

# rodolphe janssen

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## **Kendell Geers**

### **AlphaBête**

06.09 - 26.10.2013

Galerie Rodolphe Janssen is pleased to present AlphaBête, the third solo exhibition of South African artist Kendell Geers at the gallery.

AlphaBête presents a selection of new works by Kendell Geers. A display of vibrant and powerful paintings, drawings and installations in which Kendell Geers surprises but reassures at the same time; his unique visual language as forceful as ever. Through the paintings from the Ligne de Fuite series, french philosopher Gilles Deleuze's transitional notion of "ligne de fuite" (that he coined with Félix Guittari to describe existence) manifests itself in the most subtle and natural way. But as much as the distorted and aestheticized razormesh lines attract, they also stick to the viewer, infinitely questioning space, borders and our continuing tangible and intangible, moral or emotional imprisonment.

This same razormesh, that forms a strong and personal element of Geers' artistic practice throughout the years recurs in the Age of Iron series. These large rust on paper works, playing with symmetry and an intriguing texture, display again this typical South African product of violence and confinement, but emanate at the same time an infinite sense of beauty and quiet and form thus, in all their aesthetic glory, a perfect gateway to understanding Kendell Geers' work.

As usual, Kendell Geers leaves for his audience subtle references and wordplays that incorporate but exceed the borders of his own personal journey. He shares through his works more than a narration of his life, but a questioning of everybody else's.

#### **About the artist:**

Kendell Geers was born in Johannesburg (South Africa), he currently lives and works in Brussels (Belgium).

His work has been shown in numerous international group exhibitions, including the African Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007) and Documenta 11 in Kassel (2002). Recently, his solo show Irrespektiv travelled to a number of prominent European museums: the SMAK (Ghent, Belgium) and the Baltic (Gateshead, UK) in 2007; the DA2 (Salamanca, Spain) and the MAC (Lyon, France) in 2008 the MART (Rovereto, Italy) in 2009. Recently, Kendell Geers' solo exhibitions took place in Château Blandy-les-Tours in 2012 and in 2013 the Haus der Kunst presented an important retrospective.

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## Painting My Exorcisms by Kendell Geers

According to the first sentence of Sol LeWitt's 1969 manifesto defining Conceptual Art, "Conceptual Artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach" ! Around the same time Bruce Nauman proclaimed that "The True Artist Helps The World By Revealing Mystic Truths" and Claes Oldenburg said that "I am for an art that is political-erotic-mystical that does something other than sit on its ass [sic] in a museum"

In the 4 decades that have since passed, so called Conceptual Art has evolved into everything but mystical and the erotic and political function of art relegated to the off-site and fringe. Driven by market forces, a great many artists calling themselves "Conceptual" today seem more comfortable contradicting the 32nd defining point of Lewitt's manifesto, that "Banal ideas cannot be rescued by beautiful execution."

Given that art has been around for more than 80 000 years, since the dawn of Humankind in Blombos Cave, I will not waste any time talking about markets that will certainly crash, nor the kinds of art or artists that pay lip service to the whims of fashion and the dictates of seasonal taste. Politicians will come and go as their empires rise and fall and eventually the poles will melt, but there will always be art and its function shall remain political, erotic and mystical.

It was precisely with such an understanding of art that the first humans were inspired to decorate the skulls of their enemies or bones of their ancestors and enter the deepest recesses of the darkest caves to leave their mystical marks between the shadows, marks that continue to haunt humankind to this day. No doubt these ancient artists would have worked by the light of fire, to the ritual accompaniment of drums, beating out shamanic rhythms that echoed through the darkness of both cave and consciousness. These drums in turn would have been adorned with images, sacred signs and sigils that embodied their maker's spiritual and mystical conception of the worlds they inhabited. The drums were key for they provided the auditory and vibrational triggers that would induce altered states of consciousness, whereby the ancient (as well as modern) shamans could travel beyond the limits of logic into worlds beyond their imaginations. These ancients painted skins stretched tightly over wood or bone frames marked with talismanic signs and symbols were the worlds first works of art, the first paintings, the first canvases and expression of the mystical, political, erotic, irrational, and of course conceptual function of art. It was in this way that they were taught the crafts of art and keys to language, the first "Alpha:Bête." From this darkness the first theriantropic shamans were conjured into existence, being both human and animal but blessed with visions of art, language and symbol.

The only reason why these ancient drum paintings have never been found by foraging archaeologists is because they were considered so important and sacred that they would never have been left behind to rot in thousands of years of silt like discarded bones, broken arrowheads, flints and pottery shards. It is quite likely that these sacred drum paintings would have been handed down from one generation of shaman artists to another and finally burned or ritually destroyed to prevent them from ever falling into the wrong hands, for the worlds they revealed were as real for them as any other. The Hopi Indians as well as the Tibetan Lamas still believe that the worlds of dream and divine hallucination are the real and this world of 3 dimensions the illusion. These drums, like the paintings they inspired in caves like Lascaux, Altamira and Chauvet, were never meant to be seen in the light of day nor by the uninitiated for their function was the Neolithic ritual portal into the realms of divine consciousness and mystical understanding.

