

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

BRUSSELS

JORIS VAN DE MOORTEL

***This incomplete mythical world
whose perfection lay outside it***

Wednesday 18 April - Saturday 9 June



Joris Van de Moortel, *Dance of death - the night*, 2018.
Neon, plexiglass, Duratrans transparent print, objects, aluminium, 235 × 235 cm (92 1/2 × 92 1/2 in.)

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is very pleased to announce the fourth solo show of Joris Van de Moortel. The title, *This incomplete mythical world whose perfection lay outside it*, is borrowed to *The Society of Spectacle*, published in 1967 by Guy Debord, a reference book in contemporary thinking which had a major impact after the events of 1968.

The exhibition title is an extract from the thesis 137 of *The Society of Spectacle* describing Middle Age as an “unfinished mythical world”, still entirely subjected to the “cyclical time” that rules over nature, but also men, from birth to death. Here, Joris Van de Moortel convokes medieval thinking to better illustrate the excesses of this “Society of the spectacle” in which we have lived since its theorization in the midst of the turmoil of 1968. The exclusive body of work exhibited here bears witness of the new artistic perspectives opened by the artist’s philosophical and historical researches. Born in Ghent in 1983, the Belgian artist embarks us on a journey through both time and spirituality.

As death constantly loomed over the tormented Middle Age era, it appears on several occasions in this procession-like exhibition in which each work marks a station, like those that punctuate a church’s Station of the cross. But no worries: no kneeling is expected here, only the beginning of a reflection around vanity and the paradoxes of our contemporary world. To fuel the debate, the artist conjures up a farcical, sometime frightening, bestiary in the manner of Tim Burton’s heroes.

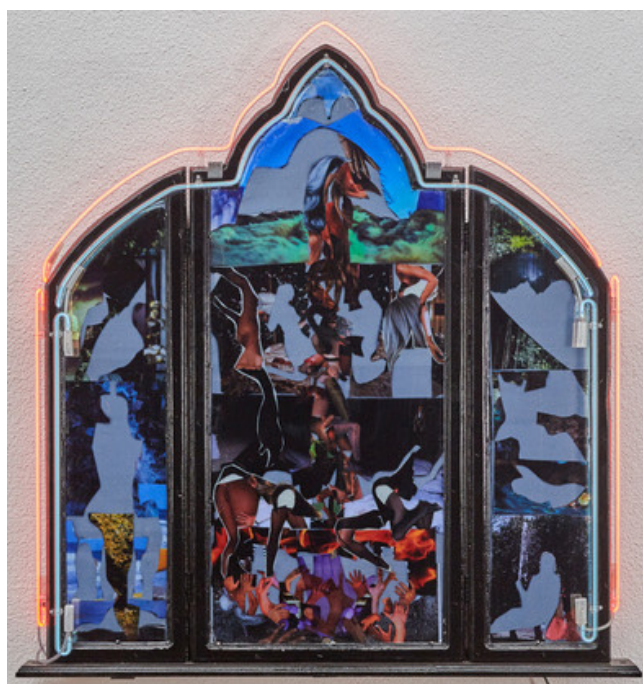
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BRUSSELS

The exhibition partly draws its inspiration from the “mythical world” of Middle Age and Renaissance, and its abundant art. Paintings, drawings, sculptures and installations –some of which including videos -, more or less directly quote a repertoire of forms and images from the Flemish 14th and 15th century.

It is the case of the collages *The Mariage of Heaven and Hell* and *Bestiarium I*, which wooden frames recall church altarpieces. Their threefold composition also reminds ancient painting triptychs, Van de Moortel borrowing their confrontation of the earthly and divine realms yet with body fragments cut out from pornographic magazines.

This gallery of licentious images worthy of libraries' Hell is arranged in the form of a medieval bestiary. The gap between their content and the sacred function of the altarpiece humorously emphasizes the fracture between former chastity and the orgy of pornographic images that now invades our daily life. The proliferation of images through the collage technique is reminiscent of Pierre Molinier's photomontages, with their farandole of legs in fishnet-stockings. The same erotic dimension is present in the work of two leading figures of Belgian pop art Evelyne Axell and Pol Mara, in which women are always depicted in sensual if not coquettish ways, to spoof the advertising imagery of the consumption society of the 1960s.



