

MARCEL BROODTHAERS

Marcel Broodthaers Fanzine

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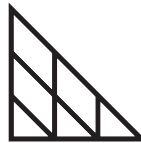
As a longtime fan –there is no other word– of Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers, I was anxiously waiting for the MoMa retrospective (02.14 through 05.15.2016), and I wasn't disappointed. I arranged my trip to North America in order to be able to see the biggest survey of my favorite artist, between the Los Angeles Art book fair and the exhibition “bookworm” that Farah Khelil and I had at Undercurrent Projects, NY (02.18 to 03.08.2016).

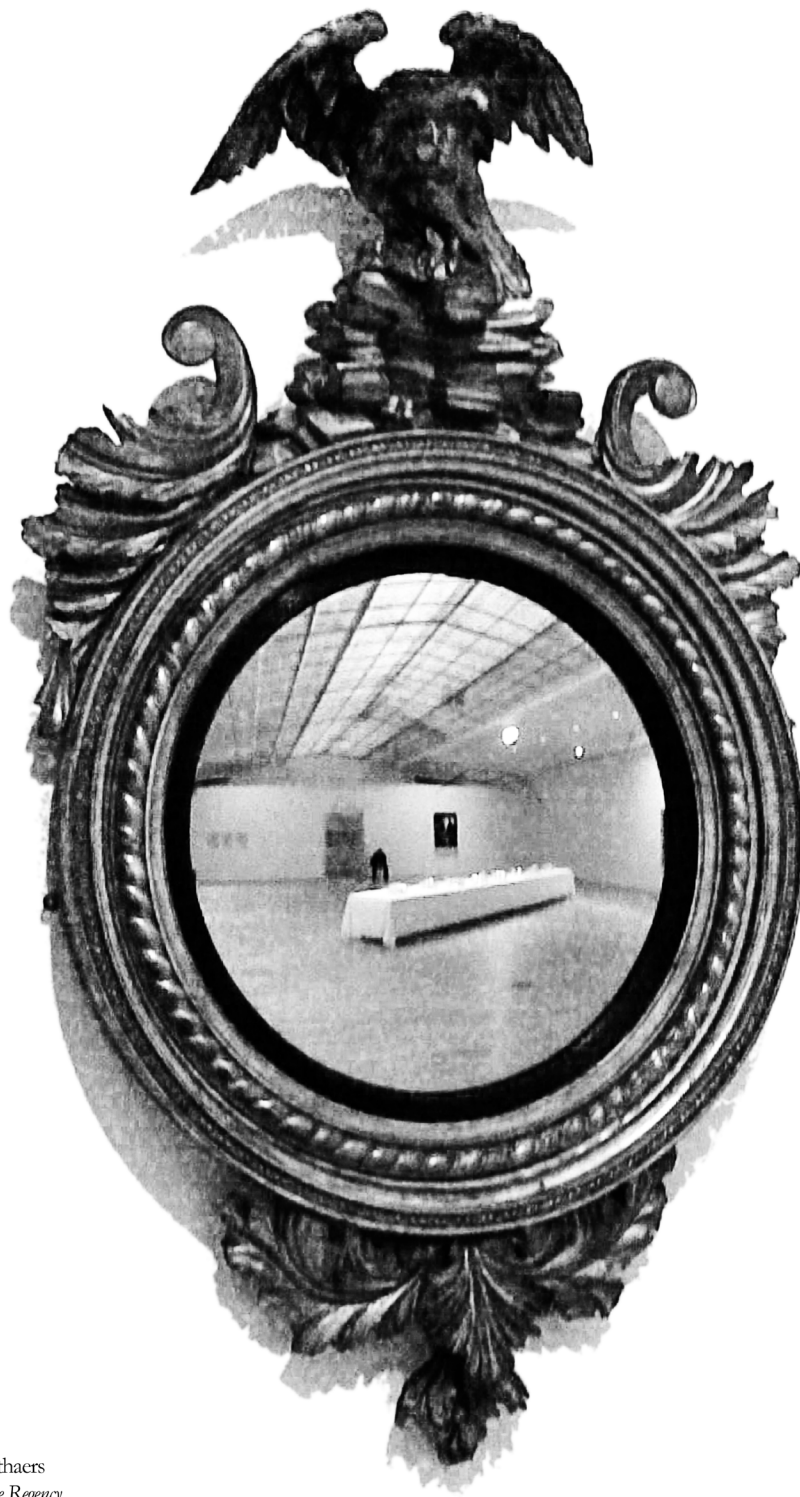
Each time I did a show in this underground salon run by artist/writer Katie Peyton, I would make a small half legal size edition. This is how I had the idea of creating *Marcel Broodthaers Fanzine*, a publication made by friends who share a common admiration for a far too little known belgian genius.

This zine is printed in an edition of 100 copies, each of them comes with two insert: an original bootleg edition of *Magie, Art et Politique* by Marcel Broodthaers, and a piece by Joseph Imhauser titled: *Joseph Imhauser, « Found printer #1, pp. 1-8 », inkjet on paper, 2016*.

