MARTIAL RAYSSE
1960–1974

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Christer Strömholm, portrait of Martial Raysse, ca. 1962.

Martial Raysse in front of a work from his series *Tableaux à Géométrie variable* (Variable Geometry Paintings), ca. 1966.

Martial Raysse in front of an early assemblage, ca. 1962.

Opposite: Martial Raysse in front of an early assemblage, ca. 1962.

MARTIAL RAYSSE

Alison M. Gingeras

LUXEMBOURG & DAYAN

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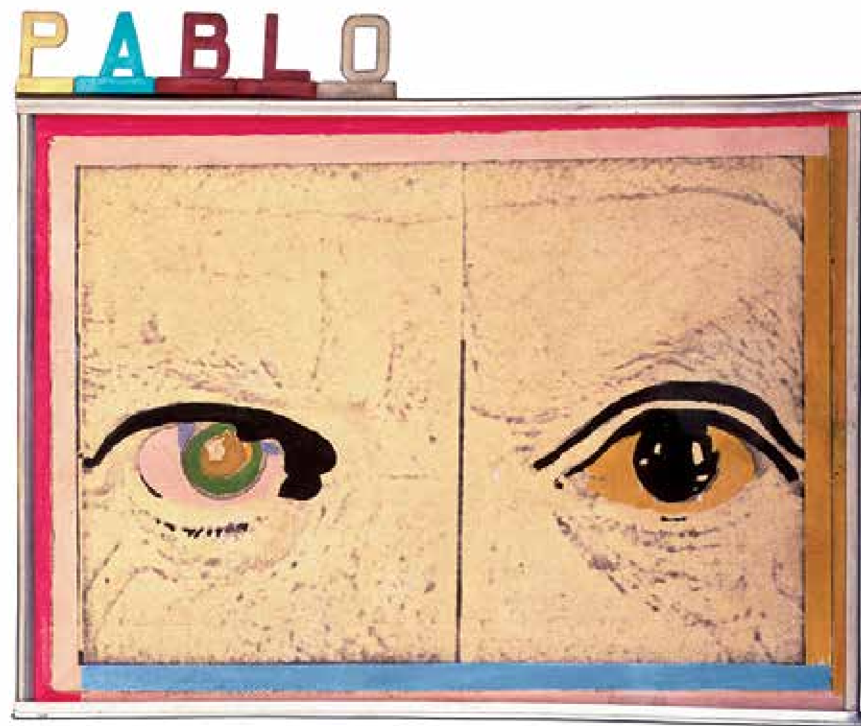

Martial Raysse, *Pablo,* 1965.
Gouache and paper collage on canvas with aluminum and plastic, 8 ¼ x 7 ¼ in. (21 x 18 cm).

FOREWORD

Martial Raysse's diminutive masterpiece *Pablo* (1965) is an exquisitely collaged and assemblaged painting, a portrait that conflates two identities by pairing one of the artist's eyes with a second eye belonging to Picasso. While this tiny, poetic work might for some be just a footnote in an oeuvre filled with countless aesthetic breakthroughs, political idealism, as well as personal twists and turns, *Pablo* is important to single out. For us, the penetrating gaze that emanates from these eyes emblematizes the fiercely independent and beautiful vision of the painting's author: Martial Raysse. In the following pages, the reader will be able to follow the development of Raysse's unique vision as it evolves and unfolds over the seminal years of 1960 to 1974. These pages transport us through his early career, when he was a promising young artist in the South of France, to his emergence as an influential force in the heyday of Pop art in America, and concludes with his return to France after the events of May 1968 in Paris. Our exhibition closes with the mysterious and until now little-studied *Coco Mato* series—a group of poetic and enchantingly crafted "things"—that Raysse created in the early 1970s and exhibited in 1974.

As the first solo presentation of Martial Raysse in over forty years in the United States, this exhibition at Luxembourg & Dayan will serve as an introduction for many who will be encountering his work for the first time. For those already steeped in Raysse's incredible oeuvre, we hope that this exhibition and catalogue will serve to deepen their knowledge of his work and cast this creative, passionate vision in a new light.

We are proud and honored that Martial Raysse has supported our exhibition and would like to sincerely extend our gratitude for his willingness to share his memories and work with us in such an intimate way.

The exhibition and publication are the enlightened creation of Alison M. Gingeras, whose fresh and original vision is apparent in the curatorial process, as well as in the text written for this catalogue.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the continuous guidance of Catherine Thieck of Galerie de France.

We would like to thank the authors who contributed scholarship and research to this catalogue—including Anaël Pigeat, who allowed us to translate and reprint her original French text so that her groundbreaking scholarship will be accessible to an English-speaking audience, and the family of Otto Hahn, whose insightful text from 1965 has been reproduced here in English for a new generation of readers.

The generous lenders to this exhibition:

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UN HOMME DE GAUCHE

The Radical Life, Art, and Politics of Martial Raysse, 1960–1974

Alison M. Gingeras

> *"So I am what is called in France* un homme de gauche*, and when I found myself in New York and I learned that a revolutionary movement shook Paris, I could not not be there."*[1]
>
> —Martial Raysse

As the art of a self-proclaimed "man of the left," Martial Raysse's work cannot be understood in its full scope unless we view it in a context that considers both the specific sociopolitical upheavals that dramatically altered Europe after World War II and the artist's professed political sympathies. Some fifty years on, it may seem odd to commence a rereading of this period of Raysse's production with specifically politicized preoccupations, yet closer investigation reveals that attention to the artist's political subject position is the key to unlocking a much more profound and dynamic understanding of this work.

There is an important linguistic distinction that must be contended with in regard to the French and English understandings of *l'homme de gauche*. The rough English translation of this French colloquial expression—"left-winger"—amounts to a slightly derogatory and ultra-reductivist term, while in French the expression is loaded with meaning, and unpacking it reveals a series of sociohistorical connotations that reflect the radicalism, progressive ideologies, anarchism, and social democratization that followed in the wake of fascism. Viewed within this more nuanced milieu, the notion of *l'homme de gauche*—particularly when applied to an artist such as Raysse, a preeminent member of the European neo-avant-garde—requires that we closely read and contextualize the artist's production in conjunction with the burgeoning of sociopolitical agency that was sweeping Europe in the 1960s and '70s. It was in this period that the Left employed new forms of activism and protest as vital means of resisting the political impotence that had marked the postwar period in Europe. This was the subject position Raysse embraced and embodied while developing his films and other artworks in these years.

An incisive reading of the term *l'homme de gauche* is thus crucial to attaining a cohesive understanding of Raysse's work that transcends the oversimplified art historical miscategorizations that have been affixed to him until

Martial Raysse during his years as a member of the PIG community, Paris, ca. 1972.

now. Labels such as "Nouveau Réalisme" (New Realism) and "European Pop" prove inadequate once one delves into the various conceptual incarnations evident in the paintings, sculptures, assemblages, and films that Raysse made in the years 1960–74. The radical politics and revolutionary aesthetics of these works are unifying characteristics, shaping an oeuvre that has either resisted or outgrown all previous attempts at classification.

A secondary issue that this rereading is obligated to grapple with is the framing of Raysse's art vis-à-vis the hegemony of American Pop art, a condition familiar to many European artists whose work investigates consumerism, mechanical reproduction, and visual serialism. A focused reevaluation of Raysse's production positions him not only as a vital (though often art-historically neglected) member of the European neo-avant-garde—and quite apart from his American contemporaries—but likewise as a singular artist whose oeuvre vibrates with a pervasive undercurrent of political radicalism. The formal and conceptual dissonance this generates become more legible when we allow his work to shed the usual categorizations, which are largely mediated by the predominantly apolitical canon of American art history. The winding narratives, dramatic shifts, ruptures, and iconoclastic inventions that reveal themselves once these works are unburdened by taxonomy offer us an esoteric road map of the politically charged events that indelibly impacted the postwar psychological topography of France, America, and Europe as a whole. It is precisely this postwar condition that acts as the cornerstone of Raysse's early works.

In the early 1950s in Nice, some years before Raysse emerged as a young artist in Paris, the seeds of the influences that would fuel his early work took hold. Although reconstruction and the model of a nascent American consumer identity offered the allure of the new, their promises were built on a foundation of incomplete amnesia. Forgetting, in this case, took the form of the commercially constructed artificial identities that populated the pages of magazines and papered billboards, numbing viewers with the dullness of their repetition. Models who were made-up, tanned, and full of life demonstrated the peaceful happiness that attends a new car or, more simply, a box of soap. The cult of the refrigerator offered what reality could not: the kind of sanitized healthfulness that denies wars, death, and absolute destruction. Underscoring this connection between collective denial and the hygienic advances of modernization phenomena, cultural historian Kristin Ross notes in her seminal tome *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*: "Five years after commenting upon the 'great hunger [*fringale*] for cleanliness' sweeping France, Roland Barthes goes one step further, linking the will to cleanliness here with a desire to immobilize time, to step outside of history."[2] All of Raysse's early tropes—healthy, clean women, idealized sunny beaches taken from the pages of magazines, new refrigerators—are echoed in Barthes's politically potent correlations. France wanted to forget the past, to clean up, and to embrace the new consumerism, and Raysse put his finger on this.

While this new, hygienic consumer identity was exploding into French popular consciousness, artists of the 1950s Parisian avant-garde were channel surfing the scar tissue of the war. Figures such as Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985), Jean Fautrier (1898–1964), and Wols (1913–1951) investigated the psychology of trauma across the thick impastos of their canvases, while Bernard Buffet (1928–1999), Europe's first proto–Pop art star, depicted a particularly gray and emaciated version of Parisian poverty. *Misérablisme* and Existentialism were the pervasive themes of inquiry, themes that continued a search for meaning in the depressive heaps of abjection that were cemented into European consciousness. It was precisely from this ferment fueled by intellectual, artistic, and socioeconomic change that Raysse and fellow École de Nice artists Arman (1928–2005) and Yves Klein (1928–1962) emerged in Nice.

SOUS LE SOLEIL, EXACTEMENT: FROM *MISÉRABLISME* TO NOUVEAU RÉALISME

> *"Human sadness was in fashion and {Bernard} Buffet the latest style with his tragic figures and his bags under his eyes. I wanted to exalt the modern world, the optimism, and the sun. To paint sadness could only be the snobbish game of a sickly unconsciousness! Death is horrible enough, worrisome enough . . . . Let's say that my paintings are perhaps an exorcism. One must chase the idea of the death, to comfort oneself. By work, by beauty."*[3]
>
> —Martial Raysse

This shift away from the aesthetic of *misérablisme* and its attendant traumatic *tristesse,* as seen in the work of Bernard Buffet, toward the new formal language and sun-soaked influence of the early Nice works of Martial Raysse, correlates to changes in French popular music. There, too, we see a move away from the melancholic, schmaltzy tradition of *la chanson Française,* epitomized by Jacques Brel's ballad "Sous la pluie" (Under the Rain), toward catchy pop hooks laced with biting criticality, such as Serge Gainsbourg's "Sous le soleil, exactement" (Sun Directly Overhead). Both paradigm shifts mark a dramatic changing of the guard. This rich pop cultural analogy is a crucial starting point from which to revisit Raysse's early career. Like a drastic shift in the weather or the passing of a musical genre, Raysse's artistic coming of age in Nice personified Gainsbourg's lyric. "Sous le soleil, exactement . . ." he was obligated to exorcise the gloomy ghost of Buffet from his worldview.

While from a twenty-first-century perspective the very idea that Buffet was a serious cultural referent might seem preposterous, it was in the context of Paris in the 1950s that Buffet reached the apex of his popularity and credibility. Before Buffet came to be derided in intellectual circles as inauthentic and corrupt due to his conspicuous financial success, his work was the pinnacle of Parisian *misérablisme.*[4] To the delight of the masses, Buffet single-handedly created icons of postwar trauma and the deprivations of the reconstruction period. Although Buffet was not alone—Alberto Giacommetti (1901–1966), Fautrier, Dubuffet, and Wols were

also associated with somber aesthetics and themes of misery and suffering—he was the most vulnerable target for this generational watershed. Hence Buffet was the *bête noire* for the young Martial Raysse. This twenty-four-year-old Niçois felt compelled to parry Buffet's emotionally distressed canvases with the benevolent light of the Mediterranean sun. He had to overthrow the deprivations of the reconstruction period with the luster of the glut of new merchandise that filled the Prisunic superstore around the corner. As Raysse stated in one of his earliest interviews: "What interests me is the colorful profusion of mass-produced objects, the quantitative influx of displays, the wave of new products in department stores. Art today is a rocket in space. The Prisunics are the museums of modern art."[5]

By 1954 there were more than two hundred Prisunic stores all over France. The postwar equivalent of today's Walmart, they featured aisles stocked with a dizzying array of new American-style gizmos, packaged food, and cleaning products. Inspired by the promise of modernity these consumer-ready goods held, Raysse homed in on the dark side lurking beneath the profusion of commodity culture. One of Raysse's earliest found object sculptures of this period, *Colonne* (Column; 1960), is a strangely totemic plastic construction containing cheap commodities (toy figurines, pharmaceutical bottles, powder puffs, brushes, etc.) that have been sealed inside Plexiglas columns. *Column* is less a heroic monument to consumer culture than a sort of space-age tomb that saves these otherwise disposable mass-produced objects from their fate as obsolete junk or fodder for the wasteland. A similar gesture of artificial preservation and its implied relationship with death is present in all of Raysse's early assemblages as well as in the work of his closest colleagues of that time. Although he was almost a decade younger than his fellow Niçois artists Arman and Yves Klein, their geographic and cultural proximity, combined with their mutual obsession with mass-produced objects, led Raysse to be grouped with them—in his first artistic labeling—as part of the Nouveau Réaliste (New Realist) movement. While much has been made of the fact that Raysse signed Pierre Restany's ill-fated Nouveau Réaliste manifesto in 1960 (the group dissolved almost as quickly as it was formed), it is his friendship and artistic dialogue with Arman that offers a more revelatory affiliation.

In the early years of the 1960s, both Arman and Raysse developed key aspects of their practice in parallel: they shared a penchant for the

Bernard Buffet, *Self-Portrait,* 1949. Oil on canvas, 36 ¼ x 65 in. (92 x 65 cm).

Opposite: Martial Raysse, *Snack,* 1964. Oil, acrylic, paper collage, plastic, wood, straw hat, plastic bird, enlarged photograph, and mixed media on canvas with neon lettering, 84 ¾ x 51 ¼ x 7 ¾ in. (215 x 130 x 19.5 cm).

Arman, *Petits Déchets Bourgeois* (Small Bourgeois Trash), 1959. Accumulation of household refuse in wooden box with glass cover, 23 x 15 ¾ x 4 ¾ in. (600 x 400 x 100 cm).

Opposite: Martial Raysse, *Colonne* (Column), 1960. Foam, toothbrush, and various objects in Plexiglas form, 55 ¼ x 4 ¾ x 4 ¾ in. (140 x 12 x 12 cm).

vitrine as a formal device for display or preservation as well as an interest in the accumulation of found objects. In the same years that Raysse began making his series of sculptures *Étalage de Prisunic: Hygiène de la vision* (Prisunic Shelf: Vision of Hygiène), Arman was making his first series of *Accumulations* (glass boxes stuffed to the brim with homogeneous found objects), such as his infamous *Home Sweet Home* (1960), an assortment of World War II gas masks; his *Portraits-Robots* (a series begun in 1960), transparent sculptural vitrines-cum-portraits filled with his subjects' trash; and his *Poubelles* (trashcans) of 1959. Structurally analogous, the works of Arman and Raysse offer a dialectical reflection of France in the 1960s. While Arman is clearly addressing "the refuse of production and the residue of consumption,"[6] Raysse offers a hyper-sanitized and ordered version of the same terrain (industrial production and the ensuing waste). Raysse's vitrines, such as the one in his early masterpiece *Supermarket Titre commercial* (1961), are formally organized to mirror the compartmentalized rows of displays at a Prisunic and are forever preserved as if encased for eternity in a refrigerator. In a manifesto of sorts published in 1967 entitled "I have a thousand things to put in order," Raysse writes: "I wanted my works to possess the serene self-evidence of mass-produced refrigerators . . . to have the look of new, sterile, inalterable visual hygiene. Life is horrible. It's

evident we are going to die. Thus we become even closer accomplices of all that bears within itself the seed of death."[7]

Death—whether glimpsed through Arman's collections of trash or mediated via the sanitizing aesthetic of Raysse's metaphorical objects of refrigeration—is thus the central subtext of the early oeuvres of both artists. It can be further argued that Arman and Raysse are simultaneously processing the traumatic effects of World War II—albeit from the slightly distanced perspective of their generation. Although these artists are not explicitly addressing specific historical events, art historian Benjamin H.D. Buchloh convincingly argues that numerous works by Arman conjure the Holocaust. He writes:

> One cannot help but see that some objects in Arman's warehouse are more prone to interpretive projection than others: his accumulations of dentures, of reading glasses and of gas masks . . . seem to echo the accumulations of clothing, hair and private objects that Alain Resnais recorded in *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog; 1955), the first filmic documentary account of the German Nazi concentration camps . . . . In their extreme forms, Arman's accumulations and *poubelles* cross the threshold to become memory images of the first historical instances of industrialized death.[8]

Like Arman, Raysse addresses the industrialization of death and the psychic reverberations of the war, albeit in a different form and with different references. In Raysse's hands, the prospect of resolution is not offered by the direct confrontation of death, decay, or obsolescence, but rather through the purposeful circumnavigation of these pitfalls via preservation. In a work such as Raysse's *Supermarket*, the compartmentalized wooden display box housing pristine dime-store bric-a-brac in fact becomes a coffin—and the objects enshrined inside it attempt to cheat death through an act of artistic embalming. So long as a commodity remains unused, it will,

Arman, *Home Sweet Home,* 1960. Accumulation of gas masks in wooden box, 55 x 63 x 7 ¾ (140 x 160 x 20 cm).

Opposite, top to bottom:

Martial Raysse, *Supermarket*, 1961. Various objects in a 28-compartment plastic display case, 26 ⅓ x 54 x 21 in. (67 x 137 x 53 cm).

Advertisement for the French refrigerator *Frigéco* published in *Elle*, May 1955

Left to right:

Arman and Raysse collecting materials for Arman's *Le Plein*

View of *Le Plein* from the exterior of Iris Clert's gallery

Raysse asserts, never die. It is this notion of material resistance, along with the continuing aura of newness the work projects, that charges much of Raysse's early production—it is, he suggests, through newness that we aim to forget. Interestingly, both Arman and Raysse couch their arguments in the same container: the vitrine.

For Buchloh, the vitrine as a sculptural element functioned not as a practical tool but rather as a means of rendering postwar sculpture both a "preserved specimen" and an expression of commodity fetishism.[9] While for Arman the vitrine acts as a shield between life (the viewer) and expiration (in all senses of the word), Raysse uses vitrines inversely, sacrificing the availability (and hence the usefulness) of their contents in order to garner protection from the threat of decay. Raysse's vitrines are analogous to the refrigerator—they are chambers that cheat putrefaction and derail cellular destruction but, in the process, permanently deny contact. Much like a magazine ad featuring the reproduced plastic beauty of a woman who will never age, these encased objects are expressions of the fragile membrane that separates the real from the manufactured, the living from the dead.

Raysse's crucial role in the making of Arman's *Le Plein* (The Full-Up; 1960) further establishes the criticality of his early practice while also reinforcing his dialectical sociopolitical relationship to Arman. Visible from the storefront vitrine of Iris Clert's Paris gallery, *Le Plein* was literally a floor-to-ceiling accumulation of rubbish. The exhibition invitation was notably delivered inside a sardine can complete with expiration date. Not only did Raysse help his friend to physically collect the trash that notoriously filled that storied avant-garde art space, he also contributed conceptually to the project. *Le Plein* was a response to Yves Klein's equally infamous installation of an empty room, *Le Vide* (The Void; 1958), which had been held in the same gallery space two years before. Whereas Klein's work was imbued with mysticism and self-mythologizing, Arman's effort was a politicized rebuttal. And despite the common perception that this was randomly collected trash, Raysse and Arman kept an exhaustive inventory of the objects they found as they scavenged the streets of Paris for refuse. In an oft-repeated anecdote, Raysse encouraged Arman to include organic material (such as an uncooked lobster) so that *Le Plein* would noticeably degrade and smell—conjuring again the miasma of death.

The significance of *Le Plein*—and of Raysse's collaborative hand in it—lies not just in the accumulation of trash but also in this methodical listing of the work's contents. This inventorying practice resonates with the practices of the French literary avant-garde of the postwar era. Arman's and Raysse's counterpart can be found in the writings of sociologist turned novelist Georges Perec (1936–1982). His seminal 1974 novel *Espèces d'espaces* (Sorts of Spaces) is dominated by lists; each one is an inventory of a given space compiled in order, as Perec writes, "to interrogate, or simply stated, to read [spaces]; because what we frequently call 'everydayness' is not obvious but opaque: it is a form of blindness, a kind of anesthesia. This book is developed from this elementary principle—it is a journal of someone who uses space."[10] Perec's notion of cultural anesthesia is examined by Arman and Raysse via this shared methodology of listing. In the same novel, Perec describes how this listing practice could even be applied to the street: "it would allow for making a census of a part of the sidewalk covered with rubbish (old newspapers, tin cans, three envelopes) or an overstuffed garbage can."[11] While this line was not written specifically to describe *Le Plein*, it reveals the common drive to list and amass objects that runs throughout the oeuvres of Perec, Raysse, and Arman. Each resorts to a practice of cataloging and accumulation as a humanistic and critical response to the decomposition of a society drowning in its own abundance.

