

YALE UNION is led by a desire to support emerging and under-acknowledged artists, propose new modes of production, and stimulate the ongoing public discourse around art. 800 SE 10th Avenue, Portland, OR 97214 www.yaleunion.org
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JEF GEYS

Curated by Nicholas Tammens
April 14–June 10, 2018
Thursday–Sunday, 12–6pm
Opening: Saturday, April 14, 4–6pm

Yale Union presents Belgian artist Jef Geys in one of the last exhibitions that Geys worked on before his passing in February. The exhibition is comprised of new work commissioned by Yale Union and fabricated onsite as well as pieces made between 1965 and 2018, continuing Geys' method of installation that integrates his total oeuvre into dialogue with new work. This will be the first large-scale presentation of Geys' work on the West Coast of the United States. It also includes a collaboration with students from Da Vinci Arts Middle School, and a late edition of Geys' newspaper, *Kempens Informatieblad*, is planned for the occasion.

The seven *paravents*, or folding screens, realized for this exhibition extend Geys' practice of reinterpreting earlier work from his own archive. Producing this commissioned work involved a strategy often used by Geys in the past that utilizes the human resources of the presenting institution whereby certain aesthetic judgments were delegated to the curator within a set of rules determined by the artist. The paravents carry cropped prints of photographs that Geys took in Lisbon in the 1970s, and were fabricated on-site with Yale Union's woodshop facilities. These prints were derived from *As Sombras de Lisboa* [translated as either *The Ghosts* or *The Shadows of Lisbon*], a previous exhibition at Culturgest, Lisbon in 2012 where Geys directed Culturgest's curator to select images from a contact sheet of vacation shots for presentation as large-scale wallpaper prints. In Lisbon, the role of wallpaper in exhibition design was of issue; here in Portland, scaled down to the domestic size of furniture and situated in a large room filled with windows, the reiteration of this work takes on a new relationship between light, architecture, and the metric of the body.

This process of Geys outsourcing artistic production continues with other works in Yale Union's exhibition that take the production line, seriality, and questions of authorship as points in their logic; for instance, in his paintings of seed packets, auto lacquered fiberglass fruit and vegetable reliefs, and a range of work inspired by the Douven painting factory in his hometown. These are all merely suggested places of departure, as Geys worked tirelessly to resist such simple reductions, and even promoted ambiguity. Where many artists of his generation performed a belief in the universal, such an aim appears and disappears in the contingencies of meaning that are the fundamental material for Geys. To be and to speak Flemish, to be a child of the War, to work as a school teacher, to run a bar and cabaret; it is telling that we so often pause on the anecdotal aspects of Geys' art as if it is the mana of the work.

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What Yale Union is exhibiting is a selection from a life of work, bringing closest to our senses an integration between the life of the artist and his output. Drawing much of their content from the experiences of life up until its close, these works engage topics as diverse as the education of children to the identification of cows, to prove that the question of what is worthy as art is never a limited pursuit.

We give special thanks to the family of Jef Geys, Francis Mary, Dirk Snauwaert, Florence Bonnefous, and to the galleries Air de Paris, Essex Street, and Galerie Max Mayer. The exhibition also could not have been realized without the generous support of the Flanders Government Delegation in the USA and the Consulat Général de France.

Jef Geys (1934, Leopoldsburg, Belgium–2018, Balen, Belgium) was among Europe's most respected yet under-acknowledged artists. Producing artwork since the 1950s, Geys' work focused on the construction of social and political engagement and the questions that are fundamental to the language of art's content, form, and function. From 1960 to 1989, Geys taught art at the state school in Balen, a town in the Kempens region where he lived for five decades. Jef Geys represented Belgium at the 2009 Venice Biennale and is featured prominently in public and private collections across Europe. He presented his work at the 21st Bienal de São Paulo in 1991, Skulptur Projekte Münster in 1997, and Documenta 11 in 2007. Additionally, he received institutional recognition in the form of one- or two-person exhibitions at ICC Antwerp, Belgium (1971), Gewad Gent, Belgium (1983), De Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands (1987); Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium (1992); Middelheim, Antwerp, Belgium (1999 & 2014); Kunstverein Munich, Germany (2001); Kunsthalle Lophem, Loppem-Zedelgem, Belgium (2003); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands (2004); Institut d'art contemporain Villeurbanne / Rhone-Alpes, France (2007 & 2017); Bawag Foundation, Vienna, Austria (2009); Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Michigan (2010); Jakob Smitsmuseum, Mol, Belgium (2011); MuHKA Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerp, Belgium (2011); Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels, Belgium (2012); CNEAI, Chatou, France (2012, 2014 & 2016); Culturgest, Lisbon, Portugal (2012); Cubitt, London, UK (2013); Les Bains-Douches, Alençon, France (2014 & 2017); SMAK, Gent, Belgium (2015); CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, France (2016); and Center d'art contemporain / Passages, Troyes, France (2017).

Nicholas Tammens is a curator, writer, and childhood educator based in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia.