

MAMCO
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INTRODUCTION

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 crisis and the measures aimed at combating it have profoundly affected MAMCO's programming and operations. For months, we were prevented from carrying out our main mission of receiving the public. Even now, our planned activities are in constant flux. And going forward, we will have to rethink how we work, as societal changes force us to shift our priorities.

From the start, we aimed to honor our commitments to our artists, employees, and partners. We thus postponed projects until the second half of 2021 and the first half of 2022.

Our next step was to focus our efforts on our permanent collection. After completing a full inventory in 2019, we are now physically checking the collection and putting it online. Since July 2020, half of these works have been available to view on our website, and we will continue adding more each month.

From January 2021 onward, we will invite the public to rediscover this collection in the form of a physical "inventory" by all of MAMCO's curators, using a plural methodology that reflects the spirit in which the collection was assembled.

The exhibition will feature works not often shown since being acquired by MAMCO, as well as some that have always been an important part of our visitors' experience. The displays will be organized both historically and thematically and interspersed with galleries dedicated to individual artists.

The aim of this exhibition is to reaffirm MAMCO's role in creating a Swiss artistic heritage and give the public a chance to (re)discover the artistic movements of the second half of the 20th century. Ranging from Minimalism and Conceptual art to Fluxus, from Body art to Appropriation art in the 1970s and 1980s, and from the legacy of abstraction to the resurgence of figurative art in recent decades, this historical overview also revisits issues such as the role of theatricality in the visual arts, how artists have explored architecture and urban spaces since the 1960s, and the "liquefaction" of images in the early 21st century.

MINIMALISM, POST-MINIMALISM

MAMCO has an extensive collection of Minimalist works, many of which are held in Ghislain Mollet-Viéville's reconstructed apartment on the museum's third floor. These include *The 10th Circle on the Floor* (1968), the final physical work by Ian Wilson (1940–2020): it consists of a 200-cm diameter chalk circle that gradually fades away as it is walked on. There is also *6 Unit 1/8" Diameter Steel Rod, Gray, Horizontal* (1968), a wire sculpture by Fred Sandback (1943–2003) whose spatialized lines embrace the void. Works by Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt, among others, round out this collection.

MAMCO also has numerous pieces that postdate the appearance of Minimalist art but which have an interrogative relationship to it. These post-minimalist artworks include *Pyromanie no 1, 1998* (1998) by François Morellet (1926–2016), which consists of semi-circular lines made out of neon, as well as an untitled work by Richard Nonas created in 1998 out of perforated slates. Alan Charlton's quadriptych (*Painting in Four Parts, 1989*) is a particularly good example of this minimalist legacy: it consists of four gray monochromes of equal size that form a compact and highly unified whole. His painting becomes a visually muted, non-narrative art form that stands out for its economy of means and aesthetic rigor.

BALTHASAR BURKHARD/ NIELE TORONI

Balthasar Burkhard (1944–2010) and Niele Toroni (b. 1937) created *Untitled* as part of their joint exhibition at the Rath Museum in Geneva in 1984. This work gives substance to a paradoxical dialogue between two artists whose work is characterized by formal reduction and an absence of lyricism.

Toroni's painting method—imprints made with a No. 50 paintbrush repeated at regular intervals of 30cm—has remained unchanged since the mid-1960s. Derived from a critical appraisal of painting, which Toroni shared with Buren, Mosset, and Parmentier, this stance reduced painting to its smallest unit of meaning—a trace whose repetition nullifies any sort of aura—which the artist has produced on all types of surfaces.

Burkhard began his career as the official photographer of the Kunsthalle Bern, when Harald Szeemann served as director. Early on, therefore, he became familiar with Minimalist and Conceptual art, some of whose principles would later emerge in his own work. These include an emphasis on the impact of raw materials, a sensitivity to the physicality of space, seriality, the question of place and the body's motion, as well as the relationship to architecture. Burkhard's formidable technical skills enabled him to experiment with a subject's framing, as well as the black and white contrast and format of his prints, all of which lend a distinctly sculptural dimension to his work.

The two series presented here, which share the same format and use of black and white, seem to reference each other, giving the viewer an insight into the heated debates of the 1960s and 1970s concerning issues of imprinting and reproducibility—concepts specific to the pictorial and photographic medium. Lastly, this dialogical exhibition suggests a certain relationship to the body: Burkhard's approach is fragmented and opaque where as, in Toroni's case, it is reduced to capturing the brushstroke.

SUPPORTS/SURFACES, FUNDAMENTALS OF PAINTING

Pierrette Bloch, Louis Cane, Daniel Dezeuze, Noël Dolla, Toni Grand,
Allan McCollum, Jean-Pierre Pincemin

Shortly after its initial experiments, the Supports/Surfaces collective was publicly established in 1970 via an exhibition at ARC (Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris). The movement quickly fell apart, however, as it was rife with contradictory ideas: freeing the canvas versus preserving the painting, painted surface versus an extension towards the subject, Maoist activism versus literary analysis, open-air versus museum exhibitions? And so on.

MAMCO's collection contains several historical works (Louis Cane, Daniel Dezeuze, and Noël Dolla), as well as some who might be thought of as anachronistic (those of Tony Grand and Jean-Pierre Pincemin). This "fiction nommée" ("identified fiction"), to use the term employed by art historian Didier Semin when describing the history of the collective, has its origins in some enthralling experiments carried out at the turn of the 1970s in the South of France. The "open air" once again became the setting for a pictorial revolution. After the School of Paris and American Minimalism, Supports/Surfaces brought together gesture and reductionism in order to separate the painting's support from its surface—contrasting the confines of the medium with nature's indeterminate space.

Supports/Surfaces echoes the artistic explorations of its contemporaries, including BMPT (1967), Process art, Land art, and Conceptual art. To avoid simplistic art historical linearity, MAMCO also presents artists from the same period but with other artistic sensibilities. What they all share is an exploration of painting's possibilities as a means of laying bare its fundamentals.

