

PRESS RELEASE

Jacques VILLON, b. Gaston Duchamp (1875–1963)

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Museum of Fine Arts, Angers

Is it time to for a reassessment of the oeuvre of Jacques Villon?

The Museum of Fine Arts in Angers offers its own answer to the question with a multi-faceted retrospective spanning the 20th century, its history and its major issues.

Jacques Villon (Damville 1875–Puteaux 1963), whose real name was Gaston Emile Duchamp, was one of the remarkably artistic offspring of a prosperous, cultivated family: he was the older brother of Marcel Duchamp, sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon and painter Suzanne Duchamp, who married Dada artist Jean Crotti. Villon – his choice of pseudonym was a homage to poet François Villon – began his career as a satirical cartoonist with a sharp eye for a changing world; a contributor to Cubism and post-World War I abstractionism, he continued to work in the abstract vein of the 1940s and 1950s, witnessing the apogee of the second School of Paris – Bazaine, Estève, Debré, Poliakoff and others – and the rise of New York as an art centre at the expense of the French capital.

The importance of the Villon oeuvre was acknowledged only in the late 1940s, when he already had more than 800 canvases and some 500 engravings to his credit. This belated recognition can be explained in part by his secretive, self-effacing character and his decision, in 1906, to set up his studio in Puteaux, far from the turmoil of Montmartre and Montparnasse. A free spirit like his brothers and sister, he developed a highly personal version of Cubism, merging a fascination with mechanics, movement and painting theory with his emotional responses to nature.

He was sixteen when he made his first engravings at the home of his grandfather, Emile Nicolle, a painter and engraver from Rouen. From 1894 to 1906 he worked as a cartoonist and illustrator for a number of Paris publications, among them the famous *L'Assiette au Beurre*. Influenced by Edgar Degas and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, he became a full-time artist in 1906; in 1911 he instigated the founding of the Puteaux Group, then of the Section d'Or, which included his brothers and sister and artists like Gleizes, Metzinger, Picabia, Gris, Léger, Delaunay and Kupka. His work was exhibited at the Armory Show in New York in 1913. After fighting in the First World War, he returned to painting and engraving. Marcel Duchamp, declared unfit for the army, had left for New York in 1915 and Raymond Duchamp-Villon had died in 1918 after contracting typhoid while in action, but their personalities and work would remain a touchstone for him. He exhibited several times in New York, where his paintings were acquired by such eminent collectors as Katherine Dreier and John Quinn.

In 1942 art dealer Louis Carré bought up his unsold work and, with the backing of the "Jeunes peintres de tradition française" group, helped establish him on the art scene. His 1944 solo show at the Galerie de France in Paris was the first of a long series that would see his work in leading museums – the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, MoMA in New York, etc. – in France and around the world. He was one of the few French painters of the time to have retained a reputation in the United States: in 1945 his work and that of his two brothers was presented at the Yale University Art Gallery and in 1950 he was awarded the Carnegie Prize. Many French and American museums, along with private collectors and the artist's family, have agreed to lend works for this exhibition in Angers.

A major contributor to this exhibition is art critic and curator Germain Viatte, author of Jacques Villon (Editions Expressions Contemporaines). Germain Viatte was director of the Musées de Marseille from 1985 to 1989, and has headed such other prestigious museums as the Centre Pompidou (1992–97) and the Musée du Quai Branly, for which he was project head (1997–2006). He was also inspector general at the Musées de France in 1989–91.

Curators

Germain Viatte, honorary curator general, heritage
Patrick Le Nouène, chief heritage curator, director Musées d'Angers

Practical information

Opening hours: Tuesday–Sunday, 10 am – 6 pm

Admission: 4 €/concessions 3 €

Catalog: *Jacques Villon né Gaston Duchamp (1875-1963)*. Publishers Expressions contemporaines, Germain Viatte, Vorwort Patrick Le Nouène, 240 pages, 39 €

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