DU PRISUNIC AU RAYSSE BEACH: RAYSSE'S REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN

> *"Photography for me played the role of a link that, in the beginning, took the form of stereotyped faces of young women in advertisements, leitmotifs of our visual culture. Through these faces, an initially experienced form of communication establishes itself beyond the preexisting formulas."*[12]
>
> —Martial Raysse

With a spray of real peacock feathers for hair and lips painted a fluorescent shade of orangey-red, *Untitled* (1961), Raysse's deceptively simple

and timeless icon of feminine beauty, was the lynchpin that would unlock the next chapter of the artist's early career. Appropriated from a magazine, this first portrait of an anonymous woman was seen as offensive by certain artists in Raysse's circle, and it was ultimately this type of work that catalyzed Raysse's ejection from the Nouveau Réaliste group around 1961. Although Raysse's connection to this group as one of the original nine signatories of Restany's manifesto has long defined the prevailing art historical context of his work, this fragile affiliation of a very diverse group of artists was never a cohesive movement. In fact, Raysse recalls that the *affichiste* wing of the group (namely Raymond Hains and Jacques de la Villeglé) rejected the imagistic turn of his works in this period, considering it a betrayal of Nouveau Réalisme's engagement with found objects and assemblage.[13] Numerous anecdotes about the infighting among the group and the almost immediate disintegration of the principles outlined in this pseudo-manifesto abound. Further enforcing Raysse's own recollections, art historian Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen notes that Raysse himself ironically proposed a splinter group, called the "École de Nice," that would band together himself, Arman, and Yves Klein. Butterfield-Rosen has convincingly argued that underlying this sardonic gesture was a shared set of conceptual concerns that transcended both the trio's mutual geographic identity as denizens of the Côte d'Azur and the limited parameters proscribed by Restany's focus on found object assemblage. She writes:

> By forcing an expansion of the common art historical pairing of Arman/Klein into the much less familiar trinity of Klein/Arman/Raysse, the affinities mapped by the "School of Nice" brings a new lens, or "solar burden," to its members' work. The insistent cross-breeding of the man-made and organic that occurs in Raysse's art is the most significant way in which he could be understood to apotheosize the new Nice sensibility and to synthesize the parallel domains of Arman and Klein.[14]

It was Raysse's dramatic conceptual and formal leap in 1961 to imagery of women, more than his earlier sculptural efforts, that offered the best means of advancing the various sociopolitical themes of his work. And while he did officially break with the Nouveau Réalistes, Raysse did not entirely abandon the object in this turn toward two-dimensional representation; elements of assemblage frequently appear on the surface of his paintings, as if to suggest humankind's cathexis toward the artificial world of consumer goods, modern conveniences, and spectacle culture. Echoing the radical writings of Guy Debord and his fellow Situationists, Raysse's work confirms the political zeitgeist of the era, which acknowledged that individual subjectivities had been fully melded with the *société du spectacle*. As Gilles Ivain wrote in the *Internationale situationniste* in 1958, "A mental illness has overcome the planet: banalization. Everyone is hypnotized by production and conveniences—sewage system, elevator, bathroom, washing machine."[15] Like Ivain, Raysse diagnosed this collective lunacy for the clean

Magasin Prisunic, boulevard de Strasbourg, Toulon, October 1963

and new; it provided the catalyst for a conceptual and formal shift whereby Raysse identified the female figure as a central vehicle through which to explore the revolutionary forces of hygiene, beauty, and decay.

After 1962, images of glamorous women came to dominate Raysse's work. Whether in the form of his unconventional, neon-hued canvases or in his early environmental installations, Raysse's new pictorial love of women was neither a misogynist about-face nor a regression into representational art. His women are simultaneously the subjects of his (pictorial) desire and critical ciphers for his sociopolitical insights into the upheavals facing France. In her analysis of the rapid transformations of this period, cultural historian Kristin Ross focuses on "France's desire to be clean," and pinpoints women—as reflected in the governmental regulation of their health and hygiene, their representation in mass culture, and the domestic products marketed to them—as the epicenter of this collective drive for sanitation. Ross argues that there is a direct correlation between the political purification of the nation after the war—manifested in "attempts to rid the nation of the traces of German Occupation and Petaniste complicity"[16]—and the embrace of a crusade for personal hygiene. Moreover, she notes, "a chain of equivalences is at work here; the prevailing logic runs something like this: if the woman is clean, the family is clean, the nation is clean . . . . France must, so to speak, clean house; reinventing the home is reinventing the nation."[17]

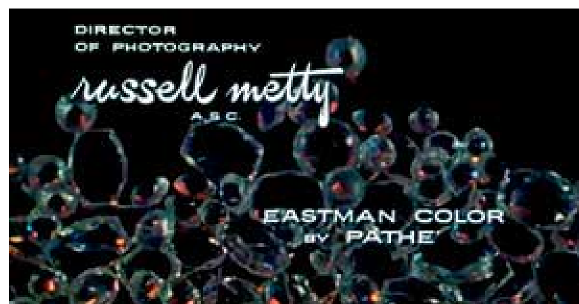
Given this cultural context, it is logical that Raysse would shift his focus to images women. Yet even the artist's earlier scrutiny of the universe of the Prisunic suggests that the primarily female domestic sphere and its material trappings had always been on his conceptual radar screen. In fact, his breakthrough painting *Untitled* (1961) was made just one year after *Étalage, hygiène de la vision* (1960), the assemblage sculpture resembling a readymade product display discussed above. In this work, a cut-out image of a smiling female protagonist from a French advertising campaign sits atop a shelf containing a variety of goods (plastic bottles, beach toys, a broom). From this *ambassatrice* of the slogan "hygiène de la vision" (hygiene of vision) immortalized in the artwork's title, Raysse gradually pushed the literal accoutrements of domestic cleanliness to the background in the interest of exploring the metonymic relationship between *Les françaises* (women) and *la France.* Notably, both are sociopolitical constructs that during this era were subjected to reductive stereotyping as well as a programmatic reinforcement and modeling of consumption and modernization. As such, they became perfect subjects for Raysse's critical practice.

From the supermarket aisles of the Prisunic to the beaches of the Côte d'Azur, Raysse pushed this loaded dynamic (woman/France) in his infamous installation *Raysse Beach*. First presented in a 1962 group exhibition at the Stedlijk Museum in Amsterdam entitled Dynamic Labyrinth, also known as *Dylaby*,[18] *Raysse Beach* was a performative environment that combined the artist's newly established pictorial practice with an arrangement of found objects (a kiddie pool, inflatable beach toys), a functioning jukebox, mannequins dressed in fashionable swimwear and novelty sunglasses,

Martial Raysse, *Étalage, hygiène de la vision*, 1960. Mixed-media assemblage with recovered objects, 82 ¾ x 27 ½ x 17 ¼ in. (210 x 70 x 44 cm).

sculptural assemblages, and a neon sign worthy of a fast-food chain (another element that would soon become a signature part of his oeuvre). At the exhibition opening, the brazenly synthetic quality of the "beach"—a mirror of the constructed topography of the new leisure industry—was further exaggerated by the inclusion of heat lamps, which mimicked the light and heat of Raysse's native Nice. Music provided a soundtrack befitting the scene's overdetermined artificiality as occasional performers frolicked through the landscape.

Hanging on the walls of the *Raysse Beach* installation were a series of *baigneuses* (bather paintings) that were made using a process that would come to typify most of Raysse's paintings from that period. He began with photographic images appropriated from advertisements (likely from swimsuit catalogs) that he had blown up to almost human scale. After applying these images to canvas, Raysse overpainted them with unnaturally bright colors and added bits of collage, adorning the figures with a variety of three-dimensional accessories (wax fruits, fake flowers, silk scarves, towels) that he attached to the canvas surface. These paintings forged a new pictorial language in the early sixties—bridging the assemblage aesthetic with the brash, colorful air of celebratory optimism associated with Pop art. Yet these works were also knowingly treading on an ancient art historical paradigm: the bathing scene. Within this genre of well-documented pictorial conventions and iconographic codes, artists had long depicted female figures as a means of demarcating or invoking a particular sociopolitical terrain. According to Linda Nochlin, a feminist scholar and authority on this genre, these bather pictures embodied "a whole tradition of masculine mastery and feminine display which underpins so much of Western pictorial culture."[19] Yet unlike the gratuitous bather scenes favored by the Salon artists of the nineteenth century, Raysse's bathers self-consciously deactivate the scopophilic power inherent in this convention by calling



attention not to the artist's objectification of his female subjects but to the industries that actively objectify and commodify all modern women. *Raysse Beach* does not present a sexualized fantasy landscape by the sea, it proposes an overly hygienic world that is dominated by advertising messages, a proliferation of plastic products (plastic gloves, brushes, sponges, etc.), and an ersatz allure of health emanating from a readymade sun. If Raysse's bathers are metonymical stand-ins for France, he is simultaneously condemning and preserving their inherent modern condition. To use the words of Otto Hahn—the preeminent French art critic of that era—*Raysse Beach* extols "inorganic material, frigid and chemically pure . . . beauty that is sterile."[20]

THE IMITATION OF LIFE: RAYSSE IN LOS ANGELES, 1963–1968

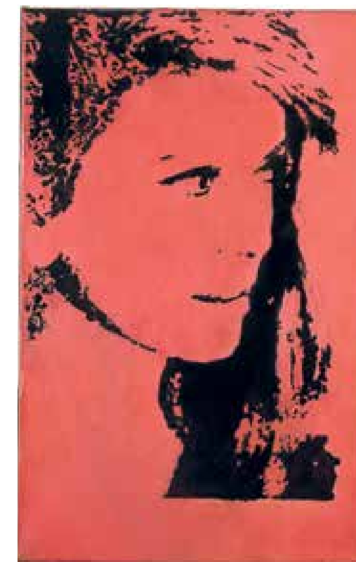
> *"To track life down in the realm of color, I tried using plastics, fluorescence, relationships that were untrue, out of key, or paintings with errors . . . flawed and faulty . . . or bad taste . . . the hideous and the horrible. And now especially, by using neon and artificial lighting, I seek in transcendental color a substitute for life."* [21]
>
> —Martial Raysse

In the opening credits of Douglas Sirk's 1959 masterpiece *Imitation of Life*, Earl King croons the title track as we watch the darkness of an empty screen slowly fill with an accumulation of falling diamonds. The diamonds, in this case, offer a critical commentary on the narrative that follows, for closer inspection reveals them to be forgeries, beveled plastic junk winking and flashing under the panoptic gaze of the Hollywood klieg light. Sirk continues this material investigation of the distance between surface and truth throughout the film, which features an overabundant and disorienting use of mirrors and artificially exaggerated colors in order to exploit the sometimes subtle discrepancies between what we see and what we get.

The final installment in a string of melodramas that the German-Dutch Sirk filmed in Los Angeles, *Imitation of Life* is constructed with all of the visually lavish and overwrought signifiers that came to typify his pioneering melodramas. Pushing his hand to its absolute limits in his final American film, Sirk amplified his signature style of turned up colors, strategic lighting, labyrinthine sets, and dramatically enhanced emotionality for a plot that examines the horrific banality that rests beneath the surface of American culture and its attendant representations of race, gender, and class. It was, of course, a perfectly self-conscious meta-commentary on the ways in which capitalism encourages the construction of identity via superficial symbols of accumulation, an argument that is further expanded when taken in the context of Hollywood and its dependence on the deployment of manufactured Star Power. This phenomenon, along with Sirk's exploration of artificial realities and constructed identities, the reframing and erasure of the familiar, and the concept of the cinematic screen as mirror, conceptually conjoins the work of Martial Raysse and Douglas Sirk—two European auteurs living and working in Los Angeles.

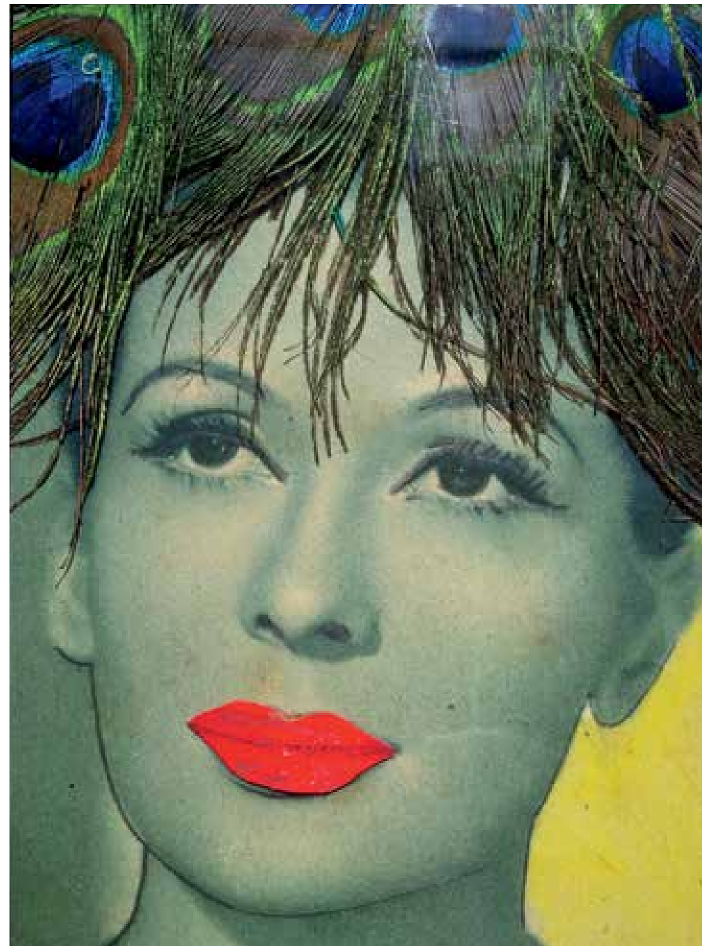
Douglas Sirk, *Imitation of Life*, 1959 (still). 35mm, color, sound, 125 min.

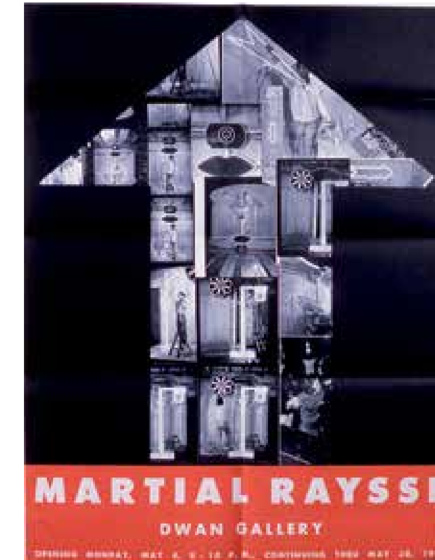
Opposite: Martial Raysse, *Portrait de Catherine Deneuve* (Portrait of Catherine Deneuve), 1965. Acrylic and flocking on canvas, 14 x 8 ¾ in. (36 x 22 cm).



In 1963 Raysse relocated to Los Angeles, where he lived and worked until 1968 and where he introduced the crucial element of imperfection into his picture planes. Though these two details may seem to be only incidentally connected, they are in fact intimately entwined by notions of dislocation and distanciation. On one hand, it was natural for a native of the South of France to be drawn to Los Angeles, a growing metropolis that offered itself to the artist as a simulacra of the Rivera with its sunny climate, overabundance of palm tree–lined beaches, and seemingly "laid back" social milieu. But lurking beneath that veneer, Los Angeles would have confronted Raysse with the reality of its unchecked hedonism, the extravagant excesses of the entertainment industry, and an overtly constructed mythology that crumbles as soon as its surface is scratched. As Marxist historian Mike Davis noted in the epigraph to his tome *City of*

Installation views of *Martial Raysse: Mirrors and Portraits,* Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, January–February, 1963.





Exhibition poster for *Martial Raysse,* Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, May 31–June 24, 1964.

Opposite: Martial Raysse, *Untitled,* 1961. Photograph with acrylic paint and peacock feathers, 7 x 5 ¼ in. (17.5 x 13 cm).

Quartz: "Los Angeles. It is not a mere city. On the contrary, it is and has been since 1888 something to be advertised and sold to the people of the United States like automobiles, cigarettes and mouthwash."[22] It is easy to make assumptions about why, following his break with Pierre Restany and the mainstream French neo-avant-garde, Raysse would be attracted to this dystopic metropolis—the land of Hollywood artifice, sunshine, and noir, a "bright, guilty place."[23] According to the inventory Davis provides in *City of Quartz,* Raysse was one in a long line of European thinkers and artists who considered Los Angeles "the essential destination on the itinerary of any late twentieth-century intellectual, who must eventually come to take a peep and render some opinion on whether 'Los Angeles brings it all together' (official slogan), or is, rather, the nightmare at the terminus of American history." In short, Davis concludes, "Los Angeles is the terrain and subject of a fierce ideological struggle."[24] Raysse packed his suitcase full of his own ideological struggles surrounding the *société de consummation*, modernization, and hygiene—and displaced them to his new studio in Los Angeles, ready to channel the alienating effects of the city as fuel for his work.

Raysse's first solo exhibition on the West Coast, *Mirrors and Portraits*, was held at the prestigious Dwan Gallery in the tony neighborhood of Westwood in 1963. With his debut at this space, which had been owned and operated by the glamorous, intrepid Dwan since 1959, Raysse was instantly understood within the context of an avant-garde movement that positioned American postwar art stars such as Franz Kline (1910–1962), Philip Guston (1913–1980), Larry Rivers (1923–2002), and Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) alongside their European peers who had crossed over to the American market, such as Claes Oldenberg (b. 1929), Arman, Jean Tinguely (1925–1991), and Niki de Saint Phalle (1930–2002). Incidentally, before showing with Dwan, Raysse had already crossed

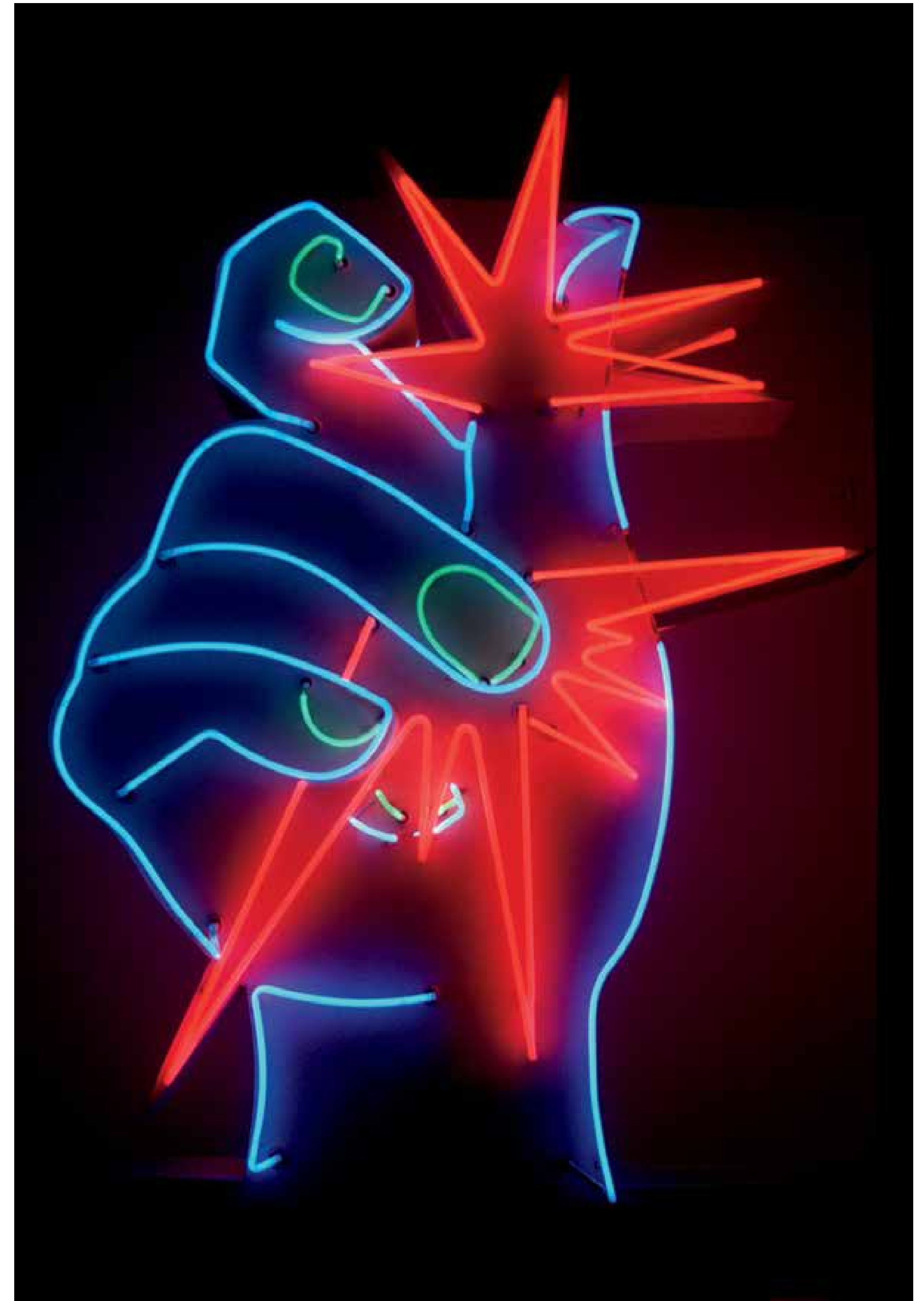
the Atlantic with the latter three of this group, French-speaking compatriots with whom he had lived and worked in New York at the Chelsea Hotel for most of 1962 before finally settling in Los Angeles.

