

MAC

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Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays from 11am to 6pm.
Last admissions 30 minutes before closing time.
Closed on 1 January, 1 May, 15 August and 25 December.

Resources centre

A team of librarians is on hand to help you follow up the exhibition experience with a selection of works of reference.

Admission free, from Tuesday to Saturday from 12:00 to 18:00
cdm.macval@macval.fr or 01 43 91 14 64

Tours

For adults and young people aged 11 and over
Every Saturday and Sunday, 4pm

For families and children upwards of 4 years old
Every Sunday, 2.30 pm
Wednesdays during school holidays, 2.30 pm
Tours are free with the museum ticket.

Information and reservation: reservation@macval.fr or 01 43 91 64 23

Publication

L'œil vérité/The Truthful Eye. Texts by Marie Castaing, Florence Cosson, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, Céline Latil, Déborah Lehot-Couette, Anaïs Linares, Ilan Michel, Margaut Segui and Nicolas Surlapierre.
New hanging of MAC VAL collection, 296 pages, 309 reproductions, 17×21 cm, 15€. In English and French.

VAL

Museum of Contemporary Art of Val-de-Marne

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11. The Restany eye (L'œil Restany)

Active from 1953 onwards, the art critic Pierre Restany became involved with certain artists and took part in discussions concerning abstraction, working it towards its limits. His meeting with Yves Klein was a turning point in his perception and understanding of art. Together they started a revolution on the French art scene. Restany also met and befriended many other artists at this time: Arman, César, Raymond Hains, Villeglé, Martial Raysse, Daniel Spoerri, François Dufrêne, Takis.

On 27 October 1960, Restany united his circle of friends in his manifesto of Nouveau Réalisme, which formalised the birth of the movement. The work of each of the signatories shows the need to present the object as it is. Pierre Restany and his wife, Jeannine de Goldschmidt, founded the J gallery, which became a genuine place of research and experimentation for these “new realists”. Sometimes simple in appearance, amusing or challenging the visitor, their works bear witness to a profound societal upheaval and the artistic appropriation of reality.

With works by Arman, César, François Dufrêne, Raymond Hains, Alain Jacquet, Asger Jorn, Martial Raysse, Daniel Spoerri, Takis, Jacques Villeglé

12. The liberated eye (L'œil libéré)

The end of the 1960s was marked by a desire for freedom that questioned the very constituents of painting – colour, frame, canvas – but also the methods of exhibition. The American scene was also influential: large abstract formats implied a new relationship to the work that fascinated French artists. The Supports/Surfaces group took on its official name in September 1970, but the artists had shared the same concerns since the mid-1960s. Nourished by these influences, they adopted a particularly engaged approach that liberated painting from the canvas and the stretcher. They were also inspired by artisanal methods while reviving industrial know-how.

Nine months after the group was made official, it was already breaking up. The split was clear: a pole from the Nice region formed around Claude Viallat, while a second, Parisian pole included Louis Cane, Marc Devade and Daniel Dezeuze. Although it was short-lived, the movement made a lasting impression on the 1970s by re-examining the place of the work and the artist within institutions.

With works by Daniel Dezeuze, Noël Dolla, Christian Jaccard, Bernard Pagès, François Rouan, Claude Viallat

13. The peripheral eye (L'œil périphérique)

Artists began to intervene in the edges, contours and margins, working there rather than tackling the centre head-on. The grouping of three artists, Pierre Buraglio, Sylvie Fanchon and Philippe Gronon, could be seen to begin with the work of Jean Hélion, an artist Buraglio appreciates and quotes in his writings.

“The peripheral eye” considers the question of collage and assemblage. Sylvie Fanchon says she likes traces of adhesive because they retain the memory of a rubbing and a contact that took place and of which only the marks of different moments of contemplation remain. Buraglio’s maskings do not cover, they force us to extract ourselves from the painting and to consider the role played by what is out of the frame. The aesthetic of Philippe Gronon’s “press stretchers” evokes the history of abstract painting. The “peripheral eye” does not necessarily indicate a threshold; it creates borders and lines in order to escape the tyranny of the centre and to ultimately broaden the field of vision.

With works by Pierre Buraglio, Sylvie Fanchon, Philippe Gronon, Jean Hélion

14. The reel-eye (L'œil bobine)

In the 1950s, experimental film constituted a new space of freedom. This medium extended the issues of kinetic art and reflected the political concerns of the period, but without being conceived for the cinema theatre. Two trends emerged in these moving images: on the one hand, an extension of abstract or figurative painting, and on the other, the political context. These means of expression are characterised by their fragmentary aspect, significantly shaped by the aesthetics of collage and then engaging with the montage process.

