

THE MORGAN PRESENTS FIRST RETROSPECTIVE OF THE DRAWINGS OF JEAN DUBUFFET

Dubuffet Drawings, 1935–1962

September 30, 2016 through January 2, 2017

New York, NY, August 24, 2016 — In the mid-1940s, French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985) shocked the art establishment with his paintings inspired by children's drawings, graffiti, and the art of psychiatric patients. Rejecting conventional notions of beauty and good taste, Dubuffet asserted that invention and creativity could only be found outside traditional cultural channels. In his efforts to emulate the immediacy of the untrained and untutored, he often turned to drawing, a medium in which he could indulge his passion for research and experimentation.

Opening at the Morgan Library & Museum on September 30, *Dubuffet Drawings, 1935–1962* is the first museum retrospective of the artist's works on paper. The exhibition includes approximately one hundred drawings from Dubuffet's most innovative decades and features



Jean Dubuffet, *L'Arnaque* (The Swindle), June 2, 1962, Gouache. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of the Stephen Hahn Family Collection, 1995. © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

rarely seen works borrowed from private and public collections in France and the United States. His favorite subjects were mundane activities of everyday life—taking the subway, bicycling in the countryside—but he also tackled traditional genres like the portrait, the female nude, and the landscape, all the better to subvert expectations with his outrageous depictions. Insatiably curious, Dubuffet explored unorthodox materials and techniques, instilling into his drawings a sense of adventure that has kept them vibrant and relevant to this day. The exhibition will be on view at the Morgan through January 2. It will then travel to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles (January 29 to April 30). The exhibition and its catalogue will showcase extensive new research on Dubuffet's drawings by the curator Isabelle Dervaux and her colleagues.

“Jean Dubuffet’s career is marked by a fearless commitment to innovation and experimentation,” said Colin B. Bailey, director of the Morgan Library & Museum. “Despite his commanding role in the postwar avant-garde and his influence on the art of the following decades, Dubuffet has received less attention than other artists of his generation, such as Jackson Pollock or Willem de Kooning. The recent wave of interest in *art brut*, or outsider art, which Dubuffet championed, has led to renewed attention to his painted and graphic work.”

THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition will be installed in chronological order and divided into seven sections:

I. Early Drawings

Although Dubuffet briefly took art classes in the late 1910s, he did not fully embrace the life of an artist until 1942, when he was forty-one years old. Two types of works on paper dominated his production at the time: colorful gouaches of commonplace subjects and ink drawings in which he experimented with unusual techniques.

Several of Dubuffet’s breakthrough subway scenes of March 1943—in which he ignored conventions of perspective and modeling in favor of bold, inventive compositions—are featured in the exhibition. While he tested the impact of color, he also played with texture, creating ink drawings that involved scratching and rubbing the paper. “I must learn how to draw,” he wrote in 1944. “Of course when I say draw I’m not to the slightest degree thinking of faithfully reproducing objects; ... no, it’s a matter of something quite different: to animate the paper, to make it palpitate. It’s a matter of learning how to make a line, a little line five centimeters long: but a line which lives, whose pulse beats.” Several drawings in this section were included in Dubuffet’s first solo



Left: Jean Dubuffet, *Le Métro*, March 1943, Gouache. Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Paris. Musée national d'art moderne / Centre de création industrielle. Photography by Philippe Migeat. © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Middle: Jean Dubuffet, *Jazz*, April 12, 1943, Gouache and brush and ink. George and Joyce Wein Collection, New York. © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Right: Jean Dubuffet, *Léautaud griffures blanches* (Léautaud with White Scratches), November 1946, India ink on scratchboard. Collection of Judy and Marc Herzstein. Photography by Thomas R. DuBrock. © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

exhibition, at Galerie Rene Drouin in Paris in October 1944. Although Dubuffet's radical approach was controversial, the show garnered much support from the Parisian intelligentsia and launched his reputation.

II. Portraits

The exhibition will feature a number of important portraits of artists and writers that Dubuffet created between 1945 and 1947. He was drawn to the particularities of his subjects: "Funny noses, big mouths, crooked teeth... I like that," he said. He emphasized such features as Henri Michaux's large ears and the long hands of Joë Bousquet. The portrait of misanthrope Paul Léautaud shows an exaggerated downturned mouth, evoking the reputation of the mean, caustic theater critic. Beyond caricature, however, Dubuffet was engaged in a radical rethinking of the conventions of portraiture in modern times. His grotesque heads—like Alberto Giacometti's gaunt figures of the same period—embody the anguish and despair of the human condition as expressed by the French intellectual community during the immediate postwar years, notably in Existentialist philosophy. To heighten the graphic brutality of some of the drawings, he incised them, graffiti-like, on scratchboard. Eschewing naturalistic representation allowed him to create powerful images, more likely to strike the viewer's imagination. Nevertheless, his subjects and viewers did not always appreciate his portrait style – Léautaud threatened to pierce his portrait with an umbrella.