This first issue is dedicated to others belgian art lovers,
THE BROODTHAERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA.

antoine lefebvre editions





Marcel Broodthaers
Miroir d'Epoque Regency
1973



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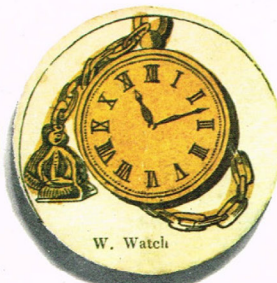
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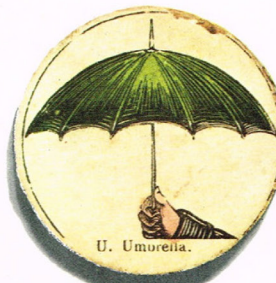
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Books that can't be read

by Antoine Lefebvre

Marcel Broodthaers's work is marked by a shift from the readable to the visual. In his first life, Broodthaers was a bookseller, a poet, a journalist and a photographer, and it is not until his 40th birthday that he decided he should become an artist. In his first exhibition held at the Galerie Saint Laurent in 1964, he exhibited *Le Pense Bête*¹, which may be his most important piece, since it symbolizes the shift between his work as a poet, playing on words, and the work he would then do as an artist, blocking words, trapping their signification, and eventually revealing new meanings. He then used the invitation to the show as a statement of intent, printing this text over on magazine pages:

"I, too, asked myself whether I couldn't sell something and succeed in life. For a while now, I have been good for nothing. I am forty years old... Finally, the idea of inventing something insincere crossed my mind, and I set to work straight away.

After three months, I showed my production to Ph. Édouard Toussaint, the owner of the Galerie Saint Laurent. But it's art, he said, and I would willingly exhibit all of this. All right, I replied. If I sell something he will take 30%. It seems that these are normal conditions, and that some galleries take 75%. What is it? In fact, objects. Marcel Broodthaers."

When Broodthaers trapped a batch of his last poetry collection *Pense-Bête*² into plaster transforming it into a sculpture titled as the book enclosed into it. This wasn't his first attempt to prevent people from reading his book. He had also censored other copies by dissimulating parts of the text behind pasted pieces of colored paper. This was a very important step toward creating books that can't be read and would therefore be art instead of poetry or literature. The artist once declared:

“It’s much harder for me to grasp things and their implications by reading books — except when the book is the object that fascinated me since for me it is the object of a prohibition. My very first artistic proposition bears the trace of this curse. The remaining copies of an edition of poems written by me served as raw material for a sculpture. [...] I took a bundle of fifty copies of a collection called *Pense-Bête* and half-embedded them in plaster. The wrapping paper is torn off at the top of the “sculpture”, so you can see the stack of books (the bottom part is hidden by the plaster). Here you cannot read the book without destroying its sculptural aspect. This concrete gesture returns the prohibition to the viewer — at least I thought it would. But I was surprised that viewers reacted quite differently from what I had imagined. Everyone so far no matter who, has perceived the object either as an artistic expression or as a curiosity. “Look! Books in plaster!” No one had any curiosity about the text; ignorant of whether it was the burial of a prose or a poetry, of sadness or of pleasure. No one was affected by the prohibition. Until that moment I had lived practically isolated from all communication, my public was fictitious. Suddenly, it became real, on that level where it is a matter of space and conquest.”³

Along with the ideas of space and conquest, this ban on reading and therefore on meaning is common ground for most of the books made Broodthaers during his second life as an artist. When he appropriated Stéphane Mallarmé’s masterpiece *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* (*A Throw of a Dice Never Will Abolish Chance*, 1897) by replacing each and every word of the poem with a black square, he did not only forbid people to read it, but he also revealed the inner musicality and rhythm of the poem.⁴ For Broodthaers, Mallarmé’s poem is not only a revolution in poetry, but the poet unintentionally invented the space

of contemporary art. Mallarmé wrote a poem in which the whites were almost more important than the actual written black words. By doing so, he showed the artists of 20th century that as poetry was not only a black square of text centered on a white page, art was not only a canvas centered on a white wall. The lesson Broodthaers reveals about Mallarmé is much like the white space of the page must be envisioned as part of the poem, the neutral white of the exhibition space must be controlled and composed by the artist when creating an exhibition.

The dialogue between black and white is at the center of numerous other books by Broodthaers. In *La Conquête de l’espace, Atlas à l’usage des artistes et des militaires*⁵ (*The Conquest of Space. Atlas for the Use of Artists and Military Men*), Broodthaers insists on the idea of conquest and power as he will also do in his parody institution, *Le Musée d’art moderne Département des Aigles* (*Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles*). In this atlas, which is one of the smaller artist books ever published, every country is the same size and featured by a plain black shape. Once again, the meaning has been blocked, and the book can’t fulfill its normal function, except for artists and militaries as the title suggests it. This idea of conquest is very important for Broodthaers and can be found in several of his artworks. It is at the heart of his *Musée d’art moderne* whose emblematic eagle refers directly to the imperialism of western culture. His work stems from the colonial history of the 19th century, and shows that the world he lives in (1960’s Belgium) has been shaped by this history.

