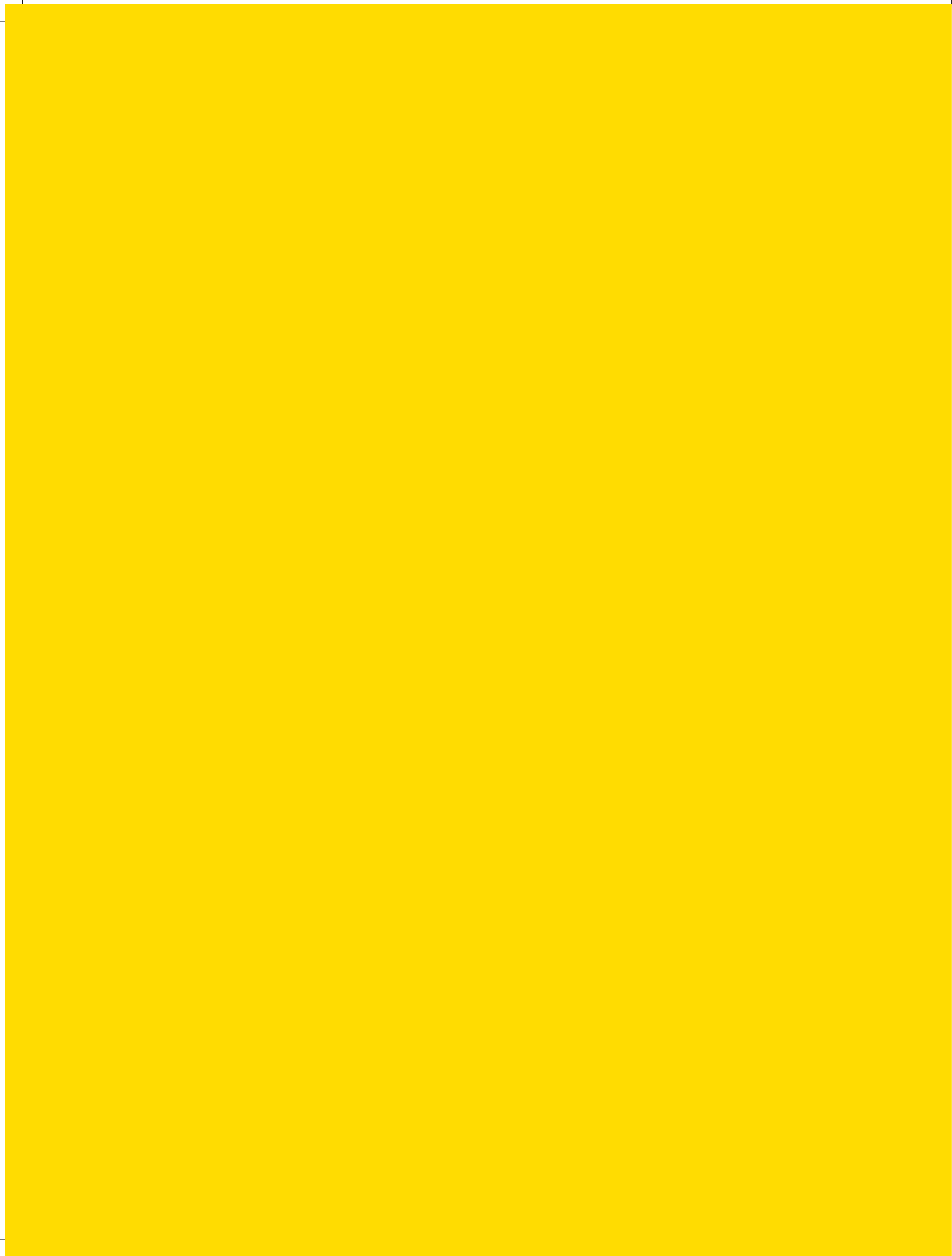
Maurizio Cattelan
Untitled

VOORLINDEN



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Maurizio Cattelan, Untitled in Museum Voorlinden (2016)

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Introduction

Ding! Something chimes softly in the distance. It's a sound you wouldn't normally expect in a museum. And there it is again: *ding!* It is then that you notice the tiny set of elevator doors at the base of the wall. The entrances to the two elevators reach only slightly higher than an adult's ankles. One of the elevators opens. For a moment, nothing happens. A few seconds later the doors close once more. The elevator cabin continues on its way to an unknown destination in Museum Voorlinden – a museum built on a single level.

A pair of elevators has been built into the wall of Museum Voorlinden at a mere 1:7.5 scale. You can see two stainless steel doors, each 30 cm high and 16.5 cm wide, that actually slide open and closed. Every part seems operational: if you push the buttons between the elevators, the red arrow lights up, as do the floor numbers B through 9 above the doors. The elevator is on its way.

When it arrives at your floor, a *ding* sounds. An attentive listener might recognise the sound of a bicycle bell. It's the first sign that perhaps some-

Maurizio Cattelan, Untitled [detail] in Museum Voorlinden (2016)

thing isn't quite right. In reality, there is no elevator mechanism at all behind the steel doors. No shafts or cables are present; the elevator cannot move. It's no more than the mere suggestion of a thing.

But what a suggestion it is! The elevator has working lighting, there are easy-to-clean rubber floor mats in place and a rail to lean against is mounted horizontally across the back wall. The miniature control panel looks just like the real thing – it is even equipped with an emergency intercom. Attention has truly been paid to every detail: a warning about the elevator's maximum capacity, a no-smoking sign and the text *'Elevator inspection certificate on file in building office'* are in place, just as they should be.

The mini-elevators are identical to the ones we come across every day – except on a much smaller scale. There is a playful tension between replication and reduction at work here, which offers the viewer space to observe reality through a fresh pair of eyes. The moment of recognition is followed closely by a discomforting sensation of alienation. It is that particular instant that interests the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan (1960) the most.

Maurizio Cattelan, Untitled [detail] in Museum Voorlinden (2016)

CHAPTER 1.

