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## Martial Raysse

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### Curated by Caroline Bourgeois in Collaboration with The Artist – Palazzo Grassi – Pinault Collection

This idea certainly isn't new; several others have commented on the privileged connections between Martial raysse's work and classical painting, or for that matter any painting that preexists his own. In 1979, Gilbert Lascault was the first to say that the timeless images the artist had recently produced "evoked, in our fantasies, the bacchanalia depicted by Nicolas Poussin." Two years later, discussing the series *Spelunca*, the critic took up this argument anew and developed it further: "It's in classical painting, in Poussin and many others, that Martial raysse finds an understanding of the right measure, of love and of life. He mentioned to me a letter from Nicolas Poussin to Paul Fréart de Chantelou from March 20, 1642, in which Poussin wrote that 'the beautiful women you'll see in Nîmes will delight your eye as much as the beautiful columns of the Maison Carrée, given that the latter are merely an older copy of the former.'" In 1989, Philippe Dagen mentioned the names of Caravaggio, Chardin, Manet, and Cézanne when describing raysse's beautiful still life, *Les fruits* (1985). In 1992, Didier Semin identified "the strange animal held by the protagonists in *Deux Poètes* (1991) as a relative of Giotto's sheep in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua." For Alain Jouroy in 1996, *Le Carnaval à Périgueux* (1992) evoked "those twentieth-century painters who, with their violent irony, their violent severity, depicted 1920s Berlin as a society play-acting as it began to decompose, both mentally and politically." A few years later, Michel Bulteau found that *Heureux Rivages* (2007) "shows a landscape worthy of the *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*," while the characters occupying it "evoked certain figures in paintings by Piero della Francesca." Even more recently, Anaël Pigeat compared the "blue-toned constructions in the background" of *La Fin des Haricots* (2006) to "the troubling metaphysical landscapes of Giorgio De Chirico" or to "certain Dutch paintings, with their faraway, inaccessible houses."

Further (highly subjective) comparisons can be suggested, with an interrogative or an affirmative tone, between paintings created long ago and Martial raysse's. For instance, would we be correct to view *Le Pèlerin de la Pierre-Juste* (1987) as a younger brother to Watteau's *Gilles*, or to spot Botticelli's Venus in *La Source* (2009)? The "little rascals, full of life, the chubby, strong, and lively country kids" in *L'Enfance de Bacchus* (1991) are quite similar to those who, on their way to school one day in 1910, encountered Jean Jouroy (1853–1924), a painter highly valued in his day, now almost forgotten. The fact that Poussin dealt with the same theme—the childhood of Bacchus—in three works between 1625 and 1630 clearly didn't stop raysse from reprising it himself, in a Caravaggio-esque chiaroscuro! "I saw this

scene at my son's school," is the most the artist has said on the subject. Perhaps the origin of *La Main, Tout Simplement!* (1992) can be found in the extended left arm of some Christ on the cross—that by Matthias grünewald in Colmar, for instance? Along with Anne-Marie sauzeau, we think of Bosch and goya when contemplating *Le Soir Antoine!* (1996)—but we can just as easily think of Jacques Callot's *Miseries of War* for the absolute horror depicted, of Antoine Caron's *Massacre Under the Triumvirate* for the frightening proliferation of people, and of Turner or lorrain, of course, for that blazing red sky and its apoca-lyptic overtones. In *Bacchus de Sainte-Terre* (1996–97)—then, ten years later, and in the opposite way, in *La Fin des Haricots*—we can recognize a very famous rubens from the louvre's collection, itself a work in which the Flemish genius had himself borrowed from one of the most famous an- cient sculpture that exists, the *Laocoon*. *Dieu Merci* (2004) evokes Ingres' *Odalisque with Slave*, which raysse used as early as 1963, as well as Chassériau's *Bather Sleeping Near a Spring*. with *Le Jour des Roses Sur Le Toit* (2005), we step into both Tintoretto's *Last Supper* and Veronese's *Wed- ding at Cana*—but interpreted by the James ensor of *The Banquet of the Starved!* In yet another register, the statuesque woman and the miniature man of *Cause Toujours!* (2006) bring to mind Cranach's many versions of *Venus and Cupid*. Finally, that same year, the still life *Merci* updates Caravaggio's *Still Life with Fruit* from the Ambrosiana in Milan—is it merely a coincidence that the two paintings have the exact same width?

