

DIANE DE POLIGNAC

GEORGES MATHIEU (1921-2012)



The French painter Georges Mathieu was one of the pioneers of the Lyrical Abstraction movement. He was also one of the first artists to paint in public, bringing together painting and performance art.

BIOGRAPHY

THE PAINTER GEORGES MATHIEU AND LYRICAL ABSTRACTION

Georges Mathieu was born in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, on 27 January 1921. Born into a family of bankers, the artist began painting in 1942 after first studying literature, law and philosophy.

At the end of the Second World War, the artist Georges Mathieu fully devoted himself to a form of non-figurative gestural painting that he called “Lyrical Abstraction”, and which he ardently defended against geometric abstraction. As a painter, he became one of the leading thinkers behind this new form of abstraction. He also brought Lyrical Abstraction closer to the Action Painting movement, which was developing at the same time in the United States. In Paris, Mathieu immersed himself in the vibrant post-war art scene, exhibiting his work at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles and the Salon des Surindépendants in 1947. The painter also exhibited at the group exhibition *H.W.P.S.M.T.B* at the Galerie Colette Allendy in Paris in 1948, showing his works alongside Hans Hartung and Wols. Mathieu’s work was exhibited by a number of other Parisian galleries in the years that followed, such as the Galerie René Drouin in 1950 and the Galerie Nina Dausset in 1951 as part of the exhibition *Véhémences Confrontées*. The Studio Paul Facchetti showed his work in 1951 and 1952, and the Galerie Pierre followed suit in 1956. It was, however, the Galerie Rive Droite in Paris that primarily presented his work during the period from 1954 to 1971.

GEORGES MATHIEU: PAINTING AS PERFORMANCE

The artist Georges Mathieu created his first tachist works of art as early as 1950. During the period that followed, Mathieu began to title his paintings with references to historical events in France—he was particularly fascinated by the Middle Ages—such as *La Bataille de Bouvines*, which he painted in April 1954. Mathieu also brought painting closer to performance art and theatrical events known as “happenings”. The artist painted his work live in front of an audience. The painting *Les Capétiens partout*, for example, was painted in one hour and twenty minutes in front of Jean Larcade’s castle in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, near Paris. During these performances, Mathieu revealed his creative process to the public, exposing himself in the very act of creation. Without sketches or preparatory drawings, the artist painted his works in a free and spontaneous manner, using colours taken directly from their tubes. The juxtaposed marks in Mathieu’s work lost any literal meaning, but his gestural painting nevertheless brought him closer to Eastern artistic practices. André Malraux even qualified the painter as a “Western calligrapher”.

THE PAINTER GEORGES MATHIEU’S INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

From the 1950s onwards, Georges Mathieu’s work crossed oceans to be shown in exhibitions in the United States and Japan. Mathieu’s work was presented in exhibitions by several galleries in New York—including the Perspective Gallery, the Stable Gallery and the Alexander Iolas Gallery—but it was, above all, the Kootz Gallery that would represent the artist in New York, presenting his work in exhibitions on an annual basis from 1954 to 1960. Mathieu was also exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1954 and participated in the group exhibition *Art from France* at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1956. In 1957, Mathieu’s paintings were exhibited in Japanese art galleries in Tokyo and Osaka. The artist travelled to Japan that year, where he was a triumphant success.

A globe-trotter, the painter Georges Mathieu travelled regularly, visiting countries all over the world. On a trip to the United States, Mathieu visited friends at the prestigious universities of Berkeley, Yale, Princeton and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He also travelled to Brazil, Argentina, Lebanon, Israel, Canada, and throughout Europe.

Mathieu’s work was presented around the world in numerous shows, including notable exhibitions at the Kunstverein in Cologne in 1959, at the Grand Palais in Paris 1978, in New York in 1979 and 1985, in Montreal in 1979, in Rio de Janeiro in 1982 and in Singapore in 1984. A more recent retrospective of the artist’s work was held at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris in 2002.