Joris Van de Moortel, *The Mariage of Heaven and Hell*, 2018.
Wood, plexiglass, photographic collages, neon and black varnish, 136 X 130 X 13cm (53 1/2 X 51 1/8 X 5 1/8 in.)

Other works on different media illustrate the fight between vice and virtue, which, in medieval thinking, is also that of good and evil, like *Drink and dice ruins wealth and fame*, after the painting attributed to Pieter Brueghel the Elder representing the twelve Netherlandish proverbs. As for the two big diptychs, *Dance of death – the night* and *A day in the life of Dance of death*, they were inspired by an older engraving on the theme of the Dance of death by Michael Wolgemut in 1493. The same fascination for death and its representations is also present in Paul Delvaux's paintings of the 1940s, to quote only his famous *Ecce Homo* (1949), in which the protagonists of the Descent from the cross are replaced by skeletons. Those of Joris Van de Moortel go on a frantic dance to the sound of screaming guitars –one can think of his own musical performances-as a metaphor of the collective hysteria to which consumption and capitalist production society have brought us, without any real alternative found to this day.

Pushed to the limits, this frenzy can lead to madness as reminded by the allegorical theme of the “Ship of fools” popularized at the end of the 15th century by the illustrated book of the same name by Sébastien Brant, which inspired Joris Van de Moortel. In his own version of *The Ship of Fools*, he puts artists on board with other dropouts. The ship stands as both a prison and a space of freedom, but in medieval mythology, it is only a one-way trip. Through the means of allegory, Joris Van de Moortel questions his own identity as an artist, wondering whether the latter gives him a particular part to play in today's society.

The Proverbs and the Dance of death are two among the most popular themes in medieval Europe. For Joris Van de Moortel, they remain the best illustrations of man's original fight against his double nature, both apollonian and dyonisian. The first symbolizes order and moderation, while the other evokes all that is elusive and unstable. The artist does not escape this duality, quite on the contrary. Both are necessary to channel his inspiration and unleash his creativity. A work such as *A representation of the incomplete mythical world whose perfection lay outside it* –a Plexiglas box containing the remains of musical performances- reflects this view, since it attempts to capture a fleeting –and often chaotic- live experience. The physical and music energy released during this performances stand in stark contrast with the monastic atmosphere of Joris Van de Moortel's studio when he works. These two antagonistic states are constitutive of the artist's creative process and reveal his attraction for two totally opposite yet magnetic dispositions.

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

BRUSSELS

Along with religion, music is the other main thread of Joris Van de Moortel's exhibition. It is present in his video *Dance of life, must be heaven?*, as well as in his various interpretations of the Dance of death and the Proverbs, which depict rather "loud" excesses to say the least. Music is there also in the series made after liturgical objects: gongs used during religious ceremonies (*Mezzo Spiral GONG and Straight GONG*), and altars in *Incense altar I and II*, which represent elements of past musical performances like speakers, amplifiers and cables, cast in bronze. Music goes hand in hand with religious rite. Joris Von de Moortel experienced it as a child when he assisted during mass and sang in choirs. Although remote, the experience continues to impact him, and occasioned a series of recent performances that resulted in the work *SMOKE*, from *A Sunday Mass; De 7 sacramenten (glass, fire, white, smoke, nature, vandal)*, in which the artist revisits the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church.



Joris Van de Moortel, *Incense altar II*, 2018.
Bronze, 50 × 35 × 10 cm (16 7/8 × 13 3/4 × 3 7/8 in.)

Last February, Joris Van de Moortel performed in The Philippines on the occasion of his solo show entitled "*European Son, Raised Catholic*" (The Drawing Room Gallery, Manila), in which, faraway from home, he questioned his double culture as catholic and European. There, he met up with local craftsmen with who he made *This incomplete world* and *Lightocaster*. These two pieces crafted in a Filipino baroque style subvert the codes of mortuary art with a typically Flemish humor -that Pieter Brueghel the Elder would have approved. This fine example of artistic syncretism reveals the boundless curiosity of Joris Van de Moortel, this "European Son, Raised Catholic", for every form of present and past art he investigates and reinterprets in the light of his own philosophical and spiritual concerns.

