

The Work of Jean Dubuffet

MOMA

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Cover: Arnold Newman (American, 1918-2006). *Jean Dubuffet in His Studio*. 1956. Gelatin silver print. 9 1/2 x 7 3/4" (24.1 x 19.7 cm). Gift of the photographer. 510.1961

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Childbirth (1944)

**Maibritt Borgen,
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A dark-haired and red-skinned female figure is splayed on top of a white mattress, a child just expelled from her body. Her arms bend upwards, palms showing. Her knees are drawn up towards the head and bent outwards to the sides, thus exposing the genital area. A male and a female figure, both dressed in dark suits, flank the delivery bed on each side.

Each of the figures' faces draws equal attention, which makes the surface of the image appear as a multi-perspectival, organic grid. A series of doublings enhance the multiple focal points. The child's body mirrors the mother's. An impromptu face on her torso doubles her mask-like facial features: her breasts make for eyes; her navel becomes a nose; and her post-partum open cervix a mouth. The two figures in black function as each other's doubles. *Childbirth* (pl. 1) is an early example of what Clement Greenberg called Dubuffet's even, "over-all" treatment of the canvas, or what Alex Potts has labeled his characteristic "tendency to dispersal."¹

Christ's entry into the world is the iconic image of birth in Western art history. However, counter to the standard iconography of Nativity scenes, *Childbirth* shows neither a close loving bond between mother and child, nor an accompanying crowd venerating the newborn. Instead, *Childbirth* illustrates Dubuffet's attraction to visual models not grounded in a Western tradition.² The female figure's violently foreshortened calves and her enlarged hands and feet bring to mind the ancient American "displayed female," a figure found carved on stone in central Ecuador (fig. 1.1). The displayed female was a representation of the pre-Columbian goddess Tlazolteotl, the earth-mother and goddess of both childbirth and filth (fig. 1.2).³ This female figure has an inherent duality. Like the earth itself, she is both the giver and taker of life.⁴ Dubuffet's investigations of the "ground" of painting would later, in works such as *The Geologist* (1950) (fig. 1.3), take on a more scatological and material character, but in *Childbirth* he instead explores the mother figure as a totemic symbol identifiable with the earth or ground.

Dubuffet painted *Childbirth* before the French liberation, in March of 1944, and exhibited it after, at his first solo show

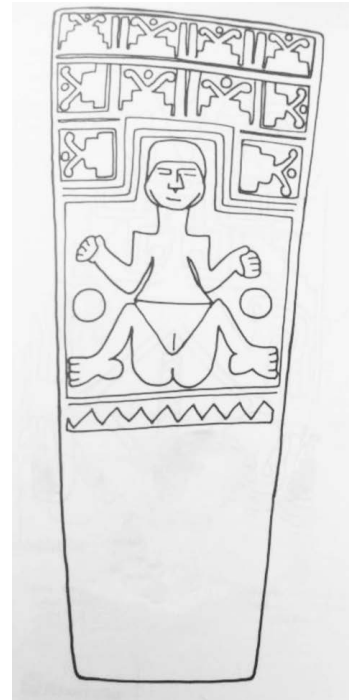
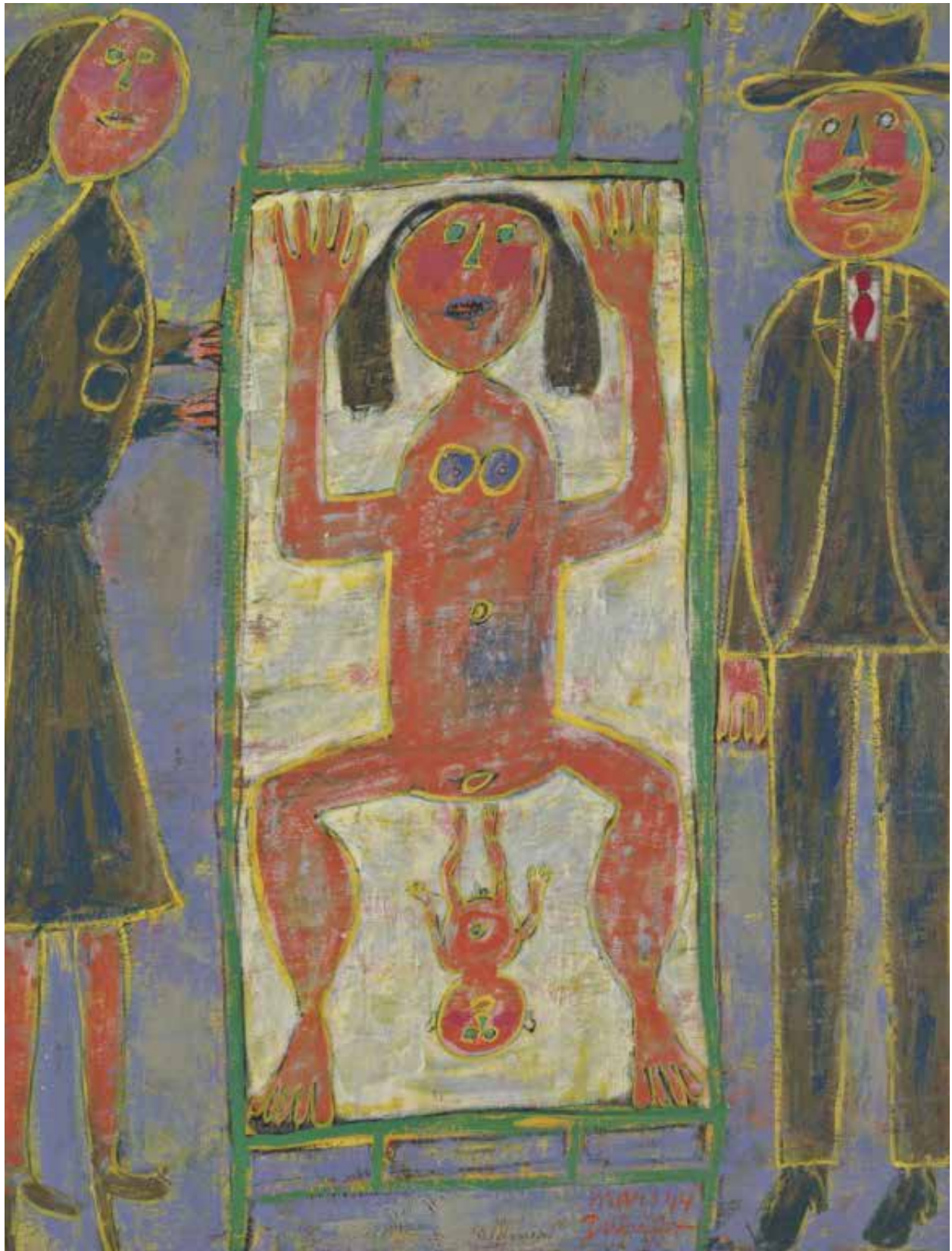


Fig 1.1 A displayed female stela from Manabi, Ecuador



Fig. 1.2 The Aztec earth monster, redrawn from the Codex Borbonicus.

at Galerie René Drouin in the fall of that year. He repeated the submissive posture of the female body with hands raised upwards in a series of female figures from 1944. The titles of these other works, such as *Woman Pinning Up Her Hair* (1944) suggest mundane activities like doing one's hair (fig. 1.4). However, the image of women with raised hands



Pl. 1 Childbirth. March 1944. Oil on canvas. 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 31 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (99.8 x 80.8 cm). Gift of Pierre Matisse in memory of Patricia Kane Matisse. 101.1982

took on a more serious meaning in the immediate postwar period. The female body was marked as a site capable of national treason, as women who had had intimate relations with German soldiers during the Occupation were arrested and publically humiliated, accused of *collaboration horizontale*.

The mattress and mother's upper body is depicted from a birds-eye perspective, while the position of her lower body, the headrest and the bed legs suggest instead that the spectator is standing at the foot of the bed, watching the child's entry into the world firsthand. The male and female figures are shown from the front, suggesting instead that the bed is upright and pinned against the wall. This distorted perspective counters the seemingly flat and naïve style of painting and questions Dubuffet's self-proclaimed distance to Cubism.



