

Jef Geys

Kempens Informatieblad

26.01.—

24.03.2019

This exhibition focuses on the *Kempens Informatieblad*, a newspaper published by Belgian artist Jef Geys between 1971 and 2018, which he used to distribute information as well as to document and discuss his artistic activities in the broadest sense. For the first time, the presentation brings together all issues of *Kempens Informatieblad* and *Kempens Informatieboek*, which have been published in parallel since 2012, and makes them accessible for viewing and research, accompanied by a selection of artworks and archival material.

Jef Geys (1934-2018) lived in the Flemish town of Balen in the Campine region, which frequently formed the point of departure and reference for his work, and therefore was often the editorial headquarters and production site of *Kempens Informatieblad*. From this peripheral position, he developed an artistic practice characterized by local engagement, an often tongue-in-cheek conceptualism, as well as a questioning of conventions and authorities in and outside the art world. In his work, which comprises photography, painting, sculpture, film, installation, and experimental approaches to pedagogy in addition to the publishing activities on focus here, he dealt with the functioning of art and its institutional forms. Through strategies of subversion and camouflage, which, as he said, could only take place "within the system," he opened up his own ethical and practical space for possibilities of artistic work by testing and indicating the rules of the "game." Geys generated a constantly growing archive of traces of his personal and professional everyday life. His works were often conceived against the backdrop of this archive and were continuously reproduced and recombined by him. In his works, Geys not only examined the value and status of art, artwork and artist, but also addressed socio-political issues such as questions of class or gender.

After studying art in Antwerp, Geys taught Positive Aesthetics at the local school in Balen from 1960 to 1989, a subject he created. As part of the curriculum, he exhibited loaned works by contemporary artists such as Roy Lichtenstein or Piero Gilardi in his laboratory-like classroom and took his students on an excursion to the studio of Marcel Broodthaers. Since the early 1960s, in addition to his interlocking artistic and pedagogical work, Geys had also been involved in the production and distribution of a local newspaper, the *Kempisch Reklamblad*, on whose pages he began to publish various textual and pictorial material among the advertisements placed therein. After it was discontinued, Geys took over the paper and continued it under his own direction as *Kempens Informatieblad*. The newspaper

superimposed the artistic and the everyday, the one disguised as the other and thus not estranged but brought closer together. Over the years, he increasingly entangled regional and international publics, letting their economies of attention run counter to each other.

The first issue of *Kempens Informatieblad* was published on March 27, 1971. The cover depicts a self-portrait of the artist with his iconic heart shape, bureaucratically emblazoned with the numerical series drawn from his passport and other identity documents. The newspaper was published in connection with a solo exhibition at the Koninklijk Museum for Schone Kunsten in Antwerp (KMSKA). When Geys had been invited the year before, he responded by proposing that the museum be blown up. He later exhibited the concept and instructions of the project as well as the documentation of the reactions it elicited. Accompanying the show was the publication of the first issue of the newspaper, which, in addition to photographs of the museum illustrating Geys' proposal, contained an interview with the artist as well as an extensive catalog raisonné. Geys took up this first issue in 1972 with the publication of the *kreatief*. A publication subtitled as “a ‘novel’ about motivation and reality.” It contained an expanded list of his works, provided with a commentary by the artist himself. These continuously updated lists of works can be found repeatedly in the *Kempens Informatiebladen*.

As an alternative to the conventional artist catalog, the issues, over 50 in total, were mostly published in connection with his exhibitions. They were distributed freely or for little money after initially being distributed door-to-door in Balen, as the preceding publication had been. The *Kempens Informatiebladen* also found their way into works and exhibitions by other means. For example, printing plates and proofs were shown, or walls were papered with the pages of the newspaper. After a long pause of publishing, resulting from Geys' temporary withdrawal from the art world, the *Kempens Informatieblad* became a central component of his artistic practice in the late 1980s. As an information system directed by the artist, it successively developed into a kind of meta-medium within his practice, through which he himself organized his representation and mediation beyond the exhibition context.

Like the *Kempens Informatieblad*, the two **folders** shown in the exhibition form an interface to Geys' archive. These are two of a series of eight folders that comprise a total of 800 pages. They contain individual artworks, sketches, postal and electronic correspondence as well as newspaper clippings, reproductions and photographs individually filed in plastic sleeves. The different contents and forms are equally juxtaposed and form a subjective order of things.