The last book that should be mentioned here is one of Broodthaers’s funniest, and it also bears a strong relationship to the cultural history of 19th century Europe. In *Magie, Art et Politique*⁶ the Belgian artist seems to take a lot of pleasure making fun of his competition and fellow artist Joseph Beuys. The book starts with a foreword in French that shows

the state of mind of the artist who might also be mocking the reader.

“I had originally chosen a different title for ‘*Magie*’. It was: ‘*Fume, c’est du belge*’ [Smoke, it’s Belgian]. This expression could have been an allusion to Belgian and French chauvinism and upset cherished ways of thinking. It is difficult to translate into German and English without too lengthy explanation”

The book is composed of two letters translated from French into English and German. The first one is a letter from Broodthaers to Beuys in which he maintains that he found a letter written by Jacques Offenbach to Wagner “in a dilapidated slum tenement”. The second is the supposed letter by Offenbach which is obviously a fake written by Broodthaers to address directly Beuys. The main goal of this letter is for Broodthaers to express his disagreement with Beuys on the relationship between art, magic and politics – as the title expresses it. This is a direct attack to Beuys’s work who was often mystical, and to Beuys himself who felt very comfortable addressing political issues directly within his work or involving himself personally in the politics of Germany. On the other hand, Broodthaers’s position on the subject is closer to Jean Luc Godard who stated that artists shouldn’t make political art, but that they should rather make art politically. In a very important text titled “10,000 Francs Reward”, Broodthaers expressed very clearly his view on this relationship between art and politics, and I will leave him the last word:

“The way I see it, there can be no direct connection between art and message, especially if the message is political without running the risk of being burned by the artifice. Foundering. I prefer signing my name to these booby traps without taking advantage of this caution.”

(Endnotes)

1 Marcel Broodthaers, *Le Pense Bête*, books, paper, plaster, plastic sphere and wood, 30 x 84 x 43 cm, collection S.M.A.K., Gand (Belgium), 1964. In French, “*pense-bête*” means “reminder” but also literally “think-dumb”.

2 Marcel Broodthaers, *Pense-Bête*, Bruxelles, self-published, 1963-1964, 32 p.

3 Marcel Broodthaers, *10,000 Francs Reward* [1974], New York, Printed Matter, 2015. (Emphasis mine)

4 Marcel Broodthaers, *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard*, *Image*, Anvers, Wide White Space Gallery; Cologne, Michael Werner Gallery, 1969, 32 p. Here is the colophon of the book: “On 25th November 1969, in Antwerp, this picture was printed in 10 copies on anodized aluminium, numbered I to X and 90 copies on translucent paper numbered from 1 to 90. All comprising a first edition. The model of this approximate picture is the first edition of the poem ‘Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard’ by Stéphane Mallarmé, published in 1914 by Librairie Gallimard.”

5 Marcel Broodthaers, *La Conquête de l’espace*, *Atlas à l’usage des artistes et des militaires*, Bruxelles, Lebeer Hossmann, 1975.

6 Marcel Broodthaers, *Magie*, *Art et Politique*, Paris, Multiplicata, 1973.



Meeting with the director

Antoine Lefebvre
interviews
Filip Noterdaeme

I met Filip Noterdaeme shortly after my arrival in New York while I was touring Chelsea, looking at art galleries. I saw a small crowd on the street and I went to take a closer look. When I saw that the crowd was surrounding a little booth with a sign that read “HOMU – The Homeless Museum of Art – The Director is IN” with a man in a suit sitting behind it, I immediately recognized it as a project I had heard about before. Noterdaeme and I connected immediately, having in common our admiration for Marcel Broodthaers. I subsequently published three books by him, including *Cat-a-log-raisin-‘A’*. At the time this interview took place, he had just finished writing his memoir, *The Autobiography of Daniel J. Isengart*, which has since then been published by *Outpost19*. The interview was conducted in his apartment in Brooklyn, which had for many years housed HOMU BKLYN, a live-in-art-installation that mocked the way contemporary art museums operate. Unfortunately, I never got a chance to experience it since he had stored it away

for good, back in September 2011, after a roof leak caused by Hurricane Irene prompted him to renovate the apartment.

June 5, 2012, 3:14 PM
Filip Noterdaeme’s home
172 Clinton Street, Brooklyn, New York, USA.

Antoine Lefebvre: Can you tell us about your history? How did you come to be the Director of the Homeless Museum?

Filip Noterdaeme: I was born in Brussels in 1965 and grew up in London, Geneva and Brussels. I had a bilingual education – French and Flemish. After High School, I studied philosophy for a year, and then went to art school. At the age of 22, I moved to New York City and enrolled in the Fine Arts Program at the School of Visual Arts (SVA). To give you a reference, this is the school Keith Haring had gone to.

AL: What kind of work did you do at that time?

