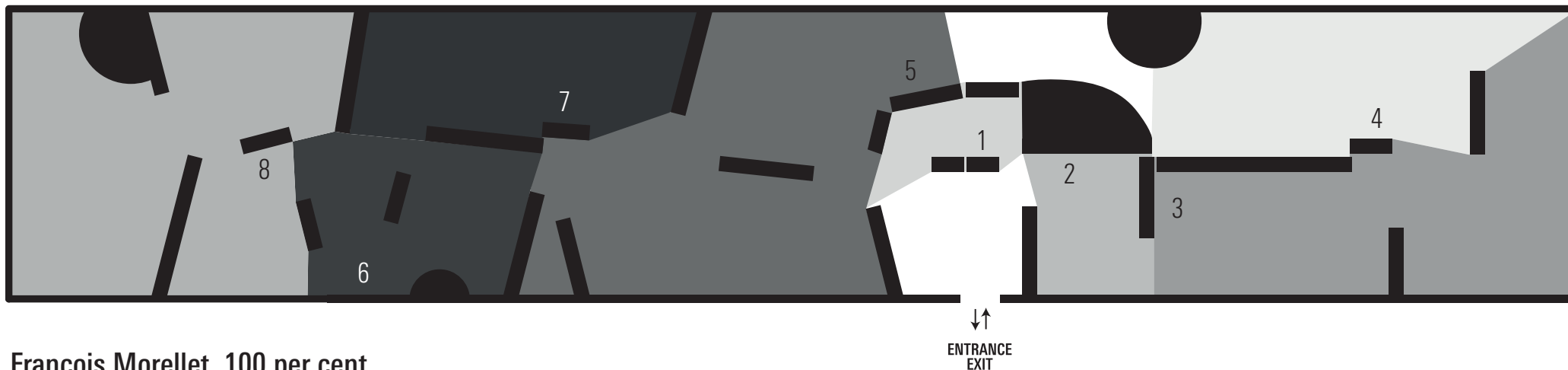




FRANÇOIS MORELLET

100 PER CENT

GALLERY 3



François Morellet. 100 per cent

03.04 → 28.09.26

Curator: Michel Gauthier, Curator of the Contemporary Collection, Centre Pompidou – National Museum of Modern Art, with the collaboration of Marion Guibert.

To mark the centenary of the birth of François Morellet (1926–2016), the Centre Pompidou-Metz is presenting the most comprehensive retrospective to date in the form of a hundred works dating from 1941 to 2016.

Morellet is unique in being both the leading French representative of geometric abstraction and the most decisive contributor to its destabilisation. Via its selection of works this major career survey explores the ambivalence between rational and irrational, and between the legacies of Francis Picabia and Piet Mondrian whom the artist liked to invoke.

The 1200 square metres of Gallery 3 offer visitors the opportunity to experience this ambivalence through two journeys in time, starting with the artist's early painting experiments from the 1940s, rarely shown until now, and ending with the baroque neons of the 2010s.

On the one hand the Morellet who champions the rule book and the triumphs of pictorial materialism, and on the other the Morellet of optical unreason and neo-Dadaist detachment. Either of these two aspects alone would have sufficed to establish the artist's historical significance, but this exhibition now makes Morellet's genius evident in all its ambiguity.

1. MORELLET BEFORE MORELLET
2. EARLY ABSTRACT PAINTINGS
3. SYSTEMATIC PAINTINGS
4. OBJECT-PAINTINGS, PAINTINGS IN SPACE
5. THE "OP" MOMENT
6. WELL DONE/ BADLY DONE
7. DISTURBED SPACE
8. GEOFOLLIES

Furthermore, the experience takes us beyond the confines of the Centre Pompidou-Metz and into the public space, with a work on the façade of the French Rail technology centre, visible from the far end of Gallery 3.

The concepts outlined in the following pages subtly interweave Morellet's artistic vocabulary with the exhibition's narrative, while giving voice to the artist himself.

LISTEN!

New episode of the
Centre Pompidou-Metz
podcast.



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here to assist you.

