

OBJECTS ARE LIKE THEY APPEAR

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Lieven de Boeck
Jason Dodge
Patrick Everaert
Hreinn Fridfinnsson
Ellen Harvey
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Sofia Hultén
René Magritte
Marcel Mariën
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Evariste Richer
Damien Roach
Fabrice Samyn
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In his essay entitled "The object of the century", French psychoanalyst Gérard Wajcman differentiates art from philosophy, seeing it as "*thought not in concept but in action, material thought*". The exhibition *Objects are like they appear* explores some of the avenues for reflection opened up in that book. Considering that "works of art" may be perceived as thinking objects and that they allow us to consider the real world in a different way, it seems relevant to bring together works by artists who challenge the notions of similarity, transposition, dissimulation and absence that affect objects. As the theme is very broad, no claims are made to an exhaustive treatment. Just a few viewpoints which weave together some connections and mirror games.

Welcomed at the outset by a threatening work by Evariste Richer{called *Meteor*, the visitor will be compelled to choose a path, to the left or to the right of this bowling ball held against the ceiling by a wooden chevron 4m50 high. The worrying strangeness of the world is highlighted here, and there will be reminders of it throughout the exhibition.

GROUND FLOOR

The **left-hand room** contains works where the object is identifiable by default. The absence of what constitutes its identity leads to confusion, while allowing the viewer to comprehend the very essence of the object. In the large 'library' of Claudio PARMIGGIANI, we find the concerns that are at the core of the artist's work; the question of emptiness, absence and disappearance. The library is the favourite place of the imagination, fiction and thought. It is also a place for keeping traces. Looking at this work, is it legitimate to ask where is the density of the book as object? In itself or in its shadow? With *Torso*, Rachel WHITEREAD fills a plastic hot water bottle with wax, then tears away the bottle to reveal the space within. So she makes this emptiness visible through a subtle process which gives volume and weight to the negative of the object. Mona HATOUM, reproduces the world map as it was reinterpreted by the cartographer and historian Arno Peeters in 1974. In *Projection*, the continents are re-drawn in their correct proportions, but are attacked by acid, and only appear by default *Le mètre vierge* by Evariste RICHER shows us the anguish of an unmeasurable world. How to re-draw a world without a standard value? The absence of any graduation plunges us into a potential redistribution of metric references which instantly calls all our certainties into question.

The **right-hand room** groups together works initiating a process of reflection about the troubles caused by reflections. Ignasi ABALLÍ challenges us as soon as we enter the room: *Objects in mirror are like they appear*: does the object also exist through its reflection? The question that comes to mind is surely: *Are people in mirror like they appear?* The questioning of one's own face is one of the most powerful enigmas that human beings have had to ponder. Who are we? This question is found in the vintage photos of René MAGRITTE, where one discovers this vital artist as well as his double. DAMIEN ROACH literally plays with the term *Reflections* (in both senses of the word), by assembling twelve vinyl records, which all have the same title, but where the picture chosen for the sleeve is very different from one record to the next.

In a small collage, the same artist draws inspiration from Bruno PERRAMANT to describe a somewhat schizophrenic vision. Twin images undergo tiny distortions and question the concept of original image and copy. By installing his surveillance mirror in a corner of the room, Lieven DE BOECK alludes to Le Département des Aigles, while creating an obvious tension between the usual use of this type of mirror and the American national emblem. As for Jason DODGE, he ruins any hope of seeing reflections in the glass, by breaking it with a solid silver ingot. *You always move in reverse* is a work which invites the viewer to think about a provocative gesture, and the motivation behind that gesture. With this work, the artist opens up many narrative spaces, and turns around the logic of our rational system. Usually made by a thief or a vandal, this malicious gesture has a different interpretation here. While questioning the codes of the art world and the sense of honesty, this act casts doubt on our conventions through absurdity.

FIRST FLOOR

Before reaching the first floor, we find that worrying strangeness again with the unexpected presence of a barn owl sitting on a cardboard box. With *Rubies inside of an owl*, Jason DODGE uses a simple device which, once you know the title of the work, takes a new turn. This title informs us that during the embalming process, he mischievously put the rubies inside the bird of prey. Reality is not always the way we see it. Likewise with *La Foudre* by Evariste RICHER which crosses the stairwell vertically. This blind

person's cane, 14 metres long, evokes a flash of lightning and brings together opposite visual phenomena (maximum illumination and blindness).

