



Wesley Willis © M. Thies/Collection MADmusée

**America does not exist !**  
(I know because I've already been there)

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**Press kit**

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© Art et marges musée/A. Sougane

## 1. Art et marges museum

Located in the heart of Brussels, Art et marges, the outsider art museum, questions art and its boundaries. Its collection has been compiled since the mid-1980s from works by self-taught artists, art workshops for persons with mental disabilities or from psychiatric circles. It now comprises more than 3500 international works produced outside the beaten tracks of art. Three temporary exhibitions per year combine artists from either side of the margin, questioning the boundaries of art and its very definitions.

The Art et marges museum is in line with Outsider Art, a concept developed in the mid-20th century by the French painter Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985), who had started collecting works by patients in psychiatric hospitals in which he saw a form of authenticity and necessity that he could not find in what he called “cultural” art.

The Art et marges museum is not, however, limited to what Dubuffet opted to call as such. Jean Dubuffet created Outsider Art. He defined it but above all he prohibited, while alive, anyone from using this term to speak of something other than his own collection (today housed in the “Outsider Art Collection” Museum in Lausanne). He did not acknowledge, for instance, works created in art workshops, whether from the mental health or mental disability sector, as belonging to Outsider Art. And it was in these terms that he replied, in 1984, to Françoise Henrion, founder of Art en Marge which would later become the Art et marges museum. It was then a Research and Dissemination Centre dedicated to works situated outside the usual artistic circuits, works by self-taught artists therefore, but also works from art workshops for persons with a mental disability or in the psychiatric sector. The association was gradually made with the term “outsider art,” which was initially the translation of the French “Art Brut” which over time came to encompass more freely artistic expressions “outside” the beaten tracks of art.

As of 1986, Art en marge had exhibition premises and functioned as a non-profit art gallery. The collection grew with exhibition after exhibition, thereby justifying the change of status into a museum. The Art et marges museum was inaugurated in December 2009. The change of name was justified by the determination to open up the premises – to show works at the margins of artistic circles, often stemming from the marginality of the artists, but in a spirit of inclusiveness and dialogue with artists that could be termed “insiders.” This place does not define the margin but questions it and in so doing questions the very definition of art.

Contact with these works gave rise easily to reflections such as this one (among others): Can a work which comes into being, without any intention to create a work of art, be considered as such?

The works which are shown stem from sharing experiences in workshops as much as the most

