



Specials > FONS AUDIO

The *Specials* programs focus on projects by artists and curators who have some kind of connection to the Museum's programming and the MACBA Collection. Conceived as an audiovisual project, FONS is a documentary series in which artists from the MACBA Collection talk about their work. This series also includes a specific montage devised for radio, entitled FONS AUDIO, created from conversations with the artists.

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FONS AUDIO #4

Jef Cornelis

Jef Cornelis (1941) is one of the pioneers of research into the language of television and its relationship to video art, documentary and the reading of history from the present, and also of the analysis of what it means to make a film. In the course of more than 25 years work at VRT, the Belgian public television corporation, Jef Cornelis directed a great deal of filmic material. His work has come to be seen as a milestone and a visual content bank of great importance to the the history of contemporary art. In FONS AUDIO #4, Cornelis contextualises some of his works in the MACBA Collection.

01. Summary

Since video emerged as an artistic format in the sixties, contemporary art's relationship with television has been complex. Many of the first video artists saw television as a space with favourable characteristics for the diffusion of their work. Thus the possibility arose to redefine the language of television and, at the same time, the almost perfect option to achieve a freer distribution of visual work was offered. Television reached all households and was therefore a direct channel to establish dialogue with people through the art of moving images. The critical spirit in many of the pioneers of video art was tied to other visuals domains, such as cinema or television, where the possibilities of image and visual narration were also being explored.

Jef Cornelis works with television to redefine the meaning of moving images and their formats. Almost like a parasite in Belgian television, from 1964 to 1998 Cornelis investigated the limits of what can be done and what – supposedly – cannot be done in a world like that of television. Already at the beginning of the seventies, television stations were beginning to timidly adjust their programming and the type of language used based principally on audience numbers. Even so, Cornelis managed to find cracks where his visually complex work could come through, understanding television as culture and not simply as entertainment. Cornelis produces and films an enormous quantity of projects that are difficult to categorise. By using documentary elements, investigating narration, bringing reality and fiction closer together, experimenting with codes in television, Cornelis's television films could be considered a visual essay, voluntarily escaping labels that lead the viewer to a type of particular consumption and moving away from television standards. According to Cornelis, "Television is basically bureaucracy" and a good part of his work consists in navigating within the framework of television to be able to make the films that he wants to make, often turning projects of a nationalistic nature upside down as another way to work with history and landscape.

Jef Cornelis's relationship with contemporary art has experienced various intensities. In 1969, he was one of the founders, along with Kasper König, of A 379089 in Antwerp, an alternative space considered an "anti-gallery" or "anti-museum" where the work of such artists as Carl André, Marcel Broodthaers and La Monte Young was shown. A 379089 became a referent in the definition of experimental artistic spaces and played an important role in promoting conceptual art. It was an alternative to the city's museum, with a full international programming and numerous activities and exhibitions that were displayed and realised before a public that was also in a period of gestation.

Through Belgian television, Cornelis carried out many cultural programmes and artist interviews, often playing devil's advocate and questioning everything he observed from an artistic context about which he had extensive knowledge. After filming *Documenta 5* (1972), Cornelis left the art world for a decade, as he felt the 1972 edition of the Documenta exhibition, curated by Harald Szeemann, was "the beginning of commercialisation". He commented that, "It's a very critical



[Jef Cornelis *Documenta 4*, 1968]

film. It's more about power than art." Cornelis went to Documenta 5 for five days with someone who was not a part of the art world, a professor and philosopher whom he used as a sparring partner to get the artists and participants of the artistic event to move away from their usual discourse and empty words. The film about Documenta 5, with its willingness to go further, starting with a critical spirit and an analytic perception, experimenting with formats and enlarging the field of work in television, is a very good example of Jef Cornelis's working system and his approach.

02. Biography

During his more than 25 years working at Flemish television network VRT, Jef Cornelis (Antwerp, 1941) produced and directed films on architecture, art, theatre and literature. Cornelis is a beacon and a pioneering legend of new formulas for creating and communicating, for anybody interested in art, video art, the media, television, documentary cinema, modern history and more.



[Jef Cornelis *Documenta 5*, 1972]

03. Works by Jef Cornelis in the MACBA Collection

Martial Raysse, 1967

MACBA Collection. Barcelona City Council Fund.

http://www.macba.cat/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=29&inst_id=26933

Documenta 4, 1968

MACBA Collection. Barcelona City Council Fund.

http://www.macba.cat/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=29&inst_id=26934

James Lee Byars, Antwerpen 18 april - 7 mei 1969, 1969

MACBA Collection. Barcelona City Council Fund.

http://www.macba.cat/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=29&inst_id=26928

James Lee Byars: World Question Center, 1969

MACBA Collection

http://www.macba.cat/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=29&inst_id=24156

Marcel Broodthaers, 1969

MACBA Collection. Barcelona City Council Fund.

http://www.macba.cat/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=29&inst_id=26929

Marcel Broodthaers. Musée d'art du XVIIe siècle, 1969

MACBA Collection. Barcelona City Council Fund.

http://www.macba.cat/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=29&inst_id=28052

Daniel Buren (Palais Royal), 1971

MACBA Collection. Barcelona City Council Fund.

http://www.macba.cat/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=29&inst_id=26930

Sonsbeek Buiten de Perken, 1971

MACBA Collection. Barcelona City Council Fund.

http://www.macba.cat/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=29&inst_id=26932



[Jef Cornelis *Documenta 5*, 1972]



[Jef Cornelis *Daniel Buren (Palais Royal)*, 1971]

Documenta 5, 1972

MACBA Collection. Barcelona City Council Fund.

http://www.macba.cat/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=29&inst_id=26935

Richard Hamilton, 15 mei - 28 juni 1970, 1973

MACBA Collection. Barcelona City Council Fund.

http://www.macba.cat/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=29&inst_id=26931

De langste dag-deel, 1986

MACBA Collection. Barcelona City Council Fund.

http://www.macba.cat/controller.php?p_action=show_page&pagina_id=29&inst_id=28053

04. Related links

Biography, bibliography, interviews and filmography.

<http://jefcornelis.janvaneyck.nl/>

Interviews with Jef Cornelis.

<http://jefcornelis.janvaneyck.nl/interviews.php>

Bibliographic information about Jef Cornelis.

<http://www.argosarts.org/media-library/agent/85c872c4282c4c03a32ee1ee26716671>

Reference to the book on the work of Jef Cornelis published by Argos Editions.

<http://www.argosarts.org/claandestine-work-jef-cornelis>

Details of the Jef Cornelis exhibitions held at Artfacts.

<http://www.artfacts.net/es/artista/jef-cornelis-44545/perfil.html>

Article in Tate Papers that analyses the work of Jef Cornelis in relation to Daniel Buren, as well as society's perception of contemporary art.

<http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/09autumn/brams.shtm>

Information on an exhibition of the collection of Herman and Nicole Daled, who contributed financially to the creation of the alternative arts centre A 379089.

<http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2010/04/02/publish/2348909939.html>

Interview in which Jef Cornelis talks about his film works, and discusses the types of artistic work produced the alternative arts centre A 379089.

http://jefcornelis.janvaneyck.nl/interview_03.php

Information about A 379089.

<http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/09autumn/morris.shtm>



[Jef Cornelis *Daniel Buren (Palais Royal)*, 1971]



[Jef Cornelis *Martial Raysse*, 1967]

05. Credits

Produced by Ricardo Duque and Lucrecia Pérez. Voice: Lucrecia Pérez and Roc Jiménez de Cisneros. Documentation: André Chêdas and Martí Manen.

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