ECART ARCHIVES

Ecart is a group of artists, an independent space, and a publishing company, founded in Geneva by John M Armleder, Patrick Lucchini, and Claude Rychner in 1969. An extension of the “non-artistic” activities—ranging from rowing to the “tea ceremony”—of a group of friends, Ecart quickly established itself in Europe as a reference site for the dissemination of artistic practices associated with Fluxus.

Opening with a festival of Happenings, the Ecart “gallery” devoted exhibitions to Daniel Spoerri, George Brecht, Ben, Ken Friedman, Manon, Olivier Mosset, Endre Tot, etc., while Editions Ecart published Genesis P. Orridge, Lawrence Weiner, Annette Messenger, Sarkis, and many others. If we add to this list the organization of Dada and Fluxus recitals, the group’s own artistic activities, and the opening of a bookshop devoted to artists’ books and periodicals, we get some measure of the protean output that made Ecart such an important link in the “Eternal Network” Robert Filliou talked of. At the heart of Ecart’s activities were quite a number of clusters of interest, influences, and sets of problems that were crucial to the period: the central role accorded to printed matter in the 1960s and 1970s; the “performative paradigm” that prevailed with Fluxus, i.e. the enactment of a “score” rather than a finished, closed work; working as a collective and all the types of authorial delegation that can result from it; as well as exchange systems such as Mail art and the nodal concept of “information,” made explicit by Kynaston McShine’s eponymous exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (New York).

Ecart was also the “place” where the individual practice of John M Armleder, a central figure in the group, emerged and developed. It is through him that these archives have been built and will enter the museum’s collection.

A retrospective dedicated to Ecart was held in 1997 at MAMCO, the Print Room of the Musée d’art et d’histoire, and Saint-Gervais, curated by Lionel Bovier and Christophe Cherix. Between 2016 and 2019 it was the subject of a HES-SO research project conducted by MAMCO and the HEAD–Genève and conducted by Elisabeth Jobin. It has now found a new place within the museum, as a resource for research, exhibition, and the development of MAMCO’s archives on recent art history.

ROBERT FILLIOU

The museum's third-floor gallery, devoted to Robert Filliou (1926–1987), an artist with ties to the Fluxus movement, displays *EINS. UN. ONE...* (1984). This artwork consists of a large number of dice (ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 pieces) of different sizes and colors. All six faces of each dice display only a single pip. Filliou has painted them in primary colors—red, blue, and yellow—as well as black and white, while some are left in natural wood. The artwork's initial form was a circle, nine meters in diameter, bounded by an 80-cm-high wooden strip. The work's installation consists of tossing the dice, which fall to the floor in unrepeatable colored constellations reminiscent of a mandala, which in Buddhist thought symbolizes the cosmos, the search for unity and wholeness. Similarly, the piece's hologrammatic nature references the Buddhist concept of being and becoming one with the universe. The piece's simplicity serves as a vehicle for complex reflections that seek the universal by transcending cultural differences.

Another part of the gallery features works from the series *Poussière de Poussière, de l'effet...*, all of which are based on the same theme: after use, a dust cloth is placed in a simple cardboard box. Inside the lid is stapled a black and white Polaroid depicting a rear or three-quarters view of Filliou dusting a famous painting. The outside of the lid is stamped with the phrase "The Eternal Network presents: / ROBERT FILLIOU / POUSSIÈRE DE POUSSIÈRE / de l'effet ..." to be completed by hand with the name of the painter and the painting in question. In 1977, Filliou cleaned some one hundred masterpieces of classical and contemporary art in the collections of the Louvre and the Pompidou Center. An iconoclastic tribute to the history of art.

NAM | JUNE | PAIK

Korean artist Nam June Paik (1932–2006)—considered the “Michelangelo of electronic art”—created several pieces that were expressly connected to his friend Joseph Beuys.

They include *Beuys vox* (1961/1986), which is presented as a photo album. It consists of 13 works signed by Paik, four by Beuys, and one by John Cage. Several of Paik’s works directly reference Beuys, including a concrete cast of the artist’s trademark hat. Others convey the style and spirit of Fluxus, the movement with which the two friends were associated, such as the old television set that has been transformed into an aquarium (*Baroque Broke TV Cabinet*, 1988). Still others are documentary in nature.

Homeless Buddha (1989) presents another aspect of Paik’s work. A wax Buddha and a filmed Buddha shown on a television screen face each other, the digital image and the sculpture echoing each other without regard to hierarchy. Paik began integrating the Buddha into his work at the beginning of the 1970s via a wide range of conceits, the most well-known being the *TV Buddha* series. By incorporating the Buddha—a pivotal figure in Korean culture—the artist was able to forge a link between ancient history and cutting-edge technological modernity. In *Burning Buddha* (1985), a Buddha fashioned from burnt wood watches on a television set his double being consumed by fire, thereby offering a bleak vision of transmission.

RUTH WOLF-REHFELDT

Mail art works by Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt (b. 1932) have gone around the world, sent as postcards from her home in Berlin—at the time the capital of East Germany—to Western Europe, the Eastern bloc, North America, Latin America and Asia.

Created without rules or limitations—except for their format and the cost to mail them—these works of art, freely sent out to like-minded participants, escaped the tyranny of both censors and the art market. In this way, her *Kunstpostbriefe* (art letters) served as independent exhibition spaces, as a means for dialogue and personal correspondence. Wolf-Rehfeldt began working with letters in the early 1970s, creating a series of “typewritings” that combine artistic rigor with a subversive sense of humor. Under her touch, a typewriter’s black and red symbols become patterns, butterflies, waves, abstract compositions, and flow charts.

