

SIMON HANTAI

**LES NOIRS DU BLANC,
LES BLANCS DU NOIR**

Paintings 1951–97

October 13, 2019–June 27, 2020

Le Bourget

GAGOSIAN

Acknowledgments

Larry Gagosian and Gagosian Paris would like to thank Zsuzsa Hantaï, Daniel Hantaï, Marc Hantaï, Jérôme Hantaï, Pierre Hantaï, and Anna Hantaï, as well as the Archives Simon Hantaï, for entrusting them with the promotion and defense of Simon Hantaï's oeuvre on the international stage.

Larry Gagosian and Gagosian Paris would also like to recognize the grandchildren of Zsuzsa Hantaï: Paul, Marie, Thomas, Suzanne, Noé, Félix, Lou, Gabriel, Rémi, and Joseph.

Finally, Gagosian would like to warmly thank Zsuzsa Hantaï and her children Daniel, Marc, Jérôme, Pierre, and Anna for their indispensable aid in realizing the first Hantaï exhibition at Gagosian Le Bourget: *LES NOIRS DUBLANC, LES BLANCS DU NOIR*.

We are also sincerely grateful to Bernard Boubat, Aurélia Chevalier, Jean Haury, Kálmán Makláry, Kamill Major, Marina Saura, Antonio Semeraro, and Olivier Weber-Cafisch for their benevolent support.

Zsuzsa Hantaï and her children and grandchildren would like to thank Anne Baldassari, a friend of Simon Hantaï and a leading specialist in his work, for her gracious and tireless help in generously designing the *LES NOIRS DUBLANC, LES BLANCS DU NOIR* exhibition and writing the booklet. Their thoughts also go to Jean Fournier and his gallery.

ÉTUDES SERIES**1969–73**

Flat now. Not only the paint that is spread, but above all the relationship between the painted and the unpainted is radically modified, reversed. The painted is no longer there in for its own sake but exclusively to activate the unpainted. The non-relationship is the relationship. . . .

—Simon Hantaï: *Donation*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1998), p. 40.

The canvas is folded uniformly and covered with a single color.

The unfolding reveals unevenly formed large white (colorless) shapes.

—“Chronologie des séries réalisées par Simon Hantaï,” in *Simon Hantaï 1960–1976*, exh. cat. (Bordeaux, France: CAPC, 1981), p. 69.

Simon Hantaï created his first series of *Études* between January and June 1969. These monochrome works are painted from edge to edge across canvases folded evenly and systematically; he would explore this pictorial principle until 1973. The inaugural exhibition of these works, generically titled Pour Pierre Reverdy: *Études*, was held at Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris, from June 19 to July 26, 1969. A French poet with a style of writing that was often challenging, Pierre Reverdy (1889–1960) was close to the Cubist, Dadaist, and Surrealist avant-gardes. Following a period of intense artistic activity, marked above all by the founding of Nord-Sud magazine in 1917, Reverdy withdrew to the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Pierre de Solesmes in 1926 in search of a simpler life. After living in self-imposed seclusion for nearly thirty years, he died there in 1960. Reverdy’s complete works were published from 1967 onward, leading to a rediscovery of his considerable production in verse and prose.

Zsuzsa Hantaï remembers that her husband—an avid reader of contemporary literature and philosophy—was familiar with Reverdy’s poetry, particularly his “poèmes noirs,” published in 1948 in *Le chant des morts (The Song of the Dead)*, illustrated with 125 lithographs by Pablo Picasso (Paris: Éditions Tériade, 1948). Reverdy’s desire to withdraw from the art world to devote himself to the search for faith and God made a profound impression on Hantaï. By dedicating his paintings to Reverdy, Hantaï appeared already to be considering abdicating the position he had earned for himself at the center of artistic life in France. In fact, Hantaï stopped painting between 1977 and 1979, and then again from 1982, withdrawing from the art world for about fifteen years.

In October 1969, François Mathey, director of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs

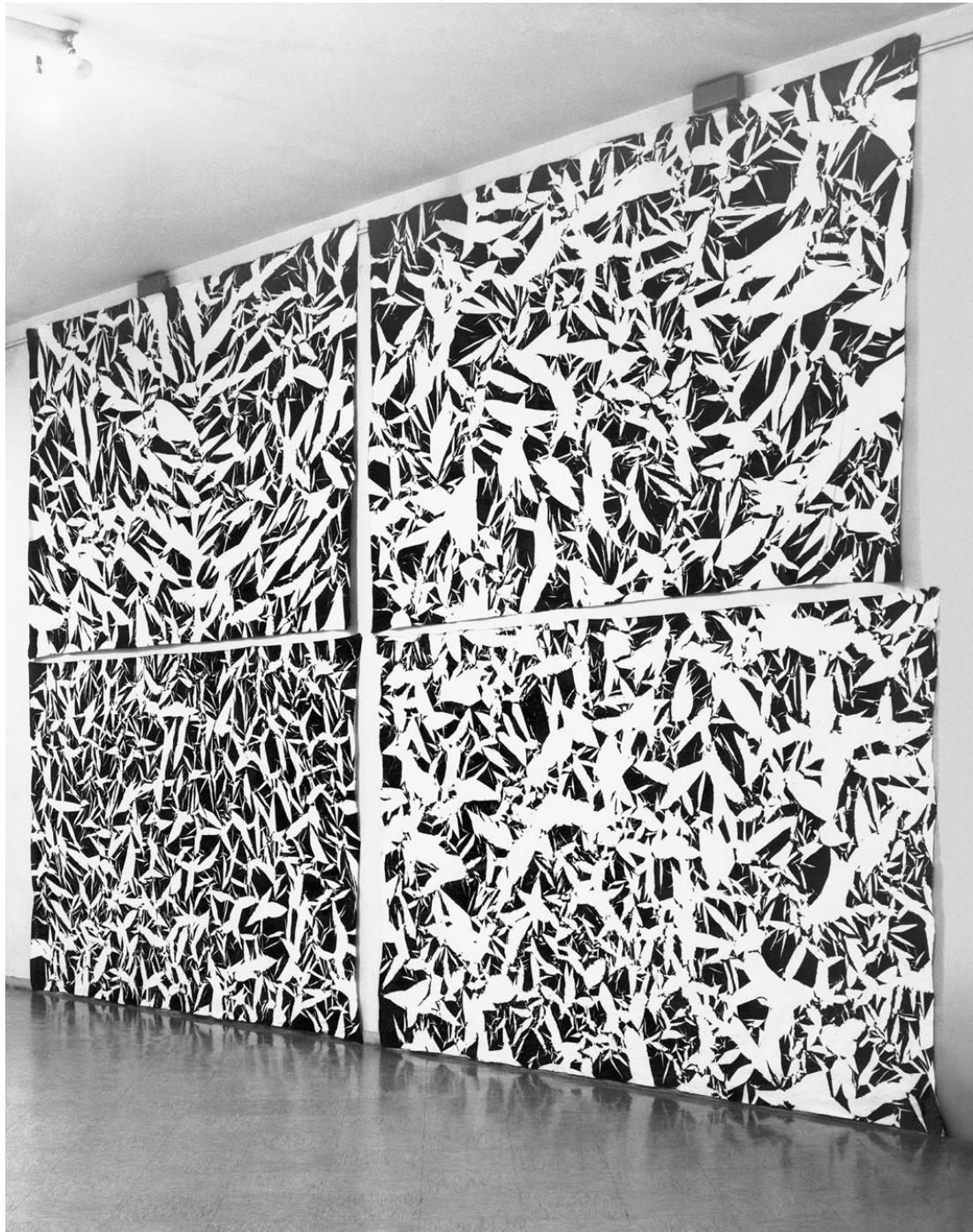


Simon Hantai in his studio
working on *Études*, Meun, 1969.
Photo: Édouard Boubat

