JEF GEYS

Jef Geys (Leopoldsburg,1934—Genk, 2018) lived and worked in Balen, a town in Flanders, Belgium that is situated in De Kempen, a natural region that encompasses part of the low countries that extends east from Antwerp and terminates in the southwestern part of the Netherlands. Much of his work centers on this locale, reflecting the artist's position in the region's environment, history, language, and social relations—what Geys referred to as "terroir." Vocationally, Geys taught "Positive Aesthetics" (his own invention) at the state middle school in Balen from 1960 to 1989. This precocious approach used Geys' own practice as an artist alongside the presentation of contemporary works of art—from Piero Gilardi to Daniel Buren to Roy Lichtenstein—to heighten an awareness in his students of the world around them, presenting concepts usually considered only for educated adults.[1] Geys staged projects in his classroom with his students and listed these activities among an inventory of artworks that he kept up to date from 1947 until his death earlier this year. What is most important about this inventory is how it establishes an equivalence between forms, between activities of the artist in everyday life and all that is commonly recognized as the production of an artist.

As early as 1966, Jef Geys began using his red heart motif, as both a signature and an arbitrary form. It appeared containing a list of numbers extracted from his personal identity cards and licenses, set within a self-portrait on the front cover of his newspaper the *Kempens Informatieblad*; on bottles of Champagne during Geys' tenure co-running Bar 900; and within the same contours, was baked as loaves of bread and sold in a gallery like any work of art. As a logo or signature form, it was modeled to point to the artist as its referent while alluding to whatever associations one might equate with the heart and the breast.

In Geys' work, the heart was one of the early examples of his interest in how a form can function as a mode of identification. He was interested in understanding what structures establish the channel of communication between a form and its referent, and to attempt to create associations of meaning beyond art's established codes:

> Precisely during the period 1960–63, I was preoccupied with such things as "form" and what made "form" look different: camouflage and mimicry, in short, the hidden, the things which one seems to see.
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> Images-forms which are shown in a certain way, i.e. in a studied "correct" way, under "correct" guidance, embedded in a "correct" strategy, are readily accepted, as if they have existed all the time. Repetition, while creating habit, nearly at the same time leaves a taste of déjà vu. The end is an accepted boredom. Images-forms, no matter how strong they are, may appear perfectly normal, submitted, tame, having reached the saturation point. The images are experienced as something "retinal," which is also the experience one is looking for: the significance underneath is kept at a distance. We are inclined to dispose of any images which cannot be used to finish our homework, as mere scenery for more important things that we supposedly have on our mind. To demonstrate this obvious wearing out of images, I started looking for basic forms with a very simple structure but a heavily loaded content.[2]

It was the fundamentals that interested Geys most, not as established universal truths, but as the basic assumptions that we all start with in making sense of the world—for instance, what structures classify hues into colors, line and space into shape. This began early, while Geys was studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp: "I've always been interested in the truth behind things, the motivation, going back. At that time I had this problem of classifying, of visual thinking. It's your environment that turns you into an artist, just as art is made. Actually the word art is artificial."[3]

This sociological question, of what fashions an artist, would be elaborated after graduation when Geys received his license to teach and returned to Balen for work. It was at this time that he designed the *Coloring Book for Adults* (1963–65) to alleviate his own impasse, creating this instructive work almost to teach himself how to be an artist. The *Coloring Book* infantilizes its subject, prescribing to its user an action as banal as coloring in the most commonplace of culturally loaded forms. It contains the themes of: 1. the gendered female form in art history; 2. maps and geopolitical borders; 3. the mid-century model home; 4. human anatomy; 5. the masculine image of the soldier; 6. consumer commodities; 7. the automobile.

As an educational tool repurposed for the adult world, the coloring book follows a pedagogical theme in Geys' work that reflected the language surrounding his vocation, while throwing its purpose into sharp contradiction. By being displaced into adulthood, the coloring book served a divisive purpose, irritating Western art's fixation on the creation of the autonomous work of art by a singular individual, as well as the perceived need for a tool to serve a clear function.

