

## Press Release

March 16  
April 27, 2024

Opening  
January, Saturday 16  
from 11am to 8pm

# Peintures d'histoire Ernest T.

Going under a pseudonym borrowed from a comic character in a US TV show, Ernest T. is a French artist whose work follows on in the tradition of Dadaism and the Incoherents. His sparse biography tells us that he worked in advertising before fully devoting himself to art in the 1980s.

His provocative oeuvre takes a swipe at the overwhelmingly coded and serious world of contemporary art, in a subversive and ironic conceptual manner. Through the use of hoaxes, misappropriation, image manipulation and even plagiarism, enhanced by linguistic games and caricatured drawings, the artist examines the world of art from the perspective of its moral turpitude, greed and other pretensions. He ridicules the obsessive attachment to signatures and authenticity, the hidden meaning and artistic trends etc., by putting his faith in the critical power of humor rather than taking a self-righteous, moralizing stance.

Ernest T. began his artistic experimentation in the 1960s with a collection of small, comic calendars, which eventually ended up as a series under the name *Dessins français [French Drawings]*. During the 1980s, he created his pseudonym and began to work on his well-known series *Peintures nulles [Useless Paintings]* that followed the narcissistic principal of depicting his repeated signature on canvas using interlocking Ts painted in primary colors. In reaction to the phenomenon of the idolization of the artist, where the signature is valued more than the work itself, Ernest T. produced offbeat sketches, such as *La signature! Où ça la signature? [The Signature! Where's the Signature?]* (1990) or *Vous dites que mon Ernest T. est faux? [Are You Saying My Ernest T. is a Fake?]* (1989).

The written press was a medium of choice for Ernest T., whose interventions included both hijacking already printed pieces or publishing his own. Between December 1985 and January 1988, for example, he published texts from irreverent pamphlets and reviews taken from early 20th century newspapers in the advertising sections of art magazines such as *Artpress* and *Artforum*<sup>1</sup>.

The exhibition in Semiose's Project Room brings together works based on engravings and press cuttings. *La Peinture Nulle n°170* (1990) is a large format photographic print of an engraving depicting the tempestuous courtesan Marie-Catherine Lescombat (1728-1755), set in her Louis XIV salon, where one of Ernest T.'s well-known, abstract, geometrical canvases made up of interlocking Ts is on display. The other works shown in the Project Room pay homage to Suprematism, with their smooth, monochrome colors emerging from the ruins left by a bombing raid on the 6 June 1944 and scenes of looting during the Watts riots in Los Angeles in August 1965. Other pieces on display include hints of grandiose canvases replaced by modernist monochromes. These oeuvres are truly a celebration of painting, its capacity to withstand any given catastrophe and the fact that it is worth defending at all costs. When all is said and done, this series of repaints is a sincere declaration of love for modern painting.

Ernest T. has enjoyed exhibitions at the MAMCO, Geneva, the Synagogue de Delme, the Lausanne Museum of Fine Art, the Plateau / FRAC Île-de-France and the Micro Onde Art Center, Vélizy-Villacoublay. His works feature in the collections of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, the Pompidou Center, the CNAP, Paris, the MAMCO in Geneva, the IAC/Villeurbanne as well as in various FRACs (regional contemporary art centers) across France: Limousin, Limoges, Poitou-Charentes, Angoulême, Pays de la Loire, Carquefou, Burgundy, Dijon, Brittany, Rennes, Corsica, Corte, Occitania, Montpellier, Normandy, Caen, Franche-Comté, Besançon et Lorraine, Metz.

<sup>1</sup>. Going under the name of *Cloaca Maxima*, these articles were collected and published by Semiose in 2015 (FILAF prize for the best art book published by a gallery, awarded at the Galeristes salon in 2016).