

**Georges MATHIEU**

*CoBo Social,*

*Hong Kong Welcomes Retrospective of Georges Mathieu on His Centennial*

*May 2021*

# Hong Kong Welcomes Retrospective of Georges Mathieu on His Centennial

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May 13, 2021

*Hong Kong's rich art and cultural activities this month sees the city welcome its largest retrospective to date of the late French artist and pivotal instigator of Lyrical Abstraction, Georges Mathieu.*



Installation view of “Calligraphy Rhapsody – Retrospective Exhibition of Georges Mathieu” at K11 MUSEA, 2021. Image courtesy of K11 Art Foundation and Comité Georges Mathieu.

TEXT: CoBo Editorial

IMAGES: Courtesy of various

Co-organised by K11 Art Foundation (KAF) and the Consulate General of France in Hong Kong & Macau, with support from Comité Georges Mathieu, “Calligraphy Rhapsody – Retrospective Exhibition of Georges Mathieu” showcases 14 select paintings traversing four decades of the artist’s oeuvre on loan from important private collections. Curated by Catherine Kwai, Director of Kwai Fung Foundation, the exhibition is on view at K11 Art & Cultural Centre until 4 July 2021.

A must visit for painting enthusiasts, lovers of art history, and even those well acquainted with the pre-eminent French artist, the exhibition demonstrates the richness of Georges Mathieu’s (1921–2012) life and work, and the extensive scope of his influence most notably in painting, among the American Abstract Expressionists and further across the

Pacific where he was revered by Gutai artists. An artist who found as many rivals as he did admirers, Mathieu's lyrical expression and captivating live painting performances left a mark on artists and critics for generations to come.

Central to the exhibition are three large-scale six-metre wide paintings, part of a suite of seven the artist specially created for his famous 1978 major retrospective at the Grand Palais in Paris, a time when Mathieu was arguably at the pinnacle of his career success. The paintings of this period epitomise the experimental and highly intuitive processes Mathieu had become so highly regarded for in the 1950s. A pivotal figure in Art Informel, and a self-proclaimed founder of Lyrical Abstraction, Mathieu made the determination in the latter half of the 1940s to completely shift away from figuration and even geometric abstraction, in search of a form of abstract painting that favoured speed, intuition, risk and free expression. A trailblazer for his live painting performances, at a time that fell in parallel to the emergence of the Gutai Art Association in Japan, whose artists were eagerly in pursuit of "the possibilities of pure creativity", Mathieu's art led him to travel the globe, painting, performing, exhibiting, theorising. In 1957, he visited Japan on the invitation of Gutai co-founder Jirō Yoshihara, painting, among many others, *La Bataille de Hakata (The Battle of Hakata)*, and *Hommage au général Hideyoshi (Homage to General Hideyoshi)*, which are both well documented, in front of eager artists and journalists. That same year he globetrotted around the world, visiting Switzerland, the US, Brazil, Argentina, the Middle East and elsewhere.

By the 1980s, Mathieu's paintings took on a mature sensibility that exemplified the technical mastery he had achieved over the years. Different to his earlier works heavy in urgency and unrestricted energy, these latter paintings, such as *Regards de flame (Glances of Flame)* (1989) and *La justice fourvoyée (The Misdemeanor of Justice)* (1990), both included in the exhibition, explode with Mathieu's various painting techniques while compositionally show more restraint.

Through "Calligraphy Rhapsody" one can trace the key moments of Mathieu's pictorial evolution. An artist so admired and respected across continents, at the same time who divided critics and artists alike, Mathieu's popularity dimmed in the early years of the 21st century, but in recent years has seen a renaissance in interest; on this premise, this exhibition has come at a quintessential time.

## **Calligraphy Rhapsody – Retrospective Exhibition of Georges Mathieu**

19 May – 4 July 2021

605, K11 Art & Cultural Centre, 6F, K11 MUSEA