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Jean Fautrier

*Matière et lumière**

26 January – 20 May 2018

Press preview: 25 January 11 am–2 pm

Official opening: 25 January 6–10 pm

Beginning on 26 January 2018 the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris is paying tribute, in a major retrospective, to Jean Fautrier (1898–1964). Rarely exhibited, this solitary figure is now considered the most significant precursor of Informal Art in 1928, the inventor of thick impasto in 1940 and a cardinal contributor to the revitalisation of modern art after Cubism.

The exhibition is a reprise of last summer's retrospective "Jean Fautrier" at the Kunstmuseum in Winterthur, Switzerland, with the addition of works from the Musée d'Art moderne, other French museums, and private collections.

Jean Fautrier is intimately connected to the history of the Musée d'Art moderne's collection and its programming. In 1964 the museum presented his first retrospective, organised in close collaboration with the artist following his large-scale donation. In 1989 a second retrospective shed fresh light on a rich, varied and notably distinctive oeuvre.

Coming after a gap of almost thirty years, this new exhibition comprises some 200 works – close to 160 paintings, drawings and prints, and a substantial group of sculptures – from numerous public and private collections in France and abroad. It will include practically the whole of the artist's donation to the museum, plus later gifts and acquisitions; with over 60 works, the Musée d'Art moderne now has the largest Fautrier collection of any museum.

Fautrier's career began in 1920. His painting, figurative at the time, was made up of still lifes, landscapes and nudes in styles ranging from a harsh, hallucinatory realism to darkly lit near-abstract shapes. After a brief period of recognition, however, the economic slump ultimately put paid to his artistic career: forced to leave Paris in the early 1930s, he lived in the Alps for several years, working as a ski instructor and manager of a hotel with its own dance hall.

Returning to Paris in 1940, he met or renewed his acquaintance with writers including André Malraux, Francis Ponge, Paul Éluard, Georges Bataille and most importantly Jean Paulhan, who would become his most ardent champion. During the War years he developed a new approach to the image in which paint itself took on a steadily increasing role in the representation of objects, landscapes and bodies.

In his famous series – *Otages* (Hostages; 1943–1945), *Objets* (Objects; 1955), *Nus* (Nudes; 1956) and *Partisans* (Partisans; 1957) – textural effects became the main subject. Using a glue-based paint for blends of pigment with transparent and opaque inks, Fautrier composed intricate, luminous harmonies whose impastos and textures induced a certain anxiety.

1960 saw him acclaimed at the Venice Biennale, where he shared the Grand Prize for Painting with Hans Hartung. Jean Fautrier died during the summer of 1964, just after his first retrospective at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris.

This exhibition is jointly organised with the Kunstmuseum Winterthur.

A bilingual French-English catalogue will be published by Editions Paris Musées.

**Texture and Light*



Jean Fautrier
Tête d'otage n°20, 1944
Huile sur papier marouflé sur toile
33 x 24 cm
Collection privée, Cologne
© Adagp, Paris, 2017

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Open Tuesday–Sunday

10 am–6 pm

Open late: Thursday until 10 pm

Admission

Full rate: 12 €

Concessions: 10 €

Cultural activities

Information and bookings
Tel. 01 53 67 40 80

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Kunstmuseum Winterthur³

Biography

1898

Jean Fautrier was born in Paris on 16 May. Raised by his maternal grandmother of Irish origin

1907

Death of his father, then of his maternal grandmother, the person to whom he was closest.

1908

His mother moves to London. The young Fautrier joins her there several months later.

1912

He is admitted to the Royal Academy of Arts, which he later leaves for the Slade School of Fine Art. He discovers Turner's work.

1917

He returns to France as a minor voluntary soldier. Dismissed from the army for ill health in 1921.

1918-1935

He lives with Andrée Pierson, his first model.

1920-1921

He travels throughout Europe, and enjoys a first stay in the Tyrol mountains.

1922

He settles in Montmartre. Participates in the Salon d'Automne with his *Tyroliennes en habit du dimanche* (Tyrolean Women in Sunday Clothing).

