



**Museu
Coleção
Berardo**

PRESS

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Temporary exhibition
Floor -1

Gérard Fromanger Splendour

17/02—29/05/2022

Curator: **Éric Corne**

The splendours of Gérard Fromanger Éric Corne

For me, colours are like human beings who have the right to speak.

The Gérard Fromanger (1939–2021) exhibition at Museu Coleção Berardo, part of the France-Portugal Season, features a number of series that characterise the artist's work: twenty-six in all, including more than sixty major paintings, drawings, and silkscreen prints as well as his *Film-tract* from 1968, which was made with Jean-Luc Godard.

“Every four or five years, I reassess everything in my life,” Gérard Fromanger used to say. In the end, the chronology of these series is of little importance as his work represents a coherent whole. It is expressed in the prominence given to the fragment, each part operating as a whole in reserve. It is for this reason that it is offered here with neither beginning nor end.

Each period, comprising reassessments, ruptures, recompositions, and different techniques, forms a highly coherent whole. According to his declared desire to constantly evolve, to paint in a free society, the images created by the artist through his processes must be perceived as aspects of reality. The whole of his work, with its multiple metamorphoses and questioning of form and even technique, is an emanation of this creative freedom. The series have an internal logic within the artist's work and mark the different eras within his personal biography, his encounters and his relationship with current events and, more broadly, with history. The series *Splendours I, II and III*, at the very core of the exhibition, lend the latter its title, which is also a tribute to Fernando Pessoa, one the artist's favourite writers, and his poem *O Esplendor*.

“Red” of all colours and shades permeates Gérard Fromanger's painting to such an extent that Jacques Prévert imagined, like Klein blue, a Fromanger red: “Rouge [Red] is a surname, but like Rose [Pink] or Blanche [White], it could equally be a first name and Gérard Fromanger could just as well be named Rouge Fromanger. ... So many people have a black, calculating heart, a mechanical heart, but his heart is red and the blood pulsing through his veins brings him to life,

bright red and exuberant, tender and violent, changing day by day like the weather.”¹

Gérard Fromanger's oeuvre is that of a great explorer of the world around him, in permanent sympathy with Walter Benjamin's flâneur aesthetic, and even with Guy Debord's *dérives*. He is often associated with May '68, but has been able to shrug off any dialectical effect. He laid down the grid, then used photography, but he is not seeking unsettling strangeness: through the banal street scenes he captures, he pursues a constant revolution made of desire in a world in which an advertising and atheistic aesthetic makes up life.

When he uses the camera, as a man involved in this world, his images do not adopt a specific point of view, nor a privileged framing, being, in the words of Michel Foucault, “images taken as a film of the anonymous movement of what is happening.”²

In historical terms, the artist's work converges with Pop Art, displaying his preference for bold, non-modulated colours, his interest in areas of popular taste, including trash culture, the culture of desire, and his focus on contemporary subjects. But Gérard Fromanger's work is in constant revolt against any categorical form of artistic convention. His conversions to various practices led him to remain constantly open to new ideas, opposing any rigid restriction to any particular well-defined artistic movement. His exploration of all the traditional themes of painting—portraiture, nudes, landscape, mythology, history painting—places him within the continuum of art history, but his form, devoid of all symbolism, implies at the same time a rupture. It is above all in the outcrop of the world and its symbols that he lays bare, in silence, his ruminations and his history of synapses and dissidence.

“The painter's task,” notes Deleuze, “is not to fill a white surface but to empty, declutter, clean it.”³ Fromanger's works, as if immaterial, appear imbued with light, born of an exposure to energy. Their coloured potency, their rupture in tone, their turmoil or reversal of space, as in the 2003–2006 series *Sens dessus dessous* [Upside Down], is a negation of the hierarchy of the visible in response to the illusion of painting. The figures, landscapes, objects, and forms appear

in the centre of the canvas in a state of weightlessness with neither shadow nor depth, without the illusion of a perspective space. The vanishing point is positioned towards the viewer in a reversed perspective: the image comes to him or her, the background and figure captured in a single view. There is indeed, in the harmonious shimmer of this painting, especially in the most recent works, a constant breathturn whereby the great expanse of the painting sparks out in their direction. Fromanger's work is that of the tension between the figurable, the representable (bodies, landscapes, cities, etc.), and that which resists: the unrepresentable, the uncertain, with its stretches of abstract painting. It must be perceived as a transitional pictorial space between what is represented (from photographs or documents) and immersion in the painting, in the colour, with its materiality and immateriality. The immobility of forms and gesturalities are maintained in a sense of indistinction between the background and the surface, the figurative and the figurable (or, more precisely, the figural,⁴ to use the words of Gilles Deleuze when defining Bacon's painting), the full and the empty. In this

respect, Fromanger cannot be associated with Narrative Figuration.

