



Michael Van den Abeele & Arnaud Hendrickx

Bonus Malus

28.11.2009 → 23.01.2010

This game is built on the ruins of a more advanced game. (Dennis Cooper, *God Jr.*, 2005)

Michael Van den Abeele is an artist long known for his inventiveness and versatility, but in recent years, the Belgian public has not had many opportunities to see his work. His last major solo exhibition, *It's Character Forming*, took place on Swiss soil. His activities within his homeland have entailed mainly small but intriguing presentations of drawings, paintings, sculptures and animation loops.

Moreover, he was recently involved in a number of group projects, from which *Isomosis*, Danaï Anesiadou's performance festival in Etablissement d'en Face, was perhaps the most striking. Together with architect **Arnaud Hendrickx** he designed a platform built of massive styrofoam blocks. The intervention subsequently became a surprising sequel *Isopolis*, an *ad hoc* exhibition with forty artists. *Isopolis* was a labyrinth filled with artistic pieces and sculptures, all extracted from the one material that was at hand in massive quantities, styrofoam.

For *Bonus Malus* Michael Van den Abeele worked again with Arnaud Hendrickx. The most striking result of this cooperation is a Neolithic pavilion, a *Fremdkörper* built from German quick-building bricks forming an inappropriate construction located in the middle of the exhibition space. The walls divide the space into blind volumes, like dead-end-rooms within a computer game, more intended to disrupt one's orientation than to clarify it. Hendrickx designed the structure as an arena to be populated by Michael Van den Abeele's assortment of characters, assembled from half familiar, half abstract fragments. Sometimes the figures are rickety and explosive, sometimes translucent and anti-human, but they always seem endowed with an indestructible phlegm of artificial bliss. Their shapes vary continuously between flatness and volume, as a precursor to a world where the human being is no longer the standard form. The characters operate within a level where the distinction between fatalism and positivism is obliterated. *Erase this game and kill us. We'll be fine. We'll come back fresh and stupid and what you call cheerful.* (Dennis Cooper, *ibid.*)

The result is remarkably plastic. The artist seems to evoke a cheerful, diffused view of a future where vitality has become an exact synonym of volatility. The personifications refer clearly to the ideas of the Russian Constructivism, but at the same time, they regularly dissolve into a soft

cosmic fog, as if somewhere *Bonus-Malus* may evoke a universe where such opposites as Lenin and Madame de Pompadour share a postponed romance. Perhaps that's the destination of the exhibition: to call into being frivolous and dissolvable radicalisms, like an open-ended play, without orthodoxy nor messianism...

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