FN: I arrived with Marcel Broodthaers in my intellectual baggage. But I soon realized that none of my classmates had a clue as to who Broodthaers was. They were all still obsessed with Andy Warhol, and Jeff Koons was making a big splash with his *Banality Show* at around that time. So there was already a kind of clash. One of the things I created at the school was an installation I called «The Museum of Belgian Contemporary Art,” a pastiche of Broodthaers’s *Musée d’Art Moderne*.

AL: That was your first museum?

FN: Yes, but it was very much a Broodthaers museum. I wanted to test an aesthetic that was not my own. I wanted to test his works against another culture, another generation, another time. I was already deeply into the appropriation process. I wanted to see how far I could take this idea of presenting a work that was not my own, how to create an identity around another identity. After obtaining a Bachelor in Fine Arts from S.V.A, I enrolled at Hunter College to pursue a Masters in Fine Arts.

AL: And it did not go well...

FN: I was expelled halfway through the program.

AL: Would you say that you were testing the limits and perhaps going too far?

FN: I have always been testing the limits, but at that time I was specifically drawn to the concept of the masterpiece. This was the challenge I used to throw my teachers. I literally used to say to them: «I have only one thing left to learn and that is how to make a masterpiece.» It completely puzzled them; they never knew what to say to that.

AL: So it’s because of a masterpiece that you were expelled?

FN: (*Pointing at a painting hanging over the mantle of the fireplace*) Because of this masterpiece here, which is an amalgam of two works: *The Origin of the World* by Gustave Courbet, and *The Treachery of Images* by René Magritte. The director of the program accused me of plagiarism—the worst thing you can

be accused of in a college.

AL: This is happening in 1991, years after the works of Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine?

FN: Yes, unbelievably. So I once again found myself in the position of the outsider. I thought a lot about the place of the artist who is challenging a supposedly permissive society. All of this inspired me to eventually create *The Homeless Museum of Art*.

AL: (*Pointing at the painting*) Did the creation of this “masterpiece” play a key role as a first step in the history of your future museum?

FN: It did, but also, when I was at Hunter College, I was already playing a character, just like I would eventually play the character of the Director of the Homeless Museum. I used to introduce myself not as Filip Noterdaeme but under another, fictional name I had come up with. I always created a lot of confusion with these different identities and relished playing mind games with everyone. The teachers were quite annoyed and kept wondering, «What’s up with this weird fellow?» Once, in an assessment about me, one of my teachers noted, “I am not sure if he is a genius or a con artist.» The jury is still out on that question...

AL: It should be noted here that this first alter ego you created for yourself was called...



FN: ... *Marcellus Wasbending-Thum*: Marcellus as an old-fashioned-sounding hint at the two Marcells (Duchamp and Broodthaers), Wasbending as a silly, literal translation of [Gustave] Courbet, and finally *Thum*, a reversal of Mutt, the fictional artist name inscribed on Duchamp's *Fountain*. And Marcellus is in fact the real author of this so-called masterpiece. (Laughter)

AL: You also told me you used to walk around Hunter College dressed like a real *hunter*!

FN: Yes, that was another mind or word game I played on them. I even came to school with an actual hunting dog, a Dachshund! They were not amused. Obviously, once a pariah has been spotted, he must be evicted.

AL: They didn't have a sense of humor about it?

FN: An institution must take itself seriously in order to survive, I understand that. But that seriousness can no longer be taken seriously when you consider that contemporary art approaches such as Levine's and Prince's (and many others like Andy Warhol's and even Duchamp's) had yet to be absorbed or integrated into their ways of thinking and teaching.

AL: In addition to the creation of the «masterpiece», what are the different events that led to the creation of the Homeless Museum?

FN: When I was at Hunter, I also worked as an intern at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was an important step for me because I found myself inside a "real" art institution for the first time, interning for the Department of Education, which sent me out to essentially promote the image of the museum. In fact, we were officially trained to become "museum ambassadors". I found this diplomatic mission very interesting because it allowed me to see how a large institution like the Met was manipulating its public image and what it meant to *represent* a museum. I ended up staying and worked for the Met for the next nine years. Later, I started to work for the Guggenheim Museum, yet another institution obsessed with branding, image,

and power.

AL: When did you create HOMU BKLYN?

FN: In 2005, at the time MoMA reopened its doors after years of renovation. Their new admission price was \$20, mine was \$0. The MoMA collection is worth millions; I presented a collection of found objects I called *The Zero Dollar Collection*. All this allowed me to create a dialogue between *the* great museum of modern art and the tiny little nothingness of my Homeless Museum, a museum that was created backwards—without a real art collection and precariously housed in a rental apartment.

AL: You did not present it on the street back then?

FN: No, that came later. It was first installed here. But before deciding to house it here, I had actually reached out to institutions such as the Guggenheim and asked them if they would allow me to occupy their roof and install this kind of anti-museum on it.

AL: And of course they said yes? (Laughter)

FN: You bet! (Laughter)

AL: So you chose to install it in this attic apartment?

