ALMINE RECH

Apocalypse
Hier et Demain

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The Bibliothèque nationale de France is staging the first major exhibition devoted to the apocalypse. Apocalypse? It's an obscure, frightening word that speaks of the end of the world. For the past two thousand years, it has resonated in our Western culture and societies whenever a major disaster strikes, and even today it is still at the root of our fears about the climate. And yet... The etymology of this word of Greek origin means revelation, unveiling, a meaning taken up by Christians. In the Book of Revelation, which closes the New Testament, Saint John speaks of a veil being lifted over the timeless kingdom that will reunite believers in the heavenly Jerusalem. A word of hope, designed to overcome our deepest fears?
From the Middle Ages to the present day, the exhibition explores this imaginary world, showing some of the most prestigious manuscripts of the Apocalypse of John, rarely-seen fragments of the famous Angers hanging, and the famous suite of engravings by Dürer devoted to the text, as well as numerous masterpieces - paintings, sculptures, photographs, installations, rare books and film extracts - from the Library's collections and the most important French and European, public and private collections (Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Orsay, British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, etc.). The 300 works on show include works by William Blake, Odilon Redon, Vassily Kandinsky, Ludwig Meidner, Natalia Goncharova, Otto Dix, Antonin Artaud and Unica Zürn, as well as works by Kiki Smith, Tacita Dean, Miriam Cahn and Anne Imhof.

Opening the exhibition's two galleries on the François Mitterrand site, the section entitled 'The Book of Revelation' plunges visitors into the Apocalypse, the most famous apocalyptic text in the Western world. It offers keys to interpreting the representations linked to the different episodes that make up the text, from the seven seals to the Last Judgement, highlighting the original meaning of the story: the positive meaning of a revelation rather than a tragic end. By exploring this complex and infinitely rich text, and exposing its visions and the multiple narratives that intertwine with them, the exhibition seeks to renew our understanding of this Christian message and this 2000-year-old warning. Flamboyant illuminated manuscripts and major works - paintings, sculptures, drawings, stained glass windows and tapestries - bear witness to the importance and spread of this text and its iconography in the Middle Ages, while showing how this imaginary world was consolidated and continues to influence our own times.

The second part of the exhibition, entitled 'The Time of Catastrophes', is devoted to the fortunes of the Apocalypse in the arts, from Dürer to Brassaï, via the English apocalyptic sublime and German Expressionism. It points out that the text has given rise to works that rank among the masterpieces of the history of art, illustrating the tenacious and persistent fascination of artists - and through them, of humanity - for this narrative that combines plagues and the end of times with hope and the expectation of a new world.

Far from limiting itself to a catastrophist vision of the apocalypse, conveyed by the post-apocalyptic genre in literature, film and comics, and returning to its original meaning, the exhibition gives pride of place to the ‘Day After’. This section presents a range of contemporary works, including some in monumental format (Otobong Nkanga, Abdelkader Benchamma, etc.), which sketch out this day after, marked by the ‘wrath’ of God or the elements. It is around this day after that the most inventive fictions and representations are built, which, in a way, remain faithful to the Apocalypse, conceiving the catastrophe as the prelude to a new world order.

General curators: Jeanne Brun, Pauline Créteur
Curators: François Angelier, Charlotte Denoël, Lucie Mailland

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