

[EXHIBITION]

**Jan Fabre - *Is the brain the most sexy part of the body?*
11.05 - 22.06.2008**

INTRODUCTION

Deweert Art Gallery is pleased to announce the eighth solo show by Jan Fabre at the gallery, *Is the brain the most sexy part of the body?*, an exhibition with almost exclusively new works. It is the artist's first show after the opening of his show at the Louvre.

Fabre has not been out of the picture for the last couple of years. The *Homo Fabre* series of events in 2006 in Antwerp, his work at the festival d'Avignon as artistic director and his upcoming exhibition at the Louvre, for which the artist was given *carte blanche* in the Richelieu wing of the museum, are just some recent highlights in a career that is hardly equalled by any other contemporary artist from the Belgian scene.

A remarkable element in this career, which has become more evident since widespread recognition enabled the artist to create the circumstances for it, is Fabre's constant cross-over between theatre and visual arts, between different genres within both, and between the visual arts of old and modern traditions and his own work.

Furthermore, as Giacinto di Pietrantonio puts it: 'Jan Fabre has always used a broad range of expressive languages, from the plastic arts to film, theatre, choreography, dance, drawing and sculpture. In each of these areas, Fabre focuses his research on the body, understood as a physical reality and mental dimension. His art reflects human nature – necessarily fragile and mortal – and the desire each of us has to overcome this precariousness, through subjects that are intrinsic to the Flemish tradition: madness, illness, death, the sweetness of sin, regeneration and spiritual power.'

As with for example *Battlefields and Beekeepers*, *Umbraculum*, *A Meeting - Vstrecha* (with Ilya Kabakov) and more recently *Turtles and Landscapes*, Deweert Art Gallery has always attempted to document every major thematic step in the development of Fabre's work, often while also showing less known aspects or unknown works.

Some models in the exhibition in the main entrance hall of the Flemish Parliament in Brussels, *Showcases and Thought Models (1977-2005)*, already hinted at Fabre's preoccupation with the brains.

As the next investigation into the poetical possibilities of the body, a leading thread within his oeuvre, Fabre recently continued to explore the theme of the brains through drawings, models, and videoworks. In Fabre's iconography, the brains are treated and depicted as an organ. They stand for the transgression from belief to thought. Just like in ancient religions where parts of the body were ritualized, the

brain is almost worshipped and often recurs as a thematic key, while philosophically pointing at just the opposite of religion - at human creativity, imagination and ratio - the kind of intelligence scientists need as much as artists. One could say that the brains are more essential to the survival of mankind than to that of animals. We depend heavily on this organ, we need it to position ourselves and to come up with solutions, which is also what makes us fragile.

The video on display here, entitled *Is the brain the most sexy part of the body?*, is a filmed conversation in which Fabre talks with one of the greatest scientists of our time, the American biologist Edward O. Wilson who is a personal hero and a source of inspiration to him, on the philosophical relationship between science and the arts.

Four smaller models and one large scale model are a second element in this exhibition. On the nature in general of this category of works within Jan Fabre's oeuvre, Florent Bex comments: 'The showcases' and 'thought models' occupy a special place in the oeuvre of Jan Fabre. They afford us a glimpse into the artist's mental world. Fabre's ideas get their first shape in drawings or three-dimensional objects. Sometimes they refer to an image that appeared previously, sometimes they resurface in later work, e.g. as a sculpture or as a prop in a stage performance. However, the showcases and thought models are certainly not blueprints. They are autonomous works that can be read as exercises of the imagination.'

In the large installation on display in the hall downstairs, entitled *I spit on my own grave*, Fabre alludes to the title of the book that made Boris Vian famous, *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes (1946)*. The artist is spitting on his own grave here, in an attempt to take distance from his own person. The figure representing the artist is holding beads in the shape of little brains and in so doing adopts the mentality of a philosopher (the brother in arms of the artist, both are fighting to cultivate the imagination on which society must feed): he is thinking, not praying. The names of insects and the dates of birth and death on the tombstones all refer to specific philosophers, writers and artists. In his imagination, Fabre links each of these personalities to the character and behaviour of one particular insect species. The artists' obsession with death and deterioration is another obvious feature, which appears not only here but also in the large model *Anthropology of a Planet*. To quote Giacinto di Pietrantonio again: 'The human being, man's precariousness and frailty are central to Fabre's oeuvre, exalting the cycle of birth-life-death-rebirth. He considers death the essence of living, the space of what is no longer alive and to which art restores life. Thus, for the artist the body is the highest representation of flow, of the cycle of life, and of what begins and ends only to begin again. Fabre often develops this concept of rebirth and of overcoming limitations through the images of insects that populate his imagination and work (...).'

