

Alphabetum XIII Le Livre de Mallarmé

Exhibition: 24.03.2023 — 25.06.2023, Opening: 24.03.2022, 19:00 hrs.

Location: West Den Haag in the former American Embassy, Lange Voorhout 102, The Hague

‘Everything exists to end up in a book.’

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842 — 1898), *Le Livre*, *Instrument Spirituel*, *Divagations* (1897), Uitgever: Bibliotheque-Charpentier.

Precisely 125 years ago, French poet and critic Stéphane Mallarmé passed away in Valvins, France. He dedicates the last twenty years of his life to his magnum opus ‘Le Livre’ — an enigmatic book with an almost superhuman aura. ‘Le Livre’ was left behind unfinished, whether intentionally or not. Through this, the book has gained a unique spot in the oeuvre of a great poet. This first museum presentation about Mallarmé at West Den Haag gives us a glance into his ideas and legacy, with facsimiles, philosophical conversations with contemporary poets and artists, a new publication and performances. It promises to give a new impetus of inspiration to literature fanatics and first readers alike.

For a select group of literature enthusiasts, ‘Le Livre’ has earned a cult status, while the general public mostly does not know of its existence. With ‘Le Livre’, Mallarmé wants to complete his life’s work. He wants to achieve something entirely new and gives the reader an active and decisive role to play as a receiver of the work. This discovery of a reimagined relationship between subject (the receiver) and object is almost as revolutionary as Einstein’s theory of relativity. Mallarmé is the first author to illustrate the crucial value of the receiver or reader of a work.

Only 61 years after his death, French literary scholar Jacques Scherer publishes Mallarmé’s notes on ‘Le Livre’. The collection comprises hundreds of pages of typographical translations and gives a clear image of what the poet envisioned: namely, a language project that goes beyond language and has a high level of ‘performativity’. It tries to bring text on paper pages to life and in this way, it questions the form of the book itself.

Did the poetic mystic Mallarmé succeed in passing over his new idea about the book as the ultimate cultural artefact? Can a greater audience than only several enthusiasts enjoy the preliminary sketches of what the poet set out to be the ‘book of all books’?

This project is the first museum exhibition of the work of Mallarmé in The Netherlands. It exists of prints of all facsimiles of ‘Le Livre’, a publication with contemporary discussions on ‘Le Livre’, the production of a new performance by Dutch writer and artist Emily Kocken, and a public programme that aims to highlight lingering questions around this work, as well as the role of the reader and viewer in the contemporary cultural field.

About Mallarmé — The symbolical poet and critic Mallarmé is considered one of the most important pioneers of modern poetry. He had a great influence on the philosophical and theoretical discourse on literature, and his legacy is still currently of living importance for a wide array of cultural makers, such as artists, thinkers and writers.

About Emily Kocken — Emily Kocken (1963) is a writer and artist. She writes novels (*Querido*), short stories and nonfiction for De Gids and other publishing platforms. Furthermore, she creates conceptual installations, with work on paper, discursive elements and performances.

About the publication — In the publication 'B ≈ B', Emily Kocken goes into a conversation with Bertrand Marchal, a French literary scholar who provided new notes and commentary for an edition of 'Le Livre' by Jacques Scherer. The publication also features a poetic travelogue and a libretto.

About the public program — Live performance during the opening on March 24, by Emily Kocken, with Jacq Palinckx and Marieke Franssen, and on April 16 a salon led by Emily Kocken with the help of David Maroto, Mischa Andriessen and Rinske Hillen about the impact and topicality of an (unfinished) work like Le Livre for today's makers and readers.

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