

## **Raymond Hains: Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris - Brief Article**

**ArtForum, Dec, 2001 by Jean-Max Colard**

"Raymond Hains, la tentative": The very title of the show--"Raymond Hains: The Attempt"--underscores the difficulties involved in mounting a Hains retrospective. The first challenge is posed by the sheer variety of the artist's oeuvre, from his photographs taken through fluted lenses and the torn posters he first realized with Jacques de la Villegle in to his Nouveau Réaliste work alongside Yves Klein in the '60s, to his recent collages of digital images, "Macintoshages," 1997-. The second hurdle is Hains himself, who has long avoided participation in a retrospective, leaving the task to curators such as Daniel Abadie, who organized the first Hains survey, at the Centre National d'Art et de Culture in Paris in 1976.

Hains has always preferred looking ahead to checking the rearview mirror; he favors the adventure of art over his own consecration. Hence, his career, like his work, has been nonlinear, made up of digressions, missed appointments, lateral moves, and temporary disappearances: the sinuous path of an artist impossible to pinpoint. Those who attended Documenta X in 1997 will not soon forget his contribution: Invited by curator Catherine David, Hains exhibited in a Kassel shop rather than at the Fredericianum and organized a parade that traveled through the city, a joyous march led by a larger-than-life-size mannequin of the late Iris Clert, Hains's gallerist and a towering figure in the Paris art world of the '60s. It was a carnivalesque scene, drawing a slightly bewildered crowd of artists, critics, curators, and museum-goers--an improvised display, a manifesto for a work in progress, a true oeuvre en marche.

Now, at seventy-five, Hains has finally agreed to set down, at least for the moment, the trademark suitcases in which he keeps all his documentation and take stock of his work, through the intermediary of an exhibition that spans from the mid-century fluted-lens images to such recent series as "Strasbourg-Beaubourg," 1999-2000, and "Serra-Serralves," 1999, photographs that make visual and linguistic associations between, for example, a Richard Serra sculpture in Bilbao and the Fundacao de Serralves in Porto. Greeting viewers at the entrance to the show was a new work, titled Palissade CIC, 2001, a Plexiglas barricade inspired by surveillance systems in banks; at the survey's center was its strongbox: the artist's website, Mon Encyclopedia Clartes, 2001, a network of images and texts encompassing Hains's career that collectively form a mosaic, an apt metaphor for the varied works he has produced. In 1976, the French poet and critic Alain Jouffroy came up with this striking formulation of the artist's oeuvre: " For over twenty years Hains has been weaving the strangest spiderweb in the world: one made of a sun that will only illuminate coincidences

everywhere." As exhibition organizer Christine Macel, a curator at the Centre Pompidou, points out in the exhibition catalogue, Jouffroy's description places Hains's work squarely in the contemporary context of the Internet, metaphorically casting the artist as a grand webmaster of twentieth-century art.

Hains himself has said that he works "on a sort of web" and defines himself not as an "artist who paints paintings" but as an inaction painter," a "rapprocheur d'images." Juggling words and images, Hains thus pairs the giant mannequin of Iris Clert in Kassel with similar figures made in the small French village of Cassel (Raymond Hains avec Reuze Papa et Reuze Mama Cassel, 1997); juxtaposes in a readymade installation the name Otto Hahn with a bottle of Petrole Rahn shampoo (Hommage Boronali, Petrole Hahn, 1989); installs the Trojan horse in Troyes (Neo-Dada emballe, 1963); and, invoking the Roman name for Brittany, transforms the American Express logo (Armorican Express, 1987). It is less a matter of simple wordplay than of hackerlike intervention: In the '50s, Hains participated in a proto-Situationist demonstration organized by Le Front Humain des Citoyens du Monde (including Camus, Sartre, Andre Breton, and Orson Welles), which called for worldwide democracy to take the place of a global capitalist economy, and he has retained some of the spirit of that political action, engaging with the brand names Shell and Citroen, as well as with Yves Klein's 1KB blue and Daniel Buren's stripes. In 1964, as further proof of his prescience with regard to the art of today, he invented the artists Seita and Saffa--their names are taken from French and Italian tobacco companies, respectively--and attributed a body of work to them, including the giant book of matches first shown in Paris in 1965. With Seita and Saffa, Hains created an artistic fiction resulting in a range of products located somewhere between Pop art and ironic capitalist enterprise.

That said, the play with language, the penchant for punning, and the enormous literary and historical bank on which Hains unceasingly draws have at times occluded the eminently visual character of his work. It is precisely this aesthetic dimension that the retrospective seeks to bring out: not just Hains's invention of forms and the plurality of his materials, but his role as scopical interpreter of signs inscribed in the landscape. Like the abstract film *Penelope*, 1950-54, made with Villegle, the exhibition reveals Hains's ongoing concern with color, especially bright color. Through the lacerated posters, photographies-constats (photographic reports), readymades--e.g., *La Foire aux skis* (The ski fair), 1988, a wall of Rossignol skis--and installations, this survey firmly establishes its subject in the register of the "ocular" arts. And it is the privileging of the visual in Hains's work that makes this retrospective so eye-opening.

"Raymond Hains, la tentative" travels to Moore College Art Galleries, Philadelphia, and the Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, California, in 2003-2004.

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