

MARYAN

Une peinture vérité

Curator: Lucas Djaou

31 March – 28 May 2022

47 rue Saint-André-des-Arts
Paris 6

With tribal artworks lent
by the Galerie Flak and
the Galerie Lucas Ratton

Born in 1927 to Polish Jewish parents in South-East Kraków, Pinchas Burstein was bound for a rough passage through the deadliest conflict of the twentieth century, which he was the only one of his family to survive. The artist who would later be known as Maryan S. Maryan left behind him a body of work whose chromatic and stylistic power were often seen to be a reflection of his own personal history in a sort of funhouse mirror. His artworks were not however a form of revenge on the events he had experienced, and he always refused to be seen through the unique prism of his time in the concentration camps. 'Most of what people write about me is bogus,' he wrote in the year he died. From his first exhibition in Jerusalem in 1949 to the moment of his sudden disappearance in 1977 in New York, Maryan used art as a vital cathartic tool. His work was without hatred but it was also not unperceptive. He was not so much a painter of his own past, personal experience as that of the brutal, stirring fate of humanity. Though he was thought of by his peers as the father of New Figuration, his work was neglected for a long time. Maryan was neither an artist-witness nor a mad artist: the madness of his paintings stopped there. He was neither militant nor spokesman for a cause. Instead, he attempted to show the world as he saw it, as he experienced it, and most probably as it really is.

In the 1950s, he lived in Paris, where abstraction reigned. He frequented the artists working in the scene at the time, from the École de Paris to Cobra, and out of his contact with them emerged what could be called 'figurative expressionist' paintings, in the footsteps of the French painter Jean-Michel Atlan and the Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo. In 1961, Mathias Fels organised the exhibition *Nouvelle Figuration*, in which he showcased the figurative movement that was developing in European painting at the time. Maryan's works were exhibited alongside those of Karel Appel, Francis Bacon, Alberto Giacometti, and Jean Dubuffet.

A new period began when Maryan went to the US in 1962 and took US citizenship in 1969, discovering the consumerist, American way of life. Abstract expressionism was falling out of favour and Pop Art was taking over. Maryan was highly attentive to this artistic movement, observing in all its details something that was not only taking place in the cultural sphere but was turning into a veritable social phenomenon. This discovery involved a major paradigm shift in his work. Maryan flourished in New York, developing a personal style imbued with multiple pop and folkloric influences. This original eclecticism would help him forge what became the distinctively recognisable 'Maryanesque' style.

The paintings from this period—often untitled—represent solitary characters dressed in extravagant clothes, looking like they have been placed on stage for all the world to see. Though many of them are anonymous and unidentified, it's possible to discern self-portraits in some, hiding behind big pairs of sunglasses. The swarm of characters includes members of the Klu Klux Klan (this white supremacist secret society was undergoing a resurgence in the 1960s), unknown men dressed in suit and tie (Wall Street bankers or businessmen), mouths stuffed with candy canes, and laughing, mocking faces. Some of them are wearing dunce's hats, others have hair falling down into their eyes. Their hats—bowler hats, pointed hats, battered,

The Galerie Claude Bernard
simultaneously presents an exhibition of
artworks from the 1950s by Maryan.

The exhibition "Une peinture vérité" is
accessible from Tuesday to Saturday from
11 am to 7 pm at 47 rue Saint-André-des-
Arts, Paris 6.

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out of shape, oversized hats—are distant echoes of those of the Penitents of Seville. They are also reminiscent of the works of Velázquez, Francisco de Goya, and Frans Hals, all of whom Maryan admired. While they offer a biting satire of contemporary society, these works seem above all to have originated in the artist's everyday life, and in unexpected aesthetic shocks, like the series of characters disguised as Napoleon (based on a statuette of the Emperor that a collector friend gave to him), or like the surprising corrido scenes he painted after spending time in Spain, in which the executioner can be seen facing his victim.

All of this comes together to form an amazing gallery of quirky, caricatural, grotesque, colourful portraits, with subjects who shout, grin, laugh, grimace, stuff themselves with sweets, vomit, stick their tongue out, hide behind masks, or expose their genitals. Maryan's pictorial world is full of strange and strangely endearing characters. Under his brush, art takes its measure from humanity, showing itself to the viewer in a way that is both trivial and grandiose. On display is one big festival, a fancy-dress party, an incredible 'human menagerie', to use the artist's own expression. In this, Maryan's painting reaches into the most profoundly intimate parts of ourselves. It is disturbing, provocative, and tender, reminding us of the cruel fact that humans are animals, drawn and quartered over our contrary, changing emotions. The multitude of symbols and stories that his body of work puts on display constitute a 'synthesis of the all the mass manifestations of humanity', as was said on the occasion of the 1978 exhibition *Hommage à Maryan* at the Galerie de France.

