



ÉTIENNE BERTRAND WEILL

UN COUP DE PEIGNE ASTRAL

Exhibition at Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris
5 November, 2022 - 14 January, 2023

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Cover: *Caprices Irisés*, 1967. Detail. Étienne Bertrand Weill

INTRODUCTION

By Maria Wettergren

“Étienne Bertrand Weill invents “abstract” images by making mobiles and putting them into motion in front of his camera, resulting in beautiful imaginary volumes, with bodies of light and skins of shadow.”

Jean-Claude Lemagny
Historian of photography

On the occasion of the Month of Photography 2022, and in collaboration with the Estate of Étienne Bertrand Weill, Galerie Maria Wettergren is pleased to present the gallery's second solo exhibition of Étienne Bertrand Weill's work, featuring over twenty original silver gelatin and cibachrome prints from the 1960s and 1970s.

'Sculpting light' [Sculpteur la lumière] is the title behind E. B. Weill's project, who in the 1950s began his kinetic work based on light in motion. Inventor of his own tools and creative processes conceived specifically to produce these families of images, it was in around 1957 that he began to build mobiles made from simple materials (wood, glass, Plexiglas, wire...) that he then subjected to light and various movements. E. B. Weill imagined an art where the film would not have *“even enough time to seize the contours of the*

object. What remains of the object's form is a new transient appearance”. This momentary appearance, he would name “Metaform” [Métaforme].

In a dedicatory poem written in 1963 entitled “Un commerce de lumières forgées avec le surnaturel” (A Trade of Forged Lights with the Supernatural), Jean Arp echoes his admiration for E. B. Weill's “Metaforms”, which he likened to *“an astral combing... ropes of stars... from real stars to dreamy companions... hourglass wonders... vibrations and waves of flowers.”* A book project is later born in 1964, imagined as a ‘naked’ dialogue between Arp's poem and 12 of E. B. Weill's “Metaforms”. It would nevertheless remain in the state of a preprint model. Galerie Maria Wettergren is delighted to publish, for the first time, a limited edition of this unseen art book, based on the original model. The publication is scheduled for 2023.

For the scenography of the exhibition, Galerie Maria Wettergren pays tribute to the kinetic dimension of his art with photographic works suspended freely in space, inspired by É. B. Weill's exhibitions of the 1960s and 70s. A continuation of the exhibition includes a projection of his audio-visual work “Musique pour les yeux” (Music for the Eyes), kinetic suites of “Metaforms” composed in collaboration with other artists, musicians, dancers, and comedians, revealing the artist's aspiration towards a musical and immaterial dimension; a total art.

E. B. Weill's pioneering work remains avant-garde even today. The 2012 retrospective at the BnF, *Vertige du Corps*, testifies to this and was preceded by a large number of solo and group exhibitions, as well as screenings of “Music for the Eyes.” E. B. Weill's work can be found in private collections and museums in France including the Centre Pompidou, Paris; Musée Réattu, Arles; and the BnF, Paris. His works can equally be found in collections in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Germany and Israel.





Exhibition view: Étienne Bertrand Weill, *Un coup de peigne astral*, Galerie Maria Wettergren, 2022

CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

By Joëlle Naïm

“Detached from [the artist], [the true work of art] takes on an autonomous life, becomes a personality, an independent subject, animated with a spiritual breath, which equally leads a real material existence – a being.”

Wassily Kandinsky
“Concerning the Spiritual in Art”

In exhibiting a group of *Métaformes* created by the photographer Étienne Bertrand Weill (1911-2001), Galerie Maria Wettergren allows us to discover, or rediscover, the universe of this artist who, in the secrecy of his studio, far from the beaten tracks, developed a powerful oeuvre - of which the *Métaformes* are the culmination and summit – crossing over the second half of the twentieth century and establishing itself within its artistic movements, such as abstract art or kinetic art.

The change of century did not diminish the force that emanates from this set of work. On the contrary. For those of us who are immersed in the racket of the present dark times and the erratic movements that disrupt it, to walk among these

photographs, suspended by an invisible thread, black and white or in color, abstract writings combed with a brush of light, is to participate in a motionless but vibrant dance, it is to listen to and “see” a silver silence that is capable of carrying us away, enlightening us. Presented as they are, in a beautiful revisitation of an historic exhibition, these sumptuous frozen images give us the feeling of entering a cathedral of which only fragments remain suspended in time and space.

The magic that emanates from these works, from these ethereal veils that seem to be moved by a quasi-divine, cosmic breath - hence the metaphor of the “astral combing” used by Jean Arp -, pipe organs of light, charcoal-infused explosions, light



whirlwinds, could make the spectator believe, at first glance, that this is the fruit of a “New Age” inspiration. This would be a great misunderstanding of the meaning and the meticulous exploration that led to their creation.

If there is a spiritual element in this art, something that Wassily Kandinsky would certainly not have denied, it is the fruit of a complex process, the result of a true artistic asceticism. This art of the essential was sharpened by its contact with other forms of expression - sculpture, architecture, painting, dance, music, mime -, whose spirit, rhythms and “inner resonances” (Kandinsky, id.) he captured, as an alchemist lover of synesthesia, in order to nourish his own photographic style, bordering on the sacred.

