



## Maike Aden: Guy Schraenen. A foreigner abroad

In this exposé I will try to retrace more than fifty years of the multifaceted activities of Guy Schraenen, one of the key figures of the international avant-garde movement focussing on independent strategies of producing, publishing and disseminating artworks and concepts. His various roles include director of an avant-garde art gallery, publisher of artists' publications, participant in international networks, collector and organizer of numerous exhibitions and events. He embodied a differentiated view on all aspects and forms of artists' publications, not only printed matter such as books, newspapers, magazines, post-cards, catalogues, posters and photos by artists, but also objects, video and film and a very special commitment to sound art projects. Dealing with this genre in all possible roles, as producer, publisher, distributor, collector, curator, archivist, filmmaker, broadcaster, theorist and advisor is unique within this field of art and makes him a decisive link between the artists, the institutions and the public.

### GALERIE KONTAKT

From his initial base in Antwerp, Schraenen initiated a range of broadly diverse projects which were from the beginning linked to various national and international contexts. In 1964, he founded *Galerie Kontakt*<sup>1</sup>. In the early years the programme

<sup>1</sup> Information on the professional activities by Guy Schraenen can be found in G. Schraenen, *An Archive as Artistic Concept, exhibition catalogue*, Bremen,

was concentrated on the field of Lyrical Abstraction and Post-Constructivism. Artists including Eduard Bal, Antoine De Bary, Bram Bogart, Jean Degottex, Jef Geys, René Guiette, Paul Van Hoeydonck, Georges Mathieu, and Vantongerloo were presented<sup>2</sup>. Later on, the programme shifted to activities related to the new avant-garde movements such as Visual poetry, Sound poetry, Sound art, Conceptual art, Fluxus, Mail art and Artists' publications.



Jef Geys' first gallery exhibition. Gallery Kontakt (1966).  
Exhibition announcement.

Neues Museum Weserburg, 2001; G Schraenen, *Collected Writings. Essays-Statements-Interviews 1974-2013*, compiled by Bettina Brach in collaboration with Maike Aden, Bremen, Neues Museum Weserburg, Centre for Artists' Publications, Archive Guy Schraenen, 2013, and [www.guyschraenediteur.com](http://www.guyschraenediteur.com).

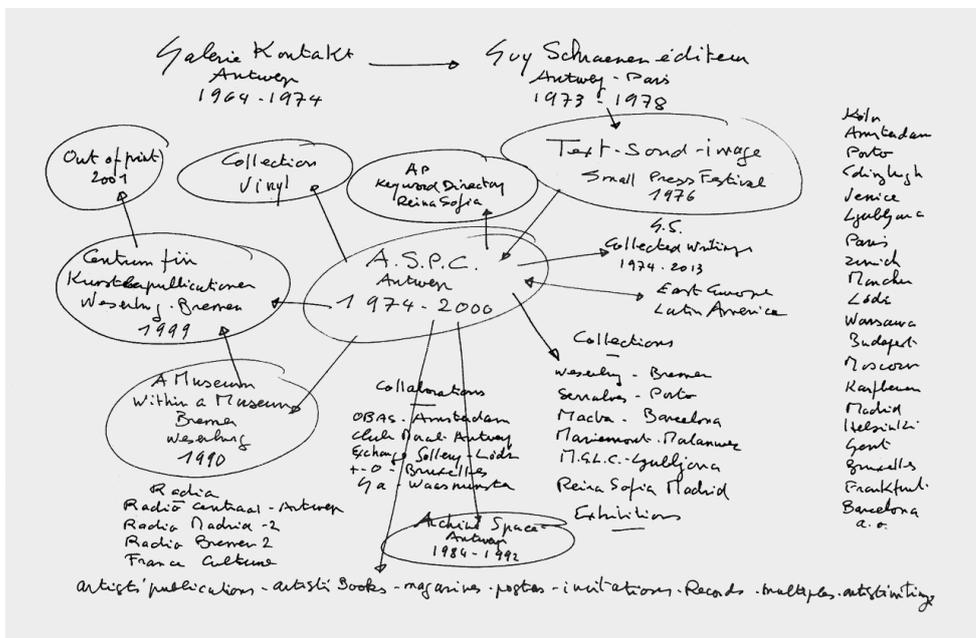
<sup>2</sup> Cf. Pierre-Jean Foulon, "Photographie et livres d'artistes", in Julie Bawin, *Art actuel & photographie*, Namur, 2008, p. 25.

