

# SIMON HANTAÏ

22 MAY – 2 SEPTEMBER 2013

The “Simon Hantaï” exhibition is the first retrospective of this painter's work for nearly forty years. It at last gives us a chance to explore the highly complex career of this great artist from the second half of the twentieth century. French painter Simon Hantaï was born in Hungary in 1922, and studied at the Fine Arts school in Budapest. He was one of the generation of Eastern European artists who moved to Paris immediately after the war. At first highly taken with Surrealism, he broke with the movement in the mid-Fifties, and then developed the abstract line of work that became his hallmark. Hantaï is chiefly known for the way he worked using “pliage”: what he called “folding as a method”, which he began exploring in 1960.

The canvas was folded before being painted, thus concealing a view of the entire surface from the artist, who could only paint the parts accessible to his brush. This imposed blindness led to a profound upheaval in his art. From then on, he made this constantly-renewed folding technique the basis of his all paintings. He would reinvent a different way each time, systemising and deploying it for a while, from the “Mariales” through to his last works, the “Laissées”. Through over 130 paintings dating from 1949 up to the Nineties, this exhibition – without precedent in terms of retrospection and scope – bears witness to the considerable richness and importance of a body of work whose influence is still felt in abstraction today.

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# PARCOURS

## Paris and Surrealism / 1949-1955

After studying in Budapest, Simon Hantaï moved to Paris in 1948. He rapidly turned to the Surrealist movement, from which he borrowed automatist processes like frottage, decalomania and dripping. Up until his break with the group in 1955, Hantaï interpreted Surrealist techniques in a highly personal way, with paintings divided into compartments, cut-outs from magazines, and bones incorporated into figures transformed into hybrid creatures. As from 1949, he created collages using feathers, leaves and small cords. He made play with materials, and used razor blades to experiment with scraping techniques. In 1950, ten years before the "Mariales", he produced his first crumpled and folded works.

**Femelle miroir II**, 1953, is one of the key pieces from Hantaï's Surrealist period. Here the scenes or sketches that peopled his work in previous years give way to a single large scene structured around a central figure, whose head is a real animal skull. This disturbing "female" with a prominent sex, arms spread as though for a crucifixion, turns its back to an old mirror, and stands between the viewer and its reflection. Around it we see meandering hybrid, biomorphic forms, with spirals treated as teeming viscera in a bold range of acid colours. In 1953-1954, these forms would be the main subject in a series of decidedly non-figurative paintings that led him to abandon all references to Surrealist imagery as from 1955.

## The gestural period / 1956-1957

Simon Hantaï came to gestural painting through the logical development of his own painting at the end of his Surrealist period. At the time, he was briefly influenced by the paintings of Georges Mathieu, and above all those of Jackson Pollock. Meanwhile, Hantaï's experiments with gesture led him to explore various directions, until he invented the "little strokes" that enabled him to occupy the entire surface area.

## "Little strokes" and writing / 1958-1959

During these two years, Hantaï developed two techniques and two approaches: "little strokes" and writing. He called the type seen here the "little alarm clock stroke", because it was produced using a metal circle from an old alarm clock.

The two key works from this period are **Peinture (Écriture rose)** and **À Galla Placidia**, which he worked on for a year, one in the mornings, the other in the afternoons. Here, they are being exhibited together for the first time. With **Écriture rose**, Hantaï experimented with the relationship between writing and painting. Every morning, he transcribed texts from the Bible onto the canvas, together with philosophical, aesthetic or poetic texts by Saint Augustine, Hegel and Heidegger. Then, to demarcate and structure the space, he dotted it with signs representing the religions that had marked his childhood: a Greek cross; the Star of David; Luther's inkwell. While **Écriture rose** is mainly based on writing, **À Galla Placidia** originates in painting. This picture is worked in a different way, not with writing, but with "little alarm clock strokes". Its title refers to the mausoleum in Ravenna, which Hantaï visited in 1948 when he was in Italy. Echoing the layout of the mosaic tesserae in Byzantine art, here Hantaï uses the little stroke as the structural principle of the pictorial space.