Fig. 1.3 *The Geologist*. December 1950. Mixed media on canvas, 38 1/2 x 51 5/8\" (98 x 131 cm). Private collection

The female figure breaks up the pictorial space in a manner similar to Leo Steinberg's description of the *rampant gisante* in Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*.⁵ Furthermore, the green bed frames the woman's body as if she is a painting within the painting rather than a real figure. This composition has a striking similarity to a similar composition from Picasso's *La Vie* of 1903 (fig. 1.5), where three people surround a canvas wherein two figures are hunched as if squeezed together by the borders of the canvas. Shared features such as the distorted Cubist perspective and the motif recalling one of Picasso's well-known paintings question Dubuffet's claim for a total break with traditions of previous art and being instead a painter that belonged solely to the anti-cultural or the quotidian.⁶

In 1944 French writer Georges Limbour supported Dubuffet's claim for a total break with tradition and posed him as the instigator of an *oeuvre nouvelle*—an art that



Fig. 1.4 *Woman Pinning Up Her Hair*. February 1944. Oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 31 3/4\" (99.8 x 80.8cm). Wexner Family Collection



Fig. 1.5 Pablo Picasso (Spanish 1881-1973). *La Vie*. 1903. Oil on canvas; framed: 94 1/16 x 66 7/8 x 3 7/8\" (239 x 170 x 10 cm); unframed: 77 5/16 x 50 13/16\" (196.5 x 129.2 cm). The Cleveland Museum of Art. Gift of the Hanna Fund. 1945.24

wants to ignore everything that has come before it. The same year writer and critic Jean Paulhan made a similar claim that Dubuffet was a painter “uniquely equipped to describe the contemporary world.”⁷ And yet, *Childbirth* does indeed engage art history—not only Cubism and pre-Columbian art but also Courbet’s Realism and classic high-art themes such as the Nativity scene and the female nude.

Dubuffet’s supposed clean break with everything that came before has implications that aren’t confined to the art historical. Because, it is precisely by denouncing art historical references and evacuating earlier work that Dubuffet shapes his legacy as a painter of the solely postwar moment. This narrative aides the forgetting of Dubuffet’s questionable wartime activities such as making money selling wine to the German occupiers.⁸ *Childbirth* therefore problematizes the image of Dubuffet as a revolutionary and essentially postwar artist emerging out of darkness after the Liberation.

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NOTES

1. Clement Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Jean Dubuffet and Jackson Pollock," *The Nation*, February 1, 1947.
2. Dubuffet called Western civilization a "dead language." See his "Anti-Cultural Positions" (1945), *Prospectus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946).
3. The Displayed Female is normally flanked by disks or monkeys. The elongated hands and feet are drawn from a variety of the Displayed Female, the Splayed Creature. See Alana Cordy-Collins "Earth Mother/Earth Monster Symbolism in Ecuadorian Manteño Art," in Cordy-Collins, ed., *Pre-Columbian Art History: Selected Readings* (Palo Alto, CA: Peek Publications, 1982), 206.
4. The goddess Tlazolteotl was the giver of life, but her counterpart Tlaltecuhltli, a giant toad with fangs, was the taker of life, a duality which corresponds to the idea of earth itself as the giver and taker of life. Dubuffet might have come upon a picture of Tlazolteotl giving birth to Cinteotl on page 13 of the Codex Borbonicus housed in the French Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale in Paris. He also might have seen a reproduction of a spectacular Aztec birthing figure now at Dumbarton Oaks, published by E. T. Hamy in Paris in 1906, or a replica of it housed in the pre-Columbian collections in Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, demolished in 1935, or in the Musée de l'Homme, Paris, established in 1937. The French Surrealists were fascinated with pre-Columbian art, as were late 19th-century artists such as Gauguin who was attracted to Aztec sculpture. See Keith Jordan, "Surrealist Visions of Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and the Legacy of Colonialism: The Good, the (Revalued) Bad, and the Ugly," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2008): 25-63.
5. In 1944, Picasso's wartime works at the Salon d'Automne overlapped with Dubuffet's and received enormous attention. Jill Shaw "A Coat that Doesn't Fit: Jean Dubuffet in Retrospect 1941-1951," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013), 37. Leo Steinberg "The Philosophical Brothel, Part 1," *Art News* 71 (September 1972), 20-29.
6. Dubuffet chose not to include any work made prior to 1942 in his catalogue raisonné. Jill Shaw describes it as "Dubuffet's own decision to excise his early artistic career—and the evidence of the impact of Cubism and Surrealism on his work—from memory." See Shaw, "A Coat that Doesn't Fit." In *More Modest*, 1945, Dubuffet describes how he was looking for the "entrée," which he describes as an "art outside of art."
7. Shaw, "A Coat that Doesn't Fit," 23.
8. Dubuffet's friend Georges Limbour stated in his first article on Dubuffet of 1944 that Dubuffet instigated an "oeuvre nouvelle" not borrowed from an earlier school, but an art that wanted to ignore "everything that came before it." See *Dubuffet*, exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2001), 360. Jill Shaw points to how his attempt to install himself as a new "painter of modern life" and his art as an "art of the moment" was aided by Paulhan and Parrot in their writings for the 1944 René Drouin catalogue. Shaw, "A Coat that Doesn't Fit."

Notes on *Wall with Inscriptions* (1945) and *Building Facades* (1946)

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In April 1945 at the Galerie André in Paris, Jean Dubuffet exhibited his recently finished series of lithographs created to accompany Eugène Guillevic's poem *Les Murs*.¹ Painted the same month, *Wall with Inscriptions* may very well have been included as one of the "peintures, dessins et ouvrages divers ayant rapport aux MURS."² In fact, the figure that Dubuffet designed for the exhibition's invitation, wearing a cap (which reads "André") and a jacket suggested by a schematic "X" across his chest, resembles the figure appearing in *Wall with Inscriptions*. In May of the following year, Dubuffet debuted his *haute-pâte* works in his exhibition *Mirobolus, Macadam & Cie, Hautes Pâtes* at the Galerie René Drouin. Just after the exhibition's close in July, Dubuffet began his paintings of building facades, including MoMA's *Building Facades* and related paintings now in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art. *Building Facades* incorporates the material lessons of *haute-pâte* and returns to themes and interests previously posed in the walls and revisited throughout Dubuffet's oeuvre, including the relationship of the figure to his surrounding environment, specifically the built environment of Paris, and a recurring interest in the visual and physical presence of writing, whether in graffiti or commercial signs.

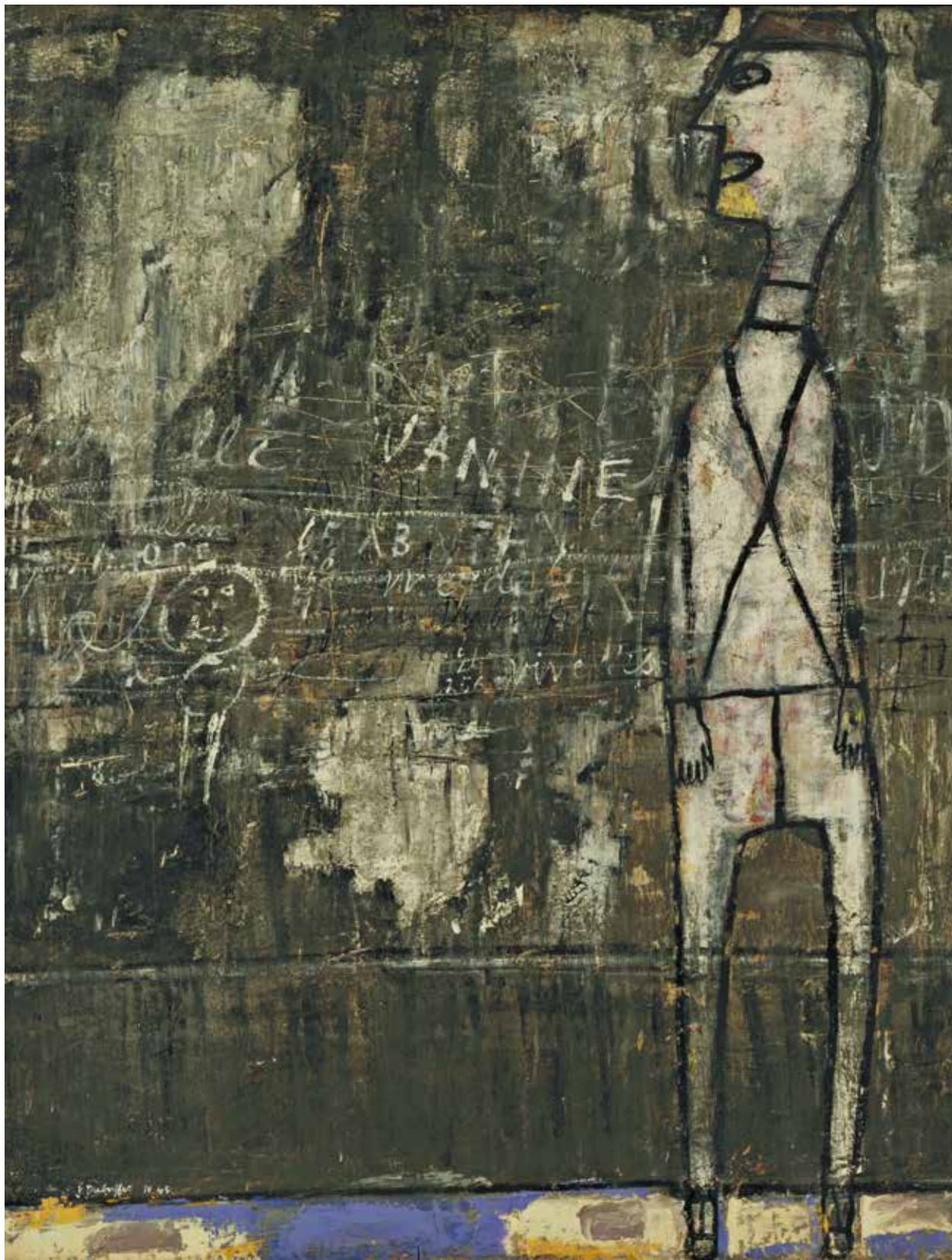
In his catalogue raisonné, *Archetypes*, painted in May 1945 just after *Wall with Inscriptions*, is identified as the first work in the *Mirobolus* series and consequently as initiating Dubuffet's work with *haute-pâte*.³ For Dubuffet, the label "haute-pâte" referred to the specific series exhibited in 1946 at René Drouin, rather than as a definition of the medium used.⁴ The series exhibited at René Drouin privileged focused representations of the human figure. However, the technique and process of *haute-pâte*, in which Dubuffet applied heavy layers of paint often mixed with various substances into which he incised his forms, clearly informed *Building Facades*. Writing to Peter Selz in preparation of Dubuffet's 1962 retrospective at MoMA, Noël Arnaud, working closely with Dubuffet, clarified, "several works which could relate to this series were not finished until shortly after the exhibition."⁵