GUY SCHRAENEN ÉDITEUR

In order to broaden the audience of the gallery by means of multiplication and distribution possibilities, Schraenen invited artists from 1973 on to release their artworks in the form of a publication, either a book, magazine, catalogue, postcard, multiple, poster, photo, object, cassette, record or film. This was the starting point of the independent publishing house *Guy Schraenen éditeur* in Antwerp<sup>3</sup>.

TEXT – SOUND – IMAGE

From the start, it was important to Schraenen to release artworks which were not only based on text and image, but also on sound. The inaugural publication, *Portrait-Pétales. Biopsie 13* (1973), a collaborative work between the sound poet Bernard Heidsieck and the Antwerp based visual artist Eduard Bal, combined a record



Guy Schraenen, diagram of his activities (2016).

<sup>3</sup> Marie-Cécile Miessner, “Les éditions de Guy Schraenen”, *Nouvelles de l'estampe*, n° 33, 1977, p. 52-53.

and a book. Another example of the many multimedia projects was the photo-record-book *Encoconnage* (1974) consisting of Schraenen's photographic montage of a performance by Françoise Janicot on a sound work by Bernard Heidsieck, where Janicot binds herself up from feet to head with a string. The multimedia concept was also realized, to give one more of many other possible examples, in the three issues of *Revue AXE* (1975-1976). This magazine comprised loose, folded and bound works on different material, as well as in different formats and techniques by about 30 contemporaries including an hitherto unreleased page of the manuscript "Bezette Stad" by the Antwerp poet and writer Paul van Ostaijen. In addition, a record could be found in each issue. The deluxe editions included a three-minute super 8 film by artists such as Brion Gysin, Jean Degottex and François Dufrêne who experimented with the format film for the very first time. Singular film projects and sound projects such as *Ceuvre Désintégrale 1, 2 & 3* (1976) by the sound poet François Dufrêne and *The Poet's Tongue* (1977) by Ulises Carrión were also released in the frame of the editorial programme of the publishing house. Some publications, for example *15 cartes postales* (1974), were the first of their kind. The series consisted of works especially designed for this postcard project which was conceived as an alternative to a catalogue, representing the artists with whom *Guy Schraenen éditeur* worked at that time.

#### ARTWORKS IN THE FORM OF A BOOK

According to his widely quoted statement: "The artist's book is not an art book. The artist's book is not a book about art. The artist's book is a work of art"<sup>4</sup>, Schraenen defined artists' books

<sup>4</sup> The complete definition can be found in the special issue "Boek als boek", in *Kunstenaarsboeken*, Gent, 1988, s.p.



Bernard Heidsieck, François Janicot, Guy Schraenen, *Encoconnage* (1974), photo-record-Book.

as “artworks in the form of a book”. A very few examples of the rich and varied types of books published by *Guy Schraenen éditeur* shall be given here. In 1974, an intense and important collaboration started with the Argentinian artist Mirtha Dermisache whose production lies between visual art and writing. Her intention was that her one-off pieces in the form of abstract “graphic texts”, “stories”, “information sheets”, “post-cards”, “letters” and “books” should come to life as multiple publications, accessible to a wide public<sup>5</sup>. Dermisache’s works were rarely published before Schraenen became the first to

<sup>5</sup> G. Schraenen, “A transatlantic ‘Affair’”, in *Mirtha Dermisache, exhibition catalogue MALBA*, Buenos Aires, Fundación Espigas, 2017.