III. Sahara

Eager to escape the cold winters and lack of coal in postwar Paris, Dubuffet made three trips to North Africa between 1947 and 1949. A few subjects attracted him repeatedly: Bedouins (notably

the complex folds of their turbans and burnouses), palm trees, camels, goats, and flies. He was also fascinated by the sand covered with footprints—ephemeral traces that “humanize the ground.”

Most of the Sahara drawings in the exhibition date to Dubuffet’s second trip to the region, when he spent five months in the oasis of El Golea. There he made his own paint by mixing pigments with gum Arabic, a medium that frustrated him at first. “It took me several months of hard work with my glue and my powdered colors to be able to speak with them in their own language with some ease and lightness,” he wrote. Although Dubuffet did not share the interest in North African light that attracted other artists there before him—such as Eugene Delacroix, Henri Matisse, and Paul Klee—the works he produced in the desert reveal his remarkable sense of color.

IV. *Corps de Dames* and Radiant Lands

In 1950, partly in a spirit of provocation, Dubuffet took up the theme of the female nude, first in painting, then in drawing. “Please let’s call them *Ladies’s Bodies*” he told his dealer, “*Women’s Bodies* is too artistic.” Disregarding the prevailing idea of beauty associated with the subject, Dubuffet flattened his huge bodies across the sheet and emphasized their materiality through a flurry of small patterns and frantic linear movements. The dense network of lines was a striking equivalent to the thick matter characteristic of Dubuffet’s oil paintings at the time.

In the following years, Dubuffet applied the technique to landscape in Radiant Lands, a series of about forty sheets begun in New York in January 1952. The graphic exuberance of these drawings, which absorbs sky, land, and figures into



Top: Jean Dubuffet, *Trois Arabes* (Three Arabs), January–April 1948, Gouache. Private collection. Photography by Kent Pell. © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Middle: Jean Dubuffet, *Corps de dame* (Lady’s Body), June–December 1950, Pen and india ink. The Joan and Lester Avnet Collection, Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY. Bottom: Jean Dubuffet, *Personnage au chapeau, seins bas superposés* (Figure with a Hat, Superimposed Low Breasts), January 1952. Gouache and india ink. The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation. Photography by Christopher Burke Studio. © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

a single texture—collapsing the traditional distinction between figure and ground—may have been influenced by the crowded compositions typical of *art brut*, or outsider art, which Dubuffet studied and collected with particular intensity in the late 1940s.

V. Butterfly Collages and Assemblages of Imprints

Always in search of modes of drawing that did not require traditional skills and could be performed by anyone who had never learned how to draw, Dubuffet developed two techniques in the 1950s: the collage and the imprint—a form of transfer. Butterfly wing collages, which the artist began making in 1953, were the inspiration for his *assemblages of imprint* or collages of pieces of paper cut from large sheets previously covered with imprints. Dubuffet made them by placing various materials—sugar, grains, threads, plants—on a table covered with ink before pressing a sheet of paper over it. He then cut up the sheet and arranged the fragments into landscapes and figures, creating eerie and mysterious compositions, which he sometimes completed with pen and ink. Dubuffet refined it throughout the decade. The technical diversity of the assemblages epitomizes Dubuffet’s experimental approach to drawing.



VI. Textures and Beards

Toward the end of the 1950s, Dubuffet’s interest in matter and texture led him to create his most abstract drawings. Characterized by a profusion of small elements filling the sheet to the edge, they suggest microscopic visions or fragments of a cosmic world. Moving effortlessly between abstraction and figuration, Dubuffet used fragments from

Top: Jean Dubuffet, *Jardin medieval* (Medieval Garden), July 1955, Butterfly wings and watercolor. Glimcher Family Collection. © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Middle: Jean Dubuffet, *La fermière* (The Farmer’s Wife), March 1955, Assemblage of imprints: collage of cut india-ink imprints with brush and ink, mounted on paperboard. The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation. Photography by Christopher Burke Studio. © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Bottom: Jean Dubuffet, *Barbe des colères* (Wrathful Beard), June 1959, Assemblage of imprints: collage of cut and torn india-ink imprints with brush and ink. Fondation Dubuffet, Paris. © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

such drawings to compose collages devoted to the subject of beards. At once comical and solemn, these monumental figures oscillate between articulated puppets and biblical prophets. Some of their titles, such as *Beard Garden*, point to the affinity between man and nature, a connection Dubuffet explored in another group of collages made at the same time called *Botanical Elements*. In them, nature became the very material of drawing as Dubuffet arranged leaves, stems, and flowers into imaginary landscapes.

