

Puss were published in 22 languages and the work - and cartoon series - increased rapidly, to the point where in 1965 Toonder realised that he had become a business director and was no longer a cartoon artist. At that point he left the Netherlands and went to live in Greystones, in County Wicklow in Ireland, and devoted himself completely to his two most famous creatures, who seemed to live in a parallel, but also clearly recognisable, universe in *Rommeldam* (Rumbeldon).

After 47 years, 177 stories, 12,000 instalments, 35,000 pictures and 13 million words Marten Toonder drew a line under the adventures of Sir Ollie and Tom Puss on 20 January 1986. Toonder was then 73 and he lived for a further twenty years, just sufficient time to complete his three volume autobiography.

What made Toonder's work so unique, and particularly the adventures of *Bommel and co*, is that it not only provided a gentle criticism of society, based as much on popular phenomena such as astrology and fashion as on the cold war and the threat of the atomic bomb, but that in so doing he created animals so like people that, as with Jean de La Fontaine, they were even more true to life than human characters could ever have been. Moreover, Toonder also used highly original language that reminds us of the best work of Lewis Carroll.

MARNIX VERPLANCKE

Translated by Sheila M. Dale

Artistic Experience Knows No Bounds

Visual Arts Flanders 2012

In 2012, the year of the British cultural event Festival - Finale of the Cultural Olympiad", on the occasion of the Olympic Games in London, and the year of dOKUMENTA 13 in the German town of Kassel, five interesting exhibitions are also being organized in Belgium. The people involved have joined forces for the publicity in Visual Arts Flanders 2012, a joint project with the Flemish Institute for Visual, Audiovisual and Media Art, the Arts and Heritage branch of the Flemish government and the participating institutions and organizations. It is the first time that a cluster of people like this has been formed in Flanders "to co-operate in strengthening their cultural impact abroad". At the invitation of Tate Modern, they put forward their plans in London at the end of 2010 and had a public discussion about a co-operative venture of this kind that would cross traditional boundaries and also have international implications.

In Flanders there are five sensational events to be seen, spread across all the provinces. At various locations along the Belgian coast, during the fourth edition of *Beaufort* (from 31 March to 9 September), there are exhibitions of works of contemporary artists from every member state of the European Union. In Ghent the tradition of the sensational exhibitions *Chambres d'Amis* (1986) and *Over the Edges* (2000) continues with *Track* (12 May to 16 September), in which more than thirty international artists are developing projects reflecting the social, cultural and economic context of the six districts of the inner city of Ghent. For its ninth edition *Manifesta* (2 June to 30 September), the European Biennale of Modern Art, is descending on a former mine site in Genk (in Belgian Limburg), with work from up-and-coming international artists. *Newtopia: the State of Human Rights* (1 September to 10 December), with works by fifty artists in various historical locations in Mechelen, is the first large in-



Jan Fabre, *Searching for Utopia*, first edition of Beaufort, 2003, Nieuwpoort.

ternational exhibition to look at the relationship between art and human rights. This year, too, the Middelheim sculpture park in Antwerp is undergoing a thorough metamorphosis with the opening of a half-open pavilion by the architect Paul Robbrecht, with an exhibition of Thomas Schütte and monumental creations by Ai Weiwei, among others, (from 26 May).

It is striking how in almost all the initiatives a lot of attention is paid to public space. In Mechelen it is about a sort of forum for human rights, in the former mining town of Genk about "the repositioning of a post-industrial community", along the North Sea about "the incorporation of art in the unique biotope of the dynamic coastal towns", in Antwerp about the art of sculpture in public spaces - including the city centre - and in Ghent about "the urban fabric and claiming a permanent place for modern art in the various districts of the inner city".

The first sentence of the *Track Manifesto*, which has been circulated in ten languages throughout the city by the Ghent Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art, emphasizes that a city has no boundaries. Director Philippe Van Cauteren and co-compiler Mirjam Varadinis say that the mu-

seum is aiming at interaction between the city and its inhabitants. For *Track* an imaginary line, a path for visitors, has been drawn between the two main railway stations in Ghent, a trajectory in a diagonal across the city centre, through six districts, six different realities and histories. The participating artists (who include the Dutchman Erik van Lieshout, the Fleming Michaël Borremans, Teresa Margolles from Mexico, the Swiss duo Fischli & Weiss, the Danish-Norwegian duo Elmgreen & Dragset and Ahmet Ögüt from Turkey) are interested in such variations, in the social context and in utopia. They are searching for the multi-faceted identity of a place and expose unexpected, surprising, forgotten and fresh approaches to, insights into and perspectives on art and the times in which we live.

The curator of *Manifesta* and *Newtopia*, the Greek Katerina Gregos, deals in a similar way with the history of a mining region or Belgium's wartime past, with genocide and human rights, and with the steadfast belief in Utopia. The work of the participating artists is embedded in society. Indeed, *Manifesta* is always closely connected to the political and social history of the region where the biennale takes place.

Paul Robbrecht, mentioned above, and Philip Van Den Bossche, curator of Beaufort 2012, reflect on how images, installations and monumental works are given a place in public space, both in parks and along the Belgian coast. How these images are positioned and exhibited is also a history of how exhibitions are organized. It leaves a clear trail.

At the end of the day the people behind the five events want to leave such a trail behind, works of art as beacons, witnesses, monuments and inspirational resting places. After four editions of *Beaufort* a vast and lasting sculpture park is gradually being established; following city exhibitions such as *Chambres d'Amis*, *Over the Edges* and now *Track*, the artistic intervention and the works of art themselves are forming "memory trails" in the image of the city. *Track*, as is stated in the exhibition manifesto, agitates, plays, reads, listens, looks, sees and provides an experience of art that is without boundaries.

PAUL DEPONDT

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www.visualartsflanders2012.be

The Story of De Stijl.

From Mondrian to Van Doesburg

Two artists and an artistic movement belong to the canon of Dutch history: Rembrandt, Van Gogh and De Stijl. In order to raise the profile of De Stijl as a journal, an artistic movement and an idea in modern Dutch museums, the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag has decided to dedicate a wing of the museum to Mondrian and De Stijl in an exhibition lasting until 1 January 2014. The image that the museum is seeking to create of this group with the exhibition and the accompanying publication is one that is lively, joyful and free: "Although art historians, particularly in the 20th century, have described De Stijl above all as a coolly rational, structured, almost cold style, the intention of the De Stijl artists themselves was to make a work of art that was both dynamic and at the same time lively, free and joyful, just like the future itself. It is no coincidence that they were also involved with dance halls, advertising and fashion." The exhibition includes models, plans, paintings, sculptures, furniture, printed work, typography and fashion and presents them as an eclectic mix, with no hierarchy. The multitude of objects is not brought together to form a clear overall picture, but demands attention for the progressive, multidisciplinary character. Another aim of the exhibition is to reinforce a dynamic image of De Stijl. Starting from Mondrian's 1927 article on neo-plasticism 'in the home, on the streets and in the city' ('Neo-plasticisme: De Woning – De Straat – De Stad'), the exhibition builds on the theme of home/street/city: the presentation is staged "from the inside to the outside, from the small to the large". For the staging of the works, this implies among other things the inclusion of models of Mondrian's studio (which show an evolution from a traditional layout in 1909 to the experimental studio in New York in 1943). The artist Krijn de Koning and the architect Anne Holtrop have created an installation specially for the exhibition (*163 spaces for a work / 163 ruimten voor een werk*), inspired by