

PRESS RELEASE
20 MAY 2022
AMSTERDAM

MARTIN MARGIELA, SELF-PORTRAITS, 2022
2 JUNE—3 JULY 2022

PROTECTION / PROJECTION

In 1929, Black Sun Press in Paris published James Joyce's *Tales Told of Shem and Shaun: Three Fragments from Work in Progress*. It is an important book because it defines literature as a fragment and process. The frontispiece precedes the publication with an informative portrait of the author by Constantin Brancusi — arguably the earliest abstract portrait of a prominent personality. Brancusi depicts Joyce as three vertical lines of varying lengths combined with a spiral on the work's right-hand side that moves inward in a clockwise direction. Only non-figurative forms are used here to represent a concrete person. Even within Brancusi's body of work, this radical representation of Joyce's portrait goes beyond the mere abstraction of the shape of a head. And yet this graphic work by Brancusi captures the character of Joyce — the lines achieve openness and finite-infinite fragmentariness while the spiral's movement implies process.

This peculiar portrait instantly came to mind when I saw the series of paintings titled 'Self-Portraits' by Martin Margiela from 2017. Its principle of representation is the avoidance of representation. Margiela covers a presumed image (of himself) within a photo frame that appears to have been taken from a contact strip. In its place is an artificial wooden surface (Formica) with a distinct grain structure, seemingly barricading the view of the supposed photograph that lies behind it. The film strip's sprocket holes remain visible on both sides, just like they do during analogue photography, for transportation inside the camera.

When looking at the contact sheets from the archives of great photographers, you will quickly notice that the selection outlining which photos will be chosen for publication is marked by the placement of small dots or, more radically, by crossing out rejected images. Either way, all pictures taken from an analogue 36-shot film strip remain visible on the contact sheet. In this sense, the way Margiela avoids the visibility of a representation is even more radical. One associates domestic, everyday protective measures with people closing the shutters on their windows in the evenings, to protect themselves from strangers' gazes. Margiela seemingly applies such a protective measure to his own depiction by transferring the motif of a glare shield and using it as a protective screen in the photo. The title conveys that this creation is a self-portrait. Were it 'Untitled', the pictorial object might be regarded as a collage or montage. From an art-historical point of view, the applied, found artificial wood immediately causes the image to appear as a trompe l'oeil, as an illusion of the eye, as a deception of the senses, as playing with reality — it becomes a painting. You have to look and scrutinise what you see to discern that it stems from a different reality. In this alternative context, the found and previously discarded material is redefined and glorified as an image. It is representation preceding a representation. A surreal pictorial principle. A portrait of itself.

The convergence of materials as diverse as celluloid and wood veneer, coupled with the title 'Self Portrait', epitomises Margiela's strategy, lived by for years, of being invisible as a person and absent as an artist. But the work is him, and he is always there in it.

This understanding is strengthened when viewing and reading the work 'Projection Screen' from 2017. It textually depicts the opening credits of a film, telling us, like so many films, that it is based on a true story but that the characters and dialogues are fictional and should not be confused with living individuals. A warning of sorts that precedes many films and, in this context, describes playing with the alter ego of a protagonist — and, I would further argue, a self-portrait of Margiela. It is the continuation of the trompe l'oeil motif achieved by other means, not only visually but drawn by hand in the linguistic expression of an inner imagination.

When I received the first email from EENWERK with the request to write a text, a wonderful typo crept in, and it should be mentioned here because of its powerful meaning. In the email, the work is referred to as 'Protection Screen', while subsequently, the respective image caption correctly states 'Projection Screen'. This significant shift in meaning due to the tiniest confusion of letters shall serve as a summary: the image (projection) is a defence (protection), and the representation serves as a protective measure so that, in the absence of the artist, one may recognise his freedom.

