

Eichmann and the Angel - Gustav Metzger, 2005

Introduction by Pontus Kyander

About Eichmann and the Angel

Eichmann and the Angel is an installation including a wall of newspapers, a working roller conveyor belt, a reading area and a wood and glass structure that evokes Adolf Eichmann's bullet-proof 'cage' from his infamous trial in Jerusalem in the early 1960s.

Viewers are free to enter the reconstructed 'cage' and sit. They are also free to take a newspaper and place it on the conveyor belt—perhaps a metaphor for time rolling ceaselessly forward or a more macabre reminder of the industrialised nature of genocide under the Nazi regime. The installation also includes a reproduction of Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* (*The Angel of History* as described by Walter Benjamin).

Through its specific elements, the installation connects philosophers Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt with Eichmann. It also introduces the notion of history as an angel looking back on the cataclysms of the past whilst heading towards the future. Eichmann and Benjamin stand in metaphorical relation to notions of death and entrapment: the former was responsible for the killing of millions and was executed for his crimes, whilst the latter killed himself in 1940. Arendt, in turn, becomes a kind of witness, someone speaking for a generation—she reflects on Eichmann's trial in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, one of the most significant essays of the 20th century, and speaks for Benjamin in her famous 'Introduction' to his book *Illuminations*. The wall inscription "*Port Bou – New York – Jerusalem*", connects three key places and figures. Port Bou is where Walter Benjamin took his own life. New York is where Hannah Arendt died—and is also a city that Walter Benjamin yearned to visit but never reached. And, ironically, it is in Jerusalem that Eichmann—accountable for the systemised organisation of the Holocaust—died. These three cities are linked by fragments of the same history, to which this work of art is dedicated.

About Gustav Metzger

Gustav Metzger (1926–2017) was born of Polish Jewish parentage in Nuremberg and, via the kindertransporten, arrived as a child refugee in Britain in 1939, aged twelve. Aware of Nazi atrocities from a young age, his interest in left-wing and pacifist politics began early. Between 1948 and 1949, he studied at the Royal Academy of Arts, Antwerp through a grant by the UK's Jewish Community.

1959 saw Metzger publish his manifesto *Auto-destructive Art*, a seminal work that would not only inform his radical practice and influence art in the 1960s, but continues to influence artistic practice today, acknowledged or through cultural absorption of ideas he introduced. This work and other ideas he formulated—such as Art Strike—can still be felt in the work of successive generations of artists.

In parallel to his artistic practice, Metzger was active in radical and anti-war political movements from about 1960 onwards—he was a named member of the Committee of 100, the influential British pacifist movement active through civil disobedience championed by the philosopher Bertrand Russell. His lifelong political activities were entirely enmeshed with his artistic practice, which Metzger clearly connected with his experience of the destructive forces that murdered his family and dominated much of the 20th century and the potential of art as a driver for social transformation.

The exhibition is part of a collaboration taking place in Antwerp and The Hague that sees the most significant exhibition of Metzger's work since his death in March 2017. Gustav Metzger had solo exhibitions at Serpentine Galleries, London; Tate Britain, London; Museo Jumex, Mexico City; Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin; Haus der Kunst München, Munich, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel; New Museum, New York; Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv and many others. His work was included in documenta 13 (2012), the 50th Venice Biennale (2003) and the São Paulo Biennale of 2010.

About Pontus Kyander

Pontus Kyander (1959) is a curator and art writer who knew and worked with Gustav Metzger since 2001. He was the curator of Metzger's retrospective *Act and Perish* (2014-16, co-curated with Dobrila Denegri). In 2006 he curated works of Metzger at Lund Konsthall, and in 2007 he co-curated *Gustav Metzger Prace 1995-2007* at Zacheta National Museum in Warsaw. In 2008, he was professor at Ewha Women's University in Seoul, South Korea, and from 2010 to 2014 he was director of SKMU Sorlandets Kunstmuseum and Trondheim Kunstmuseum. He currently lectures at the Finnish Academy of Fine Art.

Gustav Metzger - a collaborative project

Coinciding with both the exhibition *Gustav Metzger. Ethics into Aesthetics* and the international symposium *Gustav Metzger - The Conscience of the Art World* at West in The Hague, the presentation of Metzger's installation *Eichmann and the Angel* at C A S S T L in Antwerp has been initiated in close collaboration with Nico Dockx and Estate Gustav Metzger and with support of West, Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp, De Tijd, Vrienden van het M HKA and the University of Antwerp.

In the Hague

Gustav Metzger: Ethics into Aesthetics, 01.12.2017 -- 04.02.2018

West Museumkwartier, Lange Voorhout 34 + West, Groenewegje 136, The Hague, The Netherlands



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