regularly publish her<sup>6</sup>. A most notable one was the European issue of *Diario No. 1* (1975), an artists' book in newspaper format. Covered with her graphisms, it was undecipherable for any reader, including the censors in times of the Argentinian dictatorship. Other works released by the publishing house were *Cahier No. 1* (1975), *Article in Revue AXE No. 1* (1975) and *Four Postcards* (1978). Lourdes Castro's book *D' Ombres* (1974) and her large format prints *Furrows* (1974) were entirely realized in coloured silkscreen and Françoise Janicot's book *Rendez-vous* (1973), in contrary, in Xerox technique. Avant-garde poet and musician Henri Chopin's book: *29 novembre '74. Portraits des 9* (1975) was also published, as was *Roller Poem* (1977) by Brion Gysin, one of his very rare graphic works. It consisted of a graphic poem, silkscreened on a long vertical sheet of translucent tracing paper. The collections *ColleXtion* and *ColleXtion suite* consisted each of a series of, at the same time, simple and precious artists' books by various artists which are realized in offset, silkscreen, photography and photocopies. Among them was the first publisher-released book by the artist Bernard Villers, entitled *Trace* (1978).

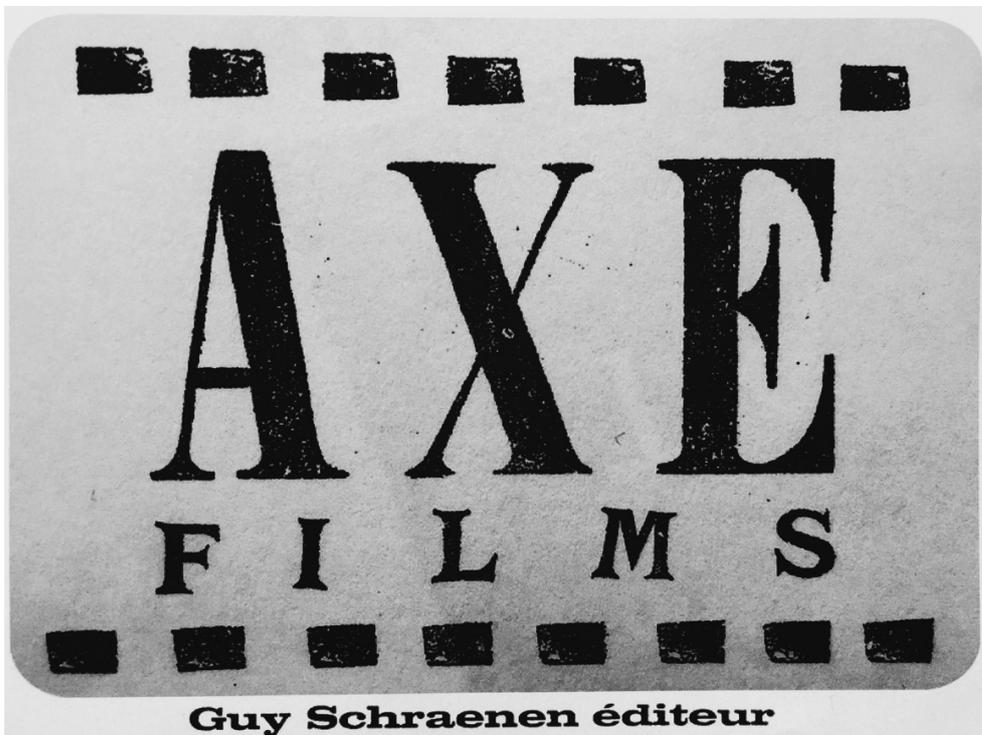
#### PRINTING WORKSHOP

All publications by *Guy Schraenen éditeur* were developed in very close collaboration with the artists who had complete freedom to conceive and produce their work. To facilitate this, a *Printing Workshop* was connected to the publishing house. It functioned as an artist residence, long before this term was coined. The artists were invited to explore and realize, among others, silkscreens, small offset publications and mimeographed

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Archivo Mirtha Dermisache: <http://mirthadermisache.com/biografia.php> [last access: 09/01/2017].