The drawings on display here are all associated to the main theme again, each one of them offering an intimate insight into the reflections Fabre makes about the problem of human beings and their brains. Together they form a catalogue of ideas, some of which will be elaborated later on.

JAN FABRE - BIOGRAPHY

Jan Fabre, visual artist, theatre director and writer was born in Antwerp in 1958.

From 1976 till 1982 Fabre held numerous performances. Fabre returned to doing performances in 2001 with *Sanguis / Mantis* at the Festival Polysonneries (Lyon). In 2004 he put on a performance for the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, together with Marina Abramovic.

From 1977 Fabre made films using his fathers super 8. In 1997 he created the film *The Meeting / Vstrecha* featuring the Russian artist Ilya Kabakov and made an exhibition about the meeting at Deweer Art Gallery, who had invited him to meet Kabakov. In the film *The Problem* (2001) Fabre, Dietmar Kamper and Peter Sloterdijk discuss the globe as a philosophical problem. In 2002 *Angel of Death* was created, a film on four screens featuring William Forsythe in a choreography of Fabre, shot in the Musée d'Anatomie in Montpellier.

His first drawings date from 1975. Since then he continuously researches the medium of drawing. He is searching for a way to make drawing an independent medium, and he experiments with different materials such as blood, tears and sperm. A famous series of drawings is *The Blue Hour* (1988). Other series of drawings are *The Fountain of the world* (1979), *The Meeting / Vstrecha (The secret of art)* (1997), and *Ilad of the Bic-Art* (1980).

Among his best known public works are the Tivoli Castle in Mechelen (1990) which was completely covered with Bic ball-point pen, and *Heaven of Delight* (2002), a permanent work for the Royal Palace in Brussels.

Fabre has taken part in important events such as the Venice Biennial (1984, 1990 and 2003), Documenta in Kassel (1982 and 1992), the Sao Paolo Biennial (1991), the Lyon Biennial (2000), the Valencia Biennial (2001) and the Istanbul Biennial (1992 and 2001). Furthermore he had important solo exhibitions in leading museums throughout the world, a.o. at Kunsthalle Basel, Centro de Arte Moderna Lissabon, Palais des Beaux-Arts Brussels, Kunstverein Hannover, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Ludwig Muzeum Budapest, Muhka Antwerp, Haggerty Museum of Art Milwaukee, Museum of Contemporary Art Warshaw, Sprengel Museum Hannover, Smak Ghent, Kunstnernes Hus Oslo, Fundacio Joan Miro Barcelona, Musée d'Art moderne et d'Art Contemporain Nice and Musée d'Art Contemporain Lyon.

In 2005 Fabre took part in the exhibition *Visionary Belgium* at the Brussels Palais des Beaux-Arts, the last exhibition organised by Harald Szeemann.

In 2007 there was the *Homo Faber* event in Antwerp, with important exhibitions a.o. at the Muhka Museum of Contemporary Art and the Royal Museum for Fine Arts. Furthermore, in July there was a solo-show at the Museum for Modern Art in Dubrovnik. The Musée du Louvre in Paris currently presents *The Angel of Metamorphosis*, a grand scale solo exhibition for which Fabre has 39 halls in the Richelieu wing at his disposal to juxtapose his works to those of the Louvre's collection. After having presented six solo-shows by Jan Fabre between 1988 and 2006, Deweer Art Gallery gallery now shows his first one-man show after the Louvre, *Is the brain the most sexy part of the body?*. The next important solo show opens in September 2008 at Kunsthaus Bregenz.

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