

Francis Alÿs: subverting art market mechanisms and foxing visitors



■ Fans of Francis Alÿs will not be disappointed by the Belgian-born artist's show at the **Schaulager** (until 24 September). As with many of his works, Alÿs' exhibition "Sign Painting Project," created between 1993 and 1997, is deeply rooted in the street culture of Mexico City, where the artist has lived for almost two decades. The central character of the show is a man in a grey suit, whom Alÿs places in a series of surreal situations with overtones reminiscent of Magritte.

Alÿs first created sketches on tracing paper, then sutured them using cellophane tape to create composites that he then rendered into small oil paintings. In the final stage, he took these paintings to the city's corps of street-sign painters, known as *rotulistas*, commissioning larger copies from them which were then sold through his galleries without any indication whether he or a *rotulista* painted them.

The project shows up a paradox: Alÿs' preparation work is minutely documented in display cases throughout the exhibition, creating a show in which nothing is hidden about the process involved in their creation—except of course the crucial question of authorship, precisely the point of Alÿs' deliberate bid to subvert the market's mechanisms. **Marc Spiegler**