.



INTERVIEW

JOS DE GRUYTER &
HARALD THYS

An e-mail interview / una intervista e-mail
Questions by Katia Anguelova and Andrea Wiarda;
answers from Jos De Gruyter and Harald Thys,
exchanged via e-mail May 2009.

Katia Anguelova / Andrea Wiarda: **Could you briefly describe yourself(s)?**

Jos De Gruyter Very slow, very jealous, a coward and often a liar.
Very scared of Islamists and diseases and many other things.
Luckily I have a good heart, both mentally and physically

Harald Thys I don't know anymore

K / A **You have been working together for over fifteen years, what was the reason to start collaborating and how would you describe your collaborative practice?**

H Actually we now 'celebrate' the 20th anniversary of our collaboration. I think the main reason is a kind of shared view on humans. Back in the 1980s at art school there were the teachers and other students which served as examples to us. The word that best describes our initial relation to these characters was consternation. This was mostly and very soon afterwards followed by depression. As a kind of survival instinct we started imitating them and quite quickly these characters became part of our universe and even possible actors for our videos.

Our collaborative practice takes place mostly in the car driving to some gloomy location. The car is a safe harbour. It contains not more than two seats directed to the outside world populated by strange species, sometimes dangerous, sometimes victimized, and their creations: houses, cars, villages, one-liners etc. These trips result in one or more heavy residues (depressions) which are then later on further developed and result in the creation of new characters and settings.

K.A. / A.W. **In your latest photo series (Untitled N°1-9) you have dressed up wooden constructions to resemble human figures in various caricaturistic postures or situations; the characters in many of your films instead seem to be acting out – albeit minimally and detached – preconceived roles. Can you elaborate on how you view man in/and society in relation to your work?**

J Since the start of the unification of Europe there has been a growing tendency towards regionalism, nationalism and extreme chauvinism because people are scared. In an effort to fight this fear, they turn to the past, to their ancestors, their perceived history and traditions, to understand how to survive. They start to re-enact the past, hoping that they will be spared of the worst, however knowing that the worst has yet to come.

The whole Vintage movement is a proof of this tendency. The Mini and the Beetle were reintroduced and in France they are working on a new Citroen DS. In a way society has come to a stand still, to an enormous depression in which we all take part. I personally think society has become far too complex for human beings. That's why they are working on super computers to take it all over. In a way, the creatures in the photo series seem to know it all. They know the meaning of life, especially the figure who sits



under the umbrella with the big glasses.

K.A. / A.W. It has been stated that you think of 'man' as a mannequin... and the 'characters' and figures in your works do often seem rather like dolls, dummy's or marionettes. How do you view these 'puppets'? What is their meaning to you in terms of culture in general?

H I think it has to do with the phenomenon of immobilization. You can see this occur in animals who are confronted with some bizarre opponent, another (bigger) animal, a human or a combination of both. Humans also have this capacity. The same mechanism is applicable for the relation between objects and humans or animals. Sometimes objects can provoke the same immobilization but objects can also undergo the same consternation. They can suffer an eternal shock when they are confronted with some weird character and become silent witnesses of perverted or strange actions, or the behavior of humans or animals. In this sense the characters in our videos, whether they are puppets or human beings, have all undergone this shock. They are there and are unwilling or incapable to evolve. This makes them dangerous and/or fragile and renders their looks and the way they look interesting, as a result they become fascinating to look at for the other characters in the video and finally for the audience looking at it.

This immobilization is also the final stadium in the evolution—decline—of western civilization. The physical expansion has made place for digital expansion and leads to a slow and gigantic implosion, a massive stand still, a epidemic attack of autism.

K / A In what kind of world do your characters live?

J In well structured well organized worlds in which depressions are so powerful that they become enjoyable. Quite similar to the world in which we live. For example in cities like Leuven, (B), Zoetermeer (NL), Gent (B), Antwerp (B), Hove (B), and many many more cities from which we get our inspiration.

K / A "The 'uncanny' is undoubtedly related to what is frightening — to what arouses dread and horror; equally certainly, too, the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general." States Freud. Could we think of this feeling of 'fear' and 'anxiety' that generates confusion and estrangement as a fundamental notion for you?