This search for model forms lead Geys to "rediscover" the golden ratio as a metric based on the human figure. In many ways, the body became ground zero for Geys, pointing back to how he oriented himself toward the world, as a resident of a small town, a teacher, organizer of community groups at socialist community centers, and as an artist within these contexts. His primary influence for making this central to his teaching and his art, was from Soviet architect and educator Nikolai Ladovsky, who imbued his teaching of architecture at the Vkhutemas (the Soviet equivalent of the Bauhaus) with the "physiological effects… and spatial properties of form" as derived from practical human use and spatial perception.[4] With his *I-form* of 1968, a year that saw considerable police violence in Europe and abroad, Jef Geys outlined his body on the pavement and photographed what remained. As with the heart, he was interested in dealing with the shape of the body as the simplest identifying form of the individual. It signaled toward a broader dialectic in Geys' work between the particular (the body of the artist, Geys himself) and the universal (the body as a general form). This remained a productive contradiction for Geys, underlining the problematics of a humanism based within the contingencies of the individual's own body, Balen, Flanders, Belgium, ad infinitum.


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Two years earlier, in 1966, the artist's outline served as a series of paper cut-outs, like paper dolls but with a 1:1 human metric. In Geys' typical elaboration of a theme, the same year saw similar "dolls" in three-dimensional form, routed in wood and painted in different guises—"camouflaged" with signifying colors of football teams, flags, and military insignia. An object of childhood again greeted the adult world in abstracted form. Termed *Schildwachten* [sentinels, or more literally, "paint-watchers"], these wooden inferences of both personhood and standardization give a sly acknowledgment to fellow Belgian René Magritte's bilboquet motif.[5] Once painted, they resemble giant table-top football players as much as they suggest the shape of the American bombs that were decimating Vietnam at the time.

The *Schildwachten* refer to military guards, in name and resemblance, not unlike what Geys would have seen coming of age in Leopoldsburg, a small military town that was occupied by Germany in WWII. We should pause to place importance on Geys' proximity to the military context, to its strategies, codified language, and flags of signification. Much of the content for Geys' work was drawn from these surroundings, including the quadrant grid design of the town's military camp. The Roman grid appeared consistently throughout Geys' work as a reference to the universal metric of land division and town planning, a design which was exported from the lowlands during colonization, made emblematic in New York, and common to every modern city since. He reduced the quadrant design to 2x2 meter squares, and installed it in his own garden as planter boxes to grow seasonal fare. The grid of quadra in his garden provided a ground for which many of his future projects were based:

> For me nothing is so binding as the laws of the grid. Trying to escape the rules of the game makes the game unnecessarily false. Grids are there because we need to speak, because rules and laws try to dominate our traffic. Sometimes the invisible rules of the game are more interesting than the game itself. In the beginning there are rules that we all can and want to recognize.[6]

Characteristic of the sense of contradiction that runs throughout much of Geys' work, the prescribed rules and protocol that he established for his own production were used equally in their capacity for limitation as they were for their productivity. For instance, Geys seemingly established a serial structure arbitrarily or retrospectively, e.g., when he annually painted the design of one of the seed packets from his garden between 1963 and 2018; or when Geys published *All the Black and White Photos until 1998*, which compiled all of his contact sheets without editing or censoring. By camouflaging the logic of the work with a new rubric, he invited a legible meaning that speaks at a different register, one which may even be out of his hands. It was a way of deceiving himself and remaining suspicious of his own intentions, throwing a net over poetic choices to give the appearance of order. Jef Geys saw structure as a necessary deception:

> Through the art of Jef Geys runs a chain of variations on the theme of *concealing*: wrapping, travesty, con-trick, kitsch, camouflage… Most of the time the artist attacks the social *deceit* indirectly. He seems to adapt; but at the same time he provides shifts which reveal his critical intention; which make the machine of deceit grind and shudder. Complicity and sabotage.
>
> Recurrent questions are: how do those who are in control, *deceive* "the masses"; which part of their memory do they try to erase? The non-conformist who asks those impertinent questions, has an amazing stock of popular candour and brutality. But no smug naïvety; he knows he is neither a saint nor a hero; he knows that the idea of art itself has been open to suspicion for long. Therefore Jef Geys passes criticism on art and the para-artistic phenomenons while at the same time he shows he is conscious of his own ambivalent position: he cannot remain completely outside the deceit. (Nobody can.) This explains his sharp camouflage-games; they caution the public or make them feel uncomfortable. (Sometimes: as if someone is lecturing you about the deceit of the world while he is pinching your wallet.)[7]

Indeed, deception was central to Geys' work—in his strategic dealings with the art industry, he often proposed the unrealizable or absurd, not as self-sabotage but as productive sleights-of-hand. There was his famous proposal to blow up the Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp; his letter to dealer Ileana Sonnabend suggesting she exhibit his vacation photos from the South of France; his bid to install a structurally unfeasible viewing platform at Le Magasin, Grenoble; or his many letters to appointed bureaucrats suggesting they allow Geys to plant vegetable gardens on state property, one of which was addressed to French president Jacques Chirac. For an artist interested in the "the invisible rules of the game," these were productive interventions, revealing something particular in each instance, be it either cultural or common sense, about the structures that circumscribe what can and cannot be done or said by an artist.

