



Direction de la communication

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## Communiqué de presse

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### Fellow Travelers: Brother Pencil, Saint Eraser Drawings by Martial Raysse, 1958-1996

#### Press Statement

Exhibit  
Museum, Graphic Arts Gallery, 4th floor  
9 April-9 June 1997

The Centre Georges Pompidou is presenting an exhibit of Martial Raysse's drawings since 1958 in its Graphic Arts Gallery. Continuing a long line of solo exhibitions organized by the Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle, this selection of some one hundred drawings is intended to reveal the importance of the medium in the work of an artist who is better known as a New Realist or figurative painter.

The beginning of the 1960s marked the discovery of Martial Raysse, New Realist. As a member of this heterogeneous group brought together on the French Riviera through the efforts of critic Pierre Restany, Raysse made himself the bard of consumer society. "I wanted a world that was new, antiseptic, pure, and, technologically speaking, on an equal footing with the technological discoveries of the modern world -objects in plastic, day-glo colors, stereotyped advertising faces. I'm a painter who uses modern techniques to express a modern world." Raysse thus set himself apart by manifesting his desire to be a painter of modern life.

This simple affirmation, which could be the leitmotif of his career, constitutes a break with the approaches of other artists in the group such as Arman, César, Daniel Spoerri, or Jacques Villeglé, who propose a more sentimental or nostalgic vision based on an aesthetic of waste and cast-offs. On closer inspection, the apology for these "daily mythologies" that Raysse proposes is not without irony, and the "Visual Hygiene" that he recommends is, to say the least, biting--the skin of the fashion magazine beauties is green, and the presence of a fly recalls that despite the mystifications of makeup, death still exists.

Does this mark the artist's first recourse to the painting of the masters? The *Made in Japan* series (1964) could be the proof. In his recasting of the masterpieces of Western art in their technicolor versions, Raysse signals the irreducibility of painting -it can be photographed, reduced, enlarged, reproduced on a large screen or in black and white, but it always slips away. This observation may well underly a certain number of his efforts, from the temptation to cross painting with film to the radicality of his 1968 break with traditional art institutions. Drawing was not to be the only means of redemption, but it played a key role, with the moving, intimist improvisations of *Coco Mato* (1970-1973) and the doodles of *Loco Bello* that soon followed. In the countryside near Ussy-sur-Marne where he had settled, Raysse rediscovered nature, its rhythms, and its demands. This lesson learned in the humility and silence of meditation encouraged the artist to continue drawing regularly.

The notebooks from the exhibit *A Garden on the Edge of the Moon* held at the Galerie Claude Givaudan in 1980, attest to this asceticism. Like a number of his forerunners in painting, Raysse has tried his hand at drawing a tree. Over the years, the apple tree at the far end of the meadow, initially sketched with a nervous gesture, first in colors and then in India ink, came to be snapped up by the eye and reconstituted with a precise movement, repeated ten times over in black pencil to give a better description of the effects of light. As drawing merged with life, Raysse came to employ the medium with real humility, but also the necessary pride and self-confidence. The uses attributed to drawing are numerous, its styles likewise. When the artist is also an architect or a sculptor, as was traditionally the case, he has to draw to give the client an idea of major projects for public spaces. In Raysse's case, his public commissions, whether they

were completed, like the Place d'Assas in Nîmes (1989) or the fountain for the Place du Marché, also in Nîmes, or never got beyond the idea stage, like the *Paths of Freedom* projected for the Universal Exposition of 1989, have all emerged from numerous studies, ranging from sketches to working drawings. This method was naturally applied to painting as well, and most of Raysse's canvases, notably *La Source* (The Spring, 1989), *Le Carnaval à Périgueux* (Carnival in Périgueux, 1992), or the last of his large allegorical compositions, created for the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Mais dites seulement une parole* (But Just Say One Word, 1996), are largely prepared with numerous drawings. Never limited to a single technique, they serve to flesh out the idea, the right gesture. They are also the site of permanent recycling, where cutting, pasting, and rubbing out are employed to save an otherwise failed exercise. Mastery of the line has virtues only when it becomes a tool for understanding the order of things. The methods have varied, but Raysse's drawing has not changed - true to the moralist ambition he set for himself from the outset, he still hopes to build a real world and a "visual hygiene" that will generate new human relations and new values.

*Exhibition Curator:* Béatrice Salmon

### **Martial Raysse : biographical notes**

- 1936 : Born on 12 February in Golfe-Juan-Vallauris, near Nice, into a family of ceramicists.
- 1957 : Exhibits his mobiles and object-poems for the first time in a group show at the Galerie Longchamp in Nice. Jean Cocteau attends the opening.
- 1960 : With his friends Arman and Yves Klein from Nice, envisions a new Nice-Los Angeles-Tokyo axis for art that will attain international renown without the habitual detour through Paris. Critic Pierre Restany publishes "The New Realists" the movement's first manifesto.
- 1962 : Participates in the "Dylaby" exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and "The New Realists" at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York. Lives in the Chelsea Hotel for a year, then moves to Los Angeles until 1968.
- 1965 : First Raysse retrospective, at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Selected to represent France at the Venice Biennale the following year.
- 1970 : Major turning-point in his work: abandons formalism for more more personal forms of expression. Interest in video and film.
- 1974 : "Coco Bello" exhibit presenting assemblages from 1970-1973 in a large variety of materials. Starts drawing and painting future "Loco Bello" series in Ussy-sur-Marne.
- 1982 : Awarded the National Grand Prize for Painting. Throughout the 1980s, explores monumental sculpture through public commissions.
- 1985 : Exhibits at the new Paris Biennale with the "Graal" series and begins to teach drawing at the Ecole des Arts décoratifs in Paris.
- 1989 : Inauguration of public commission for the Economic and Social Council in Paris and the Place d'Assas in Nîmes, one year after the inauguration of his fountain for the Place du Marché in Nîmes.
- 1992 : Designs a new image of the Marianne for French postage stamps. Major retrospective at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris.
- 1997 : Inauguration of the public commission *Mais dites une seule parole* (But Just Say a Single Word) for the new Bibliothèque Nationale de France

### **Catalogue**

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### **Practical Information**

Admission: 35 francs / reduced fee: 24 francs

**Hours of the Centre Georges Pompidou :** Monday-Friday: noon to 10 p.m.  
Saturday-Sunday: 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Closed Tuesdays.

**For all information:** Minitel: 3615 Beaubourg and Internet: <http://www.cnac-gp.fr>

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