In *Building Facades*, Dubuffet first coated his canvas with a plaster-like ground, to which he applied a light layer of gray paint.⁶ Returning to the canvas before the ground had completely dried, Dubuffet scratched and carved into the

surface with a variety of tools. On this new ground, Dubuffet continued to build up his composition with large areas of black and gray paint, and to add further visual detail and information with whites and blacks. Flecks of bright reds, greens, and yellows emerge from the various layers of the seemingly achromatic canvas. Dubuffet's process of painting and incising marks into the canvas ground evoke common acts of street graffiti, a realm outside of art that Dubuffet sought to incorporate into his works.⁷ While in *Wall with Inscriptions* the incorporation of graffiti elements visually echoes those found on the street, acts of vandalism performed on the wall, in *Building Facades*, the techniques associated with graffiti are instead used to build up and give form to the understanding of the walls that compose the scene.

In this painting, Dubuffet expands his vision from the individual wall of the previous year to a full facade, pierced by windows and inhabited by people. In the context of the facade, the wall is explicitly made into an external barrier to be encountered. It separates and isolates individuals from the city life outside. The wall of the facade separates the viewer from the space behind it, prohibiting visions of a world beyond.

Dubuffet's facade also acts as an organizing tool in the space of the composition. In the spring and summer of 1946 Dubuffet was also exploring the relationship of figures to their surroundings in rural landscapes, inhabited landscapes (*paysage habité*), and enchanted landscapes (*paysage féérique*). In such scenes, the figures are interspersed throughout busy landscapes alongside trees and houses. In contrast to these landscapes, the facade provides an order to the composition. The windows, which occur with a rhythmic regularity, provide frames for the figures that appear within the building. The physical structure of the facade becomes a compositional structure for the painting. As opposed to the countryside, the built facade offers a symbol of order in city life. In comparison to *Wall with Inscriptions* and the lithographs for *Les Murs*, even within the city the facade becomes a sign of order as acts of transgression are carried out on the street and against the city's alley walls. In *Pissers at the Wall*, the eighth plate of *Les Murs*, two men urinate on a wall that has already been marked by graffiti. In the distance, however, seen through a break in the wall, a row of building facades demonstrates



Pl. 2.1 *Wall with Inscriptions*. April 1945. Oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 31 7/8" (99.7 x 81 cm). Nina and Gordon Bunshaft Fund. 186.1966



Pl. 2.2. *Building Facades*. July 1946. Oil on canvas, 51 3/4 x 63 7/8" (130.5 x 162.3 cm). Nina and Gordon Bunshaft Bequest. 628.1994

an alternative and ordered space, separating the public street from the private world, a world that is structured, protected, and hidden by the facade.

In *Building Facades*, the street is left uninhabited. One sole figure, in the bottom left of the composition, stands in the threshold of the doorway, in the interstitial space between the street and the building created by the physical depth of the wall. Returning to *Les Murs*, Guillevic wrote, “It is in walls / That the doors are / Through which you can enter // And by one / Arrive.”⁸ In Dubuffet’s *Building Facades*, it is unclear to where this figure is arriving: to the empty street that is presented to the painting’s viewer, or to the hidden interior guarded by the imposing facade.

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NOTES

1. For more on *Les Murs*, see Jonathan Patkowski’s essay in this volume.
2. Galerie André with text by Jean Dubuffet, *Exposition de Lithographies de Jean Dubuffet* (Paris: Galerie André, 1945), 14.
3. Jean Dubuffet and Max Loreau, *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet*, vol. 2, “Mirobolus, Macadam et Cie (1945-1946)” (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1966).
4. See Letter Noël Arnaud to Peter Selz, December 11, 1961. Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exhibition #702. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
5. Ibid.
6. Thanks to Anny Aviram for sharing this and the following information about Dubuffet’s process in *Building Facades* at the MRC Study Session on January 23, 2014.
7. For more on Dubuffet’s interest in graffiti and especially his relationship to contemporary works on graffiti by René de Solier and Brassai, see Rachel Eve Perry, “*Retour à l’Ordure: Defilement in the Postwar Work of Jean Dubuffet and Jean Fautrier*” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2000), 63-65, 77-79.
8. Eugène Guillevic, “Les Murs,” trans. John Montague, in *Dubuffet’s Walls: Lithographs for Les Murs* (London: Hayward Gallery and Arts Council of England, 1999), 23.

Les Murs (1950)

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Executed between January and March of 1945, *Les Murs* consists of fifteen lithographs illustrating a volume of poetry by Eugène Guillevic on the subject of walls (pl. 3.1). *Les Murs* was Dubuffet's second illustrated book, following upon his *Matière et mémoire* of the previous year, which featured an homage to the recently-deceased philosopher Henri Bergson by the poet Francis Ponge. The texts of *Les Murs* were set by Joseph Zichierei in the antiquated typeface Falstaff, and the book was printed by the Parisian Mourlot brothers, who had recently instructed Dubuffet in lithographic techniques and who worked with the artist into the 1950s. The images of *Les Murs* were exhibited at the Galerie André in 1945 and were displayed alongside other works on the theme of "walls" from this period. After significant delays, the book was published as an unbound *livre d'artiste* by Les Éditions du Livre in 1950.¹

Formally speaking, the technique and content of *Les Murs*' imagery varies greatly from plate to plate. In some, crayon and brush crudely delineate figures within confining urban environments (pl. 3.2), while others evince no compositional elements whatsoever, instead presenting richly-textured stone facades of indeterminate scale by means of scratching, imprinting, and chemical manipulation (pl. 3.3).² In part, the variety and sequence of the imagery of *Les Murs* is determined by the progression of Guillevic's text. For instance, the poet's consideration of texture is accompanied by a closely-cropped view of a dark stone planar surface rendered with layers of ink wash lacerated by scratched white lines (pl. 3.4). Later, a text describing pedestrians' use of walls as shields against the gaze of elevated apartment dwellers appears alongside an image of a single man set against a towering building facade densely packed with cellular windows (pl. 3.5).

