



## Mark Manders/MATRIX 214

### *The Absence of Mark Manders*

February 6 – April 10, 2005

**University of California  
Berkeley Art Museum**

**MATRIX**

**Mark Manders/MATRIX 214**

Mark Manders's original idea for his self-portrait, an ongoing and monumental project that has come to define his overall oeuvre, was that it would take literary form. "Mark Manders has inhabited his self-portrait (a long term project titled *Self-Portrait as a Building*) since 1986," the artist explains. "This building can shrink or expand at any moment. In this building, all words created by mankind are on hand."<sup>1</sup> Language, as title, content, and formal structure, remains a key element of his process, in which objects are accumulated in a manner that replicates sentences. Manders physicalizes thoughts into objects and morphs obsessions into installations. His hypothetical building is an evolving space through which he investigates the process of thinking. His subject is the intersection of the tangible and the intangible, the seen and the vanished, the known and the presumed.

His installations employ everyday objects (sugar, tea bags, a pencil, a toothpaste tube) as narrative subjects. The ordinariness of the objects imbues the work with a poetic tension—things are familiar but, isolated from their original function, somehow wrong. The installations typically include roughly modeled figures and modern furnishings that have been altered, combined in surreal ways, or reduced just enough to create an alienating effect, for example to 88 percent of their normal size. Manders makes a physical as well as mental space for the viewer to "enter the world of objects and matter and find poetry in it...and to know how poorly we normally see our daily life." By his continually refining installations that incorporate the same sculptural elements, Manders's artistic production parallels the evolving nature of individual identity and the accumulation of knowledge.

While the elevation of the mundane to the status of art object has occurred since Marcel Duchamp, Manders's sculptures are not mere readymades. It is through his surreal interventions that traces of the artist's presence are suggested, as if the viewer had stumbled upon the furniture of Manders's mindscape. The disparate pieces comprising each installation suggest the constantly evolving construction of Manders's own identity both as a private person and as a public figure, a mental menagerie that has found physical expression in the form of a series of idiosyncratic "rooms." He creates a correlation between physical architectural construction and how individual identities are built. *The Absence of Mark Manders* is arranged to connote a gigantic living room—one whose inhabitants are missing. In a 1994 text, also titled *The Absence of Mark Manders*, Manders wrote, "The realization that life is taking its course, even without you, is an intense human experience; it shows the finiteness of personality."

The installation groups existing and newly created sculptural elements. All of the objects in *Reduced November Room (Reduced to 88%)* are real, three-dimensional, reduced representations of the originals. The two large figures initially appear to be identical. Upon closer inspection, one finds that they are in fact the same figure depicted at two consecutive moments, with slightly

Cover: *Reduced November Room (Reduced to 88%)*, 2000; painted aluminum, iron, wood, painted wood, ceramic, plastic, stainless steel, sugar, iron, paper; dimensions variable; private collection, United States.



different expressions and postures.<sup>2</sup> Manders illustrates how time effects what we see. Things look different, if only slightly, as time passes, second by second. There is no such thing as stasis.

Although Manders's practice is defined in part by drawing, his MATRIX show contains only one work on paper: *Drawing with Vanishing Point and Singing Sailors*. It is a drawing of a man's face absent his skin. His muscles combine with the waves of the sea, and sailing ships emerge from one of two duplicated eye sockets. Like art therapy in which dreams are remembered and recorded, it is here that the artist's process of channeling and depicting his mental imagery becomes most apparent.

*Still Life with broken Moment* and *Still Life with broken Moment (Reduced to 82%)* are the same still life, composed of an LP and sugar, created initially at a reduced size and then at full size. Presented together they evoke the notion of fate and how one slightly different gesture can unravel an entirely different set of circumstances. Manders dropped sugar. Some of it landed on the edge of the LP, the rest landed on the floor. He subsequently performed the same action of dropping the sugar but, as the receptacles are different sized forms, the effect is altered.

*Still Life with White-Yellow Ballpoint* explores invisibility and creative inspiration. It operates like a large camera into which an imaginary person can vanish. Located under a writing table is an iron shutter plate, similar to one used in conjurers' vanishing tricks. In the text referenced earlier Manders wrote, "Under a table you have the possibility to test your own absence." Here there are three absent figures: the imaginary one inside the machine, the imaginary writer at the staged worktable, and the character who created this still life. Together they form a trinity of artist, alter ego, and muse.