These alumni of Nouveau Réalisme had not come simply to check out America—they effectively "hit the New York art world with the force of an earthquake,"[25] according to Harold Rosenberg, guru of the *arrière-garde* New York School artists who pioneered Abstract Expressionism. Rosenberg was referring to the 1962 Sidney Janis Gallery exhibition *The New Realists,* which was co-organized by Restany and featured an eclectic mix of American and European artists. Considered by many to be the event that had launched American Pop art, this epoch making, cacophonous show also marked the American debut of Raysse, Arman, Tinguely, and Saint Phalle. In an article mockingly titled "The Slice of Cake School," *TIME* magazine puzzled, "Now a segment of the advance guard has suddenly pulled a switch. Unknown to one another, a group of painters have come to the common conclusion that the most banal and even vulgar trappings of modern civilization can, when transposed literally to canvas, become Art."[26] One can imagine that Raysse's later sculpture *America, America* (1964)—a flashing neon sign measuring nearly two-and-a-half meters tall that showed a hand caught mid-gesture in a snap—offers a sly response to this type of facile reception. The work also seems to acknowledge the relatively early and easy absorption into the hallowed halls of American Pop art that such works received, offering an ironic slant on the attainability of the American Dream. If Raysse's sculptural snap were an advertisement, it would be marketing the notion that Pop art is easy, "it's a piece of cake."

For his outing at Dwan Gallery, Raysse created a series of paintings depicting anonymous, stereotypically "beautiful" women engaged in banal activities: looking at themselves in the mirror, posing for the camera, or applying makeup or sun lotion. Having just discovered the possibilities of a relatively inexpensive new technology—the Xerox machine!—Raysse

Installation view of *International Exhibition of the New Realists,* Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, November 1–December 1, 1962.

Opposite: Martial Raysse, *America, America,* 1964. Neon and painted metal, 94 ½ x 65 x 17 ¾ in. (240 x 165 x 45 cm).



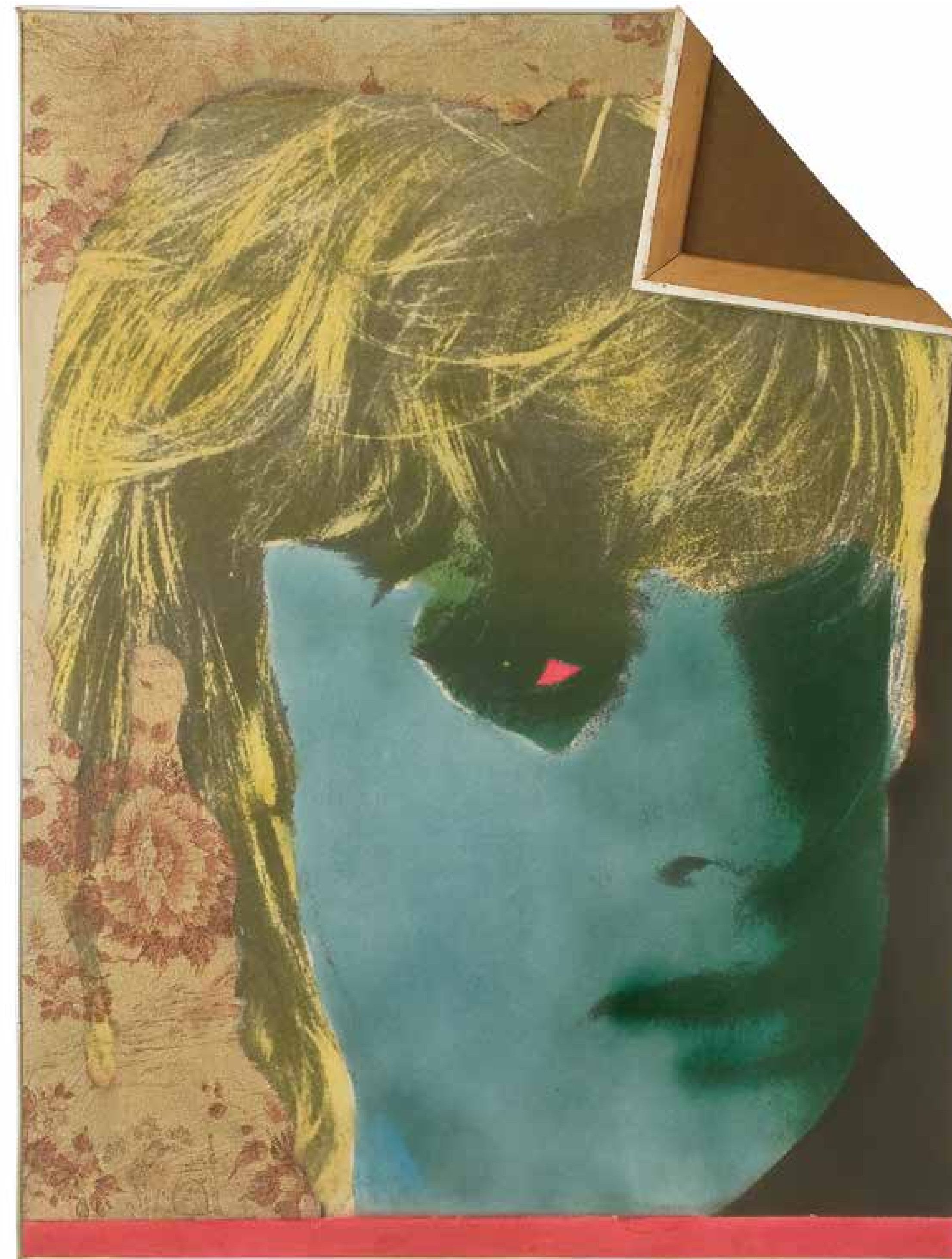
Martial Raysse, *A*, 1963.
Paint on canvas with neon light, 16 ¼ x 11 in. (41 x 28 cm).

Opposite: Martial Raysse, *About Neon (Obelisk II)*, 1964.
Neon, metal, and Plexiglas, 96 x 30 x 18 in.
(244 x 76.2 x 45.7 cm).

in this period generally preferred the anonymous faces that he could easily pilfer from the surfeit of women's magazines and commercial catalogs generated by the beauty and entertainment industries. Significantly, despite the easy mimesis of perfected faces afforded by this new photomechanical means of reproduction, Raysse systematically introduced imperfections to these otherwise idealized depictions. Not only did he introduce found objects like fake flies and spiders to physically disturb the surfaces of his female portraits (as in *Il est temps de rêver* [It Is Time to Dream]; 1963), he also methodically degraded his Xeroxed images—exaggerating, enlarging, or cropping them, and then dividing them into squares and reordering their pictorial syntax.

A seminal early work such as *Tableau Cassé* (Broken Painting; 1964) exemplifies Raysse's process in this period. Here an enlarged, photocopied image of an unknown, androgynous beauty has been overpainted in an alien palette and layered with a printed fragment of *toile de jouy* wallpaper. Most significantly, Raysse deliberately fractured the top right corner of the canvas and glued broken stretcher bars to the painting's surface. The exposure of the painting's back stretcher along with these other denaturing additions demonstrates not only Raysse's critical stance toward mass culture and the *société de consommation* but also his irreverence toward painting's own conventions. Raysse's derision of the rectangular picture plane and the traditional "rules" of composition would be further pushed in his later works, and particularly in a series he began in 1966: *Tableaux à geometrie variable* (Variable Geometry Paintings). In these works, Raysse would frequently depict fragments of a woman's face in compositions conjoining several irregularly shaped canvases that often featured relief elements and unconventional materials such as pulverized plastic mixed with pigment (a technique referred to as flocking/flocage). Exemplary works such as *La fille du desert, Tableau à géométrie variable* (Girl of the desert, Variable Geometry Painting; 1966) and *Portrait à géométrie variable, deuxième possibilité* (Variable Geometry Portrait, Second Possibility; 1966) typify not only this unusual formal process of fragmentation but also Raysse's ongoing quest for conceptual ruptures, "relationships that were untrue, out of key, or paintings with errors . . . flawed and faulty . . . or bad taste . . . the hideous and the horrible."

Raysse's interest in fragmentation also had an explicitly politicized dimension; by the mid-1960s he had grown weary of the hegemonic discourses that surrounded American Pop art, considering the movement "a simple codification of beauty." In his mind, many of his contemporaries were creating "idols not icons."[27] Raysse took specific issue with artists such as Andy Warhol, whose obsession with celebrities (movie stars like Liz Taylor and Marilyn Monroe and cultural figures like Jackie Kennedy and Elvis) filled his silkscreened canvases at that time. Raysse recounts his shock at seeing "*les accumulations d'Andy Warhol avec le visage de Marilyn {Monroe}*" when that work arrived at the last minute during the installation of the aforementioned Sidney Janis show in October 1962.[28] Although Raysse had begun to move toward this type of female



Martial Raysse, *Tableau Cassé* (Broken Painting), 1964. Paint, paper collage, toile de jouy, and broken stretcher bars on panel, 51 ¼ x 38 ¼ in. (130 x 97 cm).

Martial Raysse, *La fille du desert, Tableau à géométrie variable* (Girl of the Desert, Variable Geometry Painting), 1966. Industrial paint on canvas, 60 ¾ x 22 x 4 in. (154 x 56 x 10 cm).

Opposite: Martial Raysse, *Portrait à géométrie variable, deuxième possibilité* (Variable Geometry Portrait, Second Possibility), 1966. Oil, flocking, and mixed media on canvas, 51 ¼ x 50 ¼ in. (130 x 127.5 cm).

Top to bottom:

Martial Raysse, *Green on Green*, 1964. Tempera and charcoal on paper mounted on canvas-board relief on canvas, 13 x 8 ½ x 2 ½ in. (33 x 21.6 x 6.4 cm).

Martial Raysse, *Il est temps de rêver* (It Is Time to Dream), 1963. Paint, paper collage, and artificial spider and butterfly mounted on canvas, 10 ¾ x 8 ¾ in. (27 x 22 cm).

Opposite: Martial Raysse, *Oasis,* 1964. Metal, paint, photographs, colored light bulbs, plastic fruit, and plants, 97 x 41 ¾ x 30 in. (246 x 106 x 76 cm.).

representation in the year before seeing Warhol's early *Marilyns*—he exhibited his first works of young women's faces, such as *Untitled* (1961), at Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf in June 1962—it took him several years to fully warm to this new mode of conflating representations of the female figure and celebrity culture.

By the time his tenure in Los Angeles drew to a close later that decade, Raysse had firmly eschewed a Warholian embrace of famous subjects. There are but a handful of minor exceptions in Raysse's oeuvre—primarily representations of European film stars Brigitte Bardot, Catherine Deneuve, and Sophia Loren. While these are but footnotes in this vastly prolific period of Raysse's work, it is worth examining Raysse's *B.B.* (1964) and *Portrait de Catherine Deneuve* (1965), as well as his *Oasis* (1964), a sculpture-cum-fake-advertisement that featured flashing lights and a double-sided portrait with Brigitte Bardot on one side and the artist's then-wife, France, on the other. The obvious glamour of these European film stars perhaps made them irresistible to Raysse, especially when considering that each of these women personified a completely new type of mass-media celebrity. Yet it is also arguable that the overt construction of these personas rendered them "unlockable," and that Raysse, in turn, ultimately lost interest, choosing instead to reference specifically anonymous source imagery.

The superficial connection between Raysse's *B.B.* and Warhol's *Gold Marilyn* (1962) is transcended when we pick up the thread of political intentionality that drives Raysse's oeuvre. While Warhol isolates recognizability as the apex of cultural value (spotlighting and serially reproducing, for example, an image of Marilyn Monroe at the height of her fame and beauty), Raysse's work seems to suggest something that is quite the opposite: In his hands, commercially manipulated representations of

Andy Warhol, *Gold Marilyn,* 1962. Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 83 ¼ x 57 in. (211.4 x 144.7 cm).

Opposite: Martial Raysse, *B.B.,* 1964. Photocopies on two canvas panels, 13 x 16 ½ in. (33 x 42 cm).

beauty, be they of the named or the nameless, are all benign reflections of a society that uses consumer lust as a means of disguising the unappealing elements of culture and history. Hence the banalized image that makes up Raysse's portrait of Bardot; in this case, the photocopy mounted on the canvas is distressed and blurred as if to play down her fame. If not for her initials in the work's title, she might be mistaken for any other of Raysse's typical pretty faces. Much as Sirk constructed the visual elements of his films to act as a series of mirrors that subversively gave society back to itself in its gruesome entirety (with all the racism, sexism, and classism that this implies), Raysse's work uses recognizability as a means of gaining back-door access to the very structures that familiarity attempts to disguise.

Raysse's artistic endeavors in Los Angeles were not limited to painting. In this period he also embarked on a new pursuit, making a series of experimental films beginning with *Jésus-Cola* in 1966. It is through consideration of this new dimension of his artistic practice that Raysse's political intent—especially as it aligned with his ambivalence toward American culture—comes into focus. When asked recently about the evolution of his political attitudes in these years, Raysse reminisced:

> Of course, I wasn't entirely fooled by the society of consumption or the "tongue in cheek" of a lot of my works. Remember, these were also the Kennedy years, there was a sort of euphoria back then . . . . It's starting in 1964 that I began to ask myself sharper questions, noticeably about the bias of war in Vietnam, which reminded me of the *Guerre d'Algerie*, to which I was completely opposed. While Lyndon B. Johnson is referred to in my film *Homéro Presto* (1967), my surroundings did not speak directly of politics. At least, I could not with my status as a foreigner in America. I was obliged to keep a certain reserve.[29]

In tone, Raysse's film production is far from the stuff of propaganda—it reflects the experimental whimsy and free associations that numerous artists and filmmakers dabbled in at that time. In fact, in keeping with the advances of avant-garde cinema of the 1960s (whether in the spirit of Kenneth Anger or directly resonating with the proto-Maoist *politique ludique* of Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 film *La Chinoise*), Raysse adopted a cinematic language whose flow conflates aesthetic and political concerns in a stream-of-consciousness format. Disregarding narrative conventions, Raysse's films in these years combined his overall aesthetic vision with explicit references to the political themes (the escalating war in Vietnam, French nationalism) and radical social movements (the sexual revolution and drug cultures among them) of his time. When considered alongside his paintings, Raysse's cinematic oeuvre between 1966 and 1973 not only provides a larger cultural context for his work but also stands as profound proof of his political engagements, which would only intensify following the events of May 1968.

Photograph of the *Atelier Populaire* at the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, May 1968.

APRÈS 1968: LA LUTTE CONTINUE

> *"With air travel disrupted, I found the last ticket on a transatlantic ship called the* France. *The trip lasted five days in principle, but, gradually slowing down as the events were gathering momentum, our ship on the eighth day was still at sea. No more service on board, some of the crew were on strike, it turned to the* Raft of the Medusa. *We finally arrived in Dover on the ninth day. With a few others, we rented a boat and soon took our first steps in a strange Promised Land where there were no customs, no police, all activities extinguished. After a trip hitchhiking, I found myself in Paris and at the poster workshop of the Fine Arts. . . . While May '68 was a sham revolution, it was so sweet to think that we would change the world."*[30]
>
> —Martial Raysse

While 1968 was a watershed year for obvious reasons, the revolutionary movement that erupted on the streets of Paris was only the tip of the iceberg as far as the development of Martial Raysse's aesthetic and political radicalism was concerned, the bulk of his transformation occurring after the dust settled. As the '68 posters decried, "*La lutte continue*" ("The struggle goes on"). So too did Raysse's struggle continue for many years beyond the immediate aftermath of May 1968, but before it is possible to delve into the details of this transformational chapter in Raysse's life and work, it is necessary to set the stage with a brief recounting of the immediate milestones the artist traversed upon his return to France.

Having left New York for Paris immediately upon learning of the tumultuous events of May 1968, Raysse went directly to the Atelier

Populaire at the École des Beaux-Arts, where he joined in the propaganda poster making effort that had continued even after the riots had died down. It is in the studios at the Atelier that Raysse began a transformational process through which he voluntarily abandoned both his signature and the aesthetic authority it indicated in favor of this collective effort. These protest posters have now been mythologized and fetishized to an exponential degree, yet their significance in this instance lies not in their overt content or their look, but rather in the impact that the atelier experience and the collective act of poster making had on Raysse. Although he did not immediately abandon his own artistic practice after May 1968, it could be argued that his willingness to withhold his signature—and, by extension, forsake whatever art world "fame" he had accumulated in America—in favor of contributing anonymously to a collective action signaled a shift that would be further reflected in the increasingly militant and unorthodox activities he engaged in between 1969 and 1973. Although Raysse did produce "Art" as such in those years immediately after May 1968—including his hallucinatory *court-mettrage Camembert Martial Extra-Doux* (1969), his feature-length film *Le Grand Depart* (1970), and his series of *Formes Libres* (Free forms; 1969)—his post-1968 activities led to a complete rupture with the art world in 1970, when he announced his intention to break with "formal aestheticism." From the time of that announcement, Raysse withdrew from autonomous artistic activities in order to pursue collective work, and even joined a commune called PIG—a group of around twenty people who ritually and communally experimented with music, drawing, painting, and photography, as well as regularly published an eponymous journal. This chapter of his life

Photograph of the Atelier Populaire at the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, May 1968.

Opposite, left to right:

Student protests at the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, May 1968

Mai 68 Debut d'une Lutte Prolongée (May 68 Beginning of a Prolonged Struggle), poster produced by the *Atelier Populaire*, Paris, May 1968.

ultimately culminated in Raysse's eccentric and highly poetic "return" to art making under his own name—a move announced by the much mythologized and little understood 1974 body of work entitled *Coco Mato,* which will be discussed in greater depth below.

