PRESS KIT

FERNAND LÉGER

BEAUTY IS EVERYWHERE

The exhibition celebrates the 40th anniversary of Centre Pompidou

Centre Pompidou 40

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In partnership with Bozar, Center for Fine Arts, Brussels.
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Painter of the city who bore witness to the changes taking place in his own epoch, Fernand Léger is one of the most celebrated figures of modernity. From cubism to his commitment to communism, Léger’s painting remains associated with a vision of humanity transfigured by the machine and mass production. However, over and above these powerful images, his work is at one and the same time diverse and coherent, free from categories and from movements.

"Beauty is not codified or classified, beauty is all around, in the order of a set of saucepans on the white wall of a kitchen as well as in a museum" (L'Esthétique de la machine, l'ordre géométrique et le vrai, 1923). Fernand Léger’s catchphrase rings out like a hymn to the freedom of observation, refusing any conventional taste or established hierarchy between the fine arts and everyday life. The artist perceives the aesthetic power of modern life, vibrant and colourful, and the extraordinary challenge it represents for artists.

Taking into account his career history on its diversity, this retrospective exhibition Fernand Léger. Beauty is all around, sheds new light on the manner in which the artist reinvents painting by drawing on the spectacle of the world and by opening himself up to the other arts. Without ever ceasing to be a painter, Fernand Léger contributes to realms as varied as book illustration, theatre sets, mural painting, experimental cinema and photomontage. It is rare for modern painters to forge links with creators coming from the world of architecture (Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand, Paul Nelson…) the cinema (Abel Gance, Marcel L’Herbier, Sergei Eisenstein…) dance (Jean Börlin…) music (Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honnegger…) and poetry (Blaise Cendrars Vladimir Maïakovski…).

Bringing together five decades of creation, the thematic plan reflects the living image of painting inventing itself. Nourished by the vitality of his own epoch, work by Léger is destined to escape the confines of the picture frame, to evolve into the screen, onto the stage or onto the walls of the city. Over and above the regeneration of forms, his transdisciplinary approach is tied to his political commitment and linked to his desire to make art part of daily life and to express himself to the greatest number of people.

This monographic exhibition relies on a number of exceptional loans from the Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle. Dépôt au LaM, Lille Métropole musée d’art moderne d’art contemporain et d’art brut, Villeneuve d’Ascq. This display of numerous archival documents allows the presentation of different facets of the man : author of influential texts on painting and on his time, well seasoned traveller, professor in the workshop where hundreds of artists would be trained.

Twenty years after the great retrospective organised in Paris, the Centre Pompidou — Metz pays a tribute to the exceptional personality of this great figure of the avant-garde. Organised on a territory which bears the marks of its industrial past, the exhibition Fernand Léger. Beauty is all around represents one of the great events of the fortieth anniversary of the Centre Pompidou. It serves as a reminder of the convergence between the artist’s humanist ideas and the founding missions of the establishment : an openness to creation in all its forms, the ambition for an art for everybody.

Curator :
Ariane Coulondre, Curator at Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne – Centre de création industrielle.
Fernand Léger is very early fascinated by the intensity of modern life: the sight of the urban landscape in perpetual transformation, the noise and the speed of the motor cars, the colour of the advertisements on the walls, the manufactured products which invade the shop windows...

In his cubist canvases, the artist seeks to transcribe in a radical manner the splitting up of vision and the syncopated rhythm of this booming society. His research for a visual shock is built upon a vivid palette and on the key principle of contrast, opposing as far as abstraction, forms and colours, flat tints and moulded forms.

Called up in 1914, Léger described Verdun as “the academy of cubism”, the terrible apotheosis of the fragmentation of the landscape and the dismemberment of bodies. However, it is also the place of a return to the real. In 1917, after three years at war spent in mud and dust, his paintings, dominated by bright smooth objects, express a renewed thirst for colour, for vitality and for solidity. They physically translate the power of the machine, its perfection, its efficiency.

**CONTRAST AND FRAGMENTATION**

Fernand Léger, *La Noce*, 1911-1912
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/ Dist. RMN-GP © Adagp, Paris, 2017

Presented by the young artist at the Salon des Indépendants in 1912, this painting caused a sensation, *La Noce* introduces his own version of cubism. Because of its exceptional format for the time, this highly distinctive work of art conserves the power of its volume and colour while shattering classical prospect. The street scene comes close to the programme of Italian futurism, advocating dynamic sensation and the interpenetration of forms. The muted tones and vaporous forms of this *Noce* which distinguishes itself from the monochrome cubist models of Braque and Picasso, giving way since 1913 to the shocks of contrasts of forms and of colours.
THE MECHANISM OF WAR

Fernand Léger, La Partie de cartes, 1917
Musée Kröller-Müller, Otterlo
© Adagp, Paris, 2017

Exceptional work of the war period, La Partie de Cartes marks the return of Fernand Léger to painting and civilian life, after three years spent at the front. Reminiscence of daily life in the trenches, this scene, because of its theme and its geometrical technique is a tribute to Paul Cézanne. With this image of robotic humanity, Léger comes to the end of his exploration of cubism and begins new research into mechanical and industrial aesthetics.

