

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS

JORIS VAN DE MOORTEL

The ne'er-do-wells set out for a dubious pilgrimage

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3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri
75004 Paris



Joris Van de Moortel
The ne'er-do-wells are sailing out, 2019
Woodcut print on paper, watercolor, antireflective Plexiglas, frame by the artist
107 7/8 x 58 9/32 inches (274 x 148 cm)

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is very pleased to present Belgian artist Joris Van de Moortel's fifth exhibition, after *This incomplete mythical world whose perfection lay outside it* in 2018, in Brussels.

Through a group of works on paper, mural sculptures, installations and a video, Joris Van de Moortel builds a 7-act journey into madness, following a syncretic approach that combines 15th and 16th century Flemish painting, popular folklore, experimental music, medieval thought, writing and mysticism. Joris Van de Moortel uses a wide spectrum of techniques, which he has developed himself: engraving, gouache, neon, collage, recycled musical instruments, wax installations, videos, sound devices. The artist thus hyphenates classical figuration with rock culture, and traditional iconography with popular references.

The theme of the Ship of Fools, whose origin goes back to Plato and which was made famous in the 15th century by the writer Sebastian Brant, is the point of departure of this one-way journey toward a marginalized, spiritual and underground world, which is at once parodic and transgressive. Through the allegory of a ship carrying madmen and destined to be shipwrecked, Joris Van de Moortel questions the artist's place in society and our conscience when faced with the materialistic norms and values of the time. A depiction of drifting at sea which can also be construed as a metaphor for exile or quarantine, and which carries a clearly political dimension.

Works like *The ne'er-do-wells are sailing out* and *The Ship of Fools* introduce the theme through explicit references to the illustrations that Albrecht Dürer made for Brant's written work. The composition, enhanced by gouache or lit with neon lights, the use of engraving in the background, and the vigorous drawing all find their sources here. The procession of dead people who haunt the first scene confer an air of danse macabre, another theme that is dear to the artist, and one that draws upon Hans Holbein's work, which influenced a counter-culture to which he too ascribes. The drawing *Diagram Ritual/Horror/Animism Pilgrimage/OOO/Unfixed Fool*, which expresses the artist's connected thinking, is inspired by Hieronymus Bosch's famous and venerable representation of the Ship of Fools. Satire reaches its paroxysm in the form of a total inversion, with the ship having run aground. The famous *Dulle Griet (Margot la Folle)* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder and his upside-down world, an apocalyptic vision of madness, constitutes another influence for the artist, who seems to convey here a lucid and worried outlook on the future of the world.

In this same vein, the collages *Pilgrimage* and *Pilgrimage II* weave a clearer parallel with the status of the artist and musician: with neither perspective nor horizon, but an upturned sea where absurd drifting, which is ironically qualified as a pilgrimage, takes a carnivalesque turn. Excess, travesty, popular music and procession appear just beneath the surface, like nods to all sorts of medieval rites linked to a social experience of music (especially the tradition of charivari) but also to the artist's performative practice.

A large part of Joris Van de Moortel's work is derived from the liberating energy of live music. In fact, the artist reuses remnants of his performances in his visual practice. Thus, the artist's neon-lit self-portrait as a trumpet player (after the first representation of Jörg Schan's "Mr. Nobody" character, 1507), a guitar player's hands frozen atop his fetishized instrument, an electrifying concert reproduced on video, and song lyrics that sound like incantations cropping up throughout the exhibition. Joris Van de Moortel reminds us that the Ship of Fools became a cultural symbol for the entire rock and underground scene of the 1970s and 80s, which included the likes of John Cale, The Doors or Erasure, who made it the emblem, through their titles, of accepted and borderline non-conformity.

Several installations incarnate the dysphoric counterpart of this ambiguous frenzy: whether it is a drummer imprisoned in the chains of his instrument at the prow of a suspended ship or slumped before his image reflected in the water, Joris Van de Moortel seems to tell us something of the solitude of the powerless artist, abandoned as he is to the silent sea, unanswered.

