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## Rumours & Legends

### A new presentation of the museum's collection

15 March – 14 July 2019

**Press preview: Thursday 14 March 11 am – 2 pm**

**Official opening: Thursday 14 March 6 pm – 10 pm**

In parallel with the Thomas Houseago exhibition and the arrival of major new donations, the new presentation of the Musée d'Art Moderne collection explores narrative as a visual rather than a literary form of expression. Like a story revealed through history and time *Rumours and Legends* presents art faced with its political, social and aesthetic context, but at the same time receptive to the unpredictably personal.

The layout is divided into two large parts. One re-opens a window onto earlier decades of art in France and elsewhere, while the other echoes the present-day scene in international terms.

For starters, four sequences comprising large groups of works invite the viewer to rediscover artists who played a significant or distinctive role in the movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Over the forty years from the *Everyday Mythologies 1* and *2* exhibitions of 1964 and 1967 to the emergence of individual mythologies in 1972–2000, most of these artists were defended by the Musée d'Art Moderne and shown in these very same spaces. Because of the quantity and historical importance of their work, the Narrative Figuration artists are the core of this new presentation structured around the movement's seminal work, *A Passion in the Desert*, a cycle of 13 pictures painted in 1964 by Gilles Aillaud, Antonio Recalcati and Eduardo Arroyo.

On show with them are sculptures, drawings and documentary material from Étienne-Martin, whose collection has been enriched by a substantial donation; and pictures, engravings and photographs by painter-writer Bernard Dufour – including his manifesto painting *Holger Meins 75*, with its stark representation of the coexistence of the political and the intimate. Further along are tributes to the oeuvres of Annette Messager and Christian Boltanski, both of whom have been championed by the Museum for many years. All these artists are now integral parts of the Museum's identity.

The second part of the presentation brings together a new generation of artists, most of whose works were given their first showings here. These works testify to the Museum's active support for international contemporary art and its decoding of a world in movement. The Internet and the social networks have shaken up the information narrative and the circulation of images, and triggered a dangerous change of scale by giving friendship and privacy a global dimension. A breeding ground for multiple, serial stories, they are determining new narrative modes and speeding up legends to come. Reacting to these turbulent times, many artists are hewing their own singular paths between the individual and the collective, the digital and the organic, in an ongoing exploration of our perception of reality. Many of these works have come to us as donations, in most cases thanks to the generous support of the hardworking Friends of the Museum Society.

The two parts of this historical/contemporary presentation are made up of works which, despite their formal or technical differences, have in common an attempt to portray individuals in relation to their environment, be it personal or collective.



Gilles Aillaud, Eduardo Arroyo, Antonio Recalcati, *A Passion in the Desert*, 1964  
© ADAGP, Paris, 2019, Aillaud, Arroyo, Recalcati. Photo: Harold Asencio

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# Rumours & Legends

1960 – 2000

## First room

### ***Between Memory and Time: the sculpted narrative of Étienne-Martin***

**Étienne-Martin** (1913-1995) created his first works in the mid-nineteen thirties. He exhibited in Paris with artists in the group *Témoignage*, who, like himself, had trained at the *École des beaux-arts* in Lyon. While a refugee in Dieulefit during World War II, he met the writer and collector Henri-Pierre Roché, who supported him when he returned to Paris and introduced him to Brancusi. He established his reputation from the mid-sixties at the Biennale in Venice and retrospectives in Berne in 1963 and in Saint-Etienne in 1966, earning a Grand prix national des arts in 1967. In 1968 he was named Professor at the beaux-arts de Paris; and in 1971, he was inducted into the Académie des beaux-arts. Ever at the fringe of modernity, Étienne-Martin inspired Harald Szeemann's concept of *Mythologies individuelles*. The critic and exhibition curator invited him to exhibit at Documenta 5 in Kassel in 1972, alongside Christian Boltanski, Marcel Broodthaers, Robert Filiou, Jean Le Gac and George Brecht.