Artworks



Axe films, logo.

works. For many of them it was the occasion to publish a book for the first time. Among the artists who collaborated with Schraenen were, in addition to the above-mentioned Lourdes Castro, Henri Chopin, Mirtha Dermisache, Françoise Janicot, Brion Gysin and Bernard Villers, Bram Bogart, Ulises Carrión, Jean Degottex, Peter Downsbrough, François Dufrêne, Bernard Heidsieck, Jiří Kolář and many more. The main concern was independence from the definitions and ideologies of established institutions, critics and academics. Thus, many of these artists – even recognized now by specialists and the public in this particular field – were neglected by the traditional art world at that time.

#### SOPHISTICATION

Even if there is no generally recognised definition of the artists' book, the common notion of it is mostly defined as correlating to a low- or anti-aesthetic mass produced look. Any beholder whose perspective is shaped by this prevailing concept will notice a certain subtlety inherent to a number of books<sup>7</sup> by *Guy Schraenen éditeur*. Compared to many other artists' books, they feature a certain sophistication regarding the material, print technique, format, colour and design. Inserted cut outs, fold outs, collages, loose pages and original works distinguish these books from the more usual types of artists' books. But as much as these anti-purist publications do not follow the aesthetic conventions of understated covers, typographies and materials, they are equally far removed from the realm of fine printing and for certain from handicraft object books which are so common in the more populist sectors of this field. Not many

<sup>7</sup> The term artists' book is used in the sense of artists' publication here and includes all forms and subforms of published art works.

artists' publications fall between two stools like those published by *Guy Schraenen éditeur*. One could look at them as outsiders, or even "aliens", as Schraenen himself calls them<sup>8</sup>. But equally well one can consider them as – literally and figuratively – outstanding artworks in the form of a book which unite a persuasive concept and a corresponding aesthetic sensibility for material and formal aspects.

#### EXHIBITIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

*Guy Schraenen éditeur* publications were regularly presented in exhibitions in *Galerie Kontakt*. But also collaborations with other art institutions of that time served this purpose. Among them were Belgium based venues such as the *I.C.C.* in Antwerp along with international art spaces such as the *Centre Pompidou* and art galleries in Paris. In Amsterdam they were shown in exhibitions at *Other Books and So* by Ulises Carrión and in the artists' run bookshop gallery *Boekie Woekie*. Other places were *Wiens Laden & Verlag* in Berlin, *Granary Books* in New York, *La Mamelle* in San Francisco and the *Library of International Literature* in Moscow. Furthermore, *Guy Schraenen éditeur* appeared for many years as member of *United Untied* at the Frankfurt book fair as well as being invited to present his books at Art Basel and Art Frankfurt.

#### ARCHIVE FOR SMALL PRESS & COMMUNICATION (A.S.P.C.)

Out of the circumstances which have to be characterised by a general lack of interest in this kind of contemporary art in Antwerp at that time, the publications by *Guy Schraenen éditeur* had only a limited commercial success. But the initial idea of

<sup>8</sup> G. Schraenen in a conversation with the author in January 2017.



Frankfurt Book Fair (1994).

moving from the limited context of an institutionalized gallery to a wider, participating audience remained successful. Very helpful was the international network, which emerged in the 1960s by using the postal system. After Schraenen sent – without any comment – the first book of his publishing house to other small publishing houses and artists, the postman arrived day after day with bags full of publications which were sent in exchange by contemporaries from all over the world. The richness and diversity of these works resulted in the decision to found the *Archive for Small Press & Communication (A.S.P.C.)* together with his wife Anne Marsily in 1974<sup>9</sup>. Schraenen continued publishing until

<sup>9</sup> Océane Delleaux, “Le multiple d’artiste: Histoire d’une mutation artistique”, in *Europe-Amérique du Nord de 1985 à nos jours*, Paris, 2010, p. 20 et al.