Robert Breer was the first to explore the abstract properties of film, doing so with humour and verve. The transition from a mechanical system still controlled by humans to a system of assembly that frees itself from them also connects with works by Pol Bury and Clovis Prévost. A few years earlier, Raymond Hains and Jacques Villeglé explored optical collage with the freedom appropriate to the aftermath of war. Villeglé made his first abstract film, *Paris Saint-Brieuc*, in 1950-52, and intervened directly on the film – a process dating back to the director Georges Méliès (1861-1938).

With works by Robert Breer, Pol Bury, Raymond Hains, Pontus Hultén, Jacques Monory, Daniel Pommereulle, Clovis Prévost, Jacques Villeglé

15. The fertile eye (L'œil fertile)

“L'œil fertile” is a selection of documents from the Raoul-Jean Moulin archive and of artists’ books. It testifies to the richness of the holdings in MAC VAL’s documentation centre relating to the artists in the museum’s collection. The collection of artists’ books reflects the many forms and definitions of this unique artistic production, from the 1950s to the present day: illustrated books, dialogue books, object books, artists’ books for children, etc.

Received as a donation in 2007, the private archives of Raoul-Jean Moulin constitute another remarkable collection. An art critic for the newspapers and magazines *Les Lettres françaises*, *Opus International* and *L'Humanité*, a curator, notably of the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (1972), a writer, and director of the Val-de-Marne Departmental Fund for Contemporary Art (FDAC), Raoul-Jean Moulin (1934-2014) was a witness and protagonist of the French and international art scene from the 1960s to the 1990s. Immersion in these archives sheds new light on the atypical career of this self-taught artist who contributed to the FDAC collection and to the creation of MAC VAL.

The artist’s book is a work of art that takes the form of a book or adopts the spirit of a book.

16. The wounded eye (L'œil blessé)

Sarkis’s works are born of “conversations” between what he calls “active protagonists”. By encouraging their encounter, the artist seeks to unbalance overly linear rhythms by a process of deconstructing chronologies and spatial borders. At the heart of his approach, memory is shaped from biographical elements and multiple and common forms of expression: cinema, theatre, music, photography, literature. This cross-fertilised approach results in the creation of a “total work of art” in direct contact with life. *Trésor de mémoire* shows eleven photographs taken from films made between 1927 and 1992. An avid reader of *Cahiers du cinéma*, Sarkis made this cinematic album by putting together reproductions of frames that he cut out from the magazine. In this theatre of memory, Sarkis creates a *mise-en-scène* in which children play the leading role. They embody an unreasoning faith in the future, a promise that is fulfilled through the memory of those who remember. By choosing photography, Sarkis eternalizes “a moment that will never exist again” and presents a frozen representation of these characters who, in our minds, will remain children forever.

A work by Sarkis

L'œil vérité

The Museum in the Second Degree

Curated by Nicolas Surlapierre
Assisted by Florence Cosson, Anaïs Linares, Margaut Segui and Marzia Ferri

With works by Valerio Adami, Gilles Aillaud, Arman, Geneviève Asse, Martin Barré, Gilles Charles Roger Bec, Claude Bellegarde, Robert Breer, Anne Brégeaut, Joël Brisse, Camille Bryen, Marie-Claude Bugeaud, Pierre Buraglio, Daniel Buren, Pol Bury, César, Jacques Charlier, Roman Cieslewicz, Delphine Coindet, Emile Compard, Olivier Debré, Jean Degottex, François Despatin & Christian Gobeli, Daniel Dezeuze, Erik Dietman, Robert Doisneau, Noël Dolla, Jean Dubuffet, François Dufrêne, Erró, Sylvie Fanchon, Jacques Faujour, Philippe Gronon, Raymond Hains, Hans Hartung, Jean Hélion, Pontus Hultén, Christian Jaccard, Alain Jacquet, Asger Jorn, Michèle Katz, Ladislav Kijno, Jiří Kolář, François Kollar, Jacqueline Lamba, René Laubiès, Philippe Lepeut, Alberto Magnelli, Robert Malaval, Alfred Manessier, Marino di Teana, Jean Messagier, Henri Michaux, Bernard Monnot, Jacques Monory, Bernard Pagès, Gina Pane, Pavlos, Bruno Peinado, Daniel Pommereulle, Clovis Prévost, André Raffray, Bernard Rancillac, Martial Raysse, Antonio Recalcati, Judit Reigl, Germaine Richier, Willy Ronis, François Rouan, Sarkis, Peter Saul, Antonio Seguí, Jean-Claude Silbermann, Jesús Rafael Soto, Daniel Spoerri, Peter Stämpfli, Veit Stratmann, Takis, Hervé Télémaque, Luis Tomasello, Geer van Velde, Vladimir Veličković, Claude Viallat, Jacques Villeglé, Sabine Weiss.