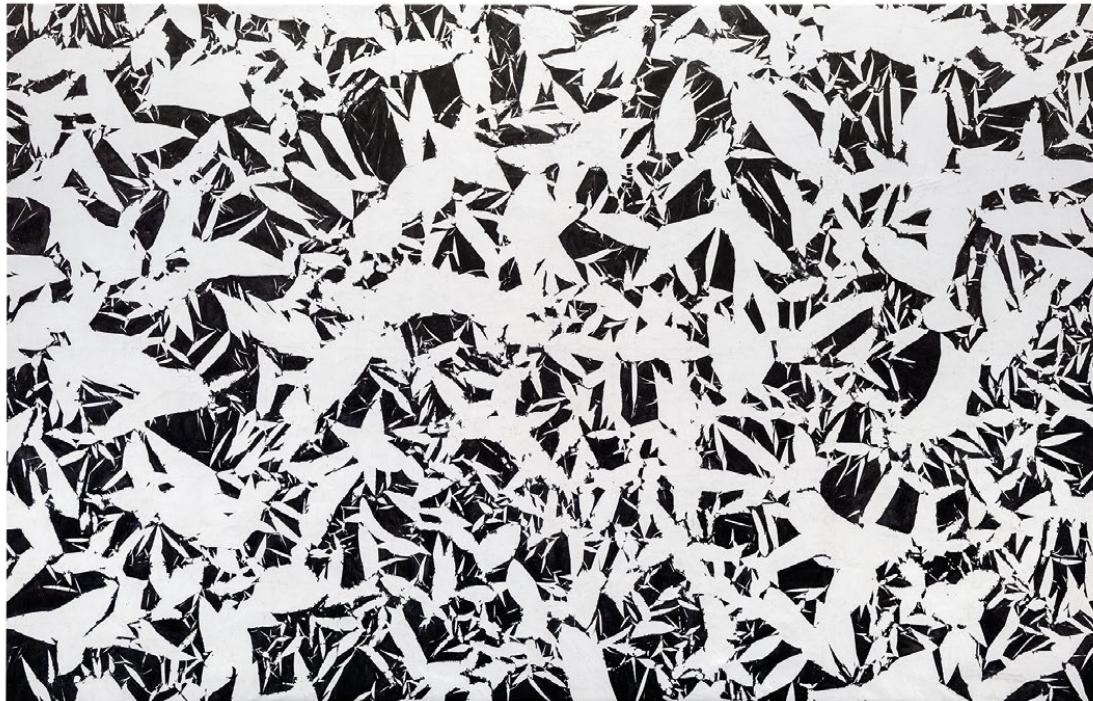
in Paris and a great friend and fervent supporter of Hantai's, organized a one-day hanging of a group of *Études* in the museum's main hall. This installation gave the painter the opportunity to get an idea of how his monumental contemporary paintings would look and feel, with a view to transposing them to a public commission, the decoration of a wall at a high school in Trappes, France. Between 1970 and 1971, Hantai produced three panels on canvas each 9 feet 10 inches × 45 feet 11 inches (3 × 14 m), the same size as the wall work he was going to make. These paintings were brought together for the exhibition *Études pour un mur* at ARC/Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (where they were displayed alongside the four *Études* exhibited in *LES NOIRS DU BLANC, LES BLANCS DU NOIR*, hung in pairs, one above and one below) in April 1970. Hantai selected one of the three panels to use as a model before proceeding to silkscreen the motif onto enameled sheet metal so as to create the wall that became part of the architecture at Trappes High School in 1973.

Hantai's last *Études* were exhibited as part of two exhibitions held in New York and Paris. The Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York mounted Hantai's very first solo exhibition in the United States, Hantai: Paintings 1960–1970, in October to November 1970. The catalogue included a preface by François Mathey and a reprint of a text by André Breton dating from the time of Hantai's exhibition at the À L'Étoile scellée gallery in 1953. The list of thirty-two works exhibited in New York includes seventeen *Études*, demonstrating Hantai's most recent research.

From June to July 1971, the retrospective exhibition *Le pliage comme méthode: regard sur dix années* was held at Galerie Jean Fournier in Paris and looked back over the painter's most recent period, devoting deserved space to the *Études*.



Exhibition view, *Études pour un mur*, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, April 15–May 3, 1970
Photo: Jacqueline Hyde



Étude, 1969, Meun
Oil and acrylic on canvas
115 5/8 × 174 1/4 in. (293.5 × 442.5 cm)
Signed and dated lower right:
“S.H. 69”

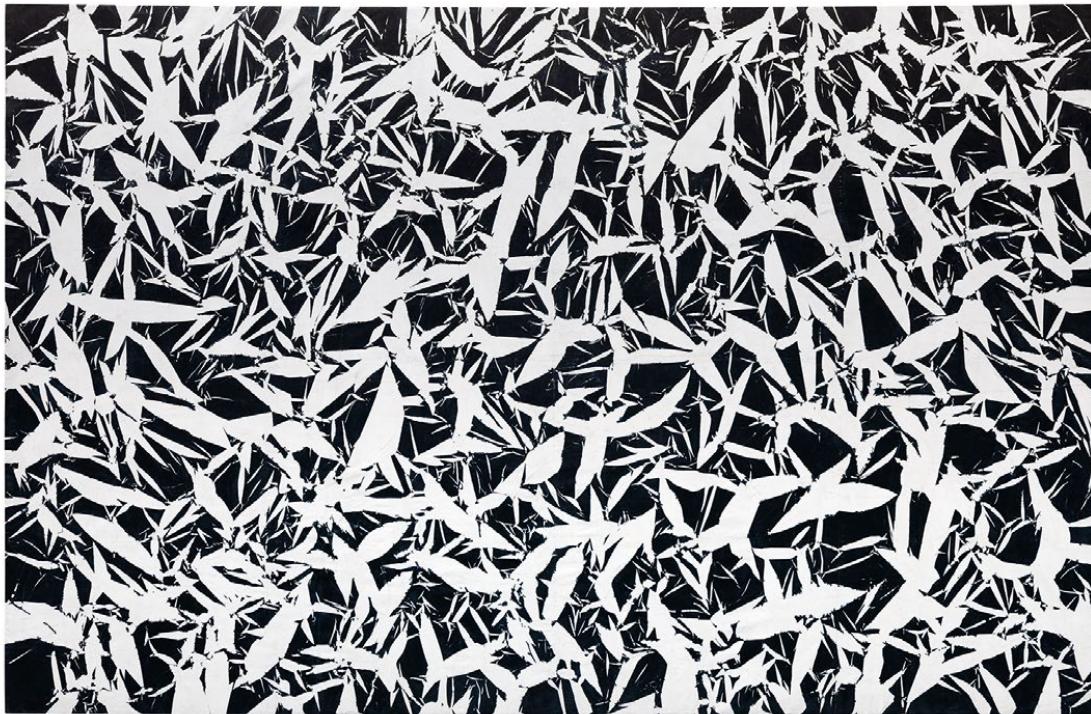
Presentation of *Études*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, Sept. 12, 1969
(on temporary display in the museum's main hall)
Études pour un mur, ARC/Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris,
April 15–May 3, 1970
Hantai, Arca, Marseille, France,
Feb. 5–March 19, 1983, cover,
illustrated
Simon Hantai, Paul Kasmin
Gallery, New York, May 8–June 15,
2013



