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33 JEAN-YVES JOUANNAIS Encyclopédie des guerres

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« Éric Mangion: Before launching this work on *The Encyclopaedia of Wars* you were an art critic, exhibition curator and writer. You abandoned at least the first two «roles» to devote yourself, when you were forty years old, to this new project. Moreover, you talk about it as the project of the «rest of your life».

How do you work on an everyday basis to successfully carry out this research in time? How does one put together an encyclopaedia?

Jean-Yves Jouannais: I don't really know how this occupation imposed itself in my life, especially how it took on such scope, to the point of absorbing everything. I think I've grasped that most of the stimuli, the sources are literary objects, and not models encountered in the field of art. In terms of *The Encyclopaedia of Wars*' essential elements, I'd mention the influence of *Bouvard and Pécuchet* by Gustave Flaubert, *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust and *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne – in which there is much talk about the art of fortifications and poliorcetics –, or a major book, to my mind, that you alerted me to, what's more, which is *On the Natural History of Destruction* by W.G. Sebald.

When it comes to the references to the history of art, I must mention the significance of two artists, who, although they didn't act as an impetus, did nevertheless reassure and encourage me along the way. I am referring to Marcel Broodthaers and Roman Opalka. In 1963, when he was forty years old, Broodthaers cast plaster copies of his last collection of poems and exhibited them as sculpture. I could paraphrase the sentences, which have since become famous, that could be read on the invitation to his first exhibition in Brussels in April 1964: «I've also wondered whether I couldn't sell something and succeed in life. For some time now, I've been a good for nothing. I am forty years old.»

It was in 1968 that he named himself «Curator of the Museum of Modern Art, Eagles Department.» Now, *The Encyclopaedia of Wars*, influenced as much by Broodthaers as by the passion nurtured by the Société Perpendiculaire for what was called «tertiary art,» developed according to a flow chart as Stalinian as it is Pataphysical: «Encyclopaedia of Wars, Heritage Department»; «Office for converting a non-war library into a war library»; «Missing Images Archives»; «Subcommittee of Children's Works in War Studies» (where, for the moment, the main question is to bring together my children's drawings on the theme of uniforms and weapons); «Maps and Atlas Cabinet,» and, lastly, the evolving exhibition *Comment se faire raconter les guerres par un grand-père mort* (How to Get a Dead Grandfather to Tell You War Stories), which is an entire department in its own right.

As for Roman Opalka, one day in 1965, in a café in Warsaw, while he was waiting for his wife who was late, he had the idea of materialising time with his painting. The painting as a lateness, according to the indications of Duchamp's *The Green Box*, so as to witness another lateness. I myself have always had the impression of having waited in a café. Expecting excitement, a partiality, something of a vocation, a calling. But nothing ever came. So, *The Encyclopaedia of Wars*, which is a collection, litany, serial, detailed account, proves to be an activity that, even if it doesn't answer this expectation, is on the other hand a mode of this waiting, one of its possible forms, which is today for me the most acceptable, although not the most comfortable, but the most exciting and gratifying.»

Excerpt from an interview between Éric Mangion and Jean-Yves Jouannais published on the occasion of the *Comment se faire raconter les guerres par un grand-père mort* exhibition at the Villa Arson, Nice, 2014.

OPENING

Tuesday November 6
from 6 pm

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November 7th

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December 1st

FORTHCOMING

36

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PIERRE SEINTURIER
January - February
2019