English

The Truthful Eye
A new hanging of the collection,
until 22 September 2024

A history of contemporary art in France, 1950-1990 and a little beyond

Related to Gérard Genette and his work *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree* (1982), this new hanging of the collection aims to meet a demand: the desire to revisit or even discover works that, for the most part, have not been shown since the museum opened in 2005. It quickly became apparent that it is possible to write a kind of history of contemporary art, based on a unity of time and place. Of course, not all the artists who have participated in this history are necessarily represented at the MAC VAL, but the main ones are and can offer a fairly accurate overview of the history of contemporary art in France.

Between the first work in this sequence and the last, it is possible to see that the distinction between modern and contemporary art was not something immediate and decisive, contrary to what some art historians have said by putting forward the rather too convenient date of 1945. This new presentation is the story of a distinction and of a critical and historical construction. Following the different movements, the exhibition traces the various debates that allowed to determine the marks which serve to differentiate modern from contemporary. Although these are questionable and sometimes almost interchangeable, they nevertheless have the merit of providing points of reference. This new exhibition presents a reflection on the transition between a modern art that is traditionally defined as a break with the past, and a contemporary art that is not simply satisfied with this prerequisite. The works also seem to transform viewers, who no longer (or decreasingly) play the passive role of consumer faced with an overly neat and closed narrative. It becomes increasingly necessary for visitors to participate in order to transform their visit into an experience.

The exhibition is punctuated by a number of counterpoint modules conceived by Veit Stratmann, highlighting the points where the transitions are most fallible. We are tempted to grasp what might look like handles or railings, although they are placed precisely in places that negate any form of utility.

“The Truthful Eye”: a journey in 16 movements

1. The devious eye (L'œil retors)

Michel Ragon wrote in *Chronique vécue de la peinture et de la sculpture, 1950-2000*: “The history of art, it is true, is always divided into two currents, which are the mark of two opposed and irreconcilable temperaments. On the one hand, what I would call the architects, and on the other, the magicians.” These oppositions to some extent determined the choice of works. Contemporary art did not arise from the aftermath of the Second World War but was built up over twenty years and more. It is therefore important to question its birth and its conditions of emergence. Everything could have gone normal if Marcel Duchamp had not come along to upset or complicate art and creation. This figure has become the paradigm of ironic distance, *a second degree*: understanding that he would have been an average painter, he turned away from painting. Based on the work *Marcel Duchamp en douze images* by André Raffray, visitors can approach the museum *in the second degree* and imagine that the twelve paintings are matched by the different sections of the “L'œil vérité” exhibition, conceived as a montage.

With works by Joël Brisse, Daniel Buren, Bruno Peinado, André Raffray

2. The deceived eye (L'œil abusé)

Profession: forger, artist, or both.

In 1988, Jacques Charlier used fifteen frames from the collection of Fernand Graindorge to create paintings whose aesthetics are reminiscent of twentieth-century art movements. Purportedly belonging to Sergio Bonati – a character put together by the artist – the works are exhibited as an “immersive device” entitled *Peintures – Schilderijen*. Each painting is accompanied by the name of a fictitious artist and a biographical note written by Charlier himself. The whole thing is a sham, a caricature of a collection. The work functions as a device to subvert the museum as an institution and as a system for legitimising artists and artworks. To put Charlier’s work at the head of a historical sequence retracing the history of a collection and of artistic movements is to play along with a big hoax, and above all to recognise the difficulties of historicising or distancing oneself from what museums do to narratives.

A work by Jacques Charlier

3. The unpredictable eye (L'œil imprévisible)

The history of art in France since the Second World War has not made things easy for itself. Nothing was truer and yet more questionable than the idea of “starting from scratch,” nothing more reassuring than to imagine a radical break. In reality, years later, it became impossible to put a label on this period because other art forms had appeared, often contradicting attempts at categorisation. It is an understatement to say that art from the end of the 1950s onwards is marked by a contrast between lyricism and intellectualism.

