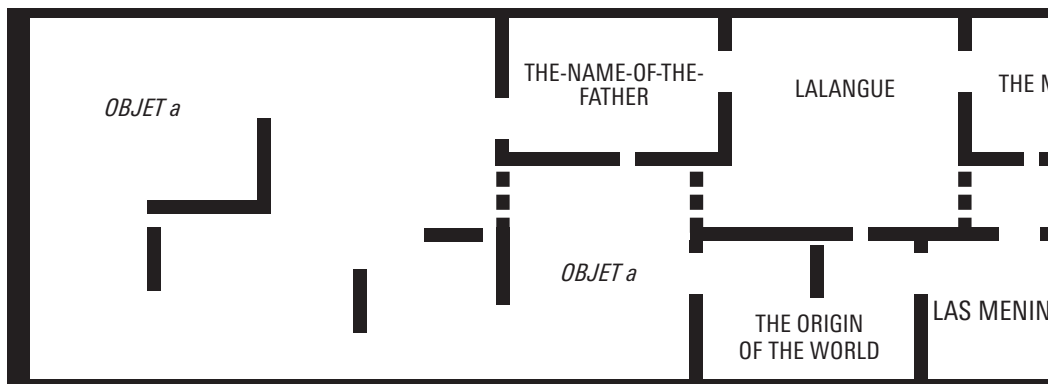


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LACAN, THE EXHIBITION

WHEN ART MEETS
PSYCHOANALYSIS



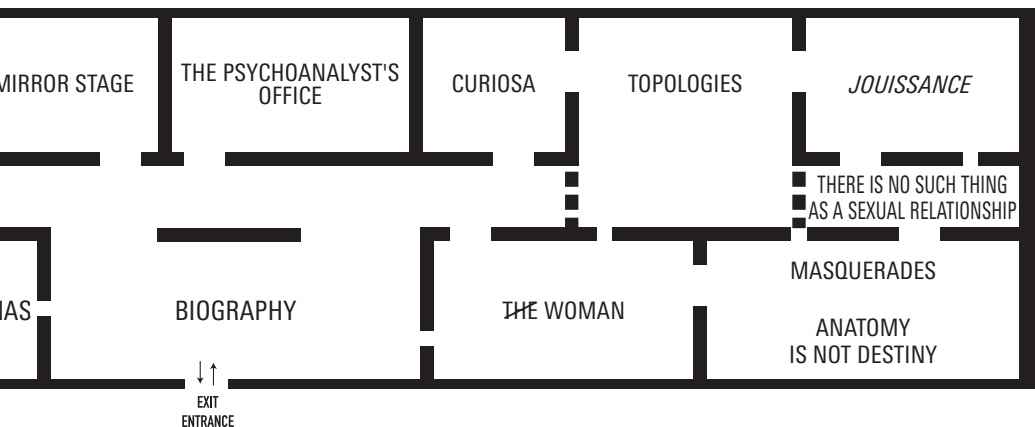
GALERIE 2

Lacan, the Exhibition. When Art Meets Psychoanalysis 31.12.23 → 27.05.24

Curators: Marie-Laure Bernadac and Bernard Marcadé, art historians,
assisted by Gérard Wajcman and Paz Corona, psychoanalysts

This is the first large-scale exhibition dedicated to the psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) and traces the major stages of his life and work, taking account of his insatiable interest in art, as illustrated notably by his own art collection (he owned Gustave Courbet's *The Origin of the World*) and his relationship with Salvador Dalí and André Masson. The exhibition presents works from all eras that Lacan himself listed in his writing and teaching—from cave paintings to Marcel Duchamp, via Diego Velazquez, Francisco de Zurbarán and Holbein the Younger—as well as artists who have paid tribute to him, and modern and contemporary works of art that reflect the principal conceptual channels of his thought: Mirror Stage, Lalangue, Name-of-the-Father, *Objet a*, *The Woman*, There is no such thing as a sexual relationship, *Jouissance* and Topologies. As a follower of the teachings of Sigmund Freud, Lacan opened up a novel, subversive field that lies at the heart of the modern

#lacan



era and the present. His thinking echoes in today's deliberations on sexuality, love, identity, gender, power, beliefs and disbelief—all questions for which Lacan provided not remedies but rather reference points that were sometimes surprising and deliberately affected.