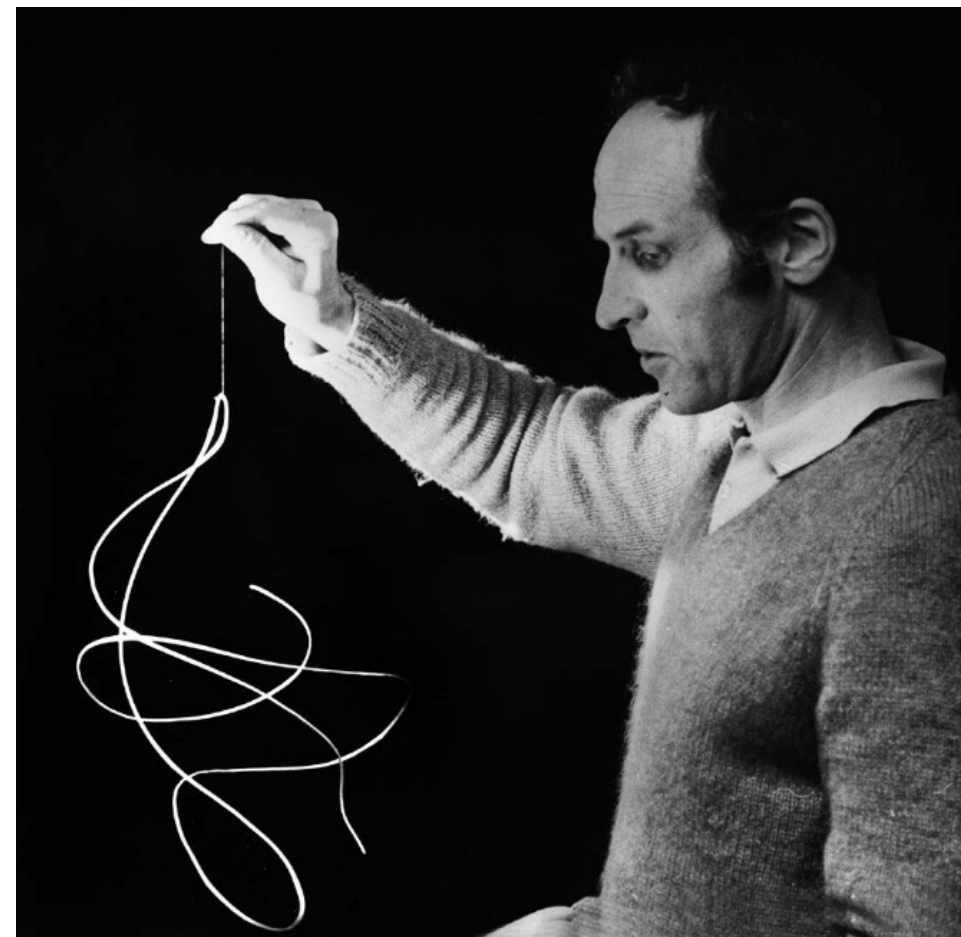
It was particularly as the photographer of Étienne Decroux, that Étienne Bertrand Weill was trained to study, even listen to, the movement of the subtlest body, detached from all contexts and contingencies. The mime knew how to become a sculpture in movement, and disappear as such, until, dressed in a black leotard outlined by a white line around the whole body, advancing on a black background, he became pure movement.

The *Métaformes* are the ultimate culmination of these experiments, in which the human body is replaced by a minimal object in motion. This carefully designed mobile, in wire, wood, glass or Plexiglas, after being

set in motion with a calculated speed and lit at a certain angle, adopting a very precise exposure time, will vanish completely in the ensuing photograph, as if dissolved by the light. Μετά means “beyond, after” in ancient Greek. In front of these works, let’s not stop at the form, already splendid, icy fire, crystalline pipe organs, crosshatched swirls... They are frozen movements, time metamorphosed into space.

This is why one has rightly spoken of “Musique pour les yeux” [Music for the eyes] (Maurice Fleuret) with regard to these works. Music, the art of time, is the very principle behind the elaboration of this form of abstraction. Many of the titles are there to guide us in this understanding: Magnificat, Contrepoint, Chants hélicés, Clé de lune, Cantate...

This is further revealed in the audio-visual kinetic montages, also presented in the exhibition. Although merely “reproductions” of the kinetic suites executed by the artist himself during dance or poetry performances, they nevertheless confirm the meaning of the photographs by putting them in motion, and thus, activating their potential, their inherent pulsations. The visual sequences, born of and accompanied by the rhythms of music, dance or voice, transform the space, or here the screen, into vibrant and fusional intensities, powerful enough “to cause vibrations of pure resonance in the soul “ (Kandinsky, id.).





*“As a generator of images, he offers us a setting
in which we are free to imagine, to interpret the
dream of our choice. Étienne Bertrand Weill does
not impose, he proposes.”*

Jean-Claude Gautrand
Photo tribune, January 1970

Kol Hazamir, 1974
40,4 x 30 cm
Original cibachrome print by É. B. Weill

METAFORMES

SILVER GELATIN PRINTS (1957 - 1966)