COBRA

Morellet was self-taught and started out painting in his spare time. He rapidly took issue with informal art and its emphasis on the artist's inspired subjectivity. In the course of 1948 he developed his painterly language into a unique form of zoomorphically nuanced Expressionism. Moving beyond the opposition between abstraction and figuration, he unwittingly aligned himself with the concerns of the Cobra group of artists, who discussed his work in 1950 in the magazine *Le Petit Cobra*.

CONCRETE ART

His discovery of the work of Max Bill in Brazil in 1950 and 1951 led Morellet down the path paved by concrete art, i.e. the notion of art based on a form of mathematical thinking. The idea of composition was gradually abandoned.

I went to Brazil to prepare an emigration which, in fact, never happened. There, in the São Paulo Museum, a major exhibition by Max Bill made me 'take holy orders'; more precisely, it converted me to concrete art, for which, since 1930, Van Doesburg and a few others had stipulated that, to be entitled to the name, a work had to be conceived before it was produced and that its production had to be meticulous and neutral, using elements of geometry.

François Morellet, « L'exposition à la galerie Raymond Creuze en 1950 », in *François Morellet. C'est n'importe quoi? 1949–2014* (Paris: Galerie Mennour, 2014), p. 9.

INFORMATION THEORY

A long-time friend of François and Vera Molnár, Morellet shared their interest in information theory, a precursor to computer coding, which developed in art in the late 1950s in opposition to the figurative painting of the École de Paris.

We were out to create experimental works that would serve a new science of art. In any case, our art form with, among other things, its trust in reason and progress and its distrust of individualism, seemed to us (with all due respect to Zhdanov) to meet the wishes of true Marxists.

François Morellet, « Résister à Descartes », 1996, in *Alliage*, no. 28, 1996, pp. 41–42.

GRAV

At the Third Paris Biennale in 1963, the members of GRAV (Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel) presented a labyrinth composed of unsigned works of art, to which Morellet contributed. The exhibition involved an innovative idea of the social function of art, together with an active role for spectators/visitors.

We affirm the existence of a visual dialogue between the being and the object. And we situate the visual fact not in the emotiveness of the being, or the artistic realisation of the work itself, but in a relationship between these two poles through visual constants.

Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, "Essai d'appréciation de nos recherches" (1960) in Yves Aupetitallot (ed.), *GRAV. Stratégies de participation, 1960–1968*, exhibition catalogue, 7 June – 6 September 1998, Grenoble, Le Magasin – Centre national d'Art Contemporain, 1998, pp. 62–63.

"UNPACKING YOUR PICNIC"

This expression is taken from a famous text by Morellet in which he argues that the artist's venture into self-effacement necessarily induces the rebirth of the viewer. The work is thus created to be interpreted.

The visual arts should allow viewers to find what they want, in other words what they bring with them. Works of art are picnic spots, where what you provide is what you get.

François Morellet, « Les œuvres d'art sont des coins à pique-nique. Une conversation avec Gerda Ridler » (2009), in *La Quadrature du carré. Une introspective*, exhibition catalogue, Waldenbuch, Museum Ritter, reprinted in François Morellet, *Mais comment taire mes commentaires* (Paris: Éditions des Beaux-Arts de Paris, 2011), p. 301.

ART AS A QUEST

For Morellet art means going with the flow. In a constant search for new processes, new materials and new explorations, the artist is committed to defending an art that is non-elitist and accessible to all.

CHOICE AND CHANCE

Throughout his life Morellet sought to erase the artist's touch from what the work reveals. He erased the brushstroke, gesture was sparse and he kept emotional decisions to a minimum, in addition to opting for unique, systematised formats based on the 80´80 cm square. His method left a noteworthy part to chance: on a grid drawn on his canvas he wrote down numbers dictated from a phone book by a third party then coloured in the squares, or left them blank, depending on whether the number he heard was odd or even.

Around 1956 I realised that chance used in this way could liven up—by which I mean fracture—my systems, which I had begun to see as too complacent, too self-satisfied.

François Morellet, « 27 juin 1984 », Cholet, François Morellet Archives.

THE WORKS IN THIS EXHIBITION ARE FRAGILE AND MADE FROM MATERIALS THAT HAVE NOW BECOME RARE. PLEASE ENJOY THEM WITHOUT TOUCHING.