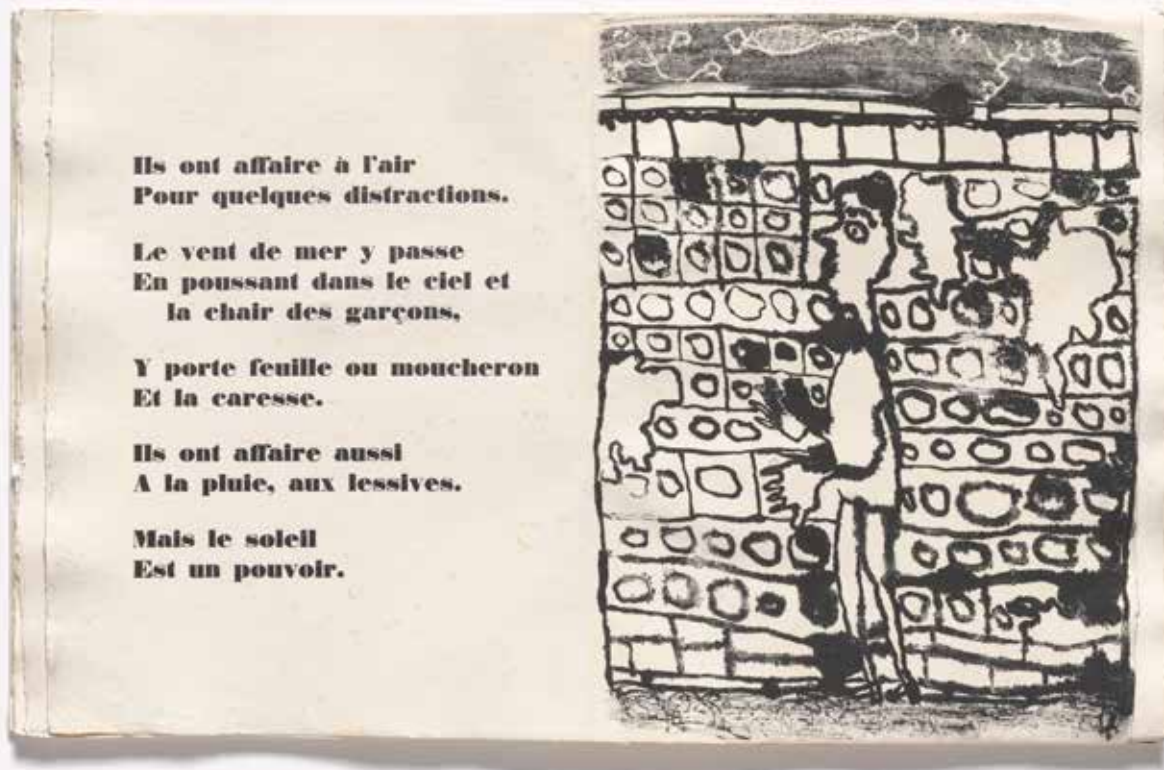
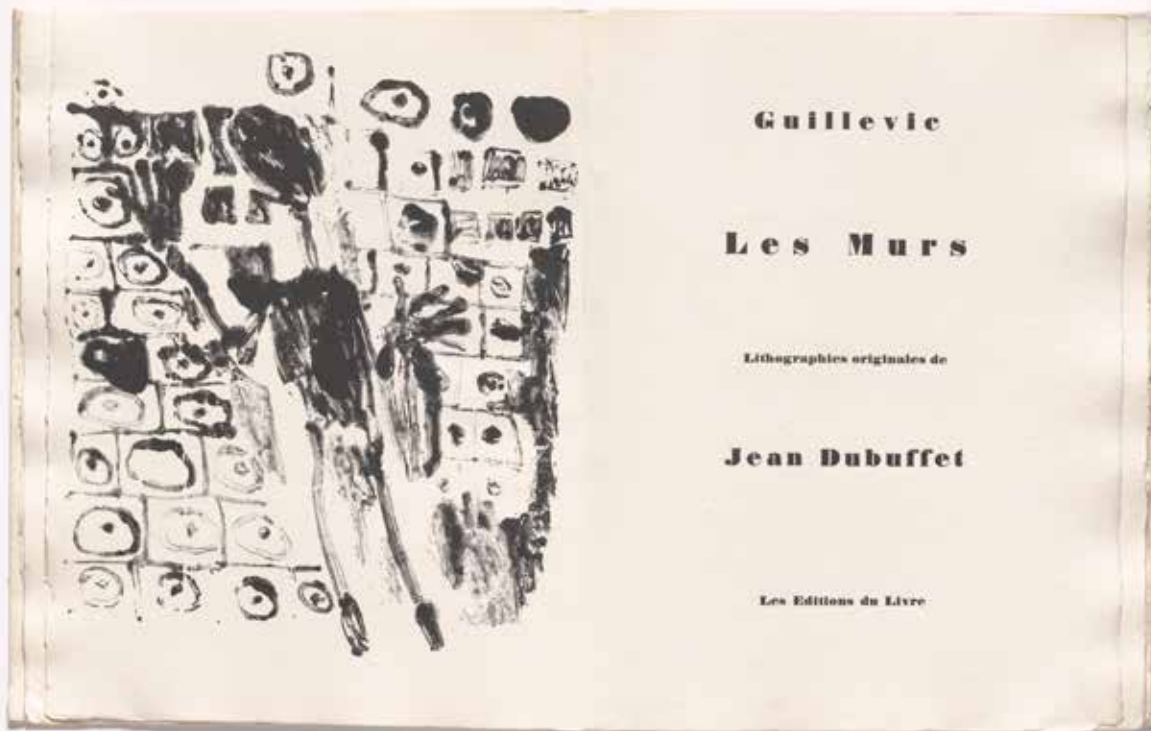
Beyond this illustrative function, the plates of *Les Murs* extend Dubuffet's preexisting lines of inquiry into walls and graffiti. Before beginning the series, the artist had already produced *Messages*, a group of inscriptions painted on news-paper derived from wall graffiti; soon thereafter, he painted a series of gouaches and canvases on the topic, and wrote a preface for René Soilier's never-published *Treatise on Graffiti*.³

Wall graffiti clearly appealed to Dubuffet's broad interest in disreputable cultural forms, as evinced by the rest of his oeuvre and, more specifically in the case of *Les Murs*, to

his anti-representational artistic program.⁴ Simulating carved wall graffiti by scraping and incising into the black tusche, the artist offers a form of mimesis that confounds distinctions between technique, material, and subject matter. Graffiti also interested Dubuffet as a means of written communication. The artist often repudiated transparently rational discourse and machine-made typography, and his repeated insertion of his name among the handwritten and fragmented phrases, scrawled expletives, lovers' initials, and obscene cartoons adorning the surfaces of *Les Murs* underlines his allegiance to an unmotivated and undisciplined form of signification (pl. 3.6). It is, however, ironic that Dubuffet advances this form of writing to illustrate the work of an existentialist poet—one whose writing he described as "exceptional" and chose to collaborate with again.⁵ On this point, *Les Murs* offers a compelling point of departure for a broader consideration of the artist's position within a French literary culture divided between Sartre's *littérature engagée* and the incipient field of what critic Jean Paulhan described as "Uncommitted Literature."⁶

Although Dubuffet rarely adopted overtly political stances, his work produced during and immediately after the German Occupation was charged with an ambiguous political valence. He often presented Paris as an enclosed field subject to disciplinary surveillance—from the confined subterranean spaces of *Voyage en Métro* (1943) to the watchful police officer of *Wall with Inscriptions* (1945)—and the setting of *Les Murs* has been identified as a specific area of the city known during the Occupation as the "zone," a site of secret executions and burials.⁷ What, then, is to be made of the scenes of graphic and scatological transgression within public architectural settings featured in *Les Murs*? They might signify Dubuffet's attraction to politically undisciplined activity beyond the state's reach, or alternatively, the very marginality and puerility of transgression, artistic or otherwise, under its totalizing grip. *Contra* Sartre's cultural political program of resistance and commitment, *Les Murs* could be said to offer one of self-marginalization and abjection.

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Pls. 3.1 and 3.2 *Les Murs*. 1950, prints executed 1945-50. Illustrated book with fifteen lithographs, page (each irregular): 14 9/16 x 11 1/4" (37 x 28.5 cm). Publisher: Les Éditions du Livre, Paris. Printer: Mourlot, Paris. Edition: proof before the edition of 160. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. 821.1965.1-15



Pls. 3.3 and 3.4 *Les Murs*. 1950, prints executed 1945-50. Illustrated book with fifteen lithographs, page (each irregular): 14 9/16 x 11 1/4" (37 x 28.5 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. 821.1965.1-15

**Les murs quand ils sont hauts,
Surtout ceux qui n'ont pas fenêtres
et rideaux,
Qui ont traînées parfois de gris
jaune et de noir
Dessous les cheminées,**

**Sont bons pour être écrans aux
visions des passants
Qui n'y trouvent pas forme ni leçon,
Mais soupirail :**

**Un géant rouge a fait grand signe
Et sur les toits ses pieds vont vite.
C'est au ciel qu'il s'en prend,
C'est à l'été. Il a du feu entre les
bras.**

**Il a laissé tomber un astre ou un
enfant.**

Il dit : Vengeance. Il se rascoit.

