

curated by:
Jan Hoet
with **Ann Demeester**

October 9 - November 9, 2002

Ellen Brusselmans
Jessica Diamond
Asta Gröting
Kenny Macleod
Manfred Pernice
Ettore Spalletti
Silke Schatz

apexart curatorial program

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Cover: Theo Van Rysselberghe, *Portrait of Marguerite Van Mons*, 1886,
Oil on canvas, 90 x 70.5 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent, Belgium



Time is free

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Silke Schatz, *IGS Roberbruch, Schulstrasse*, 1998-99, colored pencil on paper, 92" x 136"

Time is Free

Nobody likes to admit it but if you do not work you eventually start to get bored. That was definitively my case. As a young man I experienced numerous love affairs. During my time off, I strolled along the Espinel and there was always somebody to be found but after that Bruna came, and that lasted for four years. Life in Buenos Aires starts to lose its attractions when you are jobless, living alone with a cat and not being very fond of reading or roaming through the city.

-Julio Cortázar, *Collected Stories*,
Meulenhoff: Amsterdam (1996).

The experience described above of Tito Balcárel, a character in one of the marvelous stories of the Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar, is not a unique one. Several studies produced by Dutch "leisure managers" in the Benelux have proven that a large part of the European population considers "free time" a residual product generated by the working week.

In a recent publication, which deals with the historical development of the concept of

leisure time, the Dutch journalist Rudie Kagie concludes that in a 24-hour economy like ours, more and more people would no longer know how to handle their leisure time if they could not rely on events and activities which are carefully planned by travel agencies, tourist offices, and event planners. Free time is no longer "free." It is structured in a rigid way and it takes up a large part of the monthly budget available for living expenses. Kagie claims that we have evolved from a time when factory employers and directors of big companies minutely organized every spare minute their laborers had out of fear they might otherwise (if they only worked six days a week) ruin themselves while drinking or gambling. Now we have reached a period in which the employees themselves have developed an almost hysterical fear of boredom, desperately looking for organized entertainment. An obsession with incessant activity, with bustle and hum, a paranoid fear of inertia and laziness seem to have become common phenomenon. It makes us nostalgic for figures such as Oblomov, the anti-hero in Gontcharov's eponymous novel, who spends endless hours doing absolutely nothing – daydreaming, musing and enjoying sleep; "the gentle rocking travel along the river of the dark," as Anthony Burgess refers to it.

Traditionally, artists seem to live in an autonomous time zone between work and



Ellen Brusselmans, *Untitled #1H₂O*, 2002,
photograph, 46" x 47"

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leisure. Their time does not fall into any specific and well-defined category. This partly has to do with the fact that you can never bring creativity to a halt whether it is Sunday or Monday, nor can you send imagination on a holiday. But it equally relates to the fact that the artwork itself is trapped in a vacuum between past, present and future. The works in this show directly or indirectly deal with this indeterminateness. They question the essence and construction of concepts and principles such as labor and relaxation, work and leisure, time and moment.

Time remembered and reconstructed is a central issue in the work of Silke Schatz. She deals with what the classical philosopher Saint Augustine called, "that which has not yet vanished into oblivion and

that which has not yet been buried." Personal and collective memories are reconstructed in monumental, semi-architectural drawings. She draws

rooms and houses related to her own past, not as they are, but as they appear to the inner eye. Just like the Scottish artist Kenny Macleod, she jostles and juggles the concepts of reality and fiction in lived and remembered experience.

In the video *Breaking Up* by Macleod, we are confronted with the overlapping stories of two characters reliving their affair.



Kenny Macleod, *Breaking Up*, 2001, video installation, dimensions variable



Manfred Pernice, *Gartenfest*, 2001, mixed media installation, dimensions variable

Their personalities never become clearly defined. The difference between lie and truth is continuously blurred and the past stubbornly collides and interferes with the present. This sort of uncertain relationship between sign, image and meaning reoccurs time and again in Macleod's work. Words and images are played off against one another and the precise relationship between them escapes our understanding.

The works of Manfred Pernice, Ellen Brusselmans and Asta Gröting show a preoccupation with the cracks and crevices of ordinary life. Gröting brings us pictures and portraits of ventriloquists in the series "*Ventastec*" (2001). At first, one is led to believe that the preoccupation of these "actors" with their dolls is a mere hobby. The German artist however subtly hints at the fact that speaking through the mouth of an inanimate object relates to much more complex issues such as construction of identity and self-analysis.

Manfred Pernice uses makeshift wooden constructions, images and real-life elements in order to create the ambience of a garden party – a free afternoon in the sun. His installation can be read as both a sculpture and an arrangement of functional elements for everyday use. However, the decor he sets up can be changed and

transformed at will of the public. What matters is not the objects in themselves, but the atmosphere they evoke.

A similar concentration on the everyday atmosphere occurs in the photographs of Ellen Brusselmans. To create the series *Untitled/H₂O* (2002), she spent time at a swimming pool in the middle of a small industrial town – an artificial little Eden where tropical paradise is meagerly represented by a few stereotypes such as palm trees and waterfalls. The photographs pinpoint moments in which this "pleasure hall" becomes a near abstract location, where the hard edges of the artificial environment become vague and smooth, producing a dream-like quality.

Ettore Spalletti shares Brusselman's interest in the visual poetry of soft shapes and pure curves. Beauty – as a primary utterance of intelligence, a genetic reality, a gift and a sacrifice – is the favorite subject of the Mediterranean artist. He deals with silence and isolation. His sculptural paintings predate the post-modern preoccupation with "the aesthetics of ugliness." They are suspended in time.

Jessica Diamond uses a medium that can equally be called timeless and rooted in tradition. Her wall paintings seem to be a tribute to the ephemeral. They appear and disappear, staying only for a short while. This aspect seems to be reinforced by the explicit message that the painting



Ettore Spalletti, *Senza Titolo*, 1981, semi-fresco on panel, 40" x 80" x 3"

conveys. The phrase, "I hate business," seems to be a powerful statement of an artist who refuses to get trapped in and by the mechanisms of a capitalist art world. It suggests an artist who refuses to live up to the expectations of high production and big sales – an artist who chooses to live in her own time.

The element linking all of these heterogeneous works into a harmonious whole is "virtually" present. It is a *fin-de-siècle* painting of a young aristocratic girl, dressed in black, her hand on the door-

knob as if she were ready to leave, with her eyes fixed on an indeterminate point in front of the canvas. The 19th Century painter Theo Van Rysselberghe did not so much paint the *sfumato* portrait of the daughter of one of his acquaintances as the title leads us to expect. Rather, he depicted an anonymous girl caught daydreaming. Although her features are fixed in oil paint, she is hardly present, but rather, suspended in time and caught in a crevice between "then" and "now".



Jessica Diamond, *I Hate Business*, 1989, Latex paint on wall, dimensions variable. Installation view from Ridge Street, New York, NY

Jan Hoet with Ann Demeester - 2002

Mr. Hoet (Israel Pavilion - 2003 Venice Biennale; *Sonsbeek* - Netherlands, 2001; *Documenta IX* - Germany, 1992) is currently the Director of the Museum for Contemporary Art (SMAK) in Ghent, Belgium and the acting Director of the Museum for Contemporary Art and Design (MARTa) in Herford, Germany. Ms. Demeester is a Curator at MARTa and the Director of the kunsthalle W139 in Amsterdam.