1923

Moves to the district of Montparnasse. At the Galerie Fabre, he makes the acquaintance of Jeanne Castel, a great lover of painting, who buys some of his canvases.

1924

His first solo exhibition at the Galerie Visconti is praised by art critics.

1925

Jeanne Castel introduces him to the art dealer Paul Guillaume.

1926

Beginning of his "black period", with his paintings of glaciers, inspired by his frequent stays in the upper part of the Alps. Makes the acquaintance of Léopold Zborowski, who exhibits Fautrier's work alongside Modigliani, Kisling and Soutine.

1927

Paul Guillaume organizes a solo exhibition of Fautrier's work at the Galerie Bernheim. He pays the painter a regular salary, up until the time of the economic recession. Beginning of his "grey period".

1928

First stay at Port-Cros. At Jeanne Castel's home, he meets André Malraux who encourages him to create the illustrations for a literary text of his choice. Fautrier chooses Dante's *Inferno*, which marks the beginning of his involvement in the Art Informel (Informalism) movement.

1930

After several trial prints, Gallimard Editions abandon the publication.

1933

Malraux exhibits several paintings and sculptures by Fautrier at the NRF Gallery, as well as his pastels done for *l'Enfer* (Inferno).

1934-1939

He leaves Paris for financial reasons and becomes a ski instructor at Tignes. He works as the manager of "La Cagna" hotel and dance hall, and later at another establishment, "La Grande Ourse", in Val-d'Isère.

1935

He marries Yvonne Loyer. They divorce in 1942.

1939-1940

Upon his return to Paris in 1940, after several months in the south of France, Fautrier stays at Jeanne Castel's home. He rents a studio on the Boulevard Raspail—a meeting place for the Résistance—with Thérèse Malvardi, his companion. He begins painting again and participates once more in the Salons.

1941-1942

Solo exhibition at the Galerie Alfred Poyet. Develops a friendship with Paulhan, Char, Ponge, Éluard, and illustrates several books for publisher Georges Blaizot (*Orénoque, Lespugue, Madame Edwarda*).

1943

An exhibition is devoted to his work at the Galerie René Drouin, with paintings from the period 1915-1943. The exhibition is highly successful. Arrested by the Gestapo, he returns to Chamonix upon his release from prison. Back in Paris, he stays at the Châtenay-Malabry Clinic (Hauts-de-Seine), where Paulhan had advised him to hide out. It is here that he begins to paint the *Otages* (Hostages). He meets Jeannine Aeply with whom he will have two children.

1945

Exhibition of the *Otages* (Hostages) at René Drouin's gallery. The catalogue of the exhibition features a preface written by André Malraux. He moves permanently to Châtenay-Malabry.

1946

Birth of his son Dominique and then his daughter Manuelle a year later.

1949

Jean Pulhan publishes *Fautrier l'Enragé*, with etchings by the artist.

1950

Fautrier and Jeannine Aeply develop a reproduction process in order to ensure a certain financial stability and produce *Originaux multiples* (Multiple Originals).

1955

At the Galerie Rive droite Fautrier exhibits his series of *Objets* (Objects), with a catalogue prefaced by Jean Paulhan.

1956

Exhibits his series of *Nu* (Nudes) at the Galerie Rive droite. The preface of the catalogue is written by Francis Ponge.

1957

At the Galerie Rive droite he exhibits a series entitled *Partisans*, in homage to the victims of the invasion of Hungary by the Soviet army the previous year. Beginning of a series of exhibitions overseas

1960

Fautrier is the guest of honour at the Venice Biennale, where he shares the Grand International Prize for Painting with Hans Hartung

1961

He receives the Grand Prix at the 7th edition of the Tokyo Biennale.

1962

He meets Jacqueline Cousin.

1964

A retrospective is devoted to him at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris. The artist donates a large number of his artworks to the institution.

He dies on 21 July, the date scheduled for his marriage to Jacqueline Cousin.