Étude, 1969, Meun
Oil and acrylic on canvas
115 5/8 × 175 3/4 in. (293.5 × 446.3 cm)
Signed and dated lower right:
“S.H. 69”

Presentation of *Études*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris,
Sept. 12, 1969 (on temporary display
in the museum's nave)
Études pour un mur, ARC/Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris,
April 15–May 3, 1970

SIMON HANTAI



Étude, 1969, Meun
Oil and acrylic on canvas
 $115\frac{3}{4} \times 178\frac{3}{8}$ in. (294×453 cm)
Signed and dated lower right:
“S.H. 69”

Presentation of *Études*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, Sept. 12, 1969 (on temporary display in the museum's main hall)
Études pour un mur, ARC/Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, April 15–May 3, 1970
Hantai, Ludwig Múzeum, Budapest, May 9–Aug. 31, 2014, p. 164, illustrated



Étude, 1969, Meun
Oil and acrylic on canvas
 $115\frac{5}{8} \times 175\frac{1}{4}$ in. (293.5×445 cm)
Signed and dated lower right:
“S.H. 69”

Presentation of *Études*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, Sept. 12, 1969 (on temporary display in the museum's nave)
Études pour un mur, ARC/Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, April 15–May 3, 1970

**LAISSÉES SERIES
PAINTINGS & SILKSCREENS
1994–97**

After leaving the public arena and everything related to it, a retreat to what is ‘private’ to work on disappearance and destruction. And what it leaves. The cuts of the craft knife over those made by the canvas.

—Simon Hantaï: *Donation*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1998), p. 42

In 1994, Hantaï began working on the *Laissées*, a series that stemmed from the retrospective rereading and critical reinterpretation of his earlier work that he had by then been engaged in for almost a decade. Initially working in the privacy of his studio, where he would fold, split, cut up, and then cut his old canvases again, sometimes staining them with superimposed colors, he now pursued this practice of deconstruction and reconstruction on another scale and publicly exhibited the results. Hantaï returned to the *Tabulas* originally painted in 1980 for the monumental installations displayed at CAPC in Bordeaux, France (1981), and cut them up, removing elements and reframing them as new paintings in which what had initially been white ground took on a new role. By cutting into the color, Hantaï was making an explicit reference to the method Matisse used to make his paper cutouts: Hantaï literally *cut to pieces* his large and unique black monochrome *Tabula* (1980) to create twenty-four smaller canvases (the layout in the photograph reproduced here allows us to identify all these works). The exhibition *LES NOIRS DU BLANC, LES BLANCS DU NOIR* brings together seven paintings that were originally part of the black *Tabula*.

The title Hantaï gave to this new series of artworks, *Laissées*, refers as much to the unusual protocol of looking from a distance at an artwork *left* in suspense since 1982 as to a philosophical approach, one that considers painting as a mark or indexical imprint *left* by the pictorial gesture. However, Hantaï also emphasized the etymological meaning of the word, which is also used in French to refer to the traces and excretions left by an animal as it passes and marks out its territory. He points to the established meaning in old French, in which *les laissées* are literally “the droppings of black beasts” (also mentioned by Étienne Jodelle, before 1573, in his “Ode de la chasse”; in *Les œuvres et meslanges poetiques*, ed. Ch. Marty-Laveaux, vol. 2, 1870, p. 309). In addition, we know that Hantaï owned a book of antique reproductions of black-and-white engravings of the *laissées* of various animals, to be deciphered by hunters as if they were *coded texts*.

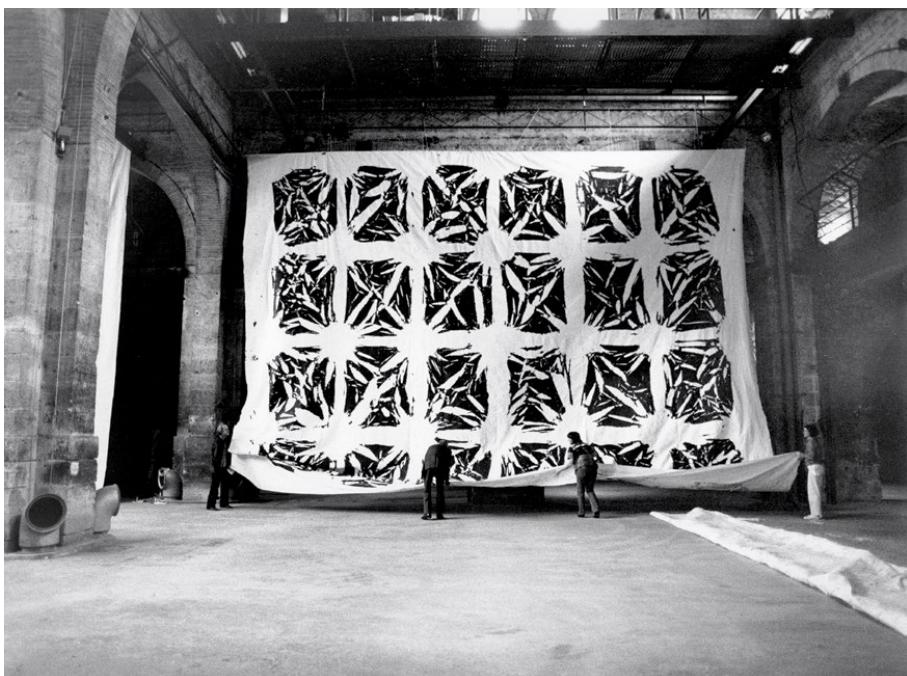


Simon Hantaï, Paris, 1994.
Photos: Antonio Semeraro

While working on the *Laissées* project in the French village of Meun, near Fontainebleau, Hantaï engaged in a veritable ritual of destruction, the parameters of which he did his best to control fully. To this end, he had the painter Antonio Semeraro, who was assisting him on the project, photograph these sessions, these “performances” with a craft knife that directly recall the execution of his *peintures à signes* (sign paintings) in the late 1950s. In the exhibition *LES NOIRS DUBLANC, LES BLANCS DU NOIR*, Hantaï’s paintings appeared face-to-face with a group of twelve of Semeraro’s photographs showing Hantaï cutting up the painted canvas.

At the same time, Hantaï materially and definitively destroyed some of his other paintings, burying a number of them at the bottom of his garden in Meun, where he abandoned them to the random process of the decomposition of the pigments. Truly *laissées*, these sacrificed paintings mark out the memory-territory of his art.