Thanks to a collection of twenty sculptures, completed by drawings and archives given by the artist's wife, Marie-Thérèse Etienne-Martin, the museum has become a reference centre for the work of Etienne-Martin. Exhibited here is a significant collection focussed on his very personal and creative notion of the *Demeure (Dwelling)* as a visual language adapted to the shape of his memories and of his own psychological universe, whose rules for use are detailed in *l'Abécédaire et autres lieux* (1967) and whose various milestones can be followed in *Demeure II* (1958-1959), *Petite Demeure (Demeure X)* (1965), *Le Passage ou la Tour des ombres (Demeure XII)* (1969), *Le Fil du temps (Demeure XIV)* (1978) et *Celle qui veille (Demeure XVI)* (1980).

## Second room

### ***A passion in the desert***

In the summer of 1964 **Gilles Aillaud**, **Eduardo Arroyo** and **Antonio Recalcati** completed this cycle of thirteen paintings, the first ever collective work by the artists of Narrative Figuration. Based on Honoré de Balzac's eponymous novella, which recounts a fantastical love affair in the Egyptian désert between a leopard and a soldier from Bonaparte's army, the series constitutes the first instalment of a visual manifesto, whose second half is *Vivre et laisser mourir ou la fin tragique de Marcel Duchamp* (conserved at the Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid). The two works were brought together in 1965 for the historic exhibition organised by critic Géraud Gassiot-Talabot at the Galerie Creuze: *La Figuration Narrative dans l'art contemporain*. On the occasion of the donation of *Une passion dans le désert*, the musée d'Art moderne revisits this art movement, several prominent members of which, including Eduardo Arroyo, have recently passed away.

With the sixties in full swing, a return to figurative depiction seemed to defend an isolated point of view, far from the dominant trends in art: abstract painting was still very much present, as were Pop Art and New Realism, Kinetic Art and the practices associated with Performance and Conceptual art then emerging. As the writer Daniel Anselme points out in his foreword to the first exhibition of *Une passion dans le désert* at the Galerie Saint-Germain (Jan.-Feb., 1965): 'Doubtless there are days when Aillaud, Arroyo and Recalcati feel a burning passion for an active, forceful painting that is open to all, insolently intelligent and meaningful, and have the sense of being surrounded—they and the handful of artists who, like them, refuse to make fashionably frivolous things—by a desert (the art world) that is all the more distressing for being overpopulated.'

### Third room

#### ***Narrative figuration***

The art critic G erald Gassiot-Talabot used the concept of Narrative Figuration in 1965 to define an art movement bringing together artists of various backgrounds who regularly exhibited at the Salon de la jeune peinture from the beginning of the 1960s. These artists mounted a critique of consumer society and political ideologies in response to the dramatic events that marked those years: the Vietnam War, the Cultural Revolution in China, the Arab-Israeli conflict of the Six-Day War, the racial upheavals in the United States, famine in India and the events of May 1968 in France. They wanted to restore to painting its capacity for analysis and its power to make political statements.

These artists developed a new figurative aesthetic, as a kind of storyline grounded in the imagery of daily life, ordinary objects of mass culture and the contemporary environment. In addition to their political sensibilities, they shared an interest in photography and cinema. At the same time, they explored other forms of visual expression such as graphic art, advertising imagery and comic books. The mus e d'Art moderne played a pioneering role in presenting this artistic approach: the exhibitions *Mythologies quotidiennes* organised by Gassiot-Talabot with the participation of the artists in 1964 and 1977 were historical milestones. This new survey of the collections provides an opportunity to revisit this art movement in light of recent acquisitions and to pay special homage to the late **Jacques Monory**.

### Fourth room

#### ***Bernard Dufour, the evolution of a painter/writer***

From his youth, **Bernard Dufour** (1922-2016), an agricultural engineer who became a painter at the end of the nineteen forties, established close personal ties with writers. These included Alain Robbe-Grillet, Claude Ollier, Andr  Pieyre de Mandiargues, Denis Roche, Pierre Guyotat, Jacques Henric and Catherine Millet. A painter and writer himself, like his comrade Pierre Klossowski, he continued to engage in literary collaborations throughout his life.