As lengthy as it may seem, the list presented above is certainly not exhaustive. Perhaps it is in- dicative of having, like raysse himself in the 1960s, consumed “a little too much Coca-Cola” to suggest here that the dance oor of *Poissons d'Avril* (2007) seems to be the result of the improb- able encounter of Botticelli's *Primavera* and Ingres' Prix de rome winning painting of *Achilles Re- ceiving the Ambassadors*; or to dare to maintain that certain aspects of *Ici Plage, comme Ici-Bas* (2012), such as its format and its atypical characters, are reminiscent of those colossi, giuseppe Pelizza da Volpedo's *Fourth Estate* (1901), and even more with the immense portraits of citizens' militias (*Schutterijen*) that used to guard Dutch cities, a genre made famous by wouter Crabeth II, Bartholomeus van der helst, and Caesar van everdingen, among others. But there's still more... Martial raysse's oeuvre contains many treasures, exceptions, episodes, or parentheses that can be considered the modern echoes of ancient practices and habits. even when they can't be com- pared to speci c works, his works often seem like the present-day embodiments of investiga- tions or concepts games that have peppered the history of western art. what is, for example, this shadow that strides through the small, surreal landscape that we can barely discern in the center foreground of *L'Enfance de Bacchus*, in a painting-within-a-painting that can be compared to the bas-reliefs that we nd in the works, amongst others, of Valentin de Boulogne (*The Concert*), Cec- co del Caravaggio (*Christ Expulses the Money Lenders Out of the Temple*), nicolas Tournier (*The Guard Room*) and so many other followers of Caravaggio? was raysse putting himself through a self-imposed rite of passage when, in the mid-1990s, he decided to forbid himself the use of color, restricting himself to painting with luminous accents and values, reducing his palette to a mute range of colors, opting for the monochrome and obscuring the scenes he illustrates in *Oncle Res* (1993), *Oncle Rémi* (1994), *Les Six Plats* (1994), or *La Divine Adoratrice Karonoma* (1996)? Did raysse deliberately choose to experiment, like so many of his predecessors, with grisaille paint- ing? After Van eyck, Mantegna, heemskerck, rubens, Boucher, Tiepolo, and Ingres, did he want to test the spontaneity of this mode of expression, deprived of all color? [...]

This art of the past from which raysse feeds himself, or in relation to which he so often shapes his own position, we can notice traces of it in still more aspects of his work, such as the occasions on which the artist defends the types of images and subjects that time, fashion, and the triumph of abstraction have long left behind. Indeed who, besides our artist, was interested over the past few decades in themes such as *The Rape of Europa* (after Cousin, Vouet, Boucher, Moreau, Vallotton, etc.) or *The Rape of the Sabine Women* (after rubens, Poussin, Déruet, David, Picasso...)? who else had the bizarre idea of asking his models to pose as Diana, as a Bacchante, as Bacchus, over two centuries after Jean-Marc nattier and Jean-Baptiste Perronneau created, the rst, the *Portrait of Madame Bouret* (Madrid, Thyssen Museum), the other, that of *Mademoiselle Elisabeth Félicité Pinchinat as Diana* (orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts), after Jean raoux et louise Élisabeth Vigée-le-Brun respectively immortalized *Mademoiselle Prévost* (Tours, Musée des Beaux-Arts) and *Lady Hamilton as Baccante* (liverpool, lady lever Art gallery), that largillier signed a *Portrait of a Stranger as Bacchus* (Paris, louvre) and grimou his *Self-Portrait as Bacchus* (Dijon, Musée Magnen)? These are only a few examples, among many others...