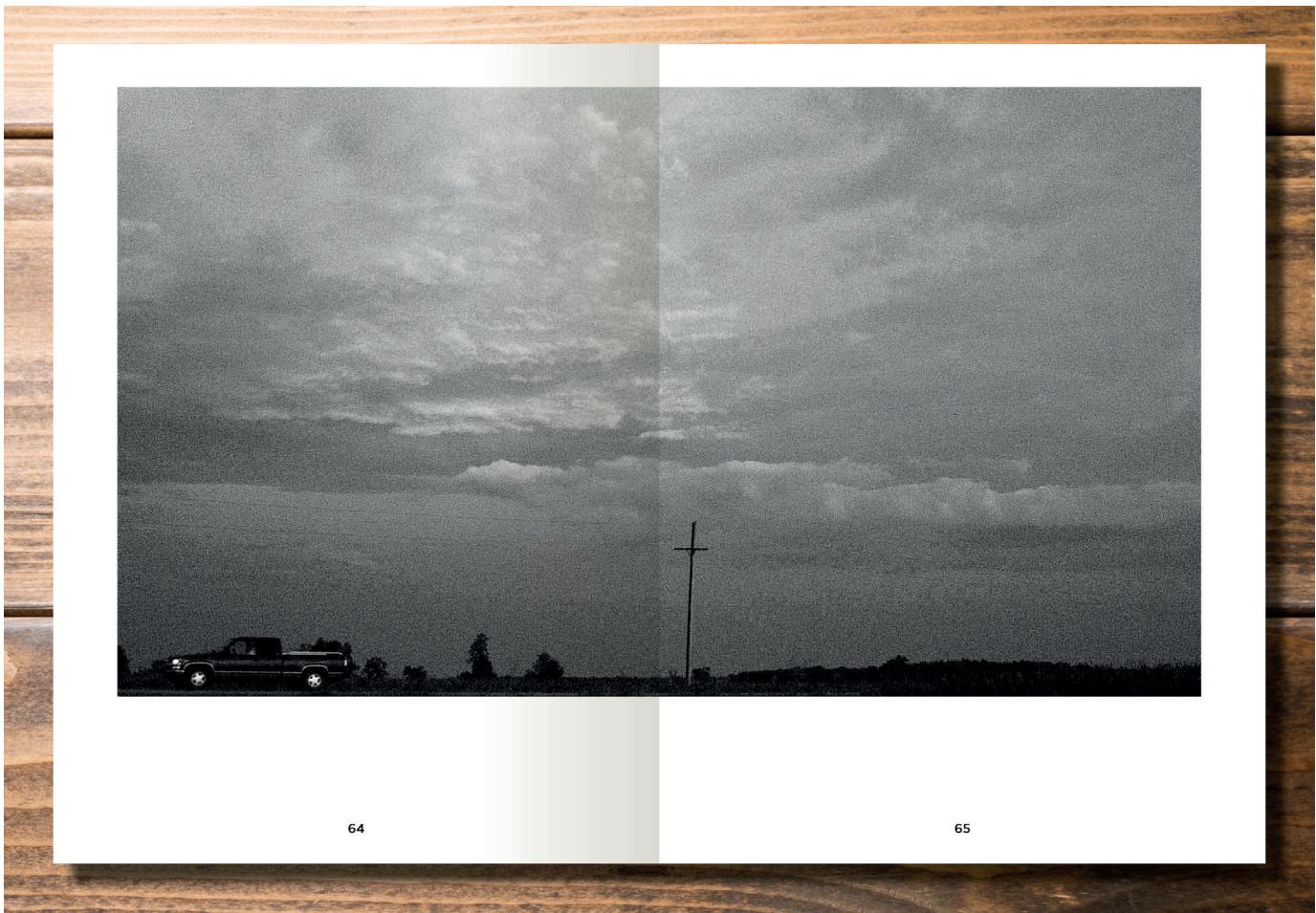
complete intimacy. They often maintain a very close link with the life of the artist. They are often produced spontaneously, without intellectualization and they often speak very directly to the beholders. They are never subjected to rules, even when they try to conform therewith. The Art et marges museum is a space where creation is an upwelling nugget of confidentiality of the place where it arose, a space where creation is associated with the idea of freedom more than ever before.

After more than 30 years (9 as a museum) Art et marges is still marked by a certain confidentiality, maintained by its size, invisibility in the building which it occupies, and, undoubtedly, its small size. This latter characteristic seems nonetheless to be considered as a strength. It is not an impressive place. Visitors are put at ease. Contact with the museum staff is very easy, and dialogue is given pride of place.

Museum Night Fever, late evening visits to Brussels Museums, Make room for children, school and family visits, roundtables, performances, meetings with the artists, etc. ... Art et marges is a lively museum to the rhythm of the activities that are held there.

The Art et marges museum attaches great importance to catering for young people as well as the not so young. Activities for children are organized regularly at the museum to explain the different works shown in a playful manner. Moreover, events such as lectures are organized in connection with the exhibitions mounted.

## 2. America does not exist! (I know because I've been there)



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Matthieu Morin © Knock Outsider

On the occasion of the publication of the work entitled “Des pépites dans le goudron! Un roadtrip brut en Amérique” [Nuggets in the Tarmac! An Outsider Road Trip through America], devoted to American outsider landscape artists and published by Knock Outsider! (see Chapter 3), the Art et marges museum gives free rein to Matthieu Morin, the author of the work and curator of the exhibition “America does not exist! I know. I've already been there.”

Inspired by a quote from Henry Miller and a reply from Alain Resnais, the exhibition raises questions about the place of the USA in the world, and in the collective imagination, to be more precise. This dual exhibition / publication project is intended to present “America” through the glare of a distorting mirror: The American Dream. The trails will become murky through the dialogue between the works on show and the erased borders between reality and fantasy – a changing reflection from light to serious, spontaneous to cynical, a disconcerting voyage through singular and plural works.

The exhibition beckons us to discover some one hundred popular and contemporary works of outsider art from the USA and the world over. From sculpture to drawing, photo to video and all the way to sound in a stage that plays with the codes of the voyage – hop on for an intramural road trip that will make you rediscover America through its singular reflection.