FN: Since none of them ever responded and since I wanted to give my museum a home *somewhere*, I once again took my cue from Broodthaers. And I once again tested his method, but this time from a slightly different, less literal angle. Well, perhaps not all that different after all because, as he clearly said, the thing that has consistently defined art since the nineteenth century is the transformation of art into a commodity, and that was precisely what I was addressing with HOMU BKLYN. Two years later, my landlord found out about HOMU BKLYN via an article in *The New York Times* and forbade me to use my apartment as a museum. And so, I was, figuratively speaking, expelled once again.

AL: From your own home!

FN: I had no recourse but to bring it to the street. Ironically, the motto of the Homeless Museum had always been «Homelessness Begins





at Home.» But I have always allowed outside forces to guide me. For example, here was a landlord who tried to force me to shut down my museum. I took it as an opportunity to transform it into something new that was perhaps even better.

AL: There is always a part of your work that is not yours, as in appropriation—an uncertain part that is left to chance.

FN: And that uncertainty is the appeal of what I do now in the street, where the entire focus is on the visitor and his interaction with the character of the museum director I play. The booth is a condensed absurdist version of an art museum. I even have a director of public relations: Florence, a taxidermied coyote I always bring along with me when I set up the booth. I play on the fact that museums have become brands, and a brand can exist only through P.R.

AL: Yes, in your museum, there is almost no art, all there is is the promotion of an “insincere” brand.

FN: The key is that I am creating a personal rapport with my audience. At the HOMU booth, the relationship between me, the museum’s only representative, and the public takes center stage.

AL: Your museum does not exist unless it has a visitor.

FN: It’s very Duchampian in the sense that art is always a sort of rendezvous.

AL: One question that seems important too in your work is the relationship you have with the art establishment.

FN: I constantly borrow concepts and strategies from the world of art, such as relational aesthetics and appropriation. As such, everything I do is informed by the art world, but not addressed exclusively to it. For me, it’s very important that my museum is there for everyone. HOMU BKLYN was a museum for insiders, but on the street, my museum belongs to everybody. I am taking my cue from Walt Whitman: «I make appointments with all, and I will not have a single person slighted or turned away.” The idea is to test the art world

against...

AL: ... the rest of the world.

FN: And to see how difficult it is to create room for art anywhere outside of or beyond the art world.

AL: Wasn’t that the theme of *I Like the Art World and the Art World Likes Me*, the exhibition organized at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts by the artist Eric Doeringer, in which you participated?

FN: The question is, does the art world *care*? Can one operate freely without any financial or institutional backing?

AL: Behind a facade of permissiveness and tolerance among people of culture, the reality is that, just as elsewhere, everybody is protecting their own backyard?

FN: Yes, and that is why I, like many other independent artists, find myself operating solo and in the margins. In the 1960s, filmmaker Robert Bresson staged a filmed interview that ends with a simple remark, addressed directly to the camera: *je suis seul*, “I am alone.” He said it with a wink, but it’s still tragic to me. I feel the same way.

AL: Isn’t it just because you are not selling anything?

FN: It’s possible, but that doesn’t help me.

AL: In France, an artist can survive, or at least show his work without selling anything, but it seems that here in New York everything revolves around money.

FN: We have no problem looking at the work of a poet without talking about money, but we are incapable of assessing the value of the work of a visual artist without the dimension of money.

AL: You’ve been writing *The Autobiography of Daniel J. Isengart*, which is an appropriation of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* by Gertrude Stein. In this book, you, like Stein, tell your life from the perspective of your companion. Should the book be understood as an extension of the Homeless Museum?

FN: Yes, to the degree that it is also a work of appropriation, like all my other artwork. But at the same time it was my way of chronicling the history

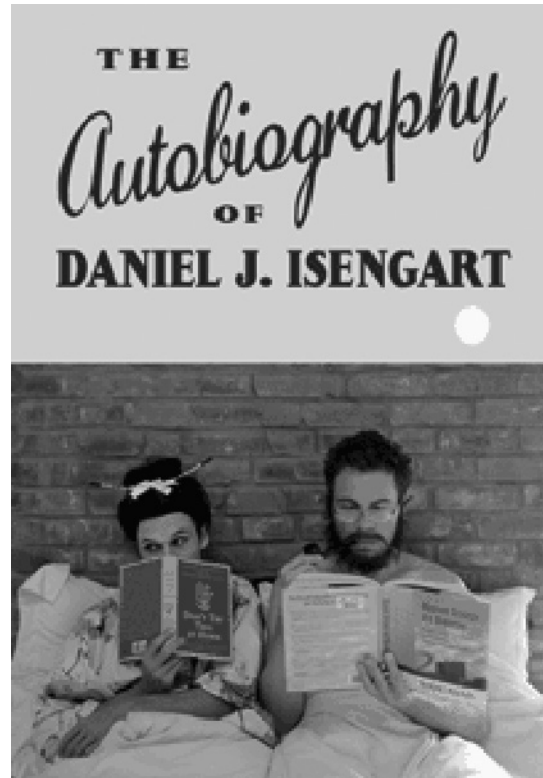
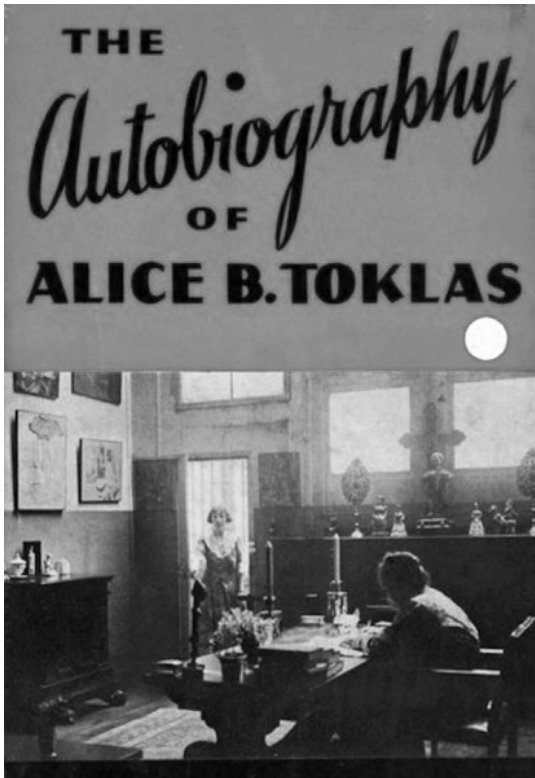
of the Homeless Museum. On the other hand, I also think of it as a work of fiction.

