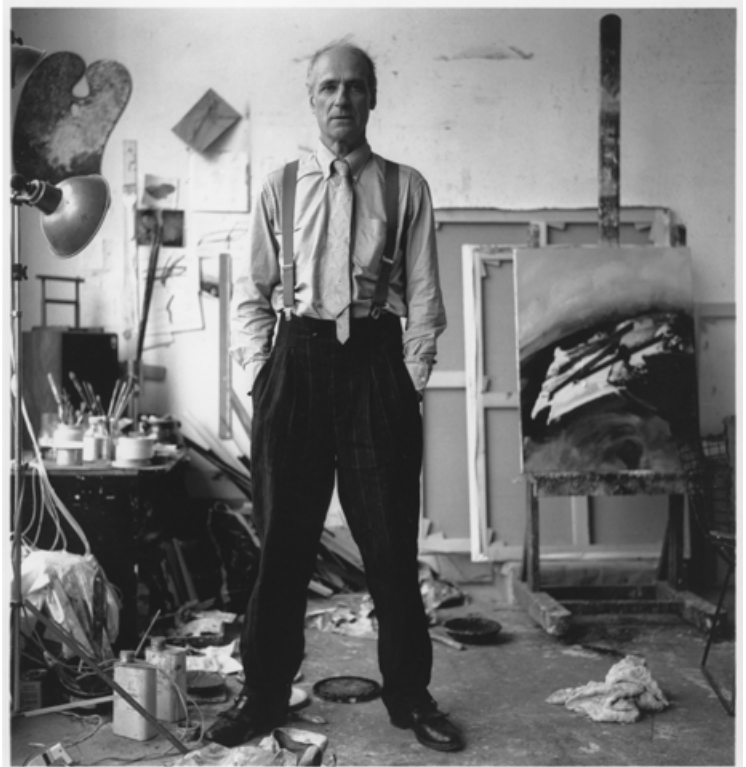


PIERRE FICHET (1927-2007)



Pierre Fichet was a French abstract painter known for his spontaneous and gestural style of painting. With a studio at the famous Bateau-Lavoir, Pierre Fichet was one of the great painters of the Parisian art scene.

THE PAINTER'S EARLY LIFE AND ARTISTIC TRAINING

Born in Paris on 10 August 1927, Pierre Fichet's parents were hat-makers and collectors. Fichet developed a passion for painting from a very young age and took painting lessons from the Italian neo-impressionist painter Dominique Aldighieri, a family friend, at the age of 14. Aldighieri trained him in landscape painting. Fichet continued his studies at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris before taking drawing lessons at a private studio in the French capital.

PIERRE FICHET'S ABSTRACT PAINTING

Pierre Fichet turned to abstract painting once and for all in 1952, inspired by religious influences. Raised by atheist parents, Fichet converted to Catholicism in his youth. His abstract canvases bore religious titles – such as *Moines de Zurbaran* and *Voile de Véronique* – until the end of the 1950s, after which he stopped titling his works. The artist would return to using titles for large canvas works in the 1980s. Influenced by his faith, Fichet began a study on the theme of the Stations of the Cross in 1964. He took up work on the project again at the end of his life, in 2006, creating a group of 14 oil paintings, each measuring 65 x 54 cm. The work, a true pictorial testament, was exhibited for the first time in 2008, after the artist's death, at the Abbey Church of Essômes-sur-Marne.

THE MULTIFACETED WORK OF PIERRE FICHET

In the 1960s, Pierre Fichet created a number of stage sets – for William Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, for the Grenier de Toulouse theatre company in 1966, and for the ballet *Espace* at the Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse in 1968.

He also worked on a number of monumental projects, including a series of paintings covering 18 metres of walls at the Hôpital Saint-Antoine in Paris in 1965, and a 50-metre-long mosaic for the Lycée Technique in Auch in 1968. These two projects were commissioned under the French “1% artistic” scheme (an initiative whereby, when public buildings are built or extended, a sum of money is set aside for the creation of one or more works of art specially designed for the site in question).

