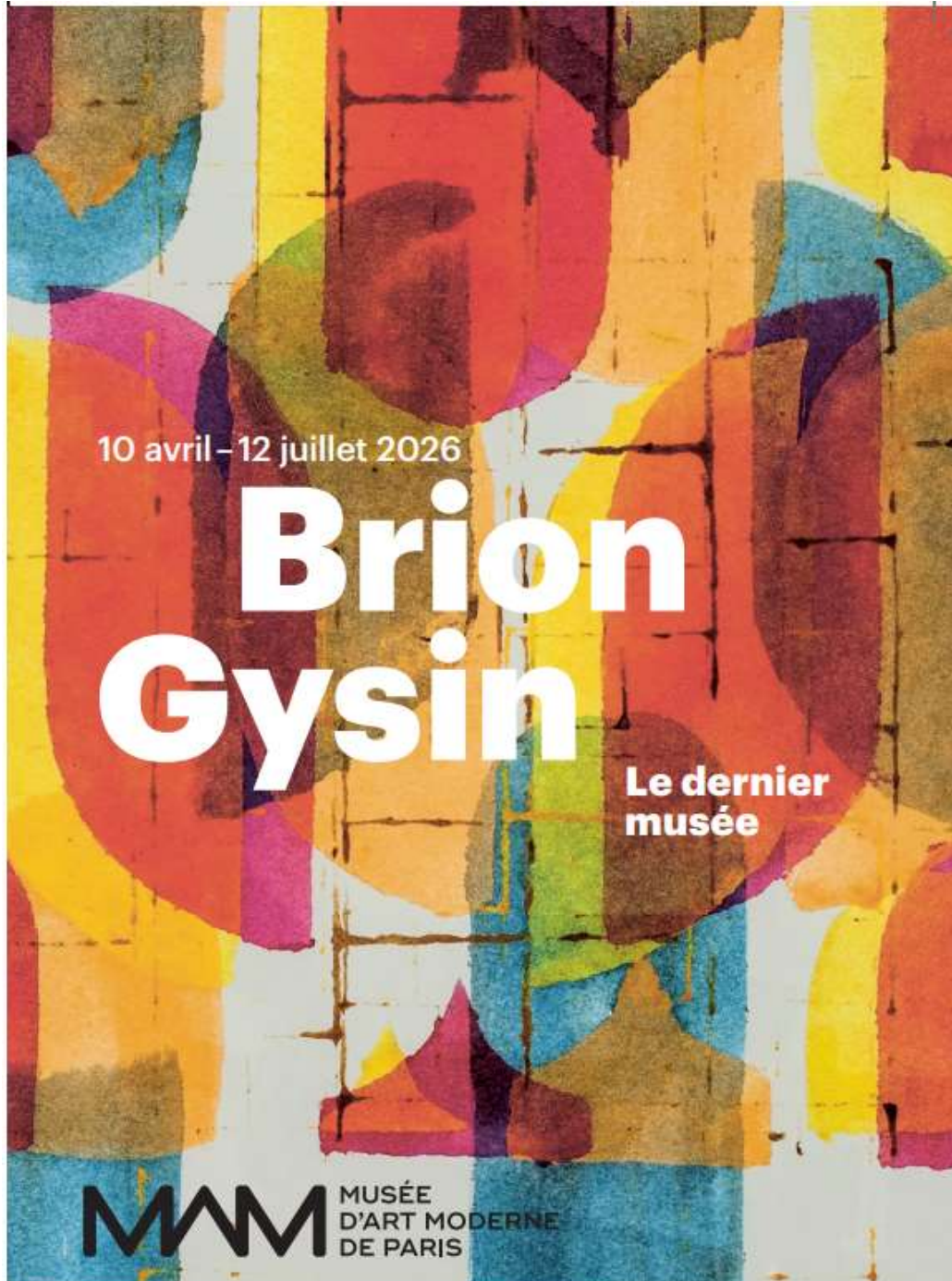


LARGE PRINT GUIDE



Brion Gysin (1916, Taplow, UK – 1986, Paris) was a multifaceted artist. A painter, poet, performance artist, photographer, and musician, he was often associated with the Beat Generation.