Establishing the mythic persona of the artist was a strategy that allowed Geys to put into question the relationship between the private life of the individual and the public identity contained within the role of the artist, continuing the theme that Joris Note identifies as a form of "concealment." Not unlike dressing the *Schildwacht* in a variety of painted appearances, Geys intentionally displaced the role by appropriating other identities—what he called "disguises." For instance, there was Mary Davenport, a nom-de-plume assumed by Geys for a body of work picturing equine figures; and Geys' adoption of the name of a village boy, Gijs Van Doorn. Geys elaborated his own persona like any other form in his work, and with considerable foresight, saw the complicity between the activity of the artist and their public persona as a site to establish one's autonomy as an artist.

This remains as evidence of Geys' singular attitude towards his position in the world, it was an idiosyncratic political stance, underwritten by a radical equivalence between all that he did. This is evident in his position on aesthetic experience that he elaborated in his work, promoting a social equality that disregarded the classist connoisseurship on which the art system has been established, ever since the invention of taste. He equated the engineering and finish of a BMW as equal in beauty to a Rubens; botanical forms as elaborate and "useful" as pornographic drawings or corporate images; and the production of a painting factory in Leopoldsburg that produced paintings of "common" Flemish taste to be as insightful on the state of artistic production as the authorship of the artist himself.

Beginning and ending in and around De Kempen, Jef Geys made this equivalence most legible by maintaining his lifelong inventory of works. While constantly referring to and reinterpreting his own output, the continuity of this index retains a steady equilibrium, giving all of Geys' divergent activities as an artist the same standing. Above all, the taxonomy of this expansive list is rooted in a sentimental materialism, cataloging everything from the commonplace to the perceptively eminent: a class field-trip to visit the studio of Marcel Broodthaers; the natural products of Geys' garden; a drive with cabbages around the region to "show" them the countryside; exhibiting at Documenta; the presentation of a snake handler in the classroom; the book compiling all of his black and white photographs; appearances on television; and a number of letters addressed to heads of state. Within all of this was a spirited questioning of art's position in the world, and consequently, the role of the artist in social life. Jef Geys rearticulated modernity's question concerning the purpose of the artist into a mode of working that sensed the boundaries of the role; he tested its limits, asking what circumscribes the expectations of what an artist is and does.

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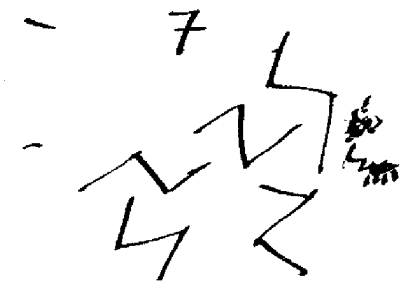
In April of 2017, I invited Jef Geys to make this exhibition and he agreed. This came after a series of earlier attempts between the artist and Yale Union's curatorial staff. First among those attempts was an exhibition proposal in 2014 which was not taken up by the institution, followed shortly thereafter by another, also not completed, then a project to publish an archive book, which lapsed after Yale Union missed the deadline for its awarded funding and had to return the grant. This culminated in early 2016, when Geys announced on his blog that the final proposal he had planned for Yale Union would be "shut down." This project expanded from an invitation from the Belgian Postal Service for Geys to produce his third commissioned stamp, but was cancelled due to the postal service's refusal to print a stamp picturing the artist seated with his neighbor sitting nude atop his lap in accordance with its strict policy of "No nude or half-naked figures."[8] Geys had potentially planned for its refusal from the beginning, since he had previous experience with the regulations of the postal service around the depiction of nude figures. This image was to serve as the content for the exhibition, where it was to be incrementally blown up twenty-two times. From Yale Union's institutional perspective, the proposed image was fraught by its racialized content (Geys' neighbor was Black), and the artist's proposal was rightfully deemed untenable for exhibition.