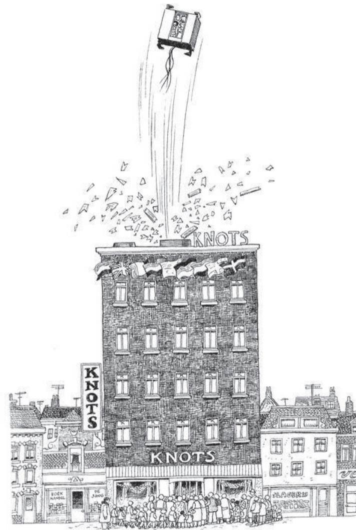
The elevator as a non-place

Each of us has congregated in front of the doors of an elevator at one time or another. We impatiently press our way into the cabin and then proceed to count down until the doors reopen. We are waiting for the moment we are released from the discomfort of sharing such a confined space with total strangers. In the midst of one moment, we are already concerned with the next. We are not there yet.

In that sense, an elevator is comparable to an airport or train platform. They are places in between here and there, where all manner of people and things move past one another on their way from A to B. They are the transitional spaces where one is obliged to wait for passage to a subsequent destination. These places are not destinations in and of themselves, only temporary, unavoidable harbours along the voyage.

The French anthropologist Marc Augé (1935) classified these spaces as *non-places*. He asserted that a place is usually defined through the social cohesion and historical values of the local culture. When a place lacks specific individual values, Augé refers to it as a non-place in metaphorical sense: a generic location with no individual identity, interchangeable with any other time and place, in which our stay is merely temporary. Today, these are the places in which we spend an increasing portion of our lives. According to Augé, the increase in the number of non-places in our environment is deeply altering our consciousness in certain ways. The non-place (or space-in-between) inhibits our ability to feel at home in a place and to establish contact with others. We are *somewhere*, but feel as though we are only loosely connected to the place, because we know we will not be staying long. Such a place will be perceived or experienced only in part: in our thoughts, we have already moved on to the next destination.

The invention of the elevator had major consequences for the course of twentieth-century architecture. The first public elevator was installed in a department store in New York in 1874. Without elevators, the urban landscape through the years would have looked drastically different. Each day, billions of people travel between the floors of office buildings,



Thé Tjong-Khing, Abeltje (1998)

department stores and apartment complexes in the cabin of an elevator. This vertical movement of human beings retains a bit of the miraculous; it speaks to one's imagination somehow. In modern fairy tales an elevator often functions as an instrument for escaping reality. Elevators figure prominently in the well-known adventures written for young people by Annie M.G. Schmidt (1911-1995) and Roald Dahl (1916-1990). Both authors penned stories—'Abeltje The Flying Lift Boy' (1953) [p. 14] and 'Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator' (1972)—in which characters travel the world in a flying elevator. An elevator plays a crucial role in the 1999 film 'Being John Malkovich' as well. In the film, protagonist Craig Schwarts takes a job with a company called Lester Corp., housed on floor seven-and-a-half of an office building. The floor can only be reached by stopping the elevator between floors 7 and 8 and forcing the doors open. Vertical transport between storeys, something we all take for granted, suddenly becomes the topic of discussion as a result of the absurdity of the situation.

ELEVATORS IN CONTEMPORARY ART

That odd little space, in which we are willingly and passively transported, seems to fascinate additional artists as well. In the elevator at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, that moment of indifference and inattention to our surroundings is interrupted by the British artist Martin Creed (1968). With his ‘Work No. 317 Elevator ooh/aah up/down’ (2004), Creed makes the viewer aware of the vertical movement through a subtle addition. A choir is heard singing a musical scale over the cabin’s intercom: the scale is either ascending or descending, depending on which direction the elevator is travelling. Creed makes gravity audible.

The Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco (1962) plays with the bodily experience of taking the elevator in another fashion. In his piece ‘Elevator’ (1994), he has lowered the ceiling of the cabin to his own height, forcing many visitors stepping into the elevator to stoop. [p. 16] One’s body feels larger when trapped in a confining space. The ceiling seemingly presses down on the visitor, emphasising the force of gravity and downwards movement at the same time. Orozco is convinced that the body retains spatial memories and that this includes a record of the feeling one sometimes has when riding in an elevator. To the artist, that moment of physical awareness is a moment of happiness as well. Stepping into his ‘Elevator’ combines a bodily experience with the memory of what it feels like to be inside an elevator. Orozco makes the viewer’s relationship to time and place both visible and tangible.

In 2011, the Argentinian artist Leandro Erlich (1973)—whose ‘Swimming Pool’ installation can be seen in Museum Voorlinden—dedicated an entire exhibition to the elevator. Some of the pieces allowed visitors to physically enter an elevator. These included ‘Elevator Maze’, for which Erlich linked six elevator cabins together in two back-to-back rows of three. Where one would normally expect a mirror to enclose the space, separating the cabins, there was now an opening allowing visitors to poke their hand or head through the ‘wall’ and into the next cabin. Erlich did, however, place mirrors at the end of the row of connected elevators, which resulted in a so-called Droste effect or *mise en abyme*: it was as if one had become

Gabriel Orozco, Elevator (1994)

trapped in an endless recursive series of elevator cabins. One might become extremely disoriented in this maze of elevators, much as one does (for that matter) when the doors of any elevator slide closed and the ascent or descent begins.

With 'Stuck Elevator' Erlich refers to how elevators can summon any number of fears. [p. 17] The artwork is a freestanding box in the space, as if the elevator has been removed from the wall intact. The doors are open, but if one looks inside, an empty shaft is visible instead of a cabin interior. At the base of the door opening, some thirty centimetres above the threshold, a sliver of the lighted cabin is visible. It is as though the elevator has gotten

Leandro Erlich, Stuck Elevator (2011)

stuck below floor level. As a visitor, one is tempted to kneel down and peer into the gap, to make sure no one is trapped inside. Erlich is masterful when it comes to creating a surreal experience by transforming an everyday setting. He makes the non-place the subject of his architectural sleight-of-hand; visitors to the museum are actors in his work. The artist is playing a psychological game: what he shows us—an apparently normal, everyday situation—doesn't quite line up with our memory of the thing, with the experience one would normally expect to have in a similar situation. Erlich uses this absurdist twist to focus the viewer's perceptions and to emphasise the peculiarly self-evident relationship we imagine ourselves to have with the world around us.

We find Cattelan's miniature elevators odd because we draw a connection between them and our expectations of what an elevator *should* be. What makes the piece such a surreal experience for the viewer is, more than anything else, how the scale is completely out of proportion to one's own body. One suddenly feels gigantic – no small feat in a museum gallery where the ceilings are over 6 metres high. The artwork—which is untitled—only truly functions at the moment of confrontation: in that sense, Cattelan's work always relies on its actors.

