

# JULIEN MEERT

# SCREENSAVERS

— Alicja Melzacka

## PROLOGUE

**In his new video-series, Julien Meert uses repetition to de-dramatise actions, transforming them into patterns, looping idly in the background. The following text, written in response to the videos, reintroduces dramatic elements by giving an account of the meeting between WRITER and CURATOR, who struggle to interpret ARTIST's work. The narrative, however, is not linear; the action is not progressing, and the characters find themselves looping in the bizarre world of Screensavers.**

## SCENE: UN SOIR TRANSPARENT

It's a cold winter morning. Or evening. Meek beams of December sun are turning the facades blue. Well, blue-ish. WRITER and CURATOR are on their way to meet ARTIST in his studio somewhere in Brussels.

WRITER

Do you think he's been expecting us? There was no specific time on the invitation.

CURATOR

If he isn't, we'll catch him by surprise. He mentioned he'd be busy painting the backgrounds and making the props, and there is nothing more exciting than seeing an artist at work!

WRITER

How about seeing an artist's work?

CURATOR

No need to be sarcastic... Here we are. (Looks up, after a pause) I've always been fascinated by what people choose to display in their windows; how carefully they curate their image. Because it's so intentional, I feel almost no guilt about peaking into their houses.

**KRIEG**

06.03 – 24.04.2020

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(Points towards the lit windows) This here reminds me of shadow theatre, at the same time showing and not showing...

CURATOR

There is something quite coquettish about it. Do you see what *kind* of objects they are? Toys, works, pieces of undergarments, heels... That's a bizarre combination, to say the least.

WRITER

I think these are ARTIST's objects of desire. They are obscured because they cannot be fully grasped. We are chasing after desires without realising that they can never be satisfied because they are not directed towards any specific object. Instead, what we start to enjoy is spinning in circles. We get addicted to struggle itself! This is what Lacan calls *jouissance*, the joy of desiring. And the best example of it is the artistic process! It is a painful but intoxicating desire to complete something which can never be completed. Making art is, therefore, a masochistic venture.

CURATOR

You and your psychoanalysis! It's too easy... it's almost as if those objects were baits for our over-interpretative impulses. Offering a promise of intimacy, a glimpse into the life of the artist... But it's all a mere construction, an illusion. ARTIST wants to entrap us.

WRITER

(pointing towards the window to the left) There he is! He is looking at us looking into his windows. We'd better get inside.

They enter the house.

### SCENE: THE GREAT ESCAPE

WRITER and CURATOR sit on the floor, in a room devoid of furniture. The walls are grey and uninteresting. The ceiling is confusing. They are confused.

WRITER

I can't tell if this room has a ceiling.

CURATOR

Doesn't seem like it... but it might be made of glass.

WRITER

A glass ceiling? Can't be an accident, can it?

CURATOR

(sceptically) What do you mean?

WRITER

I think you'd agree with me that through his repetitive actions, ARTIST renders visible his struggle against certain unspoken expectations. He strives to surpass the myth of the artistic genius, but because of the voracious character of that myth, whatever he does becomes 'absorbed', and he falls into another cliché.

(interrupts with a bray of laughter) I love how you make every sentence sound like it was meant to be read and not heard...

WRITER

(continues, unswayed) He is bound to fail! Look at what happened to Kippenberger's anti-heroic self-portraits... or to Bas Jan Ader who, to escape one myth, created another. A glass ceiling then would be a visual metaphor for this imminent failure, for the inability to break out of a constructed frame.

CURATOR

Well, obviously, there is a certain feeling of entrapment conveyed by ARTIST's work, but I wouldn't go as far as to say that he *purposely* uses the metaphor of the glass ceiling. It seems quite literal, doesn't it? And the naïveté he operates with is not identical with literalness.

WRITER

I have a feeling that you're trying to negate whatever I say, regardless of the nature of the statement...

CURATOR

It's not that... (stammers) I... I just don't agree with your approach.

WRITER

And what is my approach, according to you?

CURATOR

You're trying too hard to read the work. You treat every work of art as a text, as something that can be decoded, interpreted, and comprehended. I, in turn, am interested in affect rather than semiotics. Feeling above the meaning.

WRITER

Nonsense...

CURATOR

Yes, exactly! Non-sense.

### SCENE: OPENING

Suddenly, all three materialise in a different space. The illuminated floor tiles are changing colours in a rhythm that implies music, but the room remains silent.

CURATOR

(pointing at ARTIST) And he is still pushing! I feel tired just looking at him. I don't know what he thinks he will achieve... is he trying to beat some sort of record? (sighs with resignation) I can't help but feel it is as pointless as it is poignant.

WRITER

This entire setup reminds me of a quote from Beckett. "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better..."

(interrupts) Oh, come on! "Fail better", seriously? This phrase has been so hackneyed; it's been featured on the wall of every other start-up...

WRITER

Maybe so. But do you know how it continues? It has nothing to do with motivating 'yuccies' or motivating anyone for that matter. To me, it is about the unreliability of language, about the struggle of coming into existence, in the face of predestined failure... Beckett himself had a rather dark, at its best tragicomic, view of the world.