The Mail Art Archive of Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt is an installation that recreates her exchange of correspondence that took place in the 1970s and 1980s. The work is a tribute to the artist’s international network of correspondents that she developed over the years via her involvement in the Mail art movement. A slide show, *Mail Art Collaborations*, presents images of collaborative pieces that she worked on at the end of the 1980s. For an exhibition in Norway, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt asked several fellow artists to add to her postcards and send them back. This series includes 51 separate works.

BODY ART

Miriam Cahn, Rebecca Horn, Jürgen Klauke, Alix Lambert, Urs Lüthi, Denis Savary, Hannah Villiger, Franz Erhard Walther

The term "Body art" covers a variety of forms used by artists: happenings, performances, actions, and events. It describes a practice by which artists make use of that which is most personal to them—but also shared with all humanity—the body. In Body art, the artist's "I," their private being, is viewed as the most effective vehicle to reach the viewer's "I." The public performances that emerged in the mid-1950s took complex and often disconcerting forms: some artists, in their search for new criteria to define the artistic act, challenged themselves by experimenting with extreme sensations such as pain, endurance, and fatigue. Very early on, their work was documented by photographers and videographers, a collaboration that facilitated the transition from an art of action to a specifically photographic art, and even to representations of the body in a variety of media.

As a locus of reflection, the body is the measure of all things. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was a vehicle for evoking the utopia of change and resistance to all forms of oppression. Since the 1990s, use of the body has been less frontal, "slyer," and even playful, but it remains a forum for the search for identity, a tool for condemning moral and religious norms, and a means of reflecting on social identity linked to sexuality but also to age. Whether artists confront existential issues with caustic irony, or whether their works express a clearly asserted, politically committed, or deliberately detached content, representations of the body focus our thinking on the human condition and our place in the world.

SITUATIONIST LEGACIES

In 2018, MAMCO presented *Die Welt als Labyrinth* (The World as a Labyrinth), an exhibition that explored the origins and early years of the Situationist International (SI), a movement founded in 1957 that relentlessly criticized art as being a social construct, regulated by institutions, and driven by the market economy. In its early years, SI waged a struggle in every cultural field—from art schools, galleries, art criticism and museums to UNESCO, which the group planned to seize. Although initially an artistic movement, by the early 1960s SI came to exclude artists and shifted its criticism towards the political. All exhibitions about SI are therefore inherently paradoxical: how can museums explore the concepts espoused by people who consistently opposed such cultural institutions?

In reality, beyond its revolutionary critique, SI developed practices and forms that have had a significant influence on art from the 1960s to the present day. On the one hand, there was the “*dérive*” (the drift), a “psycho-geographic” experience of the city. This notion resonates in the way certain artists—including Gordon Matta-Clark, Fabrice Gygi and Kirsten Mosher—see the street as a playful setting and a source of forms. Then there is “*détournement*” (hijacking), a practice that seeks to alter our perception of representations conveyed by the society of the spectacle so as to reveal their ideological and authoritarian underpinnings. The Situationists recast and, as it were, hijacked official art (derided by Pinot Gallizio in his industrial paintings), advertising and cinema—a technique that prefigured the practices of the *Présence Panchounette* collective and the American Appropriationists.

PRÉSENCE PANCHOUNETTE

The collective *Présence Panchounette*, founded in 1969 in Bordeaux and disbanded in 1990, left its mark on the French art scene through a series of provocations and protestations. As suggested by the name the group chose for itself—coined from a slang term indicating a type of bad taste—*Présence Panchounette* developed a form of “critical kitsch”, mocking the high-mindedness of the official avant-garde. For this reason, garden gnomes, the epitome of a popular aesthetic disdained by the upper echelons of the art world, are omnipresent in its imagery.

For Paris’ 1988 International Contemporary Art Fair, the group recreated, based chiefly on their titles, works invented by the *Incoherents*, a group of late-19th-century artists who favored parody, mockery, and sarcasm. These farcical pieces took on the character of three-dimensional cartoons, while at the same time hinting at the 1980s postmodern aesthetic. There is a certain kinship to works by Haim Steinbach and John M Armleder. With a healthy dose of irony, *Présence Panchounette* thus blurs the boundaries between schoolyard humor and so-called serious art, reminding us how the outlandish intuition of the *Incoherents* prefigure modern art’s formal developments.

Through its use of *détournement*, the Bordeaux group manifested a lineage to the Situationists. This comes through in the mirror on which is written “À BAS LA SOCIÉTÉ SPECTACULAIRE MARCHANDE” (“DOWN WITH THE SPECTACLE-COMMODITY SOCIETY”)—a phrase based on the writings of Guy Debord that was widely circulated in May 1968. This heritage can also be seen in the way *Présence Panchounette* forged its legacy when success came along in the late 1980s: they preferred to disband and disappear.

THE STREET, URBAN SPACES

Vito Acconci, Siah Armajani, Jennifer Bolande, Fabrice Gygi,
Jenny Holzer, Dennis Oppenheim, Gordon Matta-Clark,
Robert Morris, Kirsten Mosher

If a distinction is to be made between architecture and the philosophy of history—between the postmodernist style in architecture and the concept of postmodernity—it is because these ideas are significant for artists who, in the early 1980s, were seeking to decode the city. Since the 19th century, the city has been a source of confusion or intoxication (Baudelaire). This ambivalence endures in modern and postmodern narratives in which the city is synonymous with either repression (already the case with Haussmann's 19th-century Paris) or emancipation (as in Fourier's work in the early 1800s).

In 1975, Michel Foucault, exploring his interest in prison architecture, described in his book *Discipline and Punish* how individuals internalize surveillance, taking as an example Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon.

A few years later, Robert Morris, who had already moved away from elementary geometric forms, produced a series of geometric drawings entitled *In the Realm of the Carceral*. These technical drawings combine delimiting lines and flat spaces that depict a prison-like maze.

