GERARD HERMAN
Anger Ram Herd
28.11.13 >< 23.03.14

M VAN
**MUSEUM
LEUVEN**
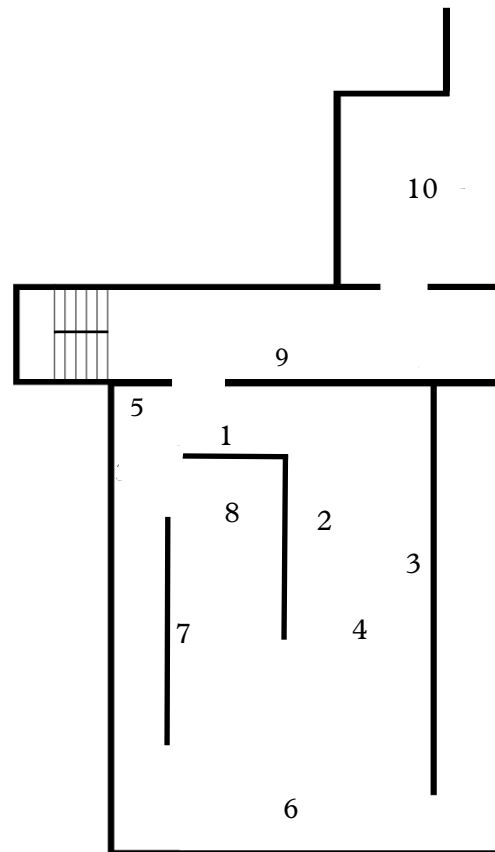
The work of the Belgian artist Gerard Herman (1989, Ghent) is difficult to categorize in a single genre or medium. Generally speaking, his everyday life and environment form the starting point of his graphic work, installations, performances, audio compositions, animated films, and radio broadcasts. By using his native language and the requisite dose of comedy, his works appear to offer bite-sized responses to human experiences like failure and success. And yet, these answers are not definitive: each work is merely an impulse that may generate further meanings.

Anger Ram Herd is Gerard Herman's first solo museum exhibition. The title is an anagram of his name and in that sense ties in with his fascination for language and wordplay. In addition to texts, the artist also associates music with his visual language, giving his work a poetic and multi-layered quality. For *Anger Ram Herd,* Gerard Herman created almost exclusively new work, tailored to the exhibition rooms at M. The exhibition thus begins a new chapter of an artistic practice that constantly reinvents itself.

....

Gerard Herman lives and works in Antwerp. In early November 2013, he took part in the three-day Playground Festival in Leuven where he presented his performance *Winterreise.* His work has also been shown in the solo exhibitions *Nioue Ouerquen* in Rossicontemporary gallery – Brussels (2013) and *Het is weer tijd voor de polonaise* in Maes & Matthys Gallery – Antwerp (2011). He has also taken part in group exhibitions, such as *I Fail Good* in Beursschouwburg – Brussels (2012) and *Unscene II* in Wiels – Brussels (2012).

1. *Gerard settles everything, Herman organises a party*
2. *Free contribution*
3. *Stopping the hobby*
4. *Conceptual bike rides*
5. *And he was all like*
6. *Billboards*
7. *Musical chairs*
8. *Vogelen des velds*
9. *L'Orchestre régionale de Pauvranie*
10. *Trumpet-fish as a verb*

Gerard settles everything, Herman organises a party

In the interactive audio installation *Gerard settles everything, Herman organises a party* (2013), the artist explores the poetic quality of the everyday written word. Visitors are invited to select one of fifty tracks, and to activate the jukebox by pressing a button. To compose the audio installation, the artist went through the television pages of magazines in search of summaries of soap operas. In 25 self-recorded audio tracks, each characterized by the same vocal monotony against a background of spontaneous, free jazz excerpts, the artist shows the potential poetic value of these texts. Using simple language, the summaries touch on complex themes that are intimately related to the capriciousness of life. At the same time, the texts are anecdotal and banal: their attempt to sketch a universal image of everyday life is always doomed to failure. Gerard Herman presents them as readymade poetry on top of the purely improvised music.

Free contribution

Between 2009 and 2012, Gerard Herman drew a monthly cartoon for *Ruis*, a magazine published by the Ghent-based non-profit organisation Kraak. The final issue was published in June 2012. His cartoons were characterised by spontaneous drawings executed in simple lines in which texts occupy an equally important place. These cartoons have been brought together f on one of the walls at M. Gerard Herman consciously chose not to enlarge the drawings or to isolate them from the context of *Ruis*. Indeed, the cartoons are shown to their best advantage in their original format and in the magazine itself, their original medium.

Stopping the hobby

For *Anger Ram Herd,* Gerard Herman made the series of drawings *Stopping the hobby* (2013). Just like his cartoons for *Ruis,* this graphic work is characterised by spontaneous, simple lines supplemented by text. *"I know how relative it is to have a unique style. I try not to adhere too strictly to any particular style of drawing. I enjoy exploring and experimenting with different styles."*
The choice of black and white drawings is primarily related to speed and the importance of text, but likewise to practical considerations related to the reproduction of images: *"I adopted a certain black and white style because it most closely resembles the original when reproduced. And yet I do very much like colour and the possibilities it offers. I've never used colour in my own work for purely economic reasons, both in the financial sense and with respect to time constraints. But I cannot rule out experimenting with it in the future."*

