

Mark Manders

Writing Yellow

April 13 – May 24, 2019

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery is delighted to present Mark Manders: *Writing Yellow*, on view at the gallery's New York location from April 13 – May 24, 2019. For the artist's fourth solo exhibition with the gallery, Manders presents a variety of sculptural works that continue his "self portrait as a building"—an ongoing investigation into self-portraiture, architecture, language, and perception. The gallery exhibition coincides with Manders' monumental Public Art Fund commission, currently on view at the Doris C. Freedman Plaza in Central Park.

Throughout his influential practice, Manders has written a continuous sculptural autobiography through objects and architecture. Over the past three decades the artist has developed a cohesive body of work that exists in its own realm, independent of a clear narrative or chronology. Language plays a defining role in Manders' practice; in a recent interview he explained, "I wanted to be a writer, but I became more fascinated with objects—how they relate to language and thinking. Instead of writing with words, I started to write with objects. I wanted to create a language out of them..." *Writing Yellow* sees Manders continue his original ambition to be a writer and aims towards a broader premise in which his works engage in a continuous dialogue with one another. In *Writing Yellow*, the artist's latest literary and sculptural undertaking is filtered through the use of a single color: yellow.

Operating under the theory that the conception and measurement of time arose with language, the artist uses words and visual codes to dislodge our spatial and temporal senses. His work constructs a timeless reality wherein contradictions co-exist: the past and the future, the temporary and the permanent, the beautiful and the grotesque, the tender and the brutal. In choosing the term yellow, Manders alludes to the multitudes that language may contain; thus yellow can convey a range of associations, feelings and memories. For instance, looking at Van Gogh's sunflower paintings and the particular yellow that the artist had chose - a specific shade that Manders describes as warm yet almost poisonous. And so, yellow offers itself as a chameleon-like construct to be transformed by the artist to communicate an endless variety of emotions.

Upon entering the main gallery, the viewer encounters *Composition with Four Yellow Verticals*, an arrangement of four monumental, craquelure busts, each set upon materials one might find in an artist's studio. The ambiguous expressions of the figures are destabilized by yellow painted wooden elements that bisect each figure's face. In a mastery of *trompe l'oeil*, Manders coaxes the familiar materials of his archetypal forms to invert our conception and understanding of what we see and experience. These enigmatic figures appearing to be composed of clay are, in fact, cast bronze. Each figure is positioned at a slightly different angle, offering multiple perspectives on the serial form, an experience intensified by the shifting scale between each form. At the same time, the figure-ground relationship is subverted, and logic is inverted, as the artist suggests a narrative where perhaps these complex monumental figures entire *raison d'être* is to act as support, an infrastructure, for an abstract composition of four vertical yellow elements.

Works consisting of papier-mâché newspapers are presented alongside the artist's figurative arrangements. Self-made newspapers are a recurring motif in Manders' practice. Timeless and abstract, devoid of any linear narrative, these notional newspapers contain every word in the English language—used only once and placed in random order—and are supplemented with images of the artist's own work. Often obscured or redacted through overpainting or collage, the artist points out that such notable words as *floor*, *object*, *newspaper*, and *yellow* can be found in these papers. And that through such a small selection of words, strung together, one can construct imaginary worlds.

In the rear gallery space, a sculpture of three half-faced figures titled, *Still Life with Thin Yellow Rope* is presented. Scale and seriality are once again at play between the three repeated 'unfinished' portraits. Structures that appear to be iron scaffolding protrude from each figure, positioning the work as a crumbling architectural remnant or ruin. Atop each of the three iron poles, a yellow iron tube follows a path that resembles a sound wave or statistical chart.

At the second floor landing, the viewer comes upon an abstract, dry clay figure, laying horizontally upon the floor, another recurring motif in Manders' practice. Crowned with a gritty and matted wig, the work is titled *Figure with Yellow Pencil*. An iron pencil is suspended from a rod and rope over a small hole created in the muddy object's visage, amplifying the notion that our mind, and conceptions of time and form, are structured first and foremost by language and writing.

