VAN DER GRINTEN GALERIE



## Frans Roermond

# PLAY, an abstract graphic novel in 141 drawings, based on Samuel Beckett

*22.04.2023–10.06.2023*

The exhibition unites 141 drawings and 9 paintings, the majority of the works created last year. The 141 original pencil drawings shown comprise a series that Roermond began in 2017, aiming to render the entirety of Samuel Beckett's theatre piece 'Play' in this form. The drawings also provide the material for an "abstract graphic novel", published in book form to accompany the exhibition.

Thomas Köster, in his opening essay, refers to the work as: *'Play is not only an outstanding example of Beckett's understanding of physical visibility expressed in speech ("Am I as much as…being seen?"), but also of the playwright's visual approach to language: the rigid characters on the dimly lit stage, named only in shorthand (W1, W2, M), each staring straight ahead, speaking only and instantly when lit by a spotlight. For Beckett the spot acts as a silent interrogator, for the viewer perhaps also as the director, or God at the Last Judgment. In any case, the spot on /spot off provides the framework for the spoken word, as do the speech-bubbles in Roermond's paintings, framing the visualized spoken words. In Play the spotlight becomes a*

*fourth actor, steering the piece and setting the pace with its rhythmic "cuts". Or, as Frans Roermond puts it: "The spotlight dispenses the words." (…) Beckett's Play is a binary piece that inhales the structuring ON of the spotlight (white) and exhales the OFF of the darkened stage (black). In this sense, the drawings of the Play series act as the negative, because the dark element (the line) tends to be more the purveyor of "meaning" than the light element (the paper). For Beckett the spotlight becomes the fourth performer; Roermond's drawings do the same: a very modern use of material and abstraction.'*

In the paintings, the speech-bubbles from earlier pictures can themselves now be seen as segments of infinite surface areas, becoming dots or holes in the skies that open up illusionistically to the viewers gaze. They thus display a developing pictorial space that appears to expand infinitely into the foreground and background. The immateriality of the cloud formations creates the impression of an alluring force that pulls one into the depths of the image. Finally, the table-like sculpture that serves as the centerpiece of the show draws the focus to a sort of stage event in the form of something like a model, an element that seems at once simple and complex and does not readily reveal its secrets.

Frans Roermond was born in 1967 in Suriname and presently lives and works in New York City.