

THE PUBLIC POEM by ALAIN ARIAS-MISSON

Alain Arias-Misson, born in Brussels, educated mostly in the U.S., describes himself as “a real fake-American, a fake real-Belgian”—a dual identity which extended into his life’s work: American novelist by vocation with seven books of experimental fiction, and European artist by accident—as one of the initiators of the visual poetry movement in the early sixties in Spain, Belgium, France and Italy. His works are represented in museums and galleries throughout Europe and the United States. His invention of the *Public Poem* in 1966-67, however, was a singular poetic experience: he decided he could “write on the street like a page”. His *Public Poems* or street-texts have since disrupted city life in a score of cities in Europe and the U.S..

The exhibition consists of a graphic-documentary illustration of his Public Poems and a video of seven Public Poems—on the occasion of the publication in the current issue of *Performance Arts Journal* of his Public Poems as the *Artist’s Drawings* section. Arias-Misson has deliberately enacted his Public Poems outside the “performances” circuit, in order to avoid an elitist art context: always taking place in the city streets, focal point of signs and *polis*, political-cultural milieu, the Public Poem uses minimal linguistic elements (such as grammatical symbols, letters, cartoon balloons) and iconic signs (masks, figures, materials) to point to or to frame an underlying city-text—in the symbolic and the functional aspects of traffic, police, monuments, public buildings, business, political and art institutions etc.. The public he addresses in the first place is the public in the street. Having begun this “street-poetry” in the Sixties, an era of cultural and urban effervescence, he feels that today with “Occupy Wall Street” and mass street demonstrations, his work again enjoys an esthetic-social dynamic.

Madrid 1971

Berlin 1991