*Fox/Mouse/Belt* sits on the floor, like most of Manders's sculptures. A mouse is strapped with the artist's belt to the stomach of a fox frozen in the

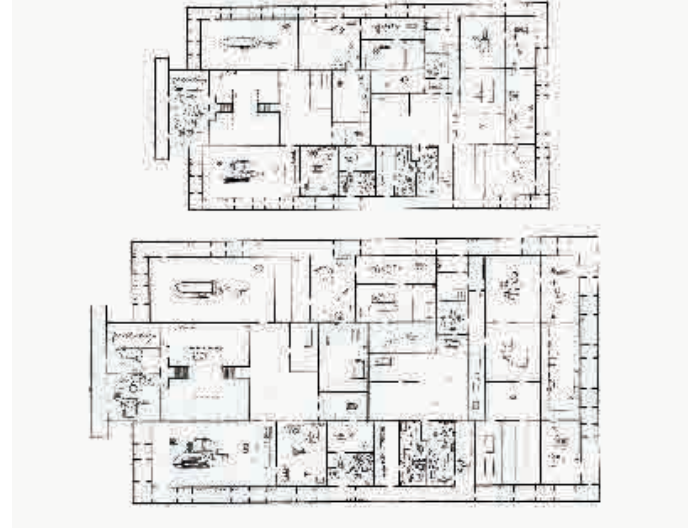
*Reduced November Room (Reduced to 88%)*, 2000; painted aluminum, iron, wood, painted wood, ceramic, plastic, stainless steel, sugar, iron, paper; dimensions variable; private collection, United States.



middle of a jump. Indicating his fascination with the ability of living creatures to disappear into others as food while still alive, the artist explained, "I wanted to create a sculpture in which a human act could be clearly distinguished. I wanted to commit a kind of double murder in which a love of some sort surfaced."<sup>3</sup> This description of his process brings up the issue of perception. People can perceive differently and name in different ways the same objects and actions. Occasionally, a huge disconnect manifests itself, and it is in this dichotomy that Manders's work inserts itself and functions. Several years ago, in Manhattan, I was called to jury duty on a criminal case in which the defense attorney asked the assembled jurors if they knew the definition of euthanasia. Not long after, the implement of death was revealed to be a sledgehammer. Manders's complex interplay between truth and reality also involves semantics. He places his self-portrait as a building between two world views: "the world as constructed from atom-like semi-truths and the one in which these truths are accepted as fact."<sup>4</sup>

Manders belongs to a generation of post-minimalist sculptors who have reacted against the industrially processed materials, impersonal austerity, and plain geometric configurations that define Minimalism<sup>5</sup> by creating conceptually messy, handmade objects loaded with narrative content. Narrative, however obtuse and fettered, is an essential element in Manders's work. While Robert Gober and Mirosław Balka can be seen as precursors for Manders, his work departs from theirs in the elaborate matrix of personal associations. In fact, he has claimed that he makes work for himself. Similar to the art of Joseph Beuys, who conceptualized sculpture not as a rigid form but as an energetic process,<sup>6</sup> Manders's work is alive in a manner that is perpetually haunting. And like Richard Artschwager, who highlighted the "ambiguities of perception by creating sculptural hybrids of recognizable objects,"<sup>7</sup> Manders distorts what we think we know through puzzling juxtapositions and *Alice in*

*Reduced November Room (detail)*, 2000 and *Table with Paper Walls (Reduced to 88%)*, 2002; mixed media installation; courtesy of Greene Naftali Gallery, New York.



*Wonderland*—like alterations of scale. Each installation is tinged with memory. Manders makes things familiar enough to be recognizable but ever-so-slightly off, so as to invoke the space in which it becomes impossible to remember whether something actually happened to us or we saw it in a film or read about it in a book. Manders said, “Once you’ve realized on a deep level that there are empty spaces in the human world in which you can show things in their naked form, you just cannot let go of that idea anymore.”<sup>8</sup>