H We can presume that fear forms the basis for the actions or the absence of actions of the characters in the videos, though it might be more complex. What is sure though is that they are in a trance. Their behavior is monotone. They are neither good nor bad. They are driven by unknown forces and therefore they are unpredictable at the same time.

We once watched a documentary on prisons in South Africa. One of the prisoners who lost his teeth told the reporter in South African: - "In die dag ik kan lach met jou en 's avonds ik kan je vermoer" (during the day I can laugh with you and in the evening I can kill you)

K / A De dramaturgy you apply in your films, and often also in photographic



work, is very specific; the location is often enclosed and very contained, what determines the set-up of your work?

J We have this fantasy about a couple of 60 years old living in a very large and clean brick house somewhere in Flanders. When the woman looks outside from behind the curtains the man who is watching her says: "...come on dear, don't look outside, it's ugly there, inside it's better"

K / A What role does sound play in your work?

H In our first videos people talked, but slowly they talked less and less. When they do talk they speak through the mouth of others (Jos and me or my father) which reveals their remote controlled characteristics and destroys their sexual identity which is replaced by a kind of bestiality when they produce strange sounds (dubbed by Jos and me) like animals trapped in a corner or monsters eager to terrorize the others. These sounds are surrounded by deep silence. For us the alienating aspects of reality, its weight, are even more stressed by eliminating all sounds that it could produce.

On the other hand Belgian architecture which is based on the laws of gravity (putting one brick in top of the other) produces very little sound and instead suffocates all sound produced by humans. The lack of sound also stresses the two dimensional aspects of the image (the background). The sound that is sometimes added in the videos is just a flat layer put on top of a flat image.

We always have this image in mind of my sister, playing in a lot of our videos, who crosses a very busy intersection in Merksem on the outskirts of Antwerp, and one of the most depressing places in Europe. The scene of her crossing the street would take like half an hour (because she would walk very slowly) on top of this image Jos and me would dub the cars passing by.

K / A You sometimes show photographs alongside your videoworks, or sculptural objects. How do the objects and photographs you make relate to your filmic work?

H The objects or photos are often frozen residues of earlier videos; sometimes they serve as prototypes for videos still to be made. For example the latest series, which is on display in Kaleidoscope, inspired us to make a video with the characters posing on the photographs. The way these works (photos, drawings, sculptures) are developed is the same as for the videos. We not only fantasize on the figures, humans, animals, houses, streets that are modeled, photographed or drawn, but also on the people who made them: during the creative process we imitate ourselves being clumsy craftsmen or Dutch alternative artists dressed in overalls and working with dripping noses in freezing cold ateliers surrounded by beer cans...

What is also interesting for us is to try to understand the space where we show something and to install or transform the space in such a way that it vibrates an uncanny atmosphere so that people seeing the show don't feel very much at ease. For example for our show with François Culet in Le Plateau in Paris we painted the whole space in grey including all windows and objects which where on display. The ensemble of the video, photos and grey objects in these grey painted spaces produced for us the feeling of an exhibition



space in a spaceship in the year 3000 where the remains of western civilization are put on display for the inhabitants of the ship. During the Berlin Biennial where we showed the video *The Frigat* we transformed a cellar into a kind of German, technical basement by adding false doors and walls and confronting the audience with the factual presence of this space by putting on very bright light between each projection of the video.

K / A The sculpture edition you made to accompany this exhibition in Milan is a slightly diminished plate of spaghetti and a real size 'macho' watch. Why did you choose to combine these two clichés of Italy?

J In fact, we dropped the spaghetti plate and we focused on the macho watch because it has to do with - in this case Italian - behavior. For England we would probably have chosen the Big Ben or a cup of tea. The form and design of the watches is in fact a synthesis of the spirit of the man who wears it. He has no idea of the fact that his watch is extremely big and heavy. These kind of watches are also worn by porn actors. As if they want to know what time it is while they are fucking a French maid or a nurse. The only thing that counts is their watch. Macho behavior also plays an important role in our works because the macho has a very clear and extreme way of acting. The macho (as we see him) has something of a robot or an animal Yet his brain can stop functioning, start to work differently, slower, or more unpredictable. The macho, who worships his objects (cars, watches, ...) seems to turn into an object himself at unpredictable times. A kind of de-humanisation. He suddenly stops everything he's doing and starts gazing, so that he doesn't understand the world anymore and becomes depressed. He looks at his watch, but no longer knows what time it is. This is what makes him in a way interesting for our films.