In making his exhibition proposal for Yale Union, Geys had known from the start that it would be unacceptable to the authorities of the Belgian Postal Service, and most likely, knew its content to be untenable in the eyes of its audience in the United States. Having never met the artist in person, and for his life to now be behind us, I'm in no position to speculate on, or reveal, his intention. What I do know is that it was in Geys' spirit to spin a game out of both social and formal contracts, to use methods of "multiplication, infiltration, and camouflage," to apply pressure on these situations, test their limits, and even "coerce a repressive response" as a result.[9] For Geys, these games were just as much part of his ethic as an artist as it was productive for the work itself. He laid out obscure rules for the production of his work and its display, setting tasks and assignments for curators, joyfully appointing friends "uninitiated" in the dealings of the art world to install his work, and testing the commercial competency of his dealers by installing ultimatums to the sale of his art. By testing the willingness of the individuals involved with his work to perform their roles within his imposed limits, Jef Geys exposed the social mores and formal structures that otherwise keep the most unassailable limits in check. By enacting this deception with Yale Union, he revealed the thin gradient between what is institutionally possible and what is easily deemed unfeasible.

The current exhibition contains a familiar tenor, wherein Geys set up a game and prescribed a task usually under the jurisdiction of the artist, to the role of the curator. Yale Union invited me to pursue developing this exhibition with Geys, to which he responded by repurposing a proposal that he had made to CNEAI, Paris that had not been realized. His outline for this exhibition was comprised of a commission and if we desired, additional work from the inventory of his dealer. The commission was to fabricate seven *paravents*, or folding screens, for which certain aesthetic judgments were delegated to the curator within a set of rules determined by the artist. The task was to select and crop sections from large pieces of photo-wallpaper that were originally produced for *As Sombras de Lisboa*, an exhibition at Culturgest, Lisbon in 2012. Geys had directed Culturgest's curator to select images from a contact sheet of photographs that Geys had taken while on vacation in Lisbon in 1998. From this contact sheet, the curator was to make a selection of images to be presented as large-scale wallpaper prints in varying sizes that would serve as the background on which to hang the photographs of the same images. The artist determined the smallest size of print, and prescribed the biggest to suit the largest gallery wall, leaving the curator to make a total selection that would conform to either seven, thirteen, or twenty-one photos. He chose thirteen, arranged their placement within two rooms, and placed the framed works on each field of wallpaper, in effect making the total decision as to how the compositions and the resulting exhibition cohered as an aesthetic whole.



Following Geys' instructions, I was delegated with selecting which segments of the images leftover from Lisbon were to fit within the dimensions of the three panels of the folding screens. This left my own aesthetic judgment as the reason for the resulting visual experience of these works. Continuing the logic of the exhibition from which the wallpaper was derived, Geys intentionally set up a game between himself and the curator of the exhibition to produce the final work. Geys had expressed disgust with the idea of the curator as auteur,[10] and in this work, intended to meddle with the expectations of the curatorial profession and its ego. A shared sentiment among people in art who had known Geys is that working with him required exposing something beyond our public front, a certain disclosure of vulnerability. By allowing a humiliating amount of agency, he applied pressure on the individuals involved, making us face certain expectations in making exhibitions today—for instance, the unreasonable demand for excessive confidence in one's own expertise and vision, and for the capacity to perform them tirelessly. (Nicholas Tammens, April 2018)

NOTES

1 Anna Harding, "Jef Geys School Projects 1960–2005." In *Magic Moments: Collaboration Between Artists and Young People*, Anna Harding, ed. London: Black Dog, 2005.
2 Jef Geys, "STORY." In *Jef Geys, Architecture as Limitation*, exh. cat., São Paulo Biennial, 1991.
3 Jef Geys, *Wien, Vienna, Wenen,* exh. cat., Bawag Foundation, 2009.
4 Jef Geys, "STORY." In *Jef Geys: Architecture as Limitation*, exh. cat., São Paulo Biennial, 1991. For further elaboration, see Jamie Stevens, *Chalet*, exh. text, La Loge, Brussels, 2017.
5 Thanks to Dirk Snauwaert for this important connection.
6 *Kempens Informatieblad*, Special Edition Biennale Venetië [Venice Bienniale], 2009.
7 Joris Note, *Jef Geys, ABC Ecole de Paris*, Stichting Kunst & Projecten, 1990.
8 See "Yale Union–Portland–Format tentoonstelling Jef Geys", https://jefgeysweblog.wordpress.com/2016/02/25/yale-union-portland-format-tentoonstelling-jef-geys/ (Accessed April 9, 2018); and "shutting down Portland Project," https://jefgeysweblog.wordpress.com/2016/03/11/shutting-down-portland-project/ (Accessed April 9, 2018).
9 Anke Bangma quoted in "Translatrix: R.H. Quaytman on Jef Geys." In R.H. Quaytman, *Allegorical Decoys*. Gent, Belgium: MER. Paper Kunsthalle, 2008: 35–46.
10 Interview with Dirk Snauwaert, '*ARCHIEF 3' JEF GEYS*, Frans Masereel Centrum, 2016; and "Entrevista Miguel Wandschneider – Jef Geys" [Interview Miguel Wandschneider – Jef Geys], https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTbP7NeQToU (Accessed April 6, 2018).

