

ANDRÉ MASSON

THERE IS NO FINISHED WORLD

EXHIBITION FROM 29.03.24 TO 02.09.24

GALLERY 3

PRESS RELEASE

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OPENING HOURS
Every day, except Tuesdays and May 1st

01.11 > 31.03
MON. | WED. | THU. | FR. | SAT. | SUN. | 10 am – 6 pm

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FR. | SAT. | SUN. | 10 am – 7 pm



André Masson, *Gradiva*, [1938-1939]
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Photo : © Georges Meguerditchian - Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI /Dist. RMN-GP

ANDRÉ MASSON. THERE IS NO FINISHED WORLD

29 March to 2 September 2024

Gallery 3

Curator: Chiara Parisi, director of the Centre Pompidou-Metz

André Masson (1896–1987), one of the greatest painters of the 20th century, was politically engaged and sensitive to the historical and intellectual upheavals of his century. His non-doctrinal presence among the Surrealists, the invention of automatic drawing and sand pictures, his fruitful relationships with the artists and thinkers of his time, and the influence of his drawings and canvases on the beginnings of Abstract Expressionism are the best-known aspects of his oeuvre whose overall power is not yet fully appreciated.

A painter who experimented with new techniques and a peerless draughtsman, Masson was also a sculptor, a designer of theatre and opera sets, an art critic, an insatiable reader with an encyclopaedic culture, passionately interested in mythology and Western and Far Eastern philosophy, and a remarkable poet and writer. The work of this free and rebellious spirit is shot through with the deep conviction the only 'justification for a work of art . . . is to contribute to the expansion of human beings, the transmutation of all values, the denunciation of social, moral and religious hypocrisy and consequently the denunciation of the dominant class, responsible for imperialist war and fascist regression.'

On the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the Surrealist Manifesto, the Centre Pompidou-Metz is paying tribute to the exceptional figure of André Masson whose liberating thought remains as powerful as ever today. The exhibition paints a picture of a multifaceted artist, open to collaborations and to the world, incessantly pursuing experimentation and guided by the 'dictates of the unconscious' and a desire for the infinite. This important retrospective explores the various facets of André Masson's work as well as his close links with intellectuals, poets, filmmakers, playwrights and artists of his time. Its chronological layout starts with forests and the first erotic drawings made a few years after the First World War, an event that left an indelible mark on Masson's work. The tangled branches and bodies reflect his anxiety in the face of the strangeness of the world.

The series of players and men in interiors, which he worked on in parallel, reflect his affinities with Cubism and the atmosphere in his studio in Rue Blomet, which he occupied from 1923. There he was visited by numerous artists, poets and writers like Antonin Artaud, Roland Tual, Michel Leiris, Georges Limbour, Joan Miró and, before long, André Breton. A pre-Surrealist meeting place, the studio was a veritable hub of dissidence with fun, games and many intellectual discussions.

In December 1923, the artist created his first automatic drawings, anticipating the automatic writing that Breton theorised in his Surrealist Manifesto in 1924, the founding act of the movement Masson joined, together with his friends, but which he would leave several times. Over the coming years, André Masson hoped to extend the automatic gesture in painting. However, hindered by the support of the canvas and by the preparation of colours, he succeeded in developing this technique with the aid of sand, which he scattered across the canvas after first applying puddles of glue to it. This new pictorial process made the artist one of the first gestural painters.

In the early 1930's a series of massacres and abattoir scenes appeared, probably in reaction to the violence experienced on battlefields, explorations of the themes of archaic sacrifice, tragedy and mythology. Although he broke with André Breton's movement, he continues to exhibit with Surrealist painters or contributing to the periodicals *Acéphale* and *Minotaure* from 1934.

The violent demonstrations of the far right leagues in 1934 led André Masson and his family to flee to Spain. When he arrived, the artist was caught up into the Asturian Revolution, in particular the uprisings in Barcelona. His commitment to liberty was reflected in his numerous political caricatures published clandestinely in anti-fascist periodicals. Resisting people's suggestion that he should leave, the artist embarked on a long walk in Andalusia; this led to a series of hallucinatory metaphysical landscapes. The magnetic aspect of the Spanish soil inspired his series of harvests and insects, in which praying mantises abound. In parallel, André Masson attended corridas, capturing the ceremonial dimension, the blazing sun and the aesthetic of the spectacle in painting.