FRIEDRICH MESCHÉDE

Art historian and former director of Kunsthalle Bielefeld

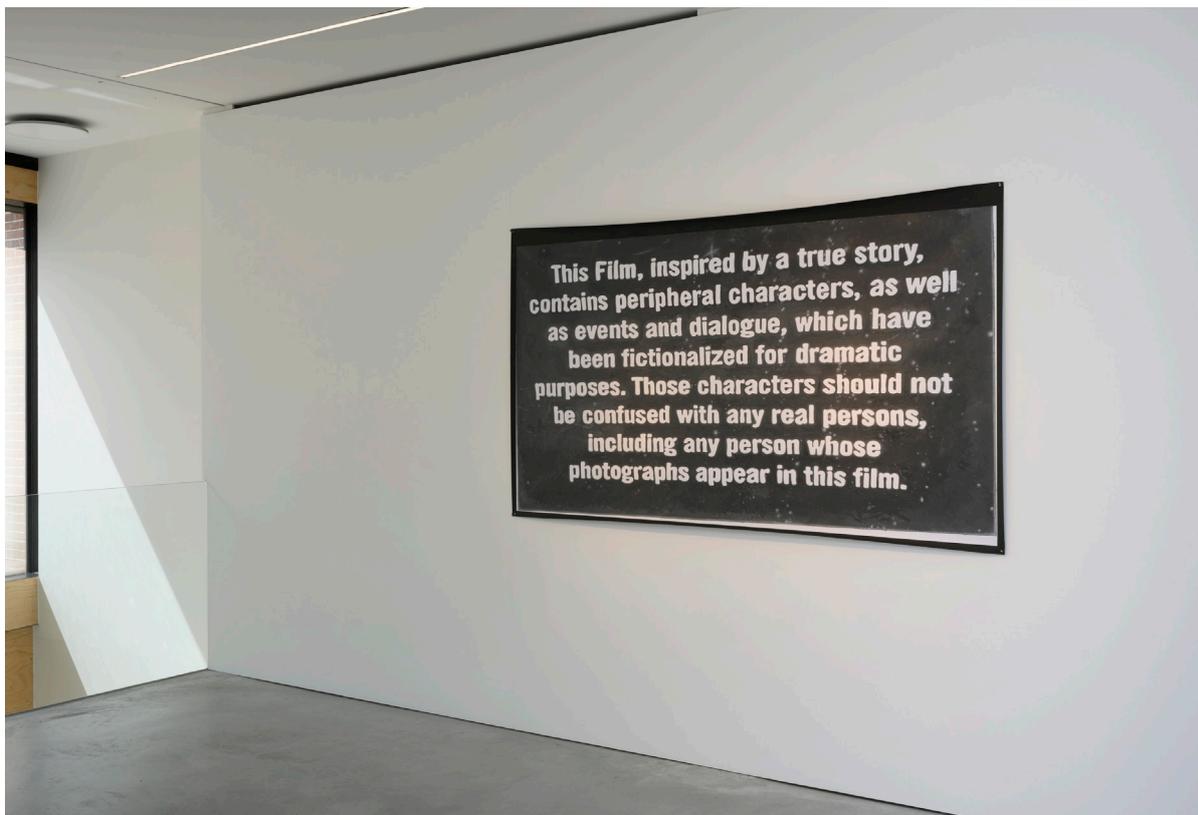
Translated from German by Katerine Niedriger

Martin Margiela was born in 1957 in Leuven, Belgium. He attended the Sint-Lukas Kunsthumaniora art school in Hasselt, Belgium, for three years, then entered the fashion department of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp in 1977–1981. After graduating, he worked in Italy and Belgium before moving to Paris, where he became Jean-Paul Gaultier's first assistant from 1984 to 1987. Maison Martin Margiela was founded in 1988 in the same city with a unique and avant-garde style, far from traditional references. Early on, Margiela forged links with the art world through exhibitions at the Thaddaeus Ropac gallery (Paris) and institutions such as BOZAR (Brussels), Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (Rotterdam), Haus der Kunst (Munich), LACMA (Los Angeles), and Somerset House (London). In 1997, while continuing to work for his own label, he was appointed as creative director for women's ready-to-wear for Hermès. He worked there for twelve seasons until 2003. In 2008, he decided to leave fashion just after the twentieth anniversary show of Maison Martin Margiela. Since then, he has devoted himself exclusively to the visual arts. His first solo exhibition, at the invitation of the Lafayette Anticipations Foundation in Paris, took place in October 2021.