JEF GEYS
April 14–June 10, 2018

Curated by Nicholas Tammens

Yale Union gives special thanks to the family of Jef Geys, Francis Mary, Dirk Snauwaert, Florence Bonnefous, Sylvie Boulanger and to the galleries Air de Paris, Essex Street, and Galerie Max Mayer. The exhibition also could not have been realized without the generous support of The General Delegation of the Government of Flanders to the USA and The Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States.

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YALE UNION 800 SE 10th Avenue, Portland, OR

WORKS IN EXHIBITION

The Shadows of Lisbon [Paravent 1], 2018
MDF, aluminum, piano hinges, photographic wallpaper
57 x 71 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris

The Shadows of Lisbon [Paravent 2], 2018
MDF, aluminum, piano hinges, photographic wallpaper
57 x 71 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris

The Shadows of Lisbon [Paravent 3], 2018
MDF, aluminum, piano hinges, photographic wallpaper
57 x 71 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris

The Shadows of Lisbon [Paravent 4], 2018
MDF, aluminum, piano hinges, photographic wallpaper
57 x 71 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris

The Shadows of Lisbon [Paravent 5], 2018
MDF, aluminum, piano hinges, photographic wallpaper
57 x 71 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris

The Shadows of Lisbon [Paravent 6], 2018
MDF, aluminum, piano hinges, photographic wallpaper
57 x 71 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris

The Shadows of Lisbon [Paravent 7], 2018
MDF, aluminum, piano hinges, photographic wallpaper
57 x 71 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris

The final page of Jef Geys' book *All the Black and White Photos until 1998* features a contact sheet of photographs that Geys took to amuse himself while visiting Lisbon in 1998. This set of photographs frames the commonplace of Lisbon's streets, creating images that play off the light and shadow of the city's architecture. As formal compositions of dynamic diagonal and horizontal leading lines, they allude just as much to the films of Eisenstein as to Geys' penchant for finding the aesthetic in the banal.

The images served as the content for a game set up by Geys to produce an exhibition with Miguel Wandschneider at Culturegest, Lisbon. The resulting exhibition pointed to the role of wallpaper in exhibition design, while revealing the allowances of the curator. Here in Portland, scaled down to the domestic size of furniture and situated in a large room filled with natural light, the reiteration of this work takes on new relationships between light and shadow, architecture, and the metric of the body. (NT)

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Viola Alpina (Reuzen alpenviola/pensée géante des Alpes), 2010
Oil on canvas and two frames
55 x 35 in., 9 x 35 in., 5 x 11 in.
Courtesy of Air de Paris

Tagetes patula nana (Afrikaner erekruis/Oeillet d'inde légion d'honneur), 2010
Oil on canvas and two frames
55 x 35 in., 9 x 35 in., 5 x 11 in.
Courtesy of Air de Paris

Floristan, 2012
10 stamps, published by the Belgian Postal Service
6 1/2 x 6 in.

Annually from 1963 to 2018, Jef Geys made two paintings reproducing the design of a packet of seeds that he planted in his garden, in the amusement that what was pictured on the packet deviated from what sprung up in his damp plot in Balen. (NT)

At the crux of the seed packets series was my conviction to blow-up, screw-up and even falsify something that is already "false": reality must serve to keep us dumb and unhappy: consumer cattle.

The small seed packets from the shop are perfect but according to the ground, the human hand and the weather, there appears from out the ground and insipid decoction of the image on the packet.

My next concern was to demonstrate that a medium —here the painting—can never be copied. Thus: two formats: small (approximately 18/24) "genuinely" painted on linen fixed to a backing—oil, gouache, etc. One in large format (0.90–1.35 m) in lacquer paint on a wooden panel (with my knowledge from the publicity department at the Antwerp Academy—as the eye-catcher).

The panels have to be shown together with two "frames"—one with the Latin and Dutch name of the content and a little frame with the year. I know that this will not happen and that the "image" will be a success without the poetry of the name of the inexorability of the year." (JG) — "STORY." In *Jef Geys: Architecture as Limitation*, exh. cat., São Paulo Biennial, 1991.

