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Opening 27/8, 12 – 16h  
Exhibition 30/8 – 29/10

**DOMINIQUE  
GONZALEZ-  
FOERSTER**

# PAVILLON D'ARGENT

Jan Mot  
Gob. José Ceballos 10  
Col. San Miguel Chapultepec  
11850 México D.F.

The concept of subjunctive art is two-sided, implying a connection between grammar (as it goes at least for Indo-European languages) and the reversion of the 'mood' in which art history (in the West) used to be written and to *happen*. Some liminal considerations might be necessary to explain this relationship.

As we can see in ordinary language, the subjunctive mood affects verbs, not nouns, that is to say actions, not things, and among these actions, utterances themselves. While the indicative mood deals with facts – “this is so and so”, “we did this and that”, etc. – a subjunctive account manages the potential of a situation beyond likelihood; its scope is thus structurally infinite. I may say “you would have laughed if someone had entered the exhibition room playing the banjo”; and an utterance can be produced in that hypothetical frame: “you would have laughed if he had played the famous bolero *Perfidia*”. “If I hadn’t said hello to anyone during the party”. And so forth. The bottom line is, a subjunctive utterance requires a larger indicative framework to be produced.

## Historicism

Things cannot be hypothetical, or can they? An art work is a thing, or is it not? An artwork can be a hypothetical thing. An artwork can consist simply in changing the grammatical mode of an existing one: from the real to the hypothetical. Yet this trick does not prevent it from *happening* as a fact itself (as much as a hypothetical utterance has nevertheless to be effectively stated).

When an art work is produced, two lines of reflection seem to collide: on one hand, the artist's consciousness regarding the history of his practice as something *prior* to it; on the other, the hypothetic historical inscription of the artwork to come. How can an artist consider the historicisation of his own work? That problem seems to be completely opposed to that of historical awareness, especially since the historicisation of an artwork, or an event, or a rumor, happens in conditions that are almost inevitably paradoxical.

The situation could be summarized this way: the excess of information, a narrative

# Subjunctive Reenacted

by  
**Manuel Cirauqui**

NEW YORK – VALENCIA, AUG 16. – In the last decade, a number of purposely regressive experiences have manifested the need to address art history through its intimate rewriting, by means of repetitive shifts and reenactments. As a response to a handful of highly symptomatic cases, an interpretive hypothesis has been discreetly thrown into public debate: the code name for this hypothesis is 'subjunctive art'. The operations it intends to encompass could be seen as foldings applied to a vast, ideal History Book. Its pages are now the object of an endless origami work and, as it hap-

pens, the foldings seem to alter the text, forcing it to migrate. But migrate where?

The following lines will try to assess reenactment – or at least some forms of the reenactment – as strategies for an immanent critique of contemporary art, and beyond the reductive paradigm of historicism. The word 'contemporary art' – as it might be obvious for some of you – refers to a loose number of years in the past – maybe thirty, maybe fifty, maybe a hundred or more – and an indeterminate number of years in the present. It appears, thus, as a historical standstill which, maybe sooner than we expect, will have to surrender itself to merciless historicisation. But it just does not seem to be the case yet.

excess, has against all appearances made our times historically *still*. The more the present time is narratively dense, the more it is difficult to consider it retrospectively. A time that is "narratively overweight" will take a long time to be read; maybe an endless amount of time. Obsessed with giving the most accurate version of itself, it will never provide for the conditions of its full reading. The arbitrariness of historical discourses, using always partial realities as epochal emblems, is exacerbated by their infinite capillarity.

Our concentration in the untimely, the anecdotic, the regional fictions of the past, instead of the major narratives that can reduce duration to a punctual event, sets the conditions for the fictionalization of the past. Whatever happened in the past is history; whatever could have happened, describes the present as a historical container. And the fictional regions of the past must communicate with each other through the windows of intimacy.

Branded by a fragmented present, the relationship of contemporary art to history is anecdotic, fictional, and historicistic rather than historical. It inevitably entails a representation, and we know how far modern culture has gone in the critique of representation. Thus the past has become skeptic about itself, preserving only its marginalia.

The fragmentation of the present affects the perception of the past, and that is how it becomes anecdotic. As much as the present is multi-centered, the past is an archipelago. Both are linked not by sequence, but analogy.

The anecdote establishes a "local" relation to the historical past, allowing us to take its detail as a prism, and to treat it like a fiction that is commensurable with the present. From this perspective, two principles inform any approach of the art work to history: these principles are reconstruction and speculation.