Exhibition layout

Introduction

Although little known to the general public, Jean Fautrier (1898-1964) is one of the most important artists of the 20th century. He belongs to a generation of artists who came after Fauvism, Cubism and the various avant-garde movements that were born out of these. Like Alberto Giacometti, Jean Dubuffet, Lucio Fontana and Henri Michaux, he was committed to exploring new avenues, a calling that emerged early on in his career. His early artwork is amongst the most striking or original of the interwar period and may be said to reflect the dramas and tensions of that time. But from the late 1920s onward, his work evolved spectacularly to the point that despite himself, he became the inventor of *art informel* (informalism). Fautrier's painting is based on matter, which acts as a souvenir of the subject and of reality. Articulated by means of nuances of light and colour, his painted work, from its realist beginnings, consisted of various attempts at pictorial experimentation that garnered much attention. Fautrier was closely linked to many great authors of his day, such as André Malraux, Jean Paulhan and Francis Ponge, who fervently supported his work. In 1946, Ponge compared Picasso's strong personality to that of Fautrier's, whom he saw as a kind of *doppelgänger*: "After the masculine and leonine Picasso, [...], Fautrier represents the feminine and feline side of painting [...]". For Ponge, Fautrier was not simply the author of another painting hanging on a wall, his work was much more powerful: "It is clear that Fautrier has another ambition. He wants to break the wall", thereby opening art toward new perspectives. This exhibition is the third retrospective devoted to Fautrier organized by the Musée d'Art moderne since the spring of 1964, after the artist had made a significant donation of his work to the Museum, just before his death. A second, large-scale retrospective took place in 1989. Today's exhibition, almost thirty years later, is an enhanced version of the retrospective at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur (Switzerland) in the autumn of 2017. Featuring almost one hundred and forty paintings, numerous works on paper and over twenty-five sculptures—nearly the totality of Fautrier's sculptural work—this exhibition provides a remarkable overview of Fautrier's art.

1. Early career, 1922-1925

Jean Fautrier's artistic career began in 1920 when, discharged from the army, he moved to Paris. In addition to painting, he experimented with the graphic arts (wood engravings and lithographs), an activity that would have an important influence on his first paintings. His work expressed a caustic realism that depicted its subjects without pity. His themes were inspired by the lives of people from a modest background, such as the inhabitants of the Tyrol region—a souvenir of his stays in the mountains—where the primitivism of the painting merged with the flagrant ugliness of the model. In 1925, Fautrier, inspired by his companion Andrée Pierson, experimented with nudes for the first time through pastels and paintings. The artist's pictorial virtuosity is evident in these works through his representation of the body and the barely defined space surrounding it. The presence of the subject is striking. Fautrier did not emulate post-Impressionism. Neither did he walk in the footsteps of the Cubist avant-garde. He ignored the milestones laid down by neoclassicism. His paintings were closer to the dark tones of Flemish painting.

2. 'Black Period', 1926-1927

In 1926, hiking in the Hautes-Alpes, Tyrol and Savoie regions, inspired Fautrier's glacier landscapes, of a unique intensity. Through his treatment of matter and light, they announced the artist's 'black period' which had no equivalent in its day. This style of painting consisted of a simple, direct and oftentimes, brutal evocation of the subject, accentuated by delicate brushstrokes of colour against the dark, monochrome canvas. Fautrier did not paint things or beings, but the essential reality of their presence in the world. The choice of the subject matter, and the subtlety of its representation, suggest that these works were painted in response to the still lifes of 18th-century French painting. At this time, Fautrier was a great admirer of the work of Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin. These paintings allowed Fautrier to develop a name for himself and two art dealers took an interest in his work: Paul Guillaume had him sign a contract and Léopold Zborowski exhibited his works alongside Modigliani, Kisling and Soutine.

3. Port-Cros, 1928

In 1927, Fautrier's painting evolved from a black palette to a softer grey (this became known as his 'grey period'). The forms also became more suggestive as in his monumental nudes that seem to emerge from a kind of half-light. A stay on the island of Port-Cros in 1928, off the coast of Toulon, marked a new departure in Fautrier's work. His palette became clearer and the flat areas of colour even pastier, as seen in his masterpiece of the period: *Forêt* (Forest). The tree trunks lose their materiality to the spaces that separate them, filled with a cold yellow, while at the tops of the trees, the line undulates and culminates in a free arabesque. Landscape allowed Fautrier to privilege a graphic representation where the subject took second place. It was also in this period that Fautrier sculpted his first body of work: several busts and a number of small statues. The deformation already evident in the artist's pictorial work finds its extension here in a very explicit way.

