

Press Release

Condo 2017
Galerie Max Mayer & CHEWDAY'S

THE MIDDLE CLASS GOES TO HEAVEN

Egyptian Funerary Objects
Jef Geys
Nicolás Guagnini

14 January 2017 – 11 February, 2017
[Preview: 14 & 15 January, 12-6 pm]

Open: Thu – Sat, 12-6 pm
or by appointment

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For Condo 2017, CHEWDAY'S (London) will host Galerie Max Mayer (Dusseldorf). The exhibition will feature works by Nicolás Guagnini and Jef Geys, of Galerie Max Mayer, alongside ancient Egyptian funerary objects, contributed by CHEWDAY'S.

The works of Guagnini and Geys draw focus onto the shrinking middle class, which, since the emergence of neo-liberal politics in the 1980s, is a growing fact within western societies with strong implications on an essentially middle class culture like contemporary art; their works are here placed amongst two groups of Egyptian funerary objects dating from the very beginning (c. 4000 BCE) and the very end (c. 30 BCE) of Ancient Egyptian civilization that attest to the funerary practices of the middle classes and the increasingly complex social structure and belief systems of these periods.

The exhibition borrows its title from Guagnini's 2005-06 work *The Middle Class Goes to Heaven*. From an artist known for his critique of social institutions, this piece – a projection of 80 slides, featuring brutalist architecture accompanied by spoken terms such as 'health insurance,' 'couple's therapy,' and 'long weekend' (procedural structures of middle class modes of production and consumption) in several languages -- shown only once previously at Orchard Gallery, New York in 2006, foreshadows middle class struggles to maintain not only their benefits, but also responsibilities as they hurdle unknowingly towards financial crisis.

Jef Geys (b. 1934), essentially coming from a middle-class background and regional context, can be seen as an annalist of the changing context around his work. Working as a teacher for almost thirty years, the artist has always insisted on locating his artistic practice in the context of his native Balen, Belgium. Every work is specifically developed for each presentation and conceptualized from his extensive archive, relating to the city and therefore building the institution for his own work, referencing the entanglement of his oeuvre with Balen and the broader region. This connection is an essentially bourgeois idea of the artist being part of a group of educated citizens and Geys' work in the span of the last sixty years represents the continuing change that this relationship has undergone.

Simple red and black-topped pottery vessels, made of fired Nile silt, commonly date to the Predynastic Era (circa 4000-3100 BCE) -- a time before Egypt was unified by a single power, when society consisted largely of simple agrarian communities. Their find-spots in tombs or temples associate these vases with ritual or funeral use. Miniature bronze sarcophagi for mummified animals date from the Late Ptolemaic period (664–30 BCE) towards the end of Ancient Egyptian civilization, when the funerary practices once only accessible to royalty became accessible to a much broader segment of society. Such containers are generally small and would have held the mummified remains, or partial remains of the animal portrayed. The shrew-mouse (one example on exhibition here) was an animal sacred to the solar deity Horus of Letopolis, but was honored all over Egypt, particularly in the Delta. The mouse was considered to be the blind eye of Horus, which was miraculously healed, thereby symbolizing resurrection and rebirth. These boxes would have been offered in temples or for deposition in animal necropolises, not just in honor of the god that they are linked to but also in broad connection with other animal representations linked to solar cults, such as shrew mice, ichneumons, or falcons. They are testament to the complex social stratification and rich belief systems of this late period.