While most of the issues were conceived and produced in Balen, Geys moved the editorial office of *Kempens Informatieblad* into the exhibition space for his 1993 project "Wat eten wij vandaag" [What Are We Eating Today?] at Witte de With. The printing plate and proof, which can be seen in the exhibition, were part of his

presentation on site. For the exhibition, Geys invited nine families from the residential projects of **Alexanderpolder**, a district of Rotterdam whose post-war buildings were the subject of the biennial Architecture International Rotterdam (AIR). Instead of architects and urbanists, Geys invited the residents of the area to speak and provided them with various media channels to comment on their environment. In situ, the three special editions *Alexanderpolder* were conceived and distributed in an edition of 258,000 copies in the free newspaper *De Havenloods/Het Zuiden* in Rotterdam and the neighboring Capelle aan den IJssel. The participating families reported on their everyday experiences alongside contributions by artists such as Jeff Wall or Geys' former colleague, Walter van den Broeck. During the seven-week exhibition period, the dinner of one of the participating families was broadcast live on local television from 6:40 to 7:00 pm from Monday to Saturday.

In the following years, he conceived further newspaper supplements, first for the British newspaper *The Independent* and later for the Belgian business newspaper *De Financieel-Economische Tijd*. The former appeared in 1995 as a one-page contribution to the group show *Take Me (I'm Yours)* at London's Serpentine Gallery. The latter was released at weekly intervals in September/October 1999 and included a continuation of the annotated work list of the *kreatief*book.

As can be seen in the chronological order of *Kempens Informatiebladen* in the exhibition, content and covers were repeated over the decades as, for instance, can be seen in the issues of *!Vrouwenvragen?* [*!Women's Questions?*]. It is a collection of women-related questions that Geys copied from newspapers and other media, beginning in 1964. He wrote the questions with a thick marker on a strip of wrapping paper hanging in his classroom. As soon as students commented on one of the questions, Geys made it a topic of the remaining lesson. In 1970, Geys showed the paper roll for the first time in an exhibition of the socialist women's group in Balen. The total of 157 questions were later edited by him as a work of art and translated into 12 different languages. Geys published a total of four *Kempens Informatiebladen* devoted to the *Women's Questions*.

Again and again, Geys extended the anti-journalistic method of his newspaper to other media. In 1973, he collaborated with filmmaker Jef Cornelis for his series *Kunst Als Kritiek. Wanneer is art Wel Kritiek?* [*Art as criticism. When is art criticism?*], which he developed for the Belgian national broadcaster BRT. The fourth part, which shows Geys as a television announcer next to his logo, proposes the answer: "4. Wanneer de Kunstenaar in all Ernst Speelt," or "When the artist is toying around in all seriousness." By first reading a detailed thank you list in the manner of a public statement and then recounting the relative costs of the program and airtime, Geys applies the format as a performative media critique to himself, thus revealing the mechanisms and bureaucracy of the medium of television.

In parallel to the printed publications, Geys started a blog at the URL jefgeysweblog.wordpress.com in 2010, which he ran in much the same way as the *Kempens Informatieblad*. The final entry from January 22, 2018, sums up his last

large-scale, internet-based work *Art Tonen* [Showing Art], for which he prompted his social and professional environment to portray themselves together with a work of art.

Curated by Gloria Hasnay and Moritz Nebenführ in collaboration with Nadja Quante

Jef Geys (1934–2018) was born in Leopoldsburg and studied at the Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten (KASK) in Antwerp. From 1960 to 1989 Geys taught Positive Aesthetics at the State school of Balen. He represented Belgium at the Venice Biennale 2009 with his projects *Quadra Medicinale* and took part in Documenta 11 (2002), Skulptur Projekte Münster (1997) and São Paulo Biennale (1991).

Solo shows (selection): NTU CCA Singapore, Singapore (2018); Yale Union, Portland (2018); S.M.A.K., Gent (2015); Cubitt Gallery, London (2013); CNEAI, Chatou (2012); M KHA, Antwerp (2011); MoCA, Detroit (2010); Bawag Foundation, Vienna (2009); Orchard, New York (2006); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2004); Kunstverein München, Munich (2001).

Group show (selection): *The Absent Museum*, Wiels, Brussels (2017); *Take Me I'm Yours*, Monnaie de Paris, Paris (2016), Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2016); *Archive Fever*, ICP, New York (2008); *Deep Comedy*, Ballroom Marfa (2007); *Chambres d'Amis*, S.M.A.K., Gent (1986).