Under the tutelage of Guy Debord, Joris Van de Moortel revisits medieval thinking through the appropriation of some of its most popular themes: good, evil and death, tied in eternity. This existential trilogy is also a leitmotiv of rock 'n' roll, as it marked the often-tragic destinies of its legends. Joris Van de Moortel is as much a plastic artist than a musician and produces works in tight relationship with music. He constantly draws from the material of his musical performances. What the latters destroy, his works of art rebuild. This is how the artist generates his own "cyclical time", which perfectly echoes the chorus of the song *Atlantic City* by Bruce Springsteen, "Everything dies that's a fact. But maybe everything that dies someday comes back" (*Nebraska* album, 1982).

Fervent admirer of German romanticism, Joris Van de Moortel is "Wagnerian" in that his recent works combine the three forms of Art: fine art, literature and music. The result being raw emotion and sensation. Everything Joris Van de Moortel transforms has a visual sound quality to it. He composes his exhibitions like an orchestra: works echo each other based on improvisations he plays like music scores.

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

BRUSSELS

Born in Ghent in 1983, Joris Van de Moortel lives and works in Antwerp (Belgium).

Graduated from the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin (Germany) in 2013, as well as the Higher Institute of Fine Arts (HISK) of Ghent (Belgium) in 2009, Joris Van de Moortel is among the most promising artists of the Belgian contemporary art scene.

The work of Joris Van de Moortel has been showcased in significant personal exhibitions like Pink Noises, his first solo show in the United States, held at the Savannah College of Art and Design of Atlanta in 2016 ; and Ça vous intéresse l'architecture? Botanical vibrations travel through the air tangled as wires, attempting to play with the rhythmic structure at the Be Part Art Center (Waregem) in 2015, his first major solo show in Belgium.

The artist will enjoy another solo show at Bozar (Brussels, Belgium) next October 2018, on the occasion of the "Baroque Season" of the museum, and the "Theodoor Van Loon. Un peintre caravagesque entre Rome et Paris" exhibition.

Joris Van de Moortel also took part in several noteworthy group shows like Ecce Homo at the Mayer Van Den Bergh museum (Antwerp, Belgium 2017), featuring about fifty Belgian artists among which Luc Tuymans, Michaël Borremans and Ann Veronica Janssens; at the Ludwig Museum (Budapest, Hungary, 2016), the Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin, Germany, 2015); the Boghossian Foundation- Villa Empain (Brussels, Belgium, 2015); the Palais de Tokyo (Paris, France, 2014), and the SMAK (Ghent, Belgium, 2013).

In 2016, Joris Van de Moortel was invited by Denis Gielen, director of the Mac's - Musée des Arts Contemporains de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (Grand Hornu, Belgium) to take part in Rebel Rebel, a reference exhibition on rock'n'roll, for which the artist created a monumental installation displayed in one of the museum's rooms.

*Joris Van de Moortel's works are featured in renowned public and private collections like the Vehbi Koç Foundation (Istanbul, Turkey), the Dena Foundation for Contemporary Art (Paris, France/New York, United-States), the collection of the Centraal Museum (Utrecht, Netherland), the Collection Raja (Roissy-en-France, France) and the Ghisla Art Collection (Locarno, Switzerland).
Joris Van de Moortel has been represented by Galerie Nathalie Obadia Paris/ Brussels since 2013.*

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18 april - 9 june

Jérôme Zonder

Des Homo Sapiens
6 april - 27 may

Agnès Varda

*UNE CABANE DE CINEMA:
La serre du bonheur*
14 april - 31 may

Summer exhibition

20 june - 21 july

Benoit Maire

8 june - 21 july

Meuser

8 september - 27 october

Edi Hila

6 september - 27 october

Rina Banerjee

8 september - 27 october