Misfits - Memoriam

Exhibition from Friday, May 17 to Saturday, July 13, 2019. Opening on Thursday, May 16, 2019 from 6pm to 9pm.

A round table dedicated to Gustav Metzger will be organized on May 24, 2019 at 7pm with Guillaume Leingre and Patrice Joly (art critic, editor-in-chief of 02 magazine).

mfc-michèle didier is pleased to present *Misfits - Memoriam* an exhibition dedicated to the artist Gustav Metzger, who died in 2017.

It is carried out in partnership with the Gustav Metzger Foundation and under the curatorial supervision of Guillaume Leingre. It will be devoted to two emblematic works, chosen at the beginning and at the end of the artist's long career, in order to embrace a path too little known.

Gustav Metzger was the creator in the 1960s of a self-destructive art (*Destruction in Art Symposium*, 1966) but was also the bearer of an ecological thought testifying a global reflection in favor of ethics.

The first part of the exhibition, which will be presented in Paris, is entitled *Misfits**. It is the unveiling of a work conceived by the artist but never achieved. Daniel Spoerri and Robert Filliou, organizers of *The Festival of Misfits*, rejected Metzger's proposal, invited to participate in this exhibition, which took place at Gallery One in London from October 23 to November 8, 1962.

The second part of the exhibition presents a work from 2005: *In Memoriam*. While this installation directly refers to Peter Eisenman's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* - a major figure in architectural deconstruction - built in Berlin, it functionally uses the principles of *Machine Art*, described by Metzger in 1962. But it also refers to an everyday object by its material: the box of cardboard handkerchiefs that will be duplicated in dozens of enlarged copies, as well as the cardboard of *Cardboards*, the artist's first exhibition in 1959.

**Misfits* will be published and produced in 50 copies by mfc-michèle didier.

Misfits - Memoriam

MISFITS AND MEMORY

By Guillaume Leingre

To Jon Hendricks

Between October 23 and November 8, 1962, at Gallery One, not far from Grosvenor Square in London's Mayfair district, the collective exhibition The Festival of Misfits was held in accordance with the precursory idea of May 1968 that an artist is a misfit, an unbalanced person. The artist exercises his/her morals, values and codes, outside or even against society.

Created according to the labyrinth model, The Festival of Misfits brought together nine artists related to Fluxus, (a movement founded in Germany by George Maciunas, an ephemeral soldier in the American army): Robert Filliou, Addi Kocpke, Gustav Metzger, Robin Page, Benjamin Patterson, Daniel Spoerri, Per Olof Ultvedt, Ben Vautier (who slept in the window) and the American poet Emmett Williams. On the invitation card, each artist is given a nickname, according to the usage of the time. Metzger was designated escaped Jew, but he won the title of misfit among the misfits at the Festival of Misfits, according to Robin Page. This was both honorary and distant.

This "young" artist, nearly 40 years old, was then a pacifist involved in the Committee of 100 who fought violence and nuclear proliferation, in which he met the British mathematician and philosopher, Bertrand Russell. In September 1961, Gustav Metzger of Camberwell Grove, as The Guardian wrote, was arrested during a demonstration of the Committee of 100 in London and then brought to the famous Bow Street Magistrates' Court. The fearsome and uncompromising judge Bertram Reece sentenced him to one month in prison for disturbing public order. Nine other anonymous activists were judged and then imprisoned 1. Metzger had had so far only one exhibition, Cardboards, that has gone unnoticed or been mocked. Reece reproved Metzger who had all the characteristics of a "bohemian", as it was called then: he would show more gratitude, the judge told him, towards a country that had generously welcomed him in 1939, by respecting its laws (Metzger was a child of Kinderstransport, who arrived in London with his brother in the last convoy from Germany on the eve of the United Kingdom's entry into the war).

Calling for "mass resistance", as claimed by the Committee of 100 and demonstrating against NATO or American bases on British soil, was therefore contrary to Kingdom law. In 1961, however, the anguish of the nuclear apocalypse was at its height. Bertrand Russell, an 89-year-old pacifist from the United Kingdom, was himself convicted by Reece and imprisoned. The scandal in public opinion was immediate.

This is the political and historical background of The Festival of Misfits.

1. Robert Bolt, Arnold Wesker, Margaret O'Connell, Ian Dixon, Trevor Hatton, Anne Kerr, Michael Sisso, Jane Noël Buxton and Douglas Brewood Senior.

Misfits - Memoriam

What was Metzger's proposal to Spoerri and Filliou? The protocol was extremely simple as it often is with this artist: he suggested exposing the daily edition of the tabloid The Daily Express. Every noon, Metzger had planned to come to the gallery and display on the wall the edition of the newspaper transformed into a readymade.