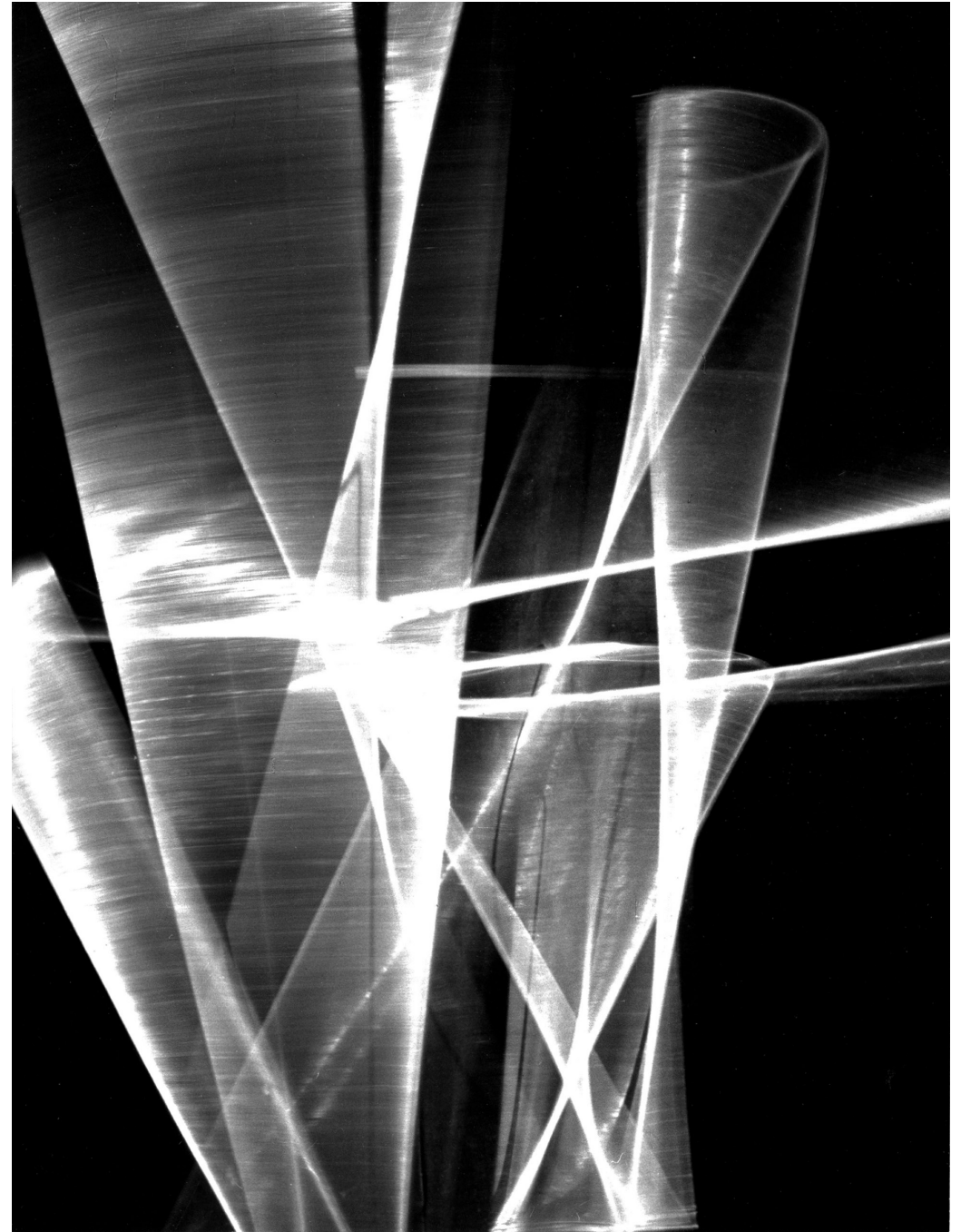


“Like music, the Métaformes are created by various vibrations or modulations distributed in time and space (volume). When an object moves during a given time, it generates a modulation perceptible to the eye through the camera. This modulation becoming object, the succession of the various modulations thus created, by their sequence, their metamorphoses, their oppositions, their fugues, their ruptures, their rhythms, etc. become in a way elements of visual music.”

“Les Métaformes par Étienne Bertrand Weill”
Today, N° 35, February 1962

Exhibition view: Étienne Bertrand Weill, *Un coup de peigne astral*
Galerie Maria Wettergren, 2022

Cantate, 1957
50 x 40 cm
Original silver gelatin print by É. B. Weill





Clé De Lune, 1960
39,5 x 26,5 cm
Original silver gelatin print by É. B. Weill

*"...un commerce de lumières forgées
avec le surnaturel.
Perruques de lumière.
Un coup de peigne astral.
Des cordages d'étoiles.
De véritables astres en compagnons de rêve.
Ouragans de photographe.
Sabliers de merveilles.
Vibrations et ondes de fleurs."*

Jean Arp
"Un commerce de lumières forgées avec le surnaturel"
Extract of poem dedicated to Étienne Bertrand Weill, 1963