This exploration of Lacan's notions reveals the psychoanalyst's approach to art, whereby works of art were not regarded as objects to be interpreted but rather as forces capable of revealing and interpreting the world.



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THE MIRROR STAGE

Jacques Lacan's inaugural, fundamental theory of the mirror stage, formulated in 1936, brought to light the remarkable role of image for Man and the secret of his strange love for his own image. This theory therefore exposes the question of identity, which is formed by alienation, like Caravaggio's *Narcissus* or the famous scene in Martin Scorsese's film *Taxi Driver*. Whether opaque and indistinct as for Marcel Broodthaers and Bertrand Lavier, split in two as for Felix Gonzalez-Torres, or a metaphor of the picture as for Michelangelo Pistoletto, the mirror is at the heart of analytic experience, as embodied by Leandro Erlich's installation.

LALANGUE

In 1955-1956, Jacques Lacan gave his *Psychoses* seminar in which he explained that "the unconscious is structured like a language". In 1971, he clarified his viewpoint by inventing the neologism "lalangue," to designate a function of language in touch with what he qualifies as Real. Based around a large installation by Marcel Broodthaers linking Stéphane Mallarmé's poetic "throw of the dice" to Lacan's analytic thought, artists celebrate wordplay and witticisms, literalism, slips of the tongue, sound jaculations, and warbling, if not 'the language of the birds', with Raymond Hains' "Nightingalesque" ski fence.

"Lalangue ("thelanguage" in a single word) is not to be called living just because it is in use. What it conveys is much rather the death of the sign. Just because the unconscious is structured like a language, this doesn't mean that lalangue doesn't have to play against its enjoyment, because it is formed of this very enjoyment."

Jacques Lacan, *La Troisième*, text edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris, Navarin Éditeur, 2021, translated by A. R. Price.

THE NAME-OF-THE-FATHER

This notion was elaborated in the 1950s by Jacques Lacan as a signifier of the symbolic paternal function. Initially, the Name-of-the-Father referred to the Christian tradition, Lacan broke with this patriarchal order, thus reflecting the social changes of the time, differentiating between the Real father and the Imaginary father. In French, the Name-of-the-Father (Nom du Père) can also be interpreted as the No-of-the-Father (Non du Père), against whom artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Niki de Saint Phalle and Camille Henrot were to rebel, having inherited their father's name, and were to base their work on the murder or destruction of the Father. Lastly, at the end of his life, Lacan effected a semantic shift in meaning of the term "Nom-du-Père" to the phrase "Les non-dupes errent" (the non-dupes err), which Sophie Calle used in ironic fashion by veiling *La mère veille* (*The Mother Keeping Vigil*, a play on the word "merveille" meaning "wonder" or "marvel").

"The hypothesis of the unconscious, and Freud underscores this, is something that can only hold up by presupposing the Name-of-the-Father. Presupposing the Name-of-the-Father, which is certainly God, is how psychoanalysis, when it succeeds, proves that the Name-of-the-Father can just as well be bypassed. One can just as well bypass it, on the condition that one make use of it."

Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome*, The Seminar, Book XXIII, text edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by A. R. Price, Cambridge, Polity, 2016.

OBJET a

Objet a, one of Jacques Lacan's cardinal inventions, which, from the late 1950s qualified "the object-cause of desire" as absence, remains and fall, was embraced by modern and contemporary art in spectacular fashion. Marcel Duchamp's list for his "transformer designed to utilise the slight, wasted energies" in 1912 would appear to foreshadow this notion. In addition to the four emblematic objects—the Breast, Shit, the

Voice and the Gaze—the Fall, the Void, and the body in pieces were added by capillarity, as well as the Phallus in so far as it was the signifier of Absence for Lacan.

“There is cause only in something that doesn’t work.”

The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, The Seminar, Book XI, text edited by Jacques Lacan, Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by A. Sheridan, London, Hogarth Press, 1977.

“How is it that nobody has ever thought of connecting this with ... the effect of an erection? Imagine a tattoo traced on the sexual organ ad hoc in the state of repose and assuming its, if I may say so, developed form in another state. How can we not see here, immanent in the geometral dimension [...] something symbolic of the function of the lack, of the appearance of the phallic ghost?”

Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, The Seminar, Book XI, text edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by A. Sheridan, London, Hogarth Press, 1977.

“In placing the emphasis on an organ, the phallus in no way designates the penis as an organ with its specific physiology, nor even the function that one can, my word, plausibly attribute to it—that of copulation. When you look at psychoanalytic texts, the term ‘phallus’ unambiguously concerns its relationship to jouissance.”

Jacques Lacan, *D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, The Seminar, Book XVIII, text edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris, Seuil, 2007, translated by B. Fink.

REGARD (OR GAZE)

Since Antiquity, science and philosophy have endlessly questioned what “seeing” is. Lacan studied all the theories of vision. In the end it was Christ’s word in St Matthew’s Gospel that clarified everything: “They have eyes that they might not see.” Lacan then asked: “might not see what?” if indeed things are looking at them. In a radical and decisive inversion of this, Lacan stated that what fundamentally

determines seeing subjects within the visible is the gaze, which is without. Here, painters, draughtsmen and sculptors brandish the gaze as an object not only in art but also of art itself. We see the works of art, but we are also looked at by them.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD

The Origin of the World by Gustave Courbet was acquired by Jacques Lacan and his wife Sylvia in 1955. That same year, the psychoanalyst commissioned André Masson, Sylvia’s brother-in-law, who was a friend of theirs and of Georges Bataille, to make a cover in the form of a thin panel of painted wood that slid open. *The Origin of the World*, long since legendary, has been the object of numerous interpretations by female artists who have either chosen to display the female genitals more openly, or to add famous feminized surnames or even a face to them in a more conceptual approach.

LAS MENINAS

In his thirteenth seminar, *The Object of Psychoanalysis*, in May 1966, Jacques Lacan meticulously analyzed the foremost allegory of painting, *Las Meninas* by Diego Velazquez. This picture thwarts all the codes of perspective, but, as a *mise en abyme* of the representational process, it can be seen as a screen that hides as much as it reveals. Lacan detects a “secret object” in the “brilliant cladding” of the infante Doña Margarita Teresa, “the central character and Velazquez’ favorite model who he painted seven or eight times.” The best definition of *objet a*, for *Las Meninas* appeals to the registers of fantasy and Freudian scopic drive. The slit, this “central object” referring to the Freudian theory of the splitting of the subject (*Spaltung*), is echoed visually, according to Lacan, in the lacerations of Lucio Fontana’s painting *Concetti spaziali*.

“At the centre of the painting is the concealed object, and it is not to have the straying mind of an analyst—I’m not here to go along with a certain facile thematics—but to call it by its name, because this name

remains valid in our structural register, and it is called the slit."

Jacques Lacan, *L'Objet de la psychanalyse*, The Seminar, Book XIII, unpublished, lesson of 25 May 1966, translated by A. R. Price.

THE WOMAN

Lacan's statement "Woman does not exist" means that it is not possible to give a universal definition of the woman. According to Lacan, women are inherently plural and their existence cannot be linked to any signifier: "She is called woman and defamed" (*Encore*, The Seminar, Book XX). In *My Collection of Proverbs* (1974), produced at the same time as Lacan's *Encore* seminar dedicated to female *jouissance*, Annette Messager embroiders derogatory, jokey aphorisms and colloquialisms about women. The female bodies that Tracey Emin tirelessly draws and paints are never set in a particular form because "not all" of a female can be described, shown or painted.

"Woman can only be written with a bar through it. There's no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital W indicating the universal. There's no such thing as Woman because, in her essence [...] she is not-whole"

Jacques Lacan, *Encore*, The Seminar, Book XX, text edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by B. Fink, New York, London, 1998.

"Woman is not-whole—there is always something in her that escapes discourse."

Jacques Lacan, *Encore*, The Seminar, Book XX, text edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by B. Fink, New York, London, 1998.

MASQUERADES

In his eleventh seminar, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan attributes authorship of the masquerade concept to the British psychoanalyst Joan Rivière, describing it as follows: "woman creates an appearance that replaces 'having' in order to hide the absence." One can view this mask that can be worn or removed, as

an act of resistance towards patriarchal domination—an exaggerated game of ultra-feminine codes and signs that form a challenge to the male gaze. Dressing up and cross-dressing have featured in works of art since the Countess of Castiglione, via historic figures like Marcel Duchamp *alias* Rose Sélavy, and Claude Cahun, who adorned both male and female masks.