Historicism in art is the mimesis of the forms that represent the ideality of the past. The more an event is obscure, undocumented, marginal, the more it is idealized along with its traces. This kind of idealization has informed, for instance, the most recent revisions of historical art movements, no matter which, but especially the most private, "esoteric" and disseminated (conceptual art stands, in any case, as a perfect example of idealization). Such historical fetishization, or historicism, is countered by compulsive documentary research and deconstruction; its goal can only be the reanimation of a reconstructed body. Above all strategies, reenactment provides a shortcut to this process *within and against* the idealization of the past. It implies the refor-

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mulation of what was, as something that could have been and, thus, it re-describes the present in its solitude. That is the first level of subjunctive art.

### At Work

Now we can repeat the question that was formulated above: how can an artist consider the historicisation of his own work?

We will call upon two main examples in our description of the subjunctive mood of the art praxis. Each of these cases is a nebula involving various works, gestures and authors, whose destinies seem to be tied sometimes by capricious or serendipitous links. It is the case of Ian Wallace and Mario García Torres, the two main characters of the following nebulae.

The first time the notion of subjunctive art was implemented, a work was at stake. A work – Ian Wallace's *At Work* – was at stake, actually it was two works, quickly dubbed into three, to which other early studies had to be added. The very title of this nebula already placed us in the enclave of a circularity that is not unrelated to the question of reenactment. Most of you will remember the first version of *At Work*: in April 1983, Ian Wallace installed a studio in the exhibition space of the OR Gallery in Vancouver. During two weeks, he exposed himself "at work", that is to say: reading, writing and thinking. In some of the pictures the gallery walls seem empty, in others we see a drawing hanging behind the artist, depicting him at work on a different,

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## JAN MOT AT ART RIO WITH DOMINIQUE GONZALEZ- FOERSTER

Pier Mauá,  
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more domestic set-up. Actually, an early version of this theme was elaborated by Wallace in his photographic montage *Critic At Work* (1982), where he depicts himself while working on (what happened to be) a critical essay (but it could have been any other sort of work). This work – *At Work* – stood in fact as both a presentation and a representation of the radical non-specificity of the conceptual art practice; it is thus an ironic form of acknowledgment. As Ian Wallace himself declared later: 'In this work I was ironically lampooning myself for taking myself so seriously as an intellectual artist. It was an attempt to confront and defuse the contradictions that can arise when an art historian practices also as an artist'. For all we know, the artist at work could be calculating his taxes or just reading for pleasure; but beyond likelihood, he happens to be making art, where in an identical image he was not. Significantly, he was writing an essay, or theatrically imitating that activity, such exercise of mimicry being performed itself as an art piece.

In 2003, an artist (Tim Lee) and a writer (Clint Burnham) reenacted *At Work* at the Western Front gallery, Vancouver, but this time it was the writer who was at work. They defined the project as a "strategical reversion", an "ersatz translation" of the performance, "a contemplation of a contemplation". Their reference to the original work was mimetic and non discursive; it implied an alteration of its meaning thanks to a syntactical shift: instead of an artist thinking about art, a critic was doing it. The

structural tension between the conceptual artist and the critic was the reason for that exchange, although other exchanges could have been possible using the same scheme of operation. Yet there is as much tension between the conceptual artist and the banking employee, the academic librarian or the illegal immigrant worker. The most relevant aspect, once again, should not be the actual content of the operation nor its quality, but its structure: the formal 'unlocking' of an existing work and its further reformulation, under the sign of a speculation on its historical relevance. What was the 2003 reenactment of *At Work* adding specifically, that wasn't already in the original project? No new layer of meaning, but a layer nevertheless; a disclosure. Once opened, the past-present, written-unwritten interface cannot be closed back. It is a form of textual infiltration, a profanation of the written (the past as *inscription*), and as such it is necessary to the process of endless secularization that is inherent to Western culture. It is partly a de-idealization of the original work as a historical material, although it creates a parasitical link to its social value, and thus, reinforces it.