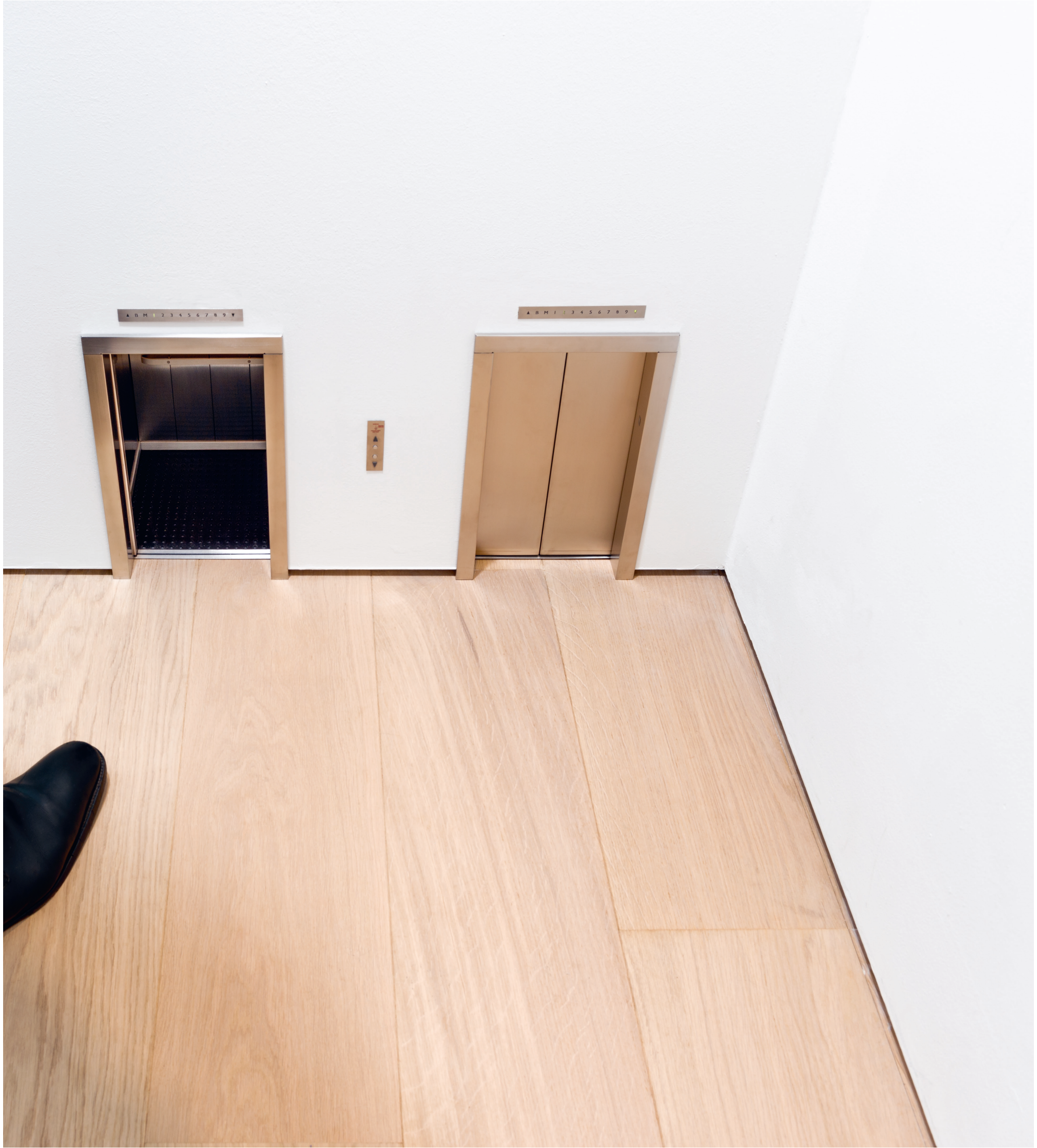
CHAPTER 2.

This is absurd

Maurizio Cattelan, Untitled in Museum Voorlinden (2016)

This work of art does not greatly benefit from sustained viewing. After all, an elevator is an elevator – no matter how small it may be. But that isn't really what Cattelan is getting at anyway. For him, the meaning of the piece resides primarily in the initial moment of contact, the confrontation with the viewer. He allows us to see or experience something for which we were completely unprepared. And because we weren't expecting it, we are caught off guard. His art forcefully confronts the viewer with the here-and-now. The works interrupt the typical routine of a visit to a museum: while strolling and perusing as usual, one is suddenly stopped short. In that momentary disorientation, however brief, space is created to view the world from another perspective. Cattelan forces the viewer to consider an experience beyond mere looking.

The French philosopher and writer Albert Camus (1913-1960) used the ancient myth of Sisyphus to illustrate the precepts of absurdism. The Greek king Sisyphus challenged the gods, but paid the price in the end: as punishment for his hubris, he was forced to roll a boulder up a mountain until the end of time. Each time he neared the top, the stone would roll back down the



Maurizio Cattelan, Untitled in Museum Voorlinden (2016)

mountainside and Sisyphus would have to begin again. For Camus, this myth symbolised the pointlessness associated with the repetitive nature of human existence in our modern, industrialised society. In theory, Camus posited, there is nothing wrong with a certain day-to-day rhythm and the repetitiousness that accompanies it. What interested him, rather, was the moment when an individual becomes aware of this repetition. At that moment, according to Camus, one begins to question the point of one's actions. In other words: while carrying out some sort of everyday activity, one is suddenly confronted with existential questions about one's very existence.

Absurdism draws attention to the issue of how reality presents itself. By deviating the tiniest bit from what is considered 'normal', an absurd situation can expose something that initially escaped notice. That which seems absurd causes one to doubt one's own reality. It is like being expectedly doused with cold water: startled, one snaps to attention and feels the sense of normalcy waver. Maurizio Cattelan finds this phenomenon deeply fascinating.

MAURIZIO CATTELAN

Cattelan grew up in Padua, Italy, in a typical working-class family: his father was a truck driver and his mother cleaned houses. From an early age, he looked for ways to escape his humble beginnings and after a number of unsuccessful jobs, he began working as an industrial designer in the late 1980s. Cattelan soon realised, however, that he lacked the patience and discipline necessary for that field. What's more, his ideas were often difficult to realise from a commercial standpoint – although a table he designed, 'Cerberino' (1989), consisting of a figure with three arms and legs supporting a glass top, remains in production to this day.