AL: How so?

FN: For me, everything related to writing is fiction. Even every museum is a fiction. The Met, the Louvre, these are all creations, these are fictions. There is a museum structure, a bureaucracy, a hierarchy, but these are all human inventions. Now we forget, it's a done deal, we say: «I was at the Louvre,» but the Louvre is all pure fabrication.

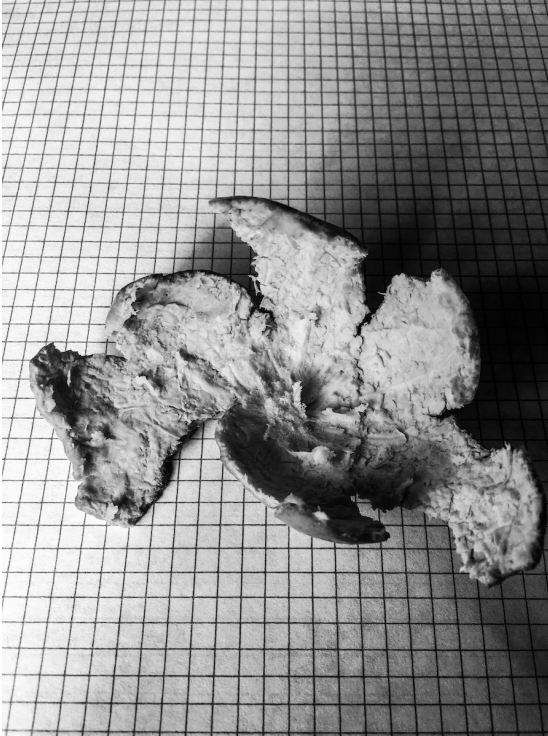
AL: We have followed the history of all your museums: the first was a pastiche of Broodthaers, then there was the Met and the Guggenheim, HOMU BKLYN, and the HOMU Booth on the street. Do you have plans for another museum? What evolution do you see? You said you removed a lot of things to go from HOMU BKLYN to the street. Is there anything left to remove? Or add?

FN: I don't know yet. The *Cat-a log-raisin-“A”*, which mocks the whole idea of a catalogue raisonné via rebus, was my way of suggesting that I was closing up shop. I don't know yet if there will be another book or another museum. My situation remains precarious. That's why I so vividly remember Robert Bresson's *Je suis seul*. All great artists today are *seul*. Duchamp was *seul*, and so was Broodthaers.



T h e D e a d

My pet terrorist has eyes as blue as the sea.
I keep him in the talisman cabinet, at ten
degrees below room temperature. He
smells like the open road.



This is a sky opener, this is
used for cleaning the utensils of
alchemists. **Fractional plastic
palm trees and promised gifts,**
they have all been forgotten by
now. This museum has no
attendance, no attendants. **No
form of attending has been
discussed here for a very long
time.**

He has found a loophole, he
says, holding it up. Light
arrives, shines through, **the size
of a pin.** But it is too late.

**the algorithm: 1/2 legal, 1/2
sex toy, 1/2 forgotten, let's**

**be honest no one really gives a
fuck and has not for a very long
time.** The terrorist can do
anything he wants, the target
audience is simply not
interested. Once he was a
leader.