THE PAINTER GEORGES MATHIEU’S UNIVERSE

Starting in 1962, the painter Georges Mathieu sought ways to transform his artistic “language” into “style”, hoping to contribute to a harmonious relationship between man and his environment. The artist created a whole universe of work using a variety of media, including furniture and jewellery. He also established various collaborative projects, including tapestries created in collaboration with the Manufacture Nationale des Gobelins, a series of plates created with the Manufacture de Sèvres, a new 10 franc coin created with the Monnaie de Paris, and a series of posters created with the airline company Air France. Mathieu also designed stamps, gates and fountains, as well as the plans for a factory in Fontenay-le-Comte in the Vendée region of France.

Mathieu created monumental sculptures, including the following notable examples in France: at the Neuilly Sports Complex (1982), at the C.E.S. in Charenton (1982) and at the Elf-Aquitaine Tower in the Parisian business

district of La Défense. The artist also painted a number of monumental works of art for public spaces, such as *La délivrance d'Orléans par Jeanne d'Arc* in 1982 for the Orléans Town Hall and ceiling decorations for the Boulogne-Billancourt Town Hall from 1984 to 1985.

Mathieu's work went through a period of transformation starting in 1985, as the artist arrived at a "cosmic juncture" in his art. Abandoning the central composition that had previously shaped his work, the artist let forms invade the entire surface of the canvas.

In parallel to his work as a painter, Mathieu became Director of Public Relations for the American airline company United States Lines in Paris in 1947 and then Editor-in-Chief of the *United States Lines Paris Review* from 1950 to 1953. The bilingual review, which he headed for ten years from 1953 to 1964, dealt with themes as diverse as "Art and Knowledge on both sides of the Atlantic" (1953–1954), "The Game" (1956–1957), "The Party" (1960–1961) and "Dandyism" (1962–1963).

The painter Georges Mathieu died on 10 June 2012 in Boulogne-Billancourt, France.

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SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Amsterdam, Peter Stuyvesant Foundation
Antibes, Musée Picasso
Basel, Kunsthau
Bennington, VT, Bennington College, Vermont
Boulogne-Billancourt, Town Hall
Boulogne-sur-Mer, Museum of the Château de Boulogne-sur-Mer
Bourgueil, C.E.S.
Brive, Town Hall
Buffalo, NY, Albright-Knox Art Gallery
Charenton-le-Pont, C.E.S.
Chicago, IL, the Art Institute
Colmar, Unterlinden Museum
Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum
Colorado Springs, CO, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center
Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts
Dunkirk, Lieu d'Art et d'Action Contemporaine (LAAC)
East Lansing, MI, Kresge Art Center
Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten
Grenoble, Musée de Peinture et de Sculpture
Hartford, CT, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art
Helsinki, Didrichsen Art Foundation
Houston, TX, Museum of Fine Arts
Ithaca, NY, White Museum, Cornell University
Jerusalem, Bezalel National Museum
Kansas City, MO, William Rockhill Nelson Gallery
Krefeld (Germany), Kaiser Wilhelm Museum
Kruishoutem (Belgium), Fondation Veranneman
Kurashiki (Japan), Ohara Museum of Art
La Chaux-de-Fonds (Switzerland), Musée des Beaux-Arts
La Jolla, CA, Museum of Contemporary Art
Le Mont-Dore (France), Musée Joseph-Foret
Liège (Belgium), Musée des Beaux-Arts
Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts
Limoges, E.N.S.C.I.
Lodève (France), Manufacture Nationale de la Savonnerie
London, Tate Gallery
Los Angeles, CA, Los Angeles County Museum
Ludwigshafen (Germany), Städtische Kunstsammlungen und Wilhelm Hack Stiftung
Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts
Mannheim, Städtische Kunsthalle
Montreal, Musée d'Art Contemporain
Neuilly-sur-Seine, Complexe Sportif
New York, NY, Chase Manhattan Plaza
New York, NY, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)
New York, NY, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
Ontario, Art Gallery
Orléans, Town Hall
Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts
Osaka, Gutai Pinacotheca
Tokyo, National Museum of Modern Art
Victoria, B.C., Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale
Paris, Fonds National d'Art Contemporain (FNAC)
Paris, Maison de la Radio
Paris, Manufacture Nationale des Gobelins
Paris, Monnaie de Paris
Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris
Paris, Musée de la Publicité
Paris, Musée National d'Art Moderne – Centre Pompidou
Phoenix, AZ, Phoenix Art Museum
Pittsburgh, PA, Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute
Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Museum
Ravenna (Italy), Museo d'Arte
Reykjavik, Museum of Reykjavik
Rio de Janeiro, Museum of Modern Art
Rome, Galleria d'Arte Moderna
Saarbrücken (Germany), Saarland Museum, Modern Gallery
São Paulo, Museum of Modern Art
Seattle, WA, Seattle Art Museum
Sèvres (France), Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres
Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie
Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv Museum
Toulouse, Musée des Augustins
Urbana, IL, Kramert Art Museum
Vascœuil (France), Château de Vascœuil
Vienna, Museum of the Twentieth Century
Vilafamés (Spain), Museo d'Arte Contemporaneo
Villeneuve d'Ascq, LaM – Lille Métropole Musée d'Art Moderne, d'Art Contemporain et d'Art Brut
Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden
Washington, D.C., the Phillips Collection
Zurich, Kunsthau

