

JEAN DEGOTTEx À la ligne

Curator: Christian Alandete

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47 rue Saint-André-des-Arts
Paris 6

Jean Degottex (1918-1988) went through the second half of the twentieth century between modern art and contemporary art. Was he a lyrical painter, a conceptual artist, a minimalist? Degottex kept his distance from the artistic movements of his time. Echoing them, he traced out his own special trajectory, moved by a programme entirely dedicated to a reduction of the sign, to a point of the most radical purification. Through his fifty years of practice, he questioned the categories of painting and of the canvas, developing new techniques for a body of work characterised by an extreme minimalism in which sensibility never gave ground to rigour. Working in series, not so much for the sake of repeating a gesture as for exhausting all of its possibilities before beginning the next one—‘because you can’t say everything in a single series’—he multiplied the effects on the surface and on the reverse side of the canvas, in a both experimental and artisanal logic that directly engaged its environment.

Though Degottex attended the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris, like many modern artists, he always claimed to be a self-taught, with ‘neither god nor 55,5 master’. At the very least, he admired the late-period Henri Matisse, the period of cm the paper cut-outs, and he preferred to spend his time with philosophers, particularly Eastern philosophers, rather than in museums. It was in fact around the topic of Zen painting that he met André Breton, who in 1955 hosted a solo exhibition of Degottex’s work in his new Surrealist gallery, *À l’Étoile scellée*. Some critics saw the inclusion of non-figurative art into the surrealists’ aesthetic programme as a heresy. And yet, for Breton, it was Degottex, no doubt more than anyone else, who had succeeded in transposing into his painting the manifestation of automatic writing. However, Degottex was implementing a form of ‘depersonalisation’, privileging the act of painting ‘without prior intention’, letting himself be led by objective chance.

The exhibition "À la ligne" 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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The 1960s saw a decisive change in direction in Degottex’s work on both an aesthetic and a personal level. The current exhibition takes this turning point as its focus, displaying the shift from painting—with what remained of the lyrical gesture—to the canvas as a surface for limitless experimentation. The lines of writing covering the surface of the canvas in 1963, scratched into the paint as if in order to bring forth their primitive origin,

would be covered the next year in solid black. These years of questioning painting would lead to his progressively abandoning the paintbrush—the painter’s traditional tool—for a paint sprayer, in the series *Horsphères*, and then the appearance of new, ‘tinkered’ materials in the following years. With their layerings, collages, rips, transfers, folds, margins, and frames, the 1970s were a time of renewal for Degottex, one in which he was engaged in an analytic approach to painting. He participated in the exhibitions that counted and for a time refused to be a part of those that reconnected him with his lyrical period. His quest for a form of neutrality, his desire to materialise the void, his obvious interest in nature all took on a new breadth in the 1980s. Degottex seemed to draw on all the successive achievements of the earlier series, ‘recycling’ old ideas, materials, tools for drawing straight, oblique, and curving lines, ‘wood lines’ borrowed from nature (nature’s fingerprints) in a quest for infinite space: ‘under the parallel, crossing stripes, no sky, no earth, no left, no right, no up, no down, no recto, no verso, and yet erect and frontal’.

— Christian Alandete

Born in 1918 in Sathonay-Camp (France), JEAN DEGOTTEx moved to Paris in 1933 where he died in 1988.

His work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions in museums and institutions such as the Palais des Beaux-Arts (Brussels, 1961), the Kölnischer Kunstverein (Cologne, Germany, 1965), the Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris (1970), the Centre Pompidou (Paris, 1981) and the Hong Kong Arts Centre (1996).

His work was also shown in many group shows such as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York, 1953), the Documenta (II) (Kassel, Germany, 1959), the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Minneapolis, USA, 1959), the 32nd Venice Biennale (1964), the 8th Bienal de São Paulo (1965), the National Gallery of Art (Washington, 1968), the Grand Palais (Paris, 1972, 1985), the Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris (1977, 1998), the Centre Pompidou (1977, 1998), the Museum of the 20th Century (Vienna, 1982), the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (Buenos Aires, 1987), the National Museum of Art of Romania (Bucarest, 1988), the Museum Ludwig (Cologne, 2000), the Hong Kong University Museum and Art Gallery (2005), the Musée Rath (Geneva, Switzerland, 2011), the Centre Pompidou-Metz (Metz, France, 2014), the Stefan Gierowski Foundation (Warsaw, Poland, 2019) and the Pushkin Museum (Moscow, 2019).

His works are present in prestigious collections in France: Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris, Centre Pompidou (Paris), Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris), Centre national des arts plastiques (Paris), MAC VAL (Vitry-sur-Seine), Musée Cantini (Marseille), Musées d’arts de Nantes, Toulon; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Brest, Dijon and various FRAC (Bretagne, Normandie, Occitanie Montpellier, Pays de la Loire, Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur); and in the world: Royal Museums of Fine Arts (Brussels), Fondation Gandur pour l’Art (Geneva), Museum of Modern Art (Vienna), Museum Abteiberg (Mönchengladbach, Germany), Israel Museum (Jerusalem), Minneapolis Institute of Art (Minneapolis), Nakanoshima Museum of Art (Osaka, Japan), Ōhara Museum of Art (Kurashiki, Japan), among others.

Degottex won the Kandinsky Prize in 1951 and was awarded the Grand National Prize of Painting (Grand Prix National de la Peinture) in 1981.