In the end Cattelan chose the life of an artist, despite never having attended art school. His first pieces, created in the late 1980s, were formed at the intersection where art meets design. The decision to become an artist came about after a remarkable experience in an Italian gallery where Cattelan, who was in his twenties at the time, saw the mirror paintings of Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto (1933). These works cast reflections of the viewer and

the exhibition space around them, making the viewer part of the art. The idea that a work of art could achieve such a direct connection to both the viewer and the immediate surroundings made a deep impression on Cattelan. At the recommendation of Pistoletto's gallerist, Cattelan began to read art history guides. Seeing all those images of modern and contemporary art in reproduction, he became convinced of the impact images can have, and of the primacy of visual representation over text.

Beginning in the early 1990s, Cattelan quickly established a name for himself with spectacular, often provocative tweaks on the expected, executed in all kinds of media. He does not, however, view his own work as provocative. In his opinion, when a thing is considered provocative or inflammatory, that judgement has less to do with the artist than with the world in which we live. Rather than asking "what is the artist trying to tell us?", Cattelan's work is intended to prompt the question: "what does this work of art say to me?" For him, the encounter between artwork and viewer is the most important factor. And although that encounter most definitely entails a kind of ambush—his work often takes one aback—the experience does not end immediately afterwards. In fact, Cattelan's art lives on in one's consciousness for rather a long time. By combining images from popular culture with a hefty dose of satire, he creates visuals that take time to consider. This strategy ensures that his images stay with one for a long time as well, engraved in memory. After seeing one of the pieces, it remains scorched into the viewer's retinas for quite some time, while the memory of one's response to the work becomes a long-term memory. Nancy Spector (1966), head curator at the Brooklyn Museum in New York, describes the effect thusly: *"Cattelan deliberately obscures where the art begins or ends, allowing elements of the everyday to infiltrate the otherwise rarefied realm of the exhibition space, requiring a more dynamic engagement from the viewer than mere contemplation."* [1]

CHAPTER 3.

The world under a magnifying glass

John Tenniel, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865)

By manipulating scale as he does, Cattelan stimulates the mind of the viewer. Yet his work elicits a bodily experience as well. At first, it feels as though one is looking down on the situation far below from a bird's eye view, even though one is standing quite nearby. The glimmer of light escaping from the elevator beckons one to approach. Before one can stop to think, one is kneeling on the floor and bending forward to peer into the miniature elevators. For a moment, it is like being Alice in Wonderland, the famous heroine of Lewis Carroll's (1832–1898) fantasy story, who grows and shrinks by drinking magic potions. [p. 25] The mini-elevator is reminiscent of the moment in the story where Alice, after fleeing through a rabbit hole, ends up in a long hall with countless doors on either side. She tries the doors, only to find them all locked. Until, that is, she draws back a curtain and discovers a small door, only forty centimetres high (as coincidence would have it, about the same height as Cattelan's elevator). When this door *does* open, she kneels and looks through – and discovers, on the other side, the most beautiful garden she has ever seen. Alice is unable to enter the garden because she is much too large to fit through the door, just as we are much too large for the elevator. Even though the doors appear to conceal a

completely normal elevator cabin, one cannot help but be intrigued by the idea of a vertical journey through the museum.

In describing a visit to Cattelan's New York flat, a writer once mentioned seeing only a single book in the artist's home: Roald Dahl's 'James and the Giant Peach' (1961). Whether by coincidence or design, Cattelan's work clearly references works of fiction, and fairy tales for children in particular. Fairy tales and bedtime stories are about imaginary adventures and fantasies; they often feature a surprising turn of events. And more than that – they are the product of invention. In the storybook world, the boundaries of possibility are expanded, creating a new and different perspective on reality. Which is exactly what one can observe in Cattelan's work.

The mini-elevators in Museum Voorlinden not only recall Lewis Carroll's 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' (1865), they also bring to mind the book 'Gulliver's Travels' (1726) by Jonathan Swift (1667-1745). In the first of the four parts of *Travels*, the shipwrecked protagonist washes ashore on the island of Lilliput. There, in a land where everything is 1/12th the size of the human world, he is taken captive by the inhabitants. These Lilliputians are a mere fifteen centimetres tall, warlike and fractious. For this reason, the book is considered a satire of British and European society at the time: it is fiction as both metaphor and medium for parody of daily life. This same mechanism is strongly present in Cattelan's art as well.

Cattelan himself refers frequently to the tales of the Brothers Grimm. 'Love saves life' (1995) and 'Love lasts forever' (1997) contain direct references to the fairy tale recorded by the Brothers Grimm called 'The Town Musicians of Bremen', in which a donkey, a dog, a cat and a rooster decide to become musicians after they have outlived their usefulness to their owners. In the fairy tale, the animals climb atop one another to make their music, and in the course of their adventures they frighten away a band of robbers. In other words: working together makes you stronger. It is not clear, however, whether the moralistic character fairy tales tend to have holds any meaning for Cattelan himself.

Maurizio Cattelan, BIDIBIDOBIDIBOO (1996)

Maurizio Cattelan, Untitled (1997)

MINIATURISATION

Cattelan's work often utilises a reduction in scale and the creation of miniature worlds. 'BIDIBIDOBIDIBOO' (1996), for example, is an installation consisting of a miniature kitchen with a stuffed—as in taxidermy—squirrel sitting in a chair at the small kitchen table. [p. 27] A tiny hot water boiler hangs on the wall and itsy-bitsy dirty dishes fill the sink. The simply furnished kitchen is based on those found in typical Italian working-class homes: an interior with which Cattelan is intimately familiar, as he grew up in such a home. While at first glance the tableau seems mainly surrealist in nature, on closer inspection it proves rather morbid. This is due to the gun laying on the kitchen floor: the squirrel, it seems, has taken his own life. In order to get a proper look, it is once again necessary to bend over, as the diminutive 'BIDIBIDOBIDIBOO' is displayed on the floor of the gallery.

Stuffed animals, preserved through taxidermy, appear often in Cattelan's art. He made a series of miniature sculptures featuring small creatures, mostly mice, arranged in human settings. In the piece 'untitled' (1997), for example, a mouse lounges on a tiny inflatable mattress, while in another work, two mice relax in beach chairs under a parasol. [p. 28] The effect is cute but a little icky at the same time – one doesn't know quite what to think. Cattelan likes to assign human characteristics to animals, creating worlds in which they seem to live like humans and experience the same desires and problems as the rest of us. The way in which he combines a make-

believe world with that of real life is familiar: it's the same as in fairy tales, a clear source of inspiration for Cattelan. The phrase 'BIDIBIDOBIDIBOO', for example, is a magic spell taken from Walt Disney's 'Cinderella' (1950), a fairy tale also included in the collection of the Brothers Grimm. Only this time, the magic words have no effect. Through the use of taxidermy as a medium, the theme of death becomes self-evident. Do not be fooled by the miniature format of these works: they are anything but adorable or playful. Cattelan holds a mirror to the real world and the sobering reality for our benefit.