In 1965, the art critic Michel Ragon created the Groupe International d’Architecture Prospective (GIAP), an association of intellectuals concerned with research into architecture and urban planning. The group brought together the architects Yona Friedman, Paul Maymont, Jean-Claude Bernard, Pascal Häusermann, Claude Costy, Jean-Louis Chanéac, Manfredi Nicoletti, Édouard Utudjian, René Sarger, Biro & Fernier, and Guy Rottier, as well as the film-makers Jacques Caumont, Jean Herman and Jacques Polieri and the artists Pierre Szekely, Victor Vasarely, James Guitet, Mathias Goeritz and Nicolas Schöffer. At Michel Ragon’s request, Pierre Fichet became an “observer member” of the group.

THE BATEAU-LAVOIR

Pierre Fichet set up his studio at the Bateau-Lavoir in 1981 and shared the space with his friend, the painter Claude Georges, for a year. The Bateau-Lavoir was an artists’ studio and residence located in the Montmartre district of Paris, at 13-13 bis Place Émile-Goudeau. The owner of the house had it converted into artists’ studios in 1889, dividing it into around twenty small one-room flats, each with a glass roof. The studios were arranged on either side of a corridor reminiscent of the passageways of an ocean liner, which is how the name “Bateau” (French for “boat”) was coined. The artist Max Jacob, who moved there in 1907, is said to have added “Lavoir” (the French for “bathhouse”) to the name in a touch of irony, as the place was particularly dilapidated – indeed, the house had only one water point for its 25 tenants. This lack of facilities was to have an impact on the works of the artists who lived there. Max Jacob, for example, used the black smoke from his paraffin lamp and even dust for his works, and in 1912, Picasso made his first collage by grafting a piece of oilcloth onto one of his paintings. Artists from all over the world would take up residence there: Kees van Dongen in 1905, Juan Gris in 1906, Constantin Brâncuși, Amedeo Modigliani, Max Jacob in 1907 and Diego Rivera in 1908, to name but a few. As such, the Bateau-Lavoir represents a legendary venue in the Parisian art scene.

RECOGNITION FOR THE PAINTER PIERRE FICHET

Pierre Fichet presented his work to the public for the first time in 1948, when he took part in the Salon des Indépendants. He would go on to participate in the Salon until 1954. Fichet’s work was also included at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in 1952 and later at the Salon d’Automne in 1986, 1989 and 1991.

He had his first solo exhibition in 1952 at the Maison des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Looking back at that moment, he said: “In 1952... there were about three or four Parisian galleries willing to exhibit works by abstract painters. All the others, and there were a great many of them, turned down these scums, who at best were described as ‘decorators’. This hatred gave us an advantage: those who considered the profession of painting as a way of building a career and getting rich by selling their work gave up on abstraction. Towards the end of the 1950s, when abstraction became more respected, if not more loved, and some of the stars of the art world had Rolls-Royce cars, sumptuous country houses and lavish lifestyles, we would see a host of painters convert; I think it’s still the case today, but at the time, you had to believe in it to keep going.”¹

The artist very quickly gained the admiration of gallery owners and critics. Exhibited at the Galerie Arnaud on numerous occasions between 1954 and 1969, Fichet naturally developed close relationships with the gallery’s other artists. The bookseller Jean-Robert Arnaud opened his gallery in Paris at 34 Rue du Four in 1951 and was immediately embraced by the American artists John Koenig, Jack Youngerman and Ellsworth Kelly, all three of whom had received support from the G.I. Bill, which enabled them to work in Paris.