A similar logic governs the later research of his *Sérigraphies* on canvas in 1997. Hantaï would refer to these, too, as *Laissées*, and they formed part of his subsequent questioning of the underlying logic of the pictorial process. Once again, Hantaï returned to the genesis of his 1980–81 *Tabulas*. This time, the starting point for the *Sérigraphies* (*Laissées*) would be a photograph of a *Tabula* as it was being painted taken by the painter Kamill Major, who assisted Hantaï in the

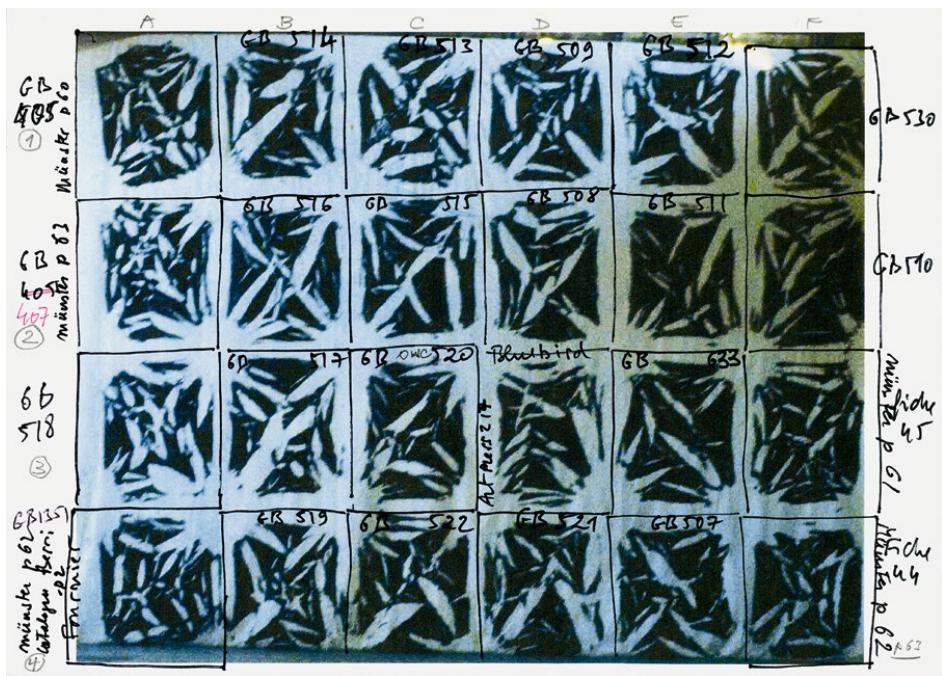


Installation of a monumental *Tabula* (c. 30 × 40 feet [c. 9 × 12 m]) in the main hall of the Entrepôt Lainé for the *Hantai* exhibition at the CAPC in Bordeaux, 1981

realization of this monumental project while simultaneously documenting it. The photograph was taken in the warehouse in Maisons-Alfort, France (which Régie Renault had made available to Hantai to help him prepare for the exhibition *Simon Hantai 1960–1976* at CAPC in Bordeaux), and shows a large painting laid out on the ground. Major remembers the experience as follows: “I also photographed his paintings from a different perspective (from a very acute angle), which makes them more enigmatic. Simon had bought some rolls of film and asked me to take a series of photos of his work for him. He was curious about my approach to his work.” The lateral viewpoint of this photo, almost in raking light, interested Hantai for the optical distortions it introduced into the perception of his painting, but this time it was the image of the canvas that he would use as material for his experiments.

Selecting the part of the large polychrome canvas reproduced in this photographic print that was painted black, he reframed it using a cardboard mask that revealed only a narrow band of the original painting. Using paper models, he reworked the resulting image, inverting its reading to make the horizontal painting vertical. He then distorted these visual bands by stretching them sideways to create several variants in which the image of the painting undergoes varying degrees of anamorphosis. Finally, he enlarged the images to the size of a wall.

Hantai decided to have the variations on these images transposed onto white canvas using black silkscreen ink and entrusted Major with the printing. This led to the creation of a triptych of three silkscreen variations derived from the same photograph that would be exhibited as part of the exhibition *L’empreinte* (Centre



Layout showing the twenty-four different fragments cut out by Simon Hantaï from the large black *Tabula* exhibited at CAPC in Bordeaux, 1981

Pompidou, Paris, Feb. 19–May 19, 1997) and donated to the Musée National d'Art moderne/Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou in 1996.

Hantaï was particularly interested in the theme of this exhibition, which had been chosen by the art historian and curator Didier Semin and the philosopher of art Georges Didi-Huberman. Hantaï would go on to become friends with Didi-Huberman, and extracts from their dialogue would be published in the form of a book, *L'étoilement. Conversation avec Hantaï* (see select bibliography p. 33).

Hantaï eventually completed this project by creating a final silkscreen from another of Major's photographs that reproduced a *Tabula* photographed horizontally on the ground. This fourth silkscreen, which Hantaï made using the same process of cutting and turning the photograph, presents a significant color variation. The artist used black ink with an indigo hue in the printing process, his intention being to evoke the color of the apron worn by his mother, Anna, in keeping with his explanation that his *pliage* (folding) method originated from a photograph of Anna wearing an apron that retained the imprint of the folds made by an iron. He had six prints (signed and numbered) made of this group of four silkscreens, all of which have been included in *LES NOIRS DU BLANC, LES BLANCS DU NOIR*.

In 1998, Hantaï decided to put an end to his self-imposed sixteen-year hiatus and threw himself into planning for a solo exhibition of his recent art with the title *Laissées et autres peintures* to be held at Renn Espace in Paris (March 7–June 21, 1998). This show included a group of *Laissées* from the cut-down *Tabulas*, as well as one of the four silkscreens Hantaï made during the course of this process of pictorial retrospection.



Laissée, 1981/94, Paris
Acrylic on canvas
87 7/8 x 78 3/8 in. (223.2 x 199 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 81-94"

Laissées et autres peintures, Renn Espace, Paris, March 7–June 21, 1998
Simon Hantai: Werke von 1960 bis 1995, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, Germany, May 8–Aug. 8, 1999, p. 62, illustrated
Simon Hantai, Centre Pompidou, Paris, May 22–Sept. 9, 2013,
not exhibited, p. 213, illustrated
Hantai, Ludwig Múzeum, Budapest, May 9–Aug. 31, 2014, p. 183, illustrated

SIMON HANTAI



Laissée, 1981/94, Paris
Acrylic on canvas
86 × 64 ¾ in. (218.5 × 164.5 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 81-94"



Laissée, 1981/94, Paris
Oil on canvas
80 ½ × 78 ¾ in. (204.5 × 199 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 81-94"



Laissée, 1981/94, Paris
Acrylic on canvas
79 × 63 in. (200.5 × 160 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 81-94"

