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Jaargang 24 No. 124

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David Lamelas at Back to the Future, Artissima XYZ



David Lamelas, *Quand le ciel bas et lourd*, 1992, installation view at the Royal Museum for Fine Arts, Antwerp. (Photographer unknown, 1990s)

(advertisement)

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Exhibition
17/10–05/12

**FRANCIS ALÿS,
GIOVANNI
ANSELMO,
LATIFA
ECHAKHCH
A BUOY IF NOT
A BEACON**

Jan Mot
Petit Sablon / Kleine Zavel 10
1000 Brussels, Belgium

BRUSSELS, OCT. 19 – The gallery partici-
pates in the online edition of Artissima in
the section “Back to the Future”. Our contribu-
tion is centered around an outdoor installa-
tion by David Lamelas, entitled *Quand
le ciel bas et lourd* (*When the sky low and
heavy*) from 1992. The work can be de-
scribed as a large sculpture built on an
inclined surface and consisting of a trapezoidal
shaped, steel roof under which
3 rows of 8 trees are planted. With time,
the trees grow over the structure, almost
hiding it, while other trees die because of
a lack of light and water, leaving a void.
The concept for this work was developed
in several drawings and paintings during
the 1980s when Lamelas was living in Los
Angeles. But it was only on the occasion of
the exhibition “America: Bride of the Sun –

500 Years of Latin America and the Low
Countries” (curated by Paul Vandenbroeck
and Catherine de Zegher) at the Royal
Museum for Fine Arts in Antwerp, that the
work could finally be realised. The exhibi-
tion commemorated the 500 years of the
so-called discovery of the Americas and
Lamelas’ work can be read as a comment
on the colonial history of repression and
domination. See also the text by Pedro de
Llano in the gallery’s newspaper 117, May
2019 (www.janmot.com/newspaper/).

The work was developed for the project as
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typical Los Angeles landscape.



Sven Augustijnen, *Imbéciles de tous les pays unissez-vous*, 2018, 160 copies of the magazine “Europe” from 1955 to 1967, vitrine, wall text. Installation view at M HKA, Antwerp (BE), 2020, photography by Christine Clinckx. This work is presented in the exhibition “Monoculture. A Recent History” (curated by Nav Haq), where the notion of ‘monoculture’ is investigated from a historical, social, cultural and ideological perspective in order to approach an understanding of ‘multiculture’, seeking to draw some conclusions that might be relevant for society and culture at large. The exhibition is on view at M HKA until January 24.

(advertisement)

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Fair
03/11–07/12

DAVID LAMELAS BACK TO THE FUTURE, ARTISSIMA XYZ (ONLINE)

Jan Mot
Petit Sablon / Kleine Zavel 10
1000 Brussels, Belgium

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Letter from Sven Augustijnen to David Lamelas

Brussels, 22 September 2020

Dear David,

It has been a while, I believe the last time was in Brussels, now already a couple of years ago, at that dinner, at the end of which I don't know how your hair was suddenly on fire...

I heard you went to visit the village in Galicia from where your parents fled during the Spanish Civil War and that you're thinking of buying a little house there! I can only approve of the idea. I was 15 or 16 when I travelled to Galicia, and I have some strong memories of the place, especially of the color, the texture and the taste of the ripe apricots that I plucked at the side of the road while hitchhiking throughout the mountainous countryside. I wouldn't know how to get there, but I believe I would still recognize the valley with the apricot tree in question.

At that time I didn't know that many valleys throughout the country were filled with bodies from the Spanish Civil War, perhaps that even in that valley some families are still hoping to dig up and recover their relatives. My journey to Galicia, down through France, over the Pyrenees to Barcelona and then to the West, was the first time I travelled in Spain, other than to the Balears where I had been in my childhood. It must have been after the death of Franco in 1975 that my grandparents bought a little apartment near Palma de Mallorca and that we visited them during the summer holidays. I remember we made a trip around the island visiting the ancient inland city Andraxte, as well some mountains and lowlands, as my father liked birdwatching. I particularly remember a natural park, at the end of which, towards the sea, an enormous electric plant rose, and where, nearby, somewhere along the road, we had sardines, the best I ever ate. I can also recall visiting with my grandmother the harbor of Palma de Mallorca, which as I know now, because of its depth, was a haven for all kind of battleships and torpedo boats from the right during the Civil War. Yes indeed, it's from Palma de Mallorca that Italian and German planes took

off to bomb Guernica, most probably from the tarmac on which I remember walking when we arrived and left the island.