These 'mass manifestations' are drawn from an incredible array of sources, from the shimmer of the folkloric costumes Maryan will have seen during his frequent visits to the Musée de l'Homme, to the angular lines of what was then known as 'tribal' art, which he collected. From Paris to New York, in Maryan's living spaces—places of transit, hotels and apartments—objects hold a special place. In 1973, he moved into the mythic Chelsea Hotel, nerve centre of the vibrant New York arts scene. His apartment can be seen in the photos taken by his dealer Allan Frumkin in 1977. It overflows with heteroclit objects and works of art. He created his own personal museum in which his own creations sat side by side with strange objects from around the world. A Polish rocking horse, a Japanese battery-powered robot, wooden puppets, chewing-gum distributors, ritual and mass market masks, a poster of Marilyn Monroe, Mexican ceramics, Disney figurines, comics, religious icons: this impressive collection in its absolute aesthetic disparity was the fertile ground from which Maryan's fantastic universe emerged.

On the 15th of June 1977, Maryan had a heart attack in his New York apartment at age fifty, leaving behind him a complex, aesthetically pioneering artistic legacy. The universe he created, the characters he invented, the society he caricatured represent so many unique images of the time he lived through. He was an amazing colourist, an unparalleled drawer, contributing to the development of a pictorial style that today has become famous through the works of artists like Peter Saul, Keith Haring, Robert Combas, and Philip Guston. Some have seen in his work the legacy of Fernand Léger, whom he studied under at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris. The big, thick black lines of his paintings, the way they hold in explosive sections of colour, anticipates contemporary graffiti. Maryan is for this one of the precursors of a free, true form of painting whose identifiably efficient graphic line still influences the younger generations of contemporary artists. Maryan called this expressionist form of painting 'truth-painting'. Undeniably, in his work the emotions push horror back.

For the last fifteen years, international cultural institutions have been giving his work the attention it deserves in a series of exhibitions and publications. In 2012, Annette M. Maryan donated about fifty works to the Pompidou Centre, including nine drawings from the *Napoléon* series. In 2013, for the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme (MAHJ), Nathalie Hazan-Brunet curated the first retrospective dedicated to his work in Paris since his death. The Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami (MOCA) is currently exhibiting a retrospective that will go on show at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art at the end of 2022. Kamel Mennour has chosen to reintroduce us here to the work of one of the leaders of New Figuration, an artist who swam against the tide of the twentieth century.

For my friend Antonio Seguí (1934-2022), a friend of Maryan's who passed away on the 26th of February.

— Lucas Djaou, curator of the exhibition

Born in 1927 in Nowy Sącz (Poland), Pinchas Burstein, known as MARYAN S. MARYAN, died in 1977 in New York. He was born into a Jewish family. During World War II he was deported to Nazi concentration camps in Poland and then at the end of the war to displaced persons camps in Germany. He was the only survivor of his family. He lived in Jerusalem from 1947 to 1950 where he attended the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design for two years. His first solo exhibition took place in 1949 at the Youth Movement of Christian Association (Y.M.C.A) in Jerusalem. He moved to France in 1950 where he studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (E.N.S.B.A) and attended classes with Fernand Léger. In 1952 he participated in the Salon des Surindépendants and from 1953 to 1965 in the Salon de Mai in Paris. In 1959, he was awarded the Art Critics Prize at the Paris Biennale. After living in France for twelve years, he moved to New York in 1962 and became a U.S. citizen in 1969. In 1976, he was awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France.

Maryan died prematurely on June 15, 1977, at the age of 50 of a heart attack in his apartment in the Chelsea Hotel in New York. He left behind a meaningful avant-garde artistic legacy. The universe he created, the characters he invented, the symbols and the society he caricatured are absolutely singular images of the time he lived through.

Several important retrospectives have been dedicated to Maryan, including at the Spertus Museum (Chicago, USA) in 1996, at the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme (mahJ) (Paris) in 2013 and at the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami (MOCA) in 2021.

His works are part of prestigious collections around the world: the Centre Pompidou (Paris), the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, the Museum of Jewish Art and History (mahJ) (Paris), the MuMa (Le Havre, France), the Museum of Tourcoing (France), the LAAC - Lieu d'Art et d'Action Contemporaine (Dunkerque, France), the Centre d'Art Contemporain de l'abbaye d'Auberive (France), the Museum of Grenoble (France), the Collections de l'État Français, the mumok (Vienna, Austria), the Staatliches Museum (Berlin, Germany), the Staatliches Museum Schwerin (Germany), the Municipal Museum of The Hague (Netherlands), the Kunsten - Museum of Modern Art Aalborg (Denmark), the Tel Aviv Museum of Art (Israel), the MoMA (New York), the Guggenheim Museum (New York) the Carnegie Museum of Art (Pittsburgh, USA), the Art Institute of Chicago (USA), the Spertus Museum (Chicago, USA), the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art (Chicago, USA), the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, USA), the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami (MOCA).