In order to truly understand what lay behind these radical turns and ruptures in Raysse's life and work, it is necessary to examine the Parisian sociopolitical context after May '68. If the student-led protests and labor strikes that had seized the city were intended to directly question the paternalistic, socially didactic, conservative policies of alienation that metastasized throughout the sociopolitical corpus of Charles de Gaulle's France, they actually led to the opposite result. Though a series of institutional occupations and wildcat strikes beginning with student protests at the Sorbonne in early May indeed effected the almost absolute paralysis of Paris until early June, these efforts did not end in the Socialist egalitarianism that protestors had envisioned, but instead effectively served to fortify the policies of de Gaulle. This reactionary turn of events confirms Jacques Lacan's famous retort to the student revolutionaries at the outset of May '68: "As hysterics, you demand a new master. You will get one."[31]

When, in the words of Raysse, "'68 proved to be a sham revolution," a dystopic pall was cast over Paris, and the veracity of Lacan's premonition was soon confirmed. The new master was a form of Socialism that, as Slovoj Žižek writes, "usurped the Left's rhetoric of worker self-management, turning it from an anti-capitalist slogan to a capitalist one. It was Socialism that was conservative, hierarchic, and administrative."[32] The fallout of this failure resulted in a European Left that was ideologically splintered into groups that can be categorized under three primary rubrics:

LA REGLE DE CE JEU EST FORT SIMPLE;D'AILLEURS LES JEU LES PLUS SIMPLES SONT
TOUJOURS LES PLUS COMPLIQUES ET NEANMOINS LES PLUS AMUSANTS PARCE QUE LA
SUBTILITE C'EST JUSTEMENT D'ETRE SIMPLE...COMME BONJOUR OU COMME UN ENFANT
ET POURTANT,QUOI DE PLUS COMPLEXE QU'UN SIMPLE ENFANT.UN ENFANT SIMPLE COM-
PRENDRA AISEMENT LA REGLE DE CE JEU;CE JEU DONT JE LAISSERAI A D'AUTRES LE
SOIN DE RETRACER L'HISTOIRE,QUE D'AILLEURS TOUT LE MONDE CONNAIT.CE JEU EST
VIEUX COMME LE MONDE ET MEME DANS LES TEMPS LES PLUS RECULES ON TROUVE,EN
CHERCHANT BIEN,DES TRACES EVIDENTES,PAR AILLEURS INDECHIFFRABLES,MAIS SUFFI
SAMMENT NETTES POUR NE LAISSER AUCUN DOUTE:NOS PERES Y JOUAIENT DEJA!!!!!!!
TOUS VOUS DIRONT COMBIEN IL EST CLAIR QUE CE JEU FUT A TOUTES LES EPOQUES
AUSSI POPULAIRE QUE LA VOIX DU PEUPLE LUI-MEME ET C'EST D'AILLEURS RECONFOR
TANT DE PENSER QUE TANT D'AUTRES AVANT NOUS......AUTRE PARTICULARITE QUE L'
ON SE DOIT DE SIGNALER POUR EN MIEUX HUMER LA SAVEUR : CE JEU S'EST TOUJOUR
JOUE SUR UNE GUITARE,RENVERSEE EVIDEMMENT COMME UNE CREME;ET LE MENEUR DE
JEU,CELUI QUI DISTRIBUE SE DOIT DE FRAPPER LA GUITARE DU POIGNET EN DISTRI-
BUANT DEVANT CHAQUE JOUEUR. LA FORME DE LA GUITARE DECIDE DU NOMBRE DE JOU-
EURS *.QUAND LA GUITARE APRES LA DISTRIBUTION,EST BIEN DESSINEE,C'EST QUE
LE NOMBRE DE JOUEURS EST BON;SINON N'INSISTE PAS ET TROUVEZ UN AUTRE JEU...
A PROPOS ON APPELLE TOUJOURS CE JEU

PIG

ET C'EST SUFFISAMMENT CLAIR POUR TOUT LE
MONDE.D'AILLEURS CE JEU EST CONNU DEPUIS L'ANTIQUITE.N'OUBLIEZ JAMAIS QUE
C'EST UN JEU DE CARTES ET QU'IL PEUT SE JOUER AVEC UN JEU DE CARTES NORMALE
* .S'IL EN RESTE ENCORE,ET QU'IL CONSISTE,FAUT-IL LE RAPPELER A NOUVEAU ?
DANS LA DISTRIBUTION A CHAQUE JOUEUR DE QUATRE CARTES EN PRENANT SOIN DE CE
QUE TOUTES LES CARTES SOIENT DISTRIBUEES ET QUE,MAIS VOUS M'AVEZ DEJA VU VE
NIR;IL S'AGIT ESSENTIELLEMENT,D'ABORD DE BIEN BATTRE LES CARTES.IL NE FAUT
SURTOUT PAS OUBLIER QUE CHAQUE CARTES DOIT Y FIGURER EN QUATRE EXEMPLAIRES
(QUATRE ROIS,QUATRE HUITS,QUATRE AS,ETC...)VOUS AVEZ DISTRIBUE LES CARTES
SUR LA GUITARE,NE JAMAIS OMETTRE LA GUITARE;C'EST LA TRADITION:ET IL EST
HORS DE QUESTION DE ... ENFIN LE JEU CONSISTE A FORMER DES CARRES * DE FIGU
RES IDENTIQUES.ET C'EST LE PLUS RAPIDE QUI GAGNERA,CAR,CHACUN DOIT ECHANGER
AVEC SES PARTENAIRES,L'UNE DES CARTES DONT IL VEUT SE DEBARASSER JUSQU'A OB
TENIR LE CARRE VOULU(N'IMPORTE LEQUEL QUATRE AS,QUATRE VALETS,...)TOUTES
LES CARTES ONT LA MEME VALEUR.POUR L'ECHANGE DES CARTES LA GUITARE EST IND-
ISPENSABLE COMME VOUS AVEZ PU VOUS EN RENDRE COMPTE. ET DES QU'IL A UN CARR
IL DOIT AVEC L'INDEX DE LA MAIN DROITE TENDU VERTICALEMENT ET BIEN FERME
POSER DELICATEMENT CET INDEX SUR LA JOUE DROITE ET CONTRE LE BORD DROIT DU
NEZ LE TOUT BIEN DISTINCTEMENT POUR QUE LE MANEGE SOIT VISIBLE PAR TOUS LES
ADVERSAIRES SINON LA PARTIE SERA REJOUEE ET LE TRICHEUR AURA UN GAGE.EVIDEM
MENT C'EST LE DERNIER JOUEUR A METRE SON INDEX SUR SON NEZ QUI PERD C'EST
DONC UN JEU DE VITESSE,VOUS L'AVEZ DEVINE.CHAQUE JOUEUR AYANT PERDU A LA PR
EMIERE FOIS UN "P" ;LA DEUXIEME FOIS UN "I" ;LA TROISIEME FOIS UN "G" DONC
IL EST " PIG " ET EST ELIMINE DU JEU.QUAND IL NE RESTE PLUS QUE DEUX ADVERS
AIRES LA PARTIE DEVIENT UN DUEL ET A CE MOMENT LE JOUEUR QUI MET SON INDEX
SUR SON NEZ SANS AVOIR UN CARRE S'EST "SUICIDE" ET DEVIENT "PIG".SI VOUS
N'AVEZ PAS BIEN SAISI.ECRIVEZ NOUS ON VOUS ENVERRA UN DESSIN...............

Cover of an undated issue of *PIG*, a journal published by the PIG commune.

Opposite: Page from an undated issue of *PIG*.

those searching for a radicalized corporeal pleasure (via experimentation with drugs and sex); those who pushed throughout the early 1970s for forms of incrementally more action-based political dissonance, realized through armed resistance and physical violence (as in Germany's *Rote Armee Fraktion* and Italy's *Brigade Rosse*); and those interested in investigating forms of mysticism that led believers to drop out, ceding contact with a society that they found permanently alienating to venture further into the wilderness of the soul. Raysse and his PIG associates found themselves straddling these radicalized options.

Though he remained loosely affiliated with various leftist political movements (such as the non-violent wing of the Italian group *La Lotta Continua* [Continuing Struggle]),[33] the early 1970s led Raysse and his comrades to conclude that change began not with revolution in the streets, but rather within the self. Attendant to this position was the theoretical stance that conventional art making, the art market, and the whole status quo of the art system are part of the state apparatus and therefore are corrupt. Without question, the pre-'68 art world had been supported, celebrated, and exhibited in state-sponsored institutions that now were viewed suspiciously as envoys for the state itself. Raysse's decision to abandon aesthetic formalism—the prevailing style of the pre-'68 art community—in 1970 is thus a shift that not only makes sense given this specific political climate but also is consistent with the series of formal and conceptual ruptures evident in his practice since its beginning.

Raysse's involvement with PIG is in many ways a direct manifestation of Žižek's analysis. While the collective did not necessarily generate discrete art objects, the time he spent there was a highly productive period for Raysse that not only marked his rejection of the idea of solitary art making but also opened crucial new artistic avenues via the group's interest in music and the publication of various types of ephemera. The six-minute film *PIG Music* (1971) serves as an "ethnoludique"[34] document of this radical period in Raysse's work. In an interview given to Anaël Pigeat on the occasion of the 2008 release of his collective films by MK2, the artist offered a series of playful comments about the project in response to Pigeat's inquiries:

AP: Where does the film's title come from?
MR: It is the music of the PIG Family.

Photos of the artist from his time with the PIG commune.

Opposite: Martial Raysse, *Le Sage sur le champignon* (The Sage on the Mushroom), 1970. Papier-mâché with tinted newsprint and 7 painted plaster balls, 13 ½ x 9 ½ x 9 ½ in. (34.5 x 24 x 24 cm).

Opposite: Martial Raysse, *Le Jardin* (The Garden), 1972. Wood, papier-mâché, and Buddha figurine, 10 ¼ x 13 ¾ x 27 ¾ in. (26 x 35 x 27 cm).

Publicité

COCOMATO
DE
MARTIAL RAYSSE
JEUDI 16 MAI 1974
A PARTIR DE 16 HEURES
25, RUE DU DRAGON - 75006 PARIS
INVITATION PERSONNELLE

Exhibition announcement published in *Le Monde* for *Coco Mato de Martial Raysse*, Rue du Dragon, Paris, 1974

AP: Without narration, the film shows a community playing music. Does the liberty of form accompany the liberty of tone?
MR: Rhythm drives all.
AP: Is the film a poem in images?
MR: That would be marvelous. [35]

Although the interview was given some four decades after *PIG Music* was created, the spirit and content of this exchange not only reveals Raysse's self erasure, enacted through the rhythms of collective creation, but also announces the poetic libido that he later channeled when he returned to making art under his own name. This film is the introductory key to the PIG years that directly gave birth to Raysse's little understood, iconoclastic series *Coco Mato*.

The *Coco Mato* works were made between 1970 and 1974, the year they were first exhibited, and they emerged into public view only briefly, after fully incubating in the spirit of Raysse's post-'68 experiences. Through a simple paid advertisement that ran in Parisian daily newspapers such as *Le Monde*, the public received a "private invitation" to a mysterious event: "*Coco Mato* by Martial Raysse. Thursday May 16, 1974, starting at 4 p.m. 25 rue Dragon, Paris, 6th arrondissement." [36] In this guerrilla exhibition organized by the artist's brother in a small, rented storefront, the *Coco Mat*o works were displayed simply on the walls and floor, without much explanation or fanfare.

The artist baptized this body of work with the Italian words "Coco Mato"—a slang term for a type of red-and-white spotted mushroom that resembles a plant from a fairy tale and is known for its hallucinatory and aphrodisiac effects. In keeping with their namesake, the *Coco Mato* "things" (Raysse prefers this term to more codified labels such as "painting" and "sculpture") are fantastical, sometimes cartoonish, precarious constructions erupting from a shaman's unconscious. Sometimes made of papier-mâché and deploying found objects such as string, feathers, figurines, beads, clothespins, bits of plastic, and other humble materials, these mysterious "things" seem born out of a dream, built to serve an unknown and unexplained ritual purpose. With the simplistic, almost naive aesthetic of this series, Raysse radically disassociates himself from the neon palette and obvious material seductions of his 1960s works. From the wooden

Martial Raysse, *La Ligne* (The Line), 1973. Electric wire, light bulb, feathers, and various pieces of wood and string, 141 ¾ x 23 ¾ in. (360 x 60 cm).

boxes filled with tiny handmade mushrooms, miniature clay unicorns, and human figures (such as *Le Jardin* [The Garden], 1972 and *Le Bleu de Licorne* [Blue Unicorn], 1973) to the more overtly magical *Le Sceptre* (The Scepter; 1970), the painstakingly handmade *Coco Mato* constructions telegraph a sense of childlike whimsy, aesthetic humility, and human fragility. Banished are the world of hygiene and spectacle, gone the demons of industrialized death. Raysse has explained that his *Coco Mato* works were simply an attempt "to speak to people."[37] The rue de Dragon exhibition was his portal to a new world where mysticism, introversion, and anti-formalism informed not only art and politics but also life itself.

Materially, the *Coco Mato* "things" connect Raysse to other neo-avant-garde artists of the late '60s and early '70s—especially those involved in the Arte Povera movement. In addition to their humble materials, the handmade and deliberately crafty qualities of these pieces give them resonance with projects such as conceptual artist Alighiero Boetti's (1940–1994) embroidery works (begun in 1971). Like Raysse, Boetti formally broke with his pre-'68 identity in the early 1970s, leaving behind Arte Povera in 1972 in order to push his interests in political art, experimentation with drug culture, and anti-elitist aesthetics to further ends. Boetti's famous truism of this period, "*Fuso Ma Non Confuso*" ("Mixed but not mixed up") might easily be applied to the heterogeneous rebus of Raysse's works and life in the 1970s. Raysse's penchant for the poetical and mystical in this period also finds a strong echo in the sentiments of other Italian artists, such as Arte Povera alumnus Pier Paolo Calzolari (b. 1943). In his post-'68 oeuvre, Calzolari, in parallel to Raysse, explored simple, elemental materials that were replete with spiritual or alchemical meanings. Calzolari's "organic palette" included fire, water, salt, lead, copper, neon, tobacco, moss, burnt wood, feathers, wax, butter, and plant leaves, materials that offered recourse to poetry and signaled an implicit rejection of the consumer advancements of the earlier 1960s—interests Raysse shared.

It is perhaps through this embrace of natural materials that Raysse and his artistic colleagues found solace amid the wasteland of post-'68 dystopia. The natural world was not just a realm of escape; unwilling to resort to the corrupt world that the events of May 1968 had unsuccessfully challenged, Raysse found in Nature a new possibility in his search for beauty, however ephemeral and unknowable. Although the *Coco Mato* series represents yet another rupture in Raysse's long and often iconoclastic artistic journey, this body of work remains intimately connected to previous iterations of his oeuvre via a narrative thread that continues to draw our attention to the struggle between nature and industry. In the *Coco Mato* "things" Raysse suggests an entropic arc within which all of our collective cultural gestures are destined to becoming glittering memorabilia catching light on the forest floor. In works that pair handmade papier-mâché mushroom sculptures loosely planted in dirt with the same types of five-and-dime flotsam and jetsam that typify his earlier works, *Coco Mato* testifies to Raysse's revised aesthetic-political return to nature. In his attempts "to speak to people," Raysse shuns the immediately identifiable consumer goods that populated

Left to right:

Martial Raysse, *La Papillote* (The Papillote), 1971. Papier-mâché, string, paint, glitter, glue, and plastic pearls, 5 7⁄8 x 16 7⁄8 x 3 7⁄8 in. (15 x 43 x 10 cm).

Martial Raysse, *Le Sceptre* (The Scepter), 1970. Wood, papier-mâché, feathers, beads, and string, 68 1⁄4 x 4 1⁄2 x 4 1⁄2 in. (173 x 11 x 11 cm).

Opposite, clockwise from top left:

Martial Raysse, *Sur la route d'El Paso* (On the Road to El Paso), 1971. Papier-mâché, blue sand, and various objects in wooden box, 6 ¼ x 9 x 8 ¼ in. (16 x 23 x 21 cm).

Martial Raysse, *Le Bleu de Licorne* (Blue Unicorn), 1973. Stones, sand, ashes, papier-mâché, paint, and plastic in wooden box, 7 x 9 ½ x 8 ¼ in. (18 x 24 x 21 cm).

Martial Raysse, *L'Innocent* (The Innocent), 1971. Papier-mâché, photograph, and various objects in wooden box, 8 ¼ x 9 x 8 ¼ in. (21 x 22.8 x 21 cm).

Martial Raysse, *Le sceau de Digpatchan* (The seal of Digpatchan), 1972. Papier-mâché and various objects in wooden box, 6 x 4 ¼ x 8 ¼ in. (15.5 x 20.5 x 22.5 cm).

This page: Martial Raysse, *Le génie de Boulaouanne* (The genie of Boulaouanne), 1972. Papier-mâché and various objects in wooden box, 7 x 9 ¼ x 8 ¼ in. (18 x 23.5 x 21 cm).

the artist's totemic monuments to capitalism, and in so doing suggests that the material products offered by an age (including those products typically categorized as being the goods of "high culture") may become momentary monuments when considered in the context of life itself.

Coming full circle, we might look to the writings of the prophet of Nouveau Réalisme himself, Pierre Restany, to better understand the incredible journey of Martial Raysse. In a descriptive report about his onetime protégé that he wrote for the influential Italian journal *Domus* in 1973, Restany evokes a panoply of cultural references to capture the magic and beauty of the *Coco Mato* works. His analysis references the "windows and doors of the '*maisons juives de Mogador à l'époque du comptoir portugais*" and the humble materials of a North African Souk before connecting Raysse's then-new works to the beauty of the desert. He concludes with what is perhaps the most concise metaphor for Raysse's practice that has ever been formulated:

> Free space. Space of the desert: Raysse made the desert around him in order to renew the means of communication. To create for himself the basis of a language that pulls towards expressing the essential of his vision . . . . After a long traversal of the desert, Raysse's objects make us arrive in another world. [The *Coco Matos*] carry in themselves the immense dignity of a struggle (*une épreuve*).[38]

Raysse indeed emerged from the desert of May 1968, not to fall prey to "a new master," as Lacan would have it, but to forge a mysterious, hopeful, and playful world that still clings to socialist ideals and sociological realities. Yet the "*épreuve*," or struggle, that Restany refers to—and that Raysse grappled with—cannot be located solely in the sociopolitical turmoil of Europe after May 1968. Raysse has forged a deeply complex oeuvre that plumbs the inner reaches of his mind and spirit as well as his intellectual and political concerns. He has foraged in the desert, searching for beauty, humanity, and political and aesthetic revolution, for communication and vision, traversing the seas of art history and the droughts of contemporary culture. While this essay is only a partial account of Raysse's continuing art practice, it is clear from the unparalleled creative and political arc of these works from the years 1960–74 that the artist's struggle is ongoing. For Raysse, *la lutte continue.*

This text is dedicated to Charles Fitzpatrick, another homme de gauche*.*

The author would like to acknowledge Alissa Bennett for her invaluable research assistance and her incisive editorial guidance with this essay.

NOTES

1. Martial Raysse, unpublished interview with the author, Spring 2013.
2. Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 106.
3. Martial Raysse, quoted in Lydie Brown, "Martial Raysse, Première partie: 'l'esthétique,'" *Zoom* (Paris) (1971): 63, 67.
4. For an excellent discussion of Buffet's reception in postwar France, see Eric Troncy,

"Je t'aime . . . moi non plus," in *Bernard Buffet: Maler, Painter, Peintre,* Udo Kittelmann and Dorothee Brill, eds., (Frankfurt am Main: MMK Museum fur Moderne Kunst, 2008), 13–25.
5. Martial Raysse, in "L'école de Nice à la Biennale de Paris," *Communications* (Nice) 4 (October–November 1961): 22.
6. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Plenty or Nothing: From Yves Klein's *Le Vide* to Arman's *Le Plein*," in *Premises: Invested Spaces in Visual Arts, Architecture, and Design from France, 1958–98*, Bernard Blistène, Alison M. Gingeras, and Alain Guilheux, eds. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1998), 96.
7. Martial Raysse, quoted in *Martial Raysse* (Los Angeles: Dwan Gallery, 1967), 196.
8. Buchloh, "Plenty or Nothing," 97.
9. Emmelyn Butterfield-Rosen, "La vitrine/L'éponge: The École de Nice and the 'Hygiene of Vision,'" in *New Realisms: 1957–1962, Object Strategies between Readymade and Spectacle* (Madrid and Cambridge, MA: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia and MIT Press, 2010), 68.
10. Jacket copy by Georges Perec from *Espèces d'espaces* (Paris: Galilee, 1974).
11. Perec attributes one of the sources for his idea "défaçader" to his admiration for a drawing by Saul Steinberg entitled *No Vacancy* that was published in the magazine *The Art of Living* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1952). Georges Perec, *Espèces d'espaces* (Paris: Galilee, 1974), 58–60. For a more complete discussion of *Le Plein* and its relationship to Perec, see my essay "Arman: *Le Plein*," in *Premises: Invested Spaces in Visual Arts, Architecture, and Design from France,* 138–41.
12. Martial Raysse, in Jean-Jacques Leveque, "La Beauté, c'est le mauvais goût," *Arts* (Paris) (June 16–22, 1965): 39.
13. Raysse discussed these events in an unpublished interview with the author, Spring 2013: "Effectively at the end of 1961, beginning of 1962, I made a sequence works featuring women's faces … that I then showed at Galerie Schmela in 1962. But when Sidney Janis's New Realist exhibition happened later in 1962, Pierre Restany, Villeglé and the other affichiste artists 'forbid' me to show them because they were readymade fanatics and they reproached me for touching my objects too much."
14. Butterfield-Rosen, "La vitrine/L'éponge," 65.
15. *Situationiste internationale* text, quoted in Tom McDonough, "Internationale Situationniste," in *Premises: Invested Spaces in Visual Arts, Architecture, and Design from France, 1958–98*, 166.
16. Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, 74.
17. Ibid., 78.
18. The Stedlijk's *Dylaby* exhibition—which takes its title from a contraction representing the expression *Dynamic Labyrinth*—has been much discussed in the art historical literature for its focus on environmental installations by Robert Rauschenberg, Daniel Spoerri, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Per Olof Ulvedt, and Jean Tinguely.
19. Linda Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty: The Visceral Eye*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 8.
20. See Otto Hahn, "Martial Raysse or The Solar Obsession," reprinted in this volume on pages 84-87.
21. Martial Raysse, "I have a thousand things to put in order," typed statement, November 1966; artist file, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Published in *Martial Raysse*, 17.
22. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles,* (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 17.
23. Orson Wells, quoted in Ibid., 18
24. Ibid., 18–20.
25. Julia Robinson, "Before Attitudes Became Form—New Realisms: 1957–1962," in *New Realisms*, 24.
26. "Art: Slice of Cake School," *TIME* magazine, May 11, 1962. Accessed April 30, 2013. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,939397,00.html.
27. Mark Francis, *Pop* (New York and London: Phaidon, 2005), 153.
28. Raysse, unpublished interview with the author, Spring 2013.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Jacques Lacan, quoted in Slavoj Žižek, "Homo Sacer as the Object of the Discource of the University," September 25, 2003. Accessed April 30, 2013. lacan.com/hsacer.htm.
32. Slavoj Žižek, "The Ambiguous Legacy of '68," *In These Times*, June 20, 2008. Accessed April 30, 2013. http://inthesetimes.com/article/3751/the_ambiguous_legacy_of_68/.
33. See Anaël Pigeat's essay on pages 91–107 in this volume for a discussion of Raysse's association with *La Lotta Continua.*
34. Raysse, unpublished interview with the author, Spring 2013.
35. Anaël Pigeat, *Martial Raysse: Les Films* (Paris: MK2 distribution, 2008), unpaginated DVD booklet.
36. See page 55 for a reproduction of the original advertisement in *Le Monde*.
37. Raysse, unpublished interview with the author, Spring 2013.
38. Pierre Restany, "Martial Deux-Martien Raysse," *Domus* (Milan) 519 (February 1973): 49.