He re-invented the technique known as the cut-up* and explored its full potential with William S. Burroughs. His work can be situated at the intersection of painting and writing, making use of an ever-evolving range of visual languages. His fascination with visions that transcend reality led him to develop a dream machine—the Dreamachine—that is viewed with one's eyes closed.

**The cut-up is a style of literary creation, where an original text is cut up randomly and the fragments rearranged to produce a new text*

Drawn to otherness and exploring the margins, he travelled the world, mixing with alternative and underground movements. His different journeys allowed him to encounter creative and intellectual circles that were occasionally complete opposites, but which enabled him to find unexpected echoes, nonetheless. Nourished by these encounters, his indefatigable creative impulse found expression in forms like sound and visual poetry, experimental cinema, performance, novels, music, painting, and photography.

This extraordinary trajectory put him in contact with many key figures in the artistic and literary domains and helped him cultivate an almost magical aura.

Beyond the legend, which he himself fuelled by means of his narrative verve, this retrospective comprising over one hundred and forty works retraces in seven thematic chapters the major stages of his career. It also sheds light on the different facets of a still little-known figure, despite the strong influence he has had on countless artists.

The first section of the exhibition, “Dreaming”, reveals Brion Gysin’s interest in dreams, Surrealism, and altered states of consciousness. Drawings, paintings, prints, decals, and texts explore the mechanisms of the imagination and the effects that drugs can have on the mind, in a context marked by the Surrealist legacy and poetic experimentation.

The following section, “Travelling”, is devoted to the importance of travel in the construction of Gysin’s work. From North Africa to America to Europe, the places visited by the artist inspired both his thought and art. These journeys sparked a reflection on otherness, popular culture, and non-Western knowledge, all of which had a profound influence on his work.

Next, the exhibition explores the principal mechanisms of his creative process (“Permutating”). Particular attention is paid to his cut-ups, permutations, repetitions, and mirror effects—techniques whose potential Gysin continually explored. He produced cut-ups alone or collaboratively, notably with William S. Burroughs, his alter ego. Together, they created a series of works in which the combination of their two personalities gave rise to a third entity: The Third Mind.

Drawing, writing, and calligraphy held an essential place (“Writing/Drawing”) in Gysin’s work. Far from being mere preparatory supports, they constitute autonomous spaces of research, where signs, words, and forms intertwine. These works attest to a physical and intuitive relationship to the gesture, the letter, and the trace.

An entire section is devoted to the Dreamachine, an iconic work in Gysin’s œuvre. This rotating, perforated cylinder, equipped with a central light bulb, generates a luminous pulse perceptible even through closed eyes.

Designed literally as a vision machine, the Dreamachine invites the public to an inner experience, where the viewer is placed at the heart of an artistic process that questions the boundaries between art, science, and perception.

The exhibition also confers a large place to the performative dimension of the artist's work ("Playing"). It was by performance that he gained recognition in avant-garde poetry circles in Paris and London from the early 1960s onwards. Music also played an important role in his performances, as may be seen in the sound poems performed as a duo with saxophonist Steve Lacy, or the other musical interventions in which he participated, merging rock and free jazz alongside figures like Ramuntcho Matta and Don Cherry.

The exhibition goes on to explore Gysin's fascination with rituals, occult practices, and oral traditions ("Entrancing"), providing his work with a captivating power that contributed to the unique aura he held over his contemporaries. John Giorno and Keith Haring, for example, saw in Gysin "a kind of teacher" and "an incredible genius whose

ideas changed [his] life”. Many artists claim his influence and Gysin’s unique way of being in the world.

Photography and photomontage punctuate the entire exhibition but form the essence of the final section “Revealing”. Used as tools to record but also to transform reality, they reveal how Gysin inscribed his presence, while simultaneously blurring the lines between document and fiction.

Throughout the exhibition, an emphasis is also put on the profoundly multimedia dimension of the artist’s work and the ongoing dialogue he maintained with other artists and writers, both past and present, from Victor Hugo to Henri Michaux, and from René Laubiès to Mohamed Hamri or Nicolas Aiello

BIOGRAPHY

1916 Brion Gysin is born in Taplow, England to Canadian parents. He spends his childhood in Canada but returns to England with his mother at the age of sixteen.