THE AESTHETICS OF THE MACHINE

Fernand Léger, Éléments mécaniques, 1924
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI / Service de la documentation photographique du MNAM/Dist. RMN-GP © Adagp, Paris, 2017

“I like forms imposed by modern industry, I make use of them, steels of a thousand coloured reflections, more subtle and more firm than more classical subjects”, wrote Léger to his art dealer Léonce Rosenberg in March 1922. Playing on effects of frontality, of contrast and dynamism, the spiral made up of a montage of lines and curves opens out vertically, like a mighty figure on a plain background. Definitive version of a theme explored at length, this painting is emblematic of the period, between 1917 and 1925, known as “Mechanical”.
1. POETRY, THE DYNAMIC OF WRITING

"On the boulevards, two men are transporting enormous golden letters in a handcart; the sight is so unexpected that everyone stops and stares. This is the origin of the modern spectacle. The creation of a shock by the element of surprise, the organisation of a spectacle based on these everyday phenomena requires of an artist who claims to entertain crowds a perpetual renewal.”


Inhabited by innumerable panels, signs and pictograms, the great modern city of the beginning of the XXth Century is metamorphosed by the development of advertising and brand emblems. His urban collective and composite poetry, reduced to acronyms and to snippets of words devoid of any meaning, punctuate Fernand Léger’s paintings from the end of the 1910’s. The artist shares with the avant-garde poets the same fascination for the renewal of forms on publicity and typography. He maintained friendships throughout his life with numerous poets such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars, Yvan Goll and Vladimir Maïkovski, and collaborated with some of them in the creation of works which change the text into a rebus game and the letters into abstract forms. The message is less important than the plastic artistic value of these letters which allow the aesthetic of the street and the newspapers onto the pages of poetry books La Fin du monde filmée par l’ange N.D.(1919) is a major collaboration of the artist with the poet Blaise Cendrars, one of his closest friends. This work recounts in the style of a farce the project of “God the father”, embodied by an American businessman in order to convert the inhabitants of Mars. The letter appears in a number of forms drawn with a stencil or more freely to create images similar to Apollinaire’s calligrammes.

TYPOGRAPHY

Fernand Léger, Le Typographe, 1919
Philadelphia Museum of Art
© The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950 © Adagp, Paris, 2017

Working on the edition of La Fin du Monde filmée par l’ange N.D., Fernand Léger is a frequent visitor of which inspire the series on the theme of the Typographer. This composition presents a craftsman seen from the rear sitting at a table onto which has been placed a red sheet of paper emblazoned with the letter “R”. This refers to the innovations of the avant-garde book, which directly interested Léger, who was himself an author of illustrations. Fascinated by printing and the monumental alphabet of publicity brand signs, the painter seizes their strength and their contrast. Fragments of characters, flat tints, forms and colours which clash exuberantly, following the example of the walls of the city, to become veritable artistic motifs.

URBAN POETRY

Fernand Léger, Les Disques dans la ville, 1920
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI / Jacques Faugier/Dist. RMN- GP
© Adagp, Paris, 2017

Les Disques dans la ville, both themes cherished by Fernand Léger, constitute the climax of the Mechanical period. It focuses on recollections of his walks in the streets of Paris with Blaise Cendrars and Darius Milhaud. The circular forms suggesting machinery or cinema reels are here associated with urban elements such as train signals, metal girders and publicity lettering which contradict and dovetail recreating a dynamic snapshot of urban life.
2. CINÉMA, THE IMAGE ON THE MOVE AND THE CLOSE-UP

"The purpose of the cinema, its only purpose, is the projected image. This image when coloured, but is still, always captivates children and adults, and it moves us. We then invented the moving image and the whole world is on its knees in front of this marvellous image which moves."


Fernand Léger very quickly became interested in the cinema, which was for him, the prime art of modernity. During a permission in 1916, Léger discovered the seventh art with Guillaume Apollinaire and Max Jacob. Fascinated by the mechanical character of Charlie Chaplin, Léger confronts the new and popular art of the cinema, which has its roots in the fairground, with the old theatrical model which is literary and sentimental. In the cinema he finds the possibility of representing the world free from narration, energized by the rhythm of the editing and framing effects. The painter proposes posters for La Roue by Abel Gance’s and designs the sets for L’Inhumaine by Marcel L’Herbier, before achieving in 1924 Ballet mécanique with Dudley Murphy, "the first film without a scenario". As an echo to his experiences in cinema, his paintings exploit the formal potentialities of the close up and unusual viewing angles. Objects of daily life become the lead characters in large stilllifes paintings. The changes of scale, the repetition of patterns and their alignment remind the rhythm of cinematic editing techniques.