MINIMALISM

In the late 1960s American Minimalism — an avant-garde movement of which Morellet was in many ways the precursor — challenged our relationship with space. Morellet shared a certain idea of non-lyrical painting with the minimalist Frank Stella, and the two artists formed a mutual admiration society.

CHOICE AND CHANCE π

Largely inspired by mathematics, Morellet found in the numerical value π a way of obtaining angles between the different segments of the lines drawn on his paintings, without having to intervene subjectively.

I was amused not to say fascinated by the importance that philosophically inclined mathematicians, who were a little nutty, accorded this sequence of numbers.

François Morellet, "Les cheminements de π ", in *Art Présence*, n° 32, October–December 1999, pp. 19–21.

THE MIRROR

In *Carré (miroir) plié (coupé) à 90° en 2 parties égales* (Square [mirror] folded [cut] at 90° into 2 equal parts) (1982), Morellet resorted to a mirror that would seem to have slipped to the floor. Here the principle of the canvas becomes a sculptural object, leaving the vertical wall and invading the exhibition space. The canvas no longer supports the subject, it becomes the (slightly ridiculed) subject itself.

LIGHT

Morellet uses light as a drawn line, with no suggestion of transcendence or glorification of electricity. The electrical cables are an integral part of the composition. They complement the two neon tubes, forming a quadrilateral in the first work, and add the «baroque» touch of the curves that destabilise the rigid, minimalist straight lines of the neons in π *Weeping Neonly n° 3*.

These 'electrical works' can be classed, like all my works of the last thirty years, as 'ironically formal' or even 'formally ironic'.

François Morellet, *Bulletin d'histoire de l'électricité*, Paris, n° 17, June 1991, pp. 21–26.

BAROQUE

A part of Morellet's work is defined by the artist himself as Baroque. Drawing more on Austrian Baroque than on the French or Italian styles, he defends these formal, irreverent games as very much his own.

A wit, a frivolousness, a joie de vivre not to be found on this scale in any Western church.

François Morellet, «BarocKonKret» [1994], in *Morellet BarocKonKret*, exhibition catalogue, 10 March – 15 April 1995, Vienna, Heiligenkreuzerhol/Hochschule für angewandte Kunst in Wien, 1995, pp. 9–11.

INSTALLATION

From the 1970s onwards, Morellet produced nearly 140 monumental works which he referred to as "architectural disintegrations". Far from blending into the background, his contributions interact with the space, distorting perspectives, playing with light and disrupting linear rationality.

From his first "architectural integration" (*2 double grids + 3° / -3° red on blue*), executed on the wall of the La Reynie plateau, facing the future Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1971, to suspending a neon work from the "Lamentable" series on the hand of the Dea Roma statue at the Villa Medici as part of the Festival of Lights "Ouvert la nuit" in 2017, François Morellet created numerous works in public spaces or in remarkable heritage sites.

Some of these works follow protocols that can be adapted to new contexts. It is in this spirit that the work *4 Grids 30° - 60° - 120° - 150°, starting from a corner of the wall, with intervals corresponding to the wall height* (1977–2026), will be reactivated on the façade of the SNCF TER Grand Est Technical Center of Metz, visible from Gallery 3, where the [François Morellet. 100 per cent](#) exhibition is presented.



Look through the glass window at the back of the gallery to catch a glimpse of the installation *4 Grids 30° - 60° - 120° - 150°, starting from a corner of the wall, with intervals corresponding to the wall height* (1977–2026)
Black adhesive tape
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PRACTICAL INFORMATION

OPENING HOURS

Every day, except Tuesdays and 1st May

SCHEDULE

1st november to 31 march

Monday → Sunday: 10-18:00

1st april to 31 october

Monday → Thursday: 10-18:00

Friday → Sunday: 10-19:00

TICKETS

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at Centre Pompidou-Metz
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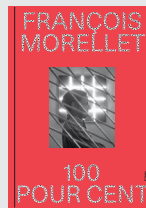
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François Morellet
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Editor: Michel Gauthier

Published by

Éditions du Centre Pompidou-Metz

224 pages, €35

Book available in bookstores

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