ALMINE RECH

Léger and the New Realism

Jun 15, 2024 — Feb 16, 2025 | Musée national Fernand Léger, Biot, France

From June 2024 to February 2025, the musée national Fernand Léger in Biot and the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain (MAMAC) in Nice will join forces to celebrate artistic creativity, with an exhibition that brings together the exuberant, colourful work of the painter Fernand Léger (1881- 1955) with the key works of the MAMAC.

Thanks to an unprecedented partnership between two major collections from the Côte d'Azur, works by Niki de Saint-Phalle, Arman, Yves Klein, Raymond Hains, Martial Raysse and César will encounter the artistic innovations of Fernand Léger, one of the pioneers of the 20th century avant-garde, in a spirit of total freedom and dialogue between the arts.

Alongside the leading representatives of New Realism, a group that formed in Paris in 1960 around the art critic Pierre Restany, works by the generation of emerging American artists in the 1960s, such as Roy Lichtestein and, later, Keith Haring, illustrate the artistic exchanges that occurred very early on between the European and American creative scenes.

Beyond several thematic or formal affinities, there is a historical link between the work of Fernand Léger and New Realism. An avid admirer of his work, Restany named the group in tribute to Léger, who used the term as early as the 1920s to define his artistic approach. Moreover, both Léger and the artists of this generation breathed new life into artistic creation by reappropriating the real world and often taking a critical and political view of contemporary society.

Continuing on from the exhibitions organised by the musée national Fernand Léger exploring the artist's collaborations or his posterity, the exhibition Léger and the New Realists highlights Léger's visionary modernity while demonstrating the possible sources of inspiration of these revolutionary 1960s artists.

The exhibition, featuring some 110 works including a selection of 60 pieces from the MAMAC, takes an entertaining and creative approach to various themes, such as the appropriation of objects, the representation of the body and of leisure activities, and the role of art in the public space. Through their powerful acts of creative expression, artists elevate objects, captured in their most mundane reality – materials, symbols, tools – to works of art. They fuse art and life, revealing the poetic beauty of our day-to-day life to the viewer.

Chief curator: Anne Dopffer
Exhibition curators: Julie Guttierez, Rébecca François