



Marcel Broodthaers, *Décor: A Conquest*, 1975. Courtesy Michael Werner Gallery, New York. © 2014 Marcel Broodthaers and Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Marcel Broodthaers *Décor: A Conquest*

December 20, 2014–March 8, 2015

About the artist

Marcel Broodthaers (1924–1976), a poet, filmmaker, and artist, was born and raised in Brussels, Belgium. As a young man, he met and exchanged ideas with artists in the Belgian Surrealist movement, including René Magritte. He spent his early career working mostly as a writer and only in the 1960s did he decide to become an artist. He often worked with everyday objects, words, and ideas that, through his arrangement, would take on a double meaning. In 1968, he established a Museum of Modern Art in his house in Brussels. This became a notable art form for Broodthaers, along with other important installations and arrangements such as *Décor: A Conquest*.



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Originally conceived in 1974 as the inaugural exhibition for the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London, Broodthaers's *Décor: A Conquest* consists of two "period rooms"—a museum term for spaces that present architectural and interior design elements to re-create the experience of a moment in time. The two spaces in this exhibition are titled *XIXth Century* and *XXth Century*.

Broodthaers called these presentations "décors" and did not consider them to be installations. Instead, he regarded the work as a "sculptural conquest" in which he said, "I don't so much organize objects and ideas as organize encounters of different functions that all refer to the same world." Here, the use of the word "décor" is important to interpret. In French, the word is used to describe a film set, which not only suggests a close relationship between Broodthaers's cinematic and artistic practices, but also between the construction of a reality and an experience. More specifically, *Décor* addresses the various constructions of meaning within a museum setting.

One way that this is examined is through a juxtaposition of "props" or display objects. Both rooms contain symbols of comfort alongside symbols of conflict. For example, in *XXth Century*, a half-finished puzzle is left out on patio furniture only steps away from weapons that line the wall. Although we are safe when we acknowledge this as a fictional setting in a museum, the emotions are real. Furthermore, the history of this exhibition is closely tied to an institutional critique of a particular museum: the ICA in London. The complex relationship between leisure and war are very much rooted in the surroundings of the ICA, which is located on The Mall, the road that extends from Buckingham Palace and used for ceremonial occasions as well as public festivals.

During the final years of his career, Broodthaers created a vast body of work

that explored the relationships between objects, language, history, and identity. *Décor* can be seen as a significant reminder that if we fail to learn from history, we are certain to continue finding ourselves in similar circumstances. The questions that Broodthaers asked and the societal abnormalities he highlighted are eerily comparable to those that concern us today.

Questions for discussion

- I What are the different moods that this exhibition creates? Make a list and see what emotions classmates share.
- I How does this exhibition relate to other experiences that you have had in other museums?
- I Broodthaers called works like those in *Décor* “sculptural conquests,” a word he liked more than “installations.” Why do you think he used this phrase? What is being conquered?

Suggested activities

Set the Stage

Have students create their own “sculptural conquests” by clearing out the desks from the classroom and bringing in new furniture and found objects that make a twenty-first-century room, building on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century rooms that Broodthaers made.

- I Pay attention to how the mood is established—can students pick objects that, when placed together, create a feeling of tension? Brainstorm ideas together and debate juxtapositions as a group.
- I Next, begin to create a full-room experience by assembling the objects, any furniture, and lighting if possible.
- I Invite students to take turns doing improvisational acting in the space. How do they feel when interacting in this environment?

For more information, please contact the Education Department at 970.925.8050 ext. 133 or email education@aspenartmuseum.org.

AAM exhibitions are made possible by the Marx Exhibition Fund. General exhibition support is provided by the Toby Devan Lewis Visiting Artist Fund. Marcel Broodthaers's *Décor: A Conquest* is funded in part by the AAM National Council. AAM education programs are made possible by the Questrom Education Fund.