I always associated Franco more with Burgos and Madrid, or even more with the Valle de los Caídos where he was buried until his exhumation last year. But as you probably know better than me, Francisco Franco was born in Galicia, more precisely in El Ferrol del Caudillo as they called it, a marine base. I should check out the road-map that I carried with me and that I still should have somewhere in my archives since I am not sure if I passed by El Ferrol during my journey. I vaguely remember an evening and a sight of the bay with some warships, but this also could have been from the other side, from the La Coruña side of the bay where the founder of the Spanish Legion and Franco's mentor was born, José Millán-Astray y Terreros, notorious for crying out "¡Abajo la inteligencia! ¡Viva la muerte!" during the inaugural speech of the academic year 1936 given by Miguel de Unamuno, rector of the University of Salamanca, the most southern city that I travelled to during that first trip to Spain, which I realize now must have been in 1986, fifty years after that date.

As you know, Galicia suffered from a bad reputation: not only were Franco and Millán-Astray born there, but the Galicians only resisted for about a week against the military coup. This led to the idea that most of them were Francoists and that they all collaborated in the regime's success. For those who did not support Franco and who were not shot right away or didn't manage to escape, the brutal repressive regime did the rest. Don't know if it was used in Galicia, but Franco's preferred method of execution for his worst enemies was by garotte, a practice common during the Inquisition in which the executioner tightens an iron collar around a person's neck. I don't know what your experience of this has been, but apparently in the little villages in the countryside, people remain to the present frightened to talk about the repression they, or others they know, endured. Only recently have historians dare to say that El Frente Popular (which was the left) had won the general elections of early 1936 with a clear majority and that in July of that same

year, less than one month before Franco's military takeover, more than two-thirds of Galicians voted for their autonomy. To be brief, today one counts 461 mass graves in Galicia out of the approximately 3,000 throughout Spain; not sure if many have been excavated.

Pedro told me that your father had already immigrated to Buenos Aires before the Civil War for economic reasons, but that your mother had to flee the mountains of Galicia during the Civil War since her brother was active in the Maquis. I am wondering if you know when this was, and also where he was hiding and resisting the regime? I traveled from Salamanca to Galicia north of the Portuguese border, and it felt like quite a remote place where one could hide, but unfortunately also one difficult to escape from, since Salazar's Portugal to the South was probably not an option, to the West and the North there is the Ocean, and to the East I guess the frontline. If I am correct, your mother's brother, your uncle, didn't survive the War, but perhaps you still have some relatives who live in the village from where your mother fled? I can only imagine you were curious to see your maternal house, if it still exists. Perhaps while visiting you recognized some of the preparations of food or other habits of daily life that your parents had taken with them to Argentina. Your parents had a bakery, so wondering if you recognized the smell and the taste of the bread in the village or some of the pastries, the very local or even family traditions passed on from generation to generation? Chantal Akerman spoke about this, saying that when she traveled to Poland and Russia after the fall of the Berlin Wall when making her film *D'Est* she recognized so many of the flavors, smells and habits that her mother had brought to Belgium, and that she suddenly understood where they came from.

While thinking about all this, I was suddenly reminded of the heat of fire that my father made around the circle of crucified lambs and the tasty marinated meat that we ate in the Flemish village where I grew up—yes indeed “asados argentinos a la cruz.” It must have been the mid- and late seventies, and probably my understanding came later, but the practice was brought

to Flanders when some of the children of Flemish collaborators who had fled to Argentina moved back. From what I can remember they were artists, writers, though retrospectively I am not sure it was all as progressive as I thought it was. Or perhaps the perspective is different; probably you know better than I do since, if I am not mistaken, you came to Belgium in 1968, before I was born. And May 68 in Belgium saw the struggle by Louvain students to make the university Flemish speaking only leading to the split of the university, which was kind of the start of the federalization of Belgium, on which my father had helped drafting the accords behind the scene in the seventies... No doubt there were some demands that needed to be made, however the Flemish movement was and still seems to be driven to some degree by the resentment of the children and grandchildren of collaborators. As a matter of fact the political movements that developed out of that time are still directed by them such is the case for the current mayor of Antwerp and the minister president of Flanders, who, as you know, don't really care whether your sculpture in the park of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp will be restored and reinstalled, or not.

