

## JOHAN MUYLE

A native of Charleroi (1956), Johan Muyle lives and works in Liege & Brussels. His exhibitions in private galleries and public centres of art located in Belgium, France, the United Kingdom and Italy, the presence of his works in Belgian, Italian, French, Scandinavian and North American public collections and his participation in fairs and international biennial shows of contemporary art (**Sao-Paulo in 1998 and Milan in 2001**) have allowed Johan Muyle to become an artist with international renown, representing the plastic arts of the **French-speaking Community of Belgium**.

Johan Muyle teaches contemporary art practices at the **La Cambre in Brussels** (Fine arts school).

From 1985 in 1994, Johan Muyle primarily produced **animated sculpture assemblages** that were presented in galleries and international fairs in Germany, Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, The Netherlands and Portugal.

Between 1995 and 2004, he left the realm of private galleries to work in a new studio (with a team of assistants) on public orders of a monumental nature. He primarily makes installations consisting of **monumental animated paintings** produced with the collaboration of poster painting artists from Madras in India. These installations have been presented in Belgium, Brazil, Cuba, France, Italy and the United Kingdom.

Starting at the end of the year 2004, Johan Muyle has reactivated individual work and the production of **motorised sculptures** consisting of objects assembled together (objects collected during his travels, at flea markets or ordered via the Internet). These latest works take a remarkable critical look, poetically distanced, at the human condition, the radicalisation of religions, the disappearance of collective utopias and the news.

Starting in 1991, he has recorded the preparatory **drawings** in A5 format in the specifications for the development of these objects and installations. (Doc. 53 & 54 & 55 & 56 & 57)

Johan Muyle's œuvre has been honoured in numerous references works, among them:

- *L'art en Belgique depuis 1975*, (Art in Belgium since 1975) Florent Bex, éditions Mercator,
- *L'art en Belgique depuis 1980*, éditions Ludion,
- *Un double regard sur 2000 ans d'art wallon*, (A dual look at 2000 years of Walloon art), éditions La renaissance du livre/Crédit Communal,
- *XXe siècle, l'art en Wallonie*, (20th century, art in Wallonia) u/d. Serge Goyens de Heusch, éditions Dexia/La renaissance du livre.

## BIOGRAPHY

1956

Born in 15 December in Montignies-sur-Sambre (Charleroi), in Belgium of parents of Flemish origin.

1980

After studies in the plastic arts in Charleroi, Namur and Brussels, and musical artistic work, settled down in Liege.

### **Performances and public displays**

1982/83

Performance "Cassement de noix" (Nut cracking), with Roland Denis, in a former garage, called "the hangar"; this space in the street of the enclosure became one of his studios from 1982 to 1997.

Different public activities in Liege by way of posters and printed materials from the association "**Mona Lisa**".

These activities were carried out together with Craig Masson and Carmelo Virone.

Met Laurent Jacob with whom he created and cooperated until 1988 in the activities of the contemporary art space "Espace 251 Nord" in Liege.

### **News items associated with the object: first installations**

At the beginning of the 1980s, Johan Muyle carried out installations, assemblages of daily objects, which would inspire fictitious news items written by authors close to the artist.

1984/85

Made a series of objects produced in the style of news items. Through the text of the narration, the object is authenticated as the accessory to a drama. In collusion with Carmelo Virone for the writing of the fictions: "La modification" (Doc. 1), «Elle ne souriait qu'aux fleurs» (She only smiles at flowers), "Le regard Atlantide" (The gaze of Atlantis) (Doc.2).

In 1985, when Belgium was experiencing its dark years marked by assassination attempts and bloodbaths, the artist co-organised and participated in the exhibition "Place Saint-Lambert Investigations" and presented in the cellars of the place Saint-Lambert in Liege a fictitious tragic news item, with a gripping realism, entitled "**Le regard Atlantide**" (installation): a blood-stained bus at the stop, with shattered windows, has apparently been the victim of an attack. The residual objects, the traces of blood and the impacts of bullets and the text are so many tangible proofs of the veracity of the event.