The reason(s) why the project was rejected is/are unclear and will likely remain so for a long time. A portrait of the artist, photographed in front of the gallery, was displayed instead of the work. But hypotheses can be developed to understand this decision: Metzger used readymade, certainly, but above all he used the "context" within the gallery. This was certainly the object of the difficulty. The context was the work of art itself. However, according to a coincidence of current events, The Festival of Misfits took place during the Cuban Missile Crisis (16 - 28 October 1962 in the Caribbean), between the United States and Russia, the two superpowers of the time. This extremely intense political, diplomatic and military crisis led the world to believe that a Third World War was imminent. The Committee of 100 had predicted it in a leaflet of December 1961: "War is inevitable unless the population mobilizes to put an end to the delirious arms race." In line with the philosopher Günther Anders' theories, this Third World War would be synonymous with the disappearance of the human species. Published in 1961, Off limits für das Gewissen, presents Günther Anders' correspondence with the American aircraft pilot Claude Eatherly, who had, in a reconnaissance aircraft, helped drop the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. In this book, which features a philosopher and a pilot, an officer of the U.S. Air Force, Anders continued his anthropological reflection, lucid and disillusioned, the Obsolescence of Man dating back a few years.

With the help of the Daily Express, Metzger was therefore soliciting history but also politics, media, and the battle of words between the two "Ks", Kennedy and Khrushchev. "The language of the Press untied and the editorial writers enjoyed recapitulating the circumstances of the "Great Mystery of the Bow"." as Israel Zangwill wrote in 1891...! Metzger thus broke with modernism and its founding idea that the work is autonomous and independent of its context. For modernism, art is within the physical limits of the work. It is not outside the museum (as in Robert Smithson's work); in theatricality (installations, minimal art); in spectator's mind (Marcel Duchamp). Modernists name, define, prioritize artistic genres, and locate art in a place: on the surface of the canvas. In 1962, Michael Fried, then a young student and admirer of Clement Greenberg, the iconic thinker of this American modernism, was already working on his now historic article Art and Objecthood, which would appear in 1967.

On this date, Metzger completed the Destruction in Art Symposium.

It is against such conceptions, sometimes considered puritanical, academic or limiting, that Metzger's work is formed. It was part of a broader movement, observable in Europe, to place political history at the heart of artistic reflection. The work did not only deal with the question of form, of abstraction supposed to respond to cubism, but it also took hold of current events and redesigned the foundations of an experience. Metzger thus took the opposite of abstract Expressionism, tachism, the École de Paris, a sovereign but criticized abstraction.

In its sound, tachism, was too close to fascism: this word "cannot last" writes the German poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger. "Who doesn't know he's dying? And then after that, / It doesn't kill you! Who's not a tachist? / Who doesn't have handcuffs in their mouths / And an antiseptic brain? And why / Why these remunerations? And why not? / Why piles of garbage for them to swagger in / Peacocks and mystical roses? And, word of honor, / Why this foam?", notes Enzensberger again in a poem when life in West Germany was only question marks².

Metzger had practiced abstraction with the painter David Bomberg. He had radically moved away from it around 1958, getting angry with his teacher and friend. Symbolic murder of the father: who knows? His proposal for *The Festival of Misfits* is therefore, understandably, part of a process that consisted of two or even three elements. The first, a relationship between the work and the history, as already discussed, and the second, an emphasis on iconography. Finally, there is the idea that the artist must go down into the arena and that, as a result, the museum loses its splendor - this was Robert Smithson's project. The same year of *The Festival of Misfits*, in West Germany appeared, in the greatest confidentiality, the first of the Pandemonium manifestos by painters Georg Baselitz and Eugen Schönebeck; initiating a series of texts aimed at reconnecting with figuration and history: the Second World War, its echo in the 1960s, the Cold War, the history of Germany are thus taken care of.

What could be more expressionist and imaginative than the pages of a daily newspaper, and more so of an English tabloid?

But Metzger's work is also sentimental: the giant tissue boxes of the installation *In Memoriam* in 2005 will not deny it. Here, with the pages of the *Daily Express*, the aim was to highlight the effect of current events on the public and to reveal the importance of the mass media in shaping opinions. In 1960, media coverage was still in its infancy, but it was effective. It was to become omnipresent with the appearance of black and white television in the homes. Thus, this undisclosed piece is the conceptual origin in the artist's work in the same way as the 1959 *Cardboards* exhibition. The *Cardboards First Manifesto* written for the occasion sheds light on its global nature: "The cardboard that was thrown away and is displayed here was probably part of a television package. No commercial consideration or requirement of a contemporary design firm can stain such cardboards. They have qualities similar to the best in painting, sculpture or modern architecture. These boxes have been mechanically manufactured, for one purpose only, for ephemeral use. They remind us that the "function in design" {Bauhaus principle} is nothing more than a slogan."