If the “building” of Manders’s ongoing self-portrait is a fictional architecture, it is also occupied by an imaginary persona, one who shares the artist’s name and his qualities (“neurotic and poetic”). Manders stated in 2002, “The artist Mark Manders is a fictional person. He is a character who lives in a logically designed and constructed world, which consists of thoughts that are congealed at their moment of greatest intensity. It is someone who disappears into his actions. He lives in a building that he continually abandons; the building is uninhabited, in fact.”<sup>9</sup> Inextricably linking his pseudo-identity to his artistic production is something that Manders shares with Duchamp/Rose Sélavy. By referring to himself in the third person, Manders establishes himself as both conjurer and conjured, a ghostly, otherworldly presence. The artist disappears, replacing himself with a fictional persona, one that is defined as both himself and not himself: Mark Manders, artist. Implying that all identities are constructed, Manders ostensibly negates his existence, insisting that it too is a fabrication.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson  
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

Mark Manders was born in Volkel, The Netherlands, in 1968, and received his M.F.A. at Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, Arnhem, The Netherlands, in 1992. He currently lives and works in Arnhem.

#### Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2005  
“Parallel Occurrence,” The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland
- 2004  
“Silent Studio,” Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium
- 2003  
“Isolated Rooms,” The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; Renaissance Society, Chicago, IL  
“Silent Factory,” Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Germany
- 2002  
“Kaleidoscope Night,” Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands  
“Yellow Bathtub,” Phillip Morris Kunstprijs 2002, Cobra Museum, Amstelveen, Netherlands  
Greene Naftali Gallery, New York, NY  
Galleries at Moore, Philadelphia, PA  
“Fragments from Self-Portrait as a Building,” Art Gallery of York University, Toronto, Canada
- 2000  
“Night Drawings,” Kabinet Overholland-Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands  
“Reduced November Room,” Greene Naftali Gallery, New York, NY  
“Room with Several Night Drawings and One Reduced Night Scene,” The Drawing Center, New York, NY

#### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2004  
“Manifesta 5,” San Sebastian, Spain  
“Precarious Sculptures,” Kunsthalle, Vienna, Austria  
“Sculptural Sphere,” Goetz Collection, Munich  
“Wonderholland,” Trajan’s Markets, Rome, Italy  
“Nederland niet Nederland,” Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, Netherlands  
“International Triennial of Small Sculpture,” Murska Sobota, Slovenia
- 2003  
“Gelijk het leven is,” S.M.A.K., Ghent, Belgium  
“Taktiken des EGO,” Stiftung Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg, Germany  
“Post-Nature. Nove Artistas Holandeses,” Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, Brazil  
“Storage and Display,” Programma Art Center, Mexico City, Mexico

ABOVE LEFT: *Staged Reading Room*, 2003; sand, iron, wood, plastic, rope, matchbox, newspapers, chair; 122 x 70 x 80 in.; courtesy of Greene Naftali Gallery, New York. ABOVE: *Writing Room/Fiction Machine*, 2003; typewriter, wood, bricks, carpet, iron, rubber; 116 x 197 x 86 1/2 in.; courtesy of Greene Naftali Gallery, New York.

- 2002  
“Documenta 11,” Kassel, Germany  
“Drawing Now: Eight Propositions,” Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY  
“On Paper 1,” Galerie Friedrich, Basel, Switzerland  
“Tabula,” Various Locations, Watau, Belgium  
“The Factory,” School of Fine Arts, Athens, Greece  
“Free Sport,” Greene Naftali, New York, NY
- 2001  
“Plateau of Humankind,” Italian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy  
“Post-Nature,” Palazzo Ca’Zenobio, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy  
“Locus Focus—Sonsbeek 9,” Arnhem, Netherlands  
“Squatters,” Museu de Serralves, Oporto, Portugal
- 2000  
“Face to Face” Museum Overholland-Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands  
Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Oostende, Belgium  
“Territory,” Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