## "Mariales" / 1960-1962

In 1960, Hantaï moved into a entirely different relationship with painting. He thought up the idea of folding the canvas before painting it, thus depriving himself of a view of the surface to be painted. The technique consisted of folding – or more precisely, crumpling – the canvas from edge to edge, then painting the parts that remained accessible. It was then unfolded, and the parts in reserve – the insides of the folds – were painted in turn, so that the surface was totally covered. The "Mariales" are a group of twenty-seven paintings divided into four sub-groups, each identified with two letters: m.a., m.b., m.c. and m.d.

As from the "m.c." series, as here with **m.c.3**, 1962, the canvas was first spattered with black, and Hantaï worked with large folds, creating very unequal proportions on the surface.

The result is colour with a very striking presence. This folding technique, which he later enshrined as a method, was decisive in the next stage of his work. The approach led to paintings where the colour “breathes” powerfully and luminously, and is produced as though it came from behind the canvas, like a stained glass window.

### “Catamurons” and “Panses” / 1963-1965

With the series of “Catamurons”, named after a holiday house he rented at Varengeville-sur-Mer, Hantaï concentrated the fold in the centre of the canvas, leaving the edges empty. In the following series – “Maman! Maman! dits: La Saucisse” and then “Panses” (“paunches”) – the canvas was knotted at the four corners into a shapeless sack, folded, painted and unfolded several times.

### “Meuns” / 1967-1968

The “Meuns” represent the moment when, for the first time in Hantaï’s work, the canvas is structured and “breathes” through the expanse of colour painted blind and its dynamic relation with the unpainted white parts. The “Meuns” take their name from the village of Meun, near Fontainebleau, where the painter settled in 1966 and set up a large studio.

This series is based more on knotting than “pliage”. The four corners of the canvas were brought together, forming, as the artist put it, a kind of “considerably flattened sack, roughly covered with paint”. The artist painted this sack, leaving the edges and the centre blank.

Here, as in *Meun*, 1968, we see how the canvas opens out in this way, and how the form breaks up into large pieces and fragments somewhat reminiscent of Matisse’s paper cut-outs.

### “Études” and “Blancs” / 1969-1973

In the “Études”, Hantaï establishes a strict equivalence between the painted and unpainted parts; between a monochrome colour laid on a finely, regularly folded canvas, and the white areas that appear after unfolding. In the more Cézanne-like “Blancs” the white prevails: the coloured patches, still caustic, sometimes bright and violent, sometimes muted, only appear as part of an invasive, unpainted area.

### “Tabulas” / 1973-1982

In 1973, Hantaï painted the very first “Tabulas”: the Latin word for “table”, or “board”.