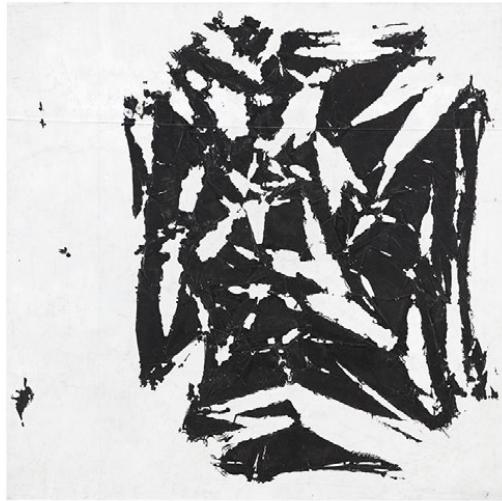


Laissée, 1981/94, Paris
Acrylic on canvas
76 ¾ × 62 ¾ in. (195 × 159.5 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 81-94"



Laissée, 1981/94, Paris
Acrylic on canvas
 $87\frac{5}{8} \times 72\frac{7}{8}$ in. (222.5×185 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 81-94"

Laissées et autres peintures, Renn Espace, Paris, March 7–June 21, 1998
Simon Hantai: Werke von 1960 bis 1995, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, Germany, May 8–Aug. 8, 1999, p. 60, illustrated
Simon Hantai, Centre Pompidou, Paris, May 22–Sept. 9, 2013, p. 210, illustrated
Simon Hantai, Académie de France à Rome–Villa Medici, Rome, Feb. 12–May 11, 2014, p. 45, illustrated



Laissée, 1981/94, Paris
Acrylic on canvas
 $78\frac{3}{4} \times 79\frac{3}{4}$ in. (200×202.5 cm)
Signed and dated lower right:
"S.H. 81-94"

Laissées et autres peintures, Renn Espace, Paris, March 7–June 21, 1998
Simon Hantai: Werke von 1960 bis 1995, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, Germany, May 8–Aug. 8, 1999, p. 63, illustrated
Simon Hantai, Centre Pompidou, Paris, May 22–Sept. 9, 2013, p. 212, illustrated

SIMON HANTAI



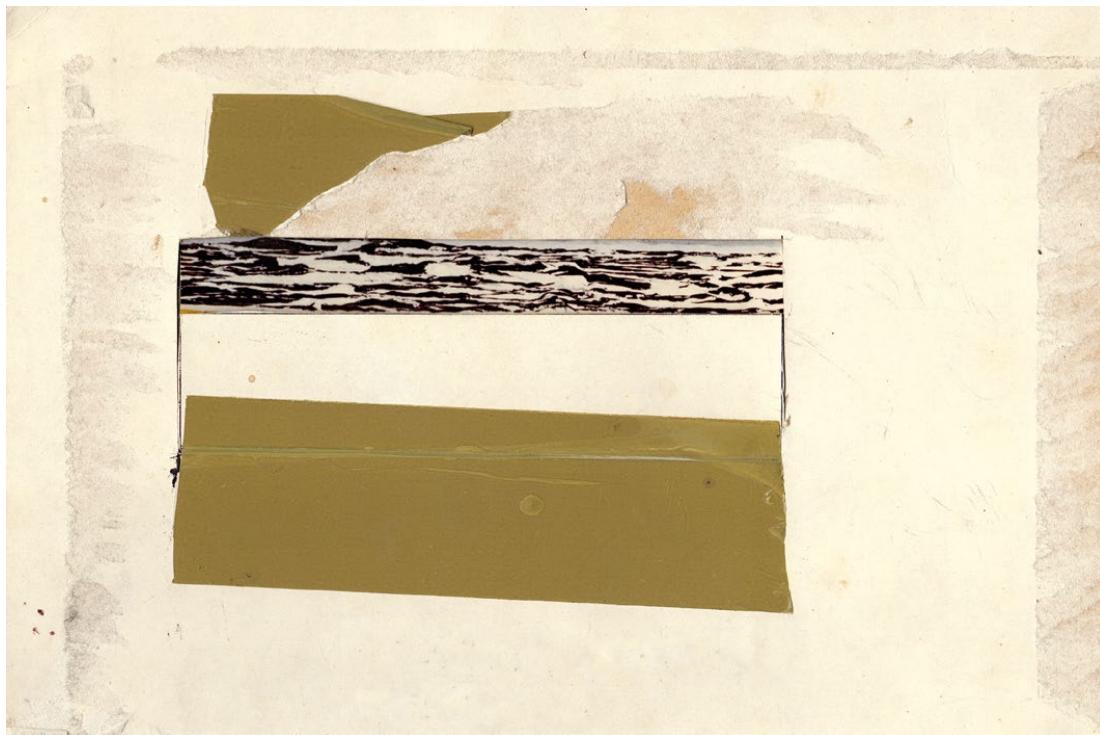
Laissée, 1981/97, Paris
Silkscreen print on canvas after a photograph of a *Tabula*
taken in 1981 by Kamill Major
118 1/8 x 40 5/8 in. (300 x 103 cm)
Signed and dated lower left: "S.H. 97"
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 81-97 N°1"

GAGOSIAN

SIMON HANTAI



Simon Hantai working on
a *Tabula*, Maisons-Alfort, 1980.
Photo: Kamill Major



Cardboard mask used by Hantai to
hide the foreground of the above
photo. Archives Simon Hantai



Laissées, 1996, Paris

Group of three silkscreens on canvas, after a photograph

of a *Tabula* taken in 1981 by Kamill Major

Each: 118 1/8 x 38 5/8 in. (300 x 98 cm)

Print 1/6

Each signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 96 N°1/6"

Messiahs, MODEM, Center for Modern and Contemporary Art, Debrecen,

Hungary, Aug. 15–Dec. 31, 2009

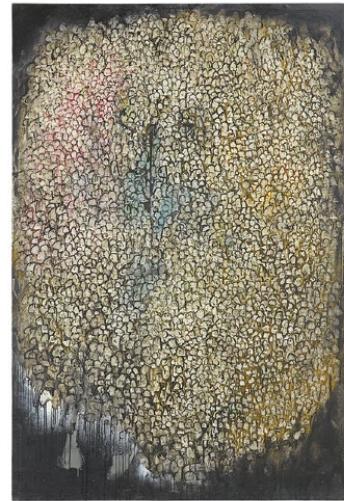
Hantai, Ludwig Múzeum, Budapest, May 9–Aug. 31, 2014, p. 185, illustrated

SIMON HANTAI



Peinture, 1951, Paris
Oil on canvas
39 x 31 1/2 in. (99 x 80 cm)
Signed on back: "S.H. 51"

Simon Hantai, Centre Pompidou, Paris, May 22–Sept. 9, 2013, not exhibited, p. 30, illustrated



Peinture, 1959, Paris
Oil on canvas
70 1/4 x 47 3/4 in. (178.5 x 121.5 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "Hantai 59"

Simon Hantai, Centre Pompidou, Paris, May 22–Sept. 9, 2013, p. 83, illustrated
Hantai, Ludwig Múzeum, Budapest, May 9–Aug. 31, 2014, p. 134, illustrated



Catamurons, c. 1963, Meun
Oil on canvas
34 3/4 x 28 in. (88.3 x 71.2 cm)
Unsigned and undated



Catamurons, 1964, Meun
Oil on canvas
86 x 85 5/8 in. (218.5 x 217.5 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 64"

SIMON HANTAI



Sans titre, 1964, Meun
Oil on canvas
86 × 84 7/8 in. (218.5 × 215.5 cm)
Signed and dated on back: "S.H. 64"



