

MAMCO GENEVE
09.10.2019 – 02.02.2020
PRESS KIT

ROSEMARIE
CASTORO

IRMA
BLANK

MARTIN
BARRÉ

ARNULF
RAINER

Opening October 8, 2019 (6 pm)

October 9, 2019–February 2, 2020



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The exhibition is curated by Clément Dirié and received the support of the Fondation Gandur pour l'Art.

"I don't paint Venuses or apples, or my last dream, or a dream I might have. I paint paintings. Propositions in paint, questions expressed in, or addressed to the medium of painting." (French artist Martin Barré in 1976, interviewed by critic Anne Tronche). In stressing his resolutely rational artistic approach, its immanent quality, and its engagement with questions of aesthetics, Martin Barré restates what is most apparent in his work: painting and nothing but painting, conceived as a (cerebral) space apart, a conceptual and visual playground, a place to think, and a place where thoughts can assume material form.

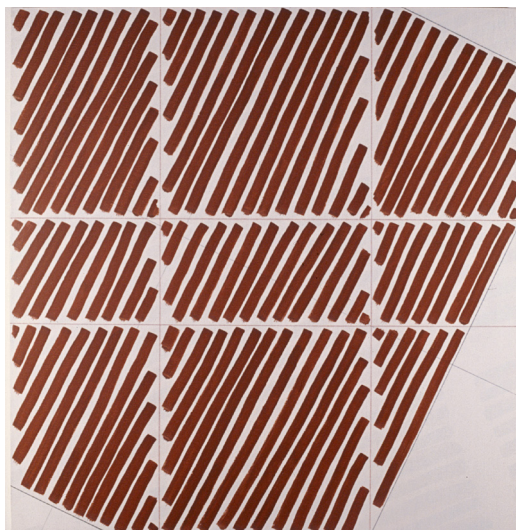
Martin Barré was born in Nantes in 1924. He studied architecture and painting at the city's Ecole des Beaux-Arts and settled in Paris at the beginning of the 1950s. He made his début on the Paris art scene with solo and group exhibitions in 1954 and 1955. Abandoning the vocabulary of his student years, he applied himself to the development of a distinctive, abstract oeuvre—an undertaking he pursued with exceptional rigor and originality over the following four decades, until his death in 1993.

His work as a whole displays remarkable coherence but is nonetheless generally divided into five periods. From 1954 to 1962, an initial phase gives form to an unprecedented synthesis of the artistic lessons of the first half of the 20th century and post-war abstraction. From 1963 to 1967, Barré developed a pioneering corpus in the history of contemporary painting, using aerosol sprays to create performative works that capture gesture and time on canvas. His so-called "conceptual episode," from 1969 to 1971, was a period of experimentation with the conceptual possibilities of photography and the

exhibition-as-artwork—new avenues for his exploration of the medium of painting and the conditions that shape its making and display. Barré's return to painting in 1972 heralded two decades of creativity, exploring the structure of paintings, and overpainting or obliteration from 1972 to 1977, followed by the investigation of color and color combinations from 1979 to 1992.

Working sequentially, in series, Martin Barré mobilizes the full range of pictorial parameters to liberate the dynamic, spatial, and cerebral potential of painting as a medium. By conceiving each picture of and in itself, and in relation to the other pictures in the series of which it is a part, Barré conducts his work with precision, applying an almost linguistic approach to painting. The formation of the picture is supremely important: it is here that his selective interplay evolves, between colors and areas left in reserve, between the foreground and background, the picture space and the space out-of-frame, effects of transparency and the border.

MAMCO's exhibition is Switzerland's first large-scale presentation of work by this pivotal figure in mid-to-late 20th-century art. Featuring representative works from each period, the show retraces Martin Barré's engagement with the medium of painting: the enterprise that led him to experiment ceaselessly with the sensory, cerebral, chromatic, and physical properties and possibilities of pictorial form.



Martin Barré, 75-76-D-145x140, 1975-1976
Acrylic on canvas, 145 x 140 cm
court. Archives Martin Barré, Paris
© 2019, ADAGP, Paris



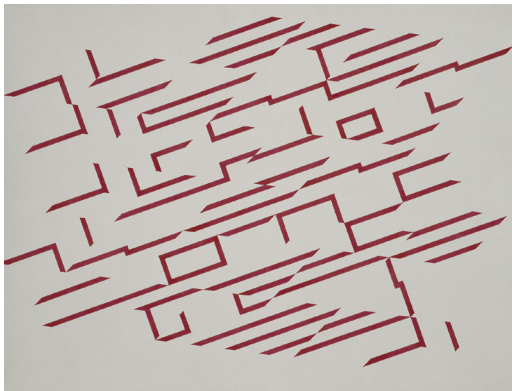
Martin Barré, 84-85-108x154-B, 1984-1985
Acrylic on canvas, 108 x 154 cm
court. Archives Martin Barré, Paris
© 2019, ADAGP, Paris



