

JACQUES-ANDRÉ BOIFFARD

LA PARENTHÈSE SURRÉALISTE

5 NOVEMBER 2014 – 2 FEBRUARY 2015

Photography has its legendary figures, and Jacques-André Boiffard is without question one of them. A founder of the journal *La Révolution surréaliste*, the photographer André Breton chose for the illustrations to *Nadja*, a collaborator of Georges Bataille's on the journal *Documents*, he was responsible for some of the most memorable of Surrealist images, an oeuvre all the more striking and brilliant for his production being limited and his photographic career so short. Boiffard, then, was something of a meteor – yet very little has been known of him. Whole areas of his work have been neglected: his portraits, his practice of photomontage, his experiments with abstract photography...

The Centre Pompidou has the largest institutional collection of the photographer's work today. The aim of this exhibition, the first monographic retrospective ever devoted to Boiffard, is to set him in his rightful place in the history of both photography and Surrealism.

The exhibition also marks the opening of the Galerie de photographies [Photography Gallery]. Free to enter, this new space will host three exhibitions a year, drawn from the photographic collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne which today numbers nearly 40,000 prints.

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A VISUAL IDENTITY FOR SURREALISM

Of all the photographers who took part in the Surrealist movement at some time in their careers, Jacques-André Boiffard was unquestionably the one most centrally involved, being closer to its leading figures and far more engaged in their collective activities than such as Brassai, Hans Bellmer, Raoul Ubac, Claude Cahun, Henri Cartier-Bresson or even Man Ray himself.

Boiffard is the only photographer whom André Breton, "the pope of Surrealism", could have identified as having "performed an act of absolute Surrealism". He is distinctive too in his images having been chosen to accompany the writings of both Breton and Bataille, representatives of the polar extremes on the spectrum of Surrealist sensibility. Between the radically impersonal images of Paris that he did for Breton to the outrageously expressive photographs he shot for Breton's *Documents*, Boiffard produced some of the icons of Surrealism. It is difficult now to imagine Breton's *Nadja*, the best-known Surrealist novel, without the wine seller of the Place Dauphine, the Hôtel des Grands Hommes, the Mazda poster, or the journal *Documents* without the photographs of the big toe, the fly-paper, the close-up on the mucous membranes of the gaping mouth. Breton, and Bataille perhaps even more, are indebted to Boiffard for the visual imaginary associated with their writing. In making these images the photographer not only participated in the activities of the Surrealist movement but also did much to forge its visual identity.

DIFFERENT STYLES, DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS

Of Man Ray it could be said that it was he who introduced the photogram into Modernist photography, of Cartier-Bresson that he was the photographer of "the decisive moment". Boiffard, on the other hand, is notable for the very great formal diversity of his work. Comparing his images for *Nadja*, shot in a neutral, documentary style, with the more aggressively expressive images published in *Documents*, and these both with the completely abstract experiments of the 1930s, one might well wonder whether they were all the work of the same photographer.

Despite this formal diversity, Boiffard's photographs do have one thing in common in nearly all being functional. In *Nadja*, for example, they allowed Breton to avoid detailed description of places in Paris; in *Documents*, they offered an unapologetic instance of "low materialism", depicting the materiality that for Bataille was foreign to ideal human aspirations. On the covers of a series of crime novels, their role was to catch the eye of the potential reader by offering a foretaste of suspense. And at the studio he established with Eli Lotar in 1929, Boiffard practiced his art at its most applied, in portrait and advertising photography. Even his most evidently creative works have an underlying functionality: the nude photographs of Renée Jacobi, for example, can be understood as studies in lighting and perspective, exploring the distortions engendered by changes of light or camera angle, while the series of abstractions puts into question the predominance of realism in photography. All Boiffard's photographs thus have a use, whether documentary, commercial, political or experimental.

EXHIBITION

CURATORS

Clément Chéroux
Damarice Amao

PRODUCTION

Véronique Labelle

EXHIBITION DESIGN

Katia Lafitte,
assisted by Clara Soulier

COLLOQUIUM

Boiffard surréaliste

14 January, 11 am and 2.30 pm,

Petite salle

With Clément Chéroux,
Damarice Amao, Sophie Berrebi,
Michel Poivert, Simon Baker,
Andrea Zucchinalli, Franca Franchi
and Georges Didi-Huberman

CATALOGUE

Jacques-André Boiffard

La parenthèse surréaliste

Edited by Clément Chéroux
and Damarice Amao

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Barral co-publication

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€40

INFORMATIONS

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www.centrepompidou.fr

EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

5 November 2014 - 2 February 2015
Galerie de photographies, Forum -1
Every day ex. Tuesday, 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Admission free

TWITTER

#Boiffard

<http://www.twitter.com/centrepompidou>

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Les Designers Anonymes

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GALERIE DE PHOTOGRAPHIES

Located in the Forum, at the heart
of the Centre Pompidou,
the new 200-square-metre
Photography Gallery is free to enter.
Its role will be to offer a window onto
the great wealth of the photographic
collection of the Musée National d'Art
Moderne, with changing exhibitions
drawing on its 40,000 prints
and more than 50,000 negatives.

This collection is one of the few
in the world to offer a complete
history of modern and contemporary
photography in all its diversity.
Photography will find a new visibility
in this gallery dedicated to the medium,
which is to host a regular programme
of three thematic or monographic
exhibitions a year – historical,
contemporary or cross-cutting.

With the support of



FUTURE EXHIBITIONS

QU'EST-CE QUE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE ?

4 March – 1 June 2015

ANNA ET BERNHARD BLUME :

LA PHOTOGRAPHIE TRANSCENDANTE

1 July – 28 September 2015

