MAMAC
Musée d’art moderne et d’art contemporain

GUSTAV METZGER
REMEMBER NATURE

11th February / 14th May 2017

Place Yves Klein - Nice
Every day from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Closed on Mondays
www.mamac-nice.org
Major actor of the avant-gardes of the second half of the XXth century, Gustav Metzger contributed by the end of the 1950's, to redefine art. The artist explored new methods of creation: manifestos, performances, ephemeral works to be made according to instructions, call for public participation, interest in works in process submitted to metamorphosis, etc.

He also broadened art to society matters and to the great issues of his time. Thus, in 1960, he developed an early thought about the setbacks of the consumer society and the environmental concerns that are still a highly topical issue.

Contemporary of the New Realists and of Fluxus, he shared with these artists this urge for a new art that would echo the issues of his time. The hovering shadow of World War II, the fast emergence of a consumer society, and the outbreak of an anti-establishment spirit, are all elements that composed the common background of this generation born in the late 1950's and which represent the core of the collections of MAMAC.

Both historical and highly contemporary, Gustav Metzger's work has come back in the spotlight since a decade. For the first time a retrospective exhibition puts in perspective fifty years of artistic experimentations throughout his early, long-lasting, and still of a great relevance ecological commitment. The exhibition offers a view in three acts: the auto-destructive art, the auto-creative art and Remember Nature.

**ROOM 1**

**GUSTAV METZGER AND THE AUTO-DESTRUCTIVE ART**

(Auto-destructive art) is an art for other people. It was a solution to the question of how I could get my art involved with society, Gustav Metzger.

Born in Nuremberg in 1926 in a Jewish family, Metzger fled to England in 1939. His parents died into concentration camps. Being immersed into drama very early in his life, he started an artistic and militant career, characterized by a feeling of urgency.

Haunted, like many of his contemporaries, by mass destructions which World War II was the scene of, but also by the Cold War tension and the beginnings of the nuclear arms race, he wrote a first manifesto in 1959 on « Auto-destructive » art. He then started a radical criticism on materials' obsolescence and degeneration, and immediately made a parallel of these researches with western society's fascination for destruction, and from 1960, with the devastation caused by humanity to nature.

**Acid Nylon Painting, 1960**

Acid Nylon Painting is a work re-created on the occasion of the exhibition at MAMAC following the original work of Gustav Metzger, The Auto-Destructive acid-action-painting on nylon, held at the Temple Gallery of London in June 1960, during a « lecture/demonstration-performance ». The artist, in front of the public, applies on a nylon canvas, a brush soaked into acid that will erode it gradually. According to Metzger, the transformation and of disintegration process, randomness and material life are dominant in this experiment: I wanted the work itself to be like a flower, yes? It's closed in the morning, by three o'clock in the afternoon it's in full bloom – and each flower does something different.

**ROOM 2**

**TOWARDS AN AUTO-CREATIVE ART**

Auto-destructive art was never merely destructive. Destroy a canvas and you create shapes Metzger said in 2012. Indeed his work must be seen as a mutual dependence between destruction and regeneration. As early as 1961 he wrote a manifesto on auto-creative art. He decided to explore the creative potential of science and technique, especially throughout the use of compressed air, water, heat, and liquid crystals that he submitted to various experiments. The constant metamorphosis of matter and the notion of process are two driving forces for his quest.

In 1966, for his solo exhibition held at Better Books, in London he presented, for the first time a work made out of liquid crystals, in collaboration with a physician. Then another major exhibition entitled « Extremes Touch: Material/transforming art », was organized in 1968 in the Chemical Engineering Department laboratory at Swansea University showing various experiments that mixed sciences, techniques and art. In the 1960's, Metzger turned towards computing aiming at creating self-generating artworks through a rigorous process, and in 1969 he became editor-in-chief for Page, the Bulletin of the Computer Arts Society. In 2013, he presented at MAC Lyon a final version of Liquid Crystal Environment, the largest ever realized, which he titled Supportive. 2013.

**Liquid Crystals, 1966**

Liquid Crystals are the best known and successful example of auto-creative art. Gustav Metzger showed them for the first time in London at Better Books Gallery in 1966. The same year, during the New Year's Eve celebrated at Roundhouse in London, he projected his liquid crystals on stage while the groups Cream, The Move and The Who were playing. Thus he paved the way for what would become a psychedelic style figure.

The colored crystals were put between two plates of glass inserted in a slide projector and submitted to the effect of the lamp's temperature. This immersive and contemplative environment created an ever-changing landscape revealing matter’s life.

**ROOM 3**

**DEFENDING A NATURE IN DANGER**

As early as 1960, in a second Manifesto on auto-destructive art, Metzger said: Auto-destructive art demonstrates man's power to accelerate disintegrative processes of nature and to order them. Thus he announced a series of projects in the early 1970's that would develop an obvious ecological content.

