

FIRST LARGE-SCALE EXHIBITION IN GERMANY AFTER TWENTY YEARS:
THE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT PRESENTS THE AFFICHISTES' RADICAL ART

POETRY OF THE METROPOLIS. THE AFFICHISTES

FEBRUARY 05 – MAY 25, 2015

PRESS PREVIEW: WEDNESDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2015, 11 a.m.

Whether categorized as early Pop artists, trailblazers of Street Art, or protagonists of a “natural poetry” of reality: in the 1950s, the “Affichistes” came forward with a completely new concept of the panel painting. On their rambles through the streets of postwar Paris and Rome, they collected fragments of ubiquitous, overlaid, often weathered and tattered posters and elevated the world of everyday urban life itself to the status of a painting. Their access to reality, as subversive as it was poetic, made them pioneers of a “New Realism.” The comprehensive overview at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt highlights the Affichistes’ radical art for the first time in Germany after twenty years. Comprising 150 exhibits, the show encompasses the entire range of the art of poster tearing, from small fragments to overwhelming formats, from abstract color formations to icons of Pop culture – supplemented by photographic, filmic, and poetic experiments by the artists represented in the exhibition: Raymond Hains, Jacques Villeglé, François Dufrêne as well as Mimmo Rotella and Wolf Vostell.

Conceived by the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt and the Museum Tinguely in Basel, Switzerland, the exhibition spans the period from 1946 to 1968 and pays particular attention to the emergence of the movement and the Affichistes’ early phases of production. With their 2.56-meter-wide manifesto-like frieze *Ach Alma Manetro*, the French artists Raymond Hains and Jacques Villeglé not only laid the cornerstone of the artistic practice of poster tearing (called *affiche lacérée* or *décollage* in French) in 1949, but also formulated a new concept of the artwork based on the understanding that “art was made by all. Not by one.” From its very beginnings, poster tearing was a practice distanced from the prevailing lyrical-abstract painting as well as from the prewar avant-garde’s collages and ready-mades. Yet, it was closely related to other artistic forms of expression and media such as language and poetry, photography and film. The exhibition at the Schirn highlights the special role of the French Affichistes François Dufrêne, Raymond Hains, and Jacques Villeglé as well as of the Italian Mimmo Rotella within the avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s. The German artist Wolf Vostell’s relationship with the Affichistes is a singular one. The presentation at the Schirn assembles the five Affichistes’ most important works, among them loans from the artists’ bequests and numerous private collections and museums like the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, the S.M.A.K. in Ghent, the Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne or the Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, the Federal Collection of Contemporary Art, in Bonn.

The exhibition is supported by the Georg und Franziska Speyer’sche Hochschulstiftung.

“Today, everybody is familiar with Street Art and its outstanding protagonists all over the world – from Brazil to the United States and to Great Britain. But only a few people know that the Affichistes were the first real trailblazers of Street Art. With this exhibition, the Schirn takes a look

at the streets of Paris and Rome in the 1950s and 1960s and explores the Affichistes' both radical and poetical involvement in the social and political reality of their time," emphasizes Max Hollein, Director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt.

Esther Schlicht, curator of the exhibition adds: "The Affichistes' art is subversive and direct. In its development from the abstract tendencies of the postwar era to the Pop Art of the 1960s, the art of the Affichistes presents itself as a counter-history of painting since 1945. It is exactly the works' media or intermedia character that makes them appear astoundingly fresh and original today, sixty years after their creation."

The exhibition centers on five central themes of the Affichistes' art: **abstraction**, **material/process**, **Lettrism**, **politics**, and **Pop** – and presents the individual artists in separate cabinets, drawing on comprehensive documentary material such as historical photographs and films.

The Affichistes made a name for themselves overnight with the first "Paris Biennale" staged in 1959, which presented works by Raymond Hains, Jacques Villeglé, and François Dufrêne. The shown poster tearings provoked fierce reactions. Though the Affichistes principally questioned Art Informel, they were presented together with abstract painters in the section dedicated to this approach. While only a few isolated figurative elements are to be found in the Affichistes' works from the 1950s, the typography of the posters played a decisive role for the artists. Their attention focused on the decomposition of words and letters generated in the poster tearings, on their peculiar poetry, and their special sound. In the 1960s, the Affichistes' production also came to include political propaganda posters. Chroniclers of their time, they captured the social conflicts of their day without taking a stand politically. With the poster turning into an illustrated advertising medium of the rapidly developing consumer and leisure society, the late 1950s saw an increasing number of pictorial motifs that also informed the visual repertoire of Pop Art, which emerged at the same time.

