

S.M.A.K.

PRESS RELEASE

Pieter Engels

Fabulous Oldest Hits

The EPO (Engels Products Organization) donation

22.Apr.2023 – 10.Sep.2023



Pieter Engels (1938-2019) occupied a distinct place in the post-war Dutch art world. Over a long and varied career, he expressed himself through paintings, photographs, installations, performances, videos and graphic work. In line with the questioning, anti-authoritarian spirit of the 1960s, he created conceptual and ironic works that punctured the seriousness of the art world. He queried the value of art, the commercialisation of the art world and the genius of the artist. In 1963, for example, he quit painting (temporarily) and established EPO (Engels Products Organization) the following year. This was the first of his many businesses, through which he positioned himself not as an artist but as an entrepreneur. As his alter ego, marketing director Simon Es, he issued beautiful posters and brochures to market his products and services. Engels sold furniture that he had broken apart and reassembled, offered bottles of exhaled air, cut-up banknotes for a fee and scratched cars (*Engels will damage your car nicely for 100 Dutch Guilders*). His actions, which he called 'wonder events', were steeped in the contrarian humour of Fluxus, the art movement that strove to close the gap between art and life.

Engels launched a new company in 1967 called ENIO (Engels New Internment Organisation), which followed developments in the funeral industry. He made coffins

for a variety of sometimes bizarre objects, such as a bag of 'drowned water', and devised several suicide machines. In 1971, he commenced a series of works for *Strike Project*, during which he temporarily suspended his activities as an artist. Engels made a proposal to the culture minister at the time, stating that he would cease all creative production, for the rest of his life, in exchange for 25 million guilders. The minister rejected the idea, however. Due to his critical stance towards the art world, it is impossible to separate Pieter Engels' work from the zeitgeist that inspired it, and from the oeuvres of contemporaries such as Piero Manzoni, Lee Lozano, Marcel Broodthaers, Wim T. Schippers and Ger van Elk.

The exhibition is complemented by a room of works from the permanent collection by Dutch conceptual artists, including Stanley Brouwn, Jan Dibbets and Ger van Elk.

The exhibition celebrates the donation of works from the EPO, in the name of Annemarie Engels, the artist's widow. S.M.A.K. has the largest museum collection of contemporary art in Belgium and is committed to a dynamic acquisition policy, of which donations are a crucial pillar.

With thanks to Annemarie Engels, Galerie Martin van Zomeren, Anny De Decker, Flor Bex, CKV and M HKA.

Biography

Pieter Engels studied at the Koninklijke School voor Kunst en Kunstnijverheid, 's-Hertogenbosch, from 1955 to 1958, and at the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, from 1958 to 1962. Solo exhibitions include the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag (1966), the Wide White Space Gallery, Antwerp (1967), the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (1969), the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1969/1981) and the ICC, Antwerp (1973). Furthermore, his work was also shown in key exhibitions, such as the Biennale de Paris (1967), Documenta IV, Kassel (1968), Op losse schroeven, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1969) and Sonsbeek buiten de perken, Arnhem (1971). More recently, his work has been included in the group exhibitions T-Tris, BPS22, Charleroi (2009), In & Out of Amsterdam. Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1976, MoMA, New York (2009) and Collection XXIV, M HKA, Antwerp (2009-2010). Engels' work can be found in a number of private and public collections, including those of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Museum Boymans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Noordbrabants Museum, 's-Hertogenbosch, M HKA, Antwerp and S.M.A.K., Ghent.

Credit beeld: BAMM: Brain-Squad against Mass-Communication and Mediocrity, *Owlglass* (1975-1977)

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