With the work 'Him' (2001), Cattelan forces the viewer to come closer and bend over in order to see the artwork. [p. 31] One approaches the piece in the gallery from behind. Nearing the piece, you see from behind the kneeling figure of a young man, dressed neatly in a suit. Anxious to get a better look and find out more, you creep closer and begin to circle the figure. The small person is kneeling devoutly with his hands folded across his body, fingers interlaced. He appears to be praying. But then you discover that the 'boy' has the face of a grown man: a terribly familiar face, in fact. You are sharing the space with none other than Adolf Hitler. Any feelings you may have had a moment ago—tenderness or compassion for the kneeling boy—turn to alarm in a fraction of a second, followed by abhorrence and disgust. Once you see his face, virtually the face of evil, all your earlier

"I really liked the idea of seeing the piece while bending or kneeling on the floor. It added a kind of spirituality to the piece. You had to look at it as if you were praying." [2]

— MAURIZIO CATTELAN

thoughts give way to bewilderment. What to make of this mini-Hitler? Is he begging for forgiveness? However diminutive the piece may be, 'Him' turns out to be anything but endearing. By reducing the scale of the figure to that of a child, Cattelan toys with the expectations of the viewer. Once you see who it is kneeling before you, all previous impressions are transformed. The mayor of Milan prohibited this piece from being used as the image on a flyer advertising an exhibition of Cattelan's work in the city. This is remarkable since Hitler's likeness frequently appears in films and documentaries without arousing the slightest controversy. Cattelan intends to promote space for discussion and dialogue with his puzzling imagery.

The fascination with miniaturisation and tiny scale models is a timeless one. Throughout history, starting in antiquity, everyday objects have been reproduced in miniature. This was often done for religious purposes. The small size was motivated in part by practical considerations: tiny idols were easier to take along on one's travels. Later on, in the early modern era (roughly 1500 to 1700 AD), cabinets of curiosities were popular across Europe. Well-to-do citizens and scientists collected the world in miniature, filling entire rooms' worth of cupboards and drawers with specimens as a kind of microcosm. In the seventeenth century, dollhouses became incredibly popular – not as a children's plaything, but as an amusing diversion for adult women. A dollhouse was a symbol of wealth and good taste, as well as a way for women to exert control in a time when they were typically denied authority. The world, when viewed under a magnifying glass, offers greater oversight and is easier to observe. It encourages a sense of wonder and incites the imagination.

Maurizio Cattelan, Him (2001)

CHAPTER 4.

“A bad joke taken too seriously”

Maurizio Cattelan, Kaputt in Fondation Beyeler, Riehen (2013)

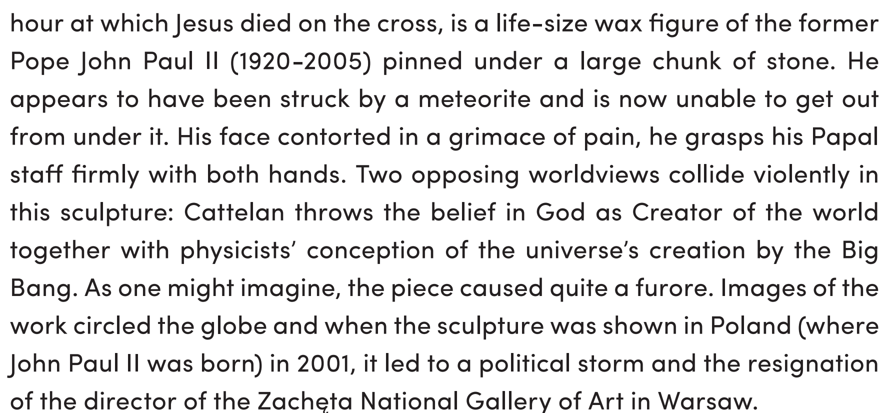
Cattelan is a highly versatile artist: in addition to his sculptures and installations, he is also well-known for his interventions, performances and invisible art (more on that in a moment). It is remarkable that his work loses very little of its impact when reproduced, whether in catalogues or on the internet. This is because Cattelan typically starts the creation of each work of art with a fully-formed image: an image he has seen somewhere else, which remains vivid in his memory.

'Novecento' (1997), a horse suspended from the ceiling in a sling, is an example of that kind of visual recreation. The work originated with a book of photographs Cattelan saw in a shop window in New York. The book's cover showed a horse being hoisted into the air in exactly the same way as one now sees in the artwork. The image stuck with the artist; when something remains in his memory long enough, he incorporates it into his work: *"I get struck by an image. It's something that hits my imagination and then the day after it's still in my imagination. It is keeping my imagination hooked. In the end, I can't reduce this image or forget it. So I start working."* [3]

Maurizio Cattelan, La Nona Ora (1999)

‘Novecento’ also marks the introduction of horses into Cattelan’s oeuvre. The horse and rider is a classic theme of sculptural art: mounted figures of important men (and every now and then, a woman) can be found in nearly every city in Europe. Cattelan tweaks this convention with his sculptures of horses with their heads ‘stuck’ high up in the wall, their bodies dangling downwards. [p. 33] It is as if they have galloped headfirst into the wall, or gotten stuck halfway through a steeplechase jump. These images stand in stark contrast to classical sculptures of horse and rider; there is no triumphant victor here, only hunting trophies mounted inversely on the wall. [4]

Another example where the viewer feels that ‘something is really wrong here’ is ‘La Nona Ora’ (1999), one of Cattelan’s best-known—and most notorious—sculptures. [p. 34] ‘La Nona Ora’, the title of which refers to the



hour at which Jesus died on the cross, is a life-size wax figure of the former Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) pinned under a large chunk of stone. He appears to have been struck by a meteorite and is now unable to get out from under it. His face contorted in a grimace of pain, he grasps his Papal staff firmly with both hands. Two opposing worldviews collide violently in this sculpture: Cattelan throws the belief in God as Creator of the world together with physicists' conception of the universe's creation by the Big Bang. As one might imagine, the piece caused quite a furore. Images of the work circled the globe and when the sculpture was shown in Poland (where John Paul II was born) in 2001, it led to a political storm and the resignation of the director of the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw.