Information on the works:

Wall

Kempens Informatieblad

1971–2018

52 issues, various dimensions

Courtesy KAZINI

Kempens Informatieblad, Special Edition Serpentine Gallery

1995

Insert in The Independent

inkjet print on paper, Facsimile

TIJD Cultuur – Bijlage bij De Financieel-Economische Tijd

Jaargang 3, Nr. 71, 8 September 1999

Jaargang 3, Nr. 72, 15 September 1999

Jaargang 3, Nr. 73, 22 September 1999

Jaargang 3, Nr. 74, 29 September 1999

Jaargang 3, Nr. 75, 6 Oktober 1999

5 newspapers, 41 x 28 cm each

Courtesy Francis Mary

Jef Meert – Greta Rihoux – Philippe-André Geys

1990

Printing plate, Kempens Informatieblad Special Editie Galerie Great Meert, Brussels (framed)

120 x 100 cm

Courtesy KAZINI

Kempens Informatieboek

2012–2018

11 issues, Ink on paper

10 DIN A4 formats and 1 US Letter format

Courtesy KAZINI

Table

MTL MAGAZINE NOVEMBER 1970

Jacques CHARLIER: *Les Coins Enchanteurs*; Marcel BROODTHAERS: *Meuwissen ou N'Importe Qui*; JEF GEYS: *Voorstel Tot Afbraak Van Het Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunsten Te Antwerpen*; Leo JOSEFSTEIN: *Letters*.

1970

17 pp. Texts in Dutch, French and English.

Soft cover. 29.3 x 20.8 cm

Edited by Galerie MTL.

Publisher: MA. Durourie, Meise, November 1970.

Sammlung ASPC/Zentrum für Künstlerpublikationen, Weserburg, Bremen

Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunst

not dated

Poster, Print on paper

72 x 52 cm

Sammlung ASPC/Zentrum für Künstlerpublikationen, Weserburg, Bremen

left

Kreatief – een 'roman' omtrent motivatie en werkelijkheid

[a 'novel' about motivation and reality]

1972

Literary and art critical journal, published by Roland Patteuw

24 x 16 cm

Courtesy KAZINI

Archive folder 201 – 300

45 x 35 cm

Various materials

Courtesy KAZINI

Archive folder 701 – 800

45 x 35 cm

Various materials

Courtesy KAZINI

right

Kempens Informatieblad press pass

not dated

Ink on paper, recto

17 x 11 cm

Courtesy KAZINI

Kempens Informatieblad press pass

1982

Ink, felt tip pen, ball pen, photograph on paper, verso

16 x 11 cm

Courtesy KAZINI.

Preliminary design of Kempens Informatieblad Special Editie Arles

2012

Various materials

44 x 30,5 cm

Courtesy KAZINI

**Preliminary design of Kempens Informatieboek Special Editie MUZEE
Oostende / Special Edition Établissement d'en Face / Edition Speciale
MUHKA Antwerpen / Sonderausgabe La Loge Brussels**

2017

Various materials

A4 format

Courtesy KAZINI

**Preliminary design of Kempens Informatieboek Special Editie MUZEE
Oostende / Special Edition Établissement d'en Face / Edition Speciale
MUHKA Antwerpen / Sonderausgabe La Loge Brussels**

2017

Various materials

A4 format, opened

Courtesy KAZINI

Jef Cornelis

Kunst Als Kritiek. Wanneer is Kunst Wel Kritiek?

4. Wanneer de Kunstenaar in alle Ernst Speelt.

[Art as Criticism. When is Art Criticism? 4. When the artist plays around in all seriousness.]

1973

16mm, digitized

4:47 min

Courtesy KAZINI

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME:

Wednesday, 27 February

6 pm: Curator's tour with Gloria Hasnay and Moritz Nebenführ

7 pm: Presentation and discussion of current artist magazine formats with *InterCity* (Hamburg), *muss sterben* (Munich/Hannover) and *The Critical Ass* (Vienna/Berlin)

Event held in German.

Wednesday, 20 March, 6 pm

Guided tour with Dr. Anne Thurmann-Jajes (Head of Centre for Artists' Publications in the Weserburg, Museum für moderne Kunst, Bremen) and Nadja Quante

Event held in German.

The Künstlerhaus Bremen and the curators* thank:

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Wednesday to Sunday 2–7pm

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