

JAN FABRE

THE ARTIST AS A STREET DOG

Text by Pilar Seivane
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MUCCIACCIA GALLERY
21 Dering St, London W1S 1AL.

Jan Fabre returns with a performance that reclaims the raw intensity at the core of his practice. This time, he fully inhabits the defiant spirit of the wandering dog: resilient, unleashed, driven by instinct, and loyal to an unfiltered authenticity. His tongue, painted blue with Bic ink—a material he has used for over four decades—recalls his seminal performance *Ilad of the Bic Art* (1981), in which he symbolically transitioned from street dog to pedigree artist. The gesture captures Fabre's complex relationship with artistic legitimacy. Yet rather than conforming, he continues to position himself as an outsider—an artist-revolutionary whose work merges eclectic epistemologies with mischievous, almost theatrical audacity.

The installation is steeped in the grammar of festivity, yet bears little of its joy. The Artist as a Street Dog is both a return and a reinvention—a restaging of his early works, such as *Me as an Aggressive German Sheepdog (with Blue Tongue)* (1979), *My Movements Are Alone Like Streetdogs* (2004), *The Carnival of the Dead Streetdogs* (2006) and *The Catacombs of the Dead Street Dogs* (2009) filtered now through the wisdom and defiance of age. The stage resembles the aftermath of a carnival—

party paraphernalia suspended alongside the skeletal remains of abandoned street dogs, creating an unsettling tableau of decay. This visual composition evokes the somber richness of Flemish vanitas, where signs of celebration sit uneasily beside reminders of mortality and time's passing. Butter—fat, indulgent, and perishable—offers a quiet homage to Joseph Beuys. Once consumed in excess before Lent, it evokes not only indulgence but the imminence of abstinence, and decay. Here, excess is not celebrated; it is mourned—a spectacle of what society discards when pleasure fades.

Fabre moves through this dark landscape embodying the street dog's rebellious endurance. The figure of the stray dog is a recurring Fabrian motif, rooted in his childhood working-class Antwerp neighborhood, where dogs were routinely abandoned by vacationing families and often left to die on the roadside. These animals became early symbols of societal neglect—and Fabre saw himself in them. Like the street dog, the contemporary artist is celebrated momentarily, yet discarded when inconvenient. Through the visceral language of the dog's body—snarling, prowling, inhabiting the periphery—Fabre delivers a sharp critique of a culture

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His aesthetic remains unapologetically Flemish in its exuberance. From Bosch's grotesque visions to Ensor's carnivalesque distortions, from the sensual density of Rubens to the surreal wit of Magritte, Fabre's lineage is rich, layered, and always slightly off-kilter. His work echoes the historical carnival's role as a space of temporary liberation and inversion, where societal roles were briefly upended. But this is no regenerating carnival. Fabre's version offers no catharsis. Instead, it mirrors the entropy and moral confusion of the present.

The dog, for Fabre, is more than a metaphor; it *is* ontology. The artist is the dog: fiercely loyal and devoted to its truth, unpredictable, and untamed—guided by instinct rather than convention. As a street dog, he disobeys the aesthetics of decorum and the ethics of consensus. In this figure, Fabre embodies a double archetype—jester and fool. He is the jester: sharp, theatrical, deliberately provocative. Yet also the fool: driven by a wild, visionary naïveté. His acts, both calculated and compulsive, often collide with public sensibilities, provoking outrage, protest, and attempts at erasure.

And yet, he persists. In an age that too easily discards artists who are no longer fashionable, no longer compliant, no longer aligned with the aesthetics or ethics of consensus, Fabre reclaims the space of the unhouseable.

The body—always Fabre's fiercest instrument—is central. He insists on the transformative power of bodily ritual and

performance as resistance. From his early performances on self-investigation to his obsessive Bic-drawn chambers, Fabre has always turned to corporeal experience as a site of rupture. His materials—bones, butter, party debris—are never neutral. They are agents of ambiguity: nourishing and rotting, sacred and profane.

Ultimately, *The Artist as a Street Dog* is a raw, poetic, grotesque statement of artistic survival. Fabre refuses quiet erasure, choosing instead a life of scars, defiance, and unsettling beauty. His performance is neither apology nor provocation, but rather a fiercely poetic declaration: the artist, continuously creating, continuously performing, and marking the ground he refuses to surrender. In this space of decay, Fabre claims his place—not to transcend the condition of the stray, but to assert its endurance.

Text by Pilar Seivane.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jan Fabre (b. 1958, Antwerp) is regarded both in Belgium and abroad as one of the most innovative and versatile personalities in the contemporary international art scene. With a career spanning over 40 years, Jan Fabre has left an indelible mark as a visual artist, theater maker, and writer. Fabre labels himself a consilience artist, merging elements from different disciplines guided by fact-based theory and practice across disciplines. Through this interdisciplinary approach, he continually offers fresh interpretations while creating an intensely personal visual oeuvre; a unique and coherent universe with recurring symbols and motifs.

Whilst studying in Antwerp at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the Municipal Institute for Decorative Arts and Crafts, Fabre developed a profound love of beauty and its spiritual power. Curious by nature and influenced by the manuscripts of the entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre (1823-1915), Jan Fabre became fascinated by the world of insects at a young age. The dynamic between humans and animals is central to Jan Fabre's work, reflecting a continual exploration of metamorphosis. His fascination with the body is evident in his personal actions and performances spanning from 1976 to the present.

Fabre achieved the distinction of being the first contemporary artist to hold solo exhibitions at prestigious institutions like the Louvre Museum in Paris (2008) and the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg (2017). Jan Fabre's artistic reach extends beyond traditional gallery spaces; integrating artworks into various public locations including *'The Man Who Measures the Clouds'* (1998), which can be seen at various sites in Europa and Asia. Other public works include the Royal Palace (2002), the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts in Brussels (2013), the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp (2015), and the Antwerp St. Augustine's Church/AMUZ (2018), with many more installed around the world.

Jan Fabre's latest permanent installations grace Naples, Italy. In 2019, he installed four red coral sculptures to the chapel of Pio Monte della Misericordia, alongside Caravaggio's works. Continuing his legacy, Fabre contributed two more coral masterpieces in 2023 to Naples' Real Cappella del Tesoro di San Gennaro and the Church of Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio ad Arco.

ABOUT MUCCIACCIA GALLERY

Massimiliano Mucciaccia opened his first gallery, Galleria Mucciaccia, in the historical centre of Rome, in 2006. Residing now in Largo della Fontanella Borghese, with a focus on XX and XXI century modern with exhibitions ranging from Futurism to Transavanguardia, from metaphysics to the School of Piazza del Popolo. The gallery has a program of contemporary exhibitions including work by Richard Paterson, Ged Quinn, Annie Morris, Jim Lambie, Fiona Rae, Ian Davenport, David Batchelor, Lothar Goetz, David La Chapelle and Philip Colbert.

In 2016, Mucciaccia Gallery opened its London branch, on Dover Street and in 2020 relocated to 21 Dering Street, off Bond Street. The gallery's vision is to explore the works of numerous artists who sought new approaches to art, with a particular attention to the XXI century. Exhibitions include: Jan Fabre *Allegory of Caritas (An Act of Love)*; Gianni Piacentino - *Recent Works 2019-2021*; *Supernature | Dan Perfect*; *Superimposition | Paul Morrison, Barry Reigate, Michael Stubbs, Mark Titchner*; *Italian Passion from 1956*; *Giosetta Fioroni | Silver Years*; *Oramai è tempo | Anselmo, Castellani, Nagasawa*.