C'était un pauvre.



**Des murs
Sont laids.**

**Ils n'y auront pas mis
Du leur.**

**Faits pour cacher,
Pour empêcher,**

**Amidonnés parfois
De tessons de bouteilles.**

**— Ils n'arrêteront pas
Les foules du triomphe.**



Pls. 3.5 and 3.6 *Les Murs*. 1950, prints executed 1945-50. Illustrated book with fifteen lithographs, page (each irregular): 14 9/16 x 11 1/4" (37 x 28.5 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. 821.1965.1-15

NOTES

1. For a detailed chronology of *Les Murs*, see Helen Lockett, "Chronology," in Julia Coats and Sophie Allen, eds., *Dubuffet's Walls: Lithographs for Les Murs* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1999), 7-12.
2. Dubuffet describes his artistic process in "Notes on Lithographs by Transfers of Assemblages, and on the Phenomena Series," in *The Lithographs of Jean Dubuffet* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1964), n.p. See also Audrey Isselbacher, "Jean Dubuffet: A Hunter of Images," in Kathryn Lang, ed., *Dubuffet Prints from The Museum of Modern Art*, ed. Kathryn Lang (New York; Fort Worth: The Museum of Modern Art; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 1989), 5-22.
3. Rachel Eve Perry offers an extended discussion of *Les Messages* in "Retour à L'Ordure: Defilement in the Postwar Work of Jean Dubuffet and Jean Fautrier" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1999), 46-80.
4. Interestingly, Dubuffet was one of many artists who at this time considered the communicative capacity of the Parisian city wall; for instance, Brassai had photographically recorded wall graffiti since the early 1930s and published *Du mur des caverns au mur d'usine* in 1933. Dubuffet was intimately familiar with Brassai's work and the two even discussed the possibility of co-authoring a text on wall graffiti in the late-1940s (See Lockett, "Chronology," 9). Additionally, in the following decade, Charles Wright, the British typographer associated with the Independent Group, juxtaposed lacerated Parisian walls with the smooth surfaces of consumer billboards in the pages of *Architectural Design*. And it was during this period too that Raymond Hains and Jacques Villeglé presented their *affiches lacérées*, posters torn from city facades.
5. See Lockett, "Chronology," 11.
6. Kent Minturn considers Dubuffet's relationship to existentialism and uncommitted literature in "Greenberg Misreading Dubuffet," in Joan Marter, ed., *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007): 125-37. See also, "Chaissac, Dubuffet, and Paulhan: From Proletarian Literature to *écrits Bruts*," *Kunstlicht: Journal for Art, Visual Culture and Architecture* vol. 33, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 88-102.
7. Sarah Wilson, "Paris Post War: In Search of the Absolute," in Francis Morris, ed., *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism, 1945-1955*, ed. Francis Morris (London: Tate Gallery, 1993), 33.

Léautaud, *Redskin-Sorcerer* (1946)

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In October 1947, Jean Dubuffet exhibited over seventy portraits at the Galerie René Drouin in Paris. Among these portraits was the painting *Léautaud, Redskin-Sorcerer* (pl. 4), which depicts the French dramatic critic and autobiographer Paul Léautaud.

Léautaud's literary career began in 1895 when he met Alfred Vallette, who had re-established the literary magazine *Mercure de France* five years earlier. At *Mercure de France*, Léautaud's writing appeared alongside that of Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud. Among his close acquaintances were André Gide and Paul Valéry. Léautaud was an eccentric and cantankerous figure in French literary life, often claiming that he wrote only for himself and not readers; he was notoriously difficult to work with, and even his intimates were at times the subjects of his critical ire. Léautaud attempted initially to write poetry and novels, but turned his back on these endeavors to focus on dramatic criticism under the name Maurice Boissard. His greatest achievement, however, was his *Journal littéraire*, a scrupulously recorded document that describes his life in minute detail from 1893 until 1956, a week before he died. Surrounded by a horde of stray cats and dogs in a derelict house in the suburb of Fontenay-aux-Roses, Léautaud cared little for human interaction and tended to make it known to those around him when he made his appearances in Paris.

Dubuffet met Léautaud at the Thursday luncheons hosted by Florence Gould, a wealthy patron of the arts. Gould inspired Dubuffet's series by requesting a portrait of her favorite attendee, Léautaud. "What an adventure you have thrown me into," Dubuffet writes to Gould. "Nothing was further from my thoughts than doing portraits...[Now] I only think of portraits."¹ In his typically combative manner, Léautaud actively discouraged Dubuffet from pursuing the series while it was in process. When his portrait was finally shown at the Galerie René Drouin in October 1947, Léautaud made an unsuccessful attempt to destroy it with his cane.

Léautaud's hands emerge directly from his torso, which makes him look more like a hand puppet than a human figure. His body appears constrained and tensed, which is further dramatized by the oversized head that sits atop his almost insect-like figure. One is drawn immediately to

Léautaud's piercing eyes, which Dubuffet chose to color yellow and green. Bewildered and somewhat frightened, Léautaud's eyes serve as a point of access to the painting while drawing our attention beyond its upper limits. Dubuffet preserves certain features of Léautaud—his tremendous ears, his narrow mouth—but his emphasis is on straining the category of portraiture. First, by representing Léautaud as a "redskin-sorcerer," Dubuffet engages in a primitivizing game of labeling that distances the portrait from conveying any sense of interiority or psychology. The figure of the "redskin-sorcerer" chosen imaginatively by Dubuffet is a representational barrier, blocking access to the person of Léautaud himself. In this manner, Dubuffet aimed, in his own words, to "depersonalize" his models.² Secondly, his painting of Léautaud is marked by a pronounced sense of materiality—Dubuffet's *haute pâte*—that frustrates the mimetic component of portraiture. Rather than looking-through the representational surface, the viewer encounters a scorched and almost impenetrable array of roughly applied paint and materials, including pebbles and gravel. Dubuffet attacks verisimilitude in his portrait of Léautaud. The critic's figure is distorted beyond recognition, and Dubuffet encourages the viewer to linger over the accidental scrapings and chance manipulations of materials constituting the work.

As Susan Cooke has pointed out, the literary circle Dubuffet assembled in his exhibition at the Galerie René Drouin centered around Jean Paulhan, director of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*.³ Dubuffet produced portraits of writers from across the political spectrum, and there is little consistency among them in terms of ideological viewpoint. Among the group there are *résistants* as well as alleged collaborators. While Paulhan had been active in the Resistance during the German occupation, he refused to partake in the literary purges that followed the Liberation. Like Paulhan, Léautaud and Dubuffet hoped to claim a space for art and literature free of the compromises and complications of the recent past. In an open letter, Dubuffet came to the defense of Charles-Albert Cingria, who had been blacklisted by the *Comité National des Écrivains* (to which Paulhan had belonged) for his alleged Nazi sympathies.⁴ Moreover, Dubuffet's inclusion in his exhibition of blacklisted authors such as Pierre Benoit and Marcel Jouhandeau, whose presence Léautaud enjoyed greatly at Gould's Thursday



Pl. 4 Léautaud, *Redskin Sorcerer*. November 1946. Oil on canvas with pebbles and gravel, 36 1/4 x 28 3/4" (92.1 x 73 cm). William H. Weintraub Fund. 129.1985

luncheons—speaks to a refusal on Dubuffet's part to pronounce political judgments. Léautaud himself was not blacklisted but he was nevertheless well known for his conservative views. Several times he returned home to see "*collaborateur*" written in chalk on the side of his house.⁵ At the Gould salon, he would lament the German defeat, claiming that the only time he enjoyed being in Paris was in 1940, when the streets were empty due to the German occupation. "We already have the P.J. (*Police Judiciaire*)," Léautaud remarked caustically, referring to the backlash against writers accused of collaboration. "I suggest we create the P.L. (*Police Littéraire*)."⁶

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Joë Bousquet in Bed (1947)

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In January 1947, Dubuffet travelled to Carcassonne for three days to visit the poet Joë Bousquet to capture his likeness for the Portraits series to be exhibited at the Galerie René Drouin in Paris in October of that year. The subjects of the series were the painter's friends and acquaintances, well-known writers, critics, and artists from the literary circle centered around Dubuffet's close friend and advocate, Jean Paulhan, the former editor of the French literary review *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. It was only through Paulhan that Dubuffet had come to know Bousquet, an enigmatic man whose surrealist work appeared in the *NRF* and who was known in literary circles as the wounded, bedridden writer. Paralyzed by a World War I wound, Bousquet spent most of his life in his bed, shut away in his room at his family's home in Carcassonne. He took opium for the constant mental and physical pain he endured, yet nonetheless he surrounded himself with friends and acquaintances who came to visit him in his dark, poorly lit room.