Starting in 1984, Johan Muyle made film sets (until 1994) and did theatre designing (until 2003).

### **The assemblage sculptures (1985-1993)**

**The first objects (1985 to 1989) consisting of animals stuffed by taxidermists**, on which the artist conferred a human and ritual identity, gave way little by little to objects found at flea markets which took their places in animated assemblage sculptures.

1986

The fictional dimension, previously present in the objects, gave way to assembled sculptures that incorporate **autobiographical** elements through metaphor: "L'homme aux mains de femme (le Père)" (Man in the hands of woman (the Father)) (Doc. 3).

Stay in Rome.

1987

Two sculptures closed a familial trilogy: "Le second martyre de la pietà (la Mère)" (The second martyrdom of the pieta (the Mother)) (Doc. 4) and the «Cherrubini Gemelli (les Fils)" (Gemelli cherubim (the Sons)) (Doc. 5).

Stay in Rome.

1988/89

**"Les reines mortes" (The dead queens)** (Doc. 6 & 7)

A sow, seated on a rock on the edge of a bath, allows a glimpse of its empty womb. Goose eggs are stuck on the stomach; each egg contains a lock of female hair. The heat of candles placed in the thorax makes a small mill installed on the beast's head turn, which makes a faint ringing sound. A permanent work at the Musée de l'Objet (museum of objects) (Blois, France) since 1996 with a second sculpture entitled "Tu me fais tourner la tête" (You make me turn my head) (1991). Showed the 'familial trilogy' during the exhibition of 1988 in which he participated in the 'Magasin' (storehouse) of Grenoble (F), also exhibited in The Netherlands and Italy.

1989

"I never go to N-Y" (Doc. 9): last of the sculptures which uses stuffed animals as a central element.

Settled at number 1a at the cul-de-sac of la Couronne (called "the studio") where he hung the walls with surplus objects that did not find a place in his sculptures. To these recovered objects little by little everyday elements were added. The objects gradually spread to several rooms to form a real cave filled with objects.

"Madonne" (Madonna)(1989) (Doc. 8)

1990/91

Starting from objects and images collected from second-hand dealers, he produced a series of **motorised sculptures**: "Die Verkündigung an Maria" (The proclamation to Mary) (1990), "L'Enervé de Jumièges" (The annoyed of Jumièges) (1990), "Melchior chocolat Antoine" (1990), "Vive la république" (Long live the Republic), "Des nouvelles du monde" (News of the world) (1991), "Gloire et Honneur" (Glory and honour) (1991), "Oh la barbe" (Oh, the beard) (1991), "Boudha Thumas" (1991), "Mon manège à toi c'est moi" (You are my Merry-Go-Round)(1991). Appearance of electrical engines and mechanical systems. The sculpture consequently develops a sequential intention, adding to the dimensions of the object (among them numerous religious objects like polychrome sculptures) that of Time. The sentences and the titles add to the metaphor of the object.

**"L'impossibilité de régner" (The impossibility of reigning)** (Doc. 14)

A casting (life-size) of a white rhinoceros (without horn) moves, runs into the walls, emerges without being able to escape the room that imprisons it.

Began a collaboration with gallery owner and collector Eric FABRE by exhibiting in the "gallery of Paris". Also exhibited with A. Crone in Hamburg (D), with A. Weber in Torino (I), in the "Anciens établissements Sacré" in Liege (Belgium) and in the Palais des Beaux-arts of Brussels (Belgium).

1992

Produced: "Angel et Angelo" (1992/95), "La vierge noire" (The black virgin), "Le devenir du monde" (The evolution of the world), "c'est triste maman se meurt" (It's sad, mother is dying), "J'ai toujours été à la fête" (I was always at the party), "La chute d'Icare" (The fall of Icarus), "Quel monde merveilleux" (What a Wonderful World), "La misère cachée" (Hidden Poverty).