André Masson's second Surrealist period, initiated in late 1936, corresponded not only to the moment when the artist was reconciled with André Breton, but also to a change of direction in his imagery. His works became more illusionistic, immersing the viewer in the mythological complexities of a world in perpetual metamorphosis. Jacques Lacan, who met André Masson during this period, acquired the first drawing from his *Mythologies de la nature*. With the *Mythologies de l'Être*, this great album of drawings encapsulated the artist's entire philosophy, based on the anthropomorphism of nature and the plant-like transformation of the human.

In 1940, the Masson family sought refuge in Marseille and set off on 31 March for the United States. During a three weeks stay in Martinique that left a deep impression, André Masson, guided by Aimé Césaire, visited the island and drew from nature while imagining “a new vegetal mythology.” Édouard Glissant, aged thirteen, spent several evenings with André Breton, André Masson and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Years later, he wrote a short text about the relationship of West Indian poets to Surrealism. When they arrived in New York, Masson and his family settled “in complete solitude, on the shores of Lake Waramaug, surrounded by forests, in New Preston in Connecticut.” The painter, fascinated by the continent’s extreme contrasts of climate and the dazzling landscapes emanating from them, sought pictorial correspondences with the expression of elementary forces and phenomena of germination and blossoming. His personal mythology was enriched by that of Amerindian nations and the graphic richness of his painting reached its peak. His experiments played a key role for young painters like Jackson Pollock and Arshile Gorky.

After breaking again with André Breton, Masson returned to France in October 1945. He created “monument-canvas” that pay tribute to resistance and the intensity of sufferings endured. Settling in Tholonet, near Aix-en-Provence, his painting bears witness to a search for osmosis with nature and the elements (waterfalls, wind, mountains, etc.), as landscape acquired a new importance, inspired by Provence and his trips to Italy. In 1947, the *Vingt-deux dessins sur le thème du désir*, automatic drawing reappeared, generated by a state close to trance, offering a new immersion in the unconscious of desire. In the mid 1950s, André Masson returned to a profuse style. Reminiscences of violence and the theme of war alternate with a search for sensorial atmosphere, in a quest for the infinite: “all that’s left is movement” wrote the one who made metamorphosis and the fusion of all the elements the watchwords of his creativity.

Nearly half a century after the anthological exhibition organised by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1976 and the Galeries Nationales d’Expositions du Grand Palais in 1977, and more than forty years after the tribute that was dedicated to him on the occasion of his 85th birthday by the Centre Pompidou, the Centre Pompidou-Metz is bringing together nearly 200 works, spanning paintings, drawings, sculptures, periodicals and illustrated books, drawn from important national and international public collections (Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne, Museum of Modern Art and Solomon R. Guggenheim in New York, Baltimore Museum of Art, Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Museo Nacional Centro Reina Sofía in Madrid, etc.). The display is also enriched by important masterpieces from private collections in America, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy and France. Thanks to these exceptional loans, the exhibition sheds fresh light on the richness and uniqueness of the man who called himself the “rebel” of Surrealism.

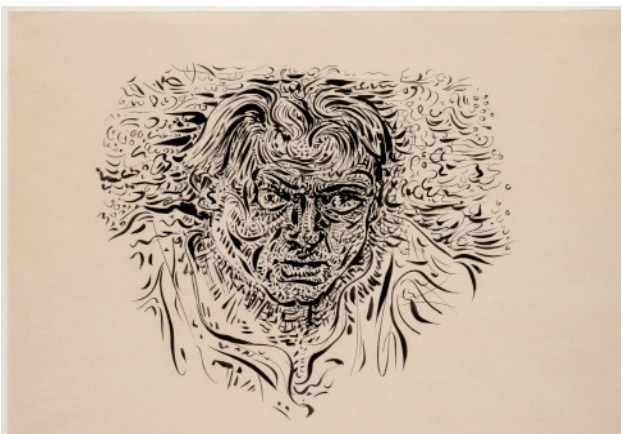
AVAILABLE VISUALS



André Masson, *En revenant de l'exécution*, 1937
Huile sur toile, 67 x 118 cm Kunsthalle Bremen Copyright : © Adagp, Paris, 2023
/ Photo : © Kunsthalle Bremen - Karen Blindow – ARTOTHEK



André Masson, *Le sang des oiseaux*, 1956
Tempéra, sable et plumes sur toile, 75 x 75 cm Paris, Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne
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André Masson, *Mon portrait au torrent*, 1945
Encre de Chine sur papier, 47,6 x 60,7 cm Paris, Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne Copyright : © Adagp, Paris, 2023 / Photo : © Philippe Migeat - Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI / Dist. RMN-GP



André Masson, *Meditation on an Oak Leaf*, 1942
Tempéra, pastel and sand on canvas, 40 x 33' New York, USA, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Copyright : URL : © Adagp, Paris, 2023
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