THE CHAPLIN REVELATION

Fernand Léger, Charlot cubiste, 1924
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Georges Meguerditchian/Dist. RMN-GP © Adagp, Paris, 2017

"Man – image" born with the cinema, Charlie Chaplin comes back several times in the works by Fernand Léger, like a cubist and disarticulated harlequin, emblematic of the fragmentation of modern life. At the beginning of the 1920’s, the painter wrote the scenario of a cartoon film, Charlot cubiste. Several three dimensional versions of Chaplin were conceived, probably for this animated film which remained unfinished. The adjustable assembly of the painted wooden planks allowed for the distortion and recomposition of the “body-puzzle” of the puppet, which reappears as an allusion in 1924 in the credits of Ballet mécanique.

BALLET MÉCANIQUE

Fernand Léger, photogramme extrait du film Ballet mécanique, 1924
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
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In 1924, the painter, in collaboration with the American filmmaker Dudley Murphy, creates Ballet mécanique, an essential work in the history of avant-garde cinema. This experimental film breaks with the principle of the scenario, by alternating in rapid succession images of incongruous objects : saucepan, face, piston, shoe, hat, newspaper headline etc. Léger uses a close up framing which cuts up the bodies and the machines, in order to fragment and metamorphose these familiar forms. This cinematic experience, which is a reflection of his new preoccupations in painting, is a confirmation for him of the plastic value of the object.
THE REIGN OF THE OBJECT

Fernand Léger, Composition à la main et aux chapeaux, 1927
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Georges Meguerditchian/Dist.RMN-GP © Adagp, Paris, 2017

The painter’s response to the means of cinema (close up framing, differences of scale, repeating of images) with this large Composition highlights the imposing presence of the object by contrast and monumentality. The main characters of his own film Ballet mécanique are deployed here: the cut-out profile of Kiki de Montparnasse, four spoons, three panamas, two bottles, a typewriter…A succession of objects seen vertically or horizontally and which articulate the composition, reminding us not only of the cinematographic plan but also the repetition of photograms on the film.

3. CIRCUS AND DANCE, THE HIGH POINT OF THE POPULAR SPECTACLE

“Go to the circus. Nothing is as round as the circus. It’s a huge bowl in which circular forms develop. It doesn’t stop it just keeps going on. The circus ring dominates, orders, takes in. The public is the moving set, it moves with the action in the ring. The movements are upwards and downwards, shouting, laughing […] You leave your rectangles, your geometrical windows and you will go to the country of circles in action…”

Fernand Léger, Cirque, éditions Verve, 1950.

Passionated about spectacles, Fernand Léger collaborated throughout his life with stage directors, choreographers and composers. He took part in about ten creations, designed sets and costumes for ballets and operas. He considered theatrical space as an extension of his painting, put into movement and into music. It is from the circus in particular that the painter drew his inspiration to imagine a dynamic stage space. Friend of Fratellini, he is a regular spectator at the Medrano Circus, the music hall and cabaret reviews. Léger drew on the experience of these popular leisure activities, to forge another idea of the human body, supple, colourful, free of gravity. Considering “the human body not as plastic value, but only as an intrinsic artistic value” (1952), the painter favoured the image of dancers and acrobats whose anatomy permits the dislocation of their body where they bend over to suit the composition.

THE SWEDISH BALLETs

Fernand Léger, Danseuses, projet de rideau pour Skating Rink, 1924
Collection Adrien Maeght
© Galerie Maeght Paris © Adagp, Paris, 2017

In 1922, Fernand Léger designed the sets and costumes of the Skating Rink, a show for Les Ballets Suédois first performed at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées based on an idea of the poet Ricciotto Canudo. The dancers were led by Jean Börlin, and were used as a constitutive effect as part of the set, moving in front of a large coloured curtain. Since this first experience of the stage, Léger determined the main implicit principle in his collaboration with choreographers: it’s his painting which, before the dance, translates the movement.
In the 1940’s, the sight of divers, in the port of Marseille and in the swimming pool in New York inspires Fernand Léger the dynamic representation of bodies free of gravity. *Les Grands plongeurs noirs*, painted in exile in the United States, develops the subject in an abstract manner by a blending of silhouettes which suggests the direct influence and the aesthetic of the circus.
Trainee architect in Normandy before becoming a painter, Léger had a privileged relationship with architecture. His works of the 1920’s favoured geometrical forms and flat coloured tints directly tied to architectural motifs (columns, windows, walls…). The painter succeeds in painting totally abstract mural compositions, conceived to dialogue with the surrounding environment. Driven by the desire to bring colour into life, Fernand Léger collaborated several times with architects such as Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand, Robert Mallet–Stevens, and Paul Nelson. The International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in 1925 and then the International Exhibition of Arts and Technology of 1937 constitute key dates in his research for a synthesis of the arts. After the war he pursued the ideal of a collective and popular mural art, Léger imagines monumental multicoloured architectural projects and exploring the spatial development of colour by way of ceramics, mosaics and stained glass windows.