The interest, if not attraction, that raysse displays towards subjects that today are spurned by his contemporaries and considered obsolete is part, we'd say, of his careful examination of the pictorial object as a whole. It's characteristic of his desire to "be worthy" of the best of his elders, to walk in their footsteps, to experiment himself with the steps that characterized their evolution. Perhaps this is also part of a desire to be a link, for generations to come, to a given past, to a precious but fragile cultural capital that consists in a group of customs, techniques, and views on painting. when he interpreted, in his own way, an episode in the life of giotto in 1995, raysse was deliberately placing himself amongst the circle of influence, the "clan," the noble family of artists who one day paid homage to their glorious predecessors. we know that Ingres depicted raphael and leonardo, Titian, Filippo lippi, Michelangelo, and that Delacroix created a portrait of Michel-angelo. In this case, unlike Taunay (1808), Bodinier (1826), Ziegler (1833), revoil (1840), gourlier (1841), Prévost (1845), Bonnat (1850), Degas (1857), ribot (c. 1870), salières (1876) and gustave Moreau (c. 1882), raysse chose not to depict the usual scene captured by all his forerunners: the young shepherd sketching a lamb on the side of the road, when Cimabue walks by, discovers him, and asks his father to let him work as his apprentice. Paying a great deal of attention to tradition does not imply, for "Monsieur raysse" (as we once said "Monsieur Ingres"), being tradition's slave.

1. Raysse, quoted by Benhamou-huet, op. cit., 100.
2. Gilbert Lascault, "Martial raysse: De nouvelles Images," *Connaissance des Arts*, no. 323, January 1979, 58.
3. Gilbert Lascault, "Annotations Plus ou Moins Dispersées Autour de Dix Ans d'Activité de Martial raysse (1970– 1980)," in *Martial Raysse* (Paris: Musée national d'Art Moderne, 1981), 12.
4. Philippe Dagen, "Martial raysse le Moderne Cannibale," *Art Press*, no. 133, February 1989, 18.
5. Didier semin, "Martial raysse, Alias hermès: la Voie des Images," in *Martial Raysse* (Paris: galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, rMn; nîmes: Carré d'Art, 1992–1993), 26.
6. Jou roy, op. cit. 77.

7. Michel Bulteau, *Heureux rivages. Un Tableau de Martial Raysse à Santa Maria delle Grazie* (Paris: Éditions Viviane hamy, 2008), n. p.
8. Anaël Pigeat, "Martial raysse. la Fin des haricots," *Art Press*, no. 23, november/December 2012, 65.
9. Claire stoulig, "Peinture d'histoire et histoire de Peinture," in *Martial Raysse. Promenade avec Vue sur Bacchus, le Pain et le Vin* (Cajarc: Maison des Arts georges Pompidou, 1997), 20.
10. Maryse Aleksandrowski, Alain Mathieu, and Dominique lobsterstein, *Henry Jules Jean Geo roy dit Géo (1853-1924)* (Trouville sur Mer: Éditions Illustria, 2012).
11. Dagen, op. cit., 11.
12. Anne-Marie sauzeau, *Enzo Cucchi – Martial Raysse, Dei, Santi e Viandanti* (Bologna: Museo Civico Medieval; ravenna: Danilo Montanari editore, 1996), 41.
13. "I've often been asked, 'but Martial, why always Ingres, Ingres, Ingres?' I think that at the time, you see, during

the '60s, I was maybe consuming a little too much Coca-Cola..." Martial raysse, quoted by Cuzin, salmon, and Viguiet, op. cit., 25.

14. The exhibition "The little Martial raysse in the collection galerie de France," 2012, included a very nice tempera and a graphite drawing on paper that reprises, in 2000, the countenance of Flora, from the same *Printemps*.
15. Wouter Crabeth II (1594–1644), *Harmanus Herberts and his O cers*, 1964, gouda, Museum het Catharina gasthuis.
16. Caesar van everdingen (1616–1678), *O cers and Standard Bearers of the New Civic Guard of Alkmaar*, 1650, and *O cers and Standard Bearers of the Old Civic Guard of Alkmaar*, 1657, stedelijk Museum.
17. Martial raysse, *L'Enlèvement d'Europe*, 1977, tempera on wood, localisation; *L'Enlèvement d'Europe*, 1989, lithography, private collection.
18. Martial raysse, *Étude pour L'Enlèvement des Sabines*, 1986, graphite on paper, private collection.
19. Martial raysse, *Séverine en Diane*, 1983, graphite on paper, Draguignan, Toussaint siloes Collection.
20. Martial raysse, *Zia en Bacchante*, 1993, tempera on wood, Paris, private collection.
21. Martial raysse, *Lucien en Bacchus*, 1991, crayon on paper, Copenhagen, hans Alfred Collection.