

For immediate release

## GUY MEES

28 June – 28 July 2017

Private view: Tuesday 27 June, 6 – 8 PM



*Verloren Ruimte (Lost Space)*, 1992  
Paper  
31 ½ x 90 ⅝ inches (80 x 230 cm)

David Zwirner is pleased to announce an exhibition of works by Guy Mees (1935-2003) in THE UPPER ROOM at the gallery's London location—the first solo presentation of the artist's work in the United Kingdom. A leading figure of the Belgian postwar avant-garde, Mees is known for his radical and poetic approach to space, form, and material. On view will be works from the artist's key bodies of work, spanning from the 1960s through the 1990s, that collectively demonstrate both the formal breadth and conceptual consistency of his singular oeuvre.

Mees first gained recognition as a member of the *Nieuwe Vlaamse School* (New Flemish School) that formed in Antwerp in 1960 who, thanks to their contact with many of the artists affiliated with the international ZERO network, mounted a number of group shows throughout Europe during their brief existence. It was during this period that

Mees developed his breakthrough series "*Verloren Ruimte*" ("Lost Space"), 1960-1967, which comprised wall-mounted monochromatic panels and freestanding neon objects, both of which were covered in lace. This early body of work—titled in reference to the artist's desire to shatter pictorial space—constitutes a programmatic assertion of Mees's working method, which was relentlessly experimental and deliberately open-ended and malleable.

Though distinct in their appearance, subsequent series maintain the same emphasis on the deconstruction of preconceived notions around medium and style in order to investigate the concept of space itself. In a recently discovered series of sculptures begun in 1970, Mees subtly undermines the seriality and rationality commonly associated with Minimalist practices. Placed on the floor, these strips of metal were arranged in a geometric configuration. Visitors were then allowed to move individual pieces around the gallery, emphasizing the precariousness of such structures. Despite their industrial materials, these works are inherently fragile—an overarching characteristic of Mees's oeuvre.

Likewise, his series "*Niveaoverschillen*" ("Differences in Levels") from the 1970s consisted of snapshot-like photographs of individuals arranged on different levels of a makeshift platform meant to mimic those used to award Olympic medals. Presented in a variety of formats, these images present a humorous take on the conceptual photography that was beginning to emerge during this period.

The later part of Mees's oeuvre is characterized by his inventive use of color as a means of delineating space. In the mid-1980s, he returned to the notion of lost space, creating a second series of *Verloren Ruimte* works, which he pursued through the early 1990s. Bearing little physical relation to the earlier, eponymous series, this second group took the form of thin scraps of colored paper cut in varying shapes and pinned to the wall. Mees imbues these open structures with a sense of weight and tactility, thereby emphasizing their relationship with external factors such as negative space, light, architecture, and even the body of the viewer; thus gesturing implicitly outside of themselves.

**Guy Mees** was born in 1935 in Mechelen, Belgium and died in 2003 in Antwerp. His work has been the subject of major museum solo exhibitions, including those held at Palais de Beaux-Arts, Brussels (1990 and 1993); Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp (2002); and Museum Leuven, Belgium (2012). The artist's work has been featured in numerous international group exhibitions including *Zero Avantgarde*, Lucio Fontana's Atelier, Milan (1965); *The Sixties: Art in Belgium*, Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK), Ghent (1979); *Betekende Ruimte II-Plaats van Handeling/Designated Space II-Space as Scene*, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium (1993); *A Story of the Image: Old & New Masters from Antwerp*, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp (traveled to Shanghai Art Museum, followed by National Museum of Singapore, 2007-2009), among others. In 2012, Mees's work was included in the *9th Shanghai Biennale: 50 Days at Sea*. Most recently, the artist's work was featured in *The Gap: Selected Abstract Art from Belgium*, curated by Luc Tuymans, which was first on view in 2015 at the Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art, London and traveled to the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp in 2016. Work by the artist is represented in several museum collections, including Museum Leuven, Belgium; Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp; and Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels. This show is organized in collaboration with Galerie Micheline Szwajcer, Antwerp, who has represented the work of the artist since 1982.

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