Panse, 1964, Meun
Oil and acrylic on canvas
85 × 66 3/8 in. (216 × 168.5 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 64"

Simon Hantai: Panses 1964–1965, Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris, Oct. 11–Nov. 24, 2012, p. II, illustrated



Meun, 1968, Meun
Oil on canvas
83 7/8 × 90 5/8 in. (213 × 230 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 68"



Sans titre, 1969, Meun
Oil on canvas
25 × 19 7/8 in. (63.5 × 50.5 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 69"

La peinture après l'abstraction, 1955–1975, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, May 20–Sept. 19, 1999, p. 178, illustrated
Simon Hantai: Meuns, Guttklein Fine Art, Paris, May 13–July 9, 2015, p. 45, illustrated
Daniel Buren: A Tiger Cannot Change Its Stripes/En Triptiek, Museumcultuur Strombeek, Ghent, Belgium, Jan. 9–Feb. 10, 2016
Freeform: Jean Dubuffet, Simon Hantai and Charlotte Perriand, Timothy Taylor, London, Feb. 1–March 29, 2018



Tabula, 1974, Meun
Acrylic on canvas
 $91 \times 81 \frac{1}{2}$ in. (231×207 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 74"
(Painted on the back of an earlier work
in the *Meuns* series)



Tabula, 1976, Meun
Acrylic on canvas
 $91 \frac{1}{8} \times 115 \frac{1}{4}$ in. (231.5×292.5 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 76"



Blancs, 1974, Meun
Acrylic on canvas
 $90 \frac{3}{4} \times 77 \frac{3}{8}$ in. (230.5×196.5 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 74"



Sans titre, c. 1990, Meun
Oil on canvas
 $43 \frac{1}{4} \times 27 \frac{3}{8}$ in. (109.7×69.5 cm)
Signed lower right: "S.H."
(Reprise of a *Plage* from the 1960s with
a black frame repainted in around 1990)

Simon Hantai, Centre Pompidou, Paris, May 22–
Sept. 9, 2013, p. 173, illustrated
Hantai, Ludwig Múzeum, Budapest, May 9–
Aug. 31, 2014, p. 169, illustrated

SIMON HANTAI



Étude, 1970, Meun
Oil and acrylic on canvas
31 x 27 ¾ in. (78.8 x 69.6 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: "S.H. 70"

Chronology

1922–40: Bia, Hungary

Simon Handl is born on Dec. 7, 1922, in Bia (now Biatorbágy), near Budapest. His parents belong to a small community of German Catholic immigrants originally from Swabia. In 1939, as a reaction to Hitler's policies, the family decides to Magyarize their last name, which becomes Hantai.

1941–47: Budapest

From 1941 to 1943, Hantai studies at the Budapest School of Fine Arts. In March 1944, he speaks out publicly against Nazi Germany and the pro-Nazi Hungarian government. In 1945, after the liberation of the country by the Red Army, the School of Fine Arts reopens, and it is there that Hantai meets Zsuzsa, a young painting student who will become his wife. From September 1945 to May 1946, Hantai follows art history courses taught by François Gachot, director of the French Cultural Institute, and discovers the contemporary art of Bonnard and Matisse. In October 1946, he joins the Magyar Communist Party.



Simon and Zsuzsa Hantai,
Paris, 1955. Photo: Madeleine
Saura-Augot

1948–49: Italy–Paris

In the spring of 1948, Hantaï is awarded a grant (which he will never receive) from the Hungarian Ministry of Culture to study in Paris. He obtains his first visa for Italy. After the signing of the Treaty of Cooperation with the USSR on February 18, marking Hungary's alignment with the Soviet Bloc, Hantaï leaves the country with Zsuzsa in early May, "on the last train." Hungary then enters a cycle of purges, arrests, trials, and convictions, of which opponents and intellectuals are the first victims. Simon and Zsuzsa travel across Italy and stay in Rome while waiting for their visa to France. At the Accademia d'Ungheria in Rome, they meet up with other Hungarian artists who have received grants, including some former classmates from the Budapest School of Fine Arts, such as Judit Reigl, Antal Bíró, and Poldi Böhm. They also form a bond with a group of American students benefiting from the GI Bill, including Norman Mailer, who will later introduce them to Joan Mitchell and Sam Francis on their arrival in Paris. The Hantaïs' journey takes them to Ravenna, Italy, then to Venice. They visit the 24th Venice Biennale, which reopens for the first time since its suspension in 1942 with a renewed vitality. It is there that they discover contemporary European painting (Georges Braque is awarded the Biennale's Gran Premio).

They arrive in Paris in September 1948. Refusing to return to Hungary despite having been summoned by the embassy, they register under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. They set up home on the Île de la Cité, then in rue Servandoni, where they are hosted by the filmmaker Richard Leacock. In the summer of 1949, they move to 21, cité des Fleurs in the seventeenth arrondissement. They become close to the Parisian circle of émigré Hungarian artists: Vera and François Molnar, Pierre and Vera Székely. Judit Reigl, held for two years in Hungary, succeeds in fleeing the country and joins them in Paris.

1949: Pictorial experiments

Hantaï experiments with various painting techniques (*grattage* [scraping], frottage, *pliage* [folding], collage, decalcomania, painting on photographs, imprints, and dripping), laying the foundations for his future work. In 1951, he begins producing his first Surrealist-type pieces based on the random appearance of images.

1953–55: Surrealist paintings

After meeting André Breton, who introduces him to the Surrealist group, Hantaï stages his first solo show in Paris at the Galerie À L'Étoile scellée and publishes a number of manifestos. His Surrealist period comes to an end in 1955 with the exhibition *Alice in Wonderland* at Galerie Kléber, a bookshop and gallery. He breaks off relations with Breton in the same year.

1955–56: Gestural paintings

The exhibition *Sexe-prime: hommage à Jean-Pierre Brisset et autres peintures de Simon Hantai* at the Galerie Kléber in the spring of 1956 brings together all Hantai's gestural painting experiments, particularly those the artist produced by smudging and scraping paint with the metal casing of an old alarm clock.

1957: Controversy and provocation

At Galerie Kléber, Hantai and Georges Mathieu organize *Les cérémonies commémoratives de la deuxième condamnation de Siger de Brabant*, a series of events in four cycles ("sacerdotal, royal, bourgeois, and popular") commemorating the condemnation of the thirteenth-century philosopher Siger of Brabant. This is followed by the publication of a manifesto and, subsequently, by a violent reaction from the Surrealist group.

1957–58: Peintures à écritures and peintures à touches

Hantai produces canvases uniformly covered with almost transparently thin traces of monochrome color that he applies using a blade. These palimpsests, described by the artist as *peintures à écritures* (writing paintings) and *peintures à touches* (touch paintings), accompany the large pieces completed at the same time. In late 1958, he begins work on two monumental canvases, *Peinture (Écriture rose)* and *À Galla Placidia*, to which he will return throughout 1959. He makes *Peinture (Écriture rose)*, a work of pictorial ritualization, by layering handwritten liturgical and philosophical texts atop one another. Hantai forces himself to strictly obey the rules of the painting. The exhibition *Peintures récentes: souvenir de l'avenir* at Galerie Kléber charts the progress of these productive experiments.