Cattelan has always denied that 'La Nona Ora' is intended to be iconoclastic. He claims that his only intent was to demonstrate the limited viability of power: *"The pope is more a way of reminding us that power, whatever power, has an expiration date, just like milk."* Attempting to put the fuss in perspective, Cattelan once called the episode *"a bad joke taken too seriously, an exercise in absurdity [...] In the end it is only a piece of wax."* [5] Cattelan denies any suggestion of a substantive or socially-conscious message behind the work. Still, the controversy surrounding the piece confirms his theory that an image or picture can have a very real impact: *"I never purposely decide to create a scandal, to provoke... Images sometimes manage to anticipate the future, and maybe that's what scandalizes the public – not to recognize themselves in what they see."* [6]

"If you think my work is provocative, it means that reality is extremely provocative, and we just don't react to it." [7]

— MAURIZIO CATTELAN

TOILET PAPER

Today Cattelan's images can be found in paper form as well. In 2010, he joined with fashion photographer Pierpaolo Ferrari (1971) to found Toilet Paper, a semi-annual magazine dedicated entirely to visual communication, without any text at all. [p. 36] Cattelan and Ferrari fill the magazine's pages with strikingly unusual creative imagery and bizarre visual narratives, for which they often rely on possibilities only Photoshop can provide. They create new work specifically for each new issue. The magazine, which is sold at newsstands like any other, offers a compilation of eye-catching photos featuring seemingly everyday situations and odd fantasies, cut up and rearranged at will. For example: a photo of a canary being held in a person's left hand, watching as its wing is clipped by the right hand. Or a black-and-white photo of a woman peering at an eyeball held in a man's mouth from mere millimetres away. Or an image of a woman lying on her stomach, silhouetted against a turquoise background, cropped so that we see only her lacy red panties and the dozen yellow clothes pegs pinching into her body. While the pictures are often sexually suggestive, and sometimes just plain repulsive; their primary characteristic is wit. Cattelan and Ferrari made a conscious decision not to market the images from Toilet Paper as individual prints – in other words, as limited-edition works of art.

As pages in a magazine, the photographs are part of a larger culture of disposable consumerism, which suits the creators just fine. *"Everybody needs Toilet Paper"*, according to Cattelan. The project demonstrates Cattelan's conviction that the world of advertising and design has just as much right to exist as that of contemporary art: the two are equal. Images from *Toilet Paper* are, however, available for purchase on merchandise such as tablecloths, mugs and mirrors, all produced by Cattelan and Ferrari in cooperation with the Italian design studio Siletti.

Cattelan's obvious preference for imagery in no way means he is indifferent to language. On the contrary – the artist is fascinated by the way in which a work of art can be used to express a word or sentence. To wit: Cattelan once made a larger replica of the iconic Hollywood sign—the word HOLLYWOOD in letters 15 metres tall—and placed it on a trash heap outside of Palermo, on the island of Sicily. By doing so, he toyed with various associations connected to the name 'Hollywood' (2001): he relocated a landmark feature of a place where fantasies are churned out relentlessly to a place where, even today, outlandish notions about the maffia are projected onto the city.

Cattelan also frequently uses titles in a conscious way. To him, they add an extra layer to a work of art – a layer one can use to communicate meaning. Significant titles are 'Love saves life' (1995) or 'La Nona Ora' (1999): it was in his ninth hour on the cross that Jesus died. The way in which title and artwork interact, how they each colour the viewer's experience of the other, is itself part of the experience. When saying the name 'Him', for example, one cannot help but use a different, colder tone of voice *after* having seen the work than one did before. It is also worth noting that for Cattelan, the name doesn't always follow upon completion of the work. Sometimes it is even the starting point: the title is then a kind of easel on which he develops the concept and allows the artwork to take shape. [8] At the same time, Cattelan makes a game of the importance often attached to titles. He has regularly asked curator Francesco Bonami (1955) to think up titles for his works of art. [9] And he sometimes feels that a title is simply unnecessary, as is the case with the untitled elevators in Museum Voorlinden.

CHAPTER 5.

“I am not an artist”

"I am not an artist. I really don't consider myself as an artist. I make art but it's a job", Cattelan says. [10] He is prepared to admit that he makes art, that much is true. But the precisely nature of what he does cannot be captured in a single word. This make Cattelan an illusive property in the art world – sometimes even in the literal sense. He is notorious for his disappearing acts, which may take on a number of forms. In 1991, for example, he filed a police report claiming a non-existent artwork had been stolen. The reason for this was he had been unable to produce a new work in time for a group exhibition in Milan. As a way of still keeping his word, Cattelan submitted the police report to the exhibition instead.

A year later, for a solo exhibition in Castello di Rivara in Torino, he tied white bedsheets together to make a rope and hung it out one of the institution's windows. That rope, entitled 'Una Domenica a Rivara' [A Sunday in Rivara] (1992), was the only piece on display in the entire exhibition. Cattelan had left all the gallery spaces empty, and was himself nowhere to be found. Outside the window dangled the knotted rope of bedsheets as a clue to his escape.

Another instance, every bit as interesting as the last, was the 1999 6th Caribbean Biennial organised by Cattelan as a kind of artwork in itself. The event was a reaction to the glut of art biennials that now take place all over the globe, and which in Cattelan's opinion, not infrequently 'use' artists in order to promote the local tourist trade. He therefore took a radically different approach when planning his own biennial. He invited ten prominent artists, all of whom were frequently selected for similar events, including Olafur Eliasson (1967), Douglas Gordon (1966), Elizabeth Peyton

(1965) and Pipilotti Rist (1962). But this time, they did not need to submit any pieces. Instead, Cattelan invited them to join him on a week-long holiday in the Caribbean. The artists' presence was itself the work of art, like a performance art piece or happening without an audience.

These examples illustrate the ambivalent nature of Cattelan's relationship with the art world. He is rebelling against an industry in which each new work of art must be better and more brilliantly imagined than the last. At the same time, the art world offers him a podium for his ideas. In the way he toys with this relationship, Cattelan clearly demonstrates his keen awareness of the mechanics of power within the art establishment. Once an object has been displayed by a gallery or museum, it immediately increases in value (including economic value) and status. In fact, museums still very much dictate what is and is not art.