CURATOR

Very well then. Continue.

WRITER

(clears her throat) "First the body. No. First the place. No. First both. Now either. Now the other. Sick of the either try the other. Sick of it back sick of the either. So on. Somehow on. Till sick of both. Throw up and go. Where neither. Till sick of there." (gets tired, makes a pause to catch a breath. Coughs. Picks up again) "Throw up and back. The body again. Where none. The place again. Where none. Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or better worse. Fail worse again. Still worse again. Till sick for good. Throw up for good." (speaks up) "Go for good. Where neither for good. Good and all". (strains her memory to find the right passage) "The void. Before the staring eyes. Stare where they may. Far and wide. High and low. That narrow field. Know no more. See no more. Say no more. That alone. That little much of void alone."

WRITER breathes heavily. CURATOR licks her lips, takes a sip of water. ARTIST's body keeps pushing up and down, up and down.

### SCENE: FERNANDO

The atmosphere is dense. An artificially lit podium emerges from the void. ARTIST and CURATOR try to join the crowd of observers but they have trouble blending in.

WRITER

(confused) I forgot why we were here.

CURATOR

I'm not in the mood for your games.

WRITER

I'm not playing any. Do you remember what we were doing?

CURATOR

(exasperated) Of course! Working!

WRITER

Why 'of course'. What is so obvious about it? What is the work that we do?

CURATOR

Well, we observe, interpret, and then we mediate. We are the bridge. Or... or an interface!

An interface? Between whom?

CURATOR

Between the artist and the general public.

WRITER

Greg Bordowitz once said that “the general public is a fiction established to organise consumers around purchasing products”...

CURATOR

(ironically) I once said that nobody likes hermetic artworks and solipsistic artists.

WRITER

(doubtingly) Still... if *that's* the definition of work, then everyone is doing it. Look at all these people! They are also observing, interpreting... Why do they need us? How are we better equipped to understand art? (sighs with resignation) Anyway... let's get out of here. It's getting darker and darker, and I start to feel anxious.

CURATOR

(looking around) Do you know those dreams where you are in a public space, and suddenly, you realise you have been naked the entire time and everyone is staring at you? That's a kind of feeling I get.

WRITER

Exactly... this is the kind of dream people have when they are concerned about how others see them... when they fear others' desires.

CURATOR

(silently) Who doesn't fear them?

### SCENE: DANS LA VILLE

ARTIST and CURATOR find themselves in front of an opening going out to the street.

WRITER

Are we inside or outside?

CURATOR

I don't know. I don't know if there is any 'inside' or 'outside'.

WRITER

What do you mean?

CURATOR

It's just flat layers. A screen, an interface between our bodies and the pictorial space.

WRITER

(confused) I thought we were talking about architecture.

Architecture is also an interface...

WRITER

(looks away) I'm sorry, I'm distracted... (pointing at one of the iterations of ARTIST) Look there, what is he doing? Dancing? Or convulsing... It's hard to tell without the music.

CURATOR

Where is "there"?

WRITER

To the left!

CURATOR

To our left?

WRITER

(very confused) Is there another left?

CURATOR

Absolutely! When we speak about a painting or an image in general, there is the observer's right and left but also the 'proper right' and the 'proper left', the relative directions with respect to the represented world.

WRITER

I see... Now that we are no longer talking about architecture, I will ask you again: are we inside or are we outside?

### SCENE: THE FALL

Comets flying around at a terrifying speed. Stars falling and rising. Amongst them hovers what appears to be ARTIST's body. CURATOR and WRITER are suspended in space, or maybe, they are outside, observing it from a distance, like an experiment behind the protective shield in a chemical lab. It is hard to tell because they don't seem to have bodies.

CURATOR

Have you noticed that there is no sound around us? This world is mute.

WRITER

That's what's the most terrifying about Space. There is nothing to carry sound. It is the greatest, ever-growing explosion, and it is entirely silent. This is how I imagine death – an ungraspable dispersal. Even if something is happening to what remains of us, we are no longer able to perceive it.

CURATOR

(saddens, attempts to change the subject) Without the sound, how come we are having this conversation?

We are the unreliable narrators, the words on a page. The rules of this world don't apply to us because we don't belong to it, and we will never be able to *really* access it. And this world, it doesn't need us... It has been perfectly complete without our remarks.

Both go quiet. The papier-mâché celestial bodies keep flying around.

CURATOR

(after a long pause) I think we failed to explain the work.

WRITER

Thank god.

## COLOPHON

Julien Meert *Screensavers*

### Works on view

*The Opening*, 2020, video, 10', loop

*Dans la Ville*, 2020, video, 6', loop

*Un Soir Transparent*, 2020, video, 10', loop

*The Fall*, 2020, video, 5', loop

*Fernando*, 2020, video, 5', loop

*The Great Escape*, 2020, video, 10', loop

Scenography: Maju Bois

Text: Alicja Melzacka

Graphic Design: Jedidja Samyn

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