K / A What will be the focus of your next project?

J The next project will be a film in which the creatures of the photo series mentioned above will be brought to life. They will be the inhabitants of a strange, cruel, funny, and totally dull place which is so extremely boring that everything that happens feels like an escape.

Selected biography

Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys (Jos de Gruyter, 1965, Geel, Be / Harald Thys, 1966, Wilrijk, Be) vivono e lavorano a Bruxelles, Belgio. Collaborano dalla seconda metà degli anni '80. Tra le mostre principali: Dependance, Bruxelles (2009); Manifesta7, Trento (2008); 5 Biennale di Berlino (2008); Gallery Artspeak, Vancouver (2007); MuHKA, Antwerp (2007); De Appel, Amsterdam (2007); Galerie Carlier/Gebauer, Berlino (2007); Gallery Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlino (2006); Bozar, Bruxelles; SMP, Marseille (2005).

Jos De Gruyter & Harald Thys (De Gruyter 1965, Geel, B / Thys 1966, Wilrijk, B) live and work in Brussels, Belgium and collaborate since the second half of the 1980s. Major exhibitions include: Dependance, Brussels (2009); Manifesta7, Trento; 5th Berlin Biennial (2008); Gallery Artspeak, Vancouver; MuHKA, Antwerp; De Appel, Amsterdam; Galerie Carlier/Gebauer, Berlin (2007); Gallery Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin (2006); Bozar, Brussels; SMP, Marseille (2005).



DCM

Il Dipartimento Curatoriale Mobile è un progetto curatoriale iniziato nel gennaio 2009 e opera come una piattaforma mobile e flessibile non legata ad una geografia. Il DCM prevede una serie di azioni collettive messe in campo da Katia Anguelova (Bulgaria), Alessandra Poggianti (Italia) e Andrea Wiarda (Olanda) scegliendo di intervenire in modo connotato a diverse situazioni, spazi, occasioni e discorsi interrogando problematiche socio-culturali che partono dal campo dell'arte contemporanea. Ogni volta mettendo in campo tattiche di lavoro diverse e interessato allo scambio fra diverse discipline e campi di conoscenza, fra *producers e receptors*, fra arte e vita. Creando un network sperimentale che potrebbe dare la possibilità ai diversi *contributors* di aggiungere nuove possibilità nella vita cittadina e partendo dall'arte come analisi visuale delle domande/dilemmi sociali e relazionali, ci si apre anche verso la cultura in generale.

Il modo itinerante di lavorare del DCM implica e prevede sia collaborazioni temporanee che più strutturate con diverse entità. Si pensa quindi di coinvolgere artisti, collettivi, professionisti di vari campi, la comunità locale, le organizzazioni culturali e internazionali, enti locali, università, fondazioni e associazioni.

The Dipartimento Curatoriale Mobile is a curatorial collaborative initiated in January 2009, operating as a mobile and flexible platform not linked to any specific geography. DCM consists of Katia Anguelova (BG), Alessandra Poggianti (IT) and Andrea Wiarda (NL). DCM works in an itinerant dynamic anticipating both temporary collaborations as well as structural projects developing over time and space. DCM takes as its point of departure contemporary artistic practice and a profound interest in exchange between creative disciplines and fields of knowledge and experience, between producers and receptors, between art and life – opening up also to contemporary culture in general. Through an experimental network DCM aims to bring together a wide range of contributors and to evolve through meetings, exchange, collaboration and reflections.