Martial Raysse, *Songez, lui dit le prince* (Think, the prince said to him), 1971. Papier-mâché, sand, coal, and plastic figurine in wooden box, 6 x 9 x 8 ¼ in. (15.5 x 23 x 21 cm).

Opposite left to right:

Martial Raysse, *Tête d'oiseau sur fond azur* (Bird's Head on a Blue Background), 1970. Wood, papier-mâché, ferric sulfate, glitter, and feathers in wooden box, 5 ¼ x 7 x 8 ¼ in. (13 x 18 x 21 cm).

Martial Raysse, *Yoko tout là-bas* (Yoko Over There), 1971. Wood, sand, papier-mâché and paint in wooden box, 6 x 4 ¼ x 8 ¼ in. (15.5 x 10.5 x 21 cm).

ANCIENT FRIENDS

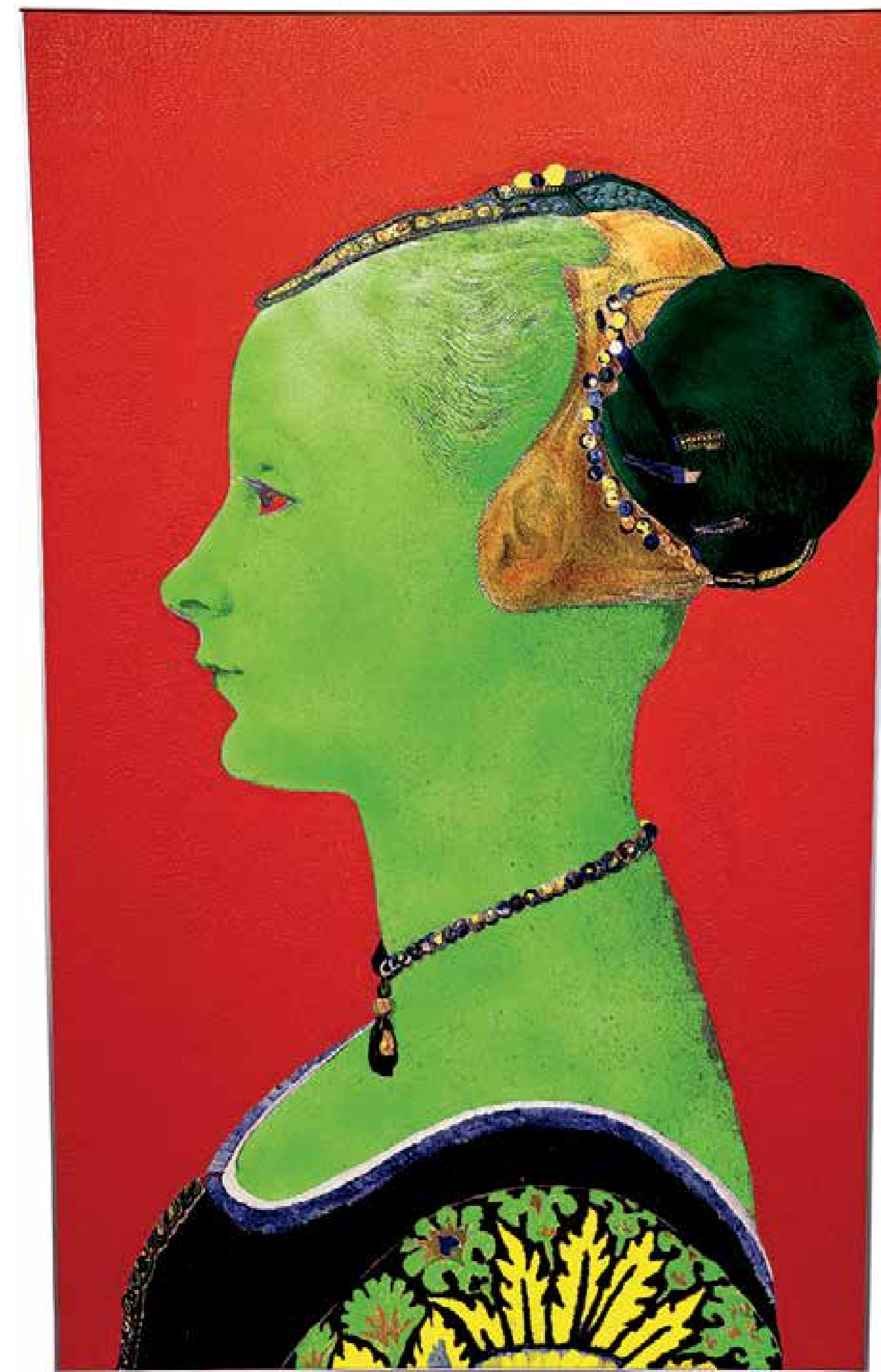
Alison M. Gingeras

> *"We know the great classical masterpieces only through reproductions. Reproductions falsify everything. I was often deceived when seeing the original works. But this, however, taught me something: the modern methods of incorporating the pictorial space in printing are very important. One can make a work not only with a paintbrush or trowel, but also with a printer, with a camera, with whatever modern means the world puts at our disposal. This led me to invent my own career."*
>
> —Martial Raysse[1]

Beginning in 1963, Martial Raysse (b. 1936) selected a handful of masterpieces from the annals of art history as the basis for what have come to be recognized as some of his most iconic and revolutionary paintings. In these art historical recapitulations, Raysse revisited figurative works by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–1494), Piero del Pollaiuolo (ca. 1441–ca. 1496), Jacopo Tintoretto (1519–1594), Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553), François Gérard (1770–1837), and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867). Though the works by these artists that Raysse took as sources span four centuries, the common denominator among them is that each falls into one of two categories: they are either portraits of attractive female sitters or genre scenes depicting a primarily female protagonist in an idealized or romanticized setting. This connective thread—the union of beautiful women and romantic imagery—is crucial to Raysse's own obsession with exploring the dichotomous correlations commonly drawn between beauty and distastefulness, originals and fakes. These works seem to enact one of Raysse's aphoristic sayings from the 1960s: "Beauty is bad taste. One must push this falseness to its limit. Bad taste is the dream of too much wanted beauty."[2]

Well ahead of the rise of conceptual practices such as rephotography or appropriation art, and in an age before the advent of Photoshop, Raysse subjected each of his source works to a similar cut-and-paste procedure in the creation of his own paintings. Using photomechanical reproductions of the original masterpieces, Raysse isolated the main figures that occupy each composition and transferred them to canvas—often cropping,

Oppoiste: Martial Raysse, *Portrait of an Ancient Friend,* 1963. Oil and collage on canvas, 59 ½ x 38 in. (151 x 96.5 cm).



obscuring, or modifying background details. He then applied his by-then signature palette of shocking neon hues to the skin of these subjects, while also over-painting details of the original canvases with similarly garish flourishes. In numerous cases Raysse created eccentric three-dimensional reliefs on top of this imagery, adding found objects (such as plastic flowers) and neon lights. These touches, along with the introduction of multiple picture planes, serve to embellish, distort, or amplify the meanings of the original works.

Although Raysse's art historical "remakes" all bear poetically playful titles, such as *Portrait of an Ancient Friend* (1963) or *Conversation printanière* (1964), they are often collectively referred to under the unofficial title *Made in Japan* (the majority of their titles begin with those words). The reference to Japan is deeply revelatory and in fact strikes at the heart of these works' specific radicality; as the artist explained, "the title of the series *Made in Japan* was a play on the aptitude of the Japanese to remake Western paraphernalia less expensively and more efficiently. I saw myself a bit in this light."[3]

The flawed mimesis inherent in Japan's own "knock-offs" of Western culture and its commodities (as seen in the countless Japanese Beatles cover bands or remakes of Mickey Mouse and Coca-Cola) is at the heart of the conceptual raison d'etre of Raysse's practice. The slogan "Made in Japan" evokes a vast sociocultural paradigm of the postwar period, signaling a phenomenon that was about not just the appropriation of Western goods but also the cross-cultural counterfeits this ethos produced. Designed as mistranslations of culturally iconic Western objects and social commodities, these purposefully overwrought, distorted, or hyper-amplified versions of popular Western products were remade and transformed to suit Japanese (or, more broadly, Asian) sensibilities.[4] Likewise, Raysse's art historical references can neither be understood as mere appropriations nor as pastiche-like alterations in the style of sociopolitical "détournement" proposed by Guy Debord and the Situationists in the 1950s. The *Made in Japan* series must ultimately be considered outside of these inadequate art historical constructs. With these works, Raysse pioneers a new type of artistic remake—something more akin to an act of aesthetic and conceptual resuscitation. Like Doctor Frankenstein, Raysse is breathing new life into dead bodies, reviving and transforming the consciousness of each player in his pantheon of "Ancient Friends."

Raysse in front of advertisement ca. 1964–1965

It is essential to recall that in the context of Pop art's high period (1963–65), Raysse's loving embrace of the Old Masters was deeply provocative because it deliberately subverted Pop's relish for the new and the modern. This asynchronous gesture also betrayed Raysse's overall artistic philosophy, which suggested that art, no matter how avant-garde, engaged in a continuing dialogue with the ideologically problematic history of earlier painting practices. Raysse had to reach into the past in order to move forward in the present. In his hands, these long deceased beauties, whether the patrician lady taken from Pollaiuolo's Renaissance portrait or the reclining bather from Ingres's Orientalist fantasy world, have become neon-colored zombies resurrected from the dusty tomb of art history to conform to our contemporary world's bad taste.

NOTES

1. Martial Raysse, excerpt from an interview with Guy de Belleval, "Je fais n'importe quoi," *Le Journal de Geneve* (Geneva) 36 (February 12–13, 1966): 19.
2. Martial Raysse, interview with Jean-Jacques Leveque, "La beaute c'est le mauvais gout," *Arts* (Paris) (June 16–22, 1965), 39.
3. Martial Raysse, interview with the author, April 2013.
4. For a scholarly discussion of this phenomenon, see Joseph J. Tobin, ed., *Re-Made in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

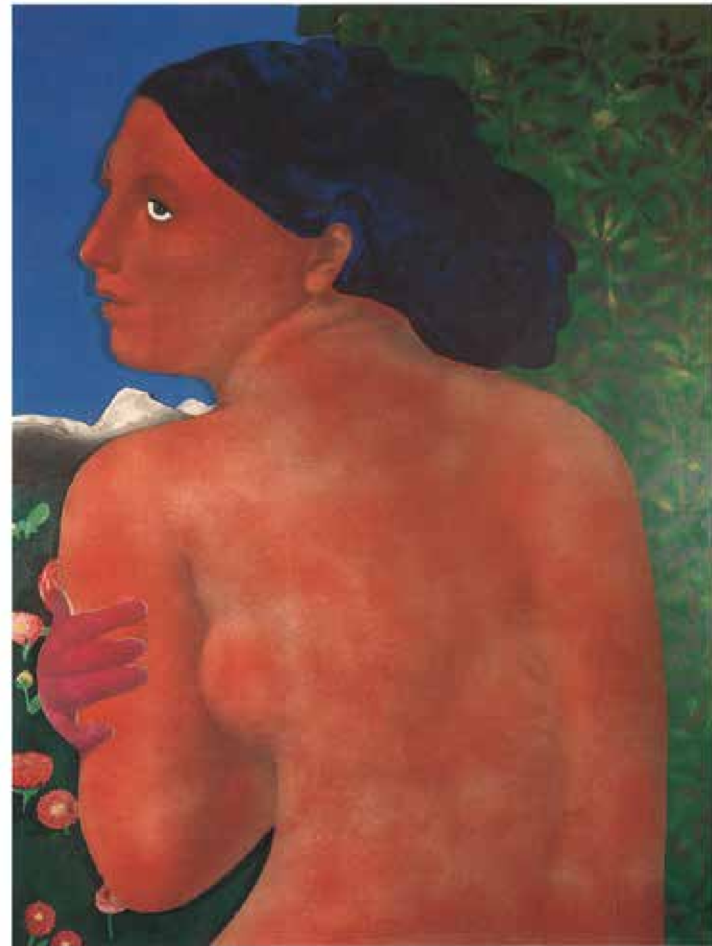
Left to right:

Martial Raysse,
Made in Japan, 1964.
Photomechanical reproductions and wallpaper with airbrush ink, gouache, ink, tacks, peacock feathers, and plastic flies on paper mounted on fiberboard, 51 ⅛ x 96 ¼ in. (129.8 x 244.3 cm).

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La Grande Odalisque,* 1814. Oil on canvas, 36 x 63 ¾ in. (91 x 162 cm).

In *Made in Japan* (1964) Raysse reworks Ingres's illustrious 1814 painting *La Grande Odalisque*, a picture commissioned for Napoleon's sister, Queen Caroline Murat, that has long been treasured as an iconic portrayal of idealized feminine purity and mystique. Despite being a self-proclaimed "conservative" and having been considered a standard-bearer for the rigorous Neoclassical style, Ingres nevertheless courted scandal with this depiction of a reclining concubine, which was seen as a direct assault on painterly conventions. When it was presented at the Salon in 1819, the public and critics alike were dismayed by the Odalisque's implausible anatomical structure—her preposterously long back seemed to have too many vertebrae, her arms did not match up to the same length, and the alignment of her legs was physically implausible. Nature at its finest, Ingres seems to suggest, cannot summon sufficient beauty for his painting. Instead, the Odalisque is clearly a creature of the artist's fantasy, luring the viewer with the hyperbolized suppleness of her curves and her direct yet imperturbable gaze.

Yet what Raysse appears to be calling attention to is the fact that for all of her sumptuousness and erotic readiness, Ingres's Odalisque—revered by such modern masters as Picasso and Matisse and endlessly replicated—has become nothing but a vacuous and washed-out contour of her former self. The fresh and shockingly modern presence of *La Grande Odalisque* could not be sustained as she was repackaged for the market as a consumable image. In rendering her flesh a burnished green hue and planting a real peacock-feathered fan in her hand, Raysse's *Made in Japan* attempts to jolt the Odalisque back into life, reinscribing her with a potency that arrests our attention and captivates our senses.



In his revisitation of immediately recognizable, historical European paintings, Raysse often concentrated his efforts on altering elements that were aesthetically central to the original source material. In his 1964 work *Made in Japan en martialcolor*, Raysse's focus is a drastic color reinterpretation of the fleshy verisimilitude presented by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's 1807 painting *Half-Portrait of a Bather*.

One of three works that Ingres was required to send to Paris while a student at the French Academy in Rome, *Half-Figure of a Bather* offers an immediately legible example of the artist's obsessive interest in rendering canvases that reflect a perfected interpretation of the human body. The painting reflects the depths to which Ingres was influenced by Mannerism during his stay in Italy, specifically in regards to the subject's slightly exaggerated form and the use of light and shadow in the depiction of her skin.

The title of Raysse's reinterpretation is particularly interesting; *Made in Japan en martialcolor* offers us a version of the painting that presents the skin of its subject in flat and mottled red, the details of her hair and headscarf deleted by an amorphous expanse of matte blue paint, her eye glowing with the artificiality of pure white paint. The background of the painting is likewise altered—its muted landscape suddenly populated with purposefully naive looking flowers and fully rendered green leaves. The suggestion made when the title is paired with the canvas is one that addresses the possibilities that erupt when artworks that have been historically exalted within the Western canon are (mis)interpreted within other cultures.

Left to right:

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Half-Figure of a Bather,* 1807. Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 ¾ in. (51 x 42.5 cm).

Martial Raysse, *Made in Japan en martialcolor,* 1964. Paint, collage, and photographic reproduction on board, 45 ¾ x 35 x 2 in. (116 x 89 x 5 cm).

Raysse's *Made in Japan, Tableau turc et invraisemblable* (1965) is part of a series of works that riff on celebrated nineteenth-century masterpieces by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. In this painting Raysse revisits Ingres's *The Turkish Bath* (1863), a tableau whose overt eroticism was in its own day made palatable to the Parisian public by its exotic framing: in the 1860s an Orientalist craze had swept up the European bourgeoisie.

Literally translating as "a Turkish and improbable painting," the title of Raysse's picture reiterates the double-meaning of the term "improbable" in French, stressing its definition as something that defies both rationale and physical semblance. Raysse here seems to be taking Ingres to task for his "unlikely" rendering of the scene—conveyed through his lack of familiarity with the subject matter (Ingres had never visited Turkey and the women he depicted are clearly white Europeans) as well as in the composite rendering of the figures (which has resulted in forms that defy the laws of anatomy). Rather than being painted from live models as the prevailing academic style demanded, the figures in *The Turkish Bath* are derived from Ingres's obsessive process of reworking various parts of his earlier works in an attempt to arrive at the "essence" of idealized femininity.

Raysse literally explodes the highly constructed underpinnings of Ingres's masterpiece by introducing the iconic bathing figures in different planes and superimposing them within an extremely flat and compact space. In trampling the figures' statuesque forms with an over-wash of garish fluorescent colors and planting them in what appears to be a dark room lined with vulgar wallpaper, Raysse presents these feminine icons as bright and zombie-like apparitions of a beauty that never really was.

Left to right:

Martial Raysse*, Made in Japan, Tableau turc et invraisemblable,* 1965. Paint on canvas with plywood-mounted photo collage, 54 x 83 in. (137 x 211 cm).

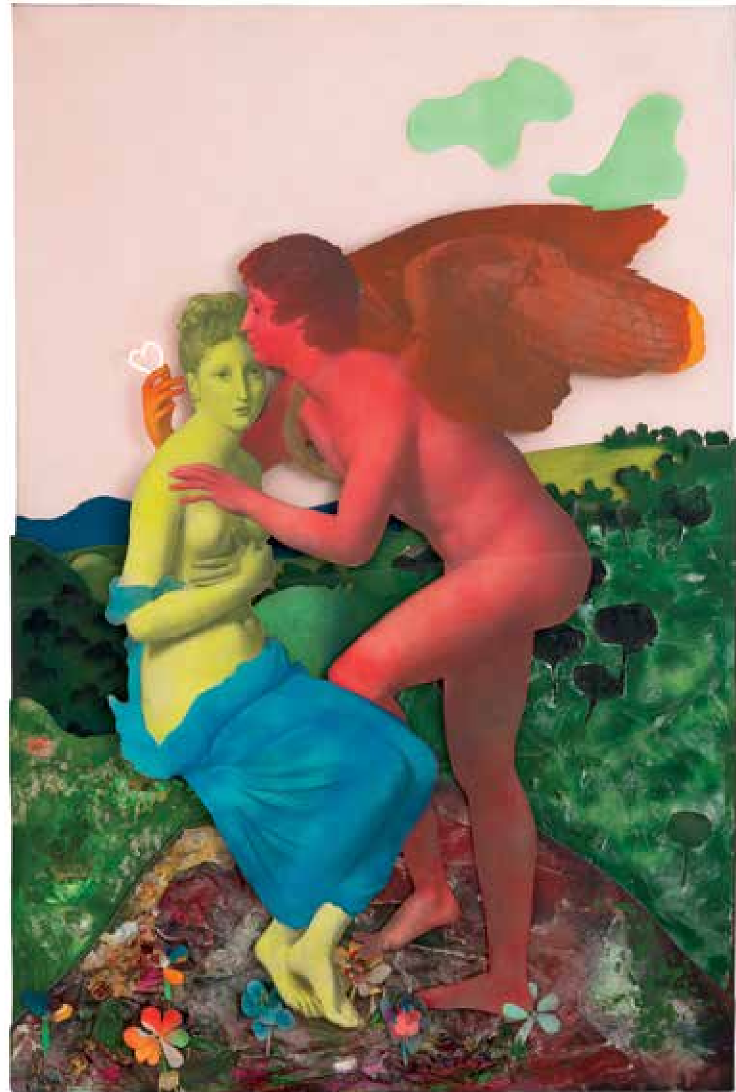
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *The Turkish Bath,* 1863. Oil on wood, 44 ½ in. (108 cm) diam.

Raysse's 1963 painting *Made in Japan* takes on the quintessential Orientalist tableau: Ingres's *Odalisque with a Slave* (1839–40). Returning at the age of sixty to his beloved subject, a concubine reclining on her bed, Ingres further tapped into his imaginings of the Near Eastern world by setting her in an intricately crafted harem room complete with Persian textiles and woodwork, arabesque-patterned tiles, red satin curtains, and a brass hookah. A cross-legged maid engrossed in playing a Turkish lute flanks the bed. The entire room speaks to sensual allurement—the curved patterns reiterate the Odalisque's voluptuous nude figure, and her startlingly crisp and pale skin is set in sharp relief against the hazy dusk overlaying the room. Her contours both stand in contrast to and seem to draw forth the dark figure of the guard in the background. And yet in the clarity of its lines and the composed atmosphere of the scene, in which each element is perfectly counterbalanced against another, Ingres's harmonious tableau of quiet splendor harks back to the values of the classical artists he venerated. In this tour-de-force of painterly control we may see Ingres staking out his position in opposition to the Romantic painters, taking part in the epic polemics of the time, which pitted the importance of line and statuesque form on the one hand against that of expressive color and dynamism on the other. Nowhere do Ingres's own aesthetic affinities and attendant disdain become more evident than in taking up a theme favored by his Romanticist rivals, chief among them Eugène Delacroix.