“How to create a feeling of space, forcing back limits? Simply by the use of colour, by walls of different colours. The apartment which I will call "a livable rectangle" will be transformed into an elastic rectangle […] Colour is a powerful means of action, it can destroy a wall, it can embellish it, it can push it back or bring it forward, it creates a new space.”


Fernand Léger, *Le Pont*, 1923
Collection Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza, Dépôt au Musée Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid © Adagp, Paris, 2017

*Le Pont* illustrates the architectural origin of the repertory of abstract and geometrical forms which prevail in Fernand Léger’s paintings at the beginning of the 1920’s. Reduced to simple forms and coloured tints, the constructive elements are organised following a system of vertical tiering, and a play of echos and interruption. The modern urban context, seen through motifs of columns, windows, walls and paving, contrasts with the shaped undulating hills. This research of maximal contrast and a spatial ambiguity, suggesting the continuous passage between interior and exterior.

Fernand Léger, *Le Balustre*, 1925

In 1925, invited by Le Corbusier into Le Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau, built for the Exhibition of Decorative Arts of 1925, Fernand Léger at first hung a very abstract canvas, Composition (1924).

He then replaced it by *Le Balustre*, in which the vocabulary of classical architecture is isolated and transformed into a monumental motif. Following the purist aesthetic, the precise and geometrical lines of the column on a background of rectangles of pure colours, are direct echos of the modernist architectural language which Le Corbusier himself was developing at that time.
MOVING TOWARDS THE MONUMENTAL, THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION, 1937

**Fernand Léger, Le Transport des forces, 1937**
Centre national des arts plastiques, dépôt au Palais de la découverte, Paris

*Le Transport des forces* is emblematic of the great commissions from the State to modern artists for the International Exhibition of Arts and Technology in Modern Life of 1937. Because of its exceptional size (10 metres wide), this industrial panorama, juxtaposes a great visual collage, of electric power poles, a rainbow, a waterfall and a factory. Celebration of technical progress, it decorates the entrance hall of the Palais de la Découverte, recently opened. The monumental composition, carried out by three of the painter’s pupils (Elie Grekoff, Asger Jorn and Pierre Wermaître) according to a gouache by Léger, also reveals the role attributed to his workshop for his monumental projects.

LA PEINTURE DANS L’ESPACE

**Fernand Léger, La Fleur polychrome, 1952**
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. RMN-GP
© Adagp, Paris, 2017

Around 1950, Léger renews contact with his pupil Roland Brice in Biot (Alpes – Maritimes) to experiment with ceramics, in order to give depth and relief to his pictorial work. He favoured flower and fruit motifs coming from his more stylised paintings. Produced in cement and in plaster, this unique *Fleur polychrome* is painted on both sides by the artist. It constitutes a natural prolongation of his research into creation of a spatial art which would be likely to transcend the limitations of the painting.
EPilogue
LÉGER AND HIS POLITICAL COMMITMENT

"Not at any time in our world have workers had access to artistic beauty and it is for this reason that they have never had the necessary time nor sufficient freedom of thought. Liberate the popular masses, give them the possibility to think, to see, to cultivate themselves and we will be at ease, they can then in turn fully enjoy the novel beauty that modern art can offer them. The working class has a right to all this. They have a right to have mural paintings signed by the best artists, and if we give them the time, spare time, they will come to settle down with this, live with this and also to like it."


All of Fernand Léger’s incursions away from the easel, in the realm of the cinema, the performing arts or mural painting, reflect his desire to popularise the modern aesthetic by taking it out of the bourgeois living room and the museum. The artist’s taste for street theatre and the industrial world are a reflection of his profound empathy for the working class, their leisure activities and their living conditions.