Art speaks a symbolic language that is separated from the daily grind of ordinary consciousness. Even when art quotes the quotidian or is plucked off from the tree of daily life, it remains offset, as art, by virtue of its context, a sacred white cube of symbols through the intention of transformation. From a point to a line to a plane, art is never the sum of its parts, nor the recipe of its elements. Every modern man can mix the same plants, minerals and binders into paint but that will never make them a shaman, nor could anyone alive today create the kind of magick that would last 30 000 years as our Neolithic ancestors were able.

The vertical line, horizontal plane, diagonal, crosshatch and organic curve transcend the physical 2 or 3 dimensions into the worlds of symbol and iconography. Two intersecting lines become a cross or a crucifix, symbols so powerful that millions of

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people have died over the centuries fighting either in defence of, or against. Adding 4 more little lines and the swastika or borne, a sign of light in the east and of darkness in the west, the rising and setting sun of symbolic understanding. Flip the cross 45 degrees and it becomes an X, the mark of democracy, buried treasure, sexual ecstasy and a mistake. The vertical sign for addition is the diagonal sign for multiplication and so forth. I, being every me, am read as a a dot and a line ("i"), a convention and habit of form that speaks even when I am silent. Words repeated become a mantra and when folded together a sigil, the flesh of my will and voice of spirit. Two circles intersect to create the Mandorla, the mystical vagina that gives birth to Jesus Christ presiding above the entrance of most European cathedrals, the alchemical marriage of heaven and earth, flesh and spirit, male and female, the Celtic-Christian Ying and Yang.

The word "symbol" was born out of the Greek word "Symbolon" meaning connection. Through symbols the literate, illiterate as well as preliterate are all united in understanding. The symbol is created out of a complex understanding of nature, both organic and inorganic, that within and that without. Symbols protect us by helping understand mystical truths as well as more banal readings such as defining speed limits, where to park cars, exit a building on fire, or where and when to cross a road. Symbols speak where words fail, speaking volumes with a single stroke.

Whilst symbols are certainly the artist's domain, the artist's true strength lies in the power of contradiction. With alchemical curiosity and a butterfly's touch, the artist seeks harmony in the mutually irreconcilable, in the simultaneous expression of creative and destructive forces, chaos and order, ecstasy and stasis, light and darkness, bold and fragile, cannibal and vegan, politically incorrect but socially responsive, drunk with sobriety, inebriated in clarity. The artist cannot seek union or synthesis between the oppositional forces for that would destroy the spirits of both in balance and harmony. The artist's true task is the simultaneous expression of opposites, the simultaneous contradictory embodiment of extremes unbridled, both in conflict, against harmony.

When lines are crossed they form signs that unfold into symbols and evolve to alter states of consciousness as sigils. Angles become angels and demons leap off the page from the imagination, conjured into this world to haunt preconceptions and disrobe the crusts of habit. Art should be transformative or not at all, evocations of spirit and embodiments of will and intent. William Blake called it "Second Sight," the metaphysical role that the imagination plays in transforming reality. For Goethe, nature lay within our consciousness as much as outside, a holistic conception of perception whereby thoughts shift and alter scientific givens. Einstein called it "spooky action at a distance" and the quantum physicists today refer to it as Dark Matter, amongst other things. William Burroughs and Brion Gysin tried to enter the "Third Mind," that space between their two consciousnesses, the overlap of worlds intersecting, the Mandorla of their two separate wills speaking a third language or discourse. Art opens our eyes so that we are no longer prisoners of perception and cease limiting reality to 3 dimensions by reducing our ability to perceive with only 5 senses.

Art needs no further justification nor explanation than itself and therein lies its greatest strength and ultimate weakness. Art can change the world one perception at a time, cleansing the doors of understanding to open the paths to other ways of being, but it can also sit on its arse in the museum, an opportunistic vacuous vanity of banality, seasonally saluting its price tag and market ranking.

In painting I have found the purest expression of the ineffable, the physical embodiment of the intangible, the unfolding of my consciousness, a channelling no less. A pure blank white canvas slowly surrenders her secrets, teasing me with optical tricks and visceral traps until she is ready to open my eyes to her true nature, the one talismanic image that was her only desire, the nude descending the staircase. Throwing paint like Pollock across the lines of Stella, thinking like Lewitt with the broken heart of Bacon glowing in the aura of Hilma af Klint, losing my mind like Michaux within the voids of Klein or Rothko, risking mistakes like Richter slipping off the fat of Beuys, I paint my exorcisms, painting rituals and wrestling rites as a witness to my transformation. Since my last exhibition at Rodolphe Janssen Gallery, the "Hand Grenades of my Heart" have literally exploded and I am left to keep up with my selves in ways that I could never have i-mage-ined here-to-fore.

Kendell Geers, 15 August 2013