Exhibited in the "Galerie de Paris" (France) and in the Bilinelli gallery in Brussels (Belgium).

**His stays in Kinshasa (1993-1995)**

Starting in 1993, the artist left the intimate atmosphere of his studio to go to the Congo (Zaire at that time) in company with L. Bilinelli with the goal of meeting and working with local artists and craftspeople. His various stays were marked by meetings with Kinshasan artists such as Chéri Samba (extended in Europe by various interviews intended for publication) and by the creation of objects made by hand by the **street children of Kinshasa** in collaboration with the artist. These elements will be incorporated later into **animated sculptures**, evoking the different impressions related to these stays in Africa (difficulties in the Mobutu era, famine, AIDS).

The works of this period express another determining statement of the artist enlightened by his travels: "... the convictions of an *armchair humanist* that drove me before my first travels to distant countries were called into question radically; I became conscious of the fact that as a creator permeated with a Western rhetoric, it was appropriate, confronted with the diversity of points of view, to call into question my ethnocentric reflexes".

1993/94

Several trips to Kinshasa and production of sculptures starting from elements collected there. "Mamiwata ou la vie comme elle va" (Mamiwata or life as it is) (1993), "N'Djili 1er avril" (N'Djili 1st of April) (1994), "Ya plus d'arzent, ya plus d'amou"

(There's no more money, there's no more love) (1994), "Une blanche pour deux noires" (1994), "Tapis Volant, papier collant" (1993/1994).

Exhibited in Belgium, France and The Netherlands.

From 1994 to 2008, teaching at the **Ecole des Beaux-arts de Valenciennes**.

1995

Following the "African" period: "Plus rien à prendre" (Nothing more to take) (1995) (Doc. 26), "Heureusement que la pensée est muette" (Luckily thought is silent) (1995) (Doc. 25).

First stays in Madras: the artist started working in the studios of poster painters who produce "Cine banners" (advertising posters for the cinema).

### **The route from Madras (1995-2004)**

The experience of travelling, the discovery of Africa modified Johan Muyle's ideas about other places and gave him a desire to initiate new experiences. Starting in 1995-1996, the artist's work took a different direction, that of Madras, in India, where this passionate fan of the subversion of popular or sacred images discovered the crafts of studios of painters who produce giant posters intended to promote the cinema films of Bollywood. In the beginning the artist bought a few cinema posters in the spirit of recovery as for the assembled objects. "... These paintings were so beautiful, that I didn't see how to operate without being illustrative". After several trips and numerous experiments in the studios of Madras, Johan Muyle requested that a team of painters produce his project by bringing along his own images (photos of people close to him as well as self-portraits).

### **The major Indian installation (1996-2004)**

Starting from monumental portraits painted in Madras in studios for painting cinema posters, he produced a series of installations in a representative style, combining the cinematographic writing specific to these advertising studios with metaphorical inscriptions imitating the Indian Tamil or Sanskrit calligraphy. The whole of it is subjected to the usual keys of the artist's plastic language and to impulses of his electro-mechanical devices making the lips move, rolling the eyes, spitting out a jet of water or a tear. Through the relationships established between the different characters represented and the texts that accompany them, the artist intends to approach the questions that ask for consciousness of diversity and advocates intermarrying as an identifying value. In these monumental "Indian" installations, combining urban and popular plastic expressions, the baroque imagery of Johan Muyle mixes up, with nostalgia and humour, the races, nationalities, origins and social classes and Eastern and Western know-how. Plays on words and images emerge and give a poetic dimension to his spectacular machinery, which become the axes of the collective imagination. Unlike the first animated sculptures recalling the principle of automatons, the movements of the large-format installations are triggered by the passage of the visitors, who put into motion an electronic sequence corresponding to a well-defined scenario.

1996

Stay in Madras.

Production of sculptures from objects brought back from India: "Past Glory, Present Pride".