Circé, 1961
80,5 x 58,6 cm
Original silver gelatin print by É. B. Weill



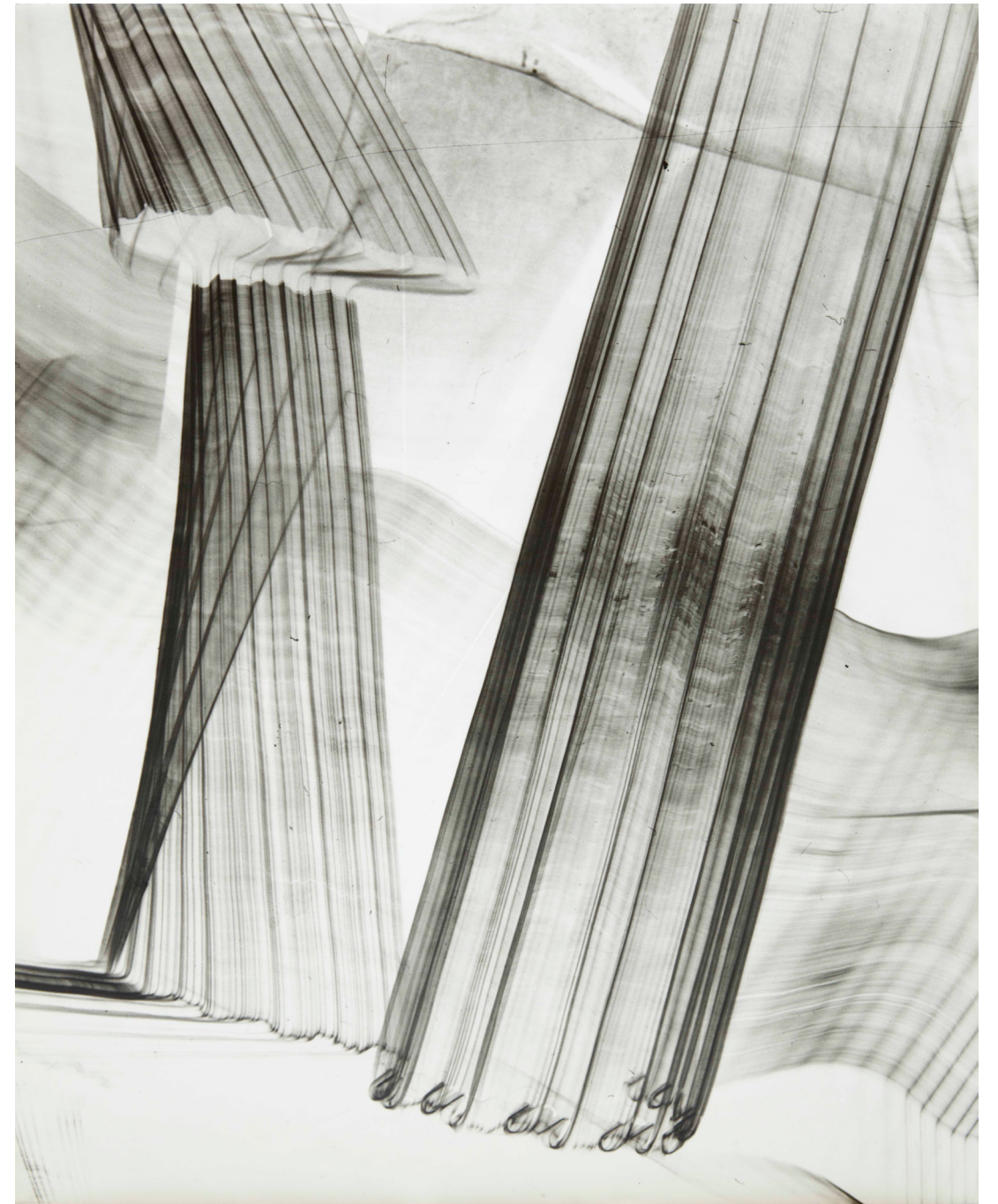


Contrepoint, 1961
39,5 x 50 cm
Original silver gelatin print by É. B. Weill

"As I sought to express the ambience of the stage and its different phases of movement in a single image, I studied and tried to master the movement, the invisible trajectory that only photography can capture. This rendering of the invisible that places time into space..."

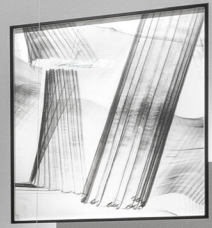
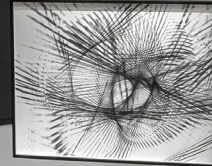
Étienne Bertrand Weill
"Du spectacle au mouvement"
Artist note, undated

Proposition Pour Un Décors Classique, 1963
59,5 x 47 cm
Original silver gelatin print by É. B. Weill





Magnificat, 1963
80,5 x 58 cm
Original silver gelatin print by É. B. Weill



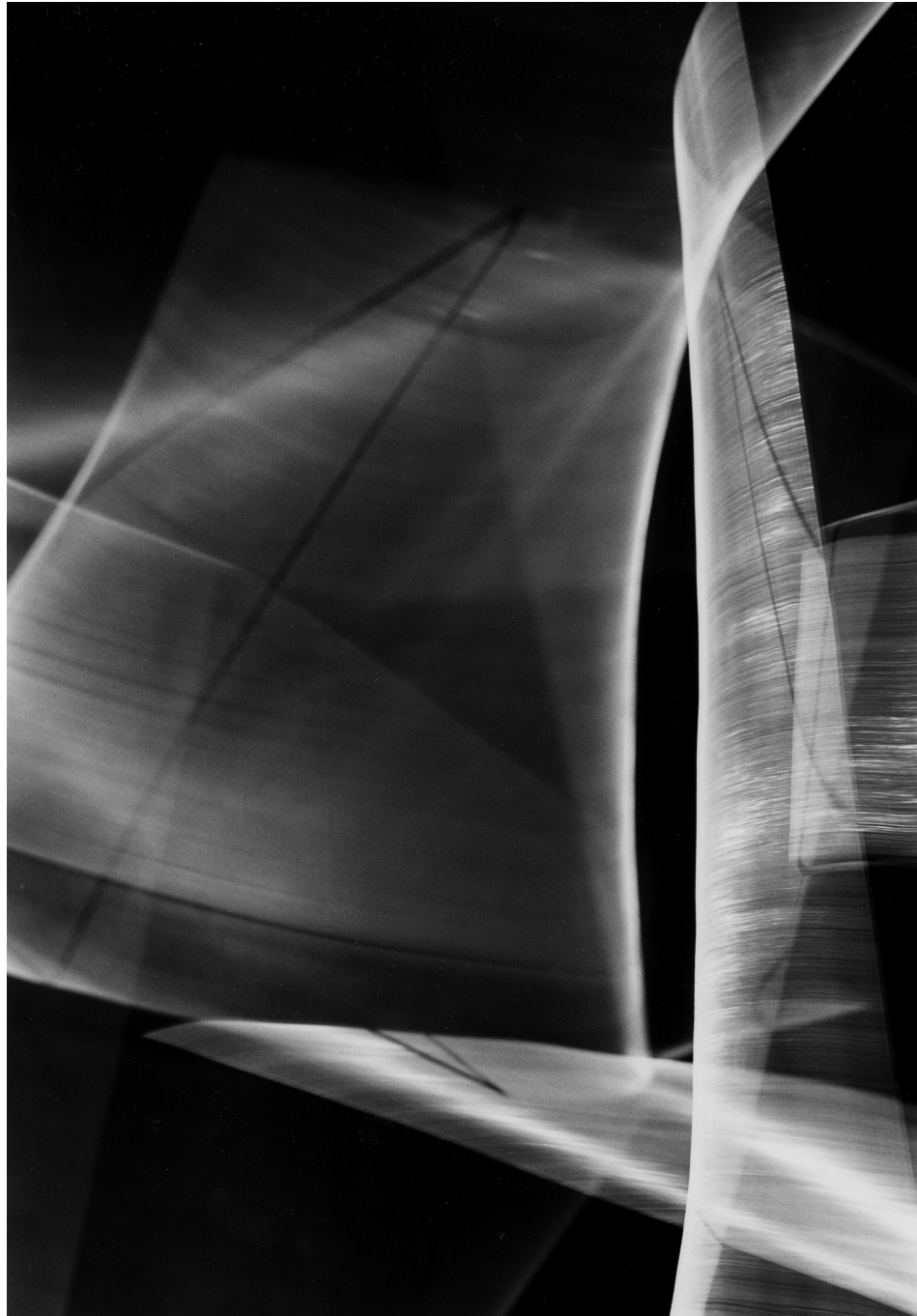
Informational text on the wall, including artist name and exhibition details.