4. Illustrations for Dante's *Inferno* and landscapes, 1928-1940

The influence of the Port-Cros experience made itself felt in the lithographs executed by Fautrier from 1928 onward for an illustrated edition of Dante's *Inferno*. The invitation to collaborate with Éditions Gallimard came from André Malraux. The majority of his pastel studies for this project have been lost, and today, only the proofs now remain. In the end, Gallimard cancelled the project, as they believed the illustrations to be too abstract. However, in these lithographs we can recognize some of the subjects previously explored in the artist's work, but here Fautrier takes a further step towards a freer application of colour, and a schematic or simplified representation of nature and figures. The small formats on paper, realized between 1928 and 1940, show how landscape as a subject paradoxically allowed Fautrier to deviate from naturalistic representation. In the small Paysage (Landscape) from 1940, we find once again the use of freer lines as opposed to precise or accurate contours, a feature already present in the artist's illustrations for *L'Enfer* (Inferno).

5. Drawings, 1930-1960

Although highly skilled at drawing, Fautrier did not really return to drawing and pastels until the middle of the war. In 1942, he was commissioned to produce the illustrations to accompany Robert Ganzo's poem *Lespugue* and for two books by Georges Bataille. The abstraction of the subject and the separation between contour and material form may be seen in the treatment of the body, albeit never purely abstract, as for example in the evocation of the heads in *Otages* (Hostages) or the voluptuous silhouettes of the elongated women in *L'Alleluiah* (The Alleluia). The line is never violent and remains distant: it surrounds the body as an object of desire in rhythmic and calligraphic movements, or summarizes it in a concise outline (a torso with a hint of arms, breasts and genitalia reduced to a simple sign). The matt background, drawn in charcoal, which recurs frequently in the nudes, appears here as the counterpart to the density of paint applied with a knife onto the canvases.

6. A period of transition, 1930-1940

Following the crash of the art market, after the economic recession of 1929, Fautrier could no longer make a living from his art, which up until then had afforded him a rather comfortable lifestyle. He was forced to look for another source of income and in the years that followed the recession, he worked as a hotelier and ski instructor in the Savoyard Alps. As he no longer had a studio at his disposal, he painted a lot less during these years. In his isolation, he devoted much thought to a new kind of painting technique that would appear in his still lifes and nudes when he resumed painting in the late 1930s. These works were designed graphically: evolving to the point of the arabesque, the line determining the appearance of the object even more than it did during his 'black period'. From this point onward, the artist worked exclusively on paper which he laid on the canvas. Fautrier then returned to sculpture: the dimensions of *Femme debout* (Woman standing) remind us of the importance of the female body as a subject to Fautrier. Furthermore, the woman's face announces the second corpus of sculpted heads that would be created in 1940. Their finely chiselled features merge with the sculptural matter, as is the case in his paintings.

7. New painting: *Otages* (Hostages), 1940-1945

In 1940, Fautrier returned to Paris. During the war years, he realized a new kind of painting to which he had devoted considerable thought and attention. These paintings consisted of a handful of subjects but transformed these utterly. Using a knife, he applied a mass of white plaster onto the paper and modelled it freely. The matter suggests rather than represents reality. On this solid base, Fautrier spread colour pigments and sketched with the paintbrush the outlines that surrounded the sculpted form and made it disappear. The number of subjects remained limited: landscapes, nudes and above all, the heads of the *Otages* (Hostages) series, which had a considerable impact when they were exhibited in October-November 1945 at the Galerie René Drouin. These hostages were the faces of prisoners held by the Gestapo, a powerful and relevant topic at that time, but the art and the way in which Fautrier depicted them was a source of contention, as was his serial treatment of the heads. In the words of writer and art critic Michel Ragon: 'Each painting was painted in the same way. Against a watery green background, lay a puddle of thick white plaster. A brushstroke indicated the outline of the face. And that was all'.