The works presented in this section date from the 1970s and 1980s and portray urban spaces where functionality serves to subjugate human bodies. In this machinery that conceals the lies of the past, poetry can only survive in the anonymous form of the *dazibao*.

SCHEERBART PARLOUR

Siah Armajani's work is deeply rooted in American culture despite the artist's Iranian origins. Arriving in the United States at the age of 21, he settled permanently in Minneapolis in 1964. His initial approach to art was through writing and collage. He covered a long roll of canvas with texts and poems, synthesizing and assembling scattered elements of his Persian heritage with his impressions of the political and ideological foundations of America (*Letters Home*, 1960). In 1974, after a period dedicated to Conceptual art, he began to define himself as a "public artist" and the bulk of his work was henceforth developed in public spaces. The annotated drawing entitled *Idea Bridge* (1967) attests to his interest in this structure. For Armajani, bridges embodied his technical and poetic sensibilities: by connecting and contrasting two shores, they create a link that previously did not exist.

Taking on the twofold role of artist and architect, in 2007 Armajani designed *Scheerbart Parlour*, a tribute to Paul Scheerbart, a pioneering theoretician of glass architecture. In addition to his *Models for Streets series* (1992), this space is home to his *Dictionary for Building* (1974–1975), a visual lexicon of architectural forms inspired by rural America. Modeled after his *Reading Rooms* (1977), these functional constructions highlight the experience of reading and turn the visitor from a viewer into a reader. *Scheerbart Parlour* is built from wood. The furniture is intentionally uncomfortable and goes hand in hand with the notion that maintaining a democratic position is not always easy. In the words of John Dewey, art is not "the beauty parlor of civilization."

In Islamic art, the written word is both ornamental and instructive. Armajani replaced calligraphy with writing and quotations from philosophers and poets. He chose a phrase from Wittgenstein to inscribe on *Scheerbart Parlour's* "pediment."

THEATRICALITIES

Guy de Cointet & Robert Wilhite, William Leavitt, David Noonan,
Marta Riniker-Radich

Art as well as the history of art are permeated and revitalized by recurrent debates. Like the 17th-century debate over whether drawing or color was more important in painting, which pitted proponents of the ideal against those who favored expressiveness, the question of theatricality has often divided critics and artists. In the 18th century, Jean-Baptiste Greuze's (1725–1805) painting *Septimius Severus and Caracalla* (1769) drew fire for its theatricality. In the 1960s, American art historian Michael Fried took minimalist sculpture to task for breaking with the confines of its medium and inhabiting time and space in a theatrical manner, which for Fried meant non-artistically.

It is beneath the banner of theatricality, therefore, that this section brings together artists from different geographic and historical contexts, who may or may not have met. Guy de Cointet (1934–1983) and William Leavitt (b. 1941), for example, two key figures from the American West coast, established dialogical relationships between theater, Minimalism, cinema, and painting. For Cointet, the narrative becomes minimal and the sculpture instrumental. For Leavitt, the illusions of Hollywood are laid bare, revealing how it shapes our existence.

The work of Marta Riniker-Radich (b. 1982) includes an extensive body of cinematic drawings whose meticulous attention to detail is reminiscent of stage sets and whose suspended narrative is evocative of photogrammetry. David Noonan (b. 1969), on the other hand, transforms the exhibition space into a stage, using cutouts as flat as playing cards, while his collages lend a mysterious depth to images. With each of these artists, the question of the relationship between theater and the visual arts is revisited in a unique and refreshing manner.

THE "PICTURES GENERATION"

On September 24, 1977, art critic Douglas Crimp opened the exhibition *Pictures* at the Artists Space in New York City. The show included works by Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, and Robert Longo, all artists who underscored the relationship between art, media, and society. They did not represent a structured movement, but instead embodied the zeitgeist and espoused a new relationship to the image. In 2009, echoing this seminal exhibition, the Metropolitan Museum brought together 25 artists, all of whom were born in Cold War America, for a major exhibition entitled *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*.

The *Pictures Generation* is thus a term used to describe a group of American artists, many of them women, who were active in New York in the 1970s and 1980s. Witnesses to the rapid development of consumer society, awash in media images since the 1960s through advertising, magazines, television, Hollywood films, and pop culture—and well-versed in the tactics of Minimal and Conceptual art—theirs is a generation marked by political disenchantment, the Vietnam War, and the Watergate crisis. John Baldessari and the classes he taught at California Institute of the Arts (Los Angeles), where many of these artists studied, were instrumental in helping them grasp the impact that these media images have on our perception of reality, and how we can appropriate them in order to subvert them.

Photography plays a key—but not exclusive—role in these works, which popularized a medium that had until then received scant attention from contemporary art lovers. As Sherrie Levine expressed it: "What interests me is the information contained in each image and what it means for us."

The inclusion of *Fair and Lovely* (1984–1985) by Pakistan-born Rasheed Araeen in this selection of works testifies to the fact that questioning the power of media images was not the prerogative of solely American artists.

APPROPRIATION

In the 1960s, Elaine Sturtevant and Richard Pettibone were innovators in the field of artistic appropriation. In fact, it was not until the 1980s that the art of quotation and appropriation became widespread. Most “appropriationists” draw inspiration from Jean Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum, which exerted considerable influence in the United States. These artists focus on the pre-existing world and redraw, repaint, or re-photograph objects they have appropriated for themselves. They offer a variety of reasons for doing so, ranging from admiration to critical scrutiny.

Richard Pettibone draws inspiration from existing works of art, which he has been miniaturizing since 1964, recreating the work of artists whose subjects are frequently themselves borrowed from reality. The titles clearly indicate that the works were made “after” the copied work.

Stephen Prina’s *Exquisite Corpse* parses Edouard Manet’s *catalogue raisonné*. It takes the form of diptychs—the left-side panel retains the same format as Manet’s original painting, although the ink wash within the frame is indistinct—a mere prelude to, or obliteration of, the piece in question. The right-hand part contains Manet’s entire body of work in the form of thumbnail views reproduced to scale.

