

ESSEX STREET

Jef Geys
Bubble Paintings
April 9–May 21, 2017

ESSEX STREET is proud to present its first exhibition with Jef Geys (b. 1934 Leopoldsburg, lives and works in Balen, Belgium).

The exhibition is a survey of Geys' works, potentially stretching back many decades, although every single work takes the new date of 2017. Every piece remains in the bubble from its previous exhibition. The works must remain in bubble forever. They can never be unwrapped. Geys painted red, blue and yellow paint marks on the edges of the packaging tape around the work, to guarantee the seal. These marks are a notary's version of painting.

The works are priced based not on the vintage, technique or subject of the painting beneath the bubble, but solely on their resulting scale. The largest work in the exhibition, *Roy Sorenson*, appears to contain an empty frame. The smallest work in the exhibition, *Foto's Gewad (Parcel)*, appears to contain an installation of twelve historic photographs mounted on panel. Some works contain paintings with other artists' signatures. One work contains a sculpture consisting of a foam core model of the M HKA (Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp) inside a cardboard box. Some of the wrapped works are labeled by the museum or gallery where they were previously exhibited. Many of the works have a small image attached to the face. Some works have the artist's name on them, and some of these are a signature. Every work contains another work.

Each Bubble Painting is on a shelf designed by the artist.

It is a Duchampian exhibition which sidesteps the importance of vision in art. It is also an exhibition which is overly aware of the conditions of the art trade, showing paintings in the accouterments with which the vast majority will spend most of their lives. It is also an exhibition about a shared responsibility with collectors and museums (Geys builds into the format of the work a trust in the parameters) even when that means denying an earlier work of his. It is also an exhibition demonstrating how we label and categorize, and designate between the specific and the general. And also, of course, perhaps most of all, it is an exhibition about customs and travel and borders and moving through the world freely. Geys informed the gallery, that if at any point in transit, a shipper or customs agent inspected a painting and opened the Bubble, breaking the red, blue or yellow paint mark seal, then the work was to be considered destroyed, and he would expect a full payout. Such an event was not entirely unlikely, considering the times, or that one of the works' label reads *BRUEGEL*.

Hanging on the back wall of the exhibition is a work from Geys' long ongoing series of *Names*. Marie Gouze was an eighteenth century French feminist playwright and political pamphleteer. Her extensive works, especially the Declaration of the Rights of Women in 1791, served a crucial role in the campaign for women's rights, including the right to divorce, which was granted. She also attacked the economics of slavery and promoted its abolition. In 1784 Gouze wrote the very first French play to feature a slave as the protagonist. The writer changed her name to Olympe de Gouges when she was 18. She was guillotined in Paris in 1793.

Since finishing his art studies in 1958, Geys has maintained an inventory of his entire output, and this inventory has in turn become generative of other works. The first entry is from 1947, when the artist was thirteen. He worked as a public school teacher in Balen from 1960–1989, teaching children aged ten to fifteen. During this time he also exhibited original works in the classroom from Fontana, Lichtenstein, Warhol, and Rauschenberg and even took his students on a class trip to visit the studio of Broodthaers. He once made a work in the series of *Names*, by hanging a banner baring the name of one of his then current students on the classroom wall. In 1984 he organized an exhibition at the school drawn from the collection of the Museum of Ghent, including works from Old Masters through Stanley Broun. That exhibition, for instance, is included in his inventory.

ESSEX STREET
55 Hester Street, New York
(917) 675-6681 info@essexstreet.biz

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Since the late 1960s Geys has been the editor and publisher of his local newspaper, the Kempens Informatieblad, initially interspersing the news with his own work. Since 1971 an edition of the Kempens Informatieblad has accompanied most of his exhibitions. In 1977 Gey built a house with only his own hands and labor using salvaged material, and then lived there for some months. In 1987 or 1989 he organized a two-person gallery exhibition of his own work with that of a fourteen year old boy with a similar sounding name, without distinguishing the works between artists.

Jef Geys represented Belgium in the 2009 Venice Biennale. His work was included in Documenta 11 in 2007, Skulptur Projekte Munster in 1997, and the 21st Bienal de Sao Paulo in 1991. He has had institutional one or two person exhibitions at De Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands (1987); Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium (1992); Middelheim, Antwerpen, Belgium (1999 & 2014); Kunstverein Munchen, Munich, Germany (2001); Kunsthalle Lophem, Loppem-Zedelgem, Belgium (2003); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands (2004); Institut d'art contemporain Villeurbanne/Rhone-Alpes, Villeurbanne, France (2007 & 2017); Bawag Foundation, Vienna, Austria (2009); Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Detroit, Michigan (2010); Jakob Smithmuseum, Mol, Belgium (2011); MuHKA Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp, Belgium (2011); Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium (2012); CNEAI, Chatou, France (2012, 2014 & 2016); Culturgest, Lisbon, Portugal (2012); Cubitt, London, UK (2013); Les Bains-Douches, Alencon, France (2014 & 17); S.M.A.K., Gent, Belgium (2015); CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France (2016); and Centre d'art contemporain / Passages, Troyes, France (2017). This is at least his fourth public exhibition in New York following Galerie 3A (2015), Carriage Trade (2011), and Orchard (2007).

ESSEX STREET must give gratitude to Galerie Max Mayer, Dusseldorf; Nina Geys; and Jef Geys.
ESSEX STREET is open Wednesday–Sunday, 12–6PM.