8. *Objets* (Objects), 1946-1955

After the war, with *Objets* (Objects), Fautrier began a new corpus of work. For these, the artist chose as his motifs, objects produced in a standardized, even industrial fashion: a glass, a pot, cans, cartons, reels or perfume bottles. He was not interested in depicting the object in its familiar appearance but sought to capture its essence. The co-existence of matter, painting and drawing, which had already provided the black images with their particular character, reached the height of refinement in *Objets*. They share the striking and obvious beauty of Chardin's still lifes. It is as if Fautrier had discovered what he had been seeking: a precise internal consistency, which moves away from the expressiveness linked to the direct gesture, cultivated since the time of the Impressionists.

9. Later career, 1955-1963

Series and repetition were processes dear to Fautrier since his suites of *Nus noirs* (Black Nudes) from 1927. In 1950, he went so far as to invent a new form of producing artwork, the '*Originaux multiples*' (Multiple Originals). Through repetition, rather than the simple reproduction of a theme and the trivialization of the object, the abstract design is highly apparent and is characterized by a simple evocation of the subject with a strong presence. Faced with the success of abstract painting, Fautrier continued to emphasize the fundamental importance of reality in his artwork. He began by taking the heads of the *Otages* and transforming them into asexual faces, naming them after famous jazz standards, for example *Wa Da Da*. In the autumn of 1956, with the Hungarian revolution on his mind, Fautrier painted the *Partisans* series and handwrote, at the bottom of each canvas, a famous line from a poem by Paul Éluard: 'I write your name, Liberty.' His work was no longer driven by the search for a new technique, but by the will to paint everything by relying on the 'bravery and brevity of drawing' advocated by Francis Ponge, ranging from eroticism to nature.

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Bilingual Catalogue – French / English

éditions Paris Musées

272 pages

44,90 €

Catalogue extracts

Fabrice Hergott, director Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Foreword

If there is an artist whose work has played a major role in the Musée d'Art moderne's rich history then it is definitely Jean Fautrier. In the spring of 1964, a few months before he died of cancer, he donated a number of works to the museum in conjunction with his retrospective, which was also his first exhibition in a French museum.

Fautrier was then an artist showing in leading galleries and championed by great writers and poets such as Malraux, Paulhan and Ponge. In the mid-1960s, this circle of prestigious and active supporters no longer sufficed to ensure recognition of the importance of his oeuvre. The young generations were no longer interested in painting unless it was American. The unclassifiable Fautrier was regarded as an artist of the past. Almost nobody remembered that he was the first informel and gestural painter in the late 1920s, and also the first to have given such importance to the physicality of the picture surface. His more figurative early work was quite simply ignored. During his lifetime, periods of recognition alternated with periods of oblivion and this has continued until today. A long time passed before his work was genuinely reappraised. In 1964 Michael Werner, art dealer and future donor to the museum, and Georg Baselitz discovered together by chance the retrospective at the Musée d'Art moderne and drew the fundamentals of their aesthetic from Fautrier's output in the 1920s. Their militant vision played a major role and led to the exhibition at the Kunsthalle in Cologne in 1980, the first stage of Fautrier's slow return to grace. In 1989, the Musée d'Art moderne, traditionally attentive to artistic practice throughout the world, organised his second retrospective. Yet despite its success, this beautiful exhibition was not enough. His oeuvre had gained respect, but only within a small circle of connoisseurs. And it is only since a little more than ten years now that there has been a succession of fine retrospectives in museums in Switzerland, Japan and, closer to home, at the Musée de Sceaux, the second beneficiary of Fautrier's 1964 donation. As successful as his exhibitions and their related publications were, they had no repercussions on the general public's appraisal of Fautrier's work and relatively little on the art market. This is why one could only enthusiastically welcome the Kunstmuseum in Winterthur's initiative in organising a Fautrier retrospective. For Dieter Schwarz, its director for twenty-six years and the author of a fascinating modern and contemporary art programme, the Fautrier exhibition was his last project there. Initially, the exhibition was to be shown only at Winterthur, but a shift in the timetable of major renovation work at the Musée d'Art moderne created an opportunity to present a third Fautrier exhibition. The exhibition in Paris is an augmented version of the Winterthur exhibition adapted to our museum's larger exhibition spaces.