Fernand Léger’s political awareness was born out of the fraternity he experienced in the trenches during the First World War. At the time of the Front populaire, his commitment in favour of social progress and education became apparent at conferences where he adopted a position against the Socialist realism advocated by Louis Aragon. Exiled in 1940 in The United States where he fled from Nazism, in 1945 he send his request to join the Communist Party just before his return to France. The last years of his life were marked by the adoption of firm political positions and an important series of paintings, including Les Constructeurs (1950) and La Partie de Campagne (1953) which combine the modern aesthetic with popular subject matter, with the ambition of being in keeping with the great pictorial tradition.

Fernand Léger, Les Constructeurs (état définitif), 1950
Musée national Fernand Léger, Biot.
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée Fernand Léger) / Gérard Biot © ADAGP, Paris, 2017

Les Constructeurs, is the culmination of a series devoted to the working class working on building sites. The composition borrows from classicism, monumentalism and history painting, but still being placed firmly in contemporary society, in the immediate after war years of reconstruction. A symbol of Léger’s political commitment, the work is a reminder of his concern that art should have a social fonction. Coming back to a more legible figuration, the painter intended to create a formal language accessible to the working classes. However, the formal liberty of this impressive composition is indicative of the shift away the artist has taken from the «descriptive literature» of the Socialist realism adopted by the Communist Party.
Few months after the death of Paul Eluard, the editor Pierre Seghers asked Fernand Léger to illustrate the most celebrated text by the famous poet, Liberté. Published for the first time in 1942, Eluard’s poem was a rapid success during the occupation, and became a symbol of the resistance against barbarity. Léger designed a book-object in which a portrait of the poet is juxtaposed with verses of the printed poem, between which freely intervene stretches of plain colours. Playing with the technique of the stencil to separate the colour from the form, Léger pays tribute to his poet friend, with whom he shared the same commitment.
Three documentary focuses forming part of the exhibition will shed light on other facets of the life and work by Fernand Léger.

**DRAWING AND PHOTOGRAPHY**

The connection between Léger’s drawings and photography are examined here. Upon his arrival in Paris Léger became a photography assistant and all his life he took an interest in this activity. His drawings from the 1930’s are close to the photographs of the “art brut” series by Charlotte Perriand, which is indicative of the complicity the two artists had concerning objects found in nature, when they were walking with Pierre Jeanneret.

**TRAVELS**

Fernand Léger increased his travelling throughout his life and published wonderful travel stories. Residing in Paris at the beginning of the century, he never ceased to return to his native Normandy to relax or to visit other regions in France. Anxious to extend his relations and to conclude his collaborations abroad, the artist very soon travelled around Europe, from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean Basin (Italy, Spain, Greece) and went several times to the United States. A cartography of his travels and numerous extracts from texts and letters reveal this international dimension.

**THE WORKSHOP**

Since 1924, Fernand Léger taught at several schools, such as l’Académie moderne, la Grande Chaumière, before opening his own establishment in 1933 l’Académie de l’art contemporain, assisted by Nadia Khodossievitch who would become his second wife. During three decades, his workshop remained a cosmopolitan meeting point, welcoming numerous women artists. Amongst the hundreds of pupils who went through the Léger workshop, the profiles are extremely varied. During the 1920’s, Tarsila do Amaral, Moï Ver, Florence Henri and Maria – Elena Viera Da Silva; in the 1930’s, Louise Bourgeois, Nicolas de Staël, Asger Jorn, Pierre Wemaëre; and from 1940 – 1950 Serge Gainsbourg, Aurélie Nemours, Sam Francis, William Klein and Bernard Lassus.
4.
EXTRACTS OF ACCOUNTS RELATED BY ARTISTS FROM THE LÉGER WORKSHOP

GEORGES BAUQUIER (1910–1997)

French Painter, Georges Bauquier was firstly a pupil before becoming in 1934 treasurer of the workshop as well as organising the lessons at Léger’s workshop.

“Those who had not known him well and had only judged him on his physical appearance, would have been unable to discern the sum of goodness and sensitivity that Léger concealed under his truculent air, as if to protect himself better from any intrusion into his secret and intimate personality. These profoundly human sentiments translated into a smiling good —heartedness which the “Boss” never allowed to leave him through the whole of a corrective procedure. He always knew how to say something kind, an encouraging word for a pupil whose work he had just criticised and the elders knew exactly what sense should be given to the qualitative “pretty”, which meant a conviction, just as “it’s strong”, was the ultimate compliment.”

Do you know what, he frequently said, painting is a damned occupation. It requires willpower, patience and courage. If you are incapable of that, choose something else. It’s a hard battle which lasts a lifetime and spares nobody, not even us the veterans.”And he would add : “You have come to work here by yourselves. Do not fear being under my influence, sometimes at least. We all went through that.Nothing falls from the sky and we are not born a genius.

Personaly, I was under the influence of Cézanne.Then one fine day I said to him : zut! Now you do the same and say “Zut to Léger” conserving from your time at the workshop everything that you consider to be useful to the development of your own personality.”