### **"Plutôt la honte"...**

A large-format portrait of the artist (portrait painted in India) is hanging from a wooden scaffolding. Under the portrait it is possible to decode, under the Indian calligraphy, the phrase in French: "plutôt la honte" (rather the shame). Through a small door in the portrait, a nose (like Pinocchio's) in fake painted wood comes out of the face. When the nose goes back in again, large tears flow into the basins placed at the feet of the sculpture.

Undertaken in the Belgian Ardennes, the construction of "the cabana": house/sculpture/studio perched in the trees on the edges of an old abandoned quarry. On the point of being finished, "the cabana" went up in flames on 28 December.

1997

Abandoned "the hangar" and "the studio", settled in Bressoux.

Stay in Madras and follow-up of "Indian" sculptures: "Tempus fugit", "Les sourires d'une longue patience" (The smiles of a long patience).

**"Holyworld"** (Doc. 30 & 31)

A portrait (close-medium shot) of the artist with four arms. Two of these arms are animated and come up to mask the mouth. The eyes also open and close. This re-reading of the Japanese Buddhist proverb "Speak no evil, see no evil, hear no evil" refers to the title "Holyworld" which is found at the bottom of the image. This monumental sculpture was set up in March/April on the Canebière in Marseille. It was shown again at BPS 22 in Charleroi within the framework of the exhibition Storage in 2004.

Also made "Promis juré, ici c'est ailleurs" (A sworn promise, here it's somewhere else) (portrait of Sabine and Eric Fabre) which was shown at the same time as "Plutôt la honte" during the last exhibition by the artist, before closing, at the 'Galerie de Paris'

"Chacun son destin".

1998

Stay in Madras.

Produced in Nîmes, in residence at the Ecole des Beaux-arts (France) the mural sculpture "Loin s'en faux" (A far and false challenge), starting from a painted cinema poster brought back from Madras.

Starts up the reconstruction of the "cabana".

**24th Biennial Art Show of Sao Paulo "We Don't Know Him From Eden"** (Doc. 33 & 34)

In his studio in Bressoux, Johan Muyle produced an animated installation "We don't know him from Eden" 40 metres by 4 in size, consisting of portraits painted in Madras by the studio of the painter J.P. Krishna with whom he is connected by friendship. With this work, on the initiative of the exhibition commissioner Catherine de Croës, the artist officially represented Belgium at the Biennial Art Show of Sao Paulo. By means of this monumental work in a way that is full of imagery and metaphors the artist questions the problem of people in their human condition and their responsibility as thinking beings. The artist prepared computer models of this installation down to the last detail before entrusting, under his direct management, his projects to Indian poster artists. Johan Muyle then brought these portraits back to his own studio, where, with his team of assistants operating on the model of teams tasked with film sets, the artist mounted the images on large panels, motorised them and added light and sound elements to make them into fully scripted objects.

1999

Stay in Madras.

Itinerary of the installation "We Don't Know Him From Eden": in England, France and Cuba (Wifredo Lam Contemporary art centre).

Carried out the recreation of his old studio at the Musée Zadkine in Paris.

Apart from trips, devoted a major part of his time to the reconstruction of his new cabana/sculpture/studio in the Belgian Ardennes.

2000

Stay in Madras.

Production in the studios of Bressoux of the monumental sculpture "**Aimer rire et chanter**" (Doc. 36 & 37).

On the sides of a bus, thus having become a float in a parade, large animated portraits painted by the studio of J.P. Krishna. "Aimer rire et chanter" (To like laughing and singing) refers to the famous Strauss waltz (Aimer boire, rire et chanter (To like drinking, laughing and singing)) and to the specific context of the accession to power of the extreme right in Austria.

Produced an ensemble of ten objects/sculptures for the show "Caméléon" by Patrick Bonté on a text by Jean Muno.

Exhibited in Belgium and the United Kingdom.

2001

Stay in Madras.