Given the importance of Fautrier's oeuvre, both in itself and within our collection, such a retrospective would have certainly taken place sooner or later. Over the last ten years, our Fautrier collection has been considerably enriched, firstly with the spontaneous donation by André Berne-Joffroy, a friend of the artist, then by the purchase of the very beautiful Lac Bleuand, last year, with an essential ensemble of subtle gouaches generously offered by Jacqueline Cousin, the artist's last companion and love. But perhaps if this exhibition is being shown now in Paris in unexpected circumstances, this is because Fautrier has arrived at a time in which the importance of his oeuvre is seen more clearly. Although he was the first informel artist and inventor in the late 1920s of the non-geometric abstraction that is perhaps the most popular form today, his oeuvre has remained permanently linked to reality. From the very beginning to the end, there is a tension in his painting that plunges us into the experience of its object and the realisation of its future. "It is by capturing a frozen instant of the future that one makes an art that has importance," Fautrier confided to Sami Tarica. A key phrase that applies to his entire oeuvre, from the hallucinatory and almost unknown *Trois Vieilles Femmes* in the Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte in Oldenburg, to his late landscapes and bodies suspended in the imminence of their disappearance. His paintings and sculptures show the portion of reality contained in the unreal and that of the unreal enveloping the real. A contradiction that Fautrier was perhaps the only one to have conveyed in such a precise, plausible, topical and premonitory manner.

Our thanks go to those who have generously loaned works for this exhibition and enabled this new venture. We also express our gratitude to the staff at Paris Musées and the Musée d'Art moderne and to Olivia Gaultier who brilliantly centralised its coordination. Our warmest thanks also and above all go to Dieter Schwarz, who generously did so much to ensure that this exhibition came to Paris in an exceptionally short time, and to the staff at the Kunstmuseum in Winterthur and the authors of the catalogue. We would finally like to thank Dominique Fautrier and Jacqueline Cousin for their kind help

Dieter Schwarz, guest curator, Foreword

Jean Fautrier is a unique figure in early twentieth-century French painting. He demonstrated immense expressiveness in his early dark nudes and still lifes, the like of which had hardly appeared in French painting since early Cézanne. Yet the paintings from Fautrier's *période noire* were not determined by a purely artistic expression, as the contours of the objects were scratched into the colour layer. Fine lines laid themselves over the delicate flowers and fruits emerging from the black background, which thus appeared to escape immediate access. Their subtle appearance suggested they were painted from the memory of the great epoch of eighteenth-century French still-life painting, a memory, of whose shakiness the painter seemed to be well aware. Stays in the south of France and the Savoie Alps, but above all the commission to illustrate Dante's *Inferno*, led Fautrier to a new artistic language at the end of the 1920s, in which the drawn line, paint dust and amorphous material evoke the object – landscape or body. It was no coincidence that Fautrier surprised the French art public with these works in the year 1945.

An exhibition of Fautrier's work imposed itself at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur (from 26 august to 12 november 2017), where French turn-of-the-century painting is so richly represented – especially with Bonnard and Vuillard – particularly since the museum is the only one in Switzerland that possesses paintings and drawings by the artist. The time had come for such an exhibition, since the last retrospectives – 1980 in Cologne, 1989 in Paris, 2004 in Martigny – were so many years ago.

Fautrier's oeuvre is well represented in private collections in Germany and Romandy. So the choice of works could be built upon that. It was supplemented with pieces from Parisian museums and collections, above all in order to be able to more broadly exhibit the important post-1940 period. Like the engravings treated extensively in the Geneva exhibition of 1986, Fautrier's drawings also play an important role. A show dedicated to all of them would have imposed itself, which is why they are only narrowly represented in the Kunstmuseum Winterthur exhibition. Fautrier turned to sculpture in two work phases – in around 1928 and 1940. His limited, and as yet little-known, sculptural work is shown here almost in its entirety.