1959: Early pliages

Simon Hantai experiments with his first *pliages*. At this stage of the works' development, the canvas is not left blank but is instead covered with a dark wash on which the overpainted folded sections are superimposed. In late 1959, his first retrospective, *Simon Hantai: peintures 1949–1959*, is held at Galerie Kléber.

1960: Mariales series

Created using crumpled canvases, these works are covered from edge to edge with oil paint. This first series of *pliages*, titled *Mariales*, is exhibited as part of the *Simon Hantai: peintures mariales* exhibition at Galerie Kléber in 1962.

1963: Catamurons series

Only the center of the canvas is folded in this series. Around this time, Hantai

becomes friends with Daniel Buren, his neighbor in the cité des Fleurs, who introduces him to Michel Parmentier. The three artists begin an ongoing dialogue that will continue throughout subsequent decades.

1964–65: *Panses* series

The paintings in this series consist of multiple ovoid folds reminiscent of the original cell that forms the basis of life.

1966: Meun

Hantaï moves with his family, which now includes four boys, to Meun, France, near Fontainebleau (his fifth and last child, a girl, will be born in 1968). He takes French citizenship.

1967–68: *Meuns* series

In this series, the canvas is knotted at the four corners and the center is covered with paint, usually monochrome. Hantaï's research is displayed in the *Peintures récentes* exhibition at Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris. In December 1968, Hantaï is given a major solo show as the inaugural winner of the Fondation Maeght prize. During the opening, he visits the chapel in Vence, France, built by Auguste Perret and decorated (stained glass, ceramics, altar, liturgical furnishings) by Matisse between 1949 and 1951; its nebulous colors (inspired by Goethe's color theory) will influence his later work.

1969: *Études* series

This series of monochrome and evenly folded canvases, dedicated to the poet Pierre Reverdy (1889–1960), is exhibited at Galerie Jean Fournier under the generic title *Études*. In October, François Mathey, director of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, and a friend of Hantaï, organizes a one-day hanging of a group of paintings from the *Études* series in the main hall of the museum.

1970–71: Public commission

The *Études pour un mur*, a public commission, are exhibited at the ARC/Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris in the spring of 1970. One of these works is later photographed in order to be silkscreened onto an enameled metal sheet; the resulting monumental wall is installed in Trappes, France, in 1973. Hantaï's first solo exhibition in New York, *Hantai: Paintings, 1960–1970*, is held at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. In the summer of 1971, the retrospective exhibition *Le pliage comme méthode: regard sur dix années* is staged at Galerie Jean Fournier.

1972: *Aquarelles* series

Galerie Jean Fournier stages the exhibition *Aquarelles*. Hantaï creates a wall for the French Pavilion at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and participates in the exhibition *60–72: douze ans d'art contemporain en France* at the Grand Palais, Paris.

1973–74: *Blancs* series

In this series, the unpainted surface takes precedence over the painted surface. Hantaï uses acrylic paint and extremely fine canvases.

1973–76: First *Tabulas* series

These regularly knotted canvases are painted in a monochrome color and display a quadrangular grid pattern punctuated by the white of the unpainted canvas. The painter's first institutional retrospective, *Simon Hantaï*, is staged at the Musée d'Art et d'Industrie in Saint-Étienne, France, followed, in 1976, by the retrospective *Simon Hantaï* at the Musée National d'Art Moderne. In the summer of 1976, the director Jean-Michel Meurice shoots the film *Simon Hantaï ou Les silences rétiniens* in Meun, in which we can see the painter at work, discussing the various stages in the creation of his *Tabulas*.

1977: A monumental commission

Commissioned by Régie Renault's Centre Recherches Arts et Industries, Hantaï produces four monumental decorative panels screen-printed onto Formica tiles for a dining hall in Rueil-Malmaison, France. He then stops painting for three and a half years.

1979: Paris

In 1979, Hantaï moves back to Paris.

1980: Second *Tabulas* series

Hantaï receives the Grand Prix National des Arts Plastiques. In 1981, the exhibition *Simon Hantaï 1960–1976* is held at CAPC in Bordeaux, France, and includes a group of monumental *Tabulas*. The Hungarian artist Kamill Major, who assists Hantaï with producing the group in a warehouse in Maisons-Alfort, France, documents the working process with a series of photographs.

1982: *Tabulas lilas* series

In 1982, Hantaï represents France at the 40th Venice Biennale with a monumental group of eighteen *Tabulas*. The exhibition of *Tabulas lilas* (subtitled *Le deuil de*

Venise) at Galerie Jean Fournier is the final act in this period of the artist's pictorial oeuvre. Hantaï subsequently decides to withdraw from public life and stop exhibiting, and ends his collaboration with Galerie Jean Fournier.

1984–85: Public commission, donation to the French state

As part of a public program initiated by the Délégation aux Arts Plastiques to commission artworks to be installed inside historic monuments, Hantaï is asked to create a set of stained-glass windows for the cathedral of Nevers, France, in partnership with the American painter Sam Francis. (This project, for which both artists do a significant amount of preparatory work, including a large model of the cathedral, is left unfinished).

As part of his work on this statue commission, Hantaï is able to carry out experiments at the Saint-Gobain research laboratory in Paris on the production of stained-glass windows, first in black and white and then with transparent glass, specifically treated to create a nebulous color inside the cathedral. As part of an agreement with the Ministry of Culture designed to ensure his continued occupation of his studio in Paris's fourteenth arrondissement, Hantaï donates four works to the French state (the Centre national des arts plastiques). These include the large *Peinture (Écriture rose)* for the collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne.

1992: Dialogue with Anne Baldassari

After a ten-year silence, Hantaï agrees to speak at length with art historian and curator Anne Baldassari. Focusing on an analysis of the artist's paintings from the collections of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, the resulting monograph, *Simon Hantaï* (see selected bibliography), is the first attempt to consider his painted oeuvre from a systematic perspective. This analytical approach, which the painter describes as "walking like a crab," ushers in a period of "distanced" retrospection: now able to look back, Hantaï questions, scrutinizes, and even makes changes to his earlier work. He goes on to develop this approach over the decade that follows.

1994–95: *Laissées* series

Hantaï decides to begin actively destroying and reconstructing his earlier paintings. Helped by the painter Antonio Semeraro, he cuts up the large *Tabulas* of the 1980s, reframing the fragments to create a new series of works: the *Laissées*. At Hantaï's request, Semeraro photographs this cutting process. At the same time, Hantaï destroys a group of paintings and buries others in his garden in Meun, where he deliberately allows them to decompose into pictorial compost.

1996–97: Early *Sérigraphies*

Hantaï cuts up the photographs of his *Tabulas* taken by Kamill Major in 1980 in order to focus on particular details, which he then asks Major to turn into silkscreens: the result is a series of three different silkscreens, then a fourth, all of them 9 feet 10 1/8 inches (3 m) high. He prints these in editions of six.

Hantaï displays a copy of the first three silkscreens at the exhibition *L'empreinte* at the Centre Pompidou. This marks the beginning of a correspondence with the exhibition curator and philosopher of art Georges Didi-Huberman, later be published in the book *L'étoilement. Conversation avec Hantai* (see select bibliography). Hantaï makes a large donation to the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, including five large paintings, one of which is *À Galla Placidia* (1958–59), and ten small paintings produced between 1950 and 1991.

