Paul Nougé, Paul Colinet, Louis Scutenaire

Ideas Have No Smell: Three Belgian Surrealist Booklets

Translated from the French and edited by M. Kasper
Introduced by Mary Ann Caws

Ideas Have No Smell collects the first English-language translation of three Belgian Surrealist works: Transfigured Publicity, visual texts by poet and photographer Paul Nougé; the whimsical, hand-drawn artist’s book, Abstractive Treatise on Obeuse by Paul Colinet; and For Balthazar, a collection of aphorisms and observations by the ever skeptical author, lawyer, and anarchist Louis Scutenaire. In addition to the booklets presented in a facsimile-style translation by M. Kasper, this special edition includes an introduction by scholar Mary Ann Caws and a poster reproduction of the 1926 handwritten panneau of Nougé’s visual poems.

"The Belgian Surrealists wrote a sparkling minor literature in the shadow of the Parisian grand-standers. They were more radical, rational, and imbued with the wit, folly and brevity of everyday life."

— McKenzie Wark

"The three Belgian Surrealists included in this delightful sampler represent a movement much too little known in the English-speaking world. This edition, with its excellent translations, is a real treasure trove.

— Marjorie Perloff

Paul Colinet (1898-1957) became acquainted with the Belgian Surrealist Group in the 1930’s. After World War II, he founded several key Belgian avant-garde journals and published two books of poems and prose poems.

Paul Nougé (1895-1967) was a founding member of both the Belgian Communist Party (1921) and the Belgian Surrealist Group (1924). In the latter, he became the central literary and theoretical figure.

Louis Scutenaire (1905-1987) joined the Surrealist Group in 1926. “Scut,” as he was affectionately known by legions of readers, was most famous for his aphorisms, first published in 1945 as Mes Inscriptions.

M. Kasper was born in the Bronx in 1947. He lived overseas for some years and worked as a librarian for many in Western Massachusetts. His previous translations include The Lamp’s Tales & Other Short Prose by Paul Colinet (with Rochelle Ratner), Correspondance: The Birth of Belgian Surrealism (with Jan Baetens), and The Development of Aerial Militarism and The Demobilization of European Ground Forces, and Fortresses and Naval Fleets by Paul Scheerbart, among others. He has also published numerous artists’ books.

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