It is thanks to the numerous lenders that this exhibition has been made possible and I would like to thank them first and foremost. The majority of them wish to remain anonymous so my thanks remain general. I may however mention those responsible from the museum, who have given the exhibition excellent support – Fabrice Hergott, Director of the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Dominique Brême, Director of the Musée du Domaine Départemental de Sceaux, and Stephan Kutniak, Directeur General Adjoint of the Conseil Départemental 92, Pôle Culture, Sam Keller, Director and Ulf Küster, Curator of the Fondation Beyeler in Riehen and Pia Müller-Thamm, Director, and Alexander Elling, Curator of the Staatlicher Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. For all manner of assistance in preparing the exhibition, I would also like to express my gratitude to Janet Briner in Geneva, Flora Triebel, custodian and Antoine Barroux, librarian from the Musée Domaine Départemental de Sceaux. The conversations I was very fortunate to have with Thomas Borgmann in Berlin, Marie-José Lefort and Alain Tarica in Geneva and Castor Seibel in Paris were extremely valuable.

Many thanks to the authors who wrote essays for the catalogue, especially Muriel Pic, SNF Professor for French Literature at the Institut de Langue et de Littérature Française of the University of Bern, who based on her long years of research not only wrote an essay, but also discovered and transcribed the unpublished texts by Neuenburger author Edith Boissonas. She kindly introduced me to colleagues, who could be persuaded to contribute from their own fields of work, including Christophe Barnabé, Doctoral Candidate at the Institut de Langue et de Littérature Française of the University of Bern, Marianne Jakobi, Professor of contemporary art history and Director of the Département d'Histoire de l'Art et d'Archeologie of the Centre d'Histoire "Espace & Cultures" at the Université Blaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand II and Eduardo Jorge de Oliveira, Assistant Professor for Brazilian Studies at the Romanian Seminar of the University of Zurich. The demanding translations for this edition were undertaken by Emer Lettow, Sophia Moss, Chrisoula Pétridis, David Wharry and Bernard Wooding.

Exhibiting Matterist Paintings in the Immediate Post-War Period Jean Fautrier and Jean Dubuffet in Their Historical

Marianne Jakobi

(...) Fautrier's first one-man exhibition made a strong visual impact on Dubuffet who, dumbfounded, discovered formless bodies and faces covered with a "strange impasto extremely unpleasant to look at", deadened, brownish bronze hues and "violent, flattened whitish marks". These were the small pictures of anonymous subjects entitled *Otages*, numbered 1 to 33. There were also several large paintings with more committed titles such as *Oradour*, *Massacre*, *Torse de fusillé* and *Femme suppliciée*. This masterly exhibition of wounded bodies made such a strong impression on Dubuffet that he returned several times, to the extent that he felt like a "sodden sponge, a chameleon oversaturated with naturally greenish colour that felt like apple green, a bit more green than natural". Dubuffet was subjugated by Fautrier's paintings and his remarks reveal his great irritation at finding himself influenced by them, but also a slight, acidic irony in his use of the word "apple", accentuated by the omnipresence of the lexicon of nature. Alongside abstract terms referring to artistic creation and painting, he uses a sometimes ambiguous vocabulary (does the "sodden sponge" designate the painter's instrument or the marine animal?), but incontestably rich in naturalist images. The painter as "chameleon" constitutes a particularly poetic figure due to his activity as a colourist, but is this not also a means of avoiding the link to contemporary history claimed by the exhibition's title itself, *Otages*?

Matter/history: To see or not to see hostages?

Representing hostages and exhibiting them in the immediate post-war context raises the question of the artist's political commitment. Whereas many artists were forced to take refuge in France's Free Zone or go into exile in neutral or allied countries, Fautrier returned to Paris, worked in a studio in Boulevard Raspail and developed close ties with major intellectual figures of the Resistance (Paulhan, René Char, Francis Ponge, Paul Eluard). Arrested in January 1943 then released thanks to the intervention of the sculptor Arno Breker, Fautrier moved to Châtenay-Malabry, into an outbuilding of the Vallée aux-Loups psychiatric clinic. Jean Dubuffet, on the other hand, mobilised in August 1939, made a fortune with his talents as a wine merchant, a financial godsend that enabled him to devote himself to painting and to frequent members of the Resistance, some of whom were particularly sensitive to the political dimension of Fautrier's *Otages* exhibition.