This said, I recently passed by the work and I liked it a lot. All the construction materials for the restoration of the museum are piled up near your work, making the critical notion to the monumentality of the museum even more apparent. It reminded me of the improvised constructions that the peasants in the village where I grew up made in the meadows for cattle to take shelter or for storing hay, where we enjoyed playing, and that started to disintegrate over time. I have to admit I didn't see the America exhibition at the time, but I wished I had since I am curious to know what images we have in common from the Spanish Empire and the Inquisition. In our family it was a common joke that the Spanish blood was in our veins, not only because of our temperament, but especially because my grandmother and her siblings were very Spanish-looking on old photographs. I don't know why I made these journeys to Spain—the following year I went further to the South—but in any case I realize now that during those two journeys I must have crossed several times the frontlines of the Spanish Civil War.

It also made me wonder how you have experienced coming to Antwerp and the Southern Provinces of the Lower Countries since the end of the sixties. As well

how life was in Buenos Aires after the War with all the refugees of the Spanish Civil War, the Jewish refugees and then the Nazis that found a hiding place there, without forgetting the many Jews who had fled the Inquisition and sailed across the Atlantic in the early days of the colonization of the Americas. Wondering also when you came to Spain for the first time, and if it is true, you sailed the Ocean to the Old Continent as a child.

All best, Sven

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(advertisement)

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Exhibition
 10/12-30/01

**STANLEY
 BROWN**

Jan Mot
 Petit Sablon / Kleine Zavel 10
 1000 Brussels, Belgium



A conversation with Heiko Goelzer on water and ice and more

BRUSSELS, OCT. 11 – The gallery is participating in an exhibition project with more than 10 galleries worldwide dedicated to the theme of water that will take place in the coming months. The very first iteration of this project consists of the exhibition ‘A buoy if not a beacon’ with works by Francis Alÿs, Giovanni Anselmo and Latifa Echakhch in our gallery. On this occasion and as an introduction to his upcoming series of contributions to our newspaper, we had a conversation per email with Heiko Goelzer, a friend and a scientist working in climate research. He studies the role of ice sheets in the climate system on various timescales in past, present and future and their contribution to sea-level change.

Jan Mot: When you hear the word ‘water’, what do you think of?

Heiko Goelzer: The first thing I had to think of now was actually tea. Maybe because the first thing I typically do when I get up in the morning is to put water to a boil and make tea. In the new place we live now, the water quality is so good, you can drink it straight from the tap. The water suppliers in most Western cities will tell you that this is possible and that their tap water is the best controlled and regularly tested. That may be so, but in Brussels, the water was so hard, we always used a water filter for our tea. It took out a lot of the calcium and magnesium to make the water softer. I could tell the age of the filter cartridge by the amount of residue in the water cooker. The only thing that is really strange for me about living with soft water now is that it is really difficult to wash off the soap from your hands and body.

JM: Let’s change our perspective, from cosy tea-sipping in an Oslo living space to the breaking off icebergs as we heard of yesterday and not for the first time.

HG: Reading about icebergs and disappearing glaciers in the news is really a two-sided sword for me. On the one hand, it is still nice to see that the issue that is close to my heart is getting more press coverage. Climate change and its consequences has really entered our everyday, but it still needs a lot of work to communicate it and get it across. I am also reading these articles with

a different angle than most other news. I have typically either heard the story already before it comes into the press, or I can roughly imagine what it is about. So, I am also evaluating if the image that is drawn with all its necessary simplifications is an accurate representation. I remember a realisation I had when I grew up. I must have been around fourteen years old. There was a news magazine article about the city I grew up in. Obviously, I knew the place pretty well from my own experience, and it was shocking to see how inaccurate and biased the descriptions were. Could this also be the case for articles about something that we don’t know something about? On the other hand, current reports about melting land ice give little reason for hope, and the stories that make it to the press are often the more catastrophic ones. In the end, I think the one thing that keeps me from really getting depressed over news like that is my professional relation to the subject that creates at the same time a closeness and distance.

