

# JOS DE GRUYTER & HARALD THYS

## OBJECTS AS FRIENDS

### 439 W 127TH STREET, NEW YORK

### FOURTH FLOOR

Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys  
*Objects as Friends (2010-2012)*

*Objects as Friends, the title of the show, finds its origins in the German language and was first spoken by Johannes\* – an amateur painter who lived from 1947 to 2010 near Aachen, Germany. Shortly before his death, Johannes made a radical change in his artistic practice; after spending a lifetime devoted to abstract expression he conceived of the idea to paint objects. The banal things around him gave him inspiration, things he found during his long walks, things that were no longer of use, things that were dear to him. He called them his friends, “Objekten als Freunden” or “Objects as Friends”.*

*Johannes died suddenly before he could begin the series.*

It is this idea that prompted Jos De Gruyter and Harald Thys to make an impressive suite of photographs that would take several years to complete.

The total number of photographs in the series is 311, each composed of a brightly lit arrangement of found objects against a dusty, grey surface. We see a broken umbrella, a collection of vessels with human faces, pieces of cloth, polystyrene, ceramics, hubcaps and so on. The ephemera comes from one-euro shops, flea markets and amateur pottery courses, or was picked up in rural second-hand stores and therefore discarded, broken or useless. These items appear here one final time before disappearing forever.

A potentially infinite world of objects and object-relationships unfolds before the viewers' eyes, made immortal by the medium of photography. Each speck of dust is captured precisely in these photos, the backgrounds' colors

rendered so accurately as to create a sense of hyper-reality, of science-fiction fantasy. The dramatic shadows and powerful reflections of the spotlight are out of proportion to the objects' illuminations. In fact, each image is stitched together out of several different shots; they are machine-constructed pictures, showing a digitally generated world. Since photography's invention in the 19th century, it has been necessary to investigate the apparatus' gaze, to constantly reconsider our definition of photographic "reality" according to technological developments. The staging of objects into still-lives – a painterly genre originating in the early Renaissance and reached its peak during the Baroque period – is a traditional test field for ways of reproducing textures of the real world in artwork. This process also calls attention to the finitude of things and life, serving as a *momento mori* – a reminder of death.

The object ensembles in de Gruyter and Thys' photographs are uncanny, sometimes funny, and always strange. The uncanny, according to Sigmund Freud, is not that which is totally foreign, but rather the thing or person that is at once familiar and unfamiliar, just a step away from the realms of imagination and daily life. The notion of a distorted dream-like parallel world also appears in the design of the exhibition space which houses a colossal, black, monolithic structure on which the photographs hang. De Gruyter and Thys consider the exhibition space not as neutral surface for presentation, but an artist medium unto itself, a symbolic terrain, an essential aspect of experiencing art.

*\*In 2010, De Gruyter and Thys made a film about Johannes titled Das Loch (The Hole).*