Presence and absence in the face of anonymous splendours are in dialogue in Gérard Fromanger's work, as they are in all the key works in the history of painting with which they interact. The historical context: painting in France in the 1960s.

Giacometti, whom he knew well, was always a painter Gérard Fromanger admired, and a film interview was planned about his relationship with the artist's painting. His passing on 18 June prevented this project from coming to fruition. For this exhibition, which is also a tribute, we have included the magnificent portrait *Rita*, 1965, from the Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum.

¹ Quoted in Marianne Mathieu, *Gérard Fromanger*, Neuchâtel, Ides et Calendes, 2004, pp. 29–30.

² Michel Foucault, *La Peinture photogénique*, Paris, Le Point du jour, 2014

³ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon. Logique de la sensation*, Paris, La Différence, 1996, vol. I, p. 57.

⁴ Cf. Olivier Schefer, «Qu'est ce que le figural?», *Critique*, no. 630, November 1999, pp. 912–925.

Álvaro de Campos
Splendour
17 January 1933

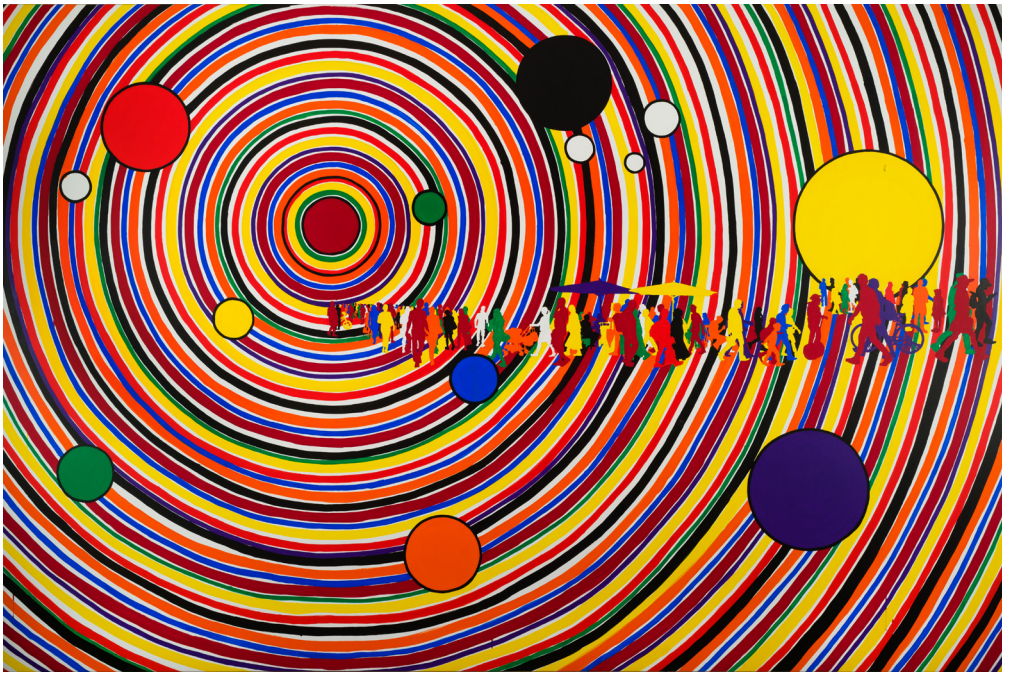
***And the splendour of maps, abstract road to concrete imagination,
Letters and random strokes open into wonder.***

***What dreaming in dusty bindings
And signatures, so complex (or so simple and graceful), of old books.
(Distant, discoloured ink, beyond death,
Time's visible enigma, the living nothing we are!)
What we forget daily comes back in drawings,
What certain engraved announcements accidentally announce.***

***Everything suggests or expresses what it doesn't express,
Everything says what it doesn't say,
And the soul dreams on, different, distracted.***

O visible enigma of time, that living nothing where we are temporarily!

Translated by Chris Daniels



Cover and back:
Existe, 1976 (from the series *Questions*). Oil on canvas. Odile Finck and Eric Beccafico Collection. Photo: Bertrand Runz
Impression, soleil levant, 2019 (from the series *Le cœur fait ce qu'il veut*). Acrylic on canvas. Anna Kamp Collection. Photo: Christian Baraja

Press

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Guided visits

26 Feb., 26 Mar., 2 Apr., 21 May |
 4 p.m.
 19 Feb. (by the curator,
 Éric Corne) | 5:30 p.m.

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Exhibition catalogue

With essays by Éric Corne,
 Sarah Wilson, Joana Baião, Michel
 Gauthier, and Louis Gohin.
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 Portuguese, French, and English.
 For sale at the museum's shop: 55 €

Opening programme of the Portugal-France Season 2022



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