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Equisetaceae Paardestaartenfamilie Equisetum arvense L. Heermoes [Middelheim "AEG"], 1999
Ink on paper under Plexiglass; dried flowers and collage on paper, wood frame and glass
20 x 15 in.; 19 x 14 in.
Courtesy of Air de Paris

Asteraceae Komposietenfamilie Achillea millefolium L. Duizendblad [Middelheim "Iberia"], 1999
Ink on paper under Plexiglass; dried flowers and collage on paper, wood frame and glass
20 x 15 in.; 19 x 14 in.
Courtesy of Air de Paris

Caryophyllaceae Anjerfamilie Cerastium Dubium (Bast. Guépin) Kleverige hoornbloem [Middelheim "Vito"], 1999
Ink on paper under Plexiglass; dried flowers and collage on paper, wood frame and glass
20 x 15 in.; 19 x 14 in.
Courtesy of Air de Paris

Onagraceae Teunisbloemfamilie Oenothera biennis L. Teunisbloem [Middelheim "Canon"], 1999
Ink on paper under Plexiglass; dried flowers and collage on paper, wood frame and glass
20 x 15 in.; 19 x 14 in.
Courtesy of Air de Paris

Caprifoliaceae Kamperfoeliefamilie Sambucus nigra L. Gewone vlier [Middelheim "Knack"], 1999
Ink on paper under Plexiglas; dried flowers and collage on paper, wood frame and glass
20 x 15 in.; 19 x 14 in.

In 1999, the park of the Middelheim Museum in Antwerp was divided into a grid. At each quadrant stood a pole, affixed with two frames containing: 1. A sample of a plant from the grounds, 2. A drawing picturing a reproduction of early 18th century pornography, set into relief by corporate logos from the fields of fashion, chemistry, luxury goods, travel, and food. (NT)

For me nothing is so binding as the laws of the grid. Trying to escape the rules of the game makes the game unnecessarily false. Grids are there because we need to speak, because rules and laws try to dominate our traffic. Sometimes the invisible rules of the game are more interesting than the game itself. In the beginning there are rules that we all can and want to recognise. The invisible grids and tracks along which the "art" or other "work" is formed are more intriguing than the "tv series" that comes out of them. Solving crossword puzzles and thinking that you're clever. Distorting cubes and fiercely discarding them. I divide the Middelheim into 110 quadrants and ask Daniël to harvest one plant per quadrant, to dry it, to name it, and to mount it. I make one drawing per quadrant: as a basis I take an historic (from Pompeï to the present day) erotic picture that I mix with a "corporate image." The border between what one calls pornography and the cunning tricks of the "business world" is for me close to one another. Per quadrant I place an iron pole whereupon the drawing mounted on plexi is fixed at approximately 2 metres from the ground. (JG) — *Kempens Informatieblad*, Special Edition Biennale Venetië [Venice Bienniale], 2009.

Middelheim high and low will be subdivided into 110 "quadras." In each of the approximately square parcels that are reminiscent of a huge allotment, I had a countryside expert search for, pick, and dry a plant. The dried specimen receives a family name in Latin and Dutch, a number, and is framed. At the places of discovery a steel pole of about two metres high is placed in the ground and onto this a drawing in A3 format. You could think of it like "bus stops" with information panels. The drawings are a mix of early 17th century to 19th century porno images mixed each time with a "corporate image" from large companies. In order not to startle the children, the drawings are placed high up. The dried and encased plants hang together on one wall in the Braem pavilion. On 23/09/99 there is union activity that holds the Middelheim low and high closed for one day. (JG) — *Kempens Informatieblad*, Special Edition Biennale Venetië [Venice Bienniale], 2009.

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Patisson – Porsche Black [patty-pan squash], 1980s/2016
Lacquer (automotive finish) on Polyester fiberglass
20 x 20 in.
Edition 3/5
Courtesy of Air de Paris

The commodity-form draws the most common social equivalence between objects: vegetables, cars, a work of art. (NT)

The dream: the car, serving as a projections screen for all our frustrations, decorated to look appealing and to boast our self-confidence with an S, SE and a lot of X's. The car which serves as a vehicle to shorten the distance between work and boredom, which is covered and painted as if it were a steed to be mounted for battle, a carriage transporting the just married, a battering-ram, a luxury yacht, a penthouse, a Versace-dress or a credit card." (JG) — "STORY." In *Jef Geys: Architecture as Limitation*, exh. cat., São Paulo Biennial, 1991.