Jean-Robert Arnaud thus became an important advocate of the Lyrical Abstraction movement, representing the painter Pierre Fichet, as well as Huguette Arthur Bertrand, Albert Bitran, James Guitet and Gérard Schneider, among others. Jean-Robert Arnaud founded the famous journal *Cimaise* in 1952 – which championed abstract artists – with the support of art critics such as Michel Ragon and Pierre Restany. Fichet was also represented by the Protée galleries – in Toulouse and Paris – and the Galerie Olivier Nouvellet. The artist was exhibited abroad for the first time in 1955, at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels. In 1959, Fichet took part in the first Paris Biennial, which was inaugurated by André Malraux, French Minister of Culture, at the Musée d’Art Moderne.

In 1957, the art historian Herta Wescher wrote the following about Pierre Fichet in the journal *Cimaise*: “For him, the act of painting is akin to religious worship,

1. Pierre Fichet, Gérard Xuriguera, *Les années 1950. Peintures. Sculptures. Témoignages.*, Arted Art Editions, Paris, 1984.

and it is in meditation that his pictorial visions are born. The biblical subjects that predominated in his early figurative paintings are revived in today's abstract compositions; liberated from traditional iconographic dogmas, their mystical meaning is diffused in subtle reflections of light, in the strange radiance of colours." The following year, Pierre Restany wrote in *Cimaise*: "A greater freedom of gesture and a lyrical imagination of the pictorial expanse... The rhythmic integration is complete, the space arranged in its totality. Fichet's art, which avoids systematic divisions and the effects of successive planes, gains in intensity and depth."

Pierre Fichet also received support from the critics Geneviève Bonnefoi, Georges Boudaille, Pierre Cabanne, Michel Seuphor, Gérard Xuriguera, Patrick-Gilles Persin and Lydia Harambourg.

Pierre Fichet also took part in several museum exhibitions: *Dix-neuf peintres français* at the Kunsthalle in Mannheim, Germany, in 1955; *De la rive droite à la rive gauche* at the Musée de Verviers in Verviers, Belgium, in 1962; *Promesses tenues* and *Une aventure de l'art abstrait* at the Musée Galliera in Paris in 1965 and 1967 respectively; *L'envolée lyrique - Paris, 1945-1946* at the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris in 2006; and *Peintres abstraits des années 1950* at the Abattoirs in Toulouse in 2007.

Fichet's works are included in the following public collections: the Centre National des Arts Plastiques in Paris, the Musée d'Arts de Nantes, the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, the Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain (FRAC) – Normandy in Caen and the Abattoirs in Toulouse.

Pierre Fichet died on 8 January 2007 in Poissy, France.

Mathilde Gubanski
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SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Brest, Musée des beaux-arts
Caen, FRAC Normandie
Lille, Palais des beaux-arts
Nantes, Musée des beaux-arts
Paris, Musée d'art moderne de Paris
Paris, Mobilier national, tapisserie de la Manufacture de Beauvais
Paris, Musée national d'art moderne
Rouen, Fonds régional d'art contemporain
Taiwan, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts
Toulouse, Musée des Augustins

MONUMENTAL ARTWORKS

Auch, Lycée technique, mosaïc
Blois, Lycée de Blois, monumental sculpture
Paris, Hôpital Saint-Antoine, amphitheatre mural

SETS

King Lear, William Shakespeare, Grenier de Toulouse, 1966
Ballet Espaces, Festival Messidor, Toulouse, 1969