Fixed Intervals is a work by Louise Lawler and Allan McCollum. These brass punctuation marks serve as “simulacra” that play on an artwork’s decorative dimension.

ERICKA BECKMAN

The work of Ericka Beckman (b. 1951 in Hampstead) explores our relationship with images and how they structure our perception of reality. Her videos come across as “enigmatic allegories filled with nervous activity and comic violence, sexual imagery... perceptual gameplaying and ingenious optical effects,” according to Jim Hoberman.

After graduating from Cal Arts (Los Angeles) in 1976, Beckman settled in New York and started showing her work in notable independent spaces such as The Kitchen, Artists Space, and Franklin Furnace. At the end of the 1970s, she created a series of experimental films known as *The Super-8 Trilogy*, consisting of *We Imitate; We Break Up* (1978), *The Broken Rule* (1979), and *Out of Hand* (1981). Influenced by post-punk culture and structuralism, these films are among the most iconic and original works from the Pictures Generation.

Beckman directed herself, along with a cast made up of fellow artists (including James Welling, Matt Mullican and Mike Kelley), in garishly-colored settings that combine songs, makeshift special effects, and dreamlike choreography, without any dialogue or real narrative structure. There are allusions to the theories of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget on children’s cognitive development, but also to the culture of televised sports and the golden age of MGM musicals. As the artist herself recently explained: “I strive to create performative images. My goal, since the beginning of my career, is to create a purely visual language, based on action.”

THE AGENCY

Launched in December 1987 at New York's Cable Gallery by French artist Philippe Thomas (1951–1995), *readymades belong to everyone*® was a communication and events agency that provided services. What this really meant was that the artist—his first and last names—was no longer indicated as the author of an artwork, in favor of an impersonal attribution.

The reference to Duchamp is evident, but there is also an allusion to the commercial art world and the era of production (hence the use of a registered trademark symbol in the agency's name). When it was created, the agency was displayed in a gallery, like an artwork, and consisted of an office and a sort of waiting room—with a genuine reception desk and workspace like in a commercial firm, complete with corporate furniture designed by Martin Szekely.

The agency's French counterpart, *les ready-made appartient à tout le monde*®, developed a number of projects and advertising campaigns, sometimes in partnership with other communication agencies such as Dolci Dire & Associés or BDDP/Paris. These offer an aesthetic of communication in highly standard forms: posters, polished and catchy slogans (e.g., "You can change it all by saying yes," a text that was part of a work from 1988), and highly constructed images in which we can glimpse the "direct platitude" that critic Daniel Soutif used to describe this movement. Thomas invented works that were signature-ready; although he was entirely responsible for their creation, not to mention production, he stopped signing them starting in the late 1980s, thus disappearing from view in favor of the agency, collectors, or other art-world personalities who, as far as the public was concerned, became the works' sole signatories because, at the artist's request, they initialed them themselves. In this piece of fiction in search of characters, we are confronted with the highly disciplined work of an artist who, from the beginning to the end of his entrepreneurial activity, was ultimately absent.

MAMCO's collections contain the remnants of this business, which the artist closed down before dying: they include full cardboard boxes, silk-screened with the agency's logo, and packing material. The agency's final exhibition was held at MAMCO in the mid-1990s. With great aplomb, lucidity and detachment—not to mention modesty—Thomas shuttered a business that, having set out to record the author's disappearance, succeeded in inventing a style of its own.

READYMADES

In 1913, when Marcel Duchamp displayed the first “readymade” artwork, i.e., an assemblage of everyday objects, he paved the way for new forms of artistic practice in the 20th century. Although early readymades recalled elements of Dada and Surrealism, with the goal of generating aesthetic shocks to reveal the poetry of commonplace—or even discarded—objects, those that emerged in the 1980s signaled a new approach.

Artists such as Haim Steinbach, John M Armleder, and Sylvie Fleury pursue a form of “commodity sculpture” that reveals the inextricability of culture and consumerism. John Miller, Bertrand Lavier, and Allan McCollum on the other hand, explore the ways in which value is conferred upon otherwise valueless objects. This “transfiguration of the banal” that forms the core of readymades thus becomes a form of investigation into the mechanics of imparting value to forms. It reveals the importance of the role of display as well as the manipulative potential of aesthetic strategies.

But these pieces also have their roots in the gradual breakdown of ideas about originality, taste, and value—ideas first challenged by Marcel Duchamp. The art of this period is thus also one of “making use of the remains” of the Western art history tradition in the throes of a crisis; an art that rejects judgments based on traditional categories (beauty, technique, heroic subject matter, etc.). Decades after its emergence, it retains all its radicalism and irreverence.

NEO-GEO AND BEYOND

Speculation about the “death of painting” were again on the rise in the mid-1980s. Despite this, a number of exhibitions at the time served as vehicles for a revival of pictorial abstraction, a trend that, in the early 20th century, sought to free the canvas from any external referent. On both sides of the Atlantic, a number of artists—many of them Swiss—contributed to this movement, which New York art critics would dub “Neo-Geo,” a contraction of “new geometry.”

The late 1970s witnessed a series of exchanges between New York and Switzerland involving Olivier Mosset, John M Armleder, Helmut Federle, and Christian Marclay. Abstraction became an appropriable resource. Paradoxical, sometimes even in the form of “found abstraction,” it was seen as an instrument index of irreducible materiality. For subsequent generations, abstraction served to demonstrate how images are transposed from one field of production to another in a media-centric society where images form the basis for reality. In the words of American artist Peter Halley, “There is no need for any more Mardens or Rymans to convince us of the essential beauty of the geometric field embodied in the television set’s glowing image.”