THE AFFICHISTES

Raymond Hains (1926–2005) created the first art-historically authenticated poster tearing "Ach Alma Manetro" in 1949 together with Jacques Villeglé. This first important *décollage* was directly connected with other artistic experiments undertaken by Hains and Villeglé at the same time. From 1946 on, Raymond Hains had placed fluted glass elements between the camera lens and his motifs in photographic experiments aimed at achieving kaleidoscope-like distortion and multiplication effects. In doing so, he picked up the thread of Surrealist pictorial methods and even earlier experimental approaches in the fields of photography and film. Together with Jacques Villeglé, he extended this principle of visual alienation to the filmic: from 1950 on, the two friends worked on an abstract color film, *Pénélope*, a technically extremely complex undertaking that remained unfinished after four years of obsessive work, and was reconstructed at a later date.

Jacques Villeglé (b. in 1926) regarded the medium of the poster a virtually infinite resource of the present continuously renewing itself. He developed the idea of anonymous authorship, which was key for his conception and led him to coin the term *lacéré anonyme*. The individual artist, his name and signature, were to disappear behind this construct. This is how Villeglé was able to appropriate all the anonymous torn posters' forms of expression, subjects, and styles in his work. Pursuing an encyclopedic objective, Villeglé has ever since been committed to the vision of creating a picture of society by collecting heterogeneous pieces of evidence of everyday reality.

SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

As one of the leading representatives of Lettrism, **François Dufrêne** (1930–1982) came to devote himself to poster tearings at a comparatively late point in time. Having become familiar with this pictorial practice through works by Hains and Villeglé, he almost exclusively used the reverse sides of posters (so-called *dessous d'affiches*) to which he ascribed a special poetic quality. Dufrêne regarded himself as a poet throughout his life. Contrary to Hains's and Villeglé's works, his pieces radiate an abstract-lyrical character and testify to the artist's archaeological search for the invisible, the unconscious brought to light by revealing and removing hidden layers.

Independent of the French Affichistes, **Mimmo Rotella** (1918–2006) discovered poster tearing as a means of artistic expression in Rome in the 1950s. His multi-faceted work ranges from abstract color formations and seemingly archaic back sides to Pop motifs dating from later years. Rotella was less concerned with visualizing pictorial works he had come upon than with appropriating an aesthetic material whose undreamt-of qualities could only be revealed by the artist. Unlike Hains and Villeglé, Rotella directly interfered with his hindings' surfaces to expose structures, patterns, and layers. From 1960 on, he mainly centered on motifs from the world of cinema and advertising.

In the 1950s, **Wolf Vostell** (1932–1998) began to infiltrate urban spaces with the recently developed forms of action and happening and applied the concept of "dé-coll/age" to all areas of his production. With his first European happening *The Theater is on the Street*, conceived in Paris in 1958, he made the process of *décollage* the subject and invited passersby on the street to read word fragments from torn posters or to rip pieces off themselves. While the destroyed billboards struck the French Affichistes as an expression of a new visual poetry, Vostell regarded them as the starting point of a decidedly critical analysis of the poster as a medium of modern mass communication.

CATALOG

Poetry of the Metropolis. The Affichistes, edited by Esther Schlicht, Roland Wetzel, and Max Hollein, with a preface by Max Hollein and Roland Wetzel, an introduction by Esther Schlicht, essays by Bernard Blistène, Fritz Emslander, Didier Semin, and Dominique Stella, as well as an interview with Jacques Villeglé conducted by Roland Wetzel, original texts by François Dufrêne, Raymond Hains, Mimmo Rotella, Jacques Villeglé, and Wolf Vostell, and a chronology of the years from 1944 to 1968, German/English edition, 280 pages, c. 170 illustrations, 30.5 x 24.5 cm, soft cover with thread stitching, American dust jacket; graphic design: Sybille Ryser, Basel; Snoeck Verlag, Cologne 2014, ISBN 978-3-86442-103-7 (trade edition), price: 32 euros (Schirn), 48 euros (bookshops)

VENUE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, 60311 Frankfurt **EXHIBITION DATES** 5 February – 25 May 2015 **INFORMATION** www.schirn.de **E-MAIL** welcome@schirn.de **PHONE** +49.69.29 98 82-0 **FAX** +49.69.29 98 82-240 **ADMISSION** 9 euros, reduced 7 euros, free admission for children under eight years of age **ADVANCE TICKETS** available online at www.schirn.de/tickets **PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS** Tue 5 p.m., Wed 11 a.m. and 8 p.m., Thu 7 p.m., Sat 5 p.m., Sun 3 p.m. **CURATORS** Esther Schlicht (Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt) and Roland Wetzel (Museum Tinguely, Basel) **CURATORIAL ASSISTANT** Katharina Knacker **ARCHITECTURE** David Saik, architekt **WITH SUPPORT FROM** Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung **MEDIA PARTNER** Frankfurter Rundschau, Journal Frankfurt

SOCIAL MEDIA The Schirn communicates the exhibition in the social web with the **HASHTAGS** #Affichistes, #PoetryOfTheMetropolis **ONLINE MAGAZINE** www.schirn-magazin.de **FACEBOOK**

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