"One might even say that the masculine ideal and the feminine ideal are represented in the psyche by something other than [the] activity/passivity opposition [...]. They spring from a term that I have not introduced, but of which one female psychoanalyst [Joan Riviere] has pinpointed the feminine sexual attitude—the term masquerade."

Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, The Seminar, Book XI, text edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by A. Sheridan, London, Hogarth Press, 1977.

ANATOMY IS NOT DESTINY

Numerous modern and contemporary artistic practices, from those of Pierre Molinier to today's queer stances, via the self-portraits of Urs Lüthi, question the discrepancy between biological sex and claimed identity. Through the work of Michel Journiac, Nan Goldin and Edi Dubien, who defended practices linked to cross-dressing and transidentity, an arrangement emerged that undermined the watchword by which, in keeping with Sigmund Freud's phrase, anatomy is destiny. Jacques Lacan distanced himself from this prescriptive position. For him, the gender-related being derives authorization from him/herself only; he/she can therefore choose his/her sexual identity, in addition to that assigned to him/her by his/her civil status and anatomy.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP

"There is no such thing as a sexual relationship" is one of Jacques Lacan's most famous and most commented on formulas. He developed this notion considerably, opposing the "act"

to the “relationship.” While sexual acts do exist, relationships between the sexes are not mathematically equal. With this in mind, the copy of Marcel Duchamp’s *Le Grand Verre* (Large Glass) undertaken by Pascal Goblot uses a narrative where the *jouissance* of the bride in the upper register of the artwork occurs without there being any physical contact with the bachelors in the lower register. This complex dual relationship is also found in an explicit manner in Maria Martins’ sculpture *The Impossible III*.

“Sex is a fact of saying. For what it’s worth, sex does not define a relationship. This is what I stated by formulating that there is no such thing as a sexual relationship. It means simply that in mankind, and doubtless due to the existence of the signifier, the set of what might amount to sexual relating [...] is an empty set.”

Jacques Lacan, *Le moment de conclure*, The Seminar, Book XXV, unpublished, lesson of 15 December 1977, translated by A. R. Price.

JOUISSANCE

For Jacques Lacan, it’s impossible to say everything there is to say about *jouissance* because it belongs to a different order than the signifier. Words are insufficient for expressing that which affects the body; they miss their target and are therefore repetitive. According to Lacan, there are two types of *jouissance*: one that is phallic (linked to the sexual act, to the forbidden, oedipal); the other feminine (beyond the phallus, experienced in the body, in the real and the imaginary). Both sexes have access to it. In his seminar *Encore*, Lacan comments on Bernini’s *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* and discusses mystical ecstasies that both intrigue and are found throughout the contemporary art scene.

“It’s like for Saint Teresa—you need but go to Rome and see the statue by Bernini to immediately understand that she’s coming. There’s no doubt about it. What is she getting off on? It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying

that they experience it, but know nothing about it.”

Jacques Lacan, *Encore*, The Seminar, Book XX, text edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by B. Fink, New York, London, 1998, p. 76.

TOPOLOGIES

From the 1950s, Jacques Lacan became interested in topological objects that enabled him to physically appreciate the subject divided by the object that causes it (like the Möbius band). From the early 1970s, influenced by the work of the mathematician Pierre Soury, Lacan was fascinated by the Borromean knot, which he said he had been given “as a ring for the finger” (*RSI*, The Seminar, Book XXII, unpublished). He used it to knot and unknot the three registers, which he identified as the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary (RSI). Numerous contemporary artists, including Raymond Hains, Jean-Michel Othoniel, Éric Duyckaerts, Pierre Huyghe, Jean-Luc Moulène and Gary Hill, have been influenced by Lacan’s topological concerns, not forgetting the psychologist’s interest in the knots and plaits created by François Rouan, an artist he met at the Villa Medici, for whom he wrote a text.

“This brings to mind a whole imbroglio, but we’re already in this imbroglio because we’re in the knot, and by the same stroke we’re in a tangle.”

Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome*, The Seminar, Book XXIII, text edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by A. R. Price, Cambridge, Polity, 2016.

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