THEATRE

Museums are themselves also a kind of theatre. Both fine-art institutions rely on their audience to suspend disbelief and surrender to the present moment. This willingness is essential to the 'Cattelan effect'. What would happen, after all, if a piece like Him or the tiny elevator were to be displayed in public? Cattelan often stage-directs the places where his sculptures are to be exhibited; for example, he ensures maximum drama in the moment of confrontation between art and viewer by leaving the rest of the gallery empty. The emptiness and silence create a certain level of suspense.

But this does not mean that Cattelan's work functions only within the context of a museum or gallery. He has also created various pieces for outdoor display, on public streets, in which he responds to the codes of conduct in effect in public spaces. He used old canvases and clothing to make sculptures resembling homeless people, entitled 'Andreas e Mattia' (1996) and 'Kenneth' (1998), except the figures had no faces – their heads were made of rags. Still, several witnesses contacted authorities when these 'transients' remained in exactly the same position for over 24 hours. Instead of approaching the figures and asking if they needed help,

members of the public sought help from the police. Through these public sculptures, Cattelan exposed certain social conventions that apparently regard homeless people as discomforting creatures, best to be avoided.

Above all, it remains unclear who Cattelan really is and what his true thoughts or intentions are with regard to his art. A sense of the masquerade surrounds his work. The secrecy around the artist as a person is strengthened by the fact that he regularly uses doubles to represent himself. For example, between 1998 and 2006, Cattelan frequently sent curator Massimiliano Gioni (1973) to act as his stand-in and give interviews in his stead. [11] When Gioni and Cattelan met for the first time, Cattelan answered the curator's questions using quotes from other people. That Cattelan the individual remains an enigma after so many years proves his willingness to make sport of authorship. Moreover, he is unconcerned with what a given artist might say about his or her own work; rather, it's all about the question: what does the artwork itself say? What response does the image elicit from the viewer?

DUCHAMP, MANZONI, BEUYS

Despite how it may seem, Cattelan is well aware of his own position relative to artistic tradition; he regularly refers to influential predecessors in his work. He is likewise more than happy to carry on the tradition of 'ready-mades' begun by Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). Much as Duchamp once exhibited a urinal with the title 'Fountain' (1917) [p. 42], Cattelan more recently hung stuffed horses in a museum, and posed a dead mouse in a beach chair. [p. 28] He has also made a habit of removing things (in this case animals) from their usual context and displaying them in a museum setting. Cattelan clearly applies the same strategy as Duchamp, in which the artist no longer functions as *maker* of a piece, but as inventor of an idea.

He sometimes also refers quite literally to the work of other artists, such as in 2009 when he hung a white canvas on the wall and leaned a broom against it, so that the broomstick pushed the canvas upward in a wrinkled, inverted 'V'. This was a direct allusion to the 'Achromes' series by the Italian

Marcel Duchamp, Fountain (1917)

artist Piero Manzoni (1933-1963). Manzoni's series consists of a number of white (colourless) paintings made using simple everyday materials such as cotton, plaster, cotton and even bread. Cattelan restricts the interference from the artist even more radically by merely leaning a broom against a white canvas, and nothing more.

Manzoni is mainly known for his 'Merda d'Artista', tin cans filled with thirty grams of the artist's feces, which he then sold for the price of an equivalent weight in 18-karat gold. In doing so, Manzoni probed the relationship between artist and work of art, as well as between a work's aesthetic and commercial value. Cattelan had this to say about the piece: *"Merda was an upgrade of Duchamp's urinal, a kind of Fountain 2.0."* [12] When Cattelan is asked for his autograph, he often signs the name 'Manzoni'. It is a wink and a nod to Manzoni, who autographed the bodies of everyday people and then displayed them as art; he signed several fellow artists in this way as well, Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976) among them.

In 2001, in an empty gallery in a museum in Zurich, Cattelan installed a card bearing the title 'La rivoluzione siamo noi' [We are the revolution], a title appropriated from a piece by German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986). [p. 43] After visitors had descended along a staircase, they discovered a realistic sculpture of Cattelan, slightly smaller than life-size, hanging by the collar of his grey felt suit (a Beuys trademark) on a coat rack. Beuys, renowned for his statement that *"Everyone is an artist"*, was convinced that human creativity was a means to affect radical social change. With 'La rivoluzione siamo noi', Cattelan—who, like Beuys, believes in the activating power of art and occasionally blurs the line between art and life—once again pays homage to one of his important predecessors.

COMEBACK

Aficionados and critics alike were surprised and perplexed when the then-51-year-old Cattelan announced his retirement from the art world in 2011. He picked the right time to go out on top: the opening of 'All', a retrospective of his work in New York's Guggenheim museum. [p. 45] As swan songs go, it was spectacular. Every sculpture produced by the artist since 1989 hung suspended as if in a giant mobile under the circular skylight of the Guggenheim. Cattelan said his decision to stop working was a result of artistic exhaustion and being fed up with the money-driven world of contemporary art. An artist who leaves the profession of his or her own free will is a rare occurrence, although Cattelan was certainly not the first to quit being an artist. Duchamp, Andy Warhol (1928) and Hans-Peter Feldmann (1941), among others, had also retired from art – although these men all later changed their minds.

Cattelan's departure proved equally temporary because, as he put it, *"actually, it's even more of a torture not to work than to work."* [13] The artist suddenly reappeared in the spotlight in April 2016, and just as before, he immediately made international headlines. It was revealed that Cattelan had designed a solid gold toilet bowl for the Guggenheim in New York, with the title of 'America'. At his request the priceless work of art will soon be available for viewing in the museum's public toilets; in fact, it will be installed as an actual toilet for visitors' use.

'All' retrospective in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2011-2012)

The piece obviously conjures associations with Manzoni's tinned excrement and—to an even greater extent—Duchamp's 'Fountain': should this work be viewed as 'Urinoir 3.0'? Or has Cattelan simply designed the perfect spot to sit and read his magazine Toilet Paper? What is the artist getting at? No one knows how much the work sold for: perhaps it should be viewed as a critique of the astronomical sums often paid for contemporary works of art? At the same time, the title 'America' grabs attention. Viewers shouldn't expect any answers from Cattelan himself: *"It's not my job to tell what a work means. But I think people might see meaning in the piece."* [14]

Cattelan keeps us on our toes with his disruptive, subversive work and his vision of art and what it means to be an artist. He continuously seeks out confrontation and uses his work to establish direct contact with the viewer. One thing is clear: Cattelan is back. What the consequences of this will be, only time will tell.

