

KETELEER GALLERY is very pleased to present a new solo exhibition by Guillaume Bijl (°1946, Antwerp), the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

Guillaume Bijl is known for his large-scale installations and visual realism. Since the late 70s, Bijl created realistic decors using found objects. In doing this, he had a pioneering role in the resurgence of the ready-made. Bijl shows the audience various aspects of our western 'civilisation' and consumer society. Using extreme stereotypes, he creates a sort of 'archeology of our time' in a tragi-comedic, alienating way.

After searching for a mode of expression which could enable the audience's involvement, the young Guillaume Bijl, a self-taught artist, started creating projects on paper in the seventies (*'Project Pleasures'*). The most important series comprised nine *'Treatments'*. This series exposes various societal determinations and phenomena like the church, the army, the education system, the holiday business, sex, businessman or the daily grind of blue-collar workers. In these depictions on paper Bijl draws a trail, accompanied by a step-by-step script, guiding the visitor from room to room to follow the life course of, for example, a soldier. It's these projects at the root of his following oeuvre both visually as in content.

In 1979 Guillaume Bijl creates his first installation *Autorijschool Z* at Ruimte Z, an artist-run gallery in Antwerp. The artist exposes what shouldn't have happened: the gallery being turned into a less appealing commercial institution, a driving-school. In this life-like décor, the artist provided chairs and benches for the students, a blackboard, didactic boards with traffic signs, a model of an engine... In this first installation three elements that will become characteristic for his entire oeuvre can already be recognised. Firstly, there's a game between fiction and reality resulting in a sense of alienation or confusion for the spectator caused by the artist's act of displacement. Secondly, Bijl criticises a contemporary societal phenomenon and, last but not least, the fact that the installation is placed inside an art space, turns every object into a sculpture and a visual image.

This driving school was the first of a series of *transformation-installations*, which evolved into a visual epos of societal phenomena. In many museum institutes and galleries, Bijl created a *Fallout Shelter* (Liège, 1985), a *Shooting Gallery* (Eindhoven, 1985), a *Caravan Show* (Grenoble, 1989), a Supermarket (Tate Liverpool, Frankfurt, Basel), a *Central Airport Basel* (1986), a *Futon Store* (New York, 1989), a Wig store (Brussels, 2012), a dog grooming salon (Zürich, 2016), etc.

In addition to these *transformation-installations*, there are 5 other types of works in Bijl's oeuvre. The names for these different types of works are also the titles for the works. Sometimes there is a "Tableau Vivant" / Performance on the Opening.

In his *situation-installations*, Bijl creates fiction in reality, usually in public space. In 1995 for instance, he mounted stuffed birds on roofs and lanterns during Documenta 9 in Kassel.

Compositions, mostly called *Composition Trouvée*, are fragments from reality, objects that seem to have been taken from antiquaries or gift shops. These often kitschy-looking works are smaller in scale and always thoughtfully put together.

His *Sorry* works can take on different forms. They are compositions of objects or installations with an absurd element to them, making them fall out of reality, into the surreal. A beautiful example is the bird's nest containing one red and two white billiard balls, a bizarre still life.

With his *Cultural Tourism* theme, Bijl creates installations that zoom in on banal museums and mass-tourism phenomena, as for example in *Roman Road* (Middelheim Museum, 1994) or the installation *Lederhosen Museum* (Graz, 1997).

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More recently Bijl made realistically painted bronze statues and scenes like *Feestelijke Beelden* at the Europaplein, Amsterdam (2014), *Saluting Admiral Couple* at MAS, Antwerp (2016) or the statue of a businessman making a hand stand out of joy 'Ein neuer erfolgreicher Tag', Wuppertal (2008) *Lighthouse / Watchtower*, De Haan, in public space.

Guillaume Bijl had major solo exhibitions and took part in numerous group shows including the Paris Biennial (1982), SMAK, Gent, (1984), Kunsthalle Bern (1986), Belgian Pavillion - Venice Biennial (1988), New Museum, New York (1989), Documenta 9, Kassel (1992), Sydney Biennial (1992), Centre Pompidou, Paris (2000), Skulptur Projekte, Münster (2007), 11th Lyon Biennial (2011), Istanbul Biennial (2013), Busan Biennial (2006) and Manifesta 11, Zürich (2016). Recently he took part in following projects: *Beaufort* (2018), *Play*, Kortrijk (2018), Félicien Rops Museum, Namur (2018), *Power to the People*, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2018), the Bruegel Year, Dilbeek (2019.), Musée d'art Contemporain, St Etienne, 2021.

Guillaume is represented now by galleries like Nicolai Wallner Gallery, Copenhagen - Nagel-Draxler Gallery, Berlin - Lumen Travo, Amsterdam – Keteleer Gallery, Antwerp - H. Winter Gallery, Vienna - Mulier-Mulier Gallery / Knokke, Vienna - Zero Galleria, Milan - Meredith Rosen Gallery, New York.

Nadia Bijl

The exhibition will be on view till 30 April, 2022.