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Morceaux de BMW, 2011
BMW z4 metal components, wooden shelf
2 x 15 x 12 in.
Courtesy of Essex Street

Morceaux de BMW, 2011
BMW z4 metal components, wooden shelf
2 x 15 x 12 in.
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Morceaux de BMW, 2011
BMW z4 metal components, wooden shelf
2 x 15 x 12 in.
Courtesy of Essex Street

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Untitled (Gavra series), 1980s
Acrylic on canvas
39 x 39 in.
Courtesy of Air de Paris

Untitled (Gavra series), 1980s
Acrylic on canvas
39 x 39 in.
Courtesy of Air de Paris

Gavra was one of Belgium's largest concrete tile manufacturers until 1982 when it ceased production. Featured among its products were reproductions of Turkish, Arabic, and "Oriental" tiles. Here their ubiquitous designs are again reproduced at one square meter. Today Gavra is the country's leading importer and distributor of ceramic tiles, and is located seventeen minutes by car from Balen. (NT)

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Ten Model Paintings, 1965/1980s
Ensemble of 10, oil on canvas
16 x 20 in. each
Courtesy of Air de Paris

Growing up in Leopoldsburg, Jef Geys attended school with one of the sons of Martin Douven, a self-taught painter who started selling his paintings in 1928. Starting with a division of labor in the Douven family home, with Douven's children painting a segment of each painting to produce the final product, he expanded his production into one of the first assembly line factories in Europe to produce paintings for the commercial market.

Later, while Geys was teaching in Balen, he received a gift of a painting originating from the Douven factory from his father-in-law. This painting, a lake picturing two white swans, became a starting point for a discussion on the connections between taste and composition, serial production, and painting. Acquiring paintings from the Douven factory, Geys began painting over them in black, leaving a small aperture of focus at a gravitational point in the picture (See: *Black with Cirkel*). Jef Geys dedicated an exhibition to this line in his work at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp (MuHKA) in 2011. See: *Kempens Informatieblad, Special Edition: Martin Douven – Leopoldsburg – Jef Geys*, 2011.

For his exhibition at Cultuurhuis de Warande in Turnhout, Belgium in 2013, Geys instructed the curator to travel to ten museums that featured natural light to install and photograph his *Ten Model Paintings* in situ. Geys intended them as light studies, responding to the current trend for all-over lighting in exhibitions by offering contrasting views in changing daylight. See: *Kempens Informatieblad, Special Edition: Warande – Turnhout*, 2013. (NT)

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Cow Passport (Lola), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink and color pencil
26 x 18 in.
All *Cow Passports* courtesy of Air de Paris

Cow Passport (Synthia), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink, felt pen and color pencil
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Dinah), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, felt pen
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Esther), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink and color pencil
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Irène), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink and color pencil
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Theodora), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink and color pencil
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Anabelle), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, color pencil
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Klara), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Catherine), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Margot), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink and color pencil
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Georgette), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink and color pencil
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Esmeralda), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print and magazine cut-out mounted on offset print, ink
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Véronique), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink, color pencil and stickers
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Greta), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print and cut-out from magazine mounted on offset print, ink
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Amélie), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink and color pencil
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Fabiola), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink and color pencil
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Sylvie), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink and color pencil
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Zara), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink and felt pen
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Petra), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, ink
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Hortense), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, color pencil and felt pen
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Anette), 1965–2014
Black & white C-print mounted on offset print, color pencil and felt pen
26 x 18 in.

Cow Passport (Angélique), 1965/1981
Black & white silverprint mounted on offset print, ink and color pencil
28 x 20 in.

In 1965–66, while attending livestock auctions with his father-in-law, Jef Geys discovered that the cows on sale had passports. There was a sheet of paper with the outline of a cow, with the accompanying data of name, date of birth, and vaccinations. Geys took on the responsibility of making accurate drawings of the cows to help register them as individuals for sale. Later, he revealed that some bovine identities were susceptible to forgery—after some camouflage, he passed off Elza as Bernadette.

