

Exhibition
15 February—14 April 2013
Wednesday—Sunday
11:00 am—6:00pm

Guided visits

Reservation advisable

“Une heure au musée”

›Thursdays at 12:30 pm

“Visite Thé”

›Saturdays at 3:30 pm

Sunday visits

›Sundays at 3 pm

Family visits

›Sundays at 3:30 pm

Groups

Customised group visits
to one or more exhibitions

Reservations: Service des Publics

Meeting/discussion

With Mathieu Copeland, the curator
of the exhibition, and the artists Jacques Villeglé
and Philippe Decrauzat.

›Thursday 14 March at 6:30 pm

In the conference room,

Free, booking recommended

Information and reservations

Service des publics

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publics@mac-lyon.com

Next exhibitions

24 May—21 July 2013

DANIEL FIRMAN

PHILIPPE DROGUET

MÉMOIRE, ŒUVRES
DE LA COLLECTION

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GUSTAV METZGER

SUPPORTIVE, 1966-2011,
THE EXHIBITION

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Exhibition view
Supportive, 1966-2011 (detail)
From 15 february
to 14 april 2013 in mac^{LYON}
Collection du musée
d'art contemporain de Lyon
©Photo Blaise Adilon



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GUSTAV METZGER

SUPPORTIVE, 1966–2011,
L'EXPOSITION

In 1939, at the age of 13, Gustav Metzger was saved from the Holocaust and brought to England, thanks to the Refugee Children Movement. Having thus been confronted with the question of survival in childhood, he served his intellectual apprenticeship in the post-war period, developing strong philosophical convictions and a critical perception of the modern scientific world. He said that the war “made me what I am – an artist who wants to use his whole life, including his art, to change society and the world”. Hesitating between a revolutionary commitment and art, he chose the latter, which he saw as a possible field of experimentation. Art allowed him to express an approach to society that was both critical and productive of positive solutions.

His first exhibition, in 1959, was entitled *Cardboards*. It consisted of boxes in which televisions were sold, displayed as they had been found in the street. In this way, he asserted the aesthetic character of industrial objects. “They have qualities equal to those of the best modern painting, sculpture and architecture.” At the end of the exhibition, the boxes were returned to the street. It was in this context that Metzger produced his first manifesto, *Auto-Destructive Art*, which explained the orientation of his work: “Auto-destructive art reflects an obsession with destruction, the blows that rain down on the individual and the masses. (It) shows

people’s power to set in motion and speed up the disintegration of nature.” And in a second manifesto, he listed the many possible materials and techniques of auto-destructive art.

While expressing his ideas in theoretical writings, Metzger also pursued research involving chemistry and physics. In 1960, he tested the action of acid on nylon as the basis of a pictorial process which, in July 1961, he demonstrated at London’s South Bank, with sheets of red, white and black nylon that disintegrated in a few minutes. That same year, in his third manifesto, he stated that auto-destructive art was the inverse of what he called “auto-creative art”, in other words “an art of change, movement and growth” in permanent (auto)genesis, which, like its auto-destructive counterpart, represented an autonomous acceptance of its own unplanned transformation.

Exploring the relations between art, science and technology, Metzger continued his experiments with acid, including, for example, transparencies consisting of nylon impregnated with acid so that they rapidly melted and dissolved, giving rise to random images. And *The Chemical Revolution in Art, Lecture/Demonstration*, which he presented at Cambridge University in 1965, included no less than 10 separate experiments. Using chemical mixtures at different temperatures, he produced constantly-changing variations

in colour. The most convincing of the experiments was probably one that used liquid crystals, which he repeated in 1966 in the window of Better Books in London.

The “Liquid Crystal Environments” – projections in which liquid crystals create non-programmed forms and colours – are the best known and most significant expression of auto-creative art. They heralded psychedelia, and the “cultural revolution” of the mid-60s.

In 1966, Metzger was invited to project his extraordinary images at a concert featuring the *Move*, the *Cream* and *The Who*. Pete Townshend, *The Who*’s iconic guitarist, had been impressed by one of his lectures at an art school, and spoke of him as the inspiration behind the apocalyptic way in which the group ended their concerts. But it was only in 1998 that Metzger, assisted by an engineer, fully mastered the Liquid Crystal Environments by controlling the alternate heating and cooling of the projectors.

The work on show here, *Supportive*, is the largest and most sophisticated of the Liquid Crystal Environments. Designed in 2011 for the third floor of the Musée d’Art Contemporain, and acquired in 2012, it is now being exhibited for the first time. The images generated by the liquid crystals and their interactions with polarising filters are constantly different.

They are projected in 16.27 min cycles onto 7 panels, each 4 × 4 m, arranged in an arc. With regard to their unpredictability, Metzger has written: “At a certain point, the work takes over and eludes the artist’s control. It attains a power, grace and transcendence that an artist could never achieve without calling on randomness.”

The film and documents that are included in the exhibition give further insights into auto-creative art. And Metzger’s five manifestos are on show together for the first time, available in a French version for consultation by visitors. In sum, this exhibition shows the extent to which, for Metzger, experimentation is inseparable from radical theory, and creativity can emerge even in “an obscene, chaotic world”.



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