

MARTIAL RAYSSE

RETROSPECTIVE 1960 - 2014

14 MAY - 22 SEPTEMBER 2014

As Martial Raysse said in the early Sixties, 'Today's art is a rocket in space. Prisunic supermarkets are the museums of modern art.'

At that moment, the provocative and optimistic artist embraced the spirit of his time, painting modern subjects, images of anonymous, stereotyped women and new forms that were up-to-date and popular, and using neon lighting as well as fiery, artificial colours. Celebrating the "Pop" aspect of the consumer society, he also revisited the history of Western painting, in a constant spirit of jubilation and irony. In the wake of the post-1968 period and upheavals in society during the Seventies, he fell prey to disillusionment. His work underwent considerable changes at the time, and sought to re-enchant the world. Reflecting the symbolic

codes of representation, the theory of perspective, allegorical systems and the lessons of the Old Masters, he pursued his pictorial quest while continuing to broaden his work to include drawing, film and sculpture. In the Eighties, his skilful and innovative work gave new life not only to each medium but also to their combinations.

Bringing together over 200 works - paintings, sculptures, films, photographs and drawings - this completely new retrospective devoted to Martial Raysse at the Centre Pompidou presents the rich and varied work of this world-famous French artist with a singular career, from his first creations in the Sixties to those of today.

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www.centrepompidou.fr

BEGINNINGS

'I wanted to be a writer.' If Martial Raysse is asked about his adolescence and what led him to become an artist, his taste for language and poetic feeling becomes immediately obvious. As a result, when he was eighteen, he began to study literature at Nice University. Why did he choose literature, when at the age of twelve he was already painting in watercolours, and had installed a makeshift studio in the family cellar? Why did he then abandon that path two years later, and began a career as a self-taught artist? The artist provides a speaking analysis: there is much that is untranslatable in a language; words are not a universal means of communication, while painting is, and that is first and foremost what he was looking for.

When asked about the origins of his art, Raysse evokes the influence of "bad painters" who incited him to paint, then his learning of basic techniques from friends who were studying art. The revelation of contemporary creation came to him, as he recounts, from the discovery of a book of works by Dubuffet, which he picked up by chance. He rapidly turned to techniques combining painting and sculpture, producing masks painted on pieces of bark and monochrome matter paintings. Combinatorial analysis and assemblage were components of his earliest pieces. They later became the very subject of his work, and his way of apprehending reality.

NICE/LOS ANGELES NEW BEACHES

At the beginning of the Sixties, Nice was the spawning ground for a new generation of artists, whom Raysse rapidly joined. Ben, Arman and Yves Klein were the "New Realists", several years older than him, who stood out with work that made a complete break with the informal abstraction of the post-war period. Contemporaries of Pop art, these artists experimented with new strategies for appropriating an emerging reality, linked with the burgeoning consumer society. Raysse began to develop his own personal direction. While assemblage was the technique he was to focus on, everyday consumer objects – detergent boxes, tins, toys and plastic gadgets – became his preferred materials as from 1959. However, the environment of Nice, the beach and the summer leisure world had a special place in his work. Likewise, the female body and accessories associated with it – suntan cream, cosmetics, mirrors and so on – became a recurrent theme from then on. Three themes also began to appear regularly in his Sixties works: the modern domestic world, women and childhood.

In 1962, Raysse also took part in the collective exhibition "Dylaby" at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, alongside Jean Tinguely, Niki de Saint Phalle and Robert Rauschenberg. In it, he presented *Raysse Beach*. This beach "theatre" mingling art and life consists of large panels featuring pin-up girls touched up with fluorescent paint, and a number of beach accessories, all bathed in lighting that creates a sunny ambiance. His work met with rapid success in Europe, then New York and Los Angeles, where he lived until 1968, and forged links with Pop artists of the American scene.

FROM "VARIABLE GEOMETRIES" TO "FREE FORMS"

However, in the mid-Sixties, Raysse began to develop his style by moving away from Pop art. He began the cycle of "variable geometry" works based on the simplified features of the female face, his favourite subject. These works, in which he fragmented images and reassembled them in random configurations, expressed a desire for emancipation from the fixed environment of composition, and that of the painting. Tending towards abstraction and "signs", these "free forms" are simple shapes (faces, stars, letters of the alphabet), which escape from the frame and move into the space, as seen in the monumental installation *Oued Laou*, 1971.

