

cura.



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THE EXHIBITION ROOM

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Fiction on Display

A Collection of Collections

BY NIEKOLAAS JOHANNES LEKKERKERK
VISUAL COMMENTARIES PROPOSED BY FRANCE FICTION

Let's for a moment contemplate the history of fictional displays, collections and exhibitions. Instantaneously I am reminded of – in order of appearance – *Le Musée Imaginaire* by André Malraux, *The Museum of Modern Art*, *Department of Eagles* by Marcel Broodthaers, and *Galerie Légitime* by Robert Filliou, among others. And yes, of course, *Boîte-en-Valise* by Marcel Duchamp. A common ground between these examples is that they are collections: mutual divergent collections of images and objects, predominantly consisting of reproductions of works of art, or substitutes of artworks in the shape of ephemera. The methods of display employed to present these assemblies, respectively, in and from a series of books, various (domestic) exhibition spaces, a hat, and a suitcase, belong to a then-unconventional, antagonistic, and authorial approach which challenged the prevailing ideas on the status of the art object, of objecthood and authenticity, systems of classification and (re)presentation, and image circulation and distribution.

The reason I am bringing forward these art-historically and curatorially renowned instances of artistic gestural differentiation, in addition to what we currently might refer to as forms of 'total curating', is their relation to the notion of fiction. As these works and events have been historicized before our eyes, I think it would be somewhat misleading to attribute them wholly to the domain of fiction, simply by means of a distance created through time's passing, through lingering hearsay, and the fact they hinge on their translation into books. In other words still, they are real, actual, factual... However, through the high degrees of authorship and inventiveness inherent to these works, in these collections of sorts, certain fictional dimensions cannot be denied. For instance, through the displacement and misplacement of collected imagery, by making poetic gestures, by applying tropes of absurdism and imaginative devices, and so forth.

With this text I would like to propose an exercise that could be considered as part of the lineage evoked by the aforementioned examples. That is to say, I would like to propose certain parts of a research trajectory that is intended to accumulate pieces of fiction writing that are employed in order to comment on exhibitions, displays and collections as part of the text, the development of its plot and story, its settings and *mise-en-scène*. In so doing there is a sensible retreat from the spatial and social dynamic and the tangibility of the objects evoked in the works of Malraux, Broodthaers, Filliou and Duchamp, to more speculative and mental – albeit grounded – arrangements that could potentially open up new registers of thought and inform exhibitions in more dynamic and divergent manners.

On the following page you will find three text fragments describing a provocative account of a collection display, a museum exhibition, and a museum collection.

1. Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, first published in 1997
2. Henri Michaux, *A Barbarian in Asia*, first published in 1945
3. Donald Barthelme, *At the Tolstoy Museum*, in *Forty Stories*, first published in 1987

1. In the Berlin zoo, beside the pool containing the live walrus, there is an unusual display. In a glass case are all the things found in the stomach of Roland the walrus, who died on 21 August 1961. Or to be precise:

a pink cigarette lighter, four ice–lolly sticks (wooden), a metal brooch in the form of a poodle, a beer-bottle opener, a woman’s bracelet (probably silver), a hair grip, a wooden pencil, a child’s plastic water pistol, a plastic knife, sunglasses, a little chain, a spring (small), a rubber ring, a parachute (child’s toy), a steel chain about 18 ins in length, four nails (large), a green plastic car, a metal comb, a plastic badge, a small doll, a beer can (Pilsner, half-pint), a box of matches, a baby’s shoe, a compass, a small car key, four coins, a knife with a wooden handle, a baby’s dummy, a bunch of keys (5), a padlock, a little plastic bag containing needles and thread.

The visitor stands in front of the unusual display, more enchanted than horrified, as before archaeological exhibits. The visitor knows that their museum-display fate has been determined by chance (Roland’s whimsical appetite) but still cannot resist the poetic thought that with time the objects have acquired some subtler, secret connections. Caught up in this thought, the visitor then tries to establish semantic coordinates, to reconstruct the historical context (it occurs to him, for instance, that Roland died one week after the Berlin Wall was erected), and so on and so forth.

2. The Chinaman has the love of imitation carried to such a degree, submits himself so naturally to the model, that one is ill at ease.*

* He copies without a single mistake and with no previous experience a Paris gown. The Museum in Peking contains thousands of plants made of stone, in various colours, pots of flowers, imitations that one can hardly detect. The Chinaman prefers them to natural flowers. He also copies shells and stones. He copies lava in bronze. He places in his garden artificial cinders made of concrete.

3. At the Tolstoy Museum we sat and wept. Paper streamers came out of our eyes. Our gaze drifted toward the pictures. They were placed too high on the wall. We suggested to the director that they be lowered six inches at least. He looked unhappy but said he would see to it. The holdings of the Tolstoy Museum consist principally of some thirty thousand pictures of Count Leo Tolstoy.

After they had lowered the pictures we went back to the Tolstoy Museum. I don’t think you can peer into one man’s face too long – for too long a period. A great many human passions could be discerned, behind the skin.