In the large gallery upstairs, Manders presents two distinct continuations of his eponymous self-portraits. In *Composition with Yellow Vertical*, a vertical sliver of the stoic subject is bookended by steel, wood and canvas, fictitious newspapers, and an enlarged yellow measuring stick. For this work the artist employs epoxy, as opposed to bronze, to beguile the viewer and achieve the illusion of clay.

Alongside this piece, *Floor with Painted Wooden Object* is presented. Reminiscent of early modernism, the painted object and parquet flooring are staged in a vitrine as a preserved artifact. Similar to his Van Gogh-esque use of yellow, Manders adopts stylistic references from various periods as a poetic ode to the ambiguous language of art and as a vehicle to further displace chronology and narrative.

Small Room with Three Dead Birds and Falling Dictionary transforms the upstairs project space. Manders is a poet, exploring the power of simple word combinations to construct complex environments and atmospheric worlds. Entering the room, the viewer encounters a soft floor covered in canvas with a single painting of a 'falling dictionary' on each of the gallery's four walls. Each painting contains layers of hand-made newspapers, created by the artist and containing every word in the dictionary. Beneath the padded canvas floor, hidden from the view of the visitors, three dead birds have been placed by the artist. Utilizing language to build a complex and poetic sense of tension and uneasiness within the space, Manders likens the experience to the act of walking in the woods, gently observing "the skin of the world is actually a thin layer of death." The canvas is tacked to a wooden frame around the perimeter of the space, a kind of painting itself, laid horizontally and stretched wall to wall across the floor. Since the first part of the installation's title is something that we are not able to physically see, we are left to conjure up the image of dead birds in our imaginations. Again, the artist invites the viewer to contemplate the hidden elements and the unyielding connection of language to image, form, object, and perception.

Born in 1968 in Volkel, The Netherlands, Mark Manders currently lives and works in Ronse, Belgium. Winner of the 2002 Philip Morris Art Prize, Manders also received the prestigious Dr. A.H Heineken Prize for Art in 2010.

Significant solo exhibitions include a 2010 major retrospective at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles which later traveled to the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas through 2012. Other solo presentations include *Mens erger je niet. De keuze van de erfgoedbewakers*, S.M.A.K., Ghent (2016); *Rainbow Caravan*, Aichi Triennale, Aichi, Japan (2016); *Mark Manders: Cose in corso*, Collezione Maramotti in Reggio Emilia, Italy (2014); *Mark Manders*, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea in Santiago de Compostela, Spain (2014); *Les études d'ombres*, Carré d'Art - Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes, France (2012); *Revisions: Mark Manders*, Carrillo Gil Museum of Art, Mexico City (2011); *Two Interconnected Houses*, La Casa Luis Barragán, Mexico City (2011); and *The Absence of Mark Manders*, which opened at Kunstverein Hannover, Germany (2007), and traveled to S.M.A.K., Ghent, Kunsthau Zurich, and to Bergen Kunsthall, Norway through 2009.

In 2013 Manders represented the Netherlands in the 55th Venice Biennale. He has been commissioned to create monumental outdoor projects by the Public Art Fund at the Doris C. Freedman Plaza at Central Park, New York (2019); the Walker Art Center for the museum's Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, Minneapolis (2017); and Rokin Square, Amsterdam (2017).

Manders participated in group exhibitions at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2019); Fondazione Prada, Milan (2018); Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2018); Palace of Versailles, Versailles (2017); WIELS, Brussels (2017); Louvre, Paris (2015); S.M.A.K., Ghent (2015); Guggenheim Museum, New York (2015); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2014); Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht (2014); 21er Haus, Vienna (2014); The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford (2012); Menil Collection, Houston (2012); David Roberts Arts Foundation, London (2012); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012); Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2011); DESTE Foundation, Athens (2011); and Kunsthalle Bern (2010), amongst many others.

Mark Manders' work can be found in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Kunsthau Zürich; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis among others.