JM: I understand, but I guess everyone’s relation to environmental issues is characterised by closeness and distance at the same time. We all experience it directly, but we also feel it is a problem of enormous proportions that needs to be solved on a higher, political level because individual action alone will not be enough. Or how would you formulate it?

HG: Yes, I think I agree with your notion of responsibility. At the same time, I think it is extremely important that people are ready for changes in their own lives. Political decision making is a slow process, almost by definition, because it concerns so many people. I can make dramatic changes with decisions that concern my own lifestyle almost instantly. Changing what we buy, eat and where we go on holiday as a family or group of friends is already more difficult, because there are more people involved, so to say. But when political incentives come in, and they are coming in more regularly now, we can choose to be hesitant or to be early adopters, where the latter often even comes with long-term benefits. However, I am not so sure about the point of experiencing climate change directly. The attribution problem of clearly detecting the

anthropogenic influence on climate change is scientifically solved, but that does not mean we are really feeling climate change in our daily lives. There are people that do, no doubt, and it often comes with threatening their livelihood, which is terrible. But I am wondering how close burning forests and melting ice sheets are for us really, as long as they are just passing on our screens. The lack of personal contact and engagement with the global environmental crisis has been a big problem since the very beginning. And it is an ongoing struggle for activists and the politically engaged alike that the moment the problem becomes a personal experience for enough people it will be too late to turn the tide.

JM: Coming back to your professional work on ice, can you describe briefly what exactly your work is about and have you always worked on this subject?

HG: I am a physicist by training, and I am now working mainly as a glaciologist and ice sheet modeler. My work is all about how large ice sheets change under different climate conditions and how they contribute to sea-level change. We have currently only two of those, one on Greenland and one on Antarctica. They are called ice sheets, because they are draped over the continents like thin sheets. Thin is relative to the several hundreds of kilometre length: they are ‘only’ a few kilometres thick in their centres. The sheer size of them makes that small changes for them mean large changes for us. When ice sheets lose mass by melting in a warmer climate, we get sea-level rise as one of the most problematic consequences of global climate change. Working as a modeller means that I study ice sheets and their interactions with other components of the climate system with computer programs that simulate their physical state and evolution. I was personally interested in climate change from early on but did not get into it professionally right away. During my master’s I first worked on automatic speech recognition, following my interest in acoustics and signal processing. It was with a PhD in oceanography that I entered into the larger theme of climate change and I started working specifically with ice sheets during my first postdoc position, now more than twelve years ago.

Seth Siegelaub: “Better Read than Dead” Writings and Interviews 1964–2013

JM: The climatological and environmental situation of our planet is dramatic but are there any positive developments to report?

HG: On the scientific side of things, there are certainly ups and downs. Taking ice sheets again as an example, occasionally, new mechanisms have been proposed suggesting that ice sheet disintegration could go much faster than previously thought. When such mechanisms are finally not confirmed and discarded as implausible, it can feel like a great relief. I have experienced two or three processes of that kind in my career and we may be in the middle of one right now concerning Antarctic ice sheet instability. But science is often a slow process and it can take years for a question like this to be settled. What I really experience as a positive development that gives me hope is people’s change of awareness about the global environmental crises over the last 15 years or so. The problem is clearly on people’s mind, on the political agenda and it is taken seriously by many companies and industries. We have a lot of work ahead of us, no doubt, but seeing that climate change and other environmental problems are taken on as global challenges by most countries is a very positive development for me.

Heiko Goelzer is working as a senior researcher at NORCE Norwegian Research Centre and Bjerknes Centre for Climate Research in Bergen, Norway.

AMSTERDAM, OCT. 10 – “Better Read Than Dead” was the title that the American art dealer, curator, publisher and researcher Seth Siegelaub (1941–2013) had chosen for an anthology of his own writings—one of the projects for which he never found the time, busy as he was running his global one-man operation. Here, that project is now fulfilled as an essential collection of writings and interviews by the polymath ‘Godfather of conceptual art’, who actually said ‘I never write, I just do.’