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- Librairie Dutilleux, Douai, 1942
Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, Paris, 1947
Salon des Surindépendants, Paris, 1947
L'imaginaire, group exhibition, Galerie du Luxembourg, Paris, 1947
H.W.P.S.M.T.B., group exhibition, Galerie Colette Allendy, Paris, 1948
White and Black, group exhibition, Galerie des Deux Îles, Paris, 1948
Group exhibition, Galerie du Montparnasse, Paris, 1948
Group exhibition, Perspective Gallery, New York, 1949
Galerie René Drouin, Paris, 1950
Véhémences confrontées, group exhibition, Galerie Nina Dausset, Paris, 1951
Signifiants de l'Informel, group exhibition, Studio Paul Facchetti, Paris, 1951
Studio Paul Facchetti, Paris, 1952
Stable Gallery, New York, 1952
Kootz Gallery, New York, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1959, 1960
Salon de Mai, Paris, 1954
Galerie Rive Droite, Paris, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1961, 1969, 1971
Arts Club, Chicago, 1954
Alexander Iolas, New York, 1955, 1959
Galerie Pierre, Paris, 1956
Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1956
Art from France, group exhibition, San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, 1956
Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1957
Galerie Kléber, Paris, 1957
Shirokiya Gallery, Tokyo, 1957
Daïmaru Gallery, Osaka, 1957
Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, 1957
Galerie Helios Art, Brussels, 1957
Selecta Gallery, Rome, 1957
Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf, 1958, 1965
Art Latin Gallery, Stockholm, 1958
Chichio Haller Gallery, Zurich, 1958
Kunst Museum, Basel, 1958
Galerie Internationale d'Art Contemporain, Paris, 1958, 1959, 1960
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Liège, 1958
Kunstverein, Cologne, 1959
Atelier Riehentor, Basel, 1959
Galleria San Babila, Milan, 1959
Galleria del Cavallino, Venice, 1959, 1960
Haus Lange Museum, Krefeld, 1959
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Neuchâtel, 1959
San Stephan Gallery, Vienna, 1959
Musée de l'Athénée, Geneva, 1959
Galerie Jacques Dubourg, Paris, 1959, 1961
Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, 1959
Galería Bonino, Buenos Aires, 1959
Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo, 1960
Galleria Notizie, Turin, 1960
New London Gallery, London, 1960
Ateneo, Madrid, 1960
The Presidential Palace, Beirut, 1961
Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf, 1961
Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, 1961
Galerie Hilt, Basel, 1962
Bezalel Museum, Jerusalem, 1962
Neue Galerie im Künstlerhaus, Munich, 1962
Galleria Boussole, Turin, 1962
Galleria l'Ariete, Milan, 1962
Galleria La Loggia, Bologna, 1962
Tel Aviv Museum, Tel Aviv, 1962
Dominion Gallery, Montreal, 1963, 1970, 1973, 1976, 1979, 1987
Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1963
Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, 1963
Arts and Culture Gallery, Geneva, 1963
Galerie Argos, Nantes, 1964, 1967, 1970
Gimpel Fils Gallery, London, 1964, 1968, 1972
Galerie Arditti, Paris, 1964
Gimpel & Hanover Gallery, Zurich, 1965, 1968
Court Gallery, Copenhagen, 1965
Galerie Bleue, Stockholm, 1965
Galleri Kaare Berntsen, Oslo, 1965
Dominion Gallery, Montreal, 1965
Galerie Charpentier, Paris, 1965
Galleria del Milione, Milan, 1965
Saqqâran Gallery, Gstaad, 1965
Galleria La Loggia, Bologna, 1966
Galerie La Vieille Échoppe, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, 1966
Galleria d'Arte dell'A.A.B., Brescia, 1966
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes, 1966
Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 1967
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, 1967
Galerie Kontakt, Antwerp, 1968
Galerie des Bastions, Geneva, 1968
Musée des Beaux-Arts, La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1968
Air France Gallery, London, 1968
Air France Gallery, New York, 1968