Etienne Bertrand Weill
Un coup de peigne astral

Exhibition view: Étienne Bertrand Weill, *Un coup de peigne astral*, Galerie Maria Wettergren, 2022

Justice, 1963
47,5 x 31,5 cm
Original silver gelatin print by É. B. Weill



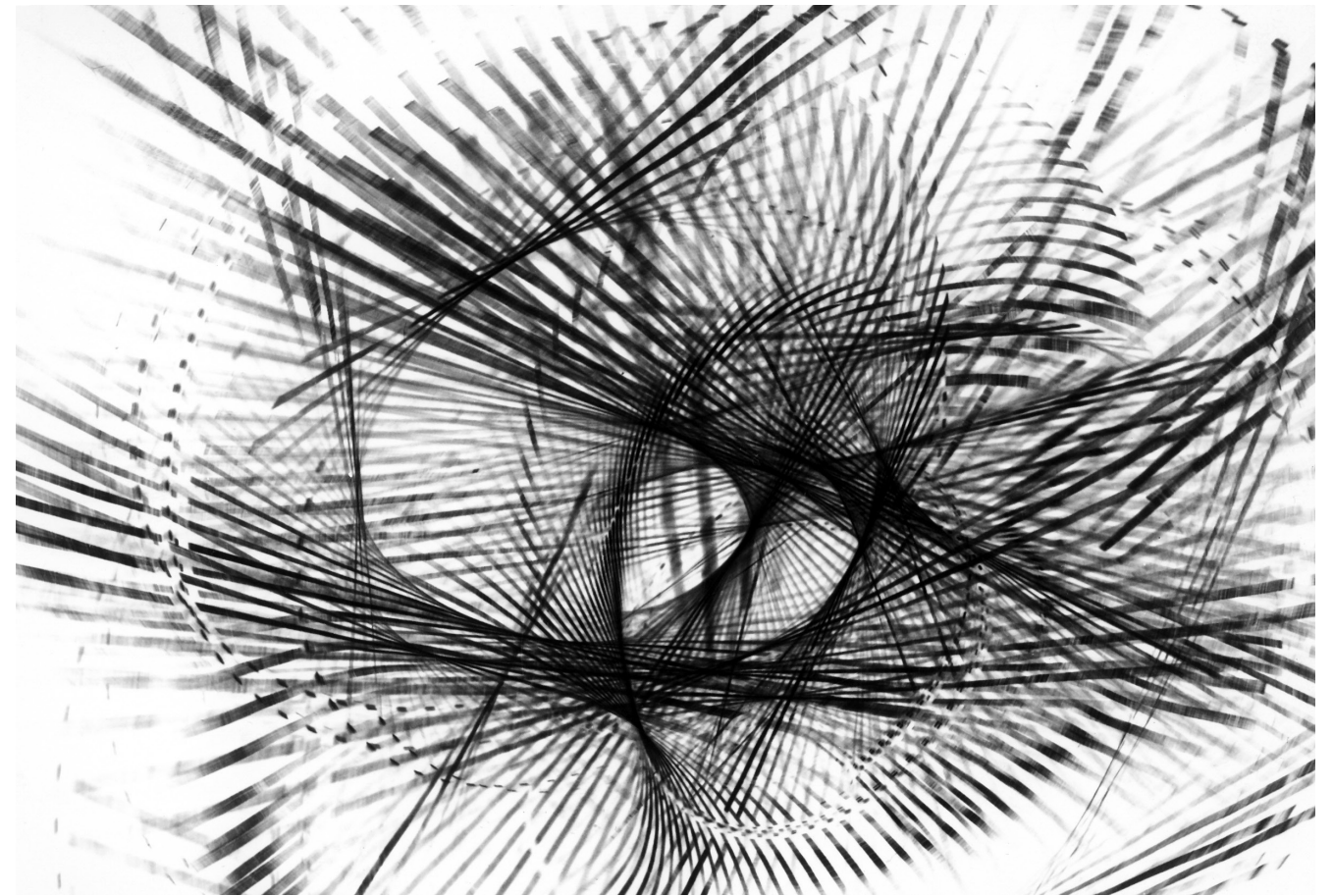


Le Passage, 1964
50 x 34 cm
Original silver gelatin print by É. B. Weill

*“What remains on the paper is the
transfiguration of matter and form
by movement and time.”*

Étienne Bertrand Weill
« Métaformes », ca. 1965

Mesure À Mille Temps, 1965
44 x 58 cm
Original silver gelatin print by É. B. Weill





Exhibition view: Étienne Bertrand Weill, *Un coup de peigne astral*
Galerie Maria Wettergren, 2022

Psaume LVII, 1966
59 x 44 cm
Original silver gelatin print by É. B. Weill





Chants Hélicés, 1966

59 x 44,5 cm

Original silver gelatin print by É. B. Weill

METAFORMES

CIBACHROME PRINTS (1964 - 1984)



Étienne Bertrand Weill, *Un coup de peigne astral*, 2022



Étienne Bertrand Weill, *Un coup de peigne astral*, 2022



Étienne Bertrand Weill, *Un coup de peigne astral*, 2022



Étienne Bertrand Weill, *Un coup de peigne astral*, 2022

"I think that one of the roles of the artist ... is to help others find their view (on the world and on things) and with this gaze, the fundamental feeling, according to Heschel, of wonder."