Artists who have inherited this postmodern redefinition of abstraction appear to be practicing what Halley preaches: metaphors of incarceration and refusal are proof of this. Such an approach resists the inevitability of everything being reduced to an image. Today, abstraction remains, by definition, a touchstone form of reduction, a ghostly or over-saturated palimpsest—and a testimony to the many upheavals brought on by the digital era.

FIGURATIONS

In 2017, MAMCO organized *Zeitgeist* (Spirit of the Times), an exhibition inspired by signs of a renewed interest in figurative painting. Although the title was used to describe the current artistic landscape, it also alludes to an eponymous exhibition held at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin in 1982. Much discussed at the time, the Berlin exhibition accompanied a surge in figurative and neo-expressionist painting that was then overtaking Western art. The exhibition left its mark on contemporary art history as the climax of the modern/postmodern debate, which was often framed in terms of the life or death of painting.

Long viewed in terms of a parallel narrative situated within an outsider/insider dialectic, this “other” tradition—this “alternative” modernity—can now in fact be understood as an extension of the field of pictorial possibilities. The MAMCO collections reflect this history in their own particular way. They remind us above all of the extent to which Swiss artists have been able to tap into outsider art and folklore as sources for subjects that call into question virtuosity and the position of the artist. They also illustrate how figuration itself can provide tools for deconstructing the *storia* of classical painting, by playing with truncated perspectives, ellipses, voids, and solids. Lastly, they point to a critical approach to representation, reminding us, where necessary, that abstraction does not have a monopoly on analytical thinking.

The exhibition *Inventaire* is an opportunity to appreciate selections from the museum’s collections that are rarely, if ever, on display. Since it cannot exhibit all of its works, MAMCO is staging a curatorial fantasy: a virtual cache that offers a different way of viewing works, independent of wall hooks. The rack installed in the center of the exhibition space features a rotating display of paintings throughout the show.

GENERAL IDEA/ GUERRILLA GIRLS

When Canada decriminalized homosexuality, AA Bronson, Felix Partz, and Jorge Zontal founded General Idea (1969) and worked together until the death of two of the collective's members in 1994. The aim of *Baby Makes 3*—an emblematic work created in 1984 that depicts the trio lying in the same bed, and thereby parodying the traditional family unit—was to encourage critics to consider the identity dimension of General Idea's work. *Untitled* (1984), a painting on paper, carries this idea forward by taking as its subject aménage à trois.

A decade later, in 1985, the Guerrilla Girls was formed, dubbing themselves "the conscience of the art world." In response to the exhibition *An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture* held that year at New York's Museum of Modern Art, the group denounced the museum's discriminatory practices, as fewer than 10% of the works on display were by women. In the early 1990s, the group, whose members included writers, artists, and filmmakers, achieved considerable notoriety. Beneath the anonymity afforded by gorilla masks—a stereotypical symbol of male virility—and with pseudonyms of deceased female artists (such as Frida Kahlo, Käthe Kollwitz, Shigeko Kubota, or Augusta Savage), the group employed humor, provocation, and protest. Using posters, colorful language, *detournement*, and slogans such as "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?", they took aim at various subjects, including museums, the art market, Hollywood, and gender inequality. Using updated tactics, they blazed new trails for feminism and ways to oppose racism and sexism.

General Idea and the Guerrilla Girls shared a number of elements— anonymity, minority- and identity-based social demands, alternative distribution and operational methods—testifying to their similarities.

SYLVIE FLEURY

For Sylvie Fleury (b. 1961 in Geneva), it was a visit to a pet store that inspired her to use a dog toy as the starting point for a work of art. This random event led, in 2000, to *Dog Toy 4 (Gnome)*, a figurine whose oversized format (193 × 169 × 162 cm) lifts it out of a commercial context and into the realm of a museum gallery. This exaggerated amplification of merchandise—and of everyday life—legitimizes this transition towards sculpture: it is the change in dimension that transforms a readymade element into a work of art. Everything is a matter of scale and, accordingly, of point of view.

Similarly, Sylvie Fleury's early films are also sites of codes and forms that shift in meaning because of how they transform the viewer's gaze. In this way, the American automobiles that she uses—the benchmark of a quintessentially masculine universe—become for her a means to assert femininity (in the early 1990s she founded the car club She-Devils on Wheels). In *Beauty Case* (1995), the artist, dressed in an elegant summer evening gown and high heels, struggles to pack and unpack a beauty case from the trunk of her classic American automobile from the 50s or 60s. What has historically been the exclusive domain of men is transformed into the personal property of a femme fatale. The vehicles she uses become as essential to her as her fashion magazines (*Current Issues*, July/August 1995)—her preferred source of visual references—or her shoe collection (*Twinkle*, 1992). Her cars are afforded special care, as she washes them while wearing glamorous outfits (*Car Wash*, 1995). These subversions serve as affirmations of a feminine power that rejects male exclusivity in any area.

AMY O'NEILL

Amy O'Neill (b. 1971) is a tireless observer of America's cultural idioms. Her quasi-anthropological approach elucidates the poetic and political structures of popular culture in the United States.

The pieces on display on the fourth floor allude to the Shrine of the Pines, a site in Baldwin, Michigan, that was created in 1930 by Raymond Overholzer (1892–1952). Distressed at the gradual disappearance of the eastern white pine, an indigenous species, due to massive logging, Overholzer devoted his life to building a site to honor the tree. Through his work as a guide for sport fishing and hunting enthusiasts, he purchased a piece of land where he built a log cabin to serve as a hunting retreat. Although never used, Overholzer worked on it until his death. At the same time, he created a collection of more than two hundred pieces of furniture made from tree roots and stumps that he had gathered over the years. His passion for this work made him famous in the region. At his death, the site and his collection were transformed into a museum and became a tourist attraction.