A glimpse behind the work

The piece 'Untitled' was made as part of an edition of ten, including two artist's proofs. When a work of art is created in an edition, the artist—in addition to the limited, numbered series—will frequently make one or two examples for him or herself as well. The expectation is that the artist will never offer these proofs for sale. There are ten of these miniature elevators scattered around the world, including in the LACMA in Los Angeles. The owner of the elevators can decide for themselves on which floor the elevator will 'arrive' at its destination and the doors will open. In Museum Voorlinden, the doors open on the ground floor, although the lights above the doors move from B through 9 and back. It is possible to change the settings so the light of one's choice will come on when the doors open.

Maurizio Cattelan, Untitled [detail] in Museum Voorlinden (2016)

▲ B M 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 ▼

Biography

Maurizio Cattelan was born on 21 September 1980 in Padua, Italy.

Cattelan did not attend any formal art academy and is a self-taught artist. He started his career in the 1980s making wooden furniture in the Italian town Forlì. When he made a catalogue of his work and sent that to various galleries. This gave him an opening into the world of design and contemporary art.

Cattelan's work often unites humor and the macabre. In his installations were configured in absurdist narrativesas well as disarmingly familiar scenarios.

Cattelan announced his retirement from the art world in 2011 with the restrospective 'All' in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. However, unpredictable as he is, the artist suddenly reappeared in the spotlight in April 2016.

Cattelan lives and works in Milan, Italy and New York, United States.

Maurizio Cattelan

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NOTES

[1] Spector, 2011, p. 86.

[2] Spector, 2011, p. 99.

[3] Bonami et.al., 2003, p. 22.

[4] Spector, 2011, p. 237.

[5] http://codylee.co/2014/06/maurizio-cattelan-la-nona-ora/

[6] Spector, 2011, p. 83.

[7] Bonami et.al., 2003, p. 50.

[8] Thornton, 2014, p. 187

[9] Bonami et.al., 2003, p. 9.

[10] Thornton, 2014, p. 235.

[11] Thornton, 2014, p. 152.

[12] Kennedy, R. A Golden Throne for the Guggenheim. In: The New York Times, April 20, 2016, p. C1.

[13] idem.

IMAGE CREDITS

cover, p. 2-3, p. 6-7, p. 8, p. 11, 19, 20-21, 47:
Maurizio Cattelan, Untitled (2001)
stainless steel, wood, electric motor, light, bell and computers
60.0 x 85.5 x 47.0 cm
© Maurizio Cattelan
Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar
photography: Antoine van Kaam

p. 14:
Thé Tjong-Khing, Illustration from the book Abeltje (1998)
in: Annie M. G. Schmidt. Abeltje en de A van Abeltje. Amsterdam: Em. Querido's Uitgeverij B.V, 2002 [orig. 1998].

p. 16:
Gabriel Orozco, Elevator (1994)
modified elevator cabin
243.8 x 243.8 x 152.4 cm
© Gabriel Orozco
Museum of Modern Art, New York
[The Dakis Joannou Collection]

p. 17:
Leandro Erlich, Stuck Elevator (2011)
mixed media, metal structure, wood, stainless steel, mirrors, button panel, airbrush painting
278.1 x 173.4 x 168.9 cm
© Leandro Erlich Studio
courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York

p. 25:
John Tenniel, illustrations from the book Alice's adventures in Wonderland (1865)
in: Lewis Carroll. Alice's adventures in Wonderland. London: Alexander Macmillan, 1865, p. 5, p. 8

p. 27:
Maurizio Cattelan, BIDIBIDOBIDIBOO (1996)
taxidermized squirrel, ceramic, Formica, wood, paint and steel
45.0 x 60.0 x 48.0 cm
© Maurizio Cattelan
Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy
courtesy: Maurizio Cattelan's Archive and Galerie Perrotin
photography: Zeno Zotti

p. 28:
Maurizio Cattelan, Untitled (1997)
3 taxidermized mice, wood, plastic, fabric toy deckchair and umbrella
15.0 x 25.0 x 25.0 cm
© Maurizio Cattelan
courtesy: Maurizio Cattelan's Archive and Galerie Perrotin

p. 31:
Maurizio Cattelan, Him (2001)
wax, human hair, suit, and polyester resin
101.0 x 41.0 x 53.0 cm
© Maurizio Cattelan
courtesy: Maurizio Cattelan's Archive and Galerie Perrotin
photography: Attilio Maranzano

p. 33:
Maurizio Cattelan, Kaputt (2013)
3 editions + 2 AP of Untitled (2007)
taxidermized horses
variable dimensions
© Maurizio Cattelan
exhibition view: Kaputt, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen, Switserland, 8 June - 6 October 2013
courtesy: Maurizio Cattelan's Archive and Galerie Perrotin
photography: Zeno Zotti

p. 34:
Maurizio Cattelan, La Nona Ora (1999)
polyester resin, painted wax, human hair, fabric, clothing, accessories, stone and carpet
variable dimensions
© Maurizio Cattelan
exhibition view: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes, France, 2014
courtesy: Maurizio Cattelan's Archive and Galerie Perrotin
photography: Zeno Zotti

p. 36:
2 covers of Toilet Paper Magazine
© Maurizio Cattelan

p. 42:
Marcel Duchamp, Fountain (1917, replica 1964)
porcelain
38.1 x 48.9 x 62.55 cm
© Succession Marcel Duchamp/ ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London (2016)
Tate, London
courtesy: Tate, London

p. 43:
Maurizio Cattelan, La rivoluzione siamo noi (2000)
polyester resin, wax, pigment, felt suit and metal coat rack
figure: 123.8 cm x 35.6 cm x 43.2 cm
coat rack: 189.9 cm x 47.0 cm x 52.1 cm
© Maurizio Cattelan
installation view at Migros Museum, Zurich, Switzerland, 17 June 2000 – 13 August 2000
courtesy: Maurizio Cattelan's Archive and Galerie Perrotin
photography: Attilio Maranzano

p. 45:
Maurizio Cattelan, ALL (2011)
installation view: Maurizio Cattelan, ALL, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 4 November 2011 – 22 January 2012
© Maurizio Cattelan
courtesy: Maurizio Cattelan's Archive and Galerie Perrotin

p. 49:
Portrait of Maurizio Cattelan
© Maurizio Cattelan

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