LOUISE BOURGEOIS (1911–2010)

French sculptress, naturalised American, Louise Bourgeois passed through the Léger workshop from 1934 – 1938.

“ For years Fernand Léger was my best professor. […] He was somebody who was very tempestuous, absolutely massive and since he wasn’t somebody who talked very much, he said to me : I don’t understand why you paint Louise.Let me show you something”.He picked up a wood chip and he hung it under his shelf then he said to me : watch the wood turn on itself like that. It’s sculpture“

WILLIAM KLEIN (1928)

American painter, photographer and film director, William Klein frequents the Léger workshop towards the end of the 1940’s

“I was twenty. I was an American soldier in the occupying army in Germany and I came to live in Paris to study painting. The American army allowed young soldiers to catch up on lost time with an allowance, the GI bill of rights. In Paris we had the choice between La Grande Chaumière, the Beaux-Arts or Fernand Léger. For me there was no hesitation, I rushed to Léger’s place.[…] Léger was not fashionable amongst young painters, but for me he had become a model. I worked in a way quite close to his. He did research with his paintings, he had worked with the Les Ballets Suédois, the cinema, he had made a film. He was multidisciplinary. It’s that which attracted me to him. I knew he was a communist and that he practised mural painting. But he didn’t talk about politics. Me, American, I was a little scared of communists, who in France represented 25% with Torez. But that didn’t count for me, I was not interested in politics. Thanks to Léger, my dream was to do mural painting. He put that into my head.”

William Klein, extract from the interview with Ariane Coulondre on January the 24th 2017
(available in the exhibition catalogue)

BERNARD LASSUS (1929)

Plastic artist, architect and landscape gardener, Bernard Lassus frequented the Léger workshop around 1950. In his later work as a colourist, he has produced multiple creations in Lorraine and Moselle having coloured the façades of 15000 residential buildings.

“In his beautiful exhibition of Les Constructeurs at the Maison de la pensée française in 1951, [Fernand Léger] asserted his personal position that art should be comprehensible for the public without recourse to photographic illusionism. This resistance, which he put up to artistic jdanovism (and not to the Communist Party), was a very important example for my generation. We didn’t know weather or not we should be involved in Socialist realism at that time, we were traumatised by this question. It was a general debate which we saw in reviews, in particular between Breton and Aragon. We don’t realised how the intellectual pressure was intense at this period. Léger represented a median position. What interested me in his painting, was the way in which he responded to this social question. As of that epoch, it was very clear to me : I wanted to do social painting without falling into a pseudo-photographic realism. Moreover, it is not by chance, that my own personal development led me towards being a colourist and a landscape gardener.”

Bernard Lassus, extract from the interview with Ariane Coulondre on November the 25th 2016 (available in the exhibition catalogue).
5.

BIOGRAPHICAL TIMELINE

1881: 4th February, birth of Fernand Léger in Argentan (Orne, Normandy).


1900: Settles in Paris.

1903: Admitted to the School of Decorative Arts but refused at the School of Fine Arts. As a free auditor, he follows the lessons of Léon Gérôme then of Gabriel Ferrier. Frequents The Académie Julian and The Louvre.

1904–1905: Paints works of impressionist influence which he destroys almost all of. Employee in an architect’s office, then with a photographer.

1906–1907: Two trips in Corsica. Visits the Cézanne retrospective at the Salon d’automne.

1908: Moves into la Ruche in Montparnasse, where he frequents Robert Delaunay, Marc Chagall, Chaïm Soutine, Blaise Cendrars, Guillaume Apollinaire, Henri Laurens, Amedeo Modigliani.

1911: Exposes at the Salon des Indépendants his first large scale canvas, Nus dans la forêt. In September, decried as “tubiste” by the critic Louis Vauxcelles.

1912: Exposes his œuvres-manifestes at the Salon des Indépendants (La Noce), at the Salon d’automne (La Femme en bleu). Takes part in the Salon de la Section d’or.

1913: Exposes at the Salon des Indépendants his first large scale canvas, Nus dans la forêt. In September, decried as “tubiste” by the critic Louis Vauxcelles.

1914: Mobilised in the army engineers. After the battle of the Marne becomes a stretcher bearer on the front at Argonne.

1915–1916: Drawings from the front. During leave, discovers the cinema with the films of Charlie Chaplin.

1917: Hospitalised, he paints La Partie de cartes. Discharged at the end of the year.

1918: Illustrates La Fin du monde filmée par l’ange N. D. by Blaise Cendrars.

1919: Illustrates La Fin du monde filmée par l’ange N. D. by Blaise Cendrars.


