

HOME-MADE VICTORIES at S.M.A.K. is the first major retrospective of the work of Koen Theys (Brussels, 1963), a pioneer of Belgian video art. The exhibition is conceived as a cross-section of Theys' oeuvre from the early 1980s to the present.

His first videos are closely linked to the punk movement and are related to the work of Paul McCarthy, Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler. In parallel with punk, these artists show that violence can no longer be pictured in a traditional way. They criticise the prevailing power structures in images that are sometimes extremely violent. Theys' work too displays an extremely critical view of society, art and culture. Using humour and irony, he sheds light on the contradictions he finds and experiences as a contemporary artist. In the 1990s he made monumental photo-collages on the subject of the characteristically human inner conflict between 'wanting to be unique' and 'wanting to belong to the group'. His formal idiom came to comprise inversions, distortions, duplications, mirror images and repetitions. This exhibition circuit also contains reflections and visual echoes to accentuate this typical feature of Theys' oeuvre.

When digital images started to open up new possibilities in the late 1990s, the artist returned to his old love: video art. They still contained the sense of drama found in his early videos, but now they had a more brazen, comical touch. Theys' fascination with 'mass ornamentation' – e.g. water ballets or Chinese mass choreography – became increasingly evident. This was to be seen in long, monumental films that move very slowly. The artist explored phenomena from mass culture, the Internet and show business, adding a hint of humour. His latest work also refers explicitly to art history: he not only comments on tradition but at the same time also gives it a new twist by means of the relatively recent medium of video art.

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