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Solo shows

Maison des beaux-arts, Paris, France, 1952
Galerie Arnaud, Paris, France, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1958, 1959, 1969, 1963, 1965, 1967, 1969
Galerie Saint-Laurent, Brussels, Belgium, 1955
Galerie de la Citadelle, Ascona, Switzerland, 1956
Galerie L'Atelier, Toulouse, France, 1965, 1968
Galerie Alice Julliard, Versailles, France, 1965, 1966
Galerie Protée, Toulouse, France, 1971, 1973, 1978, 1985
Château du Tremblay, Fontenoy, France, 1971
Galerie Regard, Paris, France, 1976, 1978, 1980
Galerie Convergence, Nantes, France, 1978, 1981
Galerie Gilles Corbeil, Montreal, Canada, 1978
Galerie Candela, Cannes, France, 1979
Maison de la culture, Chelles, France, 1981
Galerie Protée, Paris, France, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1990, 2001, 2005
Galerie Arts et lettres, Saint-Nazaire, France, 1985
Galerie Bellecour, Lyon, France, 1986
Galerie Olivier Nouvellet, Paris, France, 1987, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2010
Hommage, Galerie Olivier Nouvellet, Salon d'automne, Paris, France, 1987
Abstraction : expressions - confrontation 1950 – 1970, Galerie Bernard Davignon, Paris, France, 1988
Galerie du Manoir, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, 1988, 1996
Galerie Stenbock Fermor, Gand, Belgium, 1989
Städtisches Museum, Saarlouis, Germany, 1990
Morone Gallery, Milan, Italy, 1991
Pyramide Pernod, Créteil, France, 1991
Galerie Point Rouge, Paris, France, 1991, 1992
Galerie Le Navire, Brest, France, 1991
Galerie Van der Planten, Anvers, Belgium, 1992

Galerie du Manoir, Lausanne, Switzerland, 1995
Pierre Fichet - Chemin de croix, Abbaye Saint Ferréol, Essômes-sur-Marne, France, 2008
Maison des Princes, Pérouges, France, 2009
Galerie Bertrand Trocmez, Clermont-Ferrand, France, 2011
Prieuré d'Airaines, France, 2014

Group shows

Salon des indépendants, Paris, France, de 1948 à 1954
Salon des réalités nouvelles, Paris, France, à partir de 1952
Groupe Divergence, Galerie Arnaud, Paris, France, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958
Éloge du petit format, Galerie La Roue, Paris, France, 1955
Dix-neuf peintres français (Nineteen French painters), Kunsthalle, Mannheim, Germany, 1955
Cinquante ans de peinture abstraite (Fifty years of abstract painting), presentation by Michel Seuphor, Galerie Creuze, Paris, France, 1957
Drei Maler aus Paris (Tree Painters of Paris): *Pierre Fichet, Michel Carrade, Anna Staritsky*, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, Germany, 1957
Biennale de Paris, Musée d'art moderne de Paris, France, 1959
Sens plastique - Aspects de l'art contemporain (Plastic sense - Aspects of contemporary art) - *Pierre Alechinsky, Frédéric Benrath, Gianni Bertini, Corneille, Pierre Fichet, Pierre Gastaud, Hans Hartung, Ladislav Kijno, Bernard Rancillac, Michel Tyszblat*, Université de Caen, France, 1960
Young French Painters, CAC - Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH, USA, 1960
Lissone Price exhibition, Lissone, Italy, 1960, 1963
De la rive droite à la rive gauche (From the right bank to the left bank) - *Mogens Andersen, Martin Barre, Peter Brünig, Jacques Busse, Jean Clerté, Jean Cortot, Pierre Dmitrienko, Joe Downing, Luis Feito, Pierre Fichet, Pierre Gastaud, Jacques Germain, James Guitet, François Jousselin, John-Franklin Koenig, Joseph Lacasse, Pierre-César Lagage, Pierre Lahaut, Key Sato & Léon Zack*, Musée de Verviers, France, 1962
Promesses tenues (Promises kept) - *Robert Lapoujade, Pierre Fichet, Olivier Debré, Roger-Edgar Gillet, Yasse Tabuchi, Robert Wogensky, Gustave Singier, Kumi Sugai, Mario Prassinis, Jean Messagier, Paul Rebeyrolle*, Musée Galliera, Paris, France, 1965
Biennale de Menton, France, 1966
Une aventure de l'art abstrait (An adventure of abstract art), Musée Galliera, Paris, France, 1967
FIAC, *Le silence et le cri* (The silence and the scream) Abboud, Benanteur, Bernois-Rigal, James Guitet, Gardair, Pistre, Léon Zack, Jan Meyer, Bengt Lindström, Georges Mathieu, André Marfaing, Orlando Pelayo, Maurice Rocher & Roulin, Galerie Protée booth, Paris, France, 1986
Salon d'automne, Paris, France, 1986, 1989, 1991
L'abstraction, présence et permanence (Abstraction, presence and permanence) - *Frédéric Benrath, Olivier Debré, Natalia Dumitresco, Pierre Fichet, James Guitet, Alexandre Istrati, René Laubiès, André Marfaing, Gérard Schneider*, Abbaye de Lunan & centre René-Maheu, Toulouse, France, 1979
FIAC, Galerie Protée booth, Paris, France, 1990
Albert Féraud & Pierre Fichet, Galerie Pluriels, Deauville, France, 1991