1921: Contacts with Abel Gance for the film La Roue. Illustrates Lunes en papier by André Malraux. For the Ballets suédois directed by Rolf de Maré, he designs the costumes and sets Skating Rink.


1924: Makes the film Ballet mécanique with Dudley Murphy. Begins his teaching activity at the Académie moderne. Travels in Italy. Invited by Frederick Kiesler to spend time in Vienna at the International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques.

1925: For the exhibition of decorative arts paints an abstract panel for the entrance hall of the French Embassy for Robert Mallet-Stevens and exposes at Le Corbusier’s Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau.

1931: First trip to the United States, invited by Sara and Gerald Murphy.

1933: Retrospective at the Kunsthau in Zurich where he gives a conference, «The wall, the architect, the painter», Participates in the International Congress of Modern Architecture organised on board the liner Le Patris II on the way to Athens.

1934: Exhibition at the galerie Vignon of gouaches and drawings, entitled « Objets ». In London, at the request of Alexandre Korda a projet of costumes for the film The Shape of things to come. In September, goes with Simone Herman to Copenhagen and Stockholm.


1936: Associated with the activites of the Association of revolutionary writers and artists (AEAR) Takes part in the debates on The Quarrel about realism organised at the la Maison de la culture in Paris. Designs the sets and costumes for Serge Lifar’s ballet David Triomphant.

1937: Several monumental projects for the International Exhibition of Arts and Technology in Modern Life. Designs the sets and costumes for 300 extras for the show Naissance d’une cité by Jean- Richard Bloch, travels to Finland to exhibit with Calder. Tries unsuccessfully to obtain a visa for Russia.


1940: Takes refuge in Normandy, escapes to Bordeaux then Marseille. Flees France for the United States.

1941-1942: Lecturer at Mills College (California). Takes part in the exhibition Artists in exile at Pierre Matisse’s home. Beginning of his research into « outside colour ». Decorates the dining room of Wallace Harrison’s appartement.

1943-44: Spends his summers at Rouses Point, near Lake Champlain. Collaborates on the film Dreams that money can buy directed by Hans Richter.


1946: Reopens the Léger Workshop. Designs a mosaic for the façade of the church of Assy. Gives a conference at the Sorbonne on The art and the people.

1948: Designs the sets and for the ballet Le Pas d’acier. Takes part in the World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace in Wroclaw (Poland).


1954: Numerous monumental projects : stained glass windows for the church of Courfaivre (Switzerland), stained glass window and mosaics for the University of Caracas (Venezuela), decoration project for a building belonging to Gaz de France (Alfortville), an architectural polychromy project for the hospital in Saint-Lô. Takes part in an exhibition of the group Espace in Biot.

1955: Visits Prague for the Sokols Congress.

Dies on the 17th August at Gif-sur-Yvette.
A richly illustrated catalogue, a new reference publication about the artist will accompany the exhibition. The points of view and analysis of specialists such as Anna Valyje (Léger and Modernity”), Véronique Sorano-Stedman (Léger’s Pictorial technique”), Bénédicte Duvernay (“De l’air dans la mécanique : Léger, Delaunay, Cendras”), Victor Guégan (Fernand Léger The letter and the printing works”), François Albera(Fernand Léger film — maker) Corinne Poncenat (En quête d’un nouveau pacte imaginaire : une esthétique anti — spectaculaire”). Arnaud Dercelles (Fernand Léger and Le Corbusier”) and Cécile Pichon Bonin(Fernand Léger and the French Communist Party) nourish and deal in depth with the themes taken up in the exhibition.Apart from these essays the Léger catalogue is a gallery of portraits of the personalities who gravitated around the artist and a list of pupils who passed through his workshop together with their personal testimonies.An attractive graphic object conceived by Anette Lenz, making use of the close ups and the typography to review the painting codes employed by Léger.

Collective publication directed by Ariane Coulondre (in french)

304 pages, 44 euros
Publication date 17th May 2017
7. 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CENTRE POMPIDOU
In 2017, the Centre Pompidou is celebrating its 40th anniversary throughout France. To share the celebration with a wider audience, it will be presenting a completely new programme of exhibitions, outstanding loans and various events throughout the year.

Exhibitions, shows, concerts and meetings will be staged in 40 French cities in partnership with museums, contemporary art centres, performance halls, a festival, a key player in France’s cultural and artistic fabric and many more.

From late 2016 to early 2018, in 40 cities including Grenoble, Lille, Le Francois in Martinique, Saint-Yrieix-la-Perche, Chambord, Cajarc and Nice, everyone will be encouraged to experience and share the originality of the Centre Pompidou, from an event lasting an evening to an exhibition running for six months, with a combination of exhibitions, concerts, theatre/dance performances and talks.