"CAMEMBERT MARTIAL EXTRA-DOUX"

Film and video soon began to occupy an important place in Raysse's approach. He appropriated these media as he had done with advertising images and Old Masters, with even more freedom and an even lighter touch, which gave way to a decidedly comic verve. After a number of artist's films, where he used his friends as actors, like *Camembert Martial Extra-Doux* [Extra-soft Martial Camembert] (1969), he made a feature film, *Le Grand Départ* [The Great Goodbye] (1972). The film's narrative aspect, like its formal possibilities, enabled him to give free rein to his taste for parody, political criticism and manipulation of the image. Pastiche and subversive cinema was his preferred genre, in which he mingled a theatrical dynamic similar to "happenings" and the aesthetic of experimental and psychedelic films typical of the Los Angeles art scene.

"COCO MATO", ETC.

For Martial Raysse, the late Sixties and early Seventies were imbued with disillusionment and anxiety. With his abandonment of the Pop vocabulary, he gradually developed an internal approach that led to a complete break in his work. After returning to France in 1968, the artist lived in a number of hippy communes. Now that he had cut his ties with the art market, the works he presented in 1974, away from the hallowed circuits, bore witness to his desire to return to the childhood of art. Under the title "Coco Mato", he presented a series of bric-a-brac sculptures: a series of tiny objects linked by makeshift means and minuscule papier mâché sculptures. At the same period, Raysse returned to a style of drawing on the borderline of psychotropic inspiration, like the kind Henri Michaux experimented with, full of landscapes haunted by grotesque figures.

Raysse began living in the country in 1973, and the great change in his work came about in 1977 with the *Spelunca* series: a group of seven paintings inspired by the *Dream of Poliphilus*. This series marked a watershed, and introduced an approach and issues that still preoccupy him today. The artist attributes the starting point of these paintings with mythological subjects to a revelation: the shock of the Mediterranean light he discovered when emerging from a cave, and the mythological vision the experience inspired in him. If Coco Mato had initiated the reputation of a virtuosic artist with hallowed golden hands, *Spelunca* re-established a balance between the hand and the spirit, between reality and desire.

MYTHOLOGIES

In the early Eighties, while Raysse's artistic development went hand in hand with erudite reading, the most decisive influence on his work lay in his frequent visits to museums, and serious reflection on the history of painting. He thus achieved the assurance of a style that was not Neoclassical, but a Rayssian synthesis combining classicism, naturalism and a touch of deliberate naïveté. However, the artist remained a master of the assemblage, and the combination of these different styles within the same work often gave his compositions a particular flavour – and illustrated its contemporaneous character.

Raysse developed an ambitious pictorial style, marked by a fresh updating of the classical culture, and the invention of a personal imagery based on the observation of daily life. Bucolic themes inspired by his environment were crossed with numerous mythological and literary references. He experimented with various pictorial techniques, and explored numerous traditional practices, particularly tempera.

At the same time as he was producing these paintings, Raysse was also working on sculptures. These were of two types: small, often humorous figurines made of scrap materials, and classic-style figurative sculptures, often with mythological subjects, modelled from life and generally cast in bronze. This second type of work mainly appeared in public commissions, and he produced a number of major projects in this field.

During the Nineties and 2000s he regularly produced large pictorial compositions, which he concentrated on for several years. In these compositions, he asserted the principal that now dominates his work: the rehabilitation of technical painting, which appeals to a wide range of people through its figurative aspect and illustrative details. The scope of this format also enables him to use a favourite device of his: the inclusion of the macroscopic and microscopic in the same vision. These heroic frescoes are punctuated with curious or comical notes, and show the diversity and paradoxes of humanity.

CHRONOLOGY

1936 Martial Raysse is born on 12 February in Golfe-Juan-Vallauris in the Nice Riviera, into a family of ceramic craftsmen. His childhood is marked by his parents' commitment to the Resistance.

1955 After beginning studies in Literature at Nice University, he changes to painting and sculpture, which he has practised as a self-taught artist since childhood.

1956-1957 He exhibits his first works – paintings, assemblages of found objects and poem/objects – in collective exhibitions with young artists.

1959 Begins to use new objects bought in Prisunic stores.

1960 Refuses to fight in the Algerian War. Spends several months in the psychiatric department of the military hospital in Marseille, before being declared unfit for service. On 27 October, signs the New Realist manifesto. Takes part in the exhibition "Art of assemblage" at the MoMA, New York.

1962 Creates the installation *Raysse Beach* for the exhibition "Dylaby [Dynamisch Labyrinth]" at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

1963 After spending several months in New York, he moves to Los Angeles. He makes several journeys between France and the US until 1968.

1964 The "Made in Japan" series, inspired by postcards, opens the way to the subversive treatment of classical painting masterpieces. He makes his first foray into cinema, with the inclusion of a film featuring the artist Arman in the role of an old man, in the painting *Suzanna Suzanna*.

1966 Begins the "variable geometry" compositions. Represents France in the 33rd Venice Biennial, where he shows *Nice-Venise* [Nice-Venice], a ten-metre long polyptych.

