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Antwerp-Based Artist Joris Van de Moortel Collides Object and Sound at UNTITLED Miami Beach

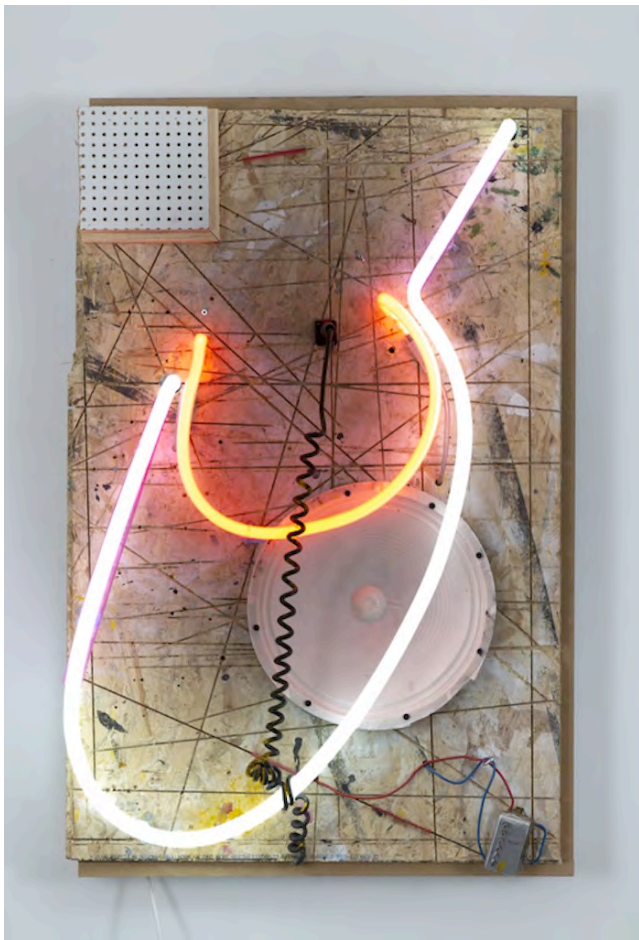


Joris Van de Moortel (pictured right) with AF Vandevorst. Photo by Boy Kortekaas.

In the work of Belgian artist Joris Van de Moortel, everything seen and heard is simultaneously a solitary object imbued with a soul of its own and also a piece of a larger sensory eco-system. Combining music rooted in *musiqué concreté* (a genre of electroacoustic music rooted in sound that has no apparent cause, or "acousmatic" music") and as well as the more melody friendly sound of thrashing psychedelic rock n'roll with installations made of mixed-media paintings, sculptures, and figurative drawings, Van de Moortel both draws attention to new meanings within the objects while creating a transcendent mode of symbiosis between them.

These performances are often driven by the free-wheeling spirit of improvisation as Van de Moortel searches for new meanings in his work every time he performs. Often, the performances culminate in a Hardcore Punk Rock-reminding destruction of the instruments and the objects. But unlike Punk Rock ethos, destruction is not the actual statement being made, instead it becomes a new way to look at the objects and assign them new meanings, possibly finding catharsis in the process.

Van de Moortel's 2014 installation and performance at the Palais de Tokyo, 'Don't Know You're Gonna Mess Up the Carpet,' exemplifies the sensory onslaught of his work. In that work, a two-level stage finds a drummer encased in a white tube while Van de Moortel stands atop conducting a psychedelic noise rock orchestra replete with neon light fixtures and video screens. The result is thrilling to watch. The possibilities of the performance are limitless.



Joris Van de Moortel, *A sudden gall of unheard-of violence* (2015). 37.8 x 24.4 x 7.8 inches. Neon, wood, resin speaker, microphone, acoustic guitar, cable wound. (Photo: © WE DOCUMENT ART)

From December 1 to the 6 at Denis Gardarin Gallery's booth at UNTITLED Miami Beach, Van de Moortel will be the subject of his first United States solo exhibition, 'Rotten Sun.' The title of the exhibition is taken from a George Bataille essay that examines the sun as a contradictory force in the universe: one that is capable of both organic creation and absolute destruction. His work becomes the fragments of musical instruments, neon tubing, and other remnants of performance that achieve harmony when internalized as part of an interlocking whole. For Van de Moortel, destruction and creation are simply aspects of his overall process and he tries to not imbue them with too much theoretical identity prior to showing them. "For me destruction, construction, creation, it's all really so common and natural I don't think in terms of: 'Let's destroy this to make this.'," says Van de Moortel in an E-mail. "It's a very natural occurrence, as much part of fantasy as it is of reality."

The exhibition's most ambitious piece, *Bird House* (2015), finds speakers caked in resin-like material animating an orchestral watchtower while an aluminum bar pierces the objects as neon casts light on its immaterial dimensions.

As you (hopefully aren't but) might be thinking, Van de Moortel's work is very hard to put into words. It deals so much in pure sensory that imbuing it with any meanings other than the internal and unexpected emotions it elicits might obscure its overall power. The work exists very much in its own dimension, where object and sound bleed into one another and clash and combine to create an aesthetic controlled chaos and cathartic calm. To learn more about his work and the artist making it, Van De Moortel and I got in touch over E-mail.