We could consider the reenactment of *At Work* a useful interpretive failure; its mimic and iconic condition would not allow it to develop all its speculative possibilities, but it certainly opens (as many other reenactments of this kind) a formal interrogation on the conditions of existence and the historical persistence of its source-work. It is,

say, an analytical parasite. As we already discussed with Ian Wallace in a recent correspondence, "the idea of a subjunctive mood in art is less related to citation than it is to reprise – a reprise, or a 'cover version' of a work, which, by integrating strategic variations in the initial scheme, becomes a critical and/or ironical comment on it. Tim Lee's piece with Clint Burnham belongs to an artistic sub-genre of our times, differing from musical cover versions or cinema remakes in the fact that it necessarily implies a high level of conscious distancing as a legal condition to the reference. Now, in which sense does this sub-genre appear to function on the subjunctive mood? If we schematize an art work as an articulation of elements into a signifying unit (i.e., a 'visual utterance'), the ironic reprise appears as the manipulation of this scheme through a 'what-if' operation: 'what if this work, instead of being so and so, was like this and that?' ('What if we replace the artist at work by a critic at work?', for instance). This operation reenacts the source-work in the subjunctive mood. A whole new chain of reflections, that might be very interesting or totally vain, opens up after this hypothetical and re-combinatory move is executed."

A new element was added to this loose compound by Ian Wallace himself in 2008. Exactly twenty-five years to the month after 1983's *At Work*, Wallace photographed himself working inside a new borrowed studio (once again, a gallery, but not in public)

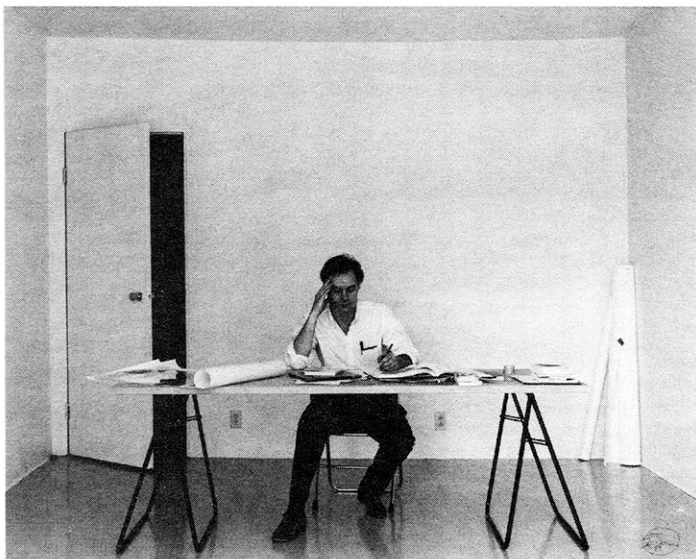
in a new version of this motif. This version was not quite a reenactment, but implied a return; a replay of the theme, which – as Wallace has recently declared – overflowed the notion of mere documentation on two sides. First, by the expressiveness of self-portraiture, which gave a 'hieroglyphical' meaning to all the elements staged for, and depicted in, each of the four tableaux. Second, by the repetitive nature of the work as a re-visit and an autobiographical update of the theme. Despite all resemblances, this work could not be less 'subjunctive', for the simple reason that repetition only operated in it as an effect of structural difference, and not the other way around. As we already pointed out, subjunctivity is, on this level, the effect of an act of supplantation whose failure is always strategically staged. Reenactment might be the primary method for this operation, though its applications might follow various patterns. In fact, there might be as many patterns as cases of study; the problem is, then, their identification.

#### A posthumous script

If reconstruction, supplantation, and analytical disturbance are the effects, documentation, re- or de-inscription and mimicry are the methods. It is not certain that the effects should be confused with the goals, since these appear to be somewhat negative – i.e., they entail the ambiguous negativity of a disclosure. The operation we are addressing involves necessarily a speculative open-endedness. The fact that mirroring and speculating have a common latin root, *speculari*, is significant also in this context. Both imply a specific form of contemplation. The disarticulation of art history as a dialectic chain, the evaporation of the idea of progress in art and its timeline, turn the dialog between art works into a specular relationship.

Thus, the subjunctive artwork reproduces the historicised object in a process that we could define as a "speculative repetition". It is inherent to the subjunctive work to be susceptible of endless reformulations, each of them opening a different conjectural perspective on its source. Yet not many reenactments follow their pattern of development with great tenacity – they seem to content themselves with the pleasures of a first disclosure.