Produced the mural sculpture **“Q(c)hi mangerà, vivrà”** (Who eats, lives) shown at the Biennial Art Show of Milan. By putting his head into the mouth of the self-portrait, the viewer (the principal actor of the work) sets in motion a machinery of laurels that refers back to the myth of Daphne.

At the invitation of the exhibition commissioner Laurent Jacob participated in the Biennial Art Show of Venice (off-official) by showing the installation **“We Don't Know Him From Eden”** at the **“serra dei Giardini di castello”** (Doc. 38 & 39).

Also exhibited in Belgium and France.

### **An animated 1600 m2 fresco in Brussels: “I promise you(r) a miracle”**

In 2001, the artist got started on the public order **“I promise you(r) a miracle”** for the bus station at the North Railway Station of Brussels. This plan for a monumental fresco (1600 m2) takes as a pretext the representation of forty artists living in Belgium, and refers deliberately to the painting **“Les aveugles”** (The blind) by Brueghel and to the classic paintings representing the **“decapitation”**. It was ordered by the C.A.I.D (Commission Artistique des Infrastructures de Déplacement). The concept of this fresco draws up an inventory of the multi-cultural contributions and relations in Belgium in the artistic realm: plastic arts, music, theatre, film, literature and other arts. The goal of Johan Muyle is to **“freeze”** his generation and to take his place in the tradition of inventories of creation following the example that was proposed by Max Ernst in his famous portrait of the surrealist family. The different personalities (authors, composers, performers, directors, producers, actors and other artist of diversified origins living in Wallonia, in Flanders and in Brussels, among them Arno, Schuiten, Poelvoorde, etc.) are represented in the form of large dimension portraits made by the painters of Indian studios where film posters are created.

2002

Stay in Madras.

Continued the project **“I promise you(r) a miracle”** for the North Station of Brussels. Making this animated fresco required 30 months of work (60 shooting sessions, 17,500 digital photos). A computer model and a three-dimensional model of the installation were produced by the artist and his assistants. The portraits were painted by the Indian poster painters, J.P. Krishna and his son Gokulnath, who came from India especially for the project for six months (2002-2003). The contributions of thirty Belgian assistants and/or sub-contractors was necessary. The installation is animated by two water features (tears and curtains of rain), mechanical systems (eyes that open and close), and sound sequences in seven European languages (Doc. 40 & 41 & 42 & 43).

2003

Stay in Madras.

**“I promise you(r) a miracle”: the animated fresco of the bus station at the North State in Brussels was unveiled in December 2003.**

### **“What a Wonderful World”**

During the summer of 2003 (6 April 2003 – 28 September), at the invitation of W. Van den Bussche and on the occasion of the **“Triennale d'art contemporain sur mer”**, Johan Muyle placed an immense photomontage on the lower part of the deck of one of the four Pierre Vandamme bridges (bridge no. 3) in the port area of Zeebrugge. Each time a boat passes, the **50 metre high bridge** straightens up and allows a giant photo (500 m2) to appear, printed on a canvas sheet, representing a beautiful girl with beach objects in her hands. Everything would be for the best in the best of all possible worlds, if she didn't have in her mouth the phrase **“What a Wonderful World”** and if the world were not the one that we know. The message hidden under the bridge becomes a monumental sign on the horizon of this flat country when the bridge is raised. The highly coloured monumental photograph enhanced with a slogan witnesses to the artist's fascination with the kitschy aesthetic of the Indian **“Bollywood”**. The fact that the artist chose a bridge in movement as the support for his work is no accident, and returns to his recurring interest in animated images.

On the initiative of Michel Antaki in Liege, reactivated (twenty years after its creation) the association **“Mona Lisa”** on an ad hoc basis by organising a new poster campaign: **“J'aimerais tant que tu te souviennes”** (I would so much like you to remember), **“ Dans tes yeux une pauvr' histoire”** (In your eyes a poor story) and **“Sioux in Paradise”**.

**New work of the studio and sculptures composed of assembled objects.**

2004

Stay in Kolkata (India): met the sculptor Alope Sen there, with whom he started cooperative work.