Étoiles de la peinture (Stars of painting) - *Valerio Adami, Pierre Fichet, Jean-Paul Mareschi, Antonio Segui, Giangiacomo Spadari*, Maison des Centraliens, Paris, France, 1992

Lienart Art Fair, Gand, Belgium, 1992

La nouvelle École de Paris, 1941-1965 (The new school of Paris), Centre d'art contemporain de l'abbaye de Beaulieu-en-Rouergue, Ginals, France, 2002

L'envolée lyrique - Paris, 1945-1946 - *Albert Bitran, Pierre Fichet, Oscar Gauthier, James Guitet, Simon Hantai, Pierre Soulages, Léon Zack, Zao Wou-Ki*, Musée du Luxembourg, Paris, France, 2006

Peintres abstraits des années 1950 - *Roger Bissière, Albert Bitran, Jacques Doucet, Pierre Fichet, Serge Poliakoff, Yasse Tabuchi*, Les Abattoirs, Toulouse, France, 2007

Atila Biro, Edward Baran, Olivier Debré, Bertrand Dorny, Natalia Dumitresco, Pierre Fichet, Josep Grau-Garriga, Paul Jenkins, Hachiro Kanno, John-Franklin Koenig, André Lansky, Robert Malaval, Anne Walker, Espace d'art contemporain du Salon national des antiquaires, parc des expositions d'Angers, France, 2009

Albert Féraud et Pierre Fichet, Abbaye de Saint-Florent-le-Vieil, France, 2010

Huguette Arthur-Bertrand et Pierre Fichet, Galerie Olivier Nouvellet, Paris, France, 2012

Trentième anniversaire de la galerie: un regard sur l'abstraction lyrique, Galerie Bertrand Trocmez, Clermont-Ferrand, France, 2013

Regard sur l'abstraction, 1933-1960 - *Huguette Arthur-Bertrand, Roger Desserprit, Pierre Fichet, Oscar Gauthier, Jean Hélon, Ivan Kawun*, Espace des Établissements Wolfberger (with the Galerie Bertrand Trocmez), Strasbourg, France, 2014

St-art 2016, Foire Européenne d'Art Contemporain, Strasbourg événements, Strasbourg, France, 2016

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Michel Ragon, *Vingt-cinq ans d'art vivant*, Tournai, Casterman, 1969

Georges Boudaille, *Pierre Fichet*, Paris, Galerie Arnaud, 1970

René Huyghe et Jean Rudel, *L'art et le monde moderne*, Paris, Larousse, 1970

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Emmanuel Bénézit, *Dictionnaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs, graveurs*, Paris, Gründ, 1999

Jean-Pierre Delarge, *Dictionnaire des arts plastiques modernes et contemporains*, Paris, Gründ, 2001

Herta Werscher, *Pierre Fichet*, Clermont-Ferrand, Galerie Bertrand Trocmez, 2011

Patrick-Gilles Persin, *Pierre Fichet*, Éditions du Prieuré d'Airaines, 2014

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