He misses the roar of the crowd, the magic
of the first

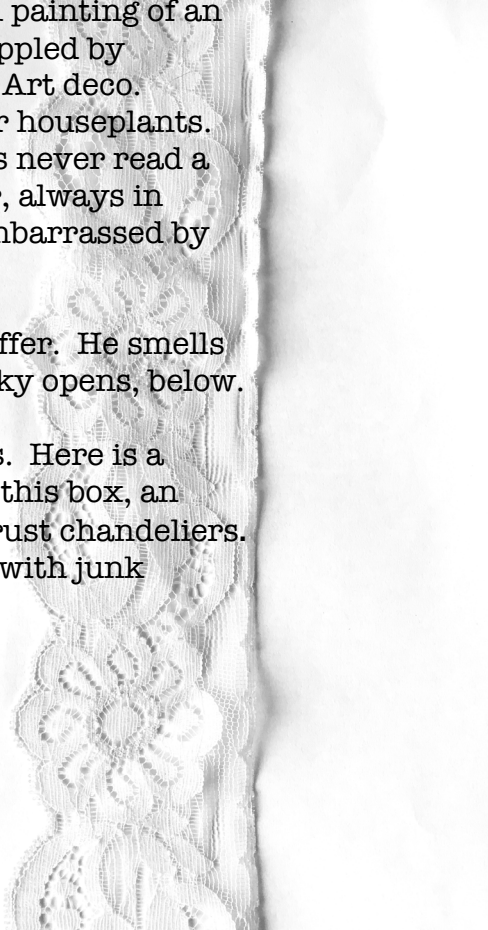
entrance, the dazzling lights.

The long broken ocean: the
extreme present. A painting of an
unknown forest, dappled by
unknown sunlight. Art deco.
Advice on caring for houseplants.

The terrorist has never read a
book cover-to-cover, always in
parts. He is a bit embarrassed by
this.

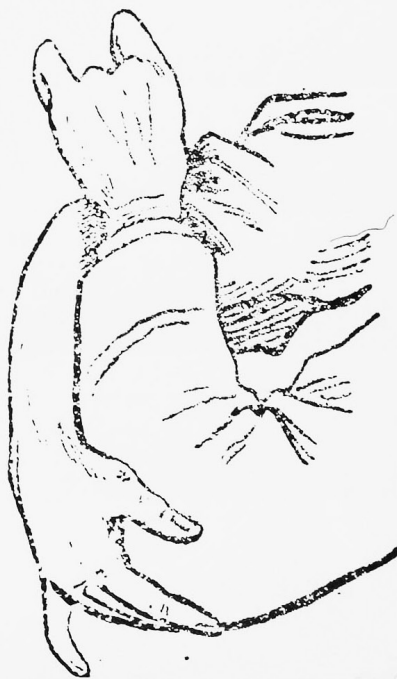
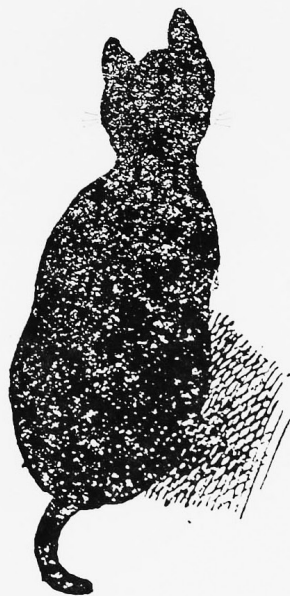
He still has lots to offer. He smells
fresh earth as the sky opens, below.

A flagpole, the news. Here is a
lawn-mower and in this box, an
antique anarchist, rust chandeliers.
An inbox, filling up with junk
emails: the dead.



by Katie Peyton

La souris écarte rat



La souris écarte rat

*La
souris écrit
rat*

by Marcel Broodthaers

THE BROODTHAERS SOCIETY of AMERICA was founded to foster a wider investigation of Marcel Broodthaers in the context of the Americas. The increasing awareness of the great Belgian artist's work in the USA in particular raises important issues that, up to now, have been little addressed by institutions of art or academia.

We love the work of Marcel Broodthaers, but we're not interested in suffocating him with reverence. Unfortunately, in the four decades since his untimely death in 1976, on his birthday, at age 52, a rather precious intellectual scaffolding has come to almost completely encase the memory of his work—a mandarin discourse that, to us, is at odds with his trademark irreverence and annihilating wit.

We love the work of Marcel Broodthaers and we take it seriously. But we also joust with it, bore out its cylinders, get it wrong. When he paints the French word for “mussels” we read “muscles” and imagine illicit connections between the wily artist and well-oiled Hollywood physique magazines.

We love the work of Marcel Broodthaers and we look at it from the standpoint of race and racism, subjects that he certainly alluded to (and privileged from) in a country like Belgium.

We love the work of Marcel Broodthaers and we often hit the reset button. We try to pick up where he left off but from the comfort of space-age Warren Platner sofas and chromium etageres. We proceed as if forty years of art, commerce, and scholarship had not transpired since his death.

And we look at Broodthaers' work now, in the present, and going forward. If there are any aspects of his work that are still capable of being in play, then it is our responsibility to discover them and play them like records purchased from a blanket spread out on the sidewalk on our way to the laundromat.

Joe Scanlan

Kindred Spirits

At the moment we're particularly interested in Broodthaers' commercial gallery catalogues, given the fact that he had to die in order for any of them to be published. We acquire every one we come across, largely because they are a record of what aspects of his work were (and remain) in circulation. As this pool gets smaller the works get more liminal and obscure—which is precisely what interests us.