Misfits provides keys. The work evokes the notion of waste and oblivion, of creative destruction because news passes and daily life is constantly renewed; it prefigures Metzger's broader reflection on automation and iconography. At the time, the *Daily Express* had a circulation of millions of copies. During the crucial week of the *Cuban Missile Crisis*, there were up to three editions a day.

2. Hans Magnus Enzensberg, *Ecume*, last poem in the collection *Parler Allemand* (1960), *In Poésies*, translation by Roger Pillaudin, Gallimard 1966.

A Daily Express was worth three pence! It was a small amount. With a maximum economy of means, in anonymity, and without the signature of the readymade, the artist has thus managed to situate himself in the field of art and its experimentation, while dealing with politics, but also, and above all, with the "épistémè": knowledge and the link between the different forms of knowledge. It is this original path that Metzger will never cease to follow and deepen during a rather withdrawn life. It is this epistemological research that will make him study the relationships between art and science, computer science and creation, the place of the eye and that of the hand in the formation of the work - and its reception. He will reflect on the link between waste and production, he will testify to the concern to reshuffle the maps of a world (of art) that did not satisfy him. Ethics had to have its place - and not only aesthetics - in art as well as in science, especially in the processes of automation and computerization. It calls on artists and engineers alike. Metzger invites everyone to become active. As he moves closer to the world of science, he will see the dangers and dehumanization that technology holds in store. In 1970, the artist gave up production in order not to supply the art market any longer. The reference is overwhelming, but it is nevertheless relevant: being an artist and an epistemologist, in the same gesture, evokes the memory of Leonardo da Vinci refusing to publish and reveal to the world his way of remaining underwater, the embryo of the submarine which he has just invented, "because of the natural wickedness of the men who would use this means to sink ships" said the Italian master.

That nuclear deterrence is now a subject of international diplomacy and is part of the fragile and precarious balance of global forces: the United States' relations with Iran or North Korea, Pakistan and India, express it so much. These relations are the subject of summits, embargoes, communiqués, military tests, tweets and threats, relayed by the media. For the population, what seems to be a gigantic abstraction, has tangible effects: hostage-taking, embargoes, shortages, etc. There is also no doubt that we are dealing with "misfits" elements, according to the priorities of this 1962 work.

ABOUT GUSTAV METZGER, Misfits – Memoriam

Gustav Metzger was an artist and activist who developed the concept of self-destructive art and "Art Strike". If Jean Tinguely was one of the first contributors to self-destructive art in the 1950s, Metzger, an artist of the same generation, politicized this notion. His manifestos of 1959, 1960 and 1961 linked self-destructive art to the social sphere and the man in the street, "The man of Regent Street is self-destructive" (1960), to technology, and finally to the military thing, whose he noted formal perfection. Behind each of these actions, Metzger embodies civic responsibility.

With John Sharkey, author of concrete poetry, he initiated a key event of the avant-garde: the *Destruction in Art Symposium* (DIAS) in London in September 1966, a festival bringing together some fifty artists from all around the world. The success of this event is due to a double energy: on the one hand, it reconnects with a part of English philosophy, we can quote Francis Bacon, the thinker at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, of the "destruction of the project" and of Aristotle's logic; on the other hand, the DIAS realizes the idea of creative destruction and... dispossesses the economist Joseph Schumpeter who saw in it the source of industrial capitalism. It was with Gustav Metzger that Pete Townshend, THE WHO's guitar hero, had the idea to destroy his guitar on stage. It was also during the DIAS that Metzger made an unwavering friendship with Yoko Ono.

Gustav Metzger was born in 1926 in Nuremberg to a Jewish family of Polish origin. In 1939, on the eve of the United Kingdom's entry into the war, he and his brother, Mendel, benefited from the last Kinderstransport. They arrived in London at the end of August 1939. Their brother, Chaim, their mother and father died in deportation.

From the mid-1950s, Mendel Metzger settled in France, studied Hebrew iconography and became a world-renowned scholar and a member of the CNRS. Gustav studied in England while travelling in Europe. He enrolled in art schools, visited Henry Moore, an artist he admired throughout his life, and then approached David Bomberg, a painter and draftsman close to Vorticism - English Futurism. However, the student broke off his relationship with the teacher around 1958.

In 1970, Gustav Metzger decreed the "liquidation of art" and then the "art strike". He lived from bric-a-brac. It was only in the early 1990s that he was rediscovered, thanks to art critic Hans-Ulrich Obrist, and the work gained international status. His themes then tightened on ecology, the notion of waste in art, and nature.

Gustav Metzger died in the spring of 2017 in his London home.