The resulting portrait, *Joë Bousquet in Bed* (pl. 5.1), depicts the poet half lying in bed, propped up by pillows and framed by the bed support that enclosed his life. Bousquet's covers are laden, as they were in reality (fig. 5.1), with books, newspapers, and letters addressed to him. Bousquet's mouth is open as if in conversation, and one of his hands, long and white is raised to participate in the discourse or perhaps in benediction. Dubuffet described the poet as "always smiling, mirthless but with immense kindness, all the air of a saint, very animated but with a white and abstract animation, in permanent radiant ecstasy."¹ The incessant movement of Bousquet's "long white hands" fascinated Dubuffet,² and he wrote that the crippled man gave a sense of "levitation," as if gravity no longer worked.³ Dubuffet sketched this very figure into the *haute pâte* material of the canvas, incised with the end of a paintbrush. The bed stands in relief, Dubuffet having carved it out of the background's thick material which he then smoothed and painted over with a spatula.

Dubuffet has abstracted Bousquet's features, yet the poet remains recognizable. Rather than liberate the individual from his own likeness, as has been said about the Portrait series,⁴ Dubuffet has captured the strongest features in his impression of Bousquet; the long white hands, the saintly



Fig. 5.1 Joë Bousquet in his bed

air, his almost floating position in a bed which is at once both vertical and horizontal. The painting's details—the bed, the letters, the book titles—all serve to individualize and identify Joë Bousquet rather than "depersonalize" his model into caricature or reduce him to a universalized "elementary figure" unconcerned with individuality. At the same time, some aspects of Dubuffet's treatment of the figure and canvas challenge his own private descriptions. Even as Bousquet floats, his bed is firmly fastened to the painting's bottom edge, anchoring the levitating poet in the reality of the weight of Dubuffet's thick material.⁵

Rather than "anti-psychological, anti-individualist," as Dubuffet claimed for his Portraits in the essay "Causette" which accompanied the 1947 exhibition, this work evokes great psychological insight.⁶ Bousquet himself wrote that Dubuffet's work "responds to the anguish I felt, only just wounded, in my bed."⁷ In a letter to Paulhan, Bousquet notes that the artist "plunges into my literary past like into



Pl. 5.1 *Joë Bousquet in Bed*. January 1947. Oil emulsion in water on canvas, 57 5/8 x 44 7/8" (146.3 x 114 cm). Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund. 114.1961

a mine, he will deliver me from my 27 years in bed.”⁸ Dubuffet captured the suffering of the man’s constrained life, and the portrait’s expressive face is marked by pain and disturbed sleep. The bed both frame and cage, the symbol of his crippled condition. Yet Dubuffet has also represented Bousquet as a man of letters, a poet free in spirit thanks to the correspondences he shared with his friends and peers. The bed, in its vertical position, is thus also the throne from which Bousquet held court, receiving guest after guest in his dark room in Carcassonne.⁹ “These people are more handsome than they think,” the Galerie Drouin exhibition catalogue declared on rough newspaper, “Long live their true faces.”¹⁰ Dubuffet has captured the true face of Bousquet, individual features and mental landscapes.

Two gouache studies exist, one of which was exhibited alongside the painting in the 1947 exhibition. The two drawings, both titled *Portrait of Joë Bousquet in Bed*, were incised with pen in black gouache on gesso before being treated with a white gouache. The drawing which Dubuffet chose for his exhibition (fig. 5.2) further detailed the figure in black and was dedicated and given to their mutual friend Jean Paulhan. The inverted colors of the other drawing, in The Museum of Modern Art’s collection (pl. 5.2), make the two studies seem like opposite sides of a print process, further suggested by the incising which is not unlike an etching. Dubuffet had recently taken a keen interest in printing techniques, experimenting throughout the Portraits series with different print methods, and he founded an etching studio with Fautrier only a few months prior in 1946.¹¹ Perhaps, then, these drawings might link printing techniques and the rough incisions of Dubuffet’s haute pâte canvases.

Overall the drawings read as spontaneously executed, a haste which the painting retains. Bousquet, describing Dubuffet’s process, said that the drawings materialised suddenly, like a “wizard’s spells.”¹² Dubuffet would have had to execute the works quickly to incise his figure in the gouache before it dried. The MoMa drawing reveals this haste; the white gouache framing the bed shows signs of mixing with the black, evidence that it was applied speedily before the black gouache had dried. It was also signed twice; once by incision in the black layer, a second time with ink after Dubuffet covered the initial signature with the white gouache. This hasty application of the white, done to demarcate the bed as Dubuffet would do on the canvas by carving it in relief, must then have been a spur of the moment decision.



Fig. 5.2 *Portrait of Joë Bousquet in Bed*. January 1947. Gouache and ink on gessoed board, 19 1/3 x 12 2/3" (49 x 32 cm). Private collection



Pl. 5.2 Joë Bousquet in Bed. 1947. Incised gouache on gessoed board, 19 1/2 x 12 3/4" (49.4 x 32.3 cm). Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund. 15.1969

NOTES

1. "... toujours souriant, sans gaieté mais avec une immense bonté, tout l'air d'un saint, très animé mais d'une animation blanche et abstraite, dans une permanente extase radieuse." Letter by Jean Dubuffet to Jacques Berne, February 8, 1947, in *Jean Dubuffet: Paysages du Mental Joë Bousquet*, exh. cat. (Carcassonne: Musée des Beaux-arts de Carcassonne, 1998), 13. Author's own translation.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Peter Selz, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 31.
5. As remarked by Sarah Rich at the MRC Study Sessions, May 15-16, 2014, at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
6. "Portraits," from the studio notebooks 1947-1950, reproduced in Georges Limbour, *L'art Brut de Jean Dubuffet* (New York: Pierre Matisse, 1953).
7. Letter by Joë Bousquet to Jean Dubuffet, June 7, 1945, in *Jean Dubuffet: Paysages du Mental Joë Bousquet*, 23.
8. Letter by Joë Bousquet to Jean Paulhan, 1946, *ibid.*, 25.
9. As remarked by Brigid Doherty at the May 2014 MRC Study Sessions at MoMA.
10. "Les gens sont bien plus beaux qu'il croient: Vive leur vraie figure." Reproduced in Max Loreau, *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet*, fascicule III (Paris: Pauvert, 1964-91), 13-16.
11. Susan J. Cooke, "Jean Dubuffet: Some Recently Discovered Prints," in *Dubuffet Prints from The Museum of Modern Art*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 18.
12. Anne Cathala, "Homage à Joë Bousquet, le Gisant de Carcassonne," in *Jean Dubuffet: Paysages du Mental Joë Bousquet*, 36.

Nomads with Camel (1948)

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When one views Jean Dubuffet's works from his Saharan trips, it is tempting to insert them at the end of a trajectory of French artistic Orientalism, a lineage that spans from Girodet, Gros, Delacroix, Chassériau, Regnault, and Gérôme to Matisse. Certainly, in many ways this work's origin and iconography share characteristics with that tradition. However, for equally numerous and compelling reasons, this narrative must be adapted to fit Dubuffet's own particular situation in approaching North Africa.

In the first place, Dubuffet shuns the more sensational subject matter of Orientalist fantasy, with its scantily clad women, lavish interiors, exotic costumes, and themes of power and domination. He rather focuses his attention on the everyday and the common man, a preoccupation that informed his concurrent definition of and fascination with *Art Brut*. But, it is in this pursuit that Dubuffet betrays his Orientalizing gaze. Through an ethnographic attention to detail of alarming accuracy and insightfulness, Dubuffet depicted the clothing bedecking his desert interlocutors and the material culture that made up their world. An eminently primitivist ambivalence emerges from the standardized motifs Dubuffet generated out of this intense examination, wherein all of the detail and cultural specificity the Westerner was attentive enough to record becomes schematized and deployed like costumery in the artist's works. Far from exotic, though, these fascinating details have instead become mundane or even banal in Dubuffet's conception.

Not only in their dress, but also in their physiognomy, these desert-dwellers become caricatures that are represented through a stock of generic features. But again, it would be wrong to read in this procedure a purely Orientalist inattention to cultural specificity. Indeed, the same principal schematization of visage and raiment can be seen in works predating Dubuffet's trips to North Africa, as well as in a series of subsequent works on the Parisian underground. This pictorial equivocation of means suggests a much more significant equivocation of races and cultures in Dubuffet's portrayal of the human panoply, one which envisions "common man" as a universal category. Furthermore, the similar schematization of equally anonymous Europeans and Africans, engaged in equally pedestrian activities, elevates these subjects to a plane of representational

importance, while nevertheless eschewing the hierarchy whereby Western art typically privileges its subjects. In this comparison, difference ends up being superficial, and the outfitting of a modular form of dress can be scraped away like the top layer of paint on these works, to expose a shared humanity beneath.