VII. Paris Circus

The exhibition concludes with a group of lively gouaches from Dubuffet's Paris Circus series. "I have turned the tide... and decided to start all over again from the beginning," Dubuffet wrote in 1961. That year, in a dramatic about-face, he abandoned the austere palette of the late 1950s to embark on a series of colorful depictions of the city. Although the theme harked back to his 1940s street scenes, the new urban environment was strikingly different. Instead of graffiti, the words that fill the Paris Circus gouaches are witty and brightly painted store names the artist invented. Overflowing department stores evoke the consumer society brought forth by the recent economic boom, as seen in *Rue des Petites-Champs*. Yet, in these crowded compositions, cars, strolling pedestrians, and shop windows are caught in the labyrinthine texture of the city just like figures were entangled in Dubuffet's Radiant Lands of the early 1950s. In both series, the world appears like a giant jigsaw puzzle in which every element is part of the same structure.



Jean Dubuffet, *Rue des Petits-Champs (Bombance)*, July 3, 1962. Gouache. Fondation Dubuffet, Paris. © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

Public Programs

GALLERY TALK

Dubuffet Drawings, 1935–1962

Isabelle Dervaux, Acquavella Curator, Modern and Contemporary Drawings

Friday, October 14, 6 pm

Tickets: Free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

FILM

The Artist's Studio: Jean Dubuffet

Director: Michael Blackwood

(1973, 32 minutes)

See the artist Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985) in his Paris studio in 1973 as he works on a detail for his musical theater piece, *Coucou Bazar*, which he saw as an animated painting.

Friday, October 21, screenings at 6:30 pm, 7:15 pm, and 8 pm*

Tickets: Exhibition-related films are free with museum admission. Advance reservations for members only. Tickets are available at the Admission Desk on the day of the screening.

*The exhibition will be open for program attendees before the screenings.

LECTURE

Dubuffet in Context: European Drawing in the 1940s and 1950s

This symposium explores the role of drawing in the art of the postwar decades in Europe. Scholars will discuss the works of artists such as Alberto Giacometti, Wols, Jean Fautrier, and Antonin Artaud. Speakers include Hal Foster, Professor at Princeton University; Rachel Perry, Professor at Haifa University; Sarah Wilson, Professor at The Courtauld Institute of Art, and others to be announced. For a detailed schedule please visit themorgan.org/programs.

Friday, October 28, 1:30–5:30 pm*

Tickets: \$15; \$10 for members; free for students with valid ID.

*The exhibition will be open for program attendees during museum hours, 10:30 am–9 pm.

GALLERY TALK

Dubuffet Drawings, 1935–1962

Holben Ellis, Director of the Thaw Conservation Center & Lindsay Tyne, Assistant Paper Curator

Friday, December 2, 1 pm

Tickets: Free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

Exhibition Catalogue

A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition at the Morgan Library & Museum, New York and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles: *Dubuffet Drawings, 1935-1962*, by Isabelle Dervaux (Acquavella Curator of Modern and Contemporary Drawings, The Morgan Library & Museum), Margaret Holben Ellis (Director of the Thaw Conservation Center, The Morgan Library & Museum), Lindsey Tyne (Assistant Paper Conservator, The Morgan Library & Museum), Alex Potts (Max Loehr Collegiate Professor, Department of History of Art, University of Michigan), and Cornelia Butler (Chief Curator, The Hammer Museum). Co-published by the Morgan Library & Museum and Thames & Hudson, the hardcover book is 224 pages with 150 illustrations. This catalogue is the first major publication devoted to works on paper by Dubuffet, one of the most important French artists of the 20th century.

Organization and Sponsorship

The curator of the exhibition is Isabelle Dervaux, Acquavella Curator of Modern & Contemporary Drawings at the Morgan.

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The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. A century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, and the 2010 refurbishment of the original library, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

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