

# IDEAS HAVE NO SMELL

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*Ideas Have No Smell: Three Belgian Surrealist Booklets*

Translation and Afterword by M. Kasper

Introduction by Mary Ann Caw

Ugly Duckling Presse, 2018

Published by Ugly Duckling Presse (UDP) in a hand-numbered edition of 1000, *Ideas Have No Smell* is clearly a work of love. As part of UDP's Lost Literature Series, a project that publishes neglected or rarely-translated 20th century avant garde works, these booklets are a welcome addition to a series that includes over thirty titles, some of which have also been translated by M. Kasper, including *Saint Ghetto of the Loans*, by Gabriel Pomerand and Paul Scheerbart's *The Development of Aerial Militarism and the Demobilization of European Ground Force, Fortresses, and Naval Fleets*. *Ideas Have No Smell*—a facsimile-style translation—builds on Kasper's twenty years of experience translating the Belgian surrealists and on his own artist books, including *Open Book* and *All Cotton Briefs*. It also aligns perfectly with Ugly Duckling Presse's commitment to publishing works that would otherwise not be published and to an aesthetic of book making marked by an attention to the physicality of the form, the materiality of structure, paper, typefaces, and printing.

*Ideas Have No Smell* is quite a charming coffret, bursting with language, aphorisms, tiny stories and big thoughts. There's the collection of the three little booklets by three Belgian surrealists, each with an afterword by Kasper and a fold-out facsimile poster with hand-scrawled texts and, on the flip side, literary scholar Mary Ann Caws' warm, playful introduction. And that red ribbon! It's attached at the middle of the front of the letterpressed slipcase holding everything together. And while delightfully decorative in the way it picks up the red printing of the surrealists' names, the ribbon also functions to help you get the books and poster out of the sleeve without any bit of awkward tugging.

A significant contribution to the history of surrealism and artists' books, the collection presents English-speaking readers with M. Kasper's wonderful translation of three relatively unknown Belgian poets/artists. Paul Nougé, Paul Colinet, and Louis Scutenaire aren't exactly household names and are often not even included in courses on the avant garde—obscured by the incandescence of Parisian surrealism. Yet their work sparkles with as much revolutionary language and imagery as the writing of their French colleagues and occasional sparring partners. These facsimile reproductions, designed by Don't Look Now! in collaboration with Kyra Simone and M. Kasper, capture the detailed textures and the odd distinctiveness of Belgian surrealism.

Paul Nougé's *Transfigured Publicity*, composed in 1926, collects visual poems that Nougé performed as part of a

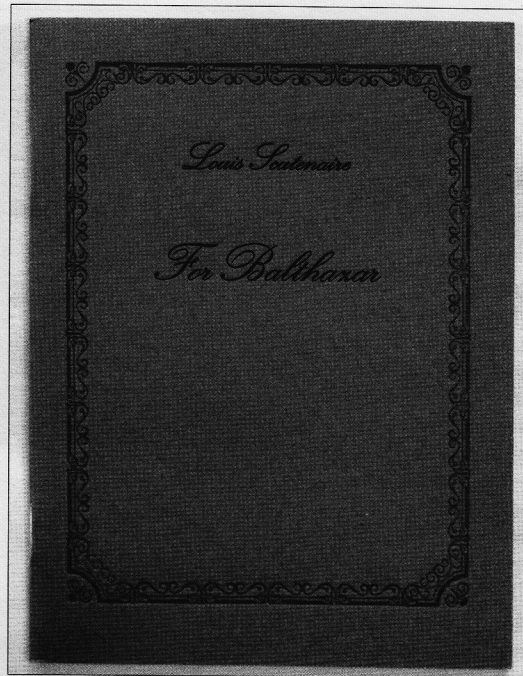


*Ideas Have No Smell*  
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“concert-spectacle” with members of a Belgian avant garde group called Correspondance, which also published a journal of the same name. A quick flip through the book and you can see the influence of the futurist F. T. Marinetti's *parole in libertà* and Guillaume Apollinaire's calligrammes. The whole project, working with the language of advertising, indeed takes very seriously Apollinaire's observation: “Catalogues, posters, advertisements of all sorts. Believe me they contain the poetry of our epoch...” One of Nougé's poems gives the collection its curious title: “IDEAS HAVE NO SMELL.” Another seems resonant with our contemporary moment: “DON'T FORGET IN THIS CITY ONE CAN WITH NO FUSS PROCURE AUTOMATIC PISTOLS . . .”