### 3. Nuggets in the Tarmac !

#### An outsider road trip brut through America

Nuggets in the Tarmac! is a multifaceted work, concurrently an art book and travel narrative. In 2011, Matthieu Morin embarked on a long road trip on the American roads to unearth monumental works of outsider art: environments.

In this crossing of the continent, the author takes us from one site to the other, but he also narrates his journey, a total submersion in popular American culture that situates the creations in their geographic and social context.

Far from the widespread academic approach to outsider art, Matthieu Morin casts a critical yet light-hearted glance that reflects a fierce determination to focus on human beings in their most distinctive dimension, when they want to compete with the gods by building modern, erratic temples full of meaning and magic.

This decidedly humorous narrative nonetheless relies on the precise and extensive knowledge of the author who is a passionate and well documented collector of outsider art.

Following the lead of the likes of Jean-Hubert Martin, Matthieu Morin has deliberately opted to call on his sensations of enlightened amateur and focus on the meeting with an artist and his element. The book comprises twelve documentary chapters, each of which is devoted to a place and its artist.

Whereas Outsider Art is being talked about nowadays, some specimens of outsider architecture featured here have already disappeared. As the fate of these invaluable works for the history of art is uncertain, this project aspires to preserve a trace of them.

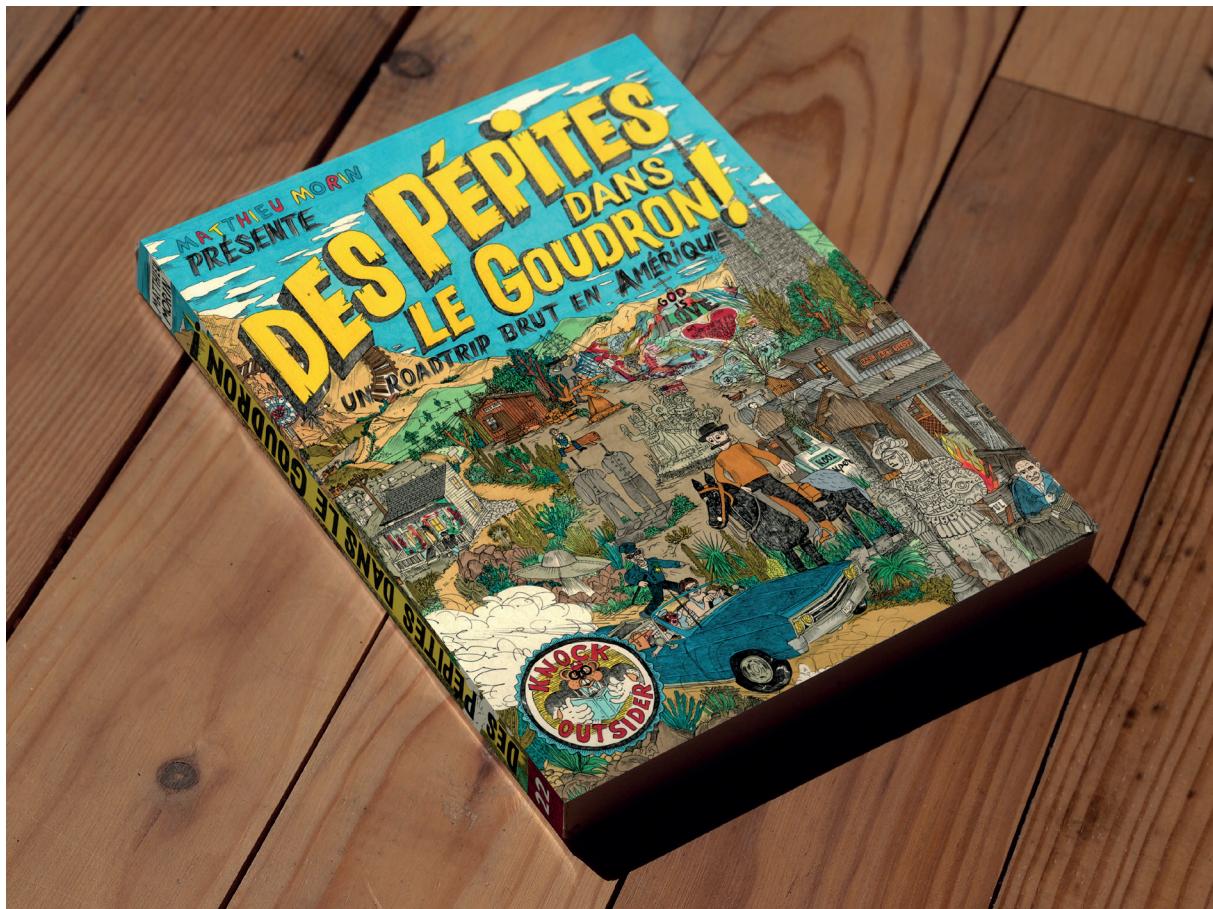
The visit of each setting is broached by the portrait of its creator, the men who devoted their entire life to edifying unique architectural works and this art that defies all definitions.