Mario Garcia Torres' series of variations on the legendary exhibition 9 at *Castelli* could, however, account for such programmatic obstinacy. In the preface to a publication that accompanies the project, Garcia Torres gave a synoptic description of the historical source for his enterprise. His synopsis withholds some clues regarding the



• Ian Wallace, *At Work* (OR Gallery), 1983, silver gelatine print, 8x10 inches, courtesy of the artist

intentions of his consecutive reenactments. The show – we read – was put together by Robert Morris according to the principles outlined in his *Anti-Form* manifesto – thus it carries the strain of an artistic statement. It ran through 15 days of December 1968, the end of a convulse year globally, and its major historical impact happened to be inversely proportional to the number of those who saw it. The existing documentation on it is rare, to the point that each of its existing items stands as a secret, or a quasi-relic, empowered by the lack of information surrounding them; which is to say that the event has become, with the help of its scarce ashes, a legend. The exhibition at Castelli's warehouse in New York City (*The Castelli Warehouse Show*, that was one of its nicknames) gathered works by nine artists, to which one should add Rafael Ferrer's special uninvited-guest appearance, Joseph Beuys' emphatic refusal to get involved, plus Bob Morris' intellectual implication as the curator. Thus 9 at Castelli was actually almost *Twelve in a Warehouse*. Since most of the works were process-oriented or materially unstable, the records happen to contradict each other, adding a controversial turn to an already feeble documental corpus.

Mario García Torres' project (he is the 12+1, or the 11+1, it depends) can in turn be succinctly described as the minute re-staging of 9 at Castelli through a documental corpus, including in some cases replicas

of the works presented in 1968. To this date, the project has been exhibited at the Wattis Institute in San Francisco and the Belkin Gallery at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, and it will be shown this upcoming September at Jan Mot in Brussels. The aforementioned publication was produced by and presented at the II Trienal Poli/Gráfica de San Juan, in Puerto Rico. Each of these instances represented 9 at Castelli in a different way – each arrangement being less a reenactment than a stage for a delayed rehearsal.

The rehearsal prepares the reenactment that, strictly speaking, does not come to pass (except as a rehearsal). This has to do with the fact that, as we pointed out, the documentation on the show – acting as a script – not only is incomplete but disagrees with itself. Yet the documentation should not be imagined as an existing body whose pieces are to be reunited, but as a *corpus under construction*. It has to be constructed and it has been constructed, under various arrangements, by García Torres – each arrangement being a possible script that never reaches the *indicative mood*. However, the intention is not to play on declination or permutation, but to enact the script straight-forward. The first obstacle to this seems to be that the script itself is artificial, tentative. Such obstacle is, as well, the first variation pattern.

The exhibition corpus – its documental corpus – is never complete. But how, in history, can a documental corpus be naturally closed? There is no such thing without an arbitrary archival gesture that requires the authority of institutional support. The artist, when reconstructing the corpse, can behave as an archive himself, but only knowing that his mimic of the institutional contention is a more or less expressive gesture (a gesture, that's all). Mario García Torres' reconstruction of 9 at Castelli is purposely non-definitive. Each of its enactments offers an alternative path into the past that goes inevitably astray – right into the hardness of the present. This movement implies a manifold learning process which explains the artist's insistence on the pedagogical functioning of his device. First, the visitor of the re-exhibition 9 at Castelli experiences the impossibility of a return, along with the ambiguity of the past-as-narrative; the right reading conditions of art history books seem thus to be reset. This learning experience radicalizes when the replicas come into scene, adding a tactile layer to this gap. The visitor may see some images of operators (including García Torres himself) in the middle of a *forensic* simulation, i.e. rebuilding some of the works presented at Castelli's.

Moreover, these *documents* are dressed in epochal costumes (in this case, black and white prints infiltrating *incognito* the historical documents). In these images, we see once again the artist *at work* – this work being the process of erasing the difference between his work and the work of others.

Then, a troublesome appendix is brought in with a collection of snapshots taken by Ian Wallace in 1968, during his visit to 9 at Castelli. Thus Ian Wallace becomes the 11th+1+1 artist involved, or the 12th+1+1, it depends on the inclusion of Mario García Torres or Robert Morris or both of them in the group. But this only happens in some of the possible variations on the documental corpus. These variations allow each of the items to live various parallel lives. The documentation provided by Ian Wallace brings us back to some of the main questions discussed on *At Work*, although here they shall be reformulated in reverse. Ian Wallace's pictures have the form of documents, in the sense that they do not imply any details out of those necessary to a record of the real. As documents, they are integrated in a new device that stands as an art work, or at least not a mere archival recollection with historical purposes. Ian Wallace's work as an art historian (for he used those snapshots as part of his scholarly activity) is shown as part of an artist's work (although the artist in this case is not Ian Wallace). Moreover, this artist's work (Mario García Torres') is mutable, and it never includes the same items in all its instances. Items go in and out of it, like pedestrians that now join, now exit a street parade. Which leads us to conclude that a document's function is not determined by its form – and it goes the same way for the art work; that there cannot be such thing as a documentary form in spite of all effective documentary features, no form that could be opposed to that of the art work. Yet the inclusion of documents – pre-existent as such – inside an artistic device leads us to acknowledge an expressiveness that pervades them without being in them; a *temporarily borrowed* expressiveness, that allows us to think of the artistic device (no matter its form) as a script for the re-reading of its components. A hypothetical re-reading, deliberately dwelling the ghostly realm of subjunctivity.

