

Born in 1967, François Curlet settled in Belgium when he was twenty-two after decisive interludes spent at the National Schools of Fine Arts in Saint-Etienne and Grenoble. For the past thirty years, he has spent most of his time in Brussels, apart from a few, brief evasions. Here, in the wake of the Belgian conceptual artists Jef Geys with whom he developed a human and artistic relationship and the generic figure of Marcel Broodthaers, he has built up several strong friendships with other internationally renowned artists from his own generation, including Michel François and Ann Veronica Janssens. By means of diversion, forgery and atypical usage, the artist got himself noticed through his humour and sense of poetry which virulently question the social, political and economic implications of the everyday objects and ready-made signs produced by our consumer society.

In the 1990s, François Curlet began exhibiting regularly in Belgium and abroad (Le Magasin in Grenoble, FRAC Nord - Pas de Calais, Fondation Cartier and the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels). During the group exhibition *Les Chantiers du musée*, devised by Laurent Busine in 2000 to prefigure the official opening of the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Grand-Hornu, he seized on the visiting cards of the MAC's team, whose names he replaced with those of people living near the museum, thereby creating an initial—perhaps ironic—connection between the institution and its social environment. Twenty years later, François Curlet has been invited back to Grand-Hornu, this time to appropriate all the museum's rooms for his first major monographic exhibition in Belgium: *Cresus & Crusoe*. It has been designed as a retrospective of his practice in three acts, coinciding with the visitor's progression through the rooms, which correspond to the three principal phases of his production: his objects, his paintings and films, which are the current focus of his attention.

In the same way as *Clockwork* (1998) for which he took the waterproof fabric of an umbrella and screen-printed it with reproductions of gearwheels extracted from The Encyclopaedia of Diderot and D'Alembert, the sign-objects which François Curlet has produced for the past thirty years are a poetic response to the “semantic rain” which pours down on us every day, in the form of an economic dialectic which effectively articulates know-how and the imparting of information, usage value and exchange value, consumer goods and advertising objects. Sometimes similar to vanitas, this art of the riposte which plays with objects and words with equal skill, to reveal their hidden or taboo meanings, forces visitors to his exhibitions to critically review their dependence on material goods and the conditions of modern life, along the same lines as Robert Filliou. “Objects last longer than man. We might wield them, but in the end they are the winners,” explains François Curlet.

This initial corpus of sign-objects is followed by a major series of spray-painted copper plates, *Spéculoos* (2013), *Waffle* (2013) and *Pepito* (2013), which François Curlet created more recently, as if to definitively blur the boundaries between the urban and the domestic, art and industry, what is

precious and scrap, the rational and the *unformed*, as defined by Georges Bataille in *The Accursed Share*. Eloquently operating the transition to the exhibition's cinematographic interlude, the *Lens Flair*(2004) series also contributes to this same conceptual telescoping, materialising an undesirable optical effect (the parasitic diffusion of light within a lens), by means of spray-painted plexiglass discs suspended in space. Finally, François Curlet takes over the MAC's large square room, where he projects four of his short, enigmatic films: *Jonathan Livingstone* (2013), *Air Graham* (2015-18), *The Hustle* (2018) and *The Yummy Patriot* (2018), which were specially created for this exhibition.

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