“The unpredictable eye” summarises the trends that critics sometimes grouped together a little too hastily under the term “informal” (art informel): abstract landscape painting represented by Martin Barré and Alfred Manessier; lyrical abstraction by Olivier Debré, Camille Bryen and Jacqueline Lamba; and then Germaine Richier, who introduces a nuance between observation and likeness. This period was eager for predictions that often took the form of prophecies, and Camille Bryen reminds us that the question of non-figuration and its link to surrealism cannot be ignored.

With works by Martin Barré, Camille Bryen, Émile Compard, Olivier Debré, Jacqueline Lamba, René Laubiès, Alberto Magnelli, Alfred Manessier, Germaine Richier, Geer van Veld

4. The motor eye (L'oeil moteur)

This section takes as its starting point the dynamism of optical and kinetic art which, from gallery walls to cinemas, from fashion to design, swept through the 1960s in a flow of vibrating lines, lighting effects, plays of colours and patterns that repeated and imprinted themselves on the retina. However, at the crossroads of geometric abstraction and informal art, this part of the exhibition demonstrates the porosity, continuities and influences between these different movements, while highlighting the beginnings of optic-kinetic art in the late 1950s and its legacy, continuing into the early 1990s.

Peter Stämpfli’s work *M 301* closes the section by illustrating the intersection between various currents: pop art, hyperrealism, narrative figuration. Soto’s works emphasise the inevitable presence of the viewer in order to activate various optical effects. He says: “I have never used anything but the eye as a motor. At no time did I try to use the electric motor or the mechanics. I wanted to use the viewer as a mechanism.”

With works by Pol Bury, Marino di Teana, Bernard Moninot, Jesús Rafael Soto, Peter Stämpfli, Luis Tomasello

5. The impossible eye (L'œil impossible)

Gina Pane, Philippe Lepeut and Geneviève Asse bring an almost meta-physical approach, a lived experience, a memory. They have several points in common: giving a geometric form to their vision by their use of framing and highly architectural works, with the colour blue serving to translate efforts of reminiscence and the porous matter of the imagination. If the eye is impossible, it is because structures and colours alone cannot capture a lived experience, yet are the only means of doing so.

Substituting lived space with a chromatic fragment points us to the theories of abstract art and, more widely, to the history of mentalities. The sky becomes blue and materializes divine light. The melancholic significance attributed to colour has to do more with the inaccessibility of the ideal.

Gina Pane seeks to make visible the production – almost in the industrial sense of the word – of an affective memory, as in a process of recollection. Geneviève Asse, too, participates in this immaterial trend, originating in American conceptual art, which attempts to break out of the frame. The Figmenta Poetica suite is a series of ten paintings by Philippe Lepeut that extends his reflections on the ordering of objects.

With works by Geneviève Asse, Philippe Lepeut, Gina Pane

6. The two-sided eye (L'œil biface)

“L'œil biface” is devoted to the different possibilities offered by figuration from the 1960s to the 1980s. It covers a wide range, from critical and narrative figuration to the emergence of free figuration.

Narrative figuration emerged, among other things, out of a reaction to the efforts of American galleries to impose pop art on the French and European scenes. Hervé Télémaque and Bernard Rancillac had begun to integrate the main attributes and motifs of that movement in order to better criticise it. These artists countered pop’s slickness with motifs from painting, combining them with other symbols that undermined their power of seduction.

As early as 1967, a debate arose that confirmed the use, if not the relevance, of the term two-sided (biface). Narrative figuration justified its difference from pop art with the notion of warmth. However, possibly under the influence of Jacques Monory and Valerio Adami, the coldness of the image, the play on surfaces and an eschewal of texture and matter introduced a distance into painting that was fundamentally critical of consumer society.