Musée des Gobelins, Paris, 1969
 Galleria del Milione, Milan, 1969
 Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast, 1970
 Galleria Il Cancellò, Bologna, 1970
 Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes, 1970
 Galerie Veranneman, Brussels, 1971
 Hôtel de la Monnaie, Paris, 1971
 Galerie Kontakt, Antwerp, 1971
 Galerie Stadler, Paris, 1971
 Galleria La Boussole, Turin, 1971
 Galerie Argès, Brussels, 1971
 Lalikata Academy, New Delhi, 1971
 Galerie Suzanne Egloff, Basel, 1972
 Galerie Lambert-Monet, Geneva, 1972
 Beirut Art Center, Beirut, 1972
 Galerie Tallien, Saint-Tropez, 1972
 Galerie du Triangle, Paris, 1972
 Galerie Verbeke, Paris, 1973
 Berlin Opera, Berlin, 1973
 Galerie Beaubourg, Paris, 1974
 Musée Picasso, Antibes, 1976
 Galerie Beaubourg, Barcelona, 1976
 Galeria Punto, Valencia, 1977
 Galeria Ruiz-Castillo, Madrid, 1977
 Galeria Valera, Bilbao, 1977
 Kursaal, Ostende, 1977
 Bodrum Kat, Festival International, Istanbul, 1977
 Château de Simiane, Valréas, 1977
 Grand Palais, Paris, 1978
 Festival d'Art Lyrique, Aix-en-Provence, 1978
 Galerie de la Prévôté, Aix-en-Provence, 1978
 Galerie Ducastel, Avignon, 1978
 Wildenstein, New York, 1979
 Galerie Protée, Toulouse, 1979
 Galerie Lauter, Mannheim, 1980
 Galerie Art Contemporain, Art Basel, Basel, 1980
 Musée de la Poste, Paris, 1980
 Galerie Protée, Paris, FIAC 1981, 1986, 1988, FIAC 1989
 Méridien Hotel, Tunis, 1982
 Galerie Jade, Colmar, 1982
 Regency Intercontinental Hotel, Bahrain, 1983
 Château de Vascœuil, Vascœuil, 1983
 Galerie Pro Arte Kasper, Morges, 1983
 Méridien Hotel, Singapore, 1984
 Municipal Theatre, Brive, 1984
 Galerie Alain Moyon-Avenard, Nantes, 1985
 Wally Findlay Galleries, New York, 1985
 Palais des Papes, Avignon, 1985
 Rue Calvin Gallery, Geneva, 1985
 Wally Findlay Galleries, Palm Beach, 1986
 Galerie du Luxembourg, Luxembourg, 1986
 Wally Findlay Galleries, New York, 1987
 Semiha Humber Gallery, Zurich, 1987
 Galerie Sapone, Nice, 1987
 Galerie de Bellecour, Lyon, 1987
 Galleria Tedia, Milan, 1987
 Galerie Protée, Toulouse, 1987
 Guy Peters Gallery, Ghent, 1987
 Galleria La Loggia, Bologna, 1987
 Angelo Foundation, Maddaloni, 1988
 Galeria Narciso, Turin, 1988
 Galeria De Crescenzo, Rome, 1988
 Galerie Mischkind, Lille, 1988
 Galeria Biniano, Finale Ligure, 1988
 Guy Peters Gallery, Knokke-le-Zoute, 1988
 Art Valley '88, Forte dei Marmi, 1989
 Abbay of the Cordeliers, Châteauroux, 1990
 Elleni Galleria d'Arte, Bergamo, 1990
 Galleri Östermalm, Stockholm Art Fair, 1990
 Galleria Arte 92, Milan, 1991
 Musée Léon Dierx, Saint-Denis, Réunion Island, 1991
 Museum of the Château de Boulogne-sur-Mer, Boulogne-sur-Mer, 1992
La France de Mathieu, Galeries de Saint-Germain, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 1994
Autour de la Bataille de Hastings, Espace d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Toulouse et Midi-Pyrénées, Toulouse, 1995
 Retrospective, Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2002
Pour un Art de Vivre, Palais Benedictine, Fécamp, 2003
 Retrospective, Salle Saint-Georges and the Saint-Paul Cathedral, Liège, 2003
 Retrospective, Galleria Gruppo Credito Valtellinese, Milan, 2003
 Petite Écurie du Château de Versailles, Versailles, 2006
 Espace d'Art Contemporain Fernet Branca, Saint-Louis (France), 2006
Espace Georges Mathieu, Museum of the Château de Boulogne-sur-Mer, Boulogne-sur-Mer, 2008
 Gallery of the Centre Culturel Français in Milan, 2011
 Galleria Agnellini Arte Moderna, Brescia, 2011
 Art of Another Kind, group exhibition, Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2012
 Galeria Mucciaccia, Rome, 2013

