

For his new exhibition at Galerie Micheline Szwajcer, Jef Geys collects a number of concepts: As the old masters in their studio, he gives a “final touch” to the artworks, and like the apprentice, he completes his paintings by affixing the last clouds on the canvas. His system, that he baptized “format”, depicts the same subjects in different sizes. For Jef Geys, It is now time to understand the notion of “format” outside the IT technics and the “format”. The main reminds us the old-time studio.

The activities of Martin Douven (1898-1973), a self-taught artist from Limburg, provide the starting point of the Jef Geys interest for production-line painting, for authenticity in art and for the creative process a work of art goes through. The man began selling his own paintings in 1928 in furniture shops. As soon as his nine children were old enough, he got them painting also. According to the method of the “painter’s chain” each child took care of a part of the canvas (blue sky, cloud, tree...), and the father would finish it off. In the 1950s the family Douven went to live in Leopoldsborg, where Jef Geys was living. He became friend with François, one of the Douven children, and was then able to visit the factory nearby in full productivity.

Today Jef Geys takes great interest in the work of painter Jef Lenaers, born in 1943 in the Campine. He used to work at the Douven factory, and for this exhibition he reproduces some of the model paintings of the Douven factory in which the sky has often the central place.

Jef Geys has summed up his entire oeuvre as an ongoing project that combines conceptual attitudes, educational activities and formal experiments. By doing so he expands the range of what constitutes an artistic experience: from the 1960’s to 1989, Jef Geys was appointed Teacher of Positive Aesthetics at a school in Balen and started to map out the possibilities of the learning process. Both on an educational as artistic level, the school was a kind of laboratory of different activities, which linked social, political and aesthetical concerns.

From the start, his work was also set against the art market and the institutional authorities. He critiques and calls into question the authority of certain accepted practices (his own and those of others) including art criticism. In his practice, Geys affirms a radical independent position and develops an unprecedented approach to collective creativity, frequently generated by the participation of his immediate community. Indeed, much of his work has to do with the term ‘terroir’ in the sense of biotope, using typical representations of everyday life. One of his most well known works is ‘zaadzakjes’: each year, he paints copies of the beautiful flowers that are pictured on seed packages with their common and scientific name. Among other projects, the artist has also converted an art gallery into a grocery store.

Jef Geys is born in 1934 in Leopoldsbuurg, Belgium. His work has been widely exhibited worldwide at venues including: WIELS, Brussels (2013); MuKHA, Antwerp (2011); Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Detroit (2010); Belgian Pavilion of La Biennale di Venezia (2009); International Center of Photography, New York (2008); Deep Comedy, Marfa (2007); Orchard Gallery, New York (2007); IAC, Villeurbanne (2007); Pori Art Museum, Pori (2005); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2004); Documenta 11, Kassel (2002); Kunstverein, Munich (2001); Witte de With, Rotterdam (1993); Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (1992); São Paulo Biennial (1991) Since the 1950s, Geys has worked at his home in Balen near Leopoldsbuurg.

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