Every indication is that Dubuffet understood full well his place as an outsider to the cultures of the desert, but that did not stop him from immersing himself in the language, adopting the local customs, and learning to ride a camel. In his sojourns to North Africa, Dubuffet sought what every primitivist seeks through their exposure to the world of another: the attainment of some greatly idealized, supposedly primordial connection to creative avenues that have been closed to Westerners by our history of the arts. Such a journey is destined to leave the journeyman disappointed in some regard, and in this respect, Dubuffet was no different than many of his predecessors.

But, Dubuffet must have gained some insight, more or less profound, from his trips to North Africa. Given that the works which took the desert as their theme were rarely exhibited, the question that remains to be answered is how did the artistic conclusions arrived at by Dubuffet as a result of his time spent in the desert effect the contemporary foundation of the *Compagnie de l'Art Brut* and future directions in his work? Was Dubuffet simply disappointed in these works, or was this phase of his career merely a stepping-stone to concerns that would occupy his later work? As tempting as it is to isolate the Saharan period and consider it on its own, the work actually speaks to a great deal of Dubuffet's production both pre- and postdating his travels, something which has yet to be considered in the literature.

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Pl. 6 *Nomads with Camel*. May-June 1948. Oil on canvas, 51 1/4 x 38 1/4" (130.1 x 90 cm). Formerly in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York

La Métromanie and Subway (1949)

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In 1945 the Gallimard publishing house rejected Jean Dubuffet's proposal for a book project comprising depictions of daily life on the Paris Métro. Jean Paulhan, however, decided to take on the artist's book project and composed five short stories later that same year to accompany Dubuffet's original gouaches. In turn, Paulhan's whimsical accounts of subway riders inspired Dubuffet to produce a new set of lithographic illustrations from September to December 1949 with a frenzied, child-like line that echoes the spontaneous, urban voyages undertaken by Paulhan's cast of characters. The January 1950 publication of *La Métromanie ou les dessous de la capitale* (pls. 7.1 and 7.2) concluded a focus on the Métro that had first entered Dubuffet's work in 1943.¹

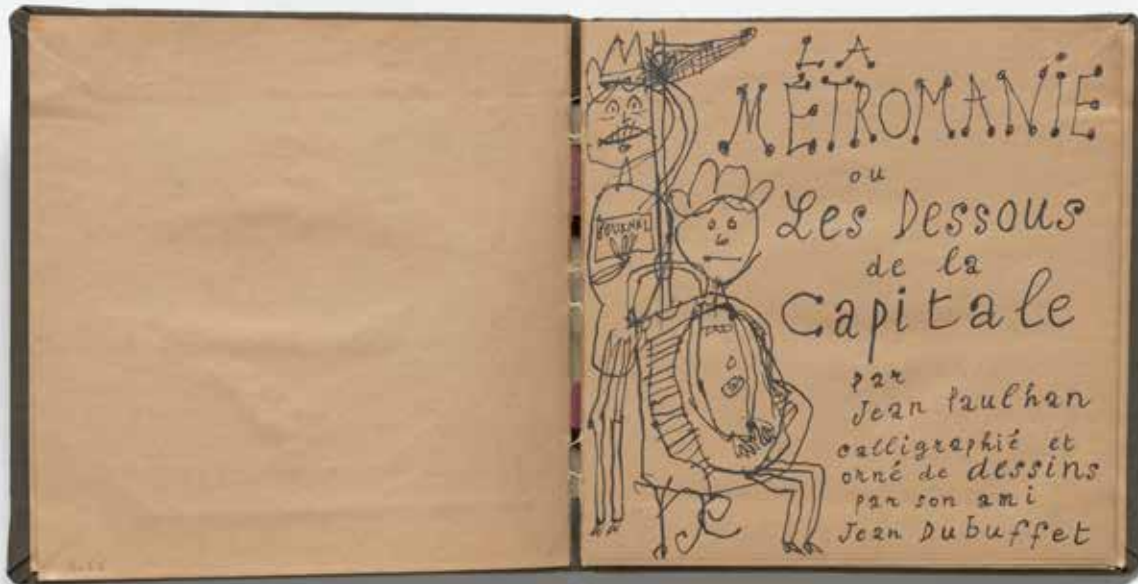
Yet the period from 1943-50 also marks a significant point of transition within Dubuffet's broader oeuvre, as he developed his signature *hautes pâtes* technique from 1945-46



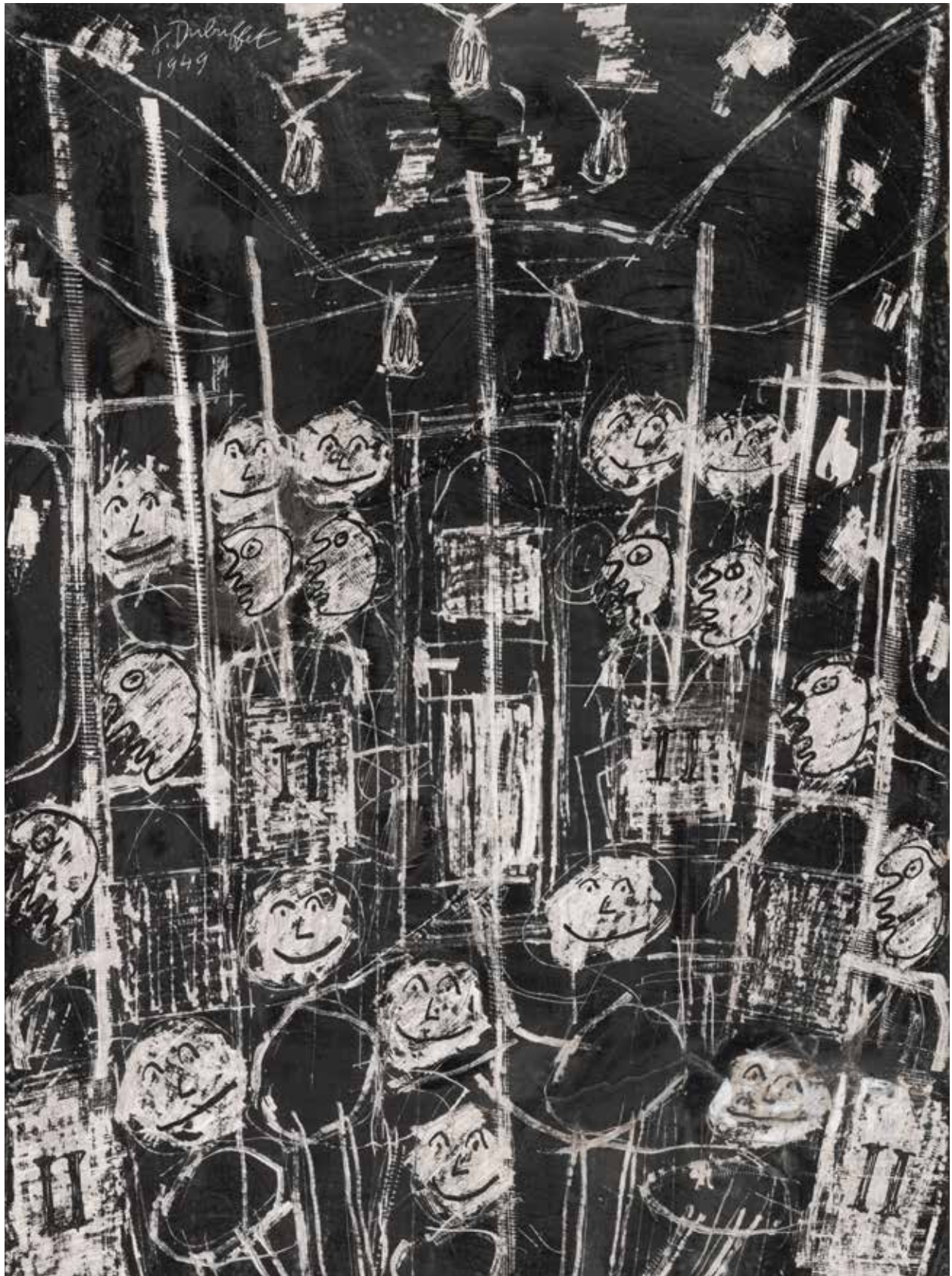
Fig. 7.1 *Métro*, March 1943. Oil on canvas, 63 3/4 x 51 1/5" (162 X 130 cm). Private collection, New York