The resulting series establishes links between photography and identification, returning to recurrent tropes in Geys' work which question the efficiency of medium and form. Within the serial, generalized contour of the cow, Geys makes coltish drawings and collages that refer back to the vernacular of his work, while questioning what one can get away with, within the lines (see: *Coloring Book for Adults*). The repetition of the series reveals it as a gendered commodity inventory, disclosing a cynical humor about the stereotypical relationship between the male artist as owner and the female subject as property. (NT)

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Black with Cirkel, 2017
Oil on canvas, bubble wrap, tape, plastic, paper, marker, paint
28 x 21 x 2 in.
Courtesy of Essex Street

Maquette Muhka, 2017
Cardboard and foam core maquette, bubble wrap, tape, paper, marker, paint
16 x 36 x 8 in.
Courtesy of Essex Street

Large Seedbag 2016 – Carnevale di Venezia, 2016
Oil on canvas, bubble wrap, tape, marker
56 x 36 in.
Courtesy of Essex Street

For the "Bubble Paintings," Geys sacrificed items from his storage, selecting finished works, maquettes, photographs, etc. and prepared them for sale on the art market. Their price was not indicative of what was contained therein, but was relative to their scale.

They are exhibited as they were packed by gallery staff or by Geys himself; "signed" on the packaging with a signature of three dots in the primary colors; and displayed on a small MDF shelf. Before the first exhibition of "Bubble Paintings," Geys stipulated that if these works were to be opened at anytime by customs authorities, then they would be deemed "destroyed" from thereon. Implying a double mortality, whereby entombing the original, the "bubble paintings" face an imminent death either by curiosity or by carelessness.

Reduced to a formal regularity, we may assume that the previous mediums of the works are irrelevant now that they are nominally subsumed by the status of "painting." While the works pictorially remain something more akin to sculpture, the painter's mark has been reduced to pure signature—three dots of yellow, red, and blue. By this gesture, they ironically inhabit a core logic of modernist painting, which questioned how little compositional content a painting could have before it merely became an object. Like with Geys' *Seed Packets*, we again encounter the unhappy marriage between reality and representation. (NT)

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Way to Hell, 2016
Calendar page (September 2016), pencil, felt pen, chipboard, nuts and bolts, Plexiglas
30 x 8 in.
Courtesy of Air de Paris

Way to Hell, 2016
Calendar page (December 2016), pencil, felt pen, chipboard, nuts and bolts, Plexiglas
30 x 8 in.
Courtesy of Air de Paris

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Untitled (Male figure), 2018
By Class of da Vinci Arts Middle School
Cardboard cut-out, acrylic paint, marker
68 x 24 in.

Untitled (Female figure), 2018
By Class of da Vinci Arts Middle School
Cardboard cut-out, acrylic paint, marker
79 x 19 in.

After an accident, when the police are away, when the legal papers have been filled-in, the spectators are back home, then all that remains is the drawn outline of the victim: a negative in the real sense of the word. Mala fide politicians and businessmen treat us like empty containers that they can fill with all their "ingredients." (JG) — *Kempens Informatieblad*, Special Edition Biennale Venetië [Venice Bienniale], 2009.

On January 7, 2018 I wrote to Jef to ask if we could introduce one of his "Schildwacht" or "doll" works into the exhibition, as I believed that the folding screens were in need of some bodies. He responded by suggesting an almost impossible loan from France and a suitably practical alternative: "Find a cardboared foto of a person you often see in the Wall mart or other stores…. make 2 of them – a man and a women- and children have to fill it up with their names!" I suggested we involve a local school, and later engaged a class at da Vinci Arts Middle School in Portland to finish the cardboard people and teach a lesson on Geys' work and the role of the signature in art. (NT)

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Kunst Als Kritiek. Wanneer Is Kunst Wel Kritiek? 4. Wanneer de kunstenaar in alle ernst speelt [Art as Criticism. When is Art Criticism? 4. When the artist plays around in all seriousness], 1973
Color video, 5:54 minutes

Jef Geys made a public announcement on Belgian national television, as part of a series of television programs directed by Jef Cornelis on BRT (Belgian radio and television broadcast network). Appearing in front of his red heart insignia, Geys responded to the thematic proposition "Wanneer is Kunst Wel Kritiek?" (When is Art Criticism?) by using the airtime to detail the cost of the television segment and to name each of the funders, thanking them until the segment was over. (NT)

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Kempens Informatieblad, Special Edition Lisbon-Portland, published by Yale Union, 2018

The *Kempens Informatieblad* was under the editorial stewardship of Jef Geys from the late 1960s—when he took over and repurposed the failing local paper—until his death. Under Geys' editorial stewardship, it became an organ that distributed and recycled matter surrounding his activity as an artist, and was generally available free to anyone. Throughout his career as an artist, it was published just as intermittently as it was published alongside exhibitions, as special editions that reflected its location in question. (NT)

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