Tolstoy means “fat” in Russian. His grandfather sent his linen to Holland to be washed. His mother did not know any bad words. As a youth he shaved off his eyebrows, hoping they would grow back bushier. He first contracted gonorrhoea in 1847. He was once bitten on the face by a bear. He became a vegetarian in 1885. To make himself interesting, he occasionally bowed backward.

I was eating a sandwich at the Tolstoy Museum. The Tolstoy Museum is made of stone – many stones, cunningly wrought. Viewed from the street, it has the aspect of three stacked boxes: the first, second, and third levels. These are of increasing size. The first level is, say, the size of a shoebox, the second level the size of a case of whiskey, and the third level the size of a box that contained a new overcoat. The amazing cantilever of the third level has been much talked about. The glass floor there allows one to look straight down and provides a “floating” feeling. The entire building, viewed from the street, suggests that it is about to fall on you. This the architects relate to Tolstoy’s moral authority.

Le jeu des qualités

France Fiction

Ces règles sont celles fixées par les joueurs le 18 mai 2013 à la galerie Antoine Levi.

Pour cinq joueurs

Matériel de jeu

Quatre plaques de verres de dimensions égales constituant les plateaux de jeu. Chaque joueur doit se munir de ses propres éléments de jeu et de *piliers* pour poser les plateaux, soient respectivement: 10 objets de forme et de substance libres et 5 objets identiques de forme stable et d’une hauteur de 9,6 cm.

Déroulement de la partie

Les joueurs établissent, pour chaque élément mis en jeu, une liste de 5 qualités (qualités premières, secondes ou accidentelles). Pour débiter la partie, l’un des joueurs, désigné au hasard, place sur la table un de ses éléments. Il annonce alors à haute voix une des qualités listées. Si un autre joueur possède dans son jeu un élé-

ment auquel a été attribué la même qualité, il y a alors *concordance*. Il place à son tour l’élément concordant sur le plateau et en annonce une autre qualité. Si plusieurs joueurs, en revanche, ont un élément auquel a été attribué une qualité proche, il y a alors *négociation*. Le joueur qui a la main écoute alors les propositions et décide quel élément possède la qualité la plus proche de celle qu’il a annoncé. Le joueur choisi place à son tour sur le plateau l’élément retenu et en annonce une autre qualité et ainsi de suite. Le positionnement de deux *éléments* par un même joueur sur un même plateau lui donne le droit de poser un de ses piliers. Lorsque trois piliers ont été placés sur un même niveau, le joueur ayant posé le troisième pilier pose le plateau supérieur, et commence un nouveau tour d’annonce avec un nouvel élément mis en jeu.

Fin de la partie

Le jeu se termine lorsqu’un des joueurs a réussi à poser son dernier pilier.





Partie en cours
Premier plateau
Deux éléments



Stéphane: *Nocturne - Ancien - Anguleux*
Négociation
Eric: *Pointu*



Eric: *Pointu - Mythologique - Froid*
Nicolas: *Froid*



Lorenzo: *pilier*



Trois piliers



Lorenzo: *deuxième plateau.*



Nicolas : *Froid - Combustible - Poussiéreux*



Négociation
Stéphane: *Limaille pour Poussiéreux*
Marie: *Lumière* (petite tête de Brancusi)
Nicolas retient *Lumière*



Marie: *pilier*
Marie: *Tête - Lumière - décapitée*



Lorenzo: *Tropical - Nacré - Océan*
Stéphane: *Nacré*



Stéphane: *Hexagonal - Nacré - Construction*
Négociation
Eric: *Artisanal pour Construction*



Eric: *Bois - Artisanal - Feu*
Nicolas: *Feu*



Nicolas: *Vérité - Tête - Identité*



Nicolas: *pilier*



Négociation
Lorenzo: *Répétition pour Identité*
Lorenzo: *Marbre - Oblong - Répétition*



Nicolas: *Feu - Météorite - Espace*
Négociation
Stéphane: *Spatial*



Stéphane: *Spatial - Antique - Anguleux*



Négociation



Stéphane: pilier



Nicolas: Vide pour Spatial
Nicolas: Deuxième pilier
Nicolas: Vide - Atomique - Extra-terrestre



Négociation
Marie: Météorite pour Extra-terrestre
Marie: Météorite - Minéral - Silice



Négociation
Stéphane: Guerre pour Pyrotechnique
Stéphane: Ciselé - Antique - Protection



Stéphane: pilier



Négociation
Eric: Brillant pour Ciselé
Eric: Pointu - Métallique - Gravité



Négociation
Nicolas: Sable pour Silice



Nicolas: pilier



Nicolas: plateau



Eric: pilier



Négociation
Nicolas: Angle pour Pointu
Nicolas: Losange - Angle - Géométrie



Nicolas: pilier



Nicolas: Sable - Square - Grain



Négociation
Stéphane: Limaille pour Grain
Stéphane: Electronique - Attraction - Fer



Marie: Fer
Marie: Cubique - Pyrotechnique - Minéral



Nicolas: plateau



Nicolas: Entrelacé - Narcissique - Mémoire



Négociation
Stéphane: Coquillage pour Mémoire
Stéphane: Venus - Calcaire - Squelettique
(...)