The paintings displayed in this room revolve around his most important work, *Holger Meins 75*, a polyptych he donated to the mus e d'Art moderne in 2008 and in which the autobiographical subjects that constantly preoccupied him are concentrated: women, sex, obscenity and politics. For this donation, Bernard Dufour wrote *L'Autre Jour*, in which he describes the particular conditions that attended production of this painting in 1974: 'When Alain Jouffroy asked me to think about what a New Historical Painting might be, the subject for me was obviously Terrorism, and all the more vividly because I could couple together History and my own story: that of my love for Martine'.

*Les Figures du temps de l'agonie de Martine Dufour*, created in 1995 when his wife was dying, were Bernard Dufour's attempt to confront, through painting, his memory of the body of his beloved wife, who was photographed in 1975, well before her illness.

To facilitate appreciation of the 'provocative power' (Alain Jouffroy) of *Holger Meins 75* and the other paintings, an abundant documentation—manuscripts and preparatory studies—donated by the artist to the museum, connects the works to their photographic sources and literary descriptions.

### Fifth room

#### ***Individual Mythologies: Christian Boltanski, Annette Messager***

In 1972 the curator Harald Szeemann appropriated the expression *Mythologies individuelles*, which he had used to designate the work of  tienne-Martin, as the title for one section of Documenta 5 in Kassel, a foundational exhibition

for the history of contemporary art. This exhibition brought together artists in search of new subjects at the frontiers between art and life, and forms of visual expression associated with both autobiography and fiction, like the works of Christian Boltanski and Annette Messager, with whom the Museum has a long-standing relationship. Most of the works presented here belong to their early period.

The installations of Christian Boltanski intersperse personal and collective memories. Beyond their modest appearance, the objects that he assembles, bordering on derision or parody, are the depositories of a memory upon which each of us can project some part of her/his private or lived experience, endowing the objects with a powerful emotional charge. In the form of inventories, window displays, archives, storage, he stages them in space but also in time, like contemporary relics.

Between 1972 and 1974 Annette Messager created numerous 'album-collections' from an accumulation of texts, photographs, notes and various articles. Sometimes arranged in notebooks, sometimes randomly placed in portfolios, these album-collections are organised with detachment and humour around various themes, such as romantic life, encounters or domestic tasks and, according to their subject, appear to belong to the realm of the personal diary, the photographic album or the cookbook.

# ***Rumours & Legends***

## **From 2000**

### ***The digital and the natural***

The two last sections of the parcours offer a selection of recent acquisitions, drawn for the most part from the Contemporary Creation Comitee which, since 2015, contributes to enriching the collections of the Musée d'Art moderne.

This overview of current artistic creation echoes the upheavals of our time, many of which can be linked to new technologies. Like the Industrial Revolution and the rise of mass production in the last century, technology has considerably inflected artistic creation in the 21st century. Capturing a world that has become subject to increasing virtualisation, artists appear to have focussed a renewed attention on the living, on materiality and also on the 'physicality' of the image, whether produced mechanically or by hand. Carrying on the language of art movements such as Pop Art, New Realism and Arte Povera, art today is anchored in new paradigms.

Artists combine natural and industrial materials, pop culture references and urban legends. They underline the excesses of consumerism and communications in the digital era, while at the same time they push back and redefine existing categories, frontiers and hierarchies.

The pieces presented here establish an interstitial space where the digital and the natural cohabit: **Olga Balema** and **Mimosa Echard** invite to examine the human interaction with the environment and their mutual contamination. For **Michel Blazy** or **Hans Schabus**, the intervention or evocation of animals questions the status of the work and its cultural representation. In her installations, **Mélanie Matranga** experiments through conflation of different spaces, the intimacy of the group and the collective within each of us. In her VR film, **Hayoun Kwon** offers an experience of mutation from the real into virtual reality. As for the hybrid works of **Oscar Tuazon** and **David Raffini**, they belong both to painting and to sculpture. The videos of **DIS** and **FAUX/real** play with the advertising codes of music videos and film trailers, while **DAS INSTITUT** borrows the techniques of marketing, to better call them into question.