1978. Then he felt that he had done what he could do in this field and devoted himself solely to the archive. Its aim was, as written in the Manifest of the A.S.P.C., “...to collect and preserve all types of art documentation, emanating principally from artists’ initiatives and covering all fields the contemporary artist is active in”<sup>10</sup>. He collected as exhaustively as possible without regard to subjective choice. Again, the collection didn’t only cover artists’ books, but all forms and subforms of published artworks created by individual artists, including records, cassettes, films, videos, objects, books, magazines, assemblings, photos, graphic works, artists’ writings, catalogues and ephemera such as bulletins, posters, invitation cards, folders etc. As these works were neglected by the official institutions at that time, the preservation of these forms and themes was thus an important contribution to the knowledge of the international contemporary art scene of the 1960s and 1970s.

#### ARCHIVE SPACE

In contrast to many private collections, the goal of the *A.S.P.C.* was to make the collection accessible to give “the opportunity to a public, kept ignorant by specialized media, to have knowledge”<sup>11</sup>. About thirty exhibitions, lectures, performances, concerts and other events by significant actors of the international artists’ initiative scene were organized; first in *Galerie Kontakt* and then, after a move in 1984, in the *Archive Space* which was affiliated to the A.S.P.C. Presented were artists such as Mirtha Dermisache, Dieter Roth, Jochen Gerz, Ed Ruscha, Ben, Paulo Bruscky, Peter Downsbrough, Bernard Villers, Sol LeWitt and Ulises Carrión, as

<sup>10</sup> G. Schraenen, *Manifest. Archive for Small Press & Communication*, Antwerp, 1974.

<sup>11</sup> G. Schraenen, *Idem*.

well as movements and groups such as *Fluxus* and *Club Moral / Force Mental*. Some presentations focussed on particular types of publications such as *Assembling Publications* and *Music-Images and Scores* for example. On display were also the publications of a variety of independent publishers such as *Something Else Press*, *Écart*, *Beau Geste Press*, *Revue Ou*, *Tau Mau*, *Laeman Verlag* and *Kontext Publications* as well as surveys of collections such as *Multiplies Inc.*, *Fluxus & Reflux Editions*, *Vice Versand*, *Giorno Poetry Systems* and *Edition Hundertmark*. For most of the shows Schraenen conceived the ephemera to communicate the event<sup>12</sup>.

The very first exhibition organized by the *A.S.P.C.* was the *Text-Sound-Image Small Press Festival* in 1976. It was a prominent international overview of the artists' publication scene of that time with about 900 works which took place in *Galerie Kontakt*, *Galerie Posada* in Brussels and *Zwarte Zaal* in Ghent. In the accompanying catalogue, Schraenen commented on the project with the following words: "I hope it will be the occasion for a new public to discover, through the most different expressions of art, what in fact is the 'Big Press' of today"<sup>13</sup>. Accordingly, the Small Press programme was an extra booklet where the so called marginal programme was literally pressed in between the official, controlled 'Big Press', represented by newspaper pages.

#### COLLABORATIONS

Using the *A.S.P.C.* collection, Schraenen organized various projects in collaboration with museums, libraries, galleries and artists' initiated venues in, among others, Antwerp, Brussels,

<sup>12</sup> A selection of them are presented on the website <https://www.guy-schraenediteur.com/ephemera/> [last access: 10/01/2017].

<sup>13</sup> G. Schraenen, *Text-Sound-Image. Small Press Festival*, Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, 1976.



Archive for Small Press & Communication (A.S.P.C.).

Ghent, Hasselt, Leuven, Mariemont, Turnhout and Waasmunster as well as internationally in Barcelona, Madrid, Palma de Mallorca (E), Le Havre, Paris (FR), Bremen, Berlin, Erlangen, Karlsruhe, Munich, Schwerin (GER), Edinburgh (GB), Amsterdam (NL), Porto (P), Łódź, Poznań, Warsaw, Wrocław (PL), Ljubljana, Murska-Sobota (SLO) and Moscow (SU). Also sections of the archive were presented, for example on *Artists' postage stamps*, *Copy art*, *Stamp art*, *Artists' statements*, *Multiples* etc. *Mail art* was presented through the first exhaustive retrospective on this network, the *International Mail Art Festival* in the *I.C.C.* Antwerp with workshops, roundtable discussions and performances. On occasion of this festival, 12 issues of the monthly mail art magazine *Libellus* (1980-1981) were released. Schraenen regarded the festival as the climax of the Mail art movement before its decline.