In his own reprise of the painting, Raysse strips all of the details of the chamber that Ingres had so painstakingly rendered. Instead, Raysse's sole charge is aimed at the Odalisque, and under his hands she is transformed from a smooth, statuesque figure into a blotch of hot-pink and seemingly reverberating flesh whose features are barely legible. In *Made in Japan*, Raysse appears to be dealing his ancient friend Ingres the full blow of color—the very thing that the old master had aligned against—and thus reinscribes himself into the age-old debate that was long a prime division within painterly tradition.

Martial Raysse, *Made in Japan,* 1963. Photo collage, oil, and wood on canvas, 49 ¼ x 75 ¾ in. (125 x 192.5 cm).

Opposite: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Odalisque with Slave,* 1839–40. Oil on canvas, 28 ⅜ x 39 ½ in. (72.1 x 100.3 cm).



Raysse's *Tableau simple et doux* (Sweet and Simple Painting; 1965) reprises François Gérard's allegorical depiction *Psyche and Cupid,* a work whose debut at the Parisian Salon in 1798 caused heavy consternation among the Neoclassical painters who dictated the *bon-ton* of the époque. The controversy surrounding the painting was largely due to its idiosyncratic take on Neoclassicism—while its subject matter adhered to the then-championed trope of resuscitating classical myths of antiquity, Gérard's treatment of the figures was seen as overly sensual and found to be lacking the veneer of stoicism and solemnity found in more canonical works. The erotic charge of *Psyche and Cupid* constituted a deviation from the ceremonious approach of Gérard's mentor, the revered Neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David, and was possibly what set him on a track away from the acclaimed genre of history painting and onto the "softer"—albeit more lucrative—route of portraiture.

Raysse's *Tableau simple et doux* harks back to the affected sensuousness of Gérard's painting and pushes its overlay of artifice to the extreme. Here Raysse supplants the celebrated delicacy of Gérard's porcelain-like figures with imperfect photographic renderings, obliquely referring to the process of erased materiality that the original painting has been subjected to in its countless reproductions throughout the years, as well as the cultural elision effected by its passage from icon to cliché. In its crude application of bright fluorescent coloring and the incorporation of such kitsch signifiers as plastic flowers and a neon heart, *Tableau simple et doux* is anything but a "simple and sweet painting." A hyper-realized pastiche, the tableau posits a usurping of French delicacy by consumption-driven frenzy and angst.

Left to right:

François Gérard, *Psyche and Cupid*, 1798. Oil on canvas, 73 ¼ x 52 in. (186 x 132 cm).

Martial Raysse, *Tableau simple et doux* (Sweet and Simple Painting), 1965. Paint, photo collage, and neon on canvas, 76 ¾ x 51 ¼ in. (195 x 130 cm).

Left to right:

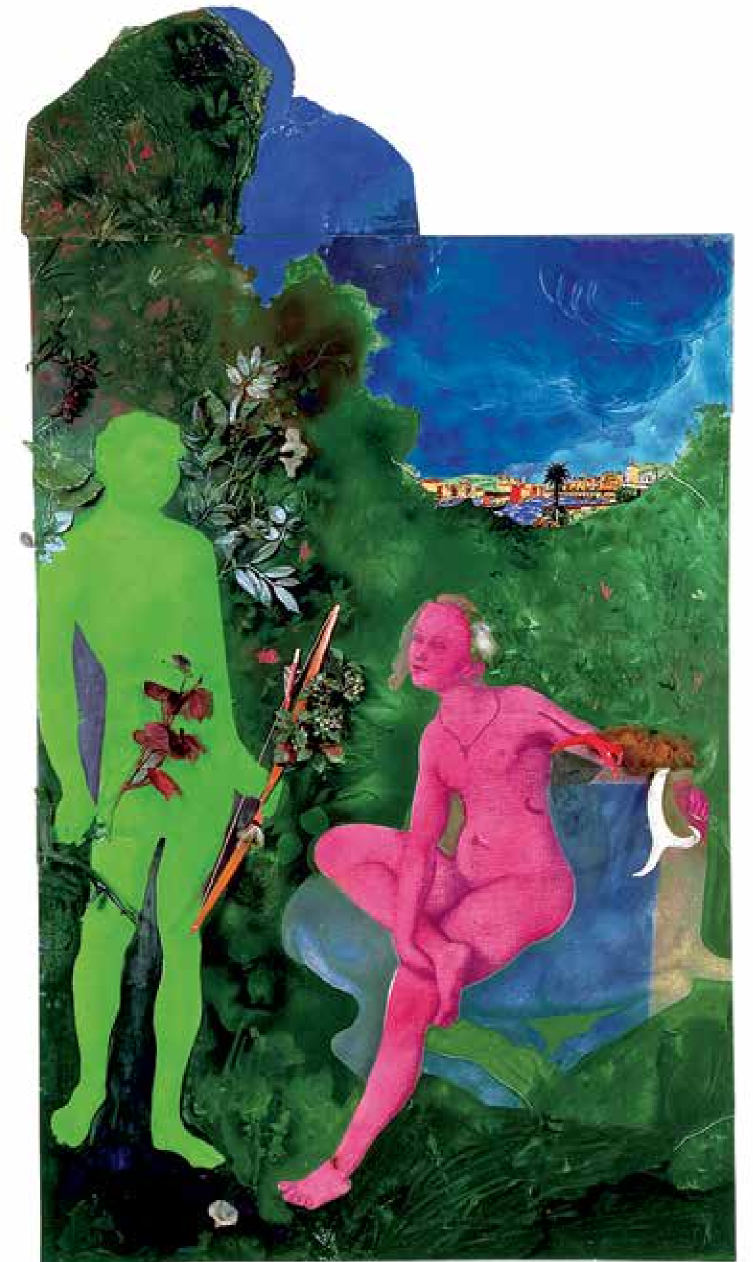
Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Landscape with Apollo and Diana,* 1530. Copper beech wood, 20 ½ x 14 ½ in. (51.8 x 36.6 cm).

Martial Raysse, *Conversation printanière,* 1964. Oil and assemblage on canvas, 90 x 100 in. (229 x 254 cm).

Raysse's *Conversation printanière* (1964) is based on a 1530 panel by Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Landscape with Apollo and Diana*, whose taut yet exultant erotic mood serves as a distinctive precursor to nineteenth-century sensibilities and offers a crucial point of departure to the lineage that Martial Raysse traces in his arc of historical paintings. Cranach's dramatic painting exemplifies the revival of the Late Gothic style that was favored by the Saxon aristocracy at the time, evident in its dramatic and unmodulated shifts between light and dark areas and in the type of body ideal that it harked back to (a type often seen in German woodcuts), in which a disproportionately small and high upper body part is counterbalanced by an elongated pelvic area and legs. Its subject matter, too, was popular among Cranach's patrons. As a thematics rooted in classical mythology, it meant that painters were able to indulgently depict an intimate rendezvous in nature, full of frivolous ease, under an assumed veil of gravity that spoke to its own illustrious tradition of depictions.

The warm encounter between the twin Greek gods Apollo and Diana was a favorite subject of Cranach and he returned to it on several occasions. Under his hands, the figures are portrayed as masters who inhabit nature confidently and luxuriantly. Their unabashed display of nudity relates the scene to the casual eroticism of Adam and Eve prior to The Fall: the landscape of mountains seems to beckon at the very sight of Apollo's languid pose, and Diana's way of matter-of-factly sitting on the stag betrays her control of the wild life as the goddess of the hunt.

Featuring Raysse's typical color conversion and an accumulation of artificial flowers that drastically alters our perception of the source material's treatment of perspectival distance, *Conversation printanière* converts the idealized Jerusalem in the background of Cranach the Elder's canvas into a view of Raysse's native Nice.



Martial Raysse installing *Raysse Beach* for the exhibition *Dynamisch Labyrinth* (Dynamic Labyrinth, also known as *Dylaby*), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, August–September, 1962.

Martial Raysse installing *Raysse Beach* for the exhibition *Dynamisch Labyrinth* (Dynamic Labyrinth, also known as *Dylaby*), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, August–September, 1962.

Installation views of *Raysse Beach* in *Dynamisch Labyrinth* (Dynamic Labyrinth, also known as *Dylaby*), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, August–September, 1962.

Installation view of *Raysse Beach* in *Dynamisch Labyrinth* (Dynamic Labyrinth, also known as *Dylaby*), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, August–September, 1962.

MARTIAL RAYSSE OR THE SOLAR OBSESSION

Otto Hahn

A hysterical, exasperated, lyrical mood characterizes Martial Raysse's work. Flowers, women, landscapes covered by table cloths of clashing colors are carried away by a delirious dream of beauty. But, in the midst of this ecstatic vertigo, in the midst of this extravagance of flowers, of tints, of light masked by the beatitude of fluorescent space, there is a whole universe of cold and exhibitionistic idols. They are the mannequins of the 5- and 10-cent store, of the fashion magazines, mute girls offered and insensitive. Under the most rare positions they remain immobile, strangers, neither accomplices nor comedians. One can transvestite them or mask them; their bodies are objects one can strip or dress or decorate, but the dream slides over them as it does over the world; it does not alter its indifferent planitude.

In the depths of each Martial Raysse painting there is the image of an inaccessible world, where dreams of conquest fail and the pursuit of a dream of grandeur is nothing else but lonely, desperate megalomania, since, in Raysse, passion freed from exaltation hides a will to deny reality. It is not by chance that one of his first paintings of 1959 represents a box of detergent in a plastic net; for Martial Raysse, beauty is above all neatness and health. After having cleansed the world, he rebuilds it, including only new aseptic elements: plastic, inorganic material, frigid and chemically pure, which, without interior life, is guaranteed against putrefaction and death.

But after the cleaning, life has to be blown in. This is Martial Raysse's second obsession, materialized in a tableau-object of 1960 where one sees a red liquid displace itself in a transparent plastic tube: *Transfusion*. This work symbolizes his pace and resumes his painterly activity; to artificially penetrate life, to beautify; to reach by any means the highest degree of intensity. This desperate passion is translated in the works by the obsessive presence of artificial beauty and cosmetic products: lipstick, false eyelashes, nail polish, hair spray, sun tan oil, powder puffs, necklaces, bracelets; not precious jewels but a bevy of 5- and 10-cent store things. Nothing counts but the appearance, the disguise. This is why the mirror plays such a role as much as the magazine photos; it is not reality that matters, but appearance; and on the cold surface of the mirror, truth and artifice are equal.

Opposite: Color Polaroids from Martial Raysse's archive, ca. 1962.

Carried on by an exasperated need of beautifying the world, he uses women as support for his dreams, just as he uses paintings of Old Masters in his series *Made in Japan*: Each time the procedure is the same, either he takes very beautiful girls or works by Ingres or Cranach, those masters of troubled eroticism. Fascinated by the sensuality of line he seizes these elements, making them receive a "sun" treatment that in turn washes them, dries them, and exalts them.

*

The *Raysse Beach* of 1962, first realized at the Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum, is particularly important to his evolution. It corresponds to the definite organization of his vocabulary. Invited to the exhibition *Dynamic Labyrinth*, or *Dylaby*, Raysse makes an environment that re-creates what he mostly is envious of; what in Amsterdam he misses the most: the sea, the sun, the women in bathing suits. He invents a beach with its elements borrowed from the 5- and 10-cent store of which he makes his paradise: symbol of profusion, the department store offers perfect objects, not yet degraded by men, and the displays propose the myth of happiness accessible through things, reassuring that all the world's horrors can be dominated thanks to a series of utensils, that life can be rendered beautiful by some operation of make-up and decoration. It is Martial Raysse's dream and here he takes elements of his "beach": a plastic wading pool represents the sea. Plastic flowers and artificial toys float on the water. Around the swimming pool are all the symbols of summer: multicolored towels, sunglasses, beach hats. On the wall a large photo of girls in bathing suits and on the floor a mannequin in a bathing suit. Lamps re-create Mediterranean light and radiators diffuse a torrid heat. A neon sign over the entrance bears the title *Raysse Beach*.

In itself this composition is nothing except an exercise of autosublimation of the sensibility, a psychodrama or a happening that objectifies a dream. It is outside the Art domain but strictly related, since any artistic activity takes its source in alienation and thus strives for an imaginary compensation for the fragmented vitality. The source of *Raysse Beach* is the same as its compensation but away from the repressive strengths of aesthetic habit that conveys the traditional instruments, brush and paint. The composition of an environment is a metaphor for art and as such has to be analyzed in order to fix its phenomenological structure. Martial Raysse thus settles the essential points of his language; he ascertains first that in his dream everything is artificial: false lights, false heat, false jewels, false women. . . . All is mere pretense and nothing else but accumulation makes it acceptable. Also, you can't let the game carry you away and take the pretense for the thing itself. It is necessary that one simulation dismantles the other and makes it relative; the mannequin in plaster is resting by the photo of the live models. In a recent painting, the painted grass is continued beyond the canvas with plastic grass and ends with a green neon tube.

Martial Raysse pushes even further the systematization of his antinaturalism; since the imaginary universe is nothing but substitutes, one has to invent them one after the other. For Raysse the question is not to make a painting resemble a prairie or a portrait but to invent a substitute for them: a photo, a photocopy, trimmed paper, neon, or flocked canvas. . . . No matter what, the condition is to fragment the identity and widen the distance from reality. Raysse wants to remain in the domain of the illusion of the dream. So that the dream will not risk being taken for reality, he multiplies it in the interior of the same work: some of his paintings are collages of several dreams, where founded dreams are also integrated—"rêves trouvés" as one says "objet trouvé"—those naive postcards from Nice serving sometimes as background.

Among others, there is also the dream of the bad painting that he exploits in the series of "awful paintings." The bad taste is the dream of too much wanted beauty. Raysse recognizes himself in the "awful paintings," since he also is looking for beauty at any price and there is a clownesque derision of himself in the mountains overloaded with paint. While over-multiplying the ecstasy, he keeps a bitter lucidity that he feeds even with his sculptures in unstable equilibrium, which gives a haloing, exasperated image that tenses the nerves. In it there is the refusal to install oneself in a state of apathy, in static rest. Instead there is need to provide the uncomfortable. The dissonant colors achieve this end: they transform beauty into a strident scream.

Each painting of Martial Raysse's is a new invention, a step forward, which states a new reference and unveils surprising archetypes of beauty. Since the imaginary universe is always based on elements borrowed from reality, Raysse's work objectively ends in integrating the plastic motives of modern civilization. Engineer of vision, he discovers the new qualities of technique, whose scattered elements he reassembles to restitute them with an invented order and a new destination.

So continuing his sumptuous delirium in research of the lost paradise that never existed, Martial Raysse inscribes himself amongst the very rare creators of myth.

1965

Translated from the French by Anna Nosei Weber

This text originally appeared in *Martial Raysse,* Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, 1967.

Martial Raysse, *A propos de New York en peinturama* (About New York in *Peinturama*), 1965. Mixed-media assemblage with flocking on canvas and Super 8 film projection, 40 ½ x 65 ¾ in. (103 x 167 cm).

Martial Raysse, *Homéro-Presto*, 1967 (still). 35mm, CinemaScope, sound, 10 min.

MARTIAL RAYSSE, PAINTER-FILMMAKER

Anaël Pigeat

"In film, as in painting, new techniques are invented every day, for film is not what people think it is."[1] With this statement, Martial Raysse (b. 1936), an artist who has often mistakenly been associated with Pop art, reminds us that he was among the signers of the manifesto of Nouveau Réalisme (New Realism) penned by art critic Pierre Restany in 1960. This new movement was centered on new ways of perceiving and representing the real. Raysse was actually some ten years younger than the other Nouveau Réalistes, but his personality and his youth led him to preserve his independence and to remain on the fringes of the movement. Originally a painter and assemblage artist, he began to work with film in 1964, and eventually experimented with video as well. He continues to work in these media today.

Among the many painters who were drawn to film in the 1920s (including Fernand Léger, Man Ray, and Salvador Dalí), it was Marcel Duchamp and his *Anémic Cinéma* (1926) who was of particular interest to the New Realists. Restany makes reference to Duchamp in a text he published on the occasion of *À 40º au-dessus de Dada* (Forty Degrees Above Dada), an exhibition held at J Gallery, Paris, from May 17–June 19, 1961, that positioned New Realism in relation to the early twentieth-century avant-garde movement.[2] Some of the Dada "artists' films" could be seen in Paris during the 1960s, notably those of Man Ray, which appeared together with a "film about Marcel Duchamp and his work" in the program of the Workshop de la Libre Expression (Workshop of Free Expression) at the American Center in Paris from May 25–30, 1964.[3]

Experimental film in the United States began to develop with particular intensity during the 1950s, having been fostered in New York by Jonas Mekas's The Film-Makers Coop (est. 1962) and by *Film Culture.* In 1963 Mekas and P. Adams Sitney traveled throughout Europe screening American avant-garde films that were to be presented during that year's Experimental Film Festival in Knokke-le-Zoute, Belgium.[4] The Americans' participation in the festival was quite remarkable that year; their contributions were the most important in both quantity and quality. Through the presentation of films by Stan Brakhage, Ed Emshwiller, Kenneth Anger, Gregory Markopoulos, and Robert Breer, the American "underground" was revealed to a European public.

From September to November 1967 the Cinémathèque française presented a major retrospective of underground cinema organized by Henri Langlois. Titled *Avant-garde pop et Beatnik* (Avant-Garde, Pop, and Beatnik), the exhibition featured many American experimental films. Nevertheless, few films by French artists were shown at the Cinémathèque during this period; notably absent were those of Martial Raysse. The films of Raysse were available only infrequently, and then only for insiders, appearing, for example, at the Biennale de Paris or at the Galerie de Givaudan in 1968. There was little interest in Raysse's work among critics, whether specialists in film or in the plastic arts. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, as Michael Caen wrote in the *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1968, "avant-garde film places such extreme demands upon the eyes and the intellect that few normal individuals are able to stand it without sustaining irreversible physical damage."[5] This may also explain the fact that the first French film cooperative, the Collectif Jeune Cinéma, did not appear until 1971.[6] Is it necessary to differentiate between the work of painter-filmmakers and that of the literary filmmakers of the Cinemathèque? Is this separation a specifically French phenomenon?

Beyond positioning the films of the painter-filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s in the context of their time and their contemporary critical reception, it is important to examine the place film held within the overall bodies of work of these artists. Is film simply a one-time or infrequent aspect of their practices or does it represent a major form of expression that has persisted throughout their careers? Do these artists utilize film as a distinctive device or rather as an extension of the act of painting?

Martial Raysse is one of the most interesting of the French painter-filmmakers to emerge in the 1960s. His filmography is very extensive and holds a key position in his art practice. Beginning in 1964, his films appeared as the logical evolution of his earlier works. They revealed a very specific and individual creative process and echoed the paintings, installations, and sculptures of the same period. Ultimately, as will be explored further below, his films presage the developments of his future work while simultaneously representing a genuine coherence between the first and second periods of his painterly oeuvre, a fact rarely realized or commented upon.

SUZANNA, SUZANNA

The films of Martial Raysse embody a natural evolution from his previous works. The artist came to film gradually, motivated by an ongoing interest that, little by little, was applied across his art practice. In the early 1960s he started using neon lights in his installations and pictures. This colored light, with its moving contours, expressed a desire to extend his pictures beyond their boundaries. *Suzanna, Suzanna*, created in 1964, marked a major stage in the integration of cinematic concerns in his painterly work. "I wanted to mix film with painting," he commented regarding this picture.[7] Here the figure of Susanna, inspired by the Tintoretto painting *Susanna and the Elders* (1555–56, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), is painted, while film footage of an older man, represented by Arman (1928–2005), a fellow artist and friend of Raysse, is projected at the edge of the canvas. A "screen space"[8] is thus introduced into the work. A few years later, in 1967, Raysse pushed the limits of realistic representation further with the creation of his *Formes en liberté* (Free Forms). In these works the depiction of a woman's face is gradually simplified, culminating in a radical stylization. This series comprises a variety of materials, including drawings on cardboard or cloth and projections created using a system of slides. In many *Formes en liberté* the woman's profile appears in color on a wall that serves as both a screen and a picture. Clearly, Raysse's interest in moving images goes beyond film, strictly speaking, since he has gone so far as to introduce a television into his installations, as in *Identité, maintenant vous êtes un Martial Raysse* (Identity, now you are a Martial Raysse, 1967). Here a television set is anchored within the framework of a picture, within one of the simplified female faces explored in *Formes en liberté*. The screen reflects the form of the viewer, whose image is captured by a camera placed behind him or her, on the opposite of the gallery. "The television in my work takes the place of the madonnas in the work of Da Vinci," Raysse has affirmed.[9]

Martial Raysse, *Suzanna, Suzanna,* 1964. Oil and collage on canvas with projection of the film *Arman dans le role du vieillard* (Arman in the Role of Old Man), 75 ⅔ x 55 ½ x 4 in. (192 x 141 x 10 cm).