Drawing inspiration from the Shrine of the Pines, Amy O'Neill selected some of Overholzer's iconic pieces, such as the gun rack (*Gun for Hire*, 2006), and commissioned Toni Meier, a woodcarver from Kriens, Switzerland, to recreate them as accurately as possible. Alongside her sculptural work, O'Neill produced several series of drawings, including the *Shrine Tables* (2008). The first in the series is an enlarged copy of a postcard of the Shrine of the Pines; the others draw upon the movements O'Neill used to create the initial drawing. The installation is rounded out with *Buris Grotto* (2008), which consists of outgrowths harvested from dead trees.

ALAIN SÉCHAS, LES SOMNAMBULES

Cultural references are not necessary to understand the work of Alain Séchas (b. 1955, Colombes), which is primarily drawing-based and whose impact is transmitted by its immediacy. Since the mid-1980s, Séchas has achieved this through the recurrent use of stylized cat figures. The cat was chosen for the similarity of the French word *chat* with the artist's last name, as well as for the animal's widespread appeal. These anthropomorphic creatures are depicted in darkly humorous settings overlaid with a certain anxiety, in which we glimpse the anguished subject struggling with destructive sexual impulses or with the difficulty of communicating with its contemporaries.

Created for Séchas's exhibition at MAMCO in 2002, *Les Somnambules* (The Sleepwalkers) features three white automatons lined up on a track. Two humanoid cats, a male and a female, are depicted with outstretched arms and closed eyes, dressed in pajamas. They are followed, a few meters behind, by a third cat, shown in the same pose but with eyes wide open and displaying an indiscreet erection. The incongruity of the situation elicits a smile. The surprise and amazement that the automaton provokes in the viewer are all part of a scene that combines clichés from silent film (the sleepwalker's posture, arms held out and chin raised) and bedroom farce (the lover bursting from the closet, unable to hide his desire). On a more formal level, although the figures are reminiscent of classical statuary, the fact that they are set in motion renders them carnivalesque. As is characteristic of Séchas' work, by giving them volume and movement, the artist lends an aspect of monumentality to subjects that have the spontaneity and unpretentiousness of newspaper cartoons.

RENÉE LEVI

Renée Levi (b. 1960 in Istanbul) was trained in architecture, but it is through sculpture, drawing, and painting that she appropriates spaces in order to transcend them.

This exhibition brings together two spray-painted works on medium-density fiberboard panels that she created in situ in 2001, as well as a painting-sculpture and “gesture paintings” executed on large, unprimed canvases.

Levi created *Roten Kuben* (Red Cubes) in 1994. This work is composed of four foam cubes coated with red acrylic paint tinged with fluorescent pink, whose glow spreads across the floor and walls of the exhibition space. Despite their three-dimensionality, their chromatic force binds them more to the world of painting than sculpture. When the work was exhibited at MAMCO in 2003, it was given the onomatopoeic title of *Red Breads* to avoid any misplaced associations with minimalist works that the word “Cube” might suggest. In Levi’s mind, the proportions of the foam cubes suggest a parent’s bed onto which a child might excitedly leap, attracted by the soft, inviting surface. In the exhibition space, the work plays with the contrast between the sides’ smooth surfaces and the coarseness of the uneven tops. *Corinna, Lucia, Renata and Lea* is the new title chosen by Levi for these four cubes, thereby confirming in retrospect the work’s polysemicity.

Spray-painted works constitute a significant portion of Levi’s oeuvre. The technique, which the artist has mastered brilliantly, combines strokes akin to graffiti or tagging—as she tested her physical limits—with colors that infuse the surface with powdery pulsations and elusive contours. *Pera I* is the first work whose title evokes the Jewish quarter of Istanbul. With *Berman Was Here*, Renée Levi reminds us that the work of Californian collage artist Wallace Berman preceded her in the MAMCO space where she exhibited her work in 2001.

ADEL ABDESSEMED

"I was born in 1971, and I grew up with the idea of the war of independence. In the 1980s, it was the popular revolt, and then later the Civil War, the rise of Islam and bloody terrorist acts. The story is far from over. My entire youth was spent in the shadow of terror and violence."

As a way of condemning and opposing violence, Adel Abdessemed (b. 1971 in Algeria), who states that he was "raised amidst brutality," sought refuge in literature and decided to become an artist. *East of Eden* (2013) was exhibited at the 2015 Venice Biennale's International Exhibition. It takes its title from the 1952 novel by John Steinbeck, which addresses the themes of original sin, Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and the fratricidal episode of Cain and Abel.

Using bundles of knives from North African markets, some of which are intended for the ritual slaughter of livestock, Abdessemed arranges these elements in configurations reminiscent of the abstract patterns of oriental carpets. These disquieting clusters of blunted blades play on the juxtaposition of opposites—evil and its antidote—here brought together in an ecumenical symbolism.

The work evokes another image, also drawn from a work of literature. In Boris Vian's novel *Mood Indigo*, he describes his profoundly pacifist protagonist Colin: "This earth is sterile. You know what that means," said the man. "We need first class material to defend the country. To grow straight, undistorted rifle barrels we came to the conclusion, some time ago, that we needed human warmth." [...] "[Colin] had been doing his very best, but the barrel inspections had shown several anomalies." [...] "There were twelve cold blue steel barrels—and, at the end of each, a beautiful white rose was in full bloom, with drops of dew and beige shadows in the curves of its velvety petals."

TATIANA TROUVÉ PREPARED SPACE

Lines whose cuttings striate the floor and walls of a room, wooden and metal blocks stuck into these slits that maintain tension between the different sections now dividing it up. The space is "prepared." This short formal description is not sufficient when it comes to apprehending the scope of this spatial proposal, for what this is about is preparation in its relation to action or to the event. What is going to happen?

What becoming is this space involved in? For what should we be preparing ourselves? There will be no answer to these questions, for the propositions hold together all the hypotheses of an act or event to come: the space is ready just as much for its destruction as for its repair, for its alteration as for its restoration. But if these questions remain open, this is above all because the space exists fully in the act and event of its preparation, which determines and defines it to the detriment of anything else, except the immaculate whiteness within which it rests.