*This text is an extended version of a lecture given at the Belkin Gallery during Mario García Torres' exhibition Material Witness. A symposium, organized by Ian Wallace, took place during this exhibition on June 25th, 2011. Manuel Cirauqui is a writer and curator based in New York and Valencia (Spain).*

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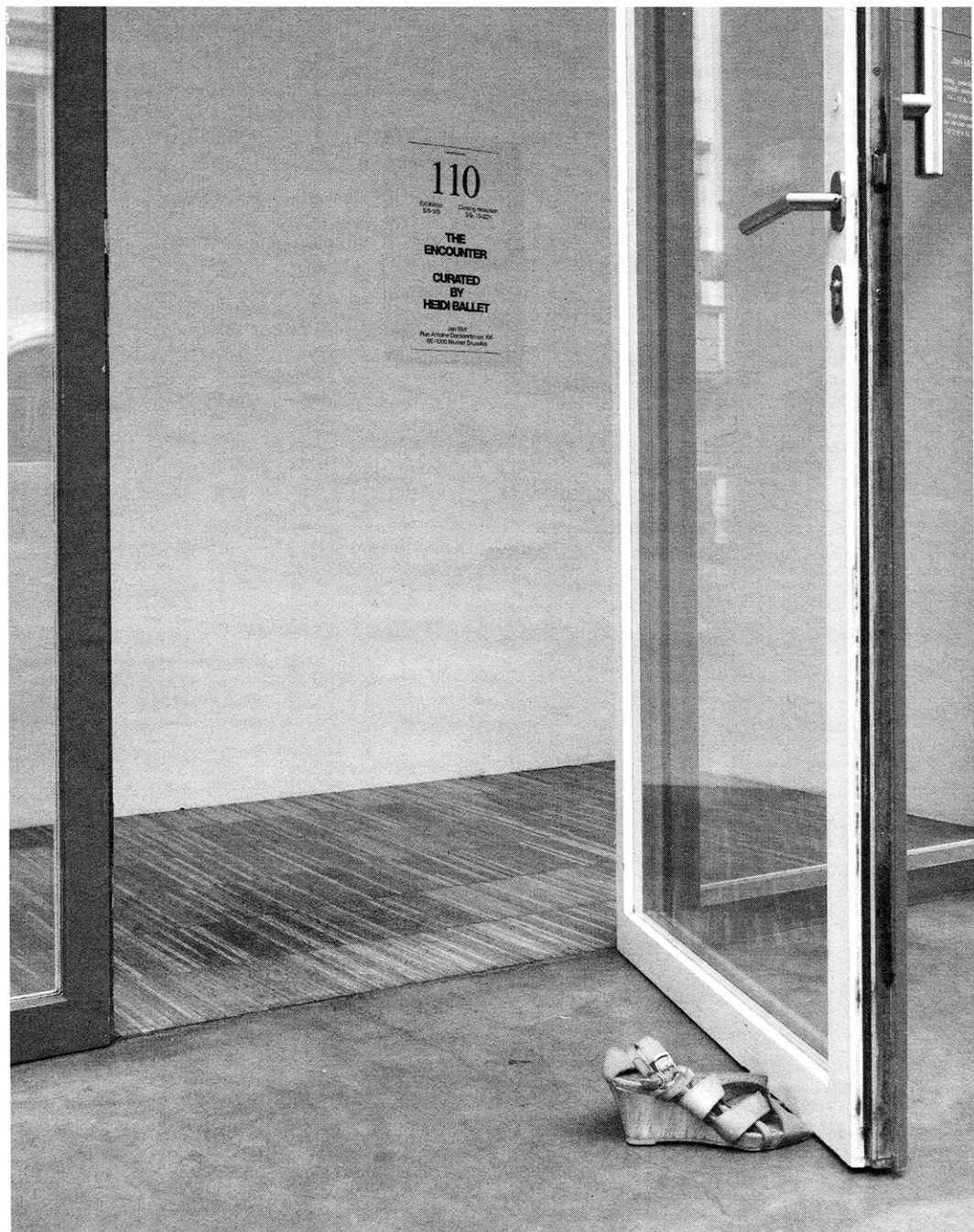
Opening 10/9 14 – 19h  
Exhibition 11/9 – 22/10