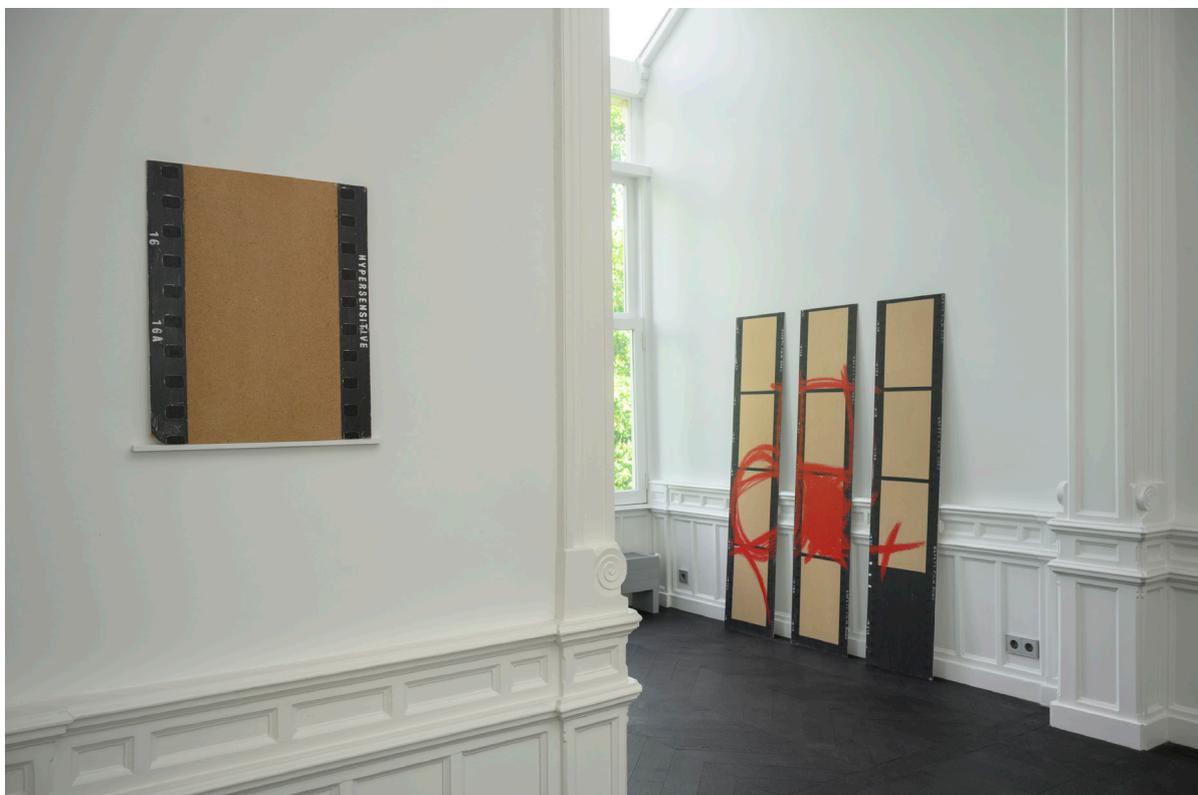
Now for the first time in the Netherlands, EENWERK presents a series of works titled 'Self-Portraits', 2017 and 'Projection Screen', 2017

FOR INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Julius Vermeulen



MARTIN MARGIELA, *PROJECTION SCREEN*, 2017



MARTIN MARGIELA, *SELF-PORTRAITS*, 2017