Georges Mathieu, vers l'Abstraction Lyrique, Museum of the Château de Boulogne-sur-Mer, Boulogne-sur-Mer, 2014

Hartung et les peintres lyriques, group exhibition, Fonds Hélène et Édouard Leclerc pour la Culture, Landerneau, 2016

Le geste et la matière, une abstraction "autre", Paris, 1945-1965, group exhibition, Centre Pompidou/Fondation Clément, Martinique, 2017

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Georges Mathieu, *De l'abstrait au possible*, Paris, Cercle d'Art Contemporain, 1959

Georges Mathieu, *Au-delà du Tachisme*, Paris, Julliard, 1963

Georges Mathieu, *Le Privilège d'être*, Paris, Robert Morel, 1967

François Mathey, *Mathieu*, Paris, Hachette Fabbri, 1969

Georges Mathieu, *De la révolte à la renaissance*, Paris, Gallimard, Collection Idées, 1973

Georges Mathieu, *La Réponse de l'Abstraction Lyrique*, Paris, La Table Ronde, 1975

Georges Mathieu, *Notice sur la vie et les travaux d'Alfred Giess*, Paris, Institut de France, 1976

M.R. Laurenda et Mioni, *Georges Mathieu e la poetica del signa*, Padoue, Universitaria degli Studi di Padova, 1976-1977

Dominique Quignon-Fleuret, *Mathieu*, Paris, Flammarion, collection Les Maîtres de la Peinture Moderne/ New York City, N.Y, Crown publishers, 1977

Georges Mathieu, *L'Abstraction prophétique*, Paris, Gallimard, Collection Idées, 1984

Gérard Xuriguera, *L'Œuvre pictural de Georges Mathieu*, Avignon, Palais des Papes, 1985

Gérard Xuriguera et Pierre Dehaye (prefaces) in *Jalons de l'Abstraction Lyrique de Georges Mathieu*, Nice, Sapone, 1987

Renato Barilli (introduction), *Mathieu*, Nice, Sapone, 1987

Gillo Dorfles, *Georges Mathieu*, Milan, Electra, 1991

Patrick Grainville et Françoise Poirer, *Mathieu*, Château-Musée de Boulogne-sur-Mer, 1992

Patrick Grainville et Gérard Xuriguera, *Mathieu*, Paris, Nouvelles Éditions Françaises, 1993

Pierre Dehaye, *L'Art : Arme des âmes*, Toulon, Promothéa, 1994

Georges Mathieu, *Le Massacre de la sensibilité*, Paris, Jean Picollec, 1994

Autour de la Bataille de Hastings, catalogue from the Toulouse exhibition, 1995

Georges Mathieu, *Désormais seul en face de Dieu*, Lausanne, L'Âge de l'Homme, 1998

Lydia Harambourg, *Georges Mathieu*, Lausanne, Ides et Calendes, Collection Polychrome, réédition 2013

Mathieu, *50 ans de création*, Paris, Hervas, 2003