Finally, the exhibition's central work, to which the artist devotes an entire room, is a video, which transposes, in stop motion, the 7 acts that constitute the storyline of the exhibition, and which follows the model of an opera. Using maquettes and miniature people which he makes in his studio, Joris Van de Moortel gives body and life to the world of spirits. At every scene, there is a way in. Against an eerie soundtrack composed by the artist, esoteric rites, black magic and voodoo cult are suggested by different effects (light, fire, smoke) and, no longer surprisingly, are associated to the phenomenon of musical trance. The video culminates in a new representation of madness borrowed from Bruegel's *Elck (Everyman)*: familiar to artists, this seems to finally incarnate a form of misunderstood wisdom.

A multi-talented artist, adept at plastic and visual experimentation, Joris Van de Moortel thus deploys a whole visual and mental universe, rich with multiple underground ramifications, nourished as much by art history as by literature and music. A celebration of alternative and spiritual lifestyles in a disenchanting and consumerist world, the exhibition appears like an invitation to set sail: « *What weight have we put on the world / What phantasms we gave birth / (...) Lets the wind in the sails of the fool / Preventing ourselves drowning in the garden's pool* ».

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

Having graduated from the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin (Germany) in 2013, and from the Higher Institute of Fine Arts (HISK) in Ghent (Belgium) in 2009, Joris Van de Moortel is one of the most remarkable artists of the contemporary Belgian scene.

Joris Van de Moortel was the subject of noteworthy solo exhibitions, including *Guitare préparée* at SintLukas Galerie (Brussels, Belgium) in 2019; *Cachivage Bugui Bugui* at BOZAR (Palais des Beaux-Arts in Bruxelles, Belgium) in 2018; *Pink Noises*, his first solo exhibition in the United States, at Savannah College of Art and Design in Atlanta in 2016; *Ça vous intéresse l'architecture? Botanical vibrations travel through the air tangled as wires, attempting to play with the rhythmic structure* at Centre d'art Be Part (Waregem, Belgium) in 2015. In October 2019, Galerie Nathalie Obadia exhibited Joris Van de Moortel's new series of works on paper, during the Art on Paper fair (BOZAR, Brussels, Belgium).

Joris Van de Moortel also participated in several important group exhibitions, including *Eyes East Bound* during the 13th edition of the Cairo International Biennale of Art (Egypt) in 2019; *Danser Brut* at LaM (Lille Métropole Musée d'art moderne, d'art contemporain et d'art brut, Villeneuve d'Ascq, France) in 2018; *Ecce Homo* at the Mayer Van Den Bergh Museum (Antwerp, Belgium) in 2017, which brought together around fifty other Belgian artists including Luc Tuymans, Michaël Booremans, and Ann Veronica Janssens; *Rebel, Rebel* at MAC's (Musée des arts contemporains de la Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles, Grand Hornu, Belgium) in 2016; *Passion – Fan behaviour and art*, a traveling exhibition that took place in 2015 and 2016 at the Ludwig Museum (Budapest, Hungary), the Stadtgalerie (Kiel, Germany), the Kunsterhaus (Nuremberg, Germany), and Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin, Germany); *Des choses en moins, des choses en plus* at the Palais de Tokyo (Paris, France) in 2014; *Upside down Part 2 Let's Dance* at SMAK (Ghent, Belgium) in 2013; *Spontaneously* at the Zacheta National Gallery of Art (Warsaw, Poland) in 2012; and *Exploded view* at Centraal Museum (Utrecht, Netherlands) also in 2012.

In June 2019, Joris Van de Moortel won the Cairo International Biennale award for his participation in its 13th edition (Cairo, Egypt).

Works by Joris Van de Moortel are held by important institutional and private collections, such as the Vehbi Koç Foundation (Istanbul, Turkey); the Dena Foundation for Contemporary Art (Paris, France/New York, USA); the collection of Centraal Museum (Utrecht, Netherlands); the Collection Raja (Roissy-en-France, France); and the Ghisla Art Collection (Locarno, Switzerland).

Paris Bourg-Tibourg	Paris Cloître Saint-Merri	Bruxelles
Sarkis <i>Vitraux Mobiles</i> October 5 - December, 2019	Mickalene Thomas <i>Jet: beautés du mois</i> September 25 - November 16, 2019	Andres Serrano <i>Infamous</i> November 14 - January 4, 2020
Fiona Rae January 10 - March, 2020	Joris Van de Moortel <i>The ne'er-do-wells set out for a dubious pilgrimage</i> November 28 - January 25, 2020	Sophie Kuijken January 17- February 22, 2020

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