Misfits - Memoriam

Gustav Metzger's biography

Gustav Metzger was born in Nuremberg, Germany, on 10 April 1926 to Polish-Jewish parents and arrived in Britain on the Kindertransport in 1939 - much of his immediate family perished in the holocaust. From 1945 to 1953, he studied art in Cambridge, London, Antwerp and Oxford - for much of this time associated with the artist David Bomberg. By 1958, Metzger was becoming heavily involved in anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist movements and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; in 1960 he was a founder member of the Committee of 100 and this led to a short imprisonment in 1961 with Bertrand Russell and other members of the Committee of 100 for encouraging mass non-violent civil disobedience. Metzger's political activism provided the foundation for his first artist manifesto in 1959, titled "Autodestructive Art", which he described 'as a desperate last-minute subversive political weapon... an attack on the capitalist system... (an attack also on artdealers and collectors who manipulate modern art for profit.)' Autodestructive art — a public art form — sought to provide a mirror of a social and political system that Metzger felt was progressing towards total obliteration. At the heart of his practice, which spanned over 65 years, are a series of constantly opposing yet interdependent forces such as destruction and creation. He has had solo exhibitions at institutions around the world, including Circuit, Lausanne (2018) ; West, Den Haag (2018) ; MAMAC, Nice (2017) ; MUSAC, León (2016) ; Tate Britain, London (2016) ; Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2015) ; CoCA Torun, Poland (2015) ; Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin (2015) ; Kunsthall Oslo and Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo (2015) ; Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2014); Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (2014); and Serpentine Gallery, London (2009).

Guillaume Leingre's biography

Trained as a lawyer and photographer, Guillaume Leingre is the author of many texts about art : "Courant faible, courant fort : The Guerrilla Art Action Group" in *Volume*, "Mike Kelley : Détruire tous les monstres" and "Christopher Williams : la 19ème leçon" both published in *20/27*, "Mots Sauvages : entretien avec Mel Bochner" in *Particules*, etc. He participated in several exhibitions notably at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris : *Dans l'œil du critique : Bernard Lamarche-Vadel et les artistes* and *Seconde Main* and at the CRAC-Languedoc-Roussillon : *5000 K*. He produced several broadcasts for France Culture : "Vestiaire liberté", "Su Tissue : la captive", "Skank Bloc Bologna", etc. He was a resident of Villa Kujoyama in Kyoto, Japan and, in 2018, a fellow of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles to conduct research on German idealism and artists in the second half of the 20th century. He is a professor of visual arts at the Institut français de la Mode.

Misfits - Memoriam





Daily Express, October 29, 1962, p.11 57.5 x 40 cm Limited edition of 50 copies

Misfits - Memoriam

PRESS RELEASE mfc-michèle didier



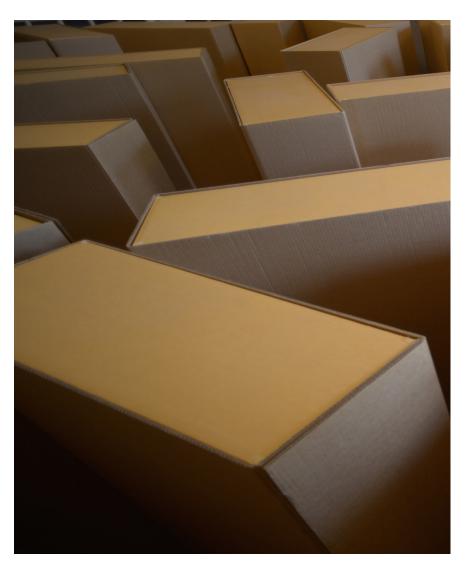
Daily Express, October 30, 1962, p.13 57.5 x 40 cm Limited edition of 50 copies

Misfits - Memoriam

PRESS RELEASE mfc-michèle didier



Daily Express, November 1, 1962, p.17 57.5 x 40 cm Limited edition of 50 copies



Memoriam Thirty cardboards boxes 186 x 96 x 35 cm each 2019

.....

mfc-michèle didier 66 rue Notre-Dame de Nazareth, 75003 Paris, France T + 33 (0)1 71 27 34 41 - P + 33 (0)6 09 94 13 46 info@micheledidier.com - www.micheledidier.com

.....

.....

Misfits - Memoriam

mfc-michèle didier 66 rue Notre-Dame de Nazareth, 75003 Paris France

annakarine@micheledidier.com micheledidier@gmail.com info@micheledidier.com

www.micheledidier.com

facebook twitter instagram

Open Tuesday - Saturday from 12 to 7pm or by apointment.

M° République, Strasbourg Saint-Denis, Arts et Métiers, Temple, Réaumur-Sébastopol

