ALMINE RECH

John Giorno
Eating the Sky

Oct 29 — Dec 18, 2010 | Brussels

For the first time in Brussels, the Almine Rech Gallery is presenting a solo exhibition by John Giorno. The exhibition will open on Thursday 28 October with an exclusive poetry performance by the artist.

Born in New York in 1936, John Giorno, a leading figure of the Beat Generation, has worked closely with William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg and Brion Gysin, as well as Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, whose legacy he is keeping alive. The Beat revolution was founded on the idea that the goodness of human nature would be stifled by a coercive society, an idea that went against the dominant post-war pessimism.

Art, they believed, enables one to go beyond traditional moral values and to explore the full human potential, thereby enhancing mankind's field of perception and inner experience. Art was thus seen as the ideal means for self-transformation, an innovative idea that was central to the emergence of the arts in the sixties. John Giorno's visual poem "Eating the Sky", recently on show at the "Traces du Sacré" exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, exemplifies the spiritual quest that was inherent to the Beat Generation and to Giorno's life.

In the words of Frank O'Hara, John Giorno is "a poet among painters", and like Warhol, Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, he radically altered our understanding of poetry. He is also interested in other artistic disciplines, and in 1963 he was the subject of Andy Warhol's famous film, Sleep.

Two years later he founded "Giorno Poetry Systems" (GPS), making use of various media to disseminate poetry. This collective of artists would also bring out records, producing the works of musicians, poets and performers, many of which would prove to be key twentieth-century artists, such as John Cage or Brion Gysin.

John Giorno is also one of the initiators of "Performance Poetry", artistic representations which, through their use of sound and image, continue to generate new trends. In 1968, GPS launched the "Dial-a-Poem" project (people could dial a number and get to hear a poem), a project in which William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg notably took part. It was a huge success, matching John Giorno's ambition. Thanks to these new media, Giorno freed poetry from its small circle of readers and contributed to its popularization by reaching out to a wider audience.

John Giorno has also developed the visual aspect of his work. His paintings, drawings and screen prints integrate words and expressions taken from his poems, recently collected in Subduing Demons in America: Selected Poems 1962-2007, a volume edited by Marcus Boon.

For the "Eating the Sky" exhibition, the poet will reveal to us the development of his "Poem Paintings" with 25 paintings and 13 drawings. Thanx 4 Nothing, a video in which the performance poet stages himself, will also be presented.