Fautrier began the *Otages* series, post-dated in 1945, before the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre on 10 June 1944. Yet it is very difficult to reconstitute the process of creation of these works and their link with historical events. Were they corpses seen in a mass grave? Or scenes of executions heard near Fautrier's home in Châtenay-Malabry? (...) The contrasting critical reception this exhibition received a little more than a year after Paris's liberation gives rise to divergent interpretations. Some saw the exhibition as the standard bearer of a committed painting; others reproached Fautrier for abandoning the idea of painting independent of history, while others found the exhibition indecent. These last stressed the contrast between colors associated with pleasure, virtuosity and frivolity and the theme of pain, the horror of massacres and death: "Almost tender pinks and greens that seem to belong to indulgence", wrote André Malraux. Dubuffet, however, smashed the relationship to history to smithereens: "As far as histories, hostages and Oradour, etc., are concerned, I could not care less, that I did not see any hostages in all that, that it did not seem at all useful to mix hostages up with all that."

Abrupt Majesty Francis Ponge, Face to Face with Fautrier's Paintings

Christophe Barnabé

(...) Ponge tells us that Fautrier's paintings, notably due to their thick impasto, distance themselves from the picture in the classical sense to become something else, to take us to a place where, "reduced to a kind of hyperbolic silence", we in turn become "hostages of the silent world".

(...) Irrespective of the words used to describe it – ascesis, purge, catharsis or even, as Ponge writes, the need to free oneself from an obsession – clearly the poet is attempting to elucidate the painter's approach faced with the "hostages affair" and at the same time observing himself confronted with Fautrier's paintings – to which he attempts to reply "more or less like a tree reacts to the wind" – and through them also to the historical events that prompted them. Indeed, by dating his text "Paris, January 1945," barely five months after the city's liberation, Ponge was stressing the temporal proximity with the hostages' execution, which he does not hesitate in describing as "the most important affair of the century", an affair to which he, who like Fautrier took part in the Resistance, must also come to terms with.

But what does the painter's gesture consist of and why is it so difficult to describe? There is, at the source, a wound and then, in front of the viewer, a series of paintings reduced to the essential, nothing but the essential: "the tension, the nerve, the pride, the arch". Thus stupor, dread and anger give rise to a new painting, a disconcerting thickness and a silence, a movement for which Ponge provides the formula in "À la gloire de Fautrier": "the stronger the emotion is, the more the abstraction can be bold". A new painting, whose access, due to its element of abstraction, is not easy, but which nonetheless figures something. Because, Ponge tells us, the intolerable, the idea of torture had to be opposed by something. And in his view, a realist pictorial response, which always runs the risk of a certain morbid indulgence in the subject, would have been less effective than Fautrier's attempt to "transform horror into beauty".

(...) The profound conviction underlying Fautrier's oeuvre is that an obstinate affirmation of beauty in the face of horror constitutes a form of resistance. Yet, as Ponge knows, any pretence at seeing beauty in what is only horror (his reflection constantly oscillates between these two poles), verges on indecency. But this is the crux of the miracle achieved by Fautrier: "He recreates the hostages as beauties." Again, this beauty is not seen at first glance. It demands that the viewer catch up with Fautrier, makes the effort to join the *Otages* in a silent world in order to understand his gesture – and it is exactly this task that Ponge undertakes and invites us to do with him. In other words, the "beauty" of Fautrier's *Otages* is an act of resistance in itself. It shows itself only after a combat, and then only to better understand that art will always respond to savagery and death by making their scars sing.

Practical information

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Station Autolib' : 24 av. d'Iéna, 33 av. Pierre 1^{er} de Serbie or 1 av. Marceau

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 6pm (ticket desk closes at 5.15pm)

Late opening on Thursdays until 10pm only for special exhibitions (ticket desk closes at 9.15pm)

Closed on Mondays and during bank holidays

Admission

Combined ticket Jean Fautrier / Mohamed Bourouissa

Full price €15

Concessions €13

Ticket desk

No-queue tickets available on www.mam.paris.fr

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