
A Belgian Tale: *Quadrum* (1956-1966)

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/787>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.787

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 September 2008

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Richard Leeman, « A Belgian Tale: *Quadrum* (1956-1966) », *Critique d'art* [Online], 32 | Automne 2008, Online since 31 January 2012, connection on 20 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/787> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.787

This text was automatically generated on 20 April 2019.

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REFERENCES

Quadrum : revue internationale d'art moderne (1956-1966), Gand : Snoeck ; Bruxelles : Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique, 2007

- 1 This summer, at the Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles in Paris, there was an exhibition organized by the Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique, which was first put on view in Brussels during the winter (23 November 2007 – 30 March 2008): *Quadrum, revue internationale d'art moderne (1956-1966)*. Organized by Florence Hespel, responsible since 2002 for this research project at the modern art department in the Royal Museums, this was an outstanding show. Smallish in scope, with a tight subject—one magazine, ten years of existence—and a sober set precisely emphasizing the works, this exhibition presented a selection of archives and documents as well as totally digitized magazine issues at a computer station. In the context of a revival of studies of the 1950s and 1960s, it offered a much-awaited contribution to the prominent part played by Brussels in the making and distribution of art in Europe at that time. This activity took place in the Palais des Beaux-Arts, base of the Association pour la Diffusion Artistique et Culturelle (ADAC), created in 1951, before moving two years later to the Aujourd'hui Gallery (1953), which was an offshoot thereof. The whole project was organized around the threesome formed by Robert Giron (1897-1967), chairman of the Société des expositions du Palais des beaux-arts, Pierre Janlet (1900-1991), director general of the Palais des beaux-arts, and Ernst Goldschmidt (1906-1992), founder and director of the Editions de la Connaissance in 1937, whose library and documentary archives are now in safekeeping at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Marseilles.
- 2 As F. Hespel's work so well shows, it was in this setting that *Quadrum* came into being in 1956. Originating from an earlier magazine, *Les Arts plastiques* (1950-1954) founded by E. Goldschmidt and Luc Haesaerts (former co-director, with his brother, of the journal *Les*

Beaux-Arts), which already had a prestigious patronage committee and an international editorial board, *Quadrum* belonged to that generation born around 1900: the Belgians Emile Langui and Paul Fierens, the Germans Will Grohmann and Ewald Rathke, the Frenchmen Georges Salles, Maurice Jardot and Jean Leymarie, the Englishmen Herbert Read and Josef Paul Hodin, the Italians Giulio Carlo Argan and Umbro Apollonio, the Dutchmen Bram Hammacher and Hans L. C. Jaffé, the Americans James Johnson Sweeney and Robert Goldwater, the Swiss Georg Schmidt and Maria Netter... All have a short but welcome biography at the end of the volume. What actually emerges is that *Quadrum* was another offshoot of that Brussels-based dynamic.

- 3 From abstract art to Pop Art, the comeback of figuration and the object, *Quadrum* was thus the medium for a whole international community of art critics, academics, and curators, whose network had been formed in the 1930s. Together, in 1949, they founded the Association internationale des critiques d'art (AICA), and most of them ended up together again in the late 1950s in group ventures like the book published by Will Grohmann in 1958, titled, it just so happens, *Depuis 1945* [*Since 1945*] [to be thoroughly accurate the title was *Neue Kunst nach 1945. Malerei*, more broadly translated in English as *Art Since 1945*.] This book was sadly never translated into French at the time (it might have been effective had it been), just like, the following year, Documenta II, curated by Arnold Bode and Werner Haftmann, another now paradigmatic event celebrating the triumph of abstract art and, incidentally, American painting in Europe.
- 4 In her text, F. Hespel rightly mentions, in relation to *Quadrum* and the Palais des beaux-arts in Brussels, the context of European reconstruction and the Cold War, the 1958 World Fair and the exhibition *50 ans d'art moderne*—which was one of the first signs of the announced end of France's pre-eminence in art matters. Based on many archives in the Palais des beaux-arts, and those of E. Goldschmidt and P. Janlet among others, she retraces very precisely the detailed relations and friendships, the magazine's difficulties, and the reasons for the choices made. We also find a *Quadrum* exhibition project, brainchild of Goldschmidt in 1976, ten years after the end of the magazine's career, which represents a prehistory of the magazine, and shows the concern with which Goldschmidt treated the historiography of this adventure. By way of a conclusion at *Quadrum*, and echoing W. Grohmann's initial book, *Depuis 45*, published in three volumes between 1969 and 1973, also showed as much.
- 5 The exhibition catalogue, which has just come out, is limited to 20 magazine covers. This is a slight pity: it would have been nice if there had also been reproductions of the originals presented on the exhibition walls, for example the one of the Larry Rivers collage (*Untitled*, 1950-1965, *Quadrum*, n° 18), whose relief barely appears on the magazine's cover. The exhibition also showed two dozen works, mainly taken from the collection of the Musées royaux des beaux-arts, including a tempera by Jean Deyrolle (*Amadeus*, 1955), a noir de fumée by Otto Piene (*Painting*, 1962), a drawing by Cy Twombly (*Untitled*, 1959), a selection of sculptures (Robert Jacobsen, *KHB 70*, César, *Torse*, 1959). All these works, it is true, are on view, and it is worth pointing out as much, in the on-line catalogue of the Musée royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique.
- 6 Give or take the odd error of detail—Jean Leymarie was not director of the museum of modern art of the city of Paris (p. 102), but of the national museum; we also find a reference to a mysterious Jean-Pierre Poinot (*sic*, p. 54)--, this book contributes to this off-kilter history of European art (occurring, that is, somewhere outside the clash between New York and Paris), where Belgium had a leading position. It shows well how

the Brussels museum held one of the top places at European level in this renewed museography incorporating the given nature of present-day art, as indicated, too, by the museums of Amsterdam, Stockholm, and Krefeld, and the German *Kunsthallen*—whereas this was not the case with French museums, precisely, as P. Janlet put it, “because nowhere is Belgium suspected of artistic imperialism.”