Étienne Bertrand Weill's comment on Agam's film





Fantaisie Pour Une Étoile, 1964
30,2 x 40,5 cm
Original cibachrome print by É. B. Weill

Tourbillonnante, 1964
40,5 x 30,5 cm
Original cibachrome print by É. B. Weill



*“...quel vent muet m’emporte et laisse
Mon corps en de nouveaux atours,
Étonné que rien ne le blesse
De ces départs et ces retours ?
Toute dévolue aux méandres
de mes caprices irisés,
Où suis-je au fond de ces baisers
D’aurore et de salamandres ?”*

Extract of the poem “La pieuvre” by Robert Ganzo, on which Weill made
an audiovisual montage and which included *Caprices Irisés* (1967)



Caprices Irisés, 1967
30,4 x 41,4 cm
Original cibachrome print by É. B. Weill

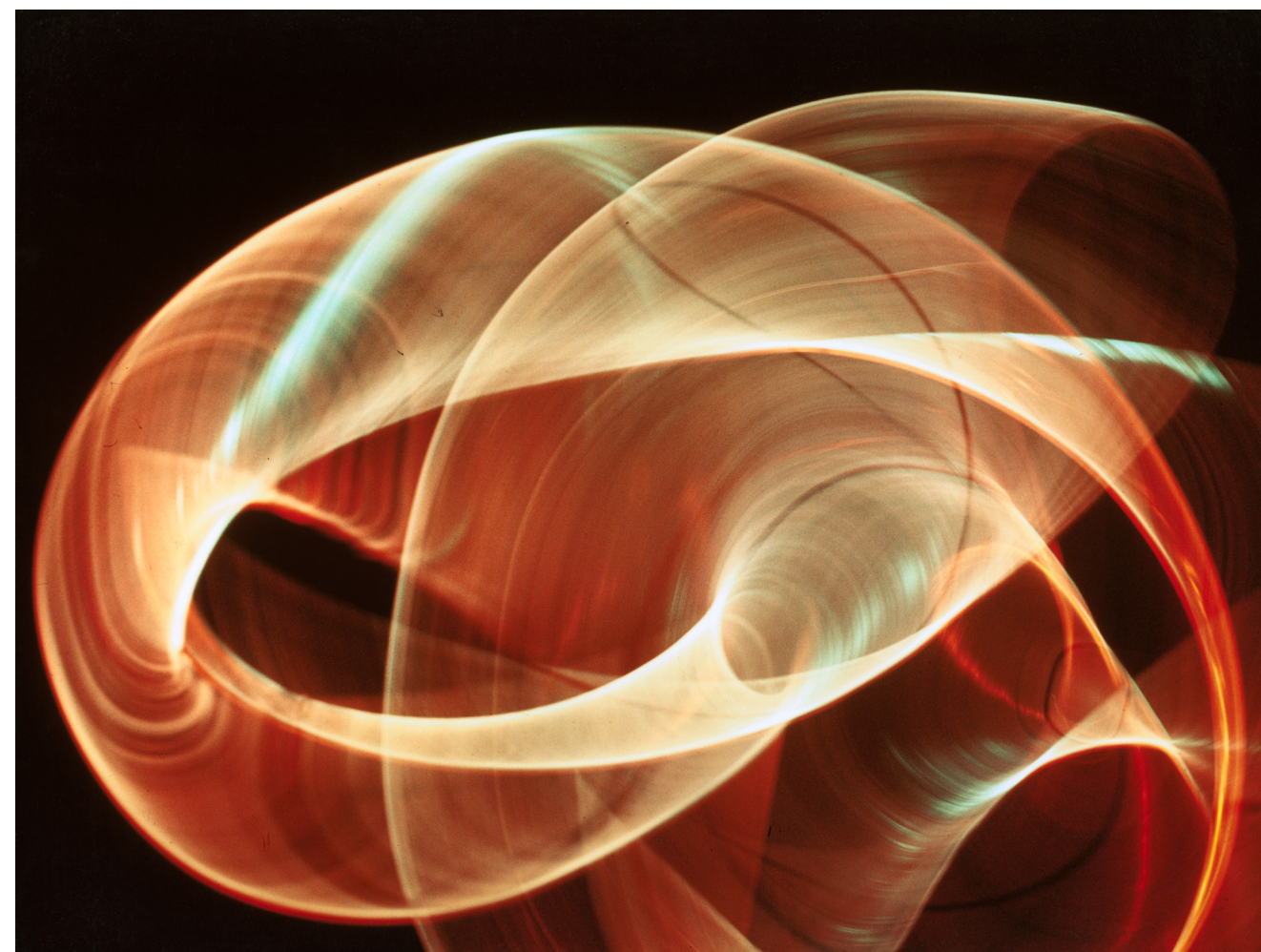
Chevauchée Iréelle, 1970
30,4 x 40 cm
Original cibachrome print by É. B. Weill