In 1967 Raysse engaged with live performance, designing the stage decoration for two ballets by Roland Petit: *Éloge de la folie* (In Praise of Folly) and *Paradis perdu* (Paradise Lost). Here he employed a deconstruction of form like that seen in the faces in his *Formes en liberté*. Petit insisted that the ballets should read as films, and he closely monitored the montages that Raysse assembled. The choreographer was fascinated by the idea

that movements could be captured in the form of images.[10] As a result of this collaboration, Raysse began to reflect more deeply upon the creative possibilities offered by the camera.

THE INFLUENCE OF CLASSICAL PAINTING AND THE MEDIA

As noted above, the films of Martial Raysse reflect a continual process of evolution within in his work. Significantly, they are closely related to painting, both that of the Old Masters and his own. His pictures and his films are filled with references, often more or less hidden, to earlier works of art. In *Jésus-Cola* (1966), a figure parodying a minister holds in his hands a plaster model of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* (ca. 220-185 BC, Musée du Louvre, Paris). This reference causes reflection upon the multiplicity, reproducibility, and nature of Western civilization's "common cultural bonds," to use the term employed by Otto Hahn.[11] In *Le Grand Départ* (The Great Departure; 1972), the image of Eugène Delacroix's *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (Liberty Leading the People; 1830, Musée du Louvre, Paris) appears in the background. A more subtle reference to Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger* (Women of Algiers; 1834, Musée du Louvre, Paris) can be found in the close-up of a water pipe. The use of negative images in color evokes the halftones of the paintings of Édouard Vuillard. This comparison is heightened in Raysse's depictions of confined spaces with fabric-covered walls.

In addition echoing the works of other artists, the films of Martial Raysse evidence clear connections to his own earlier pictures and installations. The apparently disjointed editing of the film *Jésus-Cola* recalls the Amsterdam installation *Dylaby* (1966), in which beachgoing gear, such as water toys and beach balls, was placed haphazardly on the floor. In the same film, two cosmonauts who appear to be exploring an abandoned house loom and disappear. They seem to have no narrative relationship to the rest of the work, yet they are reminiscent of Raysse's *La Colonne aux cosmonautes* (The Column

Promotional poster for Roger Vadim, *Et Dieu créa la femme* (And God Created Woman), 1956

Opposite: Promotional poster for Jean-Luc Goddard, *Pierrot le Fou*, 1965

of the Cosmonauts; 1960), a small sculpture created by an assemblage of various objects. In the video *Portrait Électro, Machin Chose* (Portrait Electro, Object Thing, 1967) the face of Zouzou, the iconic star of Saint-Germain-des-Près, is deconstructed according to the principle of the *Tableaux à géometrie variable* (Paintings of Variable Geometry).[12] In 1964 Raysse painted *Ciné,*[13] followed later that year by *Made in Japan en Martialcolor* and *Et Dieu créa la femme* (And God Created Woman), which takes its title from the highly successful 1956 film directed by Roger Vadim.

Raysse was indeed influenced by the media of his time—television as well as film. A passage in *Jésus-Cola* parodies TV advertising. In *Homéro Presto* (1967), which tells the story of Homer's *The Odyssey* in eight minutes, a Penelope equipped with enormous plastic breasts sits in a giant coffee cup. Her suitors circle around her on motor scooters. In a somewhat circuitous manner, this surprising image may be making reference to the sequence at the home of Monsieur and Madame Espresso in Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (Pete the Madman; 1965). A little later, Ulysses pierces with his lance a portrait of Penelope that one of her suitors has painted. The image bears a strong resemblance to the Picasso painting *Jacqueline aux fleurs* (1954), which Anna Karina tears in a single gesture in *Pierrot le fou*. Raysse thus lashes out at Picasso, who was treated like a god on the Côte d'Azur during these years. Was this a way of killing a father he didn't claim, or did this reflect the direct influence of Godard? Raysse insisted he had no close personal or professional affinity to the Cinémathèque or to the members of the New Wave.[14] Yet he has emphasized that he was deeply influenced by the passage from *Le Mépris* (Contempt) in which the filmmaker (played by Fritz Lang as himself in a film within a film) films a group of ancient painted statues.[15] Dominique Païni has identified other instances of Godard's influence upon Raysse. Païni compares Raysse's treatment of *The Odyssey* in *Homéro Presto* to the scene in *Pierrot le fou* in which Anna Karina and Jean-Luc Belmondo paint a model of the Vietnam War: "The revision of *The Odyssey* according to the destructive yet poetic rules of the counterculture gives the film, shot in CinemaScope

color, the atmosphere of a school playground that has been invaded by childish adults."[16] Such references exist throughout Raysse's work, in modes of parody or even irony.

Having lived in New York from 1963 to 1968, the artist has also been influenced by American film, and in particular by Kenneth Anger's cut-ups. Raysse has said of these works: "This brusque break in tone, the possibility of being carried beyond the pre-established context of the most literal manner imaginable, this seemed to me, all those years ago, to be a sort of delicious freedom, and awakened in me the desire to work in film."[17] Raysse's familiarity with these artistic movements can be confirmed by reading *The Village Voice*, a weekly newspaper launched in 1955 that covers the cultural life of New York. Reproductions of Raysse's aforementioned *Formes en liberté* appeared in the paper for several days in a row in 1970: a full-page female profile drawn in black lines, anonymously.[18] Moreover, the theme of Raysse's *Le Grand Départ* can be traced back to many American Westerns, with their emphasis on the conquest of faraway territory in an effort to flee the ravages of civilization and preserve a form of transcendent purity.

CINEMASCOPE, NEGATIVE, AND HIGH CONTRAST

Raysse has affirmed: "when I made films I was not a painter but a filmmaker."[19] He made use of various cinematographic techniques, and most of his films were shot in 16mm or 35mm. In *Homéro Presto* he used CinemaScope for the projection in order to distort the image, which had been shot without an anamorphic lens, by stretching it out and flattening it. In 1967 Pierre Schaeffer allowed Raysse the use of the video studio run by the research service of the ORTF (Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française, French Radio and Television Organization). Raysse was among the first artists allowed access to the studio, and he created his *Portrait Électro, Machin Chose* there. In this pastiche of advertising and broadcasting, the "starring role" was taken by Zouzou, who, according to Sally Shafto, was then considered France's "it girl."[20] Raysse employed high contrast, which eliminated all the grays, solarization, and false pigmentation that might otherwise filter the image.[21] In *Le Grand Départ* Raysse makes systematic use of the negative image process, which creates an abundance of green, turquoise, violet, or orange semitones.[22]

Since Raysse was far removed from both commercial cinema and the world of independent art film, opportunities for the presentation of his films remained limited during this period of experimentation. The public was able to see his *Homéro Presto* during the exhibition *Films,* held at Galerie Givaudan, Paris, from March 7–May 7, 1968. The films of several artists, among them Daniel Pommereulle, Pierre Clémenti, and Diourka Medveczki, were also presented there.[23] In an article published the year before the exhibition, gallerist Claude Givaudan explained that it would soon be possible to view a film in one's own home, in a "cinéthèque," writing: "You will be able to show [films] in your own home with your friends. Although this appears rather modest, it is perhaps the beginning of a revolution in how cinema is disseminated."[24] Yet this pioneering exhibition was not followed by comparable shows, and the momentum behind Givaudan's radical proposition—and the increasing exposure of Raysse's work the show seemed to foretell—had stalled. *Portrait Électro, Machin Chose* was shown at the Experimental Film Festival at Knokke-le-Zoute in 1967, as was *Jésus-Cola*, which was presented out of competition. That year France was represented by only four films, whereas there had been fifteen French films included in 1963.[25] Raysse only participated in the festival a single time, and although he was in contact with experimental filmmakers he was not a member of any particular movement. *Le Grand Départ* was the only one of his films to be commercially released, in Saint-Séverin in 1972, thanks to the participation of the Sunchild Production Company. In 1974 the Association Recherche Création (Association for Research and Creation) organized a video exhibition during which Raysse's *Lotel des folles fatmas* was shown.[26] This was again an exceptional event for the time, marking a rare instance in which a Raysse film project was presented in a museum setting.

The engagement of Raysse's films with their contemporary cultural moment is clearly expressed by the degree to which they illuminate the cross-cultural dynamic between Paris and New York in those years. Just as the American poets of the Beat generation came to Paris during the 1950s, it was French artists who traveled to New York in the 1960s. Raysse was one of the painters who took up residence in the legendary Chelsea Hotel during extended stays in the United States.[27] Between 1963 and 1968 he also lived on the West Coast and was represented there by the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles.[28] In tandem with the Paris-New York axis, cultural exchanges were developing between the art worlds of Los Angeles, Nice, and Tokyo. In this atmosphere Raysse came to know the American "underground" scene and

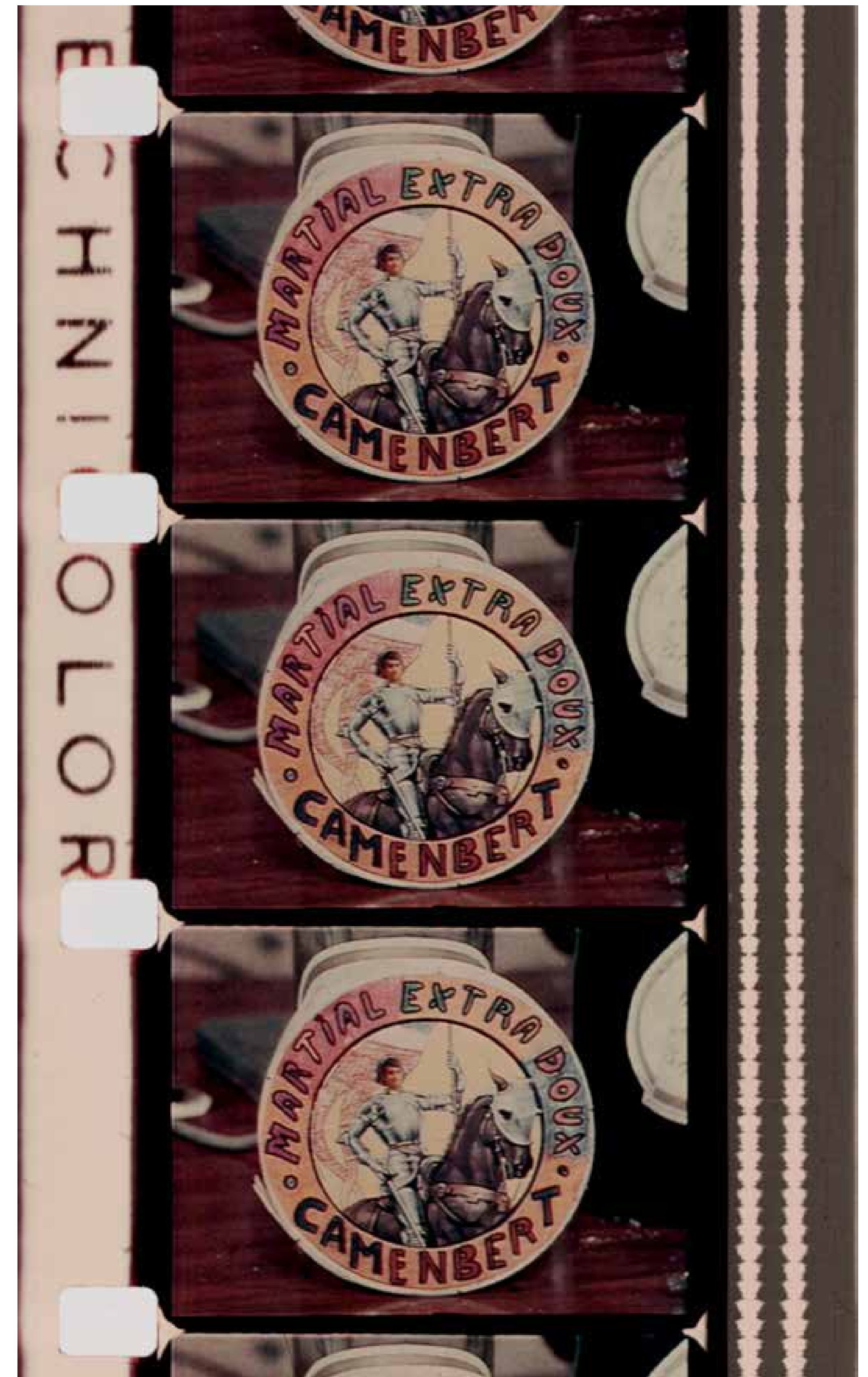
Outdoor projection of Martial Raysse, *Le Grand Départ*, 1970 (still). 16mm, color, sound, 70 min.

discovered Andy Warhol's Factory, without ever becoming a regular there.[29] He also visited Jonas Mekas's Film-Makers Coop and the Anthology Film Archives, which Mekas cofounded in 1969. This allowed Raysse to become familiar with American experimental films, notably those of Kenneth Anger, who exercised a particular influence upon him. Raysse's abovementioned contribution to *The Village Voice*, in the guise of a full-page *Forme en liberté*,[30] attests indirectly to the contacts he established during these visits.

American mass culture made as much of a mark upon Raysse as did the peripheral artistic circles he encountered. The influence of pop culture is clear, for instance, in *Le Grand Départ*, in which the characters repeatedly speak English for no apparent reason. American automobiles appear on the screen, and the character Caïn, a humanized cat, references Fritz the Cat, the hero of the American comic book series of the same name. *Fritz the Cat* was created by the celebrated illustrator Robert Crumb, whose works were published in Paris in the magazine *Actuel,* which will be discussed in greater detail below.[31] The film presents a hippie commune that departs for a better world, following in the footsteps of a guru played by the American actor Sterling Hayden. The atmosphere of the film recalls the winds of protest that were blowing on the West Coast in 1968, four years before *Le Grand Départ* was released. Yet the enthusiasm for American culture so evident in such references is always accompanied by a turn toward questioning and doubt, a tendency that was present in films Raysse made prior to his American travels, such as *Jésus-Cola*, which denounces the excesses of consumerism.

POLITICS AND BURLESQUE

The tensions captured in the films Raysse created in the four years surrounding the student protests and civil unrest of 1968 reflect the atmosphere of French society at that time. Without seeming to dwell on actual events, these works convey a certain sense of uneasiness. *Camembert Martial Extra-Doux* (Camembert Martial Extra-Mild; 1969) opens with the musings of a group of friends who are sharing a hallucinogenic Camembert cheese. Their verbal ramblings give rise to a parody of the American ideal, concretized by a Statue of Liberty made of bright green cardboard. A young girl, played by Jackie Raynal, wears a bathing suit and a laurel leaf crown, reminding us of the Daphne of Greek mythology. She dances around, swaying her hips as an offstage voice reads passages from the Bible. In one of the scenes in *Le Grand Départ*, Caïn the cat and Innocence, a little girl, catch a soldier, whom they strip of his uniform and mock. The film's musical score was composed by the band Gong, a Franco-British group formed in 1968. During the months surrounding the May 1968 protests, Gong and their concerts received great notice in *Actuel,* a magazine established in 1967 that reported on underground French culture. Raysse himself belonged to a hippie commune near Paris around this time. The name of this commune, PIG, appeared on the poster for *Le Grand Départ*, a fact that seems to imply that its members participated in the film. The film shoot, which took place during a festival in Verderonne,



Martial Raysse, *Camembert Martial Extra-Doux*, 1969 (still). 16mm, color, sound, 15 min.

Martial Raysse, *Jésus-Cola*, 1966 (still). 35mm, color, sound, 10 min.

north of Paris, was a gigantic "happening," an experience that was festive, collective, and hallucinatory.[32]

Yet behind the comic, burlesque style of these films, a political dimension emerges. Two characters in *Jésus-Cola* wear masks, one of the Chinese communist revolutionary Mao Zedong and the other of American President Richard Nixon. The masks represent a sort of carnivalesque allusion, yet the references are remarkable all the same. In *Le Grand Départ*, one of the characters wears the same Mao mask. He marries a Mona Lisa figure, interpreted by Anne Wiazemski, the same actress who played "La Chinoise" in the Godard film a few years later. This sort of nudge-nudge, wink-wink can be interpreted in a flippant way, but it can also be taken very seriously, for example in the scene from *Jésus-Cola* in which a minister manipulates a copy of the *Little Red Book,* as the compilation of selected quotations by Mao, first published in 1964, is popularly known.

Raysse returned from New York at the very moment that the events of May 1968 were breaking out in Paris, and he took part in the workshops that created posters at the École des Art Décoratifs (School for the Decorative Arts). Yet his engagement in the revolt turned out to be very different from that of the young people manning the barricades in the Latin Quarter. This was on account of his proximity to the Italian revolutionary movement *La Lotta Continua* at that time.[33] In discussing his opinion of the revolutionary efforts, the artist has since implied that the actions of May 1968 were not radical enough.[34] Indeed, in 1968 Raysse had begun to experience profound doubts about such political efforts and the general condition of contemporary French society. In his film *Lotel des folles fatmas* (1976) these doubts are given voice through two characters, barely distinguishable on the screen, who ramble and babble inaudibly, rendering the narrative incomprehensible. This strategy is pushed to an even further extreme in *Intra Muros* (Within the Walls; 1977), in which one of the characters walks among the ruins of a nuclear explosion, speaking words that are barely audible. This metaphorical explosion of communication is comparable to the disaster that closes Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*, and possesses the same quality of negativity and despair. Thus, the 1970s films of Martial Raysse constitute a significant turning point in his work.

A VISION OF HYGIENE

Raysse's films may well be seen as the agents driving the evolution of his work, particularly in view of the profound crisis of confidence that he experienced beginning in 1968. Even the film title *Le Grand Départ* (The Great Departure) is meaningful. The artist made an artistic voyage to Morocco and then retired from Parisian life in early 1973. He moved to the countryside and lived in Ussy-sur-Marne before settling down in southwestern France, where he still lives. Several artists of the same era, such as the filmmaker Diourka Medveczki, decided to undertake a comparable "great departure" at this time. This rejection of contemporary society was underlined by Raysse's refusal to participate in the Biennale de Paris of 1967.[35] In 1969 Raysse asked his dealer, Alexandre Iolas, to set up an exhibition without a vernissage. In this show only three works would be displayed, in order to undercut the sales potential (and, therefore, the commercial focus) that often drives exhibitions.[36] *Le Grand Départ* opens with a close-up of printed fabric reminiscent of Raysse's *Six images calmes* (1972) a group of silkscreen prints that through their mass-reproducibility undercut the value traditionally placed on original and singular works of art.[37] Also in 1972, Raysse, along with many of his contemporaries, delivered another blow to established art world hierarchies by refusing to participate in the exhibition *1960/1972, douze ans d'art contemporain en France* (1960/1972. Twelve Years of Contemporary Art in France), a presentation supported by French Prime Minister Georges Pompidou. (Raysse's films were, nevertheless, listed in the exhibition catalogue.[38])

A quiet evolution is evident in Raysse's 1960s work, despite the tremendous commercial success and media notoriety that the artist enjoyed at that time. He gradually abandoned the striking colors of his earlier years and entered into a universe of semitones around 1970. Phillippe Dagen notes this alteration in an article dealing with the film *Camembert Martial Extra-Doux*: "The violence becomes harsher, the colors turn toward gray, and the deconstruction has a slightly funereal air."[39] The hidden coherence between Raysse's work of the 1960s and his 1970s output is particularly palpable in his films. The atmosphere of "deconstruction" seen in *Camembert* is also present in *Le Grand Départ*. There is also a strong connection between *Étalages de Prisunic, Hygiène de la Vision* (Shelves at the Prisunic: A Vision of Hygiene; 1961), an assemblage of various consumer objects, and the *Coco Mato* series, an early 1970s work that consists of tiny bottles filled with mushrooms.

Moreover, it was likely his work on these films that led Raysse to revisit painting. The artist has stated that he is very interested in the Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978): "His refusal to be exploited by the young surrealists caused him to develop a distaste for part of his own work. . . . It is an adventure in the style of Rimbaud, in the sense that he transmuted

Actress Anne Wiazemsky as featured in Martial Raysse, *Le Grand Départ*, 1970 (still). 16mm, color, sound, 70 min.

Opposite: Martial Raysse, *Camembert Martial Extra-Doux*, 1969 (still). 16mm, color, sound, 15 min.

his genius into the completely mediocre activity of the academic painter."[40] Significantly, as Raysse observed, de Chirico did this in order to subvert the interests of the market. Raysse recalls encountering a remarkable new drawing by de Chirico, a sign that the latter's dramatic shift in style was not as simple a gesture as it may at first appear. Was it due to his own refusal to serve the interests of the market that Martial Raysse, at precisely the moment he penned these words about de Chirico, completely changed the direction of his work, in spite of the tremendous success his current style had brought him? Whatever the reason, a few months after the release of *Le Grand Départ,* Raysse abandoned the neon and the plastic in order to develop a style of painting far more traditional than that seen in his previous works. These pictures take up mythological themes, such as the Rape of Europa, or biblical ones (as in *Le Pain et le Vin* [Bread and Wine] of 1984), and elude any single approach or style. It seems that Raysse, like de Chirico, had begun to question his own work, a theme that appeared very early in his films, and which led him to return to painting. The parallel with de Chirico, who in Raysse's view was caught between boldness and tradition, is perhaps overstated, yet it is striking. Raysse has affirmed that "Film has allowed me to better regard painting."[41] The artist today pursues the path of a filmmaker for whom the moving image seems to constitute a sort of intimate medium and a means of reflection, occupying much the same role that engraving and etching fulfilled for Picasso.[42]

There are clear echoes between the films and certain of Raysse's pictures, for example *Le Minotaure* (The Minotaur; 1977). This painting takes up one of the figures from *Le Grand Départ*, whose form is itself reminiscent of the realistic funerary sculptures of the fifteenth century. It is much the same with the painting *Moïra* (1977). Also in 1977, Raysse presented several of

his recent works in the film *Sous un arbre perché* (Perched Beneath a Tree; 1981). The recent film *Mon petit Coeur* (My Little Heart; 1995) centers upon the painting *La Source* (1989). These figurative paintings display a traditional style that contrasts sharply with that of the artist's previous works.