1998: Continuation of the *Sérigraphies* and *Laissées*

Hantaï brings an end to his self-imposed sixteen-year hiatus. He agrees to write a number of short texts discussing the principles behind his paintings for the catalogue of the exhibition *Simon Hantai: Donation* at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris. The solo exhibition *Laissées et autres peintures*, at Renn Espace in Paris, features one of the four silkscreens produced with Kamill Major.

1999

Two large exhibitions bring together works by the artist: the monographic exhibition *Simon Hantai: Werke von 1960 bis 1995* at the Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte in Münster, Germany (thirty-six paintings, including eleven *Mariales*), and the thematic exhibition *La peinture après l'abstraction, 1955–1975*, at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris. Hantaï begins an ongoing correspondence with the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy.

2000–01: *Suaires* series

Hantaï works on several editorial projects with the philosophers Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy (*Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* and *La connaissance des textes*; see selected bibliography), for which he produces a number of copies on canvas. To coincide with the exhibition *Les fables du lieu* (Le Fresnoy–Studio national des arts contemporains, Tourcoing, France), Hantaï asks the laboratory at Le Fresnoy to make digital prints from photographs of the *Tabulas lilas* (1982) reworked by Patrice Vermeille, known as the *Suaires*. The results of these experiments, *Quatre impressions numériques sur toile de Simon Hantai*, are displayed at Galerie Jean Fournier.

2003: Donation to the MNAM

Hantaï makes a major donation to the Musée National d'Art moderne: twelve small paintings made from 1950 to 1986 and six large paintings, which are exhibited later in the year by the museum.

2004: *H.b.l. (Hebhel)* series

The exhibition *Simon Hantaï & François Rouan: conversation* takes place at Galerie Fournier. Hantaï makes a number of new adjustments and reframes the digital files of the *Tabulas lilas* photographs for the exhibition, creating the *H.b.l.* or *Hebhel (condensation)*, images that are almost transparent and immaterial. These are his final works.

2004–05

In 2004–05, Hantaï enters into a dialogue and correspondence with the writer and playwright Hélène Cixous. This provides the material for the text *Le tablier de Simon Hantaï: Annagrammes suivi de H.C. S.H. lettres* (see select bibliography).

2008

Sept. 12: Simon Hantaï dies at his Paris home.

This chronology was drawn up using documents kept in the Archives Simon Hantaï and refers to the following academic publications, written between 1992 and 2013: Anne Baldassari, *Simon Hantaï*, 1992 (see selected bibliography); Jean-Marc Poinsot, “Chronologie, *Simon Hantaï*,” in *Simon Hantaï 1960–1976*, exh. cat. (Bordeaux, France: CAPC, 1981); and Bénédicte Ajac, “Chronologie,” in *Simon Hantaï*, 2013 (see selected bibliography).

Selected Bibliography

- Baldassari, Anne. *Simon Hantaï*. Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1992.
- Berecz, Ágnes. *Simon Hantaï*, vols. 1–2. Budapest: Kálmán Makláry Fine Arts, 2012–13.
- Cixous, Hélène. *Le tablier de Simon Hantaï: Annagrammes suivi de H.C. S.H. letters*. Paris: Galilée, 2005.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy: accompagné de travaux de lecture de Simon Hantaï*. Paris: Galilée, 2000.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. *L'étoilement. Conversation avec Hantaï*. Paris: Minuit, 1998.
- Fourcade, Dominique. *Sans lasso et sans flash*. Paris: POL, 2005.
- “Simon Hantaï,” special edition, *Journal of Contemporary Painting*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Oct. 2015), pp. 193–349.
- Hantaï, Simon, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Luc Nancy. *La connaissance des texts: lecture d'un manuscrit illisible (correspondances)*. Paris: Galilée, 2001; Paris: Galilée/Archives Simon Hantaï, 2013.
- Hantaï, Simon, and Jean-Luc Nancy. *Jamais le mot “créateur” . . . (correspondance 2000–2008)*. Paris: Galilée/Archives Simon Hantaï, 2013.
- Warnock, Molly. *Simon Hantaï and the Reserves of Painting*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2020.

Selected Exhibitions

*Catalogue

- **Hantai*: Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul de Vence, France, Dec. 21, 1968–March 16, 1969.
- **Hantai: Paintings 1960–1970*. Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, Oct.–Nov. 1970.
- **Hantai*. Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, Saint-Étienne, France, Nov.–Dec. 1973.
- **Hantai: Paintings and Watercolors 1971–1975*. Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, Oct.–Nov. 1975.
- **Hantai, retrospective*. Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art moderne, Paris, May 26–Sept. 13, 1976.
- **Simon Hantai 1960–1976* and *Ensemble d'œuvres de très grandes dimensions conçues pour l'espace central de l'Entrepôt Lainé*. Entrepôt Lainé, CAPC, Bordeaux, France, May 15–Aug. 29, 1981.
- **Simon Hantai*. French Pavilion, 40th Venice Biennale, June 13–Sept. 12, 1982.
- **Hantai*. Arca, Marseille, France, Feb. 5–March 19, 1983.
- **Simon Hantai: Donation*. Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1997
(catalogue: published in 1998) Also published on the occasion of the exhibition:
“Hantai,” special issue, *Beaux-Arts Magazine*, no. 582 (Feb. 1998).
- **Laissées et autres peintures*, Paris, Renn Espace, March 7–June 21, 1998.
- Simon Hantai, Werke von 1960 bis 1995*. Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, Germany, May 8–Aug. 8, 1999.
- **Simon Hantai*. Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, March 19–April 24 and Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris, April 8–May 22, 2010.
- **Simon Hantai: Panses 1964–1965*. Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris,
Oct. 11–Nov. 24, 2012.
- **Simon Hantai*. Centre Pompidou, Paris, May 22–Sept. 9, 2013.
- **Simon Hantai*. Académie de France à Rome–Villa Medici, Rome, Feb. 12–May 11, 2014.
- **Hantai*. Ludwig Múzeum, Budapest, May 9–Aug. 31, 2014.
- **Simon Hantai: Plage; The First Decade*. Mnuchin Gallery, New York, April 28–June 26, 2015.
- **Simon Hantai: Meuns*. Guttklein Fine Art, Paris, May 13–July 9, 2015.
- **Simon Hantai: Blancs*. Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, Oct. 22–Dec. 5, 2015.
- **Simon Hantai*. Timothy Taylor, London, Jan. 22–March 5, 2016.
- **Simon Hantai: Paris, 1948–1955*. Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris, Dec. 14, 2017–Jan. 20, 2018.



Exhibition director: Jean-Olivier Després
Exhibition coordinator: Elsa Favreau

Restoration of works by Simon Hantaï: Aurélia Chevalier

Photographic credits: Édouard Boubat,
Jacqueline Hyde, Kamill Major, Madeleine
Saura-Augot, Antonio Semeraro

Front cover: Simon Hantaï, Maisons-Alfort, 1981

Photo: Édouard Boubat

Back cover: Simon Hantaï in his studio, Meun,
France, 1967

Photo: Édouard Boubat

All artwork by Simon Hantaï © Archives Simon
Hantaï/ADAGP, Paris