The Artist & The Amateur

by
Marcel Broodthaers

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*formatted by
The Broodthaers Society of America

THE ARTIST and THE AMATEUR
A Play in One Act

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THE SCENE
[*A paradise quickly built out of wood-based products, for wooden animals, taking into account their supernatural histories.*]

A NARRATOR
[*offstage.*]

Some animals, that slept in me, that I gave birth to, are free now … of verb, of flesh, all there … linked together and invaded by some confused reflections. The words of human flesh, necessarily warm, the words of men, who slept deeply, I swear to you. It might have been better for me to leave them forever, but they were truly threatened.

AN ENTREPRENEUR
[*Dressed in a mock turtleneck and wearing a cordless mic headset. S/he paces. S/he occasionally makes austere, inspirational gestures.*]

The Donkey

One donkey + one donkey = two donkeys
This is how I started.
I quickly got to 50 million donkeys.
Well! This was an extraordinary new universe
where I would play (could play) a giant role,
if I had the free time (I wanted some)

The problem of their food
Is solved with electricity. All by themselves,
they come charging after
the current like
a washing machine, a starter

I lose 50 million donkeys,
Take note. Meanwhile, I myself

might be a hundred million donkeys,
which represents an entirely new dimension
where I could play a giant role,
if I had the free time.

THE ARTIST

My brain is harder than oak and knotted. I am polite. I am a singer who plays on the tastes of others. This manages to raise concern among my admirers.

THE AMATEUR

No blood, oh no, no blood! No red either. A plastic skin of imitation wood. I am "manufactured." I am a portrait of a sleeping family. When awake, I pretend to sleep. All my tricks are sincere …

THE ARTIST

… while mine are false. My stomach in this respect is made of wood as hard as the most vigorous oak, and knotted. I am a crook who had to be admitted to paradise because I was at risk of disappearing into the ether while I slept. The term 'artist' is uglier than being one—I may cheat the worker, but I do work.

AN ENTREPRENEUR

[*A completely different person, but with the same mien, recites a different version of the poem.*]

The Donkey

One donkey + one donkey = two donkeys
This is how I started.
I quickly got to 50 million donkeys.
And if I had not stopped to note my remarks,
I would already be 100 million donkeys.
Out of generosity I lose 50 million
donkeys. Ah, if I was alone,
I would arrive at an incalculable
number of donkeys, just by way of
Arithmetic, this easy vertigo.

Well! This is another universe.
Thanks to electricity,
I solved the problem of their food.
They charge at the power outlet all by themselves.
Stubbornness. It's scientific,
It's a safe bet

THE ARTIST

There is the screw, the wrench, fraudulence, skill, talent. All of which must be concealed so that I can hide behind …

THE AMATEUR

… me. You had to accept me into the real wood paradise, despite my imitation skin. You couldn't avoid it anyway — not only because I asked for admission with great authority, but also because I was willing to pay my way. An advantageous thing I say, an advantageous thing. How can you not surrender to my naïve argument? A pair of dice smoking a pipe would not throw any other smoke than me. Each of my tricks is sincere.

THE ARTIST

I know it to the bottom of my heart, where the wood is hard and polished.

THE AMATEUR

[*awkward silence.*]

THE ARTIST

Superficially speaking, I know this truth as if carved into the cerebral bark. This truth which pretends to sleep in a dreadful landscape.

THE AMATEUR

I pretend to sleep in a dreadful landscape.

AN ENTREPRENEUR

[*still another completely different person, but with the same mien, recites still another version of the poem.*]

The Donkey

One donkey + one donkey = two donkeys
This is how I started.
I got to 50 million
donkeys, relatively quickly.

Well!
it's another universe,
a dimension like Mars, like
the moon we're currently photographing

SCENE
[*Low clouds, compromising, passing in and out of a full moon.*]

THE ENTREPRENEURS
[*All three actors convene on stage, shake hands, and solemnly congratulate each other. They walk off, chatting. The Artist and The Amateur go on repeating their lines, varying the nuance and emphases each time around, until they feel they have exhausted the effect. They exit stage left and stage right simultaneously, each without any acknowledgement of the other.*]

THE NARRATOR
[*Offstage.*]

What shall we make of these reflections on the object, and matter itself? From a flimsy paradise, lightweight, from this porous wood which is used to reproduce planes, "scale models." A hasty paradise, in short, where The Artist and The Amateur have little room except for themselves and their deliberate gestures. It was necessary to shelter them, to choose them from among all the animals that sleep heavily in the dust of bombs. And the critics go on living, and the ambivalent are good and dead. At least I hope, as much by these words as by fate. For them it was nothing, a small advertisement.

*While this text is a faithful translation of the exact words in Marcel Broodthaers' original manuscript, his handwritten text was not formatted as a play, let alone with stage direction. Those aspects, as well as the character of The Entrepreneur, have been added with the artistic license of the Broodthaers Society of America.

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"L'Artiste et L'Amateur" was first published as a facsimile of an original notebook written by Marcel Broodthaers in 1965. It was part of a two-person exhibition titled *Marcel Broodthaers/James Ensor* at Galerie Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp, in 1992.

It has been translated into English and formatted as a one-act play as part of *CONVOCATION BY AMATEURS*, a group exhibition organized by Joe Scanlan for the Broodthaers Society of America, New York, in 2026.

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