With works by Valerio Adami, Jacques Monory, Bernard Rancillac, Antonio Recalcati, Peter Saul, Antonio Seguí, Jean-Claude Silbermann, Veit Stratmann, Hervé Télémaque

7. The curious eye (L'œil curieux)

Cabinets of curiosities developed in response to the very human desire to understand and discover the world. The allure of the unusual became a real phenomenon between the mid-sixteenth and early eighteenth century, when its hold was loosened by the rationalist discourses of the Enlightenment. It was not until the nineteenth century that the term “bizarre” was rehabilitated by Romanticism. In the artistic field of the twentieth century, strangeness became synonymous with a freedom that the Dadaists and Surrealists seized upon like no other movement. This spirit of transgression continued in the 1950s and 1960s, almost becoming the new norm. The viewer’s eye is invited to move from the public space to the intimate sphere of a completely different kind of cabinet. By turns absurd and funny, disturbing and dangerous, the works presented here constitute a sort of heterogeneous army of “objects 2.0”. By opposing art, and more particularly the pictorial expression of their time, these artists also call on the public to exist in another way. In this mode the idea of “beauty” no longer has a place, and anything, even what seems “banaI” or “ugly”, can arouse wonder and be promoted to the dignity of the artwork.

With works by Anne Brégeaut, Roman Cieslewicz, Erik Dietman, Erró, Ladislav Kijno, Jiří Kolář, Robert Malaval, Pavlos, Daniel Pommereulle

8. The tender eye (L'œil attendri)

The dignity of workers, Sunday recreation, paid holidays and the living conditions of ordinary men and women were central subjects for the humanist photography that emerged in the 1940s around Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau and Willy Ronis. Their vision both conveyed hope and offered exorcism after the rise of fascism in the 1930s and the consequences of the economic crisis of 1929 and during the slow reconstruction of a grieving country after the Second World War. The “bright tomorrows” here are those of going to the ball, of workers and shopkeepers, but also of the first large-scale social housing projects which radically changed the suburban landscape. The first photographs acquired by the Fonds Départemental d’art Contemporain in 1986 were commissioned by the Val-de-Marne General Council from Sabine Weiss, the last representative of the French humanist trend. The following year, Robert Doisneau, François Despatin and Christian Gobeli, Jacques Faujour, François Kollar and Willy Ronis entered the collection. The 1980s marked the end of an era; photography could no longer pretend that the world was not changing.

With works by Gilles Charles Roger Bec, François Despatin & Christian Gobeli, Robert Doisneau, Jacques Faujour, François Kolla, Willy Ronis, Sabine Weiss

9. The misunderstood eye (L'œil incompris)

What if it was a wager to try to put certain issues of painting in France in the 1970s and 1980s together a single room? These were the years of a twin crisis that affected both abstract art and a part of figurative art. In France, certain exhibitions gave an overview of contemporary abstraction and its evolution compared to previous decades. Abstract art was less dominant and less sure of itself. Ambiguities emerged as works that appeared similar were made by artists who had nothing in common. Some of them expressed themselves with gravitas, others preferred to use jokes. The different ways of combining canvas and stretcher respond to a particular logic and ultimately transform the painting. They refer to the altarpiece and confirm that the painting as a form is no longer sufficient. In this spirit, Marie-Claude Bugeaud appropriates the deconstruction of the stretcher, while the tondos of Jean Degottex and Emile Compard avoid the formalist trap of symmetry. Although this tondo figure is a symbol of perfection and perhaps even of the sacred, they use it to deconstruct geometry and bestow upon it another, no doubt ritualistic status.

With works by Gilles Aillaud, Geneviève Asse, Claude Bellegarde, Marie-Claude Bugeaud, Delphine Coindet, Émile Compard, Olivier Debré, Jean Degottex, Hans Hartung, Michèle Katz, Robert Malaval, Jean Messagier, Judit Reigl, Vladimir Veličković

10. The pilot eye (L'œil pilote)

Between 1957 and 1960, Jean Dubuffet devoted several hundred paintings and lithographs to the representation of the soil as part of his “Celebration of the Soil” cycle. He was convinced that even the most seemingly unexceptional things are a source of wonder.

Contrary to appearances, Dubuffet used mainly artificial materials such as papier-mâché, silver paper and plastic paste. In 1960, it occurred to him that this undertaking was too realistic and he took the opposite path. Dubuffet refused all systems; for him, infinite multiplicity and diversity were the hallmarks of artistic creation.

Although the artist disassociated himself from art informel, critics continue to use the label his, especially for the works he created during his “Celebration of the Ground” period. Dubuffet considered his paintings to be too realistic because they were based on direct allusions to the real world. Originally envisaged as “machines of fascination”, these paintings of fragmented soil and broken earth eventually lost their power to surprise and shock.

With works by Claude Bellegarde, Jean Dubuffet, Henri Michaux