Venue d'ailleurs, ca.1970 - 1980
40,5 x 30 cm
Original cibachrome print by É. B. Weill

Nacrée, 1971
30,4 x 40,4 cm
Original cibachrome print by É. B. Weill





Etude pour un trio - 14e Variation, 1978
30,5 x 40,2 cm
Original cibachrome print by É. B. Weill

Evolutione, 1979
40,5 x 30,5 cm
Original cibachrome print by É. B. Weill





Solaire, 1984
30,4 x 40,4 cm
Original cibachrome print by É. B. Weill

A Venir, 1984
40,5 x 30,5 cm
Original cibachrome print by É. B. Weill





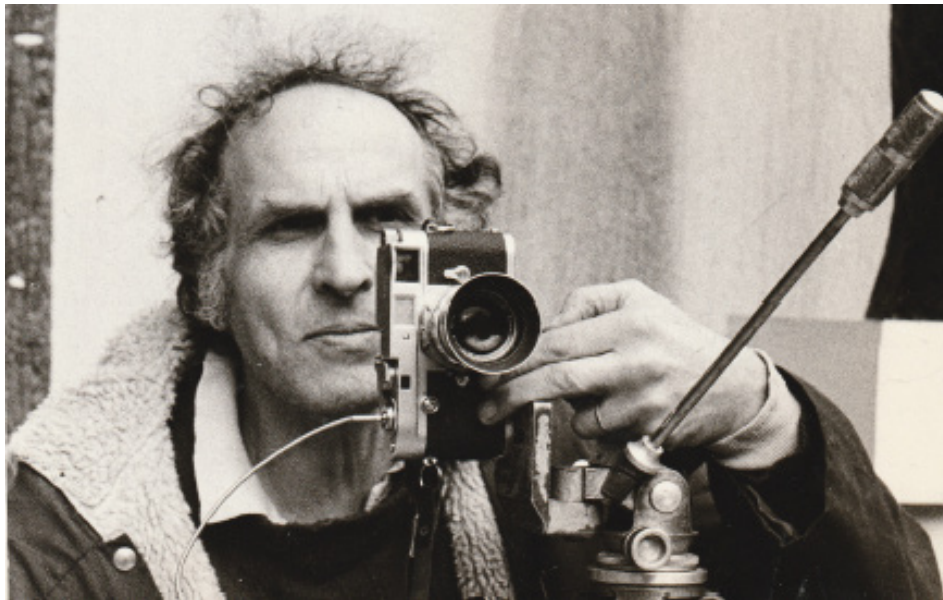
Étienne Bertrand Weill
Un coup de peigne astral
2022
Digital artwork on the wall



Étienne Bertrand Weill
Un coup de peigne astral
2022
Digital artwork on the wall



Étienne Bertrand Weill
Un coup de peigne astral
2022
Digital artwork on the wall



SHORT BIOGRAPHY

1919	Born in Paris
1938	Graduated from the National School of Photography and Cinema
1940	Mobilized in June, debacle, youth work camps
1942-1943	Member of the resistance (the Sixth 'Eclaireurs Israélites de France'), works as a laboratory assistant at the Neyrpic factories in Grenoble and forging papers in the guise of a photo studio
1944	Joined the underground 'Eclaireurs Israélites de France' then joined the army and participated in the liberation of Vosges, Alsace and the occupation of Germany
1946	Returns to Paris, builds a photo studio in the bathroom next to his bedroom
1947	Meets Marcel Marceau who introduces him to his master, Étienne Decroux
1948	Marries Jacqueline. Followed by birth of Laure 1949, Marie-Anne 1951, Nadine 1952, Eliane 1955.
1956	First attempts of his Métaformes
1957	First exhibition of Métaformes
1958	Cécile is born
1963	'Laboratoire des Arts', project for the Osaka World Fair, in collaboration with J-L.Renucci and F.E.Alata, architects
1965	First audiovisual show, "Sol de Compiègne" by Robert Desnos, narrated by Bernard Mermod at the Vieux Colombier Theater (Paris)
1976-83	Teacher at the University of Paris I Sorbonne, Department of Visual Arts
1981-83	Jury member, visual arts
1987	Emigrates to Israel
2000	Audiovisual show on three texts by André Neher - "Empreintes", dance performance by Tamara Mielnik
01/2001	Death of the artist

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
 French National Library (BnF), Cabinet of Prints and Photography, Paris, France
 French National Library (BnF), Department of Performing Arts, Paris, France
 Museum of Fine Arts and Archaeology, Toulouse, France
 Nicéphore Niepce Museum, Chalon sur Saône, France

Museum of Fine Arts and Archaeology, Toulon, France
Musée Réattu, Arles, France
Galerie Nationale de Prêt Photographique, Paris, France
Pierre David-Weill Collection, Paris, France
Museum of Fine Arts and Archaeology, Besançon, France
City Hall, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany
Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2022 Un coup de peigne astral, Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris, France
2014 Métaforme (Photographies 1959 – 1982), Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris, France
2012 Vertige du Corps, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France
2008 Galerie Hautefeuille, Paris, France
2007 La librairie de la photo, Paris, France
2005 Mimos, 23th International Festival of Mime
Centre Culturel de la Visitation, Périgueux, France
2001 Hommage à Étienne Bertrand Weill, Théâtre Gérard Béhar, Jerusalem, Israel
Centre de la Danse Suzanne Dellal, Tel-Aviv, Israel
1993 Festival du Mouvement Theater International et Galerie Esther Klein,
Philadelphia, USA
1992 Alliance française, Jerusalem, Israel
1989 Theatre of Chicago, Chicago, USA
1988 Centre Yaïr, Jerusalem, Israel
1986 Centre Rashi, Paris, France
1983 Montreal Cinémathèque & Winnipeg Theatre, Canada
1981-82 Travelling exhibition in the universities of Georgia, Kansas, New York and
the Cultural Centers of Maine, North Carolina and Wisconsin, USA
1980 Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon, France
1979 Club Méditerranée, Neuilly, France
1978 French Embassy, New York, USA
Musée Guimet, Paris, France
Musée de Poitiers, Poitiers, France
1977 C.A.E.S. – C.N.R.S. Meudon-Bellevue, France
Centre culturel de Garches, Garches, France
1976 Galerie Saint Roch, Paris, France