### ***The blind spot***

On the Web 2.0, rumours circulate and get amplified according to fads and denunciations. In becoming the channel of the whistle-blowers, but also rumours and fake news, social media compete with traditional sources and disturb the very foundations of democracy.

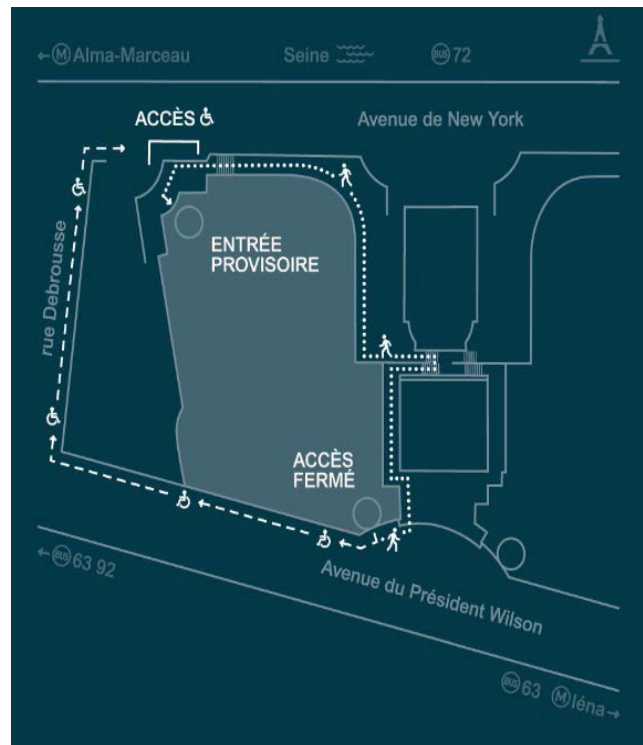
Faced with this cacophony, it becomes difficult to preserve a critical distance and discern what conveys the truth.

This last part of the presentation follows the metaphor of the blind spot. Indeed, there is on the human retina a small area without receptors, which registers no image at all. It is then up to the brain to compensate for this absent data, like a computer program, based on what is perceived in the area surrounding this blind zone. The reality of what we see is therefore partially approximate.

As a means of exploring our relationship to reality, some artists have reinvested the materiality of the work and the studio practices, while others highlight the ambiguity of this entanglement. **David Douard's** installation is an exemplary case: a super connected teenager seems, however, to be in the grips of a crushing solitude. In the work of **Laurent Le Deunff**, strips of leather torn from abandoned sofas are used to articulate the idea of an Amerindian dwelling created from the residues of an absurd consumer society to be rethought. Similarly, **Lucie Stahl's** encrypted image also escapes our comprehension, even as we perceive in it an attempt to address us. Like **Katinka Bock**, **Marion Baruch** offers an image in negative that is inscribed in a past heavy with history between

presence and absence. Lastly, employing the allegory of obscurity and light, Renaud Auguste-Dormeuil's photography and **Fayçal Baghriche's** film trigger our awareness of the world and its decidedly subjective reality with humour and poetry.

# Practical information



The Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris is currently being renovated to improve the reception facilities in the lobby and to create a greater ease of movement between the different areas.

When the renovations have been completed, the entire museum will be accessible to people suffering from impaired mobility. Visitors will also be able to enjoy the fully refurbished restaurant and the return of the bookshop.

These large-scale works have been entrusted to h2o architectes (Charlotte Hubert, Jean-Jacques Hubert and Antoine Santiard), Studio GGSV and, for access facilities, the Chiara Alessio Architecte agency.

**The Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris will remain open throughout the renovations.**

**Entrance (Seine side):**

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