## MARIO GARCIA TORRES

## SEPTEMBER PIECE

Jan Mot  
Rue Antoine Dansaertstraat 190  
1000 Brussel Bruxelles





• BRUSSELS, August 10. Installation view of *Wedge* (2011) by Nina Beier. This work was shown in the exhibition *The Encounter* that took place at the gallery from August 6 until September 3. The show also included works by Francisco Camacho, Jiří Kovanda, Yoko Ono, Karin Schneider and Tino Sehgal. Curated by Heidi Ballet.

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• México D.F., August 27 – The gallery opened a second space in México D.F. In the first exhibition two older works by Dominick Gonzalez-Forster will be shown. The venue located in the neighbourhood of San Miguel Chapultepec is an old *vecindad* and is shared with two partners: Salon, a cultural agency, and Pedro & Juano, a young architecture office.

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# In Brief

The gallery is invited to participate in two art fairs: abc Art Berlin Contemporary with **Rineke Dijkstra** and at the new Art Rio with **Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster**. The Berlin event, on the subject of painting, is curated by Rita Kersting, the section Solo Projects in Rio de Janeiro by Pablo Leon de la Barra and Julieta Gonzalez. Both fairs take place from 7/9 till 11/9.

**Sven Augustijnen** will receive the Evens Prize 2011 during an evening at the Centre Pompidou in Paris on October 17. The event will also include a special screening of his latest film *Spectres* and a debate with the artist, Bernard Blistène and Dork Zabunyan.

Out now: *Archive pour une oeuvre-événement*, 10 DVDs with 20 interviews realized by Suely Rolnik on the work of Brazilian artist **Lygia Clark** (1920–1988). In 2007 these interviews were presented in the gallery during the exhibition *Programme*. Interviews in French and Portuguese. Carla Blanc Editions, Paris; distributed by Les Presses du Réel.

The gallery participates in the gallery weekend *Brussels Art Days* on September 10 and 11. About 30 galleries in Brussels will be open on Saturday and Sunday from noon till 19h. See also [www.brusselsart-days.com](http://www.brusselsart-days.com)

(advertisement)

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Art Fair  
20/10 – 23/10

## JAN MOT AT FIAC

Grand Palais, Paris

## Agenda

### Sven Augustijnen

*Spectres*, Kunst Halle, Sankt Gallen (CH), 12/08 – 09/10 (solo); *Spectres*, Kinok, Sankt Gallen (CH), 08/09 (screening); *Melanchotopia*, Witte de With Rotterdam (NL), 03/09 – 27/11; *Spectres*, Buda, Kortrijk (BE), 08/09 (screening); *The Eye is a Lonely Hunter*, 4. Fotofestival Mannheim, Ludwigschafen, Heidelberg, Mannheim (DE), 10/09 – 06/11; *He disappeared into Complete Silence*, De Hallen, Haarlem (NL), 23/09 – 04/12; *Spectres*, Kunsthalle, Bern (CH), 08/10 – 27/11 (solo); *Spectres*, de Appel, Amsterdam, 14/10 – 08/01 (solo); *Spectres*, Awards Ceremony and screening, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 17/10 (screening); *Spectres*, videofid, Marseille (FR), 18/10 (screening); *Hantologie des colonies*, Cine 104, Pantin (FR), 20/10 (screening); *Hantologie des colonies*, Galerie Villa des Tournelles, Nanterre (FR), 22/10 (screening); *Spectres*, STUK, Leuven (BE), 24/10, 26/10, 30/10 (screening); *Spectres*, Cinema Zuid, Antwerpen (BE), 26/10 (screening); *Spectres*, *Forum des Images*, Documentaire sur Grand Ecran, Paris, 06/11 (screening); *Spectres*, *Mutations – Paris Photo Live Platform*, Grand Palais, Paris, 10/11 (screening); *Spectres*, Tate Modern, London, 22/11 (screening)

### Pierre Bismuth

*Contour*, 5th Biennial of Moving Image, Mechelen (BE), 27/08 – 30/10; *Melanchotopia*, Witte de With, Rotterdam (NL), 03/09 – 27/09; *Une terrible beauté est née*, 11th Lyon Biennial, Lyon (FR), 15/09 – 31/12; *Found In Translation*, chapter L, Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg, 01/10 – 08/01; *Underwood*, Galerie

www.janmot.com