This proposal stands at a distance from the reference evoked by its title, the "prepared piano" whose possibilities John Cage most famously explored between 1940 and 1952. Fitted with various objects that modify its workings, the prepared piano corresponds to a definition of music as a sequence of sound events. The prepared space, fully realised but forever incomplete, is determined by a definition of the work as project. Corresponding to the anticipation of the aural accidents produced in the random process of playing, in the case of the piano, the prepared space offers a suspension of time.

LIQUID IMAGES

At the start of the 2000s, a number of artists who had witnessed the emergence of digital technology in their respective countries began to develop a new relationship to images.

In New York, a dialogue between Wade Guyton, Kelley Walker, and Seth Price led to Price's 2002 publication of *Dispersion*, an artwork/essay. In it, Price explores how the meaning of cultural production is shaped: whereas production was once the primary focus of artistic engagement, Price posits that distribution is now the means through which an object's meaning emerges.

In this regard, his views echo those of other American and European artists of his generation, such as Walead Beshty, for whom images are the result of a process—more akin to “software” than “hardware.” Beshty's works, which are generated by a “program,” also call into question the *apparatus* that produces them. Here, we come face to face with one of Conceptual art's most striking legacies: the realization that art resides less *in* an object than in what contextualizes it, in what animates objects when we “use,” observe, exhibit, and interpret them.

Whereas the circulation of images was a central preoccupation of artistic practices starting in the 1980s with the Pictures Generation, aesthetic investigations now focus on images' “physicality” and how they are transformed depending on the circumstances of their “appearance.”

Whether it is the relationship between Wade Guyton's pieces and the digital world, the unstable nature of Kelley Walker's image files, or Seth Price's reflections on circulation and the fluidity of the forms he employs—each is an artistic strategy in which images become a “liquid, informational skin.”

TIMOTHÉE CALAME, MIKE LASH

This section brings together two artists from different geographical and historical backgrounds who have never met.

Mike Lash's (b. 1961) first solo exhibitions date back to the 1990s. His distinctive way of combining drawing and text testifies to an ongoing interest in the graphic novel and illustration—minor art forms that many artists of his generation (such as Keith Haring and Michael Scott) used to revitalize figurative painting. Lash was trained in Illinois and influenced by Chicago's artistic milieu, with its famous "outsiders" (Lee Godie, Henry Darger), the Hairy Who (Jim Nutt), and the Chicago Imagists (Ed Pashke)—an artistic landscape that combined surrealism, outsider art, and pop culture. The works by Lash in MAMCO's collection depict an absurd universe whose protagonists, grappling with libidinal and suicidal urges, appear to lead an existence whose meaning they no longer grasp.

The title of Timothée Calame's (b. 1991) piece, *27 générations de services culturels* (27 Generations of Cultural Services) (2016) is a sort of portmanteau phrase that refers to both a Spanish literary avant-garde movement and to arts administration. It was first shown at Edouard Montassut's gallery, located at that time in Paris' Passage du Ponceau, a private shopping arcade. For the exhibition, which he entitled *Publique*, Calame brought together a patchwork collection of artifacts—billboards, a construction site barrier, a subway car, an arrowslit, a globe, mosquito screening—all of which had the shared feature of being thresholds, or vantage points on different scales. Combined in this way, the works form a constellation similar to a stroll in a public space that guides visitors' steps and directs their imagination.

M|O|O| C|H|E|W| W|O|N|G|

Moo Chew Wong (b. 1942 in Malaysia, lives in Paris) is a copyist. For years he came to MAMCO to replicate artworks or selections from an exhibition on site. While copyists in fine arts museums planted in front of an old master work are a familiar sight, Moo Chew Wong is an exception. Bent over a canvas placed directly on the floor, he would boldly use his color palette to trace the contours of the contemporary work in front of him, whether it was a Joseph Kosuth neon, a sculpture by Philippe Parreno or a painting by Nina Childress, creating anything but exact copies.

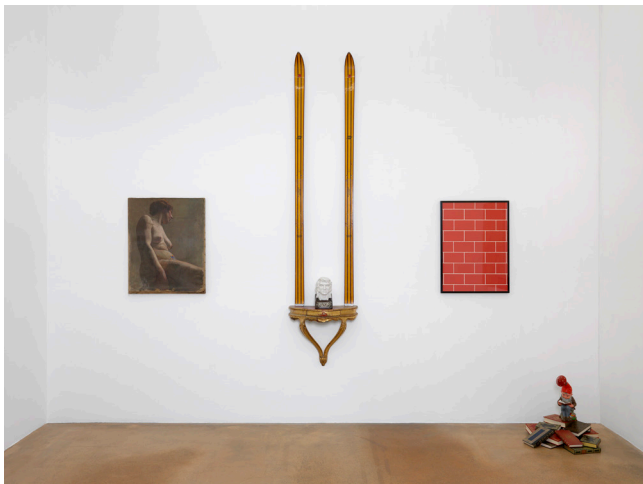
Wong's paintings speak as much about themselves as they do their subjects. Their expressive energy is as important as the originals upon which they are based. The result is an unruly personal take on MAMCO's exhibitions during the 1990s and 2000s, a thoroughly unfaithful portrait of its collections.

Moo Chew Wong's paintings are executed in oil using an impasto technique and a harsh palette of colors in which black predominates. Sometimes they are nearly indecipherable, and always incomplete with respect to the original artwork. During intensive sessions, Wong captured the works of others with the energy of their inception, his gaze enthralled by the plasticity of expressionist modernity. The feeling of urgency that emerges from this performative painting suggests that the act of painting is always a beginning. Here, the result is a subjective and unorthodox archive, an (in)exact copy

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