Of particular interest is a section of audio projects within the *A.S.P.C.* which resulted from Schraenen's interest in new music, sound, sound experiments and sound poetry. Many exhibitions were organized around these works, including *Other sounds from Belgium* (1985), *Für die Stimme* (Berlin 1991), *Erratum musical* (Bremen 1994) and *Artcoustics* (Ljubljana 2000). The decisive exhibition *Vinyl: records and covers by artists* was organized by the Museum Weserburg Bremen in 2005 and traveled afterwards to MACBA Barcelona, Museu Serralves Porto, La Maison Rouge Paris and Garage Museum in Moscow.

The collaborations also included publication projects. One example is Schraenen's contribution to Pawel Petasz's project *Commonpress Magazine*. He was the responsible editor for the special issue No. 16 (1979) on artists' postage stamps.

#### LATIN AMERICA AND EASTERN EUROPE

Not all sections of the *A.S.P.C.* can be presented in detail here but two major ones must be mentioned as exemplary. They were the result of very close relationships with artists and art scenes in Latin America and Eastern Europe, which were under the yoke of repressive governments at that time. The contacts lead to many exhibitions, lectures and publications.

A decisive event was the exhibition *Éditions et communications marginales d'Amérique Latine* in the Maison de la Culture in Le Havre (1977) which was accompanied by a catalogue – without the censored foreword – and *Latin American Assembling* with contributions by Paulo Bruscky, Mirtha Dermisache, Raúl Marroquín, Clemente Padin etc. It was the first exhibition organized by the *A.S.P.C.* on request by an institution.

Another close collaboration occurred with artists and initiatives which existed on the margins of the official culture in Poland under communism. Among them was the Exchange

Gallery in Łódź, but also other progressive art scenes in other cities such as Poznań, Warsaw and Wrocław. This engagement included lectures on and exhibitions of the *A.S.P.C.* collection in Poland, including *Documents as Statements* and *A View on Belgian Art*, both accompanied by a catalogue. Schraenen also published artists' books by Józef Robakowski. In 1985, he organized the exhibition *Polska Avant-Garde* with artists' publications, video, film, photos etc. by Henryk Gajewski, Jan Świdziński, Józef Robakowski and other Polish artists in Berchem, this time accompanied by a catalogue in form of a newspaper.

Moscow was also an important venue not only for exhibitions of parts of the archive but also for the creation of a collection of artists' publications as founding director in Moscow's International Art Library and Documentation Centre.

#### CATALOGUES AND ESSAYS

Almost all exhibitions of the *A.S.P.C.* collection were accompanied by an illustrated catalogue, designed by Schraenen. As he refused to bury art works under personal interpretations or theoretical considerations, the catalogues include essays with descriptions of the particular types of artists' publications, as well as of their contexts in terms of place and time. The catalogue texts, as well as his writings in general<sup>14</sup> include views on international artists' initiatives and their independently developed strategies of exchange and communication. He also reflects upon his own archive practices by active participation in those areas, ignored by academics, museums and gallerists. Many of the essays observe the socio-political, economical and cultural situation of the art world and contain eye-opening facts about the established art system with

<sup>14</sup> G. Schraenen, *Collected Writings...*

its rituals of recognition, blessings and financial funding strategies. As Schraenen always remained attentive to a wider perspective and to other genres than artists' books, several exhibitions, catalogues, essays and lectures shall be mentioned here which were devoted to photography and architecture.