The book will be published by Knock Outsider! on 3 October: the date of the private viewing of the exhibition.

Les Editions Knock Outsider! constitutes a project devoted to the exploration, production and dissemination of outsider art initiated by La « S » Grand Atelier and Les Editions Frémok. The project at this time boasts a dozen published works, projects and artists exhibited in reputed venues (Galerie du Jour, Palais Idéal du Facteur Cheval, La collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, Musée du Dr. Guislain, Fondation Vasarely, etc.). The Knock Outsider! Project has for ten years endeavoured to shatter all categories, open up new prospects of recognition for artists traditionally left in the margins of the main artistic trends, and showcase a “contemporary outsider’s art,” that frees itself from its historical models.

The book “Nuggets in the Tarmac!” is currently (and until the beginning of August 2019) in the crowdfunding phase on the website:

<https://livre-avenir.org/ateliersfab/knockoutsider/campaigns/des-pepites-dans-le-goudron>



Matthieu Morin © Knock Outsider

## 4. Matthieu Morin

Matthieu Morin discovered outsider art some twenty years ago while playing rock music in the garage of a psychiatrist who was a collector. It was a shock, and from that day he has devoted himself to the study, exploration and collection of this art. While expanding his collection of outsider and popular art, he has taken part in many exhibition and publication projects relating to self-taught practices of art in all its forms. In 2016, he founded the label “La Belle Brute” together with Olivier Brisson (psycho-motor therapist and musician), Julien Bancilhon (psychologist, violin maker and experimental musician) and Franq de Quengo (member of the group Dragibus and programmer of the Sonic Protest festival) – a label dedicated to music publishing and live programming of outsider music practices.

## 5. The imperatives

### Martin Ramirez / Mexique / 1895-1963

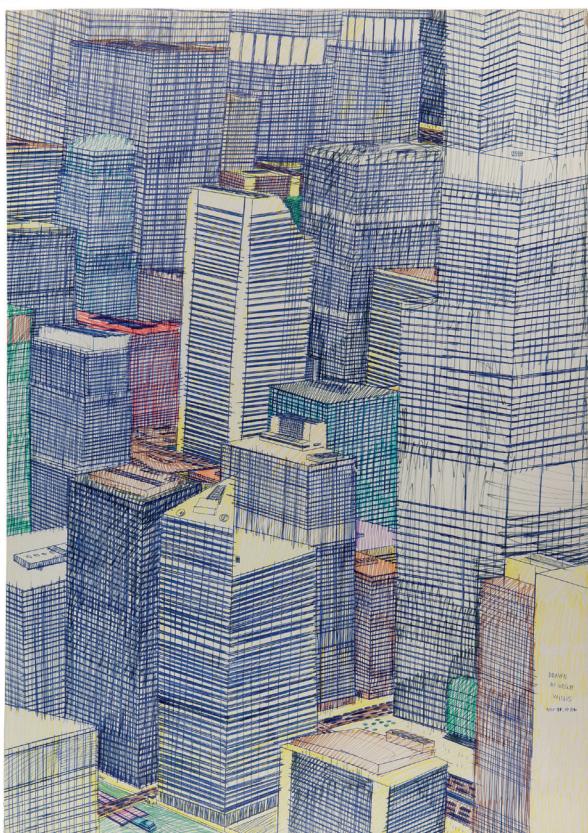
Martin Ramirez emigrated to the United States at the age of thirty in the hope of finding gainful employment to feed his family. He worked in the mines and in railway construction in Northern California. But then, the Cristero Rebellion broke out in Mexico: his property was destroyed, Martín Marírez lost the livestock he was breeding, and he broke off once and for all from his family because of a misunderstanding. Already afflicted with mental problems, in 1931 he was consigned to the Stockton State psychiatric hospital, from where he escaped on several occasions only to return of his own volition each time. He began to draw in 1935. Suffering from tuberculosis, he was transferred to the DeWitt State Hospital in Auburn in 1948.