Joris Van de Moortel, *Dramatic lightning and billows of fog, it's rare for any two performances to look and sound exactly the same* (2015). 78.95 x 83.45 x 7.9 inches. Digital printing, oil painting, neon, Plexiglass, wood, aluminum, cables, battery pieces, microphone stand, microphone, speaker resin and various objects undefined. (Photo: © WE DOCUMENT ART)

Forbes: What came first, a desire to make music or to make art?

Joris Van de Moortel: I don't come from an artistic family. Everything I do in art and music comes from a self-taught experience: education, books, records, and friends. At around ages 12 and 16, music was the only thing important to me. At the same time I started making sculptures and drawings at an art school that was close to my regular school. I took this very serious.

I started playing music when I was 12; first with the mouth harp and bass guitar and eventually guitar. I never took any lessons in music so it took years before I considered myself to be playing at a level that I was satisfied with.

So to answer the question, I think it all came around at the same time. But I took art more seriously as something that I really wanted to do and found myself supported in my talents. Playing music seriously came much later and it wasn't connected to my artistic practice at first. Now, it all melds together.

Forbes: Most sound artists, or artists that make use of sound in some way, use more tonal soundscapes, but you have rhythm and melody, are you at all trying to re-think rock music?

Van de Moortel: Rock music is just one element. I use a lot of *musique concrète* in performances. I'm working with classical musicians who play my music based on a score and composition. I worked with bats before and made a record with it. My two solo records are completely non-Rock based and instead make use of tonal structures, field recordings, and noise.



Joris Van de Moortel pictured with AF Vandevorst. (Photo: Boy Kortekaas)

Forbes: Lots of bands and musical artists incorporate a performance art aspect into their work (from Iggy Pop and Bowie to the Residents to Marilyn Manson to Madonna to Kanye West, the list goes on and on), why not just be in a rock band?

Van de Moortel: Because I happen to be an artist. The difference is that rock performances are repeated over and over much like with theater plays. That's an aspect of performance that doesn't interest me as much. Conceptually yes, and if I were to do a tour I would consider it one work. But not in a daily practice. A band like the Stooges (Iggy) is of huge importance for me and how I look at and listen to music and the aspect of performing, but I don't want to copy that or even get close to touching on it. To be clear, it's not my desire to be a Rock n' Roll musician.

Forbes: One of the primary differences I've found between music and fine art is that a musician can get positive feedback from playing a show and have kids dance or freakout, but an artist in one way or another needs a gallery to show his/her work. Do you ever feel stifled by this notion when performing music in the context of a fine art exhibition?

Van de Moortel: The gallery was also historically the place for avant-garde musicians who didn't find their way to the theaters to do their things. It helped these artists find an audience (that were also mainly artists). I'm not waiting to play at a muddy festival with people drinking beer out of plastic cans to play a set at 3 p.m. So no, I don't mind playing in galleries. I do sometimes miss the focus that a theater can provide, where people pay to see you and sit down in a darkened room and watch you. Therefore I mostly build installations in which I perform to create that environment.

Forbes: What led to your practice of destroying the objects after your performance, and is there a conceptual basis behind the practice?

Van de Moortel: People call it "destruction," 'Search and destroy,' (Stooges), but for me it's just doing. I make so much, and that's the way you sometimes make stuff. When you make a simple collage you also tear strips of paper in order to glue them in a certain composition. It's the same thing but it just makes a bit more noise than ripping a piece of paper. Of course when you do things for the first time they become part of the package, so the "uncontrolled action" always shifts to the next level within the unknown.

Forbes: At one point did you start examining these various objects and searching for new meanings hidden within them?

Van de Moortel: I think my main business now is to make these "objects" more than to theorize them. I think that's for others to collaborate with along this journey. It's quite like an open invitation actually.

Forbes: There seems to be a heavy element of design in your work, and if this is at all accurate, would you ever be interested in things like set design for musical artists or otherwise?

Van de Moortel: I don't like to say no to things so I can imagine that if the question become a reality, I would consider it and give it a go. Depending on who asks of course. I would refuse over-commercialized TV show if you know what I mean, but when a musician like Iggy, as we mentioned him before, asks me I'll say yes before he even finishes making the proposal.

Forbes: It seems like much of your work involves expanding the parameters of these practices you engage in, whether it be field recordings, performance, heavy psychedelic rock music, and visual art. How do you avoid feeling paralyzed by the utter freedom that your approach brings?

Van de Moortel: I never have that kind of feeling of being paralyzed by what I do. But it's an interesting question in relation to the freedom that working evokes. I sometimes put myself in a rather narrow situation wherein I get strangled and tangled. That's somehow what you're unconsciously searching for; the room with no control, the room with no mixing table to set the levels right.

Forbes: You came up at a time when Antwerp was already on the map for left field expression from designers like Martin Margiela and Raf Simons to artists like Roberto Mangu, did you find yourself influenced by your city or were you looking more abroad?

Forbes: It's hard to track your influences when you're actively working. Of course everything you see and hear, whether you like it or not, leaves its traces. I did two collaborations with the Antwerp Fashion duo AF Vandevorst, the first one was a performance during their fashion show in Paris earlier this year, and one now, for an edition and a publication.

Forbes: Your work has the distinction of being nearly impossible to recreate, is that element of suspense energizing?

Van de Moortel: It is because I also don't want to make the same thing twice. It's not a strategy, it's just how I work I think. I give the work the freedom to be rediscovered in another constellation. Some works travel with me for for exhibitions in different places and countries, up to the moment they get sold. The point where they meet the reality of the art market I guess (smile).