#### Selected Bibliography

- Breidenbach, Tom. “Mark Manders, Drawing Center/Greene Naftali.” *Artforum*, November 2000, 156–157.
- Campagnola, Sonia. “Eyes Wide Shut.” Due opinionu su Manifesta 5. *Flash Art*, August–September 2004, 66–67.
- Firstenberg, Lauri. “Mark Manders.” Greene Naftali Gallery, *tema celeste*, 2003, 90.
- Focus: Mark Manders*. The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL, 2003.
- Hunt, David. “Reduced November Room (Fragment from Self-Portrait as a Building, Reduced to 88%).” *Time Out*, October 2000, 12–19.
- Koplos, Janet. “Mark Manders at Greene Naftali.” *Art in America*, April 2003, 132.
- Kopsa, Maxine. “Sonsbeek 9, Arnhem.” *frieze*, November–December 2001, 125.
- Langelaar, Marije, and Mark Manders. *New Anniversaries*. ROMA Publications, Amsterdam, Netherlands; International Sculpture Collection, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 2001.
- Manders, Mark. *Isolated Rooms*. ROMA Publications, Amsterdam, Netherlands; The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; The Renaissance Society, Chicago, IL, 2004.
- Parallel Occurrence*. The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Ireland, 2005.
- Reust, Hans Rudolf. “Fabelhafte Kunst.” *Parkett* No. 71, 2004, 120–125.
- Ruyters, Marc. “Mark Manders. Documenta 11.” *Kunstforum International*, Bd. 161, August–October 2002, 325–329.
- Smallenburg, Sandra. “Mark Manders, The Drawing Room.” *The New York Times*, July 14, 2000, B28.
- Smith, Roberta. “Retreat from the Wild Shores of Abstraction.” *The New York Times*, 18 October, 2002.
- Wulffen, Thomas. “Biennalen Manifesta 5, San Sebastian.” *Kunstforum International*, July–August 2004, 239–301.

*Drawing with Shoe Movement/Two Consecutive Floor Plans from “Self-Portrait as a Building,”* 2002; pencil on paper; 42 3/8 x 31 1/8 in.; courtesy of Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp.

**Work in MATRIX**  
*Reduced November Room (Reduced to 88%)*, 2000  
Painted aluminum, iron, wood, ceramic, plastic, painted wood, stainless steel, sugar, iron, paper  
Dimensions variable  
Private collection, United States

*Drawing with Vanishing Point and Singing Sailors*, 1998–2003  
Pencil on paper  
12 x 17 inches  
Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

*Still-Life with Broken Moment (1 x 100%, 1 x 82%)*, 1998–2004  
Iron, plastic, paper, sugar, reduced chair  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp and Greene Naftali Gallery, New York

*Still-Life with White-Yellow Ballpoint*, 2004  
Painted wood, iron, rubber, ballpoint  
139 x 172 x 54 inches  
Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp and Greene Naftali Gallery, New York

*Fox / Mouse / Belt*, 1992  
Painted bronze, belt  
48 x 16 x 6 inches  
Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

The MATRIX Program at the UC Berkeley Art Museum is made possible by the generous endowment gift of Phyllis C. Wattis.

Additional donors to the MATRIX Program include the UAM Council MATRIX Endowment, Art Berliner, Glenn and April Bucksbaum, Eric McDougall, Sonja and Michael Saltman, and Christopher Vroom and Iliya Szilak.

Special support for Mark Manders/MATRIX 214 *The Absence of Mark Manders* has been provided by the Mondriaan Foundation, Amsterdam; James B. Pick and Rosalyn M. Laudati; Nancy and Joachim Bechtle; and the Consulate General of The Netherlands in Los Angeles and New York.

© 2005 The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved.

*Fox / Mouse / Belt*, 1992; painted bronze, belt; 48 x 16 x 6 in.; courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp.

<sup>1</sup> Mark Manders, *The Absence of Mark Manders*, 1994. <sup>2</sup> Marije Langelaar, “Reduced Rooms with Changing Arrest (Reduced to 88%): An Interview with Mark Manders,” in *Singing Sailors* (Amsterdam: ROMA Publications, 2002), p. 45. <sup>3</sup> Langelaar, “Room, Constructed to Provide Persistent Absence: An Interview with Mark Manders,” in *Singing Sailors*, p. 41. <sup>4</sup> Manders, *Absence of Mark Manders*. <sup>5</sup> Christopher Want, “Minimalism,” *Grove Art Online*, <http://www.groveart.com> [accessed December 12, 2004]. <sup>6</sup> “Joseph Beuys,” *Grove Art Online*. <sup>7</sup> Marco Livingstone, “Richard Artschwager,” *Grove Art Online*. <sup>8</sup> Langelaar, “It is disappointing that we seem to observe the world as through a membrane: An Interview with Mark Manders,” in *Singing Sailors*, p. 21. <sup>9</sup> *Ibid*.