His work has been preserved thanks to artist and psychology professor Tarmo Pasto, who intervened at the time. Martín Ramírez drew on pieces of recovered paper that he put together, on which he spread a colour paste made of pencils, charcoal, fruit juice, shoe polish, saliva and at times his own sputum.

Concurrently narrative and abstract, his work circumscribes while diverting all representations of his culture (the Mexican bandito, the Madonna, forest animals, the train, etc.) into a formalist patchwork.

Source: ABCD collection

### Wesley Willis / Etats-Unis / 1963-2003



Wesley Willis©M. Thies/Collection MADmusée

Wesley was born in 1963 in Chicago, the city that would become the muse of his ravings. From the moment he was born he was immersed in violence and deals being transacted above his cradle, before being removed from his parents and brought up by two of his nine brothers from homes to institutions. Diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic in the beginning of the 1990s, Wesley tried in vain to tame his demons to the point of calling them by their nickname: heartbreaker and nervebreaker, and described his psychotic episodes as real hell rides. Wesley would ride buses, scouring all the lines of Chicago from one side to the other and across the city. He supplemented his disability pension by selling his drawings in the streets and his albums when people came out of concerts.

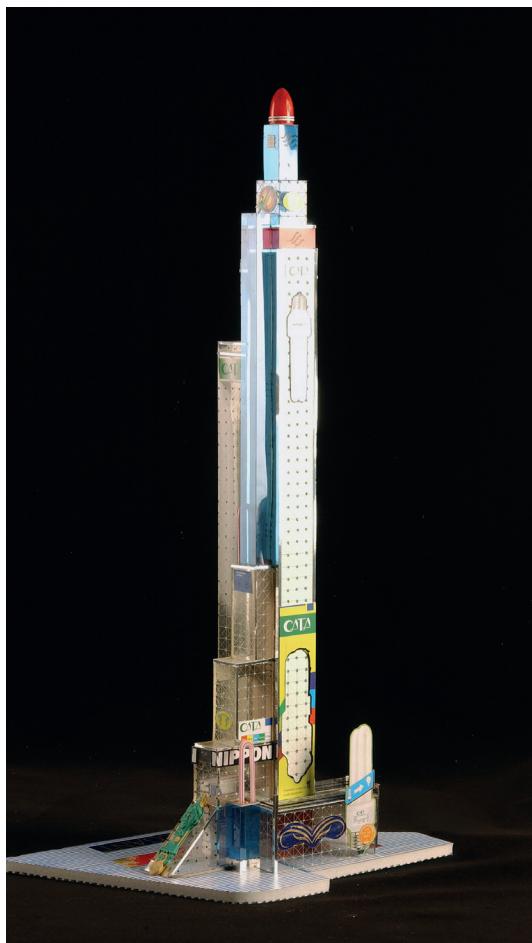
The buses, cars and jam-packed thoroughfares of Chicago served as the obsessional subjects for his drawings. Wesley would use pencil to put down on large formats his nervous hatchings and distorted vision of an already distorted landscape – a frame within a frame of urban frenzy. His skyscrapers and motorway flyovers with false perspectives, dominated by logos, come across both as a satire and an ambiguous love of the supermarket, a superposed and supercharged environment, one big organized mayhem where man is represented only by the movement of his own machines. A downright punk vision of the society that he depicts, likewise and right to the point in the songs that would turn him into the darling of the American alternative scene. The loner with absurd and vulgar lyrics comes to be considered as an authentic voice of that disillusioned and couldn't-give-a-damn young generation. His audience, whom he always cherished in his heart, is systematically, individually and sincerely thanked by a ceremonial head butt. His mania would for that matter mark him with a perpetual dark bump on his forehead – a trophy that became an additional mark of his impressive physique: 2m10 and 120 kg, an ever present smile, and small, duelling dreadlocks.

Wesley Willis is a little like as if Basquiat had eaten up Warhol or a crime of passion – that of society. Wesley died on 21 August 2003 aged 40 from leukaemia. His plastic work is eliciting increasing interest and his albums are being played more than ever before on the turntables of the underground.