“I would like the Centre Pompidou’s 40th anniversary to be a festival of artistic creation everywhere in France. I would like it to illustrate the vitality of cultural institutions that share the Centre Pompidou spirit, to celebrate the ties we have built with artists, museums, art centres, performance halls and festivals, and to develop and enrich a long history of shared projects that serve art and creation. I would like it to reach out to those who have loved the Centre Pompidou for forty years, as well as to new audiences. The Centre Pompidou’s anniversary will involve France’s entire territory, through a wide variety of events designed to create, assist, foster and facilitate projects,” says Serge Lasvignes, President of the Centre Pompidou.

75 PARTNERS
50 EXHIBITIONS
15 CONCERTS & PERFORMANCES
Centre Pompidou–Metz is the first offshoot of a major French Cultural institution, Centre Pompidou, in partnership with regional authorities. An independent body, Centre Pompidou–Metz benefits from the experience, expertise and international reputation of Centre Pompidou. It shares with older sibling values of innovation and generosity, and the same determination to engage a wide public through multi-disciplinary programming.

Centre Pompidou-Metz produces temporary exhibitions which draw on loans from the holdings of Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne. With more than 100,000 works, it is the largest collection of modern and contemporary art in Europe and the second largest in the world.

Centre Pompidou-Metz also develops partnerships with museums around the world. A programme of dance, music, films, lectures and children’s workshop further explore themes raised in the exhibitions.

Financial support is provided by Wendel, its founding sponsor.
The pictures are available online, at the address below: centrepompidou-metz.fr/phototheque

Login: presse
Password: Pomp1d57
Fernand Léger, *La roue rouge*, 1920
Huile sur toile, 65 x 56 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
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Fernand Léger, *Elément mécanique*, 1924
Huile sur toile, 146 x 97 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
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Fernand Léger, *Le mecanicien*, 1918
Huile sur toile, 65 x 56 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
Dépôt LaM, Lille Métropole musée d’art moderne d’art contemporain et d’art brut, Villeneuve d’Ascq
© Photo Philip Bernard © Adagp, Paris 2017

Fernand Léger, *Charlot cubiste*, 1924
Éléments en bois peints, cloués sur contreplaqué, 73,6 x 33,4 x 6 cm
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Fernand Léger, *L’Inhumaine* 
Projet d’affiche pour le film de Michel L’Herbier “L’inhumaine” (film muet noir et blanc 1924). Biot, musée national Fernand Léger
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée Fernand Léger) / Gérard Blot © ADAGP, Paris, 2017

Musée national Fernand Léger, Biot
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée Fernand Léger) / Gérard Blot © ADAGP, Paris, 2017

Fernand Léger, *Le Cirque Médrano*, 1918
Huile sur toile, 58 x 46,5 cm
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Fernand Léger, *Composition à la main et aux chapeaux*, 1927
Huile sur toile, 248 x 185,5 cm
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Fernand Léger, *Le Typographe*, 1919
Huile sur toile, 130,2 x 97,5 cm
Philadelphia Museum of Art
© The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950 © Adagp, Paris, 2017
Fernand Léger, Composition aux trois figures, 1932
Huile sur toile, 128 x 230 cm
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Fernand Léger, Le Transport des forces, 1937
Huile sur toile, 491 x 870 cm
Centre national des arts plastiques
Dépôt au Palais de la découverte
© Adagp, Paris, 2017

Fernand Léger, Liberté, 1953
Encre, gouache et graphite sur papier, 33,3 x 16 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne, Centre de création industrielle
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Fernand Léger, Les grands plongeurs noirs, 1944
Huile sur toile, 189 x 221 cm
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne - Centre de création industrielle
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Fernand Léger, Les trois musiciens, 1930
Huile sur toile, 118 x 113,5 cm
© Von der Heydt-Museum Wuppertal / Photo: Medienzentrum, Antje Zeis-Loi © Adagp, Paris, 2017

Fernand Léger, La Partie de campagne (Deuxième état), 1953
Huile sur toile, 130,5 x 162 cm
Collection Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza
© Adagp, Paris, 2017

Fernand Léger, La Fleur polychrome, [1952]
Ciment et plâtre peints, 165 x 132 x 47 cm
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Fernand Léger, La Partie de campagne (Deuxième état), 1953
Huile sur toile, 130,5 x 162 cm
Collection Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza
© Adagp, Paris, 2017

Fernand Léger, Le Balastré, 1925
Huile sur toile, 129,5 x 97,2 cm
MoMA (Museum of Modern Art), New York
© Adagp, Paris, 2017

Fernand Léger, Les grands plongeurs noirs, 1944
Huile sur toile, 189 x 221 cm
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