

Art in America

June 28, 2018
By Leigh Anne Miller

BACKSTORY



Marcel Broodthaers, left, and David Lamelas, ca. 1970, Brussels. Photo Maria Gilissen-Broodthaers.

White Walls and a Hat

by David Lamelas

MARCEL BROODTHAERS's wife, Maria, took this photo around 1970 in the backyard of their home in Brussels, on rue de la Pépinière. The brick wall in the background is painted white and bears some text—it's an artwork by Broodthaers. I had arrived from London that morning; I often stopped in Brussels on my way to Antwerp, where my gallery, Wide White Space, was located. Maria never liked this picture because she thought Broodthaers didn't look good, but I think he looks wonderful! Kind of like Rodin.

I first met Broodthaers at the Venice Biennale in 1968. I was representing Argentina. My piece, *Office of Information about the Vietnam War at Three Levels: The Visual Image, Text and Audio*, had a window display. I was cleaning the glass and this man came up to me and asked, in French, who made this work? Using my very primitive French I said, "moi-même." He introduced himself, but I had no idea who Marcel Broodthaers was. He brought some friends to see my work: his dealer, Anny De Decker, and her husband, who ran the gallery Wide White Space together, and a collector from Antwerp. Anny asked me what I was doing in September. I said I was going to be in England, learning English, because I had a scholarship from the British Council to go to art school. She said that her gallery was participating in Konrad Fischer's exhibition Prospect 68 at Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, and did I want to make a

work for the show? When I got to London that summer I spoke with the woman at the British Council about the show in Germany and asked if I could be away from school for a week in the fall. She agreed, so I made my first English language piece, *Analysis of the Elements by which the Massive Consumption of Information Takes Place*, for Prospect 68 while I was at Saint Martins.

I really love the hat that I'm wearing in this photo. It was brown, with touches of gold. I remember it well because it was expensive. I had a grant of sixty pounds per month, and when I arrived in London I got forty extra pounds to buy clothing. This was a lot for me! I'd never had that much money in my pocket. I always loved hats, so I decided to go to Herbert Johnson, the smartest hat shop in London, and bought it for twelve pounds. I kept the hat for many years but lost it when I moved to Los Angeles. The coat was cheap—a dark green British military coat from the '40s. I got it for maybe two pounds in Camden Town. I was only about twenty-one when I moved to London. I wasn't a regular art student; I'd won prizes and been in many shows already. But I had been living with my mom and dad in Argentina and was still a kid. This was the first time I was on my own. I had two births: one in Buenos Aires, and a rebirth in London, when my adult life started. ○

— As told to Leigh Anne Miller

CURRENTLY ON VIEW
"David Lamelas: A Life of Their Own," at the Latin American Art Museum of Buenos Aires (MALBA), through June 11, and "David Lamelas: Fiction of a Production," at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, East Lansing, June 2, 2018–Jan. 6, 2019.

DAVID LAMELAS is an artist based in Buenos Aires, Paris, and Los Angeles.