Suitcase Illuminated#6 kindly hosted by Kaleidoscope

KALEIDOSCOPE è un progetto sfaccettato che nasce con tutta la carica entusiasmante di una sfida. Prima di tutto è una casa editrice, al cuore della cui attività c'è la pubblicazione del primo free magazine europeo d'arte e cultura contemporanea. Attorno a questo nucleo centrale, Kaleidoscope si dedica allo sviluppo e alla produzione di cataloghi, saggi, libri d'artista ed edizioni limitate. Oltre all'attività editoriale ed espositiva, Kaleidoscope offre tutti i servizi di una vera e propria art agency, dallo sviluppo all'organizzazione passando per la comunicazione in ogni suo aspetto. Infine Kaleidoscope è un project space espositivo animato da un'intensa e articolata programmazione, oltre che il più fornito e selezionato punto vendita europeo di magazine internazionali specializzati in arte, architettura, design e moda.

KALEIDOSCOPE is a multi-layered project and an enthusiastic venture. It is above all a publishing house with the publication of the first European free magazine on contemporary art and culture as its core activity, Kaleidoscope also aims to develop editorial production of catalogues, monographs, academic texts, artists' books and limited editions. Kaleidoscope headquarters houses a project space animated by a rigorous programme and features an extensive stock of European art, architecture, design and fashion magazines available to browse or buy. Kaleidoscope furthermore offers its services as a very art agency.

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“Effetto tunnel” è un progetto che si articola a partire da una programmazione di proiezioni video in vari luoghi e momenti a Milano.

In fisica quantistica, l’Effetto Tunnel è *una manifestazione naturale in cui una particella in movimento, che per la fisica classica non avrebbe le energie necessarie per farlo, riesce invece ad attraversare delle barriere molto alte, creando dei flussi interazionali con altre particelle. Una fenomenologia praticamente ignorata dalla fisica classica.*

Ogni appuntamento sarà presentato in uno spazio diverso della città; tutti rappresenteranno un attraversamento, uno spostamento inteso come mezzo di conoscenza, come atto percettivo e creativo, lettura e scrittura del territorio, ma anche come una forma per discutere le pratiche artistiche. Gli spazi coinvolti saranno vissuti come *particelle* di una *manifestazione* capace di mettere in campo le proprie *energie* per attraversare e annullare le *barriere* simboliche e fisiche che si configurano negli spazi urbani.

“Effetto Tunnel” rappresenta la **VI tappa di Suitcase illuminated**, un progetto ideato da K. Angelova e A. Poggianti che si propone di individuare il lavoro di video-artisti provenienti da diversi paesi e “metterlo in viaggio”, un itinerario globale che traccia una geografia immateriale e nomade. *Suitcase illuminated* è una piattaforma mobile che si può inserire in contesti già pre-esistenti o può definirne altri. Il progetto sceglie il linguaggio video per aprire nuove prospettive e, attraverso l’occupazione dello spazio, generare connessioni e relazioni multiple. “Suitcase Illuminate#6” avrà come obiettivo quello di realizzare una programmazione video che si svolgerà per tutto il 2009-2010 in diversi spazi milanesi.

Tunnel Effect is the first instance of the activities of the Dipartimento Curatoriale Mobile. The project is articulated through a programme of video presentations in various locations and moments in the city of Milan, Italy. *Tunnel Effect is a natural manifestation supposed by quantum physics in which a particle in movement succeeds in moving through a barrier, creating interactive flows with other particles. The effect occurs equally when the given particle has a lower quantity of energy than the potential barrier. It is a phenomenon that has been largely ignored in classical mechanics.*

Each occasion in *Tunnel Effect* will be presented by **DCM** in a different location in town, representing a crossing and a movement as a means of knowledge, as a perceptive and creative act, a reading and writing of the urban territory as well as a format to discuss artistic practices. The spaces involved are viewed as particles of a manifestation capable of putting forward their own energies to move through and annul the symbolic and physical barriers of urban space.

Tunnel Effect is the 6th edition of **Suitcase Illuminated**, a project initiated by Katia Angelova and Alessandra Poggianti that proposes itself as a video node and container for different video researches and compilations. *Suitcase Illuminated* hosts projects of its own and from third parties. It proposes a global itinerary to outline an immaterial and nomadic geography. *Suitcase Illuminated* assumes video compilations as a node that opens further perspectives through the occupations of the expository space that generates multiple relations and connections. *Suitcase Illuminated #6* takes the format of a spatio-temporal video programme in the city of Milan throughout 2009-10.