Raysse is hardly the only artist to have returned to a more traditional style after having produced really daring works. After developing the radical style of Cubism in the years leading up to and during World War I, Picasso traveled to Rome, and initiated what is known as his "Ingresque" period, which featured portraits of his wife, Olga Khokhlova. In these works he returned to a type of classicism as a means of self-reassurance after the nightmare of war. Cocteau characterized this turn as "a call to order."[43] In small measure, this is comparable to the return to painting by certain painters during the 1980s. For instance, after the unrest of 1968 and a series of radical artistic developments, including Pop art, Supports/Surfaces, and the Nouveau Réalisme, Gérard Garouste (b. 1946) and Jean-Michel Albérola (b. 1953) embarked upon a form of new painting. They painted religious, mythological, and historical subjects on large-scale canvases. Raysse cannot be directly linked to Garouste and Albérola, yet it is important to underscore this convergence of attitudes at that particular time. For Raysse the medium of film seems to have been the formal cause of his shift in approach. In the preface to the catalogue of the 1985 Martial Raysse exhibition in Antibes, Danièle Giraudy suggests that it was film that allowed Raysse to accept himself as a painter.[44]

FILM LIBERATES PAINTING

An examination of the films of Martial Raysse reveals the key themes of his work. The character of Ulysses, with all the ambiguities that he conveys, appears in *Homéro Presto*. Raysse himself had taken part in a film project, *Le Retour d'Ulysse* (The Return of Ulysses), in which he played the title role. The ancient hero is seen in several pictures, among them *Ulysses, why do you come so late poor fool?*, a painting from the series "à géometrie variable" (variable geometry). In the catalogue text cited above, Giraudy describes the artist as "a new Ulysses." *Homéro Presto* therefore should not be viewed as mere entertainment or as a simple pastiche.

Martial Raysse, *En prime Pig Music*, 1971 (still). Video, color, 10 min.

The cat Caïn in *Le Grand Départ* also proves to be a crucial figure. By virtue of his name he possesses a malevolent side, but he is also the savior who announces the great departure of the film's title. He is a harlequin, simultaneously positive and negative, uniting all extremes within himself, an insider. In the history of art, the harlequin has often represented a double of the artist, the one who knows.[45] In the film *La Petite Danse* (The Little Dance; 1978–89) Raysse appears on the screen dressed in the sort of ruff that is reminiscent of Pierrot, a character from the *Commedia dell'Arte*. Pierrot is also a figure of complexity and duality, sharing in some of the thematic concerns conveyed by Harlequin. These themes are related to those of the circus and are marked, as is the *Commedia dell'Arte*, by a sense of rootlessness and wandering. The subject of wandering is at the heart of *Le Grand Départ*, in which the characters depart for another world in a long procession resembling those made by performers at fairgrounds or carnivals. One year after the release of the film Raysse produced a series of engravings representing a *danse macabre*, the line dance of medieval legend, with Harlequin leading the way. The large painting *Carnaval à Périgueux* (1992) revives this theme almost twenty years later as a sign of the artist's continuing interest in this subject. "Film has played a major role in the evolution of my thinking," Raysse has noted. " One of the things that has encouraged me to do film has been the understanding that it would free me from many of the problems that had confronted me in painting."[46]

As we have seen time and again, the films of Martial Raysse offer a sort of lens through which we may view the artist's work and detect the coherence and continuity within it. The potential of such an examination is rich, but serious consideration of these films has been long in coming. Raysse's work was not a fixture of the 1960s Parisian film scene, and he was not part of the Cinémathèque française. Today, Raysse's films are primarily shown in museums. Notably, they were presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Les Années Pop* at the Georges Pompidou Center in 2001[47] In 2005 *Jésus-Cola* was shown in China as part of the exhibition *Nouvelles Vagues*[48] (New Waves). How better to consider this artist than through his films? Martial Raysse has declared that when he makes films he is not a painter, he is a filmmaker.[49] This is doubtless the point of the debate: Must we really draw a distinction between the two?

This essay was originally published in 2005 in the French journal *1895,* and is reprinted here by permission. See "Martial Raysse, 'Peintre-Cinéaste,'" 1895, no. 46 (June 2005): 55-73.

Translated from the French by Alan G. Paddle

NOTES

1. Martial Raysse, interview with Emmanuel Mavrommatis, late 1970s. Unpublished transcript in the archives of Galerie Samy Kinge, Paris, 49.
2. See *1960: les Nouveaux Réalistes* (Paris : Musées et Société des Amis du Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1986), 267.
3. Nelcya Delanoë: *Le Raspail Vert, l'American Center à Paris, 1934-1994, une histoire des avant-gardes franco-américaines.* (Paris: Seghers, 1994), 115. See also Henri Michaux, *Images du monde visionnaire* (1964) and Wolf Vostell, *Sun in your Head* (1963), among others.
4. Xavier Garcia Bardon, "EXPRMNTL, festival hors normes, Knokke 1963, 1967, 1974," *Revue belge du cinéma* 43 (December 2002): 20. A second European tour of avant-garde American films with Jonas Mekas and P. Adams Sitney would take place in 1967at the festival in Knokke-le Zoute.
5. Michel Caen, "Knokke . . .," *Cahiers du cinéma* 200-201 (April–May 1968): 101. This subject was reexamined by Bardon in his « EXPRMNTL, festival hors normes,"37.
6. The Paris Film Co-op and its journal, *Melba*, were not founded until in 1974.
7. Edith Cottrell, "Martial Raysse, deuxième partie: films," *Zoom* 9 (November–December 1971): 15.
8. Laurent Danet, "Martial Raysse," in *L'Art du mouvement, collection cinématographique du Musée National d'Art Moderne, 1919–1996,* ed. Jean-Michel Bouhours (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996), 367.
9. Didier Semin, ed. *Martial Raysse* (Paris: Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, RMN, 1992), 106.
10. See M.B., "Roland Petit n'écrit pas, il filme," *Humanité* 12 (November 12, 1966). "It is amazing to be able to seize the moment," [Petit] exclaimed. "Dance only exists in the moment that it exists, at a single point in time. I do not write down my choreographies . . . . I do not write but I film."
11. Semin, *Martial Raysse*, 61.
12. Ibid., 108. He further noted: "I had the idea of applying to film what I already knew about the deconstruction of a face from the point of view of painting."
13. In this work the title, *"Ciné,"* is inscribed on the canvas itself in white neon letters.
14. Born in Nice, Raysse lived in New York from 1963 to 1968. Thus he had relatively little contact with the Parisian film world in those years, although he was very well known there as a painter, as the press coverage of the day attests.
15. Martial Raysse, interview with the author, Paris, April 2004.
16. See Dominique Païni, "Cinéma Martial Extra Doux," *Cahiers du cinéma* 461 (November 1992): 12–13. For further discussion see Nicole Brenez and Christian Lebrat, eds. *Jeune dure et pure! Une histoire du cinéma d'avant-garde et expérimental en France* (Paris: Édition de la Cinémathèque française, 2001), 253.
17. Semin, *Martial Raysse*, 90.
18. *The Village Voice*, February 19, 1970.
19. Raysse, interview with the author, Paris, April 2004.
20. Sally Shafto, "La 'it' girl," Programme du Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Paris, Winter 2003–4.
21. Semin, *Martial Raysse*, 108.
22. Dominique Païni, "Cinéma Martial Extra Doux," 253.
23. Sally Shafto, *The Zanzibar Films and the dandies of May 1968* (New York: A Zanzibar USA Publication, 2000), 17.
24. "Arts," *Opus international* (December 1967): 67.
25. Bardon, "EXPRMNTL, festival hors normes," 42. The group of activists who who had arranged showings and performances around Jean-Jacques Lebel at the end of the 1960s was not present here.
26. Jeanine Warnod, "Martial Raysse au Musée d'Art Moderne," *Le Figaro*, December 7–8, 1974.
27. Semin, *Martial Raysse*, 96.
28. His work was presented at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles from January–February 1963 as part of *Mirrors and Portraits 1962*, as well as from May 4–30, 1964, and from May 31–June 24, 1967 in *Martial Raysse Works 1963–1966*.
29. Raysse, interview with the author, Paris, April 2004.
30. See footnote 18.
31. Raysse, interview with the author, Paris, April 2004.
32. Lucienne Hamon, telephone interview with the author, Paris, April 2004.
33. Raysse, interview with the author, Paris, April 2004.
34. Martial Raysse, "Les socialistes n'aiment pas leur mère," *VH101* 1 (1970): 70. "We have to come to an agreement about the word 'revolution.' Revolution does not mean changing the government by shooting off guns everywhere. True revolution takes place by immediately changing the economic, social and cultural structures. . . . It would be extremely important for the people who claim to want a political revolution to experience in themselves the deep spiritual revolution that their attitude implies. This means that they would no longer be driven by bourgeois fears, nor by bourgeois attitudes and mentality. But these sorts of people are, in general, revolutionaries where the economy is concerned, while they remain antediluvian in terms of the arts, morality and philosophy." Raysse goes on to distinguish political revolution that aims at changing national structures from the mental revolution that can be brought about through painting. According to Raysse both aspects are indispensable, yet one or the other is all too often lacking.
35. Pierre Restany and Jacques Lassaigne, "Un échange de lettres," *Opus International* (October–November 1967). Restany, who had been charged with organizing an exhibition hall at the Biennale de Paris, wrote to Jacques Lassaigne that the artists were no longer interested in the project.
36. Alain Jouffroy, "Martial Raysse," *Opus International* (April 1969): 124.
37. Semin, *Martial Raysse*, 132.
38. See *1960–1972, douze ans d'art contemporain en France* (Paris: Grand Palais, RMN, 1972).
39. Phillippe Dagen, "Martial Raysse le moderne cannibale," *Art Press* (February1983): 14.
40. Raysse, "Les socialistes n'aiment pas leur mère," 70.
41. Raysse, interview with Emmanuel Mavrommatis.
42. This was explored further in *Dieu merci, un tableau de Martial Raysse,* Galerie de France, Paris, January 19–February 19, 2005. Raysse's latest film, *Ex-Voto* (2005) was presented as part of this exhibition.
43. Jean Cocteau, *Le Rappel à l'ordre* (Paris: Stock, 1923).
44. *Martial Raysse à Antibes* (Antibes: Éditions Musée Picasso, 1982), 11.
45. This is the case in the works of Picasso.
46. Raysse, interview with Emmanuel Mavrommatis.
47. *Les Années Pop,* Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, March 15–June 18, 2001.
48. *Nouvelles vagues,* Shanghai Art Museum and the Millennium and Canon Museum of Fine Art in Beijing, January 17–June 15, 2005. Part of the Année de la France en Chine, Paris, organized by the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2005.
49. Raysse, interview with the author, Paris, April 2004.

MARTIAL RAYSSE FILMOGRAPHY

Les Monstres du samedi soir, 1965
Projected upon the picture *À propos de NY en peinturama*, 1965
Super 8, color, 2 min.
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

Jésus-Cola, 1966
35mm, color, sound, 10 min.
Produced by Marlux Sybilla x Films
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

Homéro Presto, 1967
35mm, CinemaScope, sound, 10 min.
Produced by Marlux Sybilla x Films
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

Portrait Électro, Machin Chose, 1967
Video transferred to 16mm, black and white, 20 min.
Produced by Service de la Recherche de l'ORTF
Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, Paris

Camembert Martial Extra-Doux, 1969
16mm, color, sound, 15 min.
Produced by Z.D.F. (Second German Television Network)
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

Le Grand Départ, 1972
16mm, color, sound, 70 min.
Produced by Sunchild Production
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

En prime Pig Music, 1971
Video, color, 10 min.
Technical assistance: Alain Jacquier

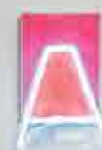
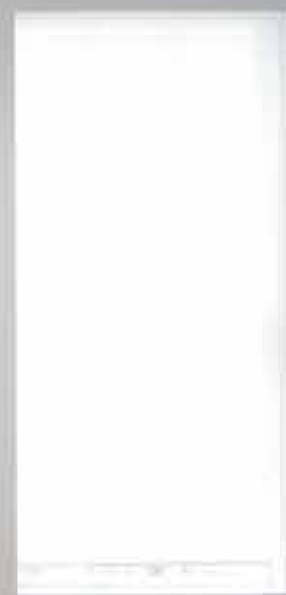
Lotel des folles fatmas, 1976
Video, colorized black and white, 20 min.
Technical assistance: Alain Jacquier

Intra Muros, 1977–80
Video, colorized black and white, 12 min.
Technical assistance: Alain Jacquier

La petite danse, 1978-89
Video, 5 min.
Technical assistance: Alain Jacquier

Sous un arbre perché, 1981
Video, color, 20 min.
Produced by Cellule d'Animation Culturelle, Ministère des Relations Extérieures, Paris / SERDDAV – CNRS / Camera

Installation view of
Martial Raysse, 1960–1974
Luxembourg & Dayan, New
York, May 11–July 13, 2013

Installation view of *Martial Raysse, 1960–1974*, Luxembourg & Dayan, New York, May 11–July 13, 2013

Installation view of *Martial Raysse, 1960–1974*, Luxembourg & Dayan, New York, May 11–July 13, 2013

WORKS EXHIBITED

Colonne (Column)*,* 1960. Foam, toothbrush, and various objects in Plexiglas form, 55 ¼ x 4 ¾ x 4 ¾ in. (140 x 12 x 12 cm). Private collection

Untitled, 1961. Photograph with acrylic paint and peacock feathers, 7 x 5 ¼ in. (17.5 x 13 cm). Collection of Angélina Raysse

A, 1963. Paint on canvas with neon light, 16 ¼ x 11 in. (41 x 28 cm). Marin Karmitz Collection

Il est temps de rêver (It is time to dream), 1963. Paint, paper collage, and artificial spider and butterfly mounted on canvas, 10 ¾ x 8 ¾ in. (27 x 22 cm). Courtesy Galerie GP & N Vallois, Paris

Made in Japan, 1963. Photo collage, oil, and wood on canvas, 49 ¼ x 75 ¾ in. (125 x 192.5 cm). Pinault Collection

About Neon (Obelisk II), 1964. Neon, metal, and Plexiglas, 96 x 30 x 18 in. (244 x 76.2 x 45.7 cm). Private collection

Green on Green, 1964. Tempera and charcoal on paper mounted on canvas-board relief on canvas, 13 x 8 ½ x 2 ½ in. (33 x 21.6 x 6.4 cm). Collection of Daniel Boulakia

Snack, 1964. Oil, acrylic, paper collage, plastic, wood, straw hat, plastic bird, enlarged photograph, and mixed media on canvas with neon lettering, 84 ¾ x 51 ¼ x 7 ¾ in. (215 x 130 x 19.5 cm). Pinault Collection

Tableau Cassé (Broken Painting), 1964. Paint, paper collage, toile de jouy, and broken stretcher bars on panel, 51 ¼ x 38 ¼ in. (130 x 97 cm). Private collection

Pablo, 1965. Gouache and paper collage on canvas with aluminum and plastic, 8 ¼ x 7 ¼ in. (21 x 18 cm). Virginia Dwan Collection

A propos de New York en peinturama (About New York in *Peinturama*), 1965. Mixed-media assemblage with flocking on canvas and Super 8 film projection, 40 ½ x 65 ¾ in. (103 x 167 cm). Galerie Natalie Seroussi

Tableau simple et doux (Sweet and Simple Painting), 1965. Paint, photo collage, and neon on canvas, 76 ¾ x 51 ¼ in. (195 x 130 cm). Private collection

La fille du desert, Tableau à géométrie variable (Girl of the Desert, Variable Geometry Painting)*,* 1966. Industrial paint on canvas, 60 ¾ x 22 x 4 in. (154 x 56 x 10 cm). Private collection

Jésus-Cola, 1966. 35mm, color, sound, 10 min.
Produced by: Marlux Sybilla x Films
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

Portrait à géométrie variable, deuxième possibilité (Variable Geometry Portrait, Second Possibility), 1966. Oil, flocking, and mixed media on canvas, 51 ¼ x 50 ¼ in. (130 x 127.5 cm). Marin Karmitz Collection

Homéro-Presto, 1967 (still). 35mm, CinemaScope, sound, 10 min.
Produced by Marlux Sybilla x Films
Assisted by: Mireille Bouille, Chatelot Camille, Monique Giraudy, Jacqueline Raynal with Pamela Uecker, Douglas Mourgues, Rudolfo Kaz, Barbara Decker, Charlotte Hilton, Chris Roto / Gil Argensson, Clarke Cane, Xavier Calle, Adolf Bourgeois, Marilu G.
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

Portrait Électro, Machin Chose, 1967. Video transferred to 16mm, black and white, 20 min.
Produced by Service de la Recherche de l'ORTF
Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, Paris

Camembert Martial Extra-Doux, 1969. 16mm, color, sound, 15 min.
Produced by Z.D.F. (Second German Television Network)

Le Sage sur le champignon (The Sage on the Mushroom)*,* 1970. Papier-mâché with tinted newsprint and 7 painted plaster balls, 13 ½ x 9 ½ x 9 ½ in. (34.5 x 24 x 24 cm). Marin Karmitz Collection

Le Sceptre (The Scepter), 1970. Wood, papier-mâché, feathers, beads, and string, 68 ¼ x 4 ½ x 4 ½ in. (173 x 11 x 11 cm). Private collection

Tête d'oiseau sur fond azur (Bird's Head on a Blue Background), 1970. Wood, papier-mâché, ferric sulfate, glitter, and feathers in wooden box, 5 ¼ x 7 x 8 ¼ in. (13 x 18 x 21 cm). Private collection, Milan

L'Innocent (The Innocent), 1971. Papier-mâché, photograph, and various objects in wooden box, 8 ¼ x 9 x 8 ¼ in. (21 x 22.8 x 21 cm). Private collection, Milan

La Papillote (The Papillote), 1971. Papier-mâché, string, paint, glitter, glue, and plastic pearls, 5 ⅞ x 16 ⅞ x 3 ⅞ in. (15 x 43 x 10 cm). Collection of Soizic Audouard

En prime Pig Music, 1971. Video, color, 10 min.
Technical assistance: Alain Jacquier

Songez, lui dit le prince (Think, the prince said to him), 1971. Papier-mâché, sand, coal, and plastic figurine in wooden box, 6 x 9 x 8 ¼ in. (15.5 x 23 x 21 cm). Private collection, Milan

Sur la route d'El Paso (On the Road to El Paso), 1971. Papier-mâché, blue sand, and various objects in wooden box, 6 ¼ x 9 x 8 ¼ in. (16 x 23 x 21 cm). Private collection, Milan

Yoko tout là-bas (Yoko Over There), 1971. Wood, sand, papier-mâché and paint in wooden box, 6 x 4 ¼ x 8 ¼ in. (15.5 x 10.5 x 21 cm). Private collection, Milan

Le génie de Boulaouanne (The Genie of Boulaouanne), 1972. Papier-mâché and various objects in wooden box, 7 x 9 ¼ x 8 ¼ in. (18 x 23.5 x 21 cm). Private collection, Milan

Le Jardin (The Garden), 1972. Wood, papier-mâché, and Buddha figurine, 10 ¼ x 13 ¾ x 27 ¾ in. (26 x 35 x 27 cm). Private collection, Milan

Le Sceau de Digpatchan (The Seal of Digpatchan), 1972. Papier-mâché and various objects in wooden box, 6 x 4 ¼ x 8 ¼ in. (15.5 x 20.5 x 22.5 cm). Private collection, Milan

Le Bleu de Licorne (Blue Unicorn), 1973. Stones, sand, ashes, papier-mâché, paint, and plastic in wooden box, 7 x 9 ½ x 8 ¼ in. (18 x 24 x 21 cm). Collection of Soizic Audouard

La Ligne (The Line), 1973. Electric wire, light bulb, feathers, and various pieces of wood and string, 141 ¾ x 23 ¾ in. (360 x 60 cm). Marin Karmitz Collection

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Front Cover: Martial Raysse, *Tableau Cassé* (Broken Painting), 1964.
Paint, paper collage, toile de jouy, and broken stretcher bars on panel,
51 ¼ x 38 ¼ in. (130 x 97 cm).

Back Cover: Translation of a poem by Martial Raysse:

Like a mass-produced refrigerator
Like the knees of the lady opposite you
in the subway
Beautiful
Beautiful enough
To make a painting

Comme un réfrigerateur de série

Comme les genoux de la dame d'en face

dans le métro

Beau

Beau comme quoi

Faire un tableau