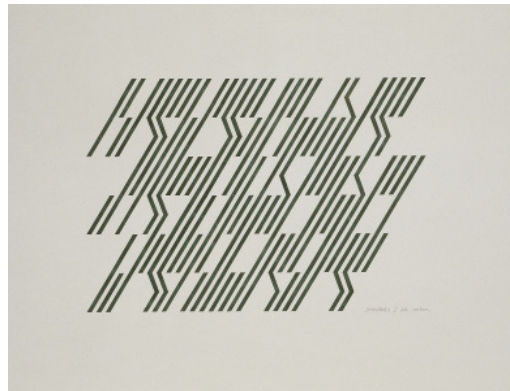
Martin Barré, 92B-128x124-D, 1992
Acrylic on canvas, 128 x 124 cm
court. Archives Martin Barré, Paris
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Fondation Gandur pour l'art, Genève



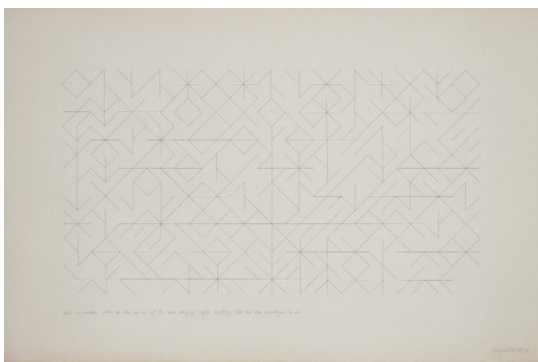
Martin Barré, 92B-128x124-G, 1992
Acrylic on canvas, 128 x 124 cm
court. Archives Martin Barré, Paris
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Guy de Cointet, *Sans titre*, ca 1980
watercolor on paper
58 x 79.4 cm
coll. MAMCO, gift Succession Guy de Cointet



Guy de Cointet, *Nevertheless I did Venture*
1978
ink on paper
65.2 x 101.7 cm
coll. MAMCO



Guy de Cointet
*And no wonder...What he saw was one
of the most amazing sights...*, 1978
ink on paper
65 x 102 cm
coll. MAMCO



Guy de Cointet, *Sans titre*, ca. 1965
collage, painting on isorel plate
107 x 79 cm
coll. MAMCO, gift Succession Guy de Cointet

Quicksand 2, 2019

Conceived for MAMCO, the installation has been gifted to the museum by the artist

At first sight, the installation devised by John M Armleder (b. 1948) for London's Dairy Art Centre in 2013, now re-created in a new version for MAMCO, resembles an industrial storage facility partly filled with an eclectic assortment of items (sheets of Plexiglass, artificial flowers, books etc.), and animated by audio and televisual elements. John M Armleder delights, it seems, in mixing styles and registers through his use of furnishings, artistic and decorative objects, natural and artificial materials to form an ensemble reminiscent of a shop interior, an artist's studio, or the reserve collection of a museum—the assembled objects hark back to their commercial and industrial origins, or to the works of art represented by their fragmented remains.

Like John M Armleder's earlier installations—featuring piled-up bottle racks, mussel shells, and sledges, with a nod to the figures of Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Broodthaers, and Joseph Beuys—the objects in *Quicksand 2* remind us of what Arthur Danto has described as art's power to "transfigure the commonplace."

The origins of this practice—the transformation of ordinary objects into artworks—lie of course in the "ready-mades" of the early 20th century, but also in American Pop art of the 1960s and in the "commodity sculpture" trend of the 1980s (including Jeff Koons, Haim Steinbach, and John M Armleder himself).

We might equally be reminded of the *Wunderkammer* or cabinets of curiosities assembled by collectors from the Late Renaissance onwards, featuring natural, scientific, and artistic treasures alike: ultimately, it is precisely these systems of classification that Armleder is calling into question. His work demonstrates how the power of display, the very act of organization and presentation (however chaotic) will always prevail over the individual items presented. Artistry resides in the arrangement of the objects, their interrelationships, and the desire (however illusory) to harness them to *make meaning*. Nothing is ever wholly an original piece, or a reproduction, or a product of artistic or contrastingly commercial intent: things are always shaped in some way, and this is also the "art of context."

These are the "quicksands" of the title, into which the artist invites the viewer to venture. John M Armleder's installation crystallizes the preoccupations of an artistic career extending from the late 1960s to the present: the metaphor of the museum as a repository for the fragmentary leavings of artistic practice, the concept of a reservoir of available forms for the shaping of a new work of art, or an assortment of items offered up by an improbable vendor.

In the 1970s, Armleder's work with the Ecart group highlighted this non-distinction between every-day and artistic activity, in the wake of the Fluxus movement. In the 1980s, his *Furniture Sculptures* (as per Erik Satie's "furniture music") stressed this aspect of avant-garde practice and its ultimate fate. In the 1990s his *Pour Paintings* and murals stressed the ancillary role of the composition in relation to the vagaries of the artistic program. Since the early 2000s, his installations have showcased artistic (or curatorial) endeavours that hark back to the era of the "B movie," when a set created for one screenplay would become the springboard for another. Today, as we discern the overall purpose and direction of this unique oeuvre, we can look into the heart of the maelstrom of forms, media, new creations and re-workings, gestures, and references and see—as in Edgar Allan Poe's short story—how its swirling power draws everything in. As if the unblinking "eye" of the vortex was gazing out at us in its turn.

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