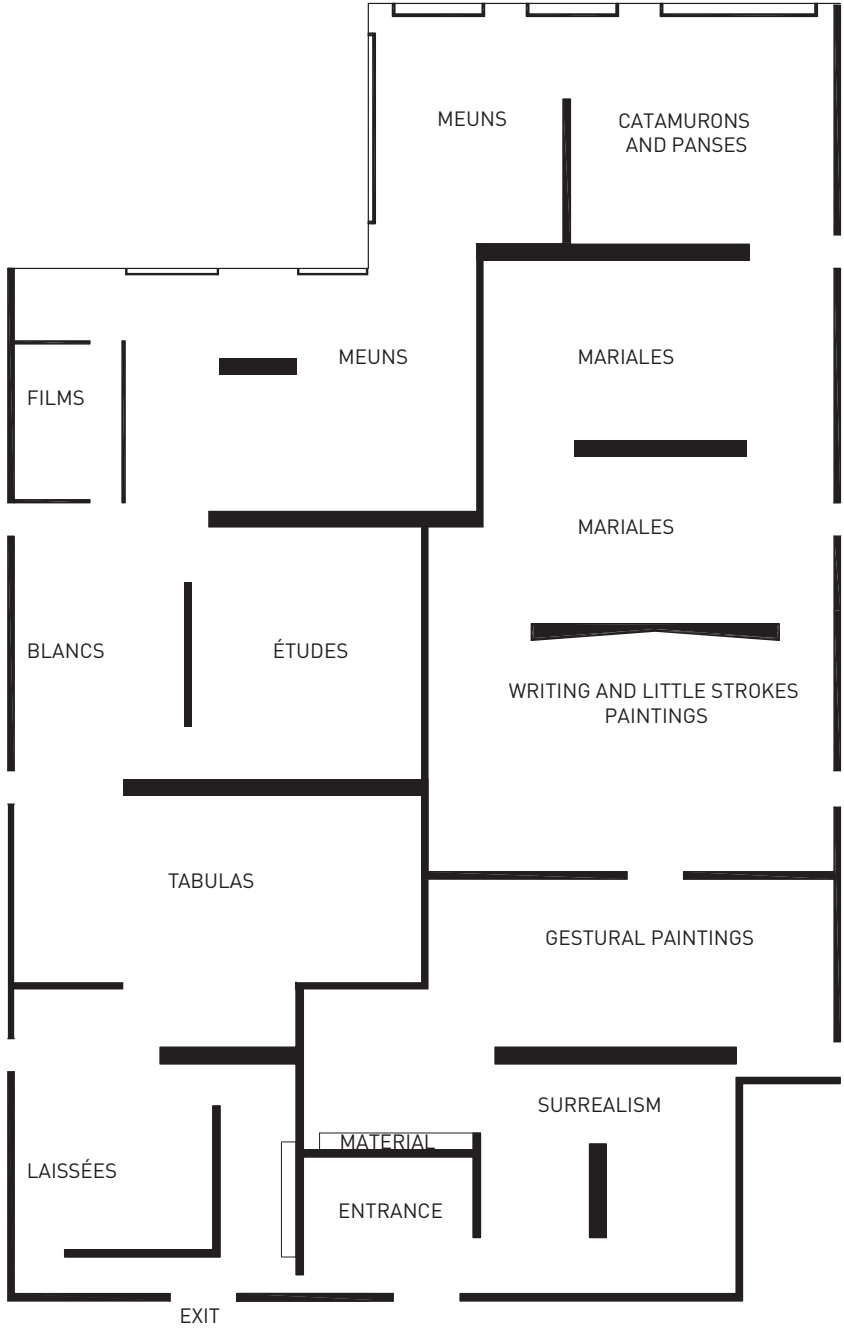
The “Tabulas” series is based on another “pliage” procedure that uses knotting rather than folding. The fine-grained canvas was knotted at regular intervals on one of its sides, so as to produce a grid. This way of folding in squares or rectangles was the last invented by the painter.

When the canvas covered with monochrome paint was unfolded, the knots, placed at regular intervals, produced a large number of small squares. The size of the coloured squares obtained after unfolding, and their relationship of scale with the amount of white separating them, varies over a decade. This grid system, counterbalanced by the breakup and penetration of the white into the colour at the intersections, emphasises the interaction between background, colour and form. In 1980, Hantaï painted this *Tabula* with large pink rectangles in oil and acrylic paint. The relationship between the quality of the colour, its fullness and the expanse it covers in each square on the surface results in star-shaped forms.

### “Laissées” / 1981-1994

In 1982, after his participation in the Venice Biennial, Hantaï decided to withdraw from the world of art. This withdrawal lasted until his death in 2008, apart from some rare public events. In 1994, Hantaï decided to cut large fragments from a number of immense *Tabulas* he had produced for a 1981 exhibition in Bordeaux, and turned them into new paintings. The name he gave to these works created from the destruction of previous paintings was *Laissées* (“leftovers”).

