

ARTSPEAK



Harald Thys & Jos de Gruyter, from the series *Travaux Photographiques*, 2006. Photo courtesy Galerie Aliceday, Brussels.

Harald Thys and Jos de Gruyter in Vancouver

June 30 - July 28, 2007

Opening Friday June 29, 8pm

Artist talk Thursday June 28, 7:30pm at Emily Carr Institute (Theatre)

Curated by Monika Szewczyk

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Artspeak is a member of the Pacific Association of Artist Run Centres (PAARC). Artspeak gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council, the Province of BC through the BC Arts Council, the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver Foundation, our Board of Directors, volunteers and our members.

The collaborative work of Belgian artists Harald Thys and Jos de Gruyter 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 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 a ghoulish humour, Thys and de Gruyter broaden the scope of reflection on socially produced behaviour.

Their exhibition at Artspeak will include three video works and a photographic series. The exhibition centres on Thys and de Gruyter's newest and most ambitious narrative film entitled *Ten Weyngaert* [In the Vineyard]. Adopting the name and setting of a Brussels Community Center that was built as a utopian space (but is now frequented by troubled people and remains isolated from the city's public life), the action of *Ten Weyngaert* is transposed into a world ruled by a 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 will include a series of recent scene studies in the guise of black and white photographic works. The photographs were conceived independently, but comprise a crucial component of the film's presentation, as it is here that Thys and de Gruyter introduce many of the characters that we meet in *Ten Weyngaert*. The exhibition also includes the mime-performance video *Le Cercle N. 1: The Chair* in which a white man switches into a black man, then back again and so on. Artspeak's publications area will be activated through a monitor screening of an early work, *The Experiment*, as well as a bibliography/library as a means to further engage with the work of Thys and de Gruyter.

Harald Thys and Jos de Gruyter 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 MUHKA, Antwerp; SMP, Marseille; Galerie Carlier/Gebauer, Berlin; and Galerie EOF, Paris. 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. The exhibition at Artspeak is their first exhibition in North America.