Louis Scutenaire's *For Balthazar* was originally published in 1967 as volume twelve in Le Daily-Bul's Picked Pocket collection. More inscrutable as a text than Nougé's visual poems, it is punctuated by four otherwise blank pages, each bearing a single letter spelling out “Scut,” Scutenaire's nickname. There are some great absurd one-liners: “At the root of every active truth, a theoretical lie;” “A hard-head is a hard-head;” “Nothing minus girl;” “Big statue of happy, big flag of sad;” “So happy to ignore anything he doesn't know.” And some great little vignettes: of a bloody boxing match, thunderstorms, of a collaborative architectural design for an insane asylum, of a search for a leper colony, of reading Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson*. The title's implied dedication goes unexplained, but as Mary Ann Caws notes it could refer to one of the magi, but also to the “beloved and mistreated donkey of Robert Bresson's 1966 *Au Hasard Balthazar*.” I kept thinking of the enigmatic paintings of Balthus, but the pamphlet probably is titled in honor of André Balthazar, a co-founder of Le Daily-Bul, the publishers of the original booklet.

Paul Colinet's *Abstractive Treatise on Obeuse*, (1948) is the weirdest little book of the bunch, with a narrative that follows a scratchy little circle engaged in a number of strange actions

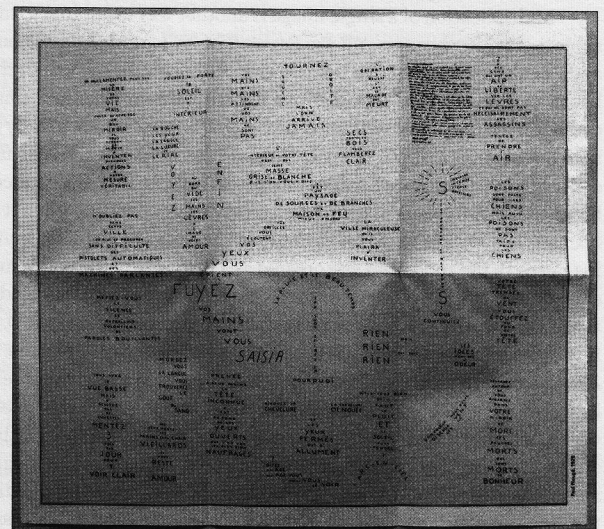
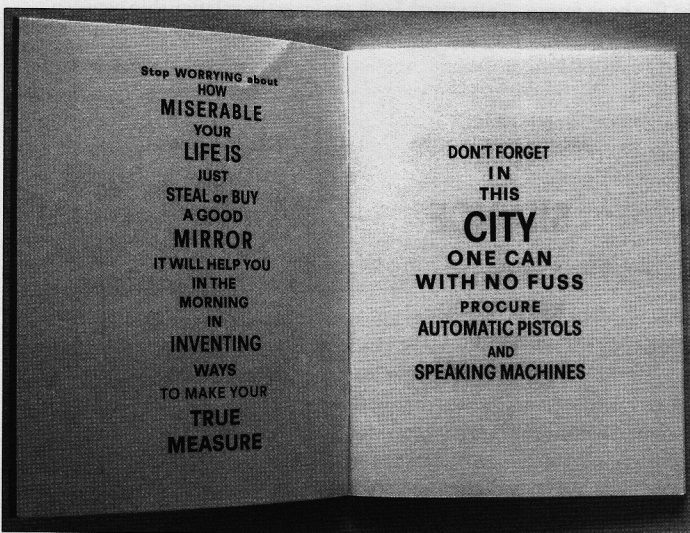


For Balthazar, Louis Scutenaire  
Ugly Duckling Presse, 2019 (facsimile)  
originally published in 1967

like shattering porcelain lutes, inspecting one of the summits of Gauri Sankar, or bathing while being sketched by a feminist. Colinet dedicated the book to André Breton, and it seems that he made it as an object especially for him as a sign of their friendship. Caws describes the book as having an “extraordinary sense of object-gameness,” and indeed the little hand-drawn circles seem like game pieces—moving about with a logic that makes sense within the game, if only one could figure it out!

Each of the booklets, along with the poster that reproduces Nougé’s visual poems as they appeared during the performances of February 2, 1926, serves as a radiant little nugget, crafted so meticulously, nestled so perfectly together in their new present,

our present. They fit neatly in the hand, and bring forward something we didn’t know we missed, but perhaps desired to experience. Ideas may have no smell, but, as the artists of Correspondance write, they sometimes behave like fragrance: “. . . the page which encloses them for an instant, wouldn’t know how to hold them back.”



Transfigured Publicity, Paul Nougé  
Ugly Duckling Presse, 2019 (facsimile), originally published in 1926

Paul Nougé  
Ugly Duckling Presse, 2019