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Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago News

MCA SCREEN: JOS DE GRUYTER AND HARALD THYS

August 8, 2015 - January 17, 2016



The **Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago** presents the first major work by Belgian artist duo **Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys** to be acquired by an US museum. The pair has been working collaboratively since the late 1980s, and though their primary medium is film, the exhibition also features their sculpture, photography, drawings, and paintings. De Gruyter and Thys' largest installation to date, *Im Reich der Sonnenfinsternis* (*In the empire of the solar eclipse*), is the sole work on display. The exhibition is on view August 8, 2015 to January 17, 2016 and is organized by Dieter Roelstraete, former Senior Curator at the MCA.

Im Reich der Sonnenfinsternis is an installation comprised of over 200 paintings attributed to a painter named Johannes. Johannes is the fictional protagonist of a 25-minute video *Das Loch* (*The hole*), which is also part of the work. Although prolific, Johannes is hopelessly untalented, which may have been a factor in his self-willed death. The paintings, made by De Gruyter and Thys in the course of a couple of weeks in 2011, are provocatively, jarringly ugly, reflecting the disjointed narration of *Das Loch* and the film's dreary and dismal aesthetic. Sloppily constructed mannequins made of Styrofoam heads, thumbtacks, and metal frames are awkwardly costumed to stand as characters. The film is made up of a series of slow, still shots accompanied by random musings on the latest technological gadgets, a metaphor for Johannes' torment.

De Gruyter and Thys's work often incorporates a deep-seated feeling for the morbid and the macabre, along with a sardonic sense of humor that can seem alienating. Their exploration of the intersection of mental states and physical space is a common terrain for them to present their strange and shattered story lines with narratives that do not always produce meaning.

Jos de Gruyter (born in 1965 in Geel, Belgium) and Harald Thys (born in 1966 in Wilrijk, Belgium) met in 1987 as film students at the Sint-Lukas Brussels University College of Art and Design. Their first collaboration was a 5-minute film titled *Mime in the Videostudio* (1988). They now live and work in Brussels, Belgium.

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Image: Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys. *Das Loch - Im Reich der Sonnenfinsternis*, 2010–11. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of Mary and Earle Ludgin by exchange, 2012.120. Photo: Nick Ash, courtesy of Isabella Bortolozzi Galerie, Berlin.

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