Centre Rashi, Paris, France
Orly Airport, Paris, France
Galerie Lilienhof, Fribourg en Brisgau, Germany
Bibliothèque Municipale de Troyes, Troyes, France
1975 Inauguration of the Centre Culturel du Vésinet, Vésinet, France
Galerie Cottache, Paris, France
Centre Culturel de la ville nouvelle de Cergy-Pontoise, France
Centre Rashi, Paris, France
Parti socialiste, rencontres culture, Paris, France
Châlon sur Saône, France
1974 Maison de la Culture, Colombes, France
Maison Jean Vilar, Marly le Roi, France
Rencontres de la Culture du Parti Socialiste, Cité Universitaire, Paris, France
1973 Gallery Knoll, Nîmes, France
Librairie Lamartine, Paris, France
Centre Alsthom, Paris, France
1972 Holstebro Museum, Denmark, Copenhagen
Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture, Paris, France
Malakoff Festival de Collias, Île-de-France, France
1971 Secrétariat des Clubs, Paris, France
Théâtre Récamier (Compagnie Renaud-Barrault), Paris, France
Wervicq-Sud, Châtillon sous Bagneux, France
1969 Palais de l'Europe, Menton, France
1968 Travelling exhibition in le Havre, Centre Culturel des Dombes, France
Châtillon / Chalaronne, Bourg en Bresse, France
Nouveau Centre Culturel d'Yerres, France
1967 Cloître de la Cathédrale de Vaison la Romaine, Vaison-la-Romaine, France
Musée de Louviers, Louviers, France
1966 Maison de la Culture, Le Plessis Robinson, France
Institut français, Sarrebrueck, Germany
Edinburgh festival, Edinburgh, United Kingdom
1965 Ambassade de France, Tel-Aviv, Israel
Institut Français de Haïfa, Haïfa, Israel
Institut Français d'Eilat, Eilat, Israel
Maison de la Culture de Beersheba, Israël
1964 Institut Français de Cologne, Germany
Sarrebruck University, Germany

1962 Métaformes, Maison des Beaux Arts, Paris, France
 1960 Travelling exhibition in France and Austria through the Ministry of Culture in France
 1957 Al ferro di Caballo, Rome, Italy & Centre of French Studies in Milan, Italy
 1956 Galerie d'Orsay, Paris, France
 1955 Festival de Salzbourg, Salzbourg, Austria
 Galerie d'Orsay, Paris, France
 1954 Galerie Palmes, Paris, France
 Université de Fribourg en Brisgau, Germany

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2019 Vers d'autres rives, Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris, France
 2017 Corps et Ames, Galerie Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris, France
 Le pouvoir du geste, Grande Salle de l'Aubette, Strasbourg, France
 2016 Trajets de lumière, Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris, France
 2015 Photographie française du vingtième siècle, Pordenone, Italy
 2008 Acteurs en scène, regards de photographe, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France
 2005 L'œil moteur. Art cinétique et optique, Musée d'Art Moderne de Strasbourg, France
 Galerie « A l'Art Notre », Paris, France
 1999 Exhibition Renaud Barrault, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France
 1987 Le temps d'un mouvement, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, France
 1985 Le Bougé, Edinburgh, London, United Kingdom
 Musée de Beaune, France and in Australia
 1984 La photographie créative, Pavillon des Arts au Forum des Halles, Paris, France
 1983 Salon de la Photo, Porte de Versailles, France
 1982 Une autre photographie, Maison des Arts, Créteil, France
 1979 Les photographes de l'Imaginaire, Palais de la Découverte, Paris, France
 1977 Inauguration of the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
 Festival de Théâtre Musical de Poitiers, Poitiers, France
 1976 Biennale d'Ibiza, Ibiza, Spain
 1975 Espace Mobile, Centre Culturel de Cergy Pontoise, Cergy, France
 Maison de la Culture de Chalon-sur-Saône, France
 Musée de Biot, France
 1974 Les peintres Musicalistes, Galerie Hexagramme, Paris, France

Biennale du Noir et Blanc, La Garenne Colombes, France
 Salon d'Art Sacré, La Grange de Négron, Nazelles-Négron, France
 Groupe des 30x40, Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Israel
 1973 10e Festival d'Art Contemporain de Royan, Royan, France
 1972 Journées du Graphisme, Dijon, France
 1971 Maison de Toulouse-Midi-Pyrénées, Paris, France
 Le Ballet Théâtre Contemporain, Paris, France
 Palazzo dell'Arte, Milan, Italy
 1970 Festival Européen de l'Image Photographique, Pau, France
 Le Dynamisme, Wervicq-Sud, France
 World Expo, Osaka, Japan
 1968 Troisième Festival de la Photographie, Besançon, France
 Cinétisme, Spectacle, environnement, Grenoble, France
 Exposition d'Art Cinétique, Paris, France
 Espace Mobile pour un parcours, Cartoucherie de Vincennes, Paris, France
 1967 Espace Mobile, Centre Culturel International de Royaumont, Asnières-sur-Oise, France
 1966 International Exhibition of Photography, Edinburgh, United Kingdom
 1963 Laboratoire des Arts, Paris, France
 1949 Salon National de la Photographie, Paris, France



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