# EXHIBITION MAP



## EXHIBITION

### CURATORS

Dominique Fourcade  
Isabelle Monod-Fontaine  
Alfred Pacquement

### CONSERVATION ASSISTANT

Bénédicte Ajac

### PRODUCTION MANAGER

Anne-Claire Gervais

### ARCHITECT/STAGE DESIGNER

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assisted by Valentina Dodi

In partnership with:

 Le Parisien

 RATP

 france  
culture

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info

## PUBLICATIONS

### CATALOGUE

#### Simon Hantai

Edited by Dominique Fourcade,  
Isabelle Monod-Fontaine  
and Alfred Pacquement  
320 pages, 330 colour illustr.  
Price: €49.90

### ALBUM

#### Simon Hantai

By Bénédicte Ajac  
60 pages, 60 colour illustr.  
Price: €9.90

### APPLICATION

Versions in French and English  
Available on Apple Store  
and Google Play  
Price: €4.49

## AROUND THE EXHIBITION

### “PAROLE AUX EXPOSITIONS”

Round table on the work of  
Simon Hantai  
With Anne Baldassari,  
Dominique Fourcade, Rémi Labrusse,  
Jean-Michel Meurice and  
Alfred Pacquement  
Friday 24 May, 7.00 pm, Petite Salle,  
level -1  
Free entry, subject to available  
seating

### GUIDED TOURS

Saturdays at 5.30 pm in July and  
August  
Saturdays and Sundays at 5.30 pm,  
from 22 May to 30 June,  
and in September  
€4.50; reduced rate: €3.50 +  
“Museum & exhibitions” ticket  
at reduced rate

### CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS

“Plis surprises”  
Workshops for 3-5 year-olds  
Wednesdays, from 22 May to 31 July  
Saturdays and Sundays in July  
3.00-4.30 pm, Atelier des Enfants

“Entre froissements et images”  
Workshops for 6-12 year-olds  
Wednesdays for children only:  
from 22 May to 26 June  
Saturdays for families:  
8 and 22 June  
Sundays for families: 26 May;  
16 and 30 June  
2.30-4.30 pm, Atelier des Enfants

### TOURS FOR DISABLED VISITORS

- Tours for the partially-sighted  
Saturday 15 June at 2.30 pm  
- Lip-reading tour for the hard  
of hearing  
Saturdays 25 May and 15 June,  
11.00 am  
- Tour in French sign language  
for the deaf  
Saturdays 25 May and 15 June,  
2.30 pm

### AUDIOGUIDE

Languages: French, English,  
Spanish, German and Italian.  
Available for rental at the Centre

Pompidou, the audio guide brings  
the creative process alive. Let us  
guide around the “Simon Hantai”  
exhibition and discover nearly  
60 works from the Museum’s  
permanent collections. Special tour  
available for children aged 8-12.  
You can also tour the building and  
discover its history.  
€5, reduced rate €4, free for under- 13s  
For rental at the ticket desk, level 0  
Pick-up at the “Espace Audioguide”,  
level 0, near the Bookshop

## INFORMATION

01 44 78 12 33

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### EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

From 22 May to 2 September 2013  
Galerie 1, Level 6  
Every day except Tuesdays  
from 11 am to 9 pm  
Ticket counters close at 8 pm  
Late nights openings  
on Thursdays until 11 pm  
Ticket counters close at 10 pm

### ADMISSION

#### Access with the ticket

#### “Museum & Expositions”

Valid throughout the day at the  
Museum, for all exhibitions  
and the View of Paris, for a single  
admission in each space  
€13, concessions €10  
Free with the annual pass and  
for under-18s

#### Online ticket purchase and printing (full price only)

[www.centrepompidou.fr/billetterie](http://www.centrepompidou.fr/billetterie)

### TWITTER

Information on the exhibition on  
twitter #Hantai hashtag, or http:  
//www.twitter.com/centrepompidou

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