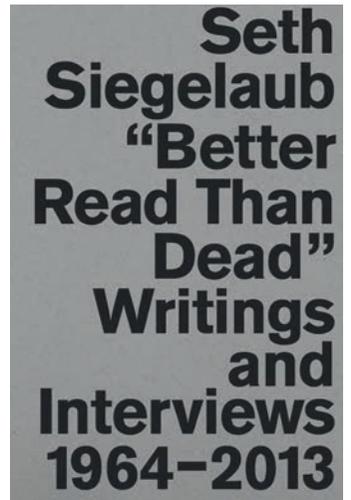
Siegelaub was the first dealer and exhibition organizer in New York to focus on conceptual art, and remains best-known for his innovative “catalogue-exhibitions” with Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner. Yet his career interests stretched far beyond. The selected writings, interviews, extended bibliography and chronology gathered in *Seth Siegelaub: “Better Read than Dead” Writings and Interviews 1964–2013*, fill the historical gaps in the sprawling network of exhibitions, publications, projects, and collections that constitute Siegelaub’s life’s work. The writings are produced as scans in order to give a sense of archival immersion, and to capture the various typologies of documents that Siegelaub produced, including form letters to book distributors, solicitations for patrons and collaborators, and curatorial essays among others. Interspersed with these “writings” are interviews and talks, several newly transcribed and published for the first time. The majority of interviews from 1969–1972 are reprinted here, representing the height of Siegelaub’s activities in conceptual art.

Siegelaub worked in many different fields: (conceptual) art, forms of exhibiting, left mass media and communication, and last but not least the history of textiles. He approached each endeavor with a similar method: building a topic-specific research library, producing and distributing a bibliography, while developing new approaches to the study of the subject. Across these diverse career interests his coherence of intellectual inquiry is clear, as he wrote in his bibliography on the history of textiles, the aim of his research was to “weave together ... the social-economic-

practical aspects (of the history) along with the artistic,” encouraging accessibility and approachability for both the fellow expert and student alike. Despite this activity, Siegelaub resisted calling himself as a writer, instead sharing his thoughts publicly in interviews, while in the background producing copious theoretical sketches through which his ideas and working practices developed.

Edited by a group of researchers and curators who each collaborated with Siegelaub, *“Better Read Than Dead”* brings together his personal notes, public interviews, and precious few published writings into one volume, offering unprecedented insight into the many facets of his inquisitive life.

Another interview between Seth Siegelaub and Raimunda Malasauskas was done for our newspaper and was printed in no. 41, March 2004. It can be found on our new website.



Seth Siegelaub: “Better Read than Dead” Writings and Interviews 1964–2013. Edited by Marja Bloem, Lauren van Haften-Schick, Sara Martinetti, Jo Melvin. Published by Koenig Books, London and Stichting Egress Foundation, Amsterdam, 2020.

The exhibition at Jan Mot with weekly dates
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In Brief

The Johannes Vermeer Award, the annual Dutch state prize for the arts, is awarded to **Rineke Dijkstra**. The award consists of the sum of 100,000 euros, which the winner may use to fund a special project in his or her specific field. Previous laureates were Pierre Audi, Marlene Dumas and Rem Koolhaas, among others.

David Lamelas' site specific installation *Corner Piece* (1966) is presented as part of the show *Collection 1940s-1970s* at MoMA New York starting on October 24th. The work will be on view for approximately three years.



Also on view in New York at the Met Fifth Avenue (Gallery 851) is **Lamelas'** *Rock Star* (*Character Appropriation*) from 1974. One of the great works of late Conceptualism, *Rock Star* (*Character Appropriation*) is a witty, note-perfect imitation of an archetype then at the height of its sway over the popular imagination. Born in Buenos Aires in 1946, Lamelas first came to prominence with his installation for the Argentinean pavilion at the 1968 Venice Biennale, entitled *Office of Information about the Vietnam War at Three Levels: The Visual Image, Text, and Audio*. For that piece, the artist essentially transformed the exhibition space into a working newsroom, in which information about the war arrived constantly via telex and was read aloud through microphones in various languages.

GROUP SHOW



The work of an artist exists as a real and final statement about what he feels.

A gallery's commitment to what it feels about that statement should be just as strong.

**SETH
SIEGELAUB**
CONTEMPORARY ART

Volume I No. I

Catalogue cover Group Show (Vol. I, no. 1, New York: Seth Siegelau Contemporary Art), 1964.

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