Conceptual bike rides

In his performative bike rides, Gerard Herman explores the poetic associations of words. This is evident from titles such as *Komen Halen* (2011), *Uit een Belgisch dal klimmen* (*Climbing out of a Belgian valley*) (2013) or *Wilrijkevorselaarne* (2013) and *Aartselaartselaartselaar* (2013). Gerard Herman sometimes takes these bike rides alone, but usually he's joined by a group of friends who have nothing to do with the art world. The performance consists of creating a new linguistic map, or in other words, traveling a route from one geographic point to the other in which the selected toponyms only have meaning thanks to their mutual relationships. The concept is predetermined, the route carefully outlined. *"The conceptual bike rides grew out of the Youth Association for Nature and the Environment where I met friends with a shared love for long bike rides. It all started when we cycled to France for a week. When planning our new routes, we thought it would be interesting to do it based on an underlying idea. For example, our first conceptual bike ride to one another's parents' houses, which became a tour across Belgium from Bruges to Roeselare, Hoogstraten and Kapellen."* Through his conceptual bike rides, Gerard Herman reveals, as it were, a message that at first appears hidden, a kind of whole that is not actually there. The performances are documented en-route by amateuristic photos. In this sense, the conceptual bike rides are above all a celebration of being on the road, life and friendship.

And he was all like

The installation *And he was all like* (2013) forms a very literal depiction of 'nagging', a figurative expression indicating boredom and annoyance. Gerard Herman sculpturally translated the movement of two crossed arms, one of which moves back and forth, in polyester moulds of his own arms that he has made to move in a constant repetitive mechanical motion. The soft sound produced by the mechanism underscores the idea of continuous monotony. The simple execution betrays a certain form of amateurism, an aspect Gerard Herman does not try to hide: *"I advocate restoring the word 'amateurism' to its original status, namely that of a love for something, which is a positive approach. Nowadays, amateurism has become a negatively charged word. It sounds like a hobby, a pastime you engage in, in addition to your regular life."*

Billboards

Gerard Herman has built two monumental billboards in the exhibition space at M: an enormous billboard bearing the word 'alles' ('everything') and behind it a small board with the text 'nog een keer alles' ('everything again'). In *Billboards* (2013), however, the artist looks beyond the medium, the often blaring billboards one sees on the street, encouraging constant consumerism. *Billboards* is primarily a reference to *Thoughts Unsaid, then forgotten,* a 1973 work by the Dutch artist Bas-Jan Ader on poetry and transience. *Thoughts Unsaid, then forgotten* consists of the text of the title, hand-written on the wall by Ader and lit by a floor lamp standing beside a vase of flowers. Just like the Dutch artist's work, Herman's *Billboards* may also be interpreted as an a priori vain attempt to express complete meaning via text or images.

Musical chairs

Despite what the title may lead one to suspect, the installation *Musical Chairs* (2013) isn't an invitation to dance. By suspending 23 chairs high-up on the wall, Gerard Herman makes it impossible for the visitors to play musical chairs. What's more, the music that is occasionally interrupted as the rules of the famous game stipulate, can only be listened to by one person at a time through a headphone. Gerard Herman pressed this disco track on 23 vinyl records that he placed inside the cut-out seats of all the chairs. The chairs consequently have multiple functions: besides being both seats and works of art, they are also record covers.

Vogelen des velds

Gerard Herman's nature educational radio programme *Vogelen des velds* (*Birds of the Field*) focuses not only on the spoken word but also on silence, sonorous imperfection, unusual animal sounds and bird song. *Birds of the Field* is broadcast every Tuesday afternoon on the free Antwerp-based radio station Radio Centraal. The artist has already made more than 180 radio shows, and they are all available online via his website www.gerardherman.be. Every week, with the collaboration of scientists, amateur nature lovers and acquainted ornithologists, Gerard Herman creates a space for language, music and sounds in all their forms. In an improvised radio studio at Museum M, the artist will record episodes of *Birds of the Field* with a number of 'special guests'. The shows will be broadcast on Radio Centraal.

This improvised radio studio is occupied once a week to broadcast Vogelen des velds. Thank you for not touching the radio installation.

L'orchestre régional de Pauvranië

Music occupies an important position in Gerard Herman's artistic practice. He is for example a member of the free jazz group *Sheldon Siegel* and he releases cassettes or records under his own name. In his unrelenting search for new sounds, the artist also creates his own musical instruments. *L'orchestre régional de Pauvranië* (2013) is yet another step further. Not only is it a self-made dub instrument actuated by the breeze of an electric fan. In all its poetic simplicity, it is also a cinetic sculpture whose soft and sporadic drum creates a stilled atmosphere.

Trumpet-fish as a verb

The visual and audio installation *Trumpet-fish as a verb* (2013) combines music and images. Against a soundtrack of dissonant and abstract sounding music that Gerard Herman improvised with musician Kris Vanderstraeten in the summer of 2013, we see ten stop-motion animated films drawn by the artist himself and edited into endless loops. Just like in the jukebox installation, *Trumpet-fish as a verb* illustrates everyday situations in a poetic manner. The soundtrack will also be released on an LP by Gerard Herman and Kris Vanderstraeten. Its release (accompanied by a concert) took place during the opening of the exhibition at M. The record is available at the M Shop.

……………………………………………………………………………..

The following publications and vinyl records by Gerard Herman are available at the M Shop:
- Gerard Herman, *Te koop wegens stopzetting hobby,* 2013
- Nel Aerts and Gerard Herman, *Het Gehavende Handje,* 2012
- Artists (Gerard Herman and Bert Huyghe), *Namedropping,* 2012 (7" vinyl record)
- Gerard Herman, *Terloops plaatje,* 2012 (12" vinyl record)
- Gerard Herman, *Fêta Justice,* 2012 (12" vinyl record)
- Gerard Herman and Kris Vanderstraeten, *Trompetvissen als werkwoord,* 2013 (12" vinyl record)
- Bert Huyghe, *Een aap met schaamhaar,* 2013 (12" vinyl record)
- Sine Van Menxel, *Pootje,* Groepsdruk, 2013