Participated in the exhibition "Les Afriques" (The Africas) within the framework of 'Lille 2004' (France) by presenting the sculpture "L'impossibilité de régner" (1992), a work whose title makes reference to the voluntary impossibility of reigning of King Baudouin on the occasion of the vote on the law on abortion by the Belgian government.

Exhibited in BPS 22 in Chareleroi.

### **Reactivated in the studio a work on sculpture of assembled objects.**

Objects collected during travels, from flea markets or ordered on the Internet are incorporated into animated sculptures of assemblages. Johan Muyle takes a remarkable critical look, poetically distanced, at the human condition "Un de mes amis" (One of my friends) (Doc. 51), "Mon ami James" (My friend James), "La mort viendra et elle aura tes yeux" (Death will come and it will have your eyes), "La Redoute" (The redoubt), on the news: the extreme right "La face cachée de la lune" (The hidden face of the moon), Jerusalem "La ronde de nuit" (The night patrol), the war in Iraq "Joshua fit the Battle of Jericho", the United States of America "Such a Tranquil Ocean", "A Walk on the Moon", India "Peu de nouvelles du Mahatma" (Not much news of Mahatma), "Sorry, so sorry", the radicalisation of religions "(No) More Opiate for the Masses", the disappearance of collective utopias "Rouge" (Red) (Doc. 52).

### **« Visionary Belgium »**

2005

Exhibition of recent sculptures in Belgium and The Netherlands (private galleries).

The sculptures "Les reines mortes" (1989-1991) and "Quel monde merveilleux" (What a wonderful world) (1992) were selected by Harald Szeemann to participate in the exhibition "**La Belgique visionnaire**" which will be presented at the BOZAR (Brussels) in 2005.

Stay in Madras.

« Hansel & Gretel's Entry into Brussels », « Somewhere over the rainbow », « A ça ira ».

2006

Shows « B. au bord des lèvres » et the Ghislain Museum in Gent (group exhibition 'PIJN').

Shows « Que le monde aille à sa perte » (1994) and « Le second martyre de la Piéta » (1987) in the Contemporary Art Center « La Centrale électrique » in Brussels (opening exhibition 'ZOO').

Solo show at the Art Center BPS 22 in Charleroi – Belgium (Curator Pierre-Olivier ROLLIN, Director of BPS 22). From September to November 2006.

Several exhibitions in Belgium and France (private galleries).

Stay in Madras.

Public project for the social housing infrastructure « Merlo » in Brussels (ordered by the « 101 pourcent artistique » department of the SLRB).

(900 squared meters of fresco work, inside and outside of a social housing centre created in collaboration with the Indian painters 'workshop J.P. KRISHNA from Madras).

New animated sculptures : « Vous chantez, j'en suis fort aise », « Plus d'opium pour le peuple », « Il y a-t-il une vie avant la mort? », « Atlas », ...

2007

Exhibitions in Belgium, France, the Netherlands

Stay in Madras.

Creates the installation « What a wonderful world » in the Troubleyn Theater of Jan Fabre (Antwerp).

Creates the bottle edition « Sioux in paradise » (200.000 ex.) for Lipton Belgium

Creates new animated sculptures : « The show must go on », « Le chant des sirènes », « Mâdinat al-Salâm », « Ceci n'est pas une pipe / Impuesto revolucionario voluntario », « Les gens qui sont nés quelques part », « Singing in the rain », ...

2008

Exhibitions in Belgium, Luxembourg, France, the Netherlands

Solo show at Bozar Brussels from June to September 2008 and from October on at ODAPARK in Venray (NL)

Stay in Madras.

Creates new animated sculptures: « La fin du monde, la faim du monde », « le dieu des voleurs », « No un paso atras », « C'est le chapeau que fait l'homme qui fait l'homme », « Somos un ejército de soñadores y por eso somos invencibles », « We are Under surveillance », « le tonneau des Danaïdes », ...