1934 Gysin travels to Paris, where he signs up for French civilization classes at the Sorbonne. He frequents expat literary and artistic circles. He becomes friendly with Marie-Berthe Aurenche, who is then married to Max Ernst. This is his introduction to the Surrealist milieu.

1935 He is invited to present his drawings in a collective exhibition of works by the Surrealists at the Galerie Aux Quatre Chemins.

1939 His first solo exhibition, in the same gallery, is quite successful. He is in Lausanne when World War II is declared. He decides to leave Europe and heads to the United States.

1940-1943 He arrives in New York in June 1940, where he makes the acquaintance of lyricist John Treville La Touche, who helps Gysin find a job as an assistant to Irene Sharaff , a famous Broadway costume designer, and also introduces him to Black underground circles.

1944 Drafted to fight for North America in March 1944, Gysin is rapidly transferred to the Canadian Army who assigns him to a spy unit where he discovers the Japanese language and calligraphy.

1945-1948 He returns to New York after the war and devotes himself to writing a novel and scripts for musical comedies.

1950 His stay in Morocco is a revelation. Gysin settles in Tangier but travels the country, fascinated by the local traditions and culture that he discovers thanks to his friend, painter Mohamed Hamri.

1954 Gysin discovers Sufi trance music in the village of Jajouka. This is a rich period of written and artistic creation. He meets William S. Burroughs.

1958 Brion Gysin returns to Paris in the autumn and moves into the Beat Hotel, on the rue Gît-le-Cœur. The hotel gets its name from the fact that it frequently hosts Americans connected to the Beat Generation.

1959 Discovers by chance the random method of creation known as the cut-up, which had previously been used by members of the Dada movement. Gysin experiments with the technique across multiple media— texts, sounds, fixed or moving images— by applying all kinds of permutations to the cut-up materials.

1961 Creates the Dreamachine with Ian Sommerville, based on his “flicker” experiments. Gysin would continue to produce new versions of this coloured cylinder, a pioneer piece of optical art.

1964 Travels to New York to promote the Dreamachine and meets up with Burroughs, with whom he embarks on the creation of The Third Mind, their most ambitious collaboration to date.

1973 Gysin permanently settles in Paris, at 135 rue Saint-Martin, opposite the Centre Pompidou, then under construction. Photography becomes his preferred medium.

1974 Diagnosed with cancer, Gysin is operated on in London. Traumatized by the secondary effects caused by the treatment he receives, he falls into a deep depression and attempts suicide.

1978 Participates in the Nova Convention in New York, an event bringing together the proponents of the 1960s and 1970s avant-garde and the punk movement.

1986 Surrounded by a close circle of friends and artists (Keith Haring, George Condo, John Giorno, Genesis P-Orridge), Gysin dies on 13 July. Shortly before his death, he donates the works from his studio to the musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris.

1993 The exhibition Brion Gysin Play Back is held at the Espace Electra (EDF), organized by the musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris.



Brion Gysin, *Autoportrait*, 1961, Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris.

Brion Gysin The Last Museum

April 10 – July 12, 2026

Director : Fabrice Hergott

Curator: Olivier Weil with the participation of Hélène Leroy, chief curator of heritage.

Exhibition assistant : Juliette Theureau

PUBLICATION

Catalog, 200 pages, published by Paris

Musées : 39 €

PRICES

Regular rate 17€

Reduced rate 15€

Combined ticket 20€/18€

Free for visitors under 18

With the Paris Musées card, unlimited access to all exhibitions of the museums of the City of Paris (except for the Crypte archéologique and Catacombes).

Recommended booking of a time-stamped ticket at: www.billetterie.parismusees.paris.fr

Free entry for the permanent exhibitions

VISITOR INFORMATION

MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE DE PARIS

11 avenue du Président Wilson

75116 Paris

T 01 53 67 40 00

www.mam.paris.fr

GETTING THERE

Métro line 9: Alma-Marceau or Léna

Bus : 32 / 42 / 63 / 72 / 80 / 92

RER C : Pont de l'Alma

The exhibition is accessible to persons with disabilities.

OPENING HOURS

Tuesday to Sunday from 10 am to 6 pm

Late-night opening Thursday until 9:30 pm
(exhibition only)

Closed on Mondays and some public
holidays