#### RADIO

The medium of radio was very important to Schraenen to inform the public about artists' initiatives and projects which maintained their ideological and artistic independence. For the regular program *I am an Artist* at the free radio station *Radio Centraal*, he invited artists to speak about their independent spaces, projects and publications. A series of interviews were broadcast from 1987 to 1989 with artists such as Wilfried Huet, György Galantai, Ben Vautier, Bernard Villers, Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven & Danny Devos, Jozef Robakowski, Ulises Carrión, Henri Chopin, John Giorno, George Smith, Luc Deleu and Baudouin Oosterlynck. The radio series *The Roots of Contemporary Music* focussed on experiments with music, language, and sound since the beginning of the 20th century. The *Radiofonisch Festival* (1987) was a six-day series of programs on contemporary music. For the last evening a live concert was organized, taking place at the event location of the radio. One series was especially dedicated to *The Sound of Fluxus* (1992). In Madrid, Schraenen was invited to collaborate with *Ars Sonora* of the Radio Nacional de España and in the German cultural radio station Radio Bremen 2 he broadcasted a series of programmes entitled *Freiheit zum Klange*.

#### AN ARCHIVE AS POLITICAL CONCEPT

In 1988, fifteen years after the founding of the A.S.P.C., a retrospective of the archive was held in Ghent, and in 1990 in Hasselt. In 2001, a major retrospective of the *A.S.P.C.* was organized by

the Museum Weserburg, Bremen: *Out of Print. An Archive as Artistic Concept* which travelled to MACBA Barcelona, the International Centre of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana, Museum Serralves in Porto, CNAEI Chatou near Paris, Zagreb and Erlangen. As indicated by the subtitle, Schraenen's process of collecting was marked by an artistic approach. This can be explained by the fact that it was gathered "in direct osmosis"<sup>15</sup> with the artists. But a more important objective for him was, as he explains, to create a political statement<sup>16</sup>. This consideration is not only based on the fact that the artistic concepts during the 1960s and '70s were closely linked to the critical consciousness and the political concerns about the definitions and conceptions of art. It had also less to do with the fact that artists' books were regarded as a democratizing medium<sup>17</sup> which subvert the structures of the commodity market in the art world. These hopes rarely came to pass anyway<sup>18</sup>. The main reason for considering the archive as a political statement was, as Schraenen states, that the *A.S.P.C.* is proof of the extraordinary creativity and richness of art projects and initiatives which grew far away from the official art world with their canons. The archive was not only a testimony to the sensitive and critical sense towards the institutional restraints of the authorities, but moreover the practical power of freedom and independence from the mainstream through individual acts and new artistic languages. This fact was more important to Schraenen than the artworks themselves<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Isabelle Schwarz, "Archive for Small Press & Communication (ASPC). Archive für Künstlerpublikationen des 1960er bis 1980er Jahre", *Schriftenreihe für Künstlerpublikationen*, Köln, 2008, p. 43-81.

<sup>16</sup> Idem.

<sup>17</sup> Clive Phillpot, *Book Art Digressions*, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Lucy Lippard, *The Artist's Book Goes Public*, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> G. Schraenen in an interview with the author, 15/01/2017.

## TRANSFORMATION

The *A.S.P.C.*, consisting of a collection of about 50,000 items from several hundred artists from almost a hundred countries, was actively collected until the beginning of the 1980s. Since then, when the the concepts and forms of artists' books followed more and more the demands, definitions and mechanisms of institutions – contrary to its growing reputation as being resistant and subversive – Schraenen and Marsily decided to stop collecting new items and focussed on completing the collection respectively.

In 1999, the *A.S.P.C.*, “the largest collection of published artworks in Europe”<sup>20</sup> which covers all the fields of artists' publications except the collection of records – was acquired by the Museum Weserburg Bremen. It forms the heart of the Centre for Artists' Publications, a collaboration between the University of Bremen and the Museum Weserburg Bremen<sup>21</sup>.