Nothing blinding is that created by Fabrice SAMYN in the **alcove** of the first floor with his work entitled *the Golden Calf*. The artist has put a 17th century painting there which you cannot approach and whose subject is the adoration of the golden calf. The light cast on the work is so strong that it is impossible to discern it except by shifting your viewpoint considerably. This painting, representing the deviation of representation via the adoration of an idol, is itself put in a similar position to the calf. But being lit from all sides, it is dazzled, which suggests not only a movement of adoration but also its opposite: that of the shame inherent in the forbidden nature of the representation. A paradox is being suggested here: it is the radiance of the work which makes it invisible.

Further on, we find two other works by Fabrice SAMYN, entitled *Feue la vie* representing a "flame of ice" which melts, as if consumed by itself, by her inner fire. Combining the two natural opposites par excellence, water and fire, the artist reflects on life and death; two other opposites which, in reality, feed off each other perpetually.

The **left-hand room** creates, by highlighting common objects, relationships between everyday reality and the new perception of an object to which a slight change has been made. Mona Hatoum frequently creates a tension in her works, and here she rubs almost electrically to reveal a kitchen utensil (*Tea strainer*). The outline of the common object confers a persistent aura to the real object. We also see this approach in work by DAMIEN ROACH whose *Jupiter* shows the relationship between a routine object and one of the wonders of the heavens. Also observed by René MAGRITTE (*Les Belles Réalités*), the table becomes an object that turns around any rationality. For her series *Points in a room condensing*, Sofia HULTÉN mischievously makes an object disappear by placing it inside another, larger one. Starting with a marble that she hides in a bulb, she finishes with a cupboard containing all the objects.

In the **right-hand room**, laws governing rationality are forgotten in favour of a manipulation that gives the object a second life. Maarten VANDEN EYNDE gathers branches selected on his travels around the world, and sets them like hunting trophies. The symbolism of the trophy is foiled here by a subtle shift, while emphasising the beauty of a piece of dead wood.

Patrick EVERAERT, manipulates images collected and archived, in order to give them a new meaning, often worrying. The association of ideas dear to surrealism is found in this work, as well as the drawings of Marcel MARIËN and René MAGRITTE.

A discreet work, *Fruits of Labour* by Hreinn FRIDFINNSSON is shown in the corner of the room. It consists of residues of pencil sharpenings, and allows the viewer to appreciate the labour of the studio, all this hidden life of the artist, which the public only rarely gets to see. To sharpen his thought, the artist makes notes, writes, draws sketches and we discover in this work all the beauty hidden in forgotten remnants.

In the backyard, the **videobox** is occupied by Ellen HARVEY who is showing her video *The Camera doesn't like its portrait*. Through a subtle *mise en abîme*, the artist questions the representation of a filmed object and the representation of the reflection of an object. The video shows a camera filming its own reflection in a mirror, that the artist is recording behind it. The mirror is strongly backlit, which enables us to see the drawing changing as Ellen Harvey works on it. One soon realises that the artist is actually recording the "portrait" of the camera. Once the drawing is finished, the mirror breaks, as if by magic.

On -1, in the reception area, *Delirium* by Mar ARZA creates a possibility of meaning emerging from the entanglement of phrases and words drawn from various sources (scientific texts and extracts of poems). This labyrinthine network constitutes a genuine architecture which sets language in space, opening up new areas of cross reading.

Finally, in the '**wunderkammer**', Evariste RICHER reveals *Le Monde maculé* and *Le Monde immaculé*, two copies of French newspaper *Le Monde*, one soaked in ink, the other pristine. "Each of them embodies an extremity of the process of printing the daily newspaper. *Le Monde maculé* results from inking-up process which enables the ink to be spread uniformly on the rollers, while *Le Monde immaculé* testifies to the cleaning of the rollers once the print run is complete. All of this suggests information overload and the paradoxical vacuity of this overflow, while their monochromy also evokes the history of

abstraction"¹. From this room which gives out onto the street, opening into the outside world in a way, it seemed logical to close the exhibition with the disappearance of language and the maximum potential that it can achieve.