« Rock n roll Mac Dooooonalds!!! Rock n roll Mac Dooooonalds!!! (ad lib) »

Source: Matthieu Morin for the Galerie du Moineau Ecarlate.

## Bodys Isek Kingelez / République démocratique du Congo / 1948-2015



Bodys Isek Kingelez©Courtesy AEROPLASTICS Bruxelles

Bodys Isek Kingelez taught in a secondary school until 1977. After more than a year of isolation and research, he produced in 1979 a strange scale model that attracted the attention of the director of the Kinshasa Museum where he became a restorer. As of 1985, he devoted himself fully to his artistic work, which he described as "Scale Model Architecture." Kinshasa was then a large, chaotic, anarchic, and increasingly dilapidated metropolis. Kingelez, who witnessed the havoc wrought by a policy with little concern for the community, developed a work of architectural form which encompasses all the conditions of the development of his capital and his country: housing, education, justice, health, security, etc. All his poetic and political work questions the human condition. Having produced more than one hundred scale models from recovered materials such as paper, cardboard and plastic where the Present, Future and hopes of an African renewal seem to coexist and take shape, he conceived of entire cities as of 1992. These "cities" are an assemblage of scale models of buildings unusual in shape, grandiose edifices, complexes with lively colours that pack all the functions of the ideal cities that the artist is dreaming of seeing erected.

His first city was called Kimbembele Ihunga, in honour of the village of his birth. He had this to say about his works Ville Fantôme (1995), Kinshasa: Project for the Third Millennium (1997), and The City of the Future (2000): “I wanted my art to enable a new generation to create a new world, because the pleasures of our earthly world depend on the people who live in it. I created these cities so that peace, justice and freedom can live on in a universal manner. They function like small, secular states, with their own political structures, without any need for an army or police.” In a true mark of success, the exhibition “Bodys Isek Kingelez: City Dreams” is held in the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2019.

Source: André Magnin collection.

### Jean Smilowski / France / 1927-1989

Born in France to Polish immigrant parents who arrived in Lille in 1924, Jean Smilowski knew only hardship throughout his life. Working as a manual labourer in the factory of Fives-Lille- Cail, he had an accident which disabled him when he was 33 – the same age as Christ when he died – a detail that was important for him. From 1943 to 1985, he lived in a shed built in the midst of the Poterne workers’ gardens, at the foot of the fortifications of the old town in Lille.

On the fringe of society, he invented a kingdom for himself where he reigned as prince. He painted with bright colours, with Ripolin paints, on pieces of sheets, plywood and wood. Not given an easy life, he proceeded to build his own life with a flurry of dreams. His imagination fed off westerns, pop songs, illustrations from magazines, travel and war books, comic strips, but also sacred images. He “brushed shoulders with” John Wayne, Clark Gable, Popeye, Charlie Chaplin, Tino Rossi... but also with Saint Rita, Saint Theresa, the Buddha, Hindu deities,... He would “invite” the high and mighty of this world to his kingdom: De Gaulle, Churchill, Mao... He invented a muse, Ramona, whom he adorned with Indian braids and who would follow him everywhere. Love, war, religions are to be found in all his work. In 1980, Smilowski was threatened with expulsion. He then made wooden suitcases which he painted on both sides. “My suitcases are ready,” he said.

Source: La Voix Du Nord / Association La Poterne

## 6. Don't miss it for anything!

**03/10 18-21:00**

- Private viewing in the presence of Matthieu Morin, curator of the exhibition, and a number of artists and lenders.
- Concert/Performance "Once upon a time in the West," by Kostia Botkine (Choolers Division / Grand atelier la S), Julien Bancilhon (Is a Fish, La Belle Brute) and Wilfrid Morin (Keeper Volant), with mood ambiance created by Daniel Croutemane.
- After party at the café «Le Petit Lion» with DJ Blondie Warolles (France)

**10/10/19 17-22.00** late evening opening of Brussels museums (mediation throughout the evening)

**2/11/19 16.00** Dia de muertos. Workshop open to all at the museum

**27/12/19 14-16.30** Afternoon for children: playful visit and creative workshop

**2/02/20 14-18.00** Free Sunday - festive closing ceremony. In the presence of the curator and artists

## 7. Contacts

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