

PRESS
RELEASE

Basel, October 2014

Poetry of the Metropolis The Affichistes

Museum Tinguely, Basel: 22 October 2014 – 11 January 2015



Mimmo Rotella, *Per l'insalata*, 1961
Collezione Peruz Milano, © 2014 PrdLitteris, Zurich

One of the most radical and simultaneously most poetic approaches to reality was made from 1950 onwards by the “Affichistes”: Francois Dufrêne, Raymond Hains, and Jacques Villeglé belonged, like Jean Tinguely, to the “Nouveaux Réalistes” group. Their creative work fitted in with that of the like-minded Mimmo Rotella and Wolf Vostell. The exhibition “Poetry of the Metropolis. The Affichistes” jointly devised by Museum Tinguely and Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt has as its theme an artistic current which, outside of France, in Switzerland and Germany too, has been largely disregarded up to now. The Affichistes are now comprehensively on show in Switzerland for the first time ever. The exhibition is arranged in the form of a trail, which presents the urban space as a place of varied inspiration for strolling *flâneurs* and creates locations for encountering the radical inventions of these five artists; be they *décollages*, or filmic, photographic, or even poetical experiments.

entering the radical inventions of these five artists; be they *décollages*, or filmic, photographic, or even poetical experiments.

Dufrêne, Hains, and Villeglé, later Rotella too, came together with Arman, Yves Klein, Martial Raysse, Daniel Spoerri, and Jean Tinguely to form the “Nouveaux Réalistes”, founded by means of manifesto by Pierre Restany in 1960. Although the artistic field that revolves around the smallest common denominator, the “nouvelles approches perceptives du réel”, is thus marked out, in the Affichistes’ case this classification does not take account of the fact that, already in 1950 or thereabouts, they were important trailblazers for a new thinking that prepared the broader field of artistic acting and creating in around 1960. For example it is no coincidence, also, that important ideas for Restany’s first manifesto for the “Nouveaux Réalistes” (1960) were derived from a text already published in 1958 by Jacques Villeglé, *Des réalités collectives*. However, the Affichistes only arrived at their first exhibition opportunities after a delay and in the context of the “Nouveaux Réalistes” show at the 1st Biennale de Paris in 1959 and subsequently with solo presentations at the Parisian Gallery J, an ally of Restany. The formation of the “Nouveaux Réalistes” was therefore of no little consequence for the Affichistes’ reception and success.

Before they converged to form collaborations, to make mutual dedications of work and joint appearances, the origins and development of the five presented artists were highly varied. What united them, however, was cross-disciplinary thinking and functioning: Performative action, poetry, onomatopoeia, theatrical action, happening, photography, and film took shape through the medium of the *décollages* and the process of *décollage*. At the same time, though, their works, which range from the minute fragment – small exercises and studies – to the overwhelming large format, also have an inherent painterly and pictorial potential, which appears to unite objectivity and abstract reading with equal naturalness and arbitrariness.

François Dufrêne's origin as a literary and ultra-literary onomatopoeist, language subverter and language actionist formed the manner of his appropriation of posters by means of language games, a partly cryptic/objective interpretation of abstract shape fragments, and the fascination for temporality, reprinting, and the archaeological method of stratification – as his peeled-out poster backs show. With Raymond Hains he shared the joy of the deformation and reformation of the verbal and of the visual that extends into the absurd, which in Hains was turned even more toward the playful, to pure chance and to free association and which understood the city as a fountainhead for strings of poetical actions. As early as the end of the 1940s, together with Jacques Villeglé, Hains created the first torn-up posters; probably the most famous of these, *Ach Alma Manetro* (1949), forms the opening of the exhibition. From 1950 onwards, using a complex method of transformation by means of optical distortion and alternating media, they developed the film *Pénélope*, which is exemplary of the way *décollages* are synonymous with the conceptual process of finding (more than inventing). For Villeglé, for his part, the medium of the poster is an almost infinite, constantly self-renewing fund of the present, conserving a specific aesthetic and temporality, and consequently, with time, also the respective "historical location".

All this material is provided by the metropolis in "autopoetic productivity" to the attentive city stroller. Be it Paris for Dufrêne, Hains, Villeglé, or Vostell too, be it Rome for Mimmo Rotella. Rotella, who joins the circle of the "Nouveaux Réalistes" via acquaintance with Restany, experimented for his part, independently of the other Affichistes, with *décollages* from as early as 1953. Collages of even earlier date are followed in formal similarity by initial *décollages* and poster backs which deal likewise, as actual material images, with the theme of the archaeological, and which are directed toward the special quality of weathered paper and their rear support. In contrast to Hains and Villeglé Rotella also, however, intervenes directly in the surface, in order to reveal structures, patterns, and strata. The objects of his torn-off posters change after 1960. Now he is particularly interested in colorfully advertised products from the consumer world and in movie posters. In this he concurs, in turn, with Villeglé, who was occupied with the same fascination for advertising's popular images. They thereby become Pop Art pioneers. Wolf Vostell uses the term of "dé-coll/age" not only in connection with torn-up posters, but also as a comprehensive art concept, in order to emphasize deconstruction as a creative process. He uses torn-up posters in one of his first happenings, *Das Theater ist auf der Strasse* of 1958, in which the audience was called to take part in the action, to cite text fragments, or to imitate (fragmentarily) illustrated gestures. In Vostell, Actionist elements of reworking or overpainting (by the audience) complement the process of selection and appropriation.

The exhibition **Poetry of the Metropolis** covers the period from 1946 until 1968 and pays particular attention to the emergence and early phase of the Affichistes, to photographic, filmic, and poetical experiments and collaborations. We are indebted for being able to present the five artists with their most important works to a large number of lenders who are generously supporting our project – something which cannot be taken for granted given the fragility of these "paper works". The presentation is arranged as a chronologically and thematically linked urban space, which particularly emphasizes the abstract large formats and the large objective *décollages*, but also specifically presents the theme of the political posters just as much as the fascination for text, texture and structure.

An abundant supporting program featuring concerts, films, and poetry and literature events will be taking place as part of the exhibition, updating the haphazard nature of this fascinating art form for the present day as well. The exhibition has been devised by Roland Wetzel, Director of Museum Tinguely, and Esther Schlicht, curator at Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt.

Publication

The exhibition will be accompanied by a lavishly illustrated catalog edited by Snoeck Verlag with articles by Bernard Blistène, Fritz Emslander, Esther Schlicht, Didier Semin, Dominique Stella and an interview with Jacques Villeglé by Roland Wetzel. German-English edition, 280 pages, price at Museum's book shop: 42 CHF, ISBN: 978-3-9523990-8-8

General information Museum Tinguely:

Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday: 11 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Admission prices:

Adults: CHF 18

Students, people with disabilities: CHF 12

Groups of 12 people or more: CHF 12 (per person)

Children under 16: free entrance

For further information and press images please have a look at our website:

<http://www.tinguely.ch/en/presse/pressematerial/2014.html>

Press office Museum Tinguely:

tel. +41 61 68 746 08

isabelle.beiffuss@roche.com