## A MUSEUM WITHIN A MUSEUM

For the past several years, Schraenen has worked as a curator and advisor for several international museums. Already in 1989, the director of the future museum for contemporary art in Bremen, Thomas Deecke, asked him to set up a collection for the museum. The thus founded artists' publication collection *A Museum within a Museum* in the Museum Weserburg Bremen was the very first autonomous department of its kind. Never before were artists' books regarded as artworks and presented equally alongside paintings, sculptures, graphics and installations in a museum. For ten years (1990-2000), Schraenen organized 25 exhibitions

<sup>20</sup> Research Centre for Artists' Publications. Online: <http://www.weserburg.de/index.php?id=328&id=328&0=&L=1> [accessed: 02/01/2017].

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.weserburg.de/index.php?id=328&L=1> [last access: 10/01/2017].

on artists' publications within the museum's exhibition programme. Aside from this, Schraenen has been responsible for the creation and development of artists' books collections and exhibitions in many other museums; among them the Musée royal de Mariemont, the Fundação de Serralves in Porto, the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), the International Centre of Graphic Arts (MGLC) in Ljubljana and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid. In the latter museum, to give an example, he recently curated a trilogy of exhibitions which gave an overview of the main investigative fields within the universe of artists' books and the first exhaustive retrospective on Ulises Carrión which traveled afterwards to Mexico-City's Museo Jumex<sup>22</sup>. For this retrospective Schraenen also designed an illustrated catalogue which includes texts and a long essay on his close professional and amicable relationship with Carrión.

#### CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with a few general remarks on the title of this lecture *A foreigner abroad*. Schraenen himself proposed it and I agreed immediately because it offers a most lucid reflection on his role within the field of artists' books. This has not only to do with his concrete life's path with stages in several countries. It equally applies to living and working as a Francophone in the Flemish city Antwerp. This situation shall be mentioned in particular in this context because it is of more relevance than it appears at first glance to somebody who is not familiar with the fact that language is a sensitive, if not a sore subject in this part of Belgium. When, as is the case for *Guy Schraenen éditeur*,

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/exhibitions/ulises-carrion> [last access: 10/01/2017].

everything concerning information and communication appears in French, from the company name to the book titles and the colophons up to all announcements, invitations and sales catalogues, a certain invisibility and nonrecognition by the responsible officials and cultural protagonists, as well as by the general public



Museum Reina Sofia (2016).

is almost guaranteed. Some may think that the situation was different for him in the French speaking Wallonian part of Belgium but there the ignorance resulted from the simple fact that he was not domiciled there. Schraenen's professional situation fell in fact between two stools – just like the above-mentioned style of many of his publications. In a way it seems that he chose this position which was marked by a remarkable scepticism towards taking root; not only with regard to a geographical or social situation but also towards intellectual constructions and ideologies. Evident is a strong mistrust in any common field of mutual consent.

Being separated from the mainstream, from the anti-mainstream mainstream too, creates what one calls 'otherness'. The consequence is, on the one hand, a disregard and neglect of certain representatives of the established common sense. On the other hand, it can engender very productive and fruitful moments of individual independence and freedom. In this case it is the fertile ground for a voyage within the art world which is exemplary. It allowed and allows Schraenen to develop his professional engagements on the basis of his own, sometimes radical, viewpoints, preferences and convictions. This doesn't mean the refusal of collaborations with people or institutions who help to flesh out a decisive project<sup>23</sup>. But above all stands the firm belief in the necessity of an individual and uncompromising responsibility to be able, instead of forging ahead blindly upon the beaten tracks within a deadlocked art world, to discover new perspectives and to embark on new paths – as a foreigner abroad.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the reflections on the idea of the "the personal is political" within the political landscape of the 1970s: Peter van der Meijden, "DIY Utopia and Every Issue Imaginable", in *Keep Art Flat! Mail Art and the Political 1970s*, [Denmark], Lomholt Formular Press, 2016. Online: <http://www.lomholt-mailartarchive.dk/keep-art-flat/peter-van-der-meijden-diy-utopia-and-every-issue-imaginable> [last access: 10/01/2017].