

MAGICIENS DE LA TERRE

A LOOK BACK AT A LEGENDARY EXHIBITION

2 JULY – 8 SEPTEMBER 2014

Magiciens de la terre, staged in the Centre Pompidou and the Great Hall of La Villette from 18 May to 14 August 1989, was a huge surprise, because in a contemporary art world at the time almost exclusively limited to Europe and North America, this exhibition presented artists from every continent. Since then, the emergence of new scenes in areas of the world hitherto kept at a distance by institutional contemporary art networks has triggered and nourished a wealth of initiatives. Conferences, exhibitions, biennials and university courses have been dedicated to these new scenes, all spawning a plethora of publications. Young artists, researchers, curators and art dealers constantly cite *Magiciens de la terre*, though few of them saw the exhibition in the summer of 1989. A legend has grown up.

Through its complexity, geographical scope and gestation period, the exhibition (the most extensively documented of all those produced by the Centre Pompidou) provides a remarkable case study.

With a selection of notes, reports, publications, films, photographs and correspondence, this "Look back" exhibition makes it possible to follow the course of *Magiciens de la terre*, and relive the venture in a highly original staging. A frieze of images designed by the artist Sarkis, executed by the graphic artists of s-y-n-d-i-c-a-t, re-situates the works of the artists involved in their temporary community of 1989, which ushered in a new phase in the globalisation of art.

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1989: A POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Before *Magiciens de la terre*, a number of major exhibitions had already brought artists and works from other cultures to light. But the ambition of this exhibition was to present an overview of artistic practices throughout the world, in an approach more open to otherness and less centred on Europe. It showed that objects seen in Western cultures as works of art, but embodying a functional, spiritual aspect for the civilisations they came from, had a legitimate place in the Museum environment. The exhibition presented a mix of so-called Western artists and non-Western artists, evoking the precepts developed by Joseph Beuys with his Peace Biennial and Robert Filliou with his "Poïpoïdrome", whereby the practice of art should include otherness and exchange as fundamental components at the very heart of creativity. During the preparatory stages for *Magiciens de la terre*, this was the guiding principle for both the group formed around its head curator, Jean-Hubert Martin, and the artists who agreed to take part.

UNITING ARTISTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD

"Magicien" was used as an umbrella term for artists using extremely different practices in cultures far distant from each other, where some possessed a pronounced otherness with regard to European culture. It covered Western artists who were already known, artists discovered only recently in Western Europe, and artists discovered during field missions. Brought together in two separate venues, the exhibition presented two very different faces. This was because the Great Hall of La Villette, a huge, open space, was suitable for the installation of monumental pieces and the creation of works on site – and as we see in the photographs and films of the exhibition's assembly, it led to dialogues and exchanges between artists and between works. In contrast, the Centre Pompidou provided a more classical museum space, restricted by the display walls and thus more partitioned. This isolated each artist, and prevented visual confrontations, artificial formal parallels and aesthetic comparisons.

A METHODOLOGY INSPIRED BY ETHNOGRAPHY: THE FIELD MISSIONS

While a tour of studios and meetings with artists are standard stages in the preparatory phase of any exhibition, *Magiciens de la terre* gave rise to numerous missions throughout the world. Based on solid scientific and visual documentation, the purpose of each mission was to meet creators and see them working in their original context. Four curators and around twenty project leaders thus set off to prospect in galleries, art centres, schools, workshops and villages in the selected countries. The methodology chosen reflected the ethnographic method. So travel diaries, numerous series of photographs and mission reports make it possible to follow the meetings and the problems encountered during the journey, and to get an idea of the team members' questionings, negotiations and impressions. The numerous series of photographs taken during the missions and safely kept by the curators show the variety of works and objects studied, and the wide range of practices, techniques and rituals.

COSMOGONY, RITES AND RITUALS

One of the aims of the *Magiciens de la terre* was to show the Western public what Jean-Hubert Martin called "visual and static objects, whose essential quality is to be vessels of the spirit" – a collection of works embodying a spiritual aspect and objects from ritual practices, which their creators had imbued with traditional codes while giving them a personal dimension. In this respect, Voodoo rites are particularly present in the exhibition archives, and so the terms "cosmogony", "rites" and "rituals" are omnipresent in the surviving documentation. This includes periodicals, specialist books, photographs, and extremely varied scientific notes providing a number of keys to understanding this exhibition, and enabling viewers to become more familiar with the artists and works presented and appreciate the choices made by the exhibition curators.

EXHIBITION

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André Magnin, Jean-Hubert Martin
Musée du quai Branly
Musée d'art et d'histoire du judaïsme

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INFORMATIONS

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EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

2 July to 9 September 2014
Galerie du Musée, level 4
Every day except Tuesdays from
11.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.
Ticket offices close at 8.00 p.m.

SUMMER UNIVERSITY

1 to 10 July
9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., Galerie du Musée
Public admitted from 11.00 to 1.00

PRICES

Admission with the

"Museum & Exhibitions" pass

Valid the same day for one admission
to each area:
the Museum, all exhibitions,
and the View of Paris
€13; reduced price €10
Free with the annual Pass and
for those under 18

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