We also like repetitive examples of similar content, such as the apparent necessity for different institutions at different times publishing their account of Catalogue of Books, The Complete Prints, The Complete Prints and Books, The Complete Books and Prints, and Catalogue of the Editions, Prints and Books. We're interested in more than one copy of anything.

We like being able to consider the shift in meaning that occurs when looking at identical content in different formats, such as Broodthaers' “Le Séance, Film de M.B.” within the pages of *Interfunktionen* 11 side by side with his artist's book *Racisme végétal*.

Peruse our current holdings under Reading Room in the menu, and do contact us if you have any questions. Access to the Reading Room is free (by appointment), electronic devices and pencils only (no pens), and free tea or coffee in the adjacent lounge.

Available times are erratic—and possibly last minute—so contact us at member@broodthaers.us and see what might work.

520 West 143rd Street, New York, NY, 10031

*The
American
Broodthaers
Society*

from <http://broodthaers.us>

Figures

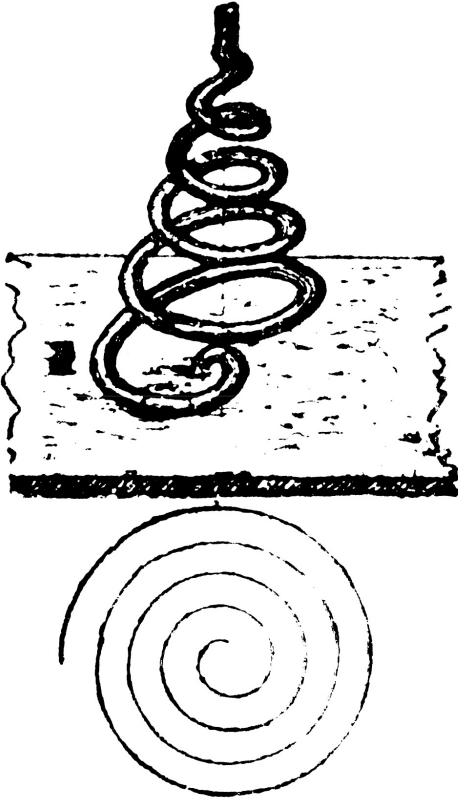


Fig. 1

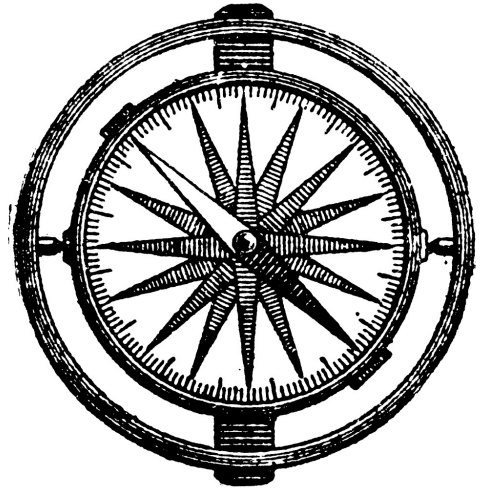


Fig. 2

Fig. III



Fig. 3

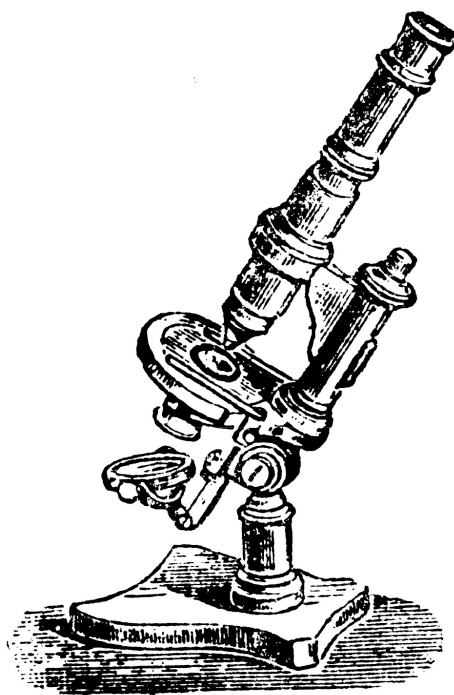


Fig. 4

Fig. B



Fig. 5

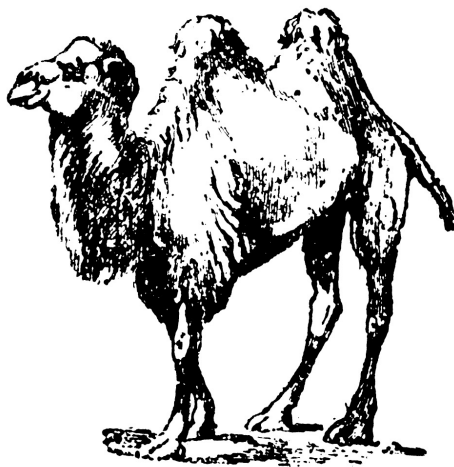


Fig. 6

Fig. C