The awakening of consciousness has always been a major concern to Metzger. In order to raise his contemporaries’ awareness on ecological issues, and on species and natural resources loss, he used every symbolic, creative or informative means available: installations, posters, publication in the newspapers, public spaces performances, participatory and collaborative actions of any kind.

From the performance entitled Mobbile (1970), which highlighted car pollution and intoxication of the living, to the participatory installation called Mass Media: Today and Yesterday, that offered the visitor the possibility to make his own press review on extinction and ecology, Metzger incessantly invented shock actions and artistic forms to point out major contemporary environmental issues.

The appeal he made all his life long against the violence made to every living form, with the vivid consciousness of one having narrowly escaped from death, reminds us the vulnerability of every single thing and the responsibility of every one in front of the great issues of our time.

**Mass Media : Today and Yesterday, 1971/2017**

Gustav Metzger presented for the first time in August 1971 the work Mass Media : Today, on the occasion of the exhibition entitled « Art Spectrum » that was held at Alexandra Palace, in London. The work is recreated
for the MAMAC exhibition and invites the visitor to participate in the creation of a subjective press review dedicated to the great environmental issues of our time. Thus, each visitor is invited to pick up among the newspapers at their disposal, photographs or articles dealing with environment, and to cut and put them up on the walls. This installation was realized in partnership with the group PRESSTALIS, first press distributor to the single issue.

DISCOVER A SELF-DESTRUCTIVE ART TOUR THROUGH THE MAMAC COLLECTIONS!

The exhibition looks at the MAMAC’s collections through the prism of «self-destruction». Haunted, as many of his contemporaries were, by the mass destruction seen in the Second World War, the tension of the Cold War and the start of the nuclear arms race, Metzger published a manifesto in 1959 on «self-destructive» art, highlighting western society’s fascination with destruction. In the same period (1960-1961), Arman began his famous “Colères”, Niki de Saint-Phalle came up with the subversive act of shooting at the canvas (“Tirs”), and Jean Tinguely created self-destructive machine-sculptures. The exhibition shows the major works in the MAMAC’s collection from in a truly original light.

PROGRAM AND ASSOCIATED EVENTS

IN ANTICIPATION OF THE EXHIBITION

Reenactment of the work Mobbile
In anticipation of the exhibition, MAMAC recreated Mobbile (1970/2017) thanks to the participation of the students of the school of Condé. The inhabitants of the city might have witnessed this enigmatic vessel, with no mention of the nature of the process: scientific experiment, botanical test or automobile control? Photographs of the car taken at different stages and in different contexts document the work and are exhibited next to the Plexiglas cube at MAMAC.

Reenactment of the work South Bank Demonstration
On Tuesday, February 7, at 3:00 pm, MAMAC recreated in public for the exhibition devoted to the artist, South Bank Demonstration (1961/2017). In June 1961, Metzger organized a lecture/demonstration of acid painting in public called The South Bank Demonstration. Equipped with a gas mask, and gloves the artist sprayed three nylon cloths of different colors with hydrochloric acid while he gradually went through the structure. Thus, the work was born and self destroyed simultaneously, progressively revealing the view of London and the Thames. For this work, Metzger deliberately used equipment that more than protecting him, immediately referred to the notions of danger and toxicity. The piece is reactivated for the exhibition of the MAMAC following the original work.
On the trail of Gustav...

AUTO-DESTRUCTIVE ART
Gustav Metzger used new material to paint! It was no longer about paint in the traditional sense but about a material that gradually made the canvas disappear, as, for example, in the painting in room 1, produced using hydrochloric acid, do you see it? Can you tell me its name? And the date it was created?

The artists in the museum’s collection used original tools to create their works, such as rifles, hammers, a hydraulic press and even dynamite. After the exhibition, you can discover them on the second floor of the museum and write down your favorite artwork:

AUTO-CREATIVE ART
In room 2, you can see writing from Gustav on his auto-creative art. He tells us: 
Auto-creative art is the art of change, of evolution and of movement.

Connect the artist’s words with the corresponding artworks below:

Mica Cube            Auto-creative
Dancing tubes        Change
Liquid Crystal Environment Evolution
Earth from Space     Movement

Gustav turns to science and technology for various experiments. From the list below, circle those that use:

Compressed air – fire – water – heat – liquid crystals
electronics – wind – aerodynamics – neon

DID YOU NOTICE?
The work Liquid Cristals Environment changes every second! Take a closer look!

From the list, circle the natural elements used by Gustav Metzger in his work.

- Green plants
- Hydrochloric acid
- Mica
- Plexiglas
- Liquid crystals
- Flowers
- Trees
- Batteries

In the frame below draw the elements you think pollute the most:

What is Gustav trying to say with the artwork Mobbile (produced for the first time in 1970)?

a. House plants should travel around on a car roof more often!
b. Man’s pollution is gradually destroying nature
c. I want the people living in Nice to be surprised when they see the car driving around with a plant on the roof