1968 Returns to France to participate in the events of May '68. He leaves the US for good, and takes his distance from Pop art. Begins to produce "free forms".

1970 Breaks with the world of official art and its galleries. Shoots a feature film in Morocco and Paris, *Le Grand Départ* [The Great Goodbye], released in 1972 at the Saint-Séverin cinema in Paris.

1971 Produces the installation *Oued Laou* at the Modern Art Museum in Munich.

1973-75 Moves to the country, to Ussy-sur-Marne. Begins the "Coco Mato" and "Loco Bello" series.

1977 Produces the *Spelunca* series, which marks a turning point in his work. In his new bucolic, mythologically-inspired figurative works, he opens a dialogue with the history of art and traditional painting practices.

1981 Exhibition of work from the previous ten years at the Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne.

1989 Creates a monumental group for the Conseil Economique et Social, Place d'Iéna, Paris.

1992 Paints *Le Carnaval à Périgueux*, his first very large format painting. First major retrospective exhibition staged at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, in Paris.

1996 Inauguration of the large painting *Mais dites une seule parole* [But say a single word], a permanent installation at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France – François Mitterrand site.

2001 Creates the stained glass windows for the Church of Notre-Dame de l'Arche d'Alliance, in Paris.

2005 Produces a portrait in neon lighting, *Sinéma, les anges sont avec toi* [Sinema: the angels are with you] for the façade of the MK2-Quai de Loire cinema in Paris.

2007 Creates the large paintings *Heureux rivages* [Blessed Shores] and *Poisson d'avril* [April Fool].

2008 MK2 publishes a box of DVDs of the films he produced between 1986 and 2008.

2011 His work *Quinze août* [15 August] (1964) obtains a record price at auction, making him "the most expensive living French artist in the world".

2012 Paints the large-format picture *Ici plage, comme ici-bas* [Here the beach, as here below].

2014 Retrospective at the Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne.

EXHIBITION

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CATALOGUE

Martial Raysse

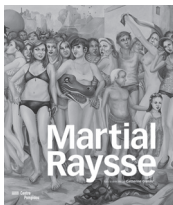
Edited by Catherine Grenier

Published by Centre Pompidou

500 colour ill., 304 pp.

French and English

Price: €44.90



ALBUM

Texts by Catherine Grenier

Published by Centre Pompidou

73 colour ill., 60 p.

Bilingual: French and English

Price: €9.90

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

FAMILY WORKSHOP

"Banales férias: Martial Raysse

(Ordinary feria: Martial Raysse)

What is a landscape, a still life, a portrait?

How can the world be represented

today? With traditional – or in contrast,

iconoclastic – materials, mixing

tempera with phosphorescent tubing,

children overturn the rules

of art and reinvent their daily lives!

Saturdays of 17 and 31 May, 7, 14

and 28 June, and 5, 12, 19 and 26 July,

2.30 to 4.30 p.m.

€10 for one child and one adult

(€8 for each extra person);

reduced price: €8.

GUIDED VISITS

In French

Every Saturday and Sunday at 5:30 p.m.

until the 6th of July. At 5:30 p.m.,

Saturdays 12th, 19th,

26th of July and 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd,

30th of August. At 7 p.m.,

Wednesdays 11th, 18th, 25th of June

and 2nd, 9th of July.

TAILOR-MADE TOURS

Saturday 17 May at 10.00 a.m.,

"Listen and see"

tour for the partially-sighted

Saturday 17 May at 11.00 a.m.,

lip-reading tour

Saturday 17 May at 2.30 p.m.,

sign language tour

AUDIOGUIDE

Languages: French, English, Spanish,

German and Italian. Enjoy a guided tour

of the exhibition "Martial Raysse" with

the voices of the exhibition curator and

authors of the catalogue.

You can also discover 50 works from

the museum's permanent collections

and an architectural tour of the building.

€5; reduced price: €4

On hire at the ticket office, level 0

To be collected at

the "Espace audioguide", level 0

INFORMATION

01 44 78 12 33

www.centrepompidou.fr

EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

14 May to 22 September 2014

Galerie 1

Every day except Tuesdays, 11.00 a.m.

to 9.00 p.m.

Ticket desks close at 8.00 p.m.

Late night opening on Thursdays until

11.00 p.m.

Ticket desks close at 10.00 p.m.

PRICES

Access with

the "Museum & exhibitions" ticket

Valid the same day for one admission

to each area: the museum,

all the exhibitions and the View of Paris

€13; reduced price: €10

Free with the annual pass

and for those under 18

TWITTER

#Raysse

<http://www.twitter.com/centrepompidou>

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Service de l'information

des publics et de la médiation, 2014

Graphic design

MODULE

Printing

Friedling Graphique, Rixheim, 2014

In media partnership with:



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