

Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys
Ten Weyngaert

The collaborative work of Brussels-based Belgian artist duo Jos De Gruyter & Harald Thys is rooted in a folksy, tragicomic sensibility honed into an experimental dramaturgy. Their video and photographic work use simple, symbolic sets, including the paradigmatic spaces (or non-spaces) of home, battlefield, urban periphery and community hall. They have engaged a recurring cast of non-professional actors as well as invented or adopted personae spanning the forms of puppets, dummies, plush animals, makeshift robots and rejected toys. These characters continually rehearse power dynamics and emotional entanglements, creating worlds not unlike our own, yet more focused, bizarre and bleak. The artists seek ways to confront marginal, incapacitated, lost and alienated subjects without defining these 'others' in sociological terms. In this sense, and especially in their novel use of ghoulish humour, De Gruyter & Thys broaden the scope of reflection on socially produced behaviour.

Lonely at the Top # 4: Ten Weyngaert includes three video works and a photographic series. The presentation centres on De Gruyter & Thys' newest and most ambitious narrative film entitled *Ten Weyngaert* [In the Vineyard]. Adopting the name and setting of a Brussels Community Centre that was built as a utopian space (but is now notoriously frequented by troubled people and remains markedly isolated from the city's public life), the action of *Ten Weyngaert* is transposed into a world ruled by a metallic spider, where robots act as intermediaries between the minute monarch and a motley cast of dysfunctional archetypes. The human cast, as is often the case with the artists' work, is comprised of family members, friends and non-professional actors—all familiar people placed in a radically non-familiar situation. The unfolding action becomes an allegory of human behaviour under social and psychological 'pressure'. Accompanying the film, the exhibition includes a series of recent scene studies in the guise of black & white photographic works, a suite of 22 tableaux in all. The photographs were conceived independently, but comprise a crucial component of the film's presentation, as it is here that De Gruyter & Thys introduce many of the characters that we meet in *Ten Weyngaert*, similarly engrossed in a bewildering array of sinister rituals. Not a single smile seems to break through the dark grey haze that envelops these scenes of quotidian madness – a marked contrast with the effect that so many of these bizarre depictions produce in the viewer.

Jos De Gruyter & Harald Thys and live and work in Brussels and have been working together since the mid-1980s. Their work has been widely exhibited throughout Europe including solo and duo exhibitions at Middelheim Museum, Antwerp; SMP, Marseille, and Galerie Carlier/Gebauer, Berlin. Their work has also been included in exhibitions at Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin; Bozar, Brussels; and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, among others. In the summer of 2007, their work will also travel to Vancouver, Canada; in September, *Ten Weyngaert* will be shown at Fracc Le Plateau in Paris.