and began experimenting increasingly with the texture and materiality of painting.² Deborah Wye has explained that parallel explorations of texture also occurred in his works on paper, where Dubuffet would often scratch his lithographic stones with sandpaper or rub them with rags to emphasize the graphic surface. The vertical marks of a roller in *Subway* (pl. 7.3) and aggressive incisions into the inked board reveal the white gesso underground and produce textural differences that depart drastically from the flat, unmodulated, and brightly colored forms in the earlier painted iteration of *Métro* of 1943 (fig. 7.1). A growing emphasis on texture also appears within the pages of *La Métromanie*. The flattened, hieratic figures rendered on the book's cover contrast starkly with later pages, where densely packed personages appear caught within a claustrophobic web of scrawled line and dark ink splotches (pl. 7.4).³ These two examples further reveal the ways in which Dubuffet similarly moved from a schematic representation of form within a crude rendering of perspectival space, to a complete spatial collapse that conflates a frontal and aerial perspective. This type of spatial disorientation seems to prefigure later landmark works like *Traveler without a Compass* of 1952 (fig. 7.2), where frontal and cross-section views of the soil are merged and confused. Here, space functions simultaneously as background and underground.

As such, it might be productive to consider the subway works as one of the primary sites through which Dubuffet began to experiment with the materiality and texture of his medium as both his subject matter and mode of production (a characteristic of much of his work following 1950). I am particularly interested in exploring this intersection in Dubuffet's treatment of the *dessous*, or underground, as both a literal space and recursive idea throughout the artist's oeuvre. In *La Métromanie*, the *dessous* exists literally as subterranean Paris and metaphorically—within Paulhan's narrative—as a transcendental escape from everyday routine. Sarah Rich has also interpreted the *dessous* as an integral site of the French resistance under the Occupation that might be referenced within the book's pages. Connotations of the underground evolved further as Dubuffet left the urban context behind in the 1950s and explored the topographic, working toward the *Textuologies* series that emerged at the end of the



Pls. 7.1 and 7.2 *La Métromanie ou les dessous de la capitale*. 1950, prints executed 1949. Illustrated book with 58 transfer lithographs, page (each approx.): 7 7/8 x 7 7/8" (20 x 20 cm); overall (closed): 8 1/4 x 8 1/4 x 1/2" (21 x 21 x 1.3 cm). Publisher: Jean Dubuffet, Paris. Printer: Edmond Desjobert. Edition: 135. The Louis E. Stern Collection. 810.1964.1-58



Pl. 7.3 *Subway (Métro)*. 1949. Incised ink on gesso on board, 12 5/8 x 9 1/4" (32.1 x 23.5 cm). The Joan and Lester Avnet Collection. 53.1978

decade. Furthermore, Hubert Damisch has discussed the idea of the *dessous* as a modernist trope and alternative to Greenbergian flatness, where the medium's thickness characterizes high modernist painting. "If Dubuffet does not enjoy working with flat brushstrokes," Damisch claims in his book, *Fenêtre jaune cadmium, ou les dessous de la peinture*, "that is because the observer of the 'dessous de la capitale' and the geologist he later became, likes to work within the thickness of the ground—I mean the painting—and to disclose its undersides."⁴ Damisch ultimately reads Dubuffet's treatment of materiality as a way of exposing what lies *underneath* painting and eradicating conventional pictorial illusions.



Fig. 7.2 *The Traveler without a Compass*. 1952. Oil on masonite, 46 2/3 x 61" (118.5 x 155.0 cm). Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

In terms of print media, the lithographic stone, of course, is a literal underground material. Audrey Isselbacher has also suggested that Dubuffet's first foray into lithography around 1944 was partially motivated by his interest in the very elemental nature of the medium—one based on the most fundamental understanding that oil and water do not mix.⁵ Such a fascination with basic physical properties is, furthermore, inextricably linked to the artist's appreciation for the rudimentary or ulterior art of marginalized peoples and the anti-cultural positions of Art Brut, which was founded at this same time in Dubuffet's career in the literal underground space of Drouin's basement *foyer*.⁶

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Pl. 7.4 La Métromanie ou les dessous de la capitale. 1950, prints executed 1949. Illustrated book with 58 transfer lithographs, page (each approx.): 7 7/8 x 7 7/8" (20 x 20 cm); overall (closed): 8 1/4 x 8 1/4 x 1/2" (21 x 21 x 1.3 cm). Edition: 135. The Louis E. Stern Collection. 810.1964.1-58

NOTES

1. Dubuffet began a series of large-scale paintings and smaller gouaches of the Métro in 1943 related to his series the *Marionettes de la ville et de la campagne*. He hoped to assemble a book from the gouaches, but Gaston Gallimard rejected the proposal in 1943. Paulhan wrote the accompanying short stories in 1945, and the two began collaborating around 1948. This chronology of events is cited in Julien Dieudonné, “Le prince et la bergère: la relation Paulhan/Dubuffet d’après leur correspondance (1944-1968),” *Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France* 103.1 (2003): 153-68. Sophie Webel also specifies that the *Subway* cardboard work (in MoMA’s collection) was completed in September 1949. Dubuffet completed the *Métromanie* lithographs in December 1949, and *La Métromanie* was published in January 1950. See Sophie Webel, *L’Oeuvre Gravé et les Livres Illustrés par Jean Dubuffet*, nos. 175-264 (Paris: Baudoin-Lebon, 1991), 64.

2. A growing interest in the surface texture of his prints is evident in Noël Arnaud, ed., *Jean Dubuffet, gravures et lithographies. Catalogue générale et introduction par Noël Arnaud. Exposition particulière des collections du Musée de Silkeborg* (Silkeborg: Le Musée, 1961), no. 134.

3. See for example, the illustrations on page 19 or 21 of *La Métromanie*.

4. Hubert Damisch has discussed Dubuffet’s manipulation of physical material as the *underside* of painting, but I am interested in how that concept relates to the Métro works. Hubert Damisch, *Fenêtre jaune cadmium ou les dessous de la peinture* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 114.

5. See Audrey Isselbacher, “Jean Dubuffet: A Hunger of Images,” *Dubuffet Prints from The Museum of Modern Art*, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 1989), 5-15.

6. Dubuffet references the opening of Drouin’s gallery in November 1947 in Dubuffet, “A Word about the Company of Raw Art,” 1948. Text from Kent Minturn archive, circulated at the 2014 MRC Study Sessions.

Corps de dames (1950)

Phil Taylor
Princeton University

“A simple experiment—more of a challenge, really. I tried to identify with the corpse.”¹
-Zadie Smith

For an intense period between April 1950 and February 1951, Jean Dubuffet found himself occupied with a series of female nudes collectively entitled the *Corps de dames*.² These women with hypertrophic torsos were manifested in paintings on canvas, drawings, gouaches, watercolors with crayon, and lithographs.³ Three drawings from the series (pls. 8.1-8.3), made sometime between June and December 1950 in the midst of the Corps de dames campaign, are held in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art, and together they represent the considerable range of markmaking strategies explored by Dubuffet when he turned to ink on paper in this series. All three are rendered in China ink, variously produced with combinations of pen, calamus reed pen, and wash drawing techniques.

Daniel Cordier describes how Dubuffet's drawing practice offers the skeleton of an idea not present in his paintings.⁴ Likewise Georges Limbour argues that the Corps des dames on the whole do not limit their material pleasures to the surface, but penetrate to the interior of the body.⁵ This interiority seems key to whatever provisional mimetic function the drawings perform. Among the three drawings, skeletal, nervous, and cardiovascular systems are evoked without ever serving as secure references. But if the drawings do enable a seeing-into the body, it is far from the manner of anatomical illustration, which cleanly dissects and clarifies. Rather they map chaotic disorganization. Anatomy is described schematically; otherwise the body is remarkably undifferentiated. Even in a work composed of wire-like skeins (pl. 8.2), it is less the evocation of an organic system than a random agglomeration of discontinuous attacks on the paper.

Despite this physical interiority, whether the dames have been granted psychic interiority is at most ambiguous, as is their position within anything like a world. Insistently frontal and approximating lateral symmetry, the orientation of the bodies remains uncertain. The drawings lack any ground other than the preexisting support. Deracinated, it is unclear if the woman is standing or laid out horizontally

and seen from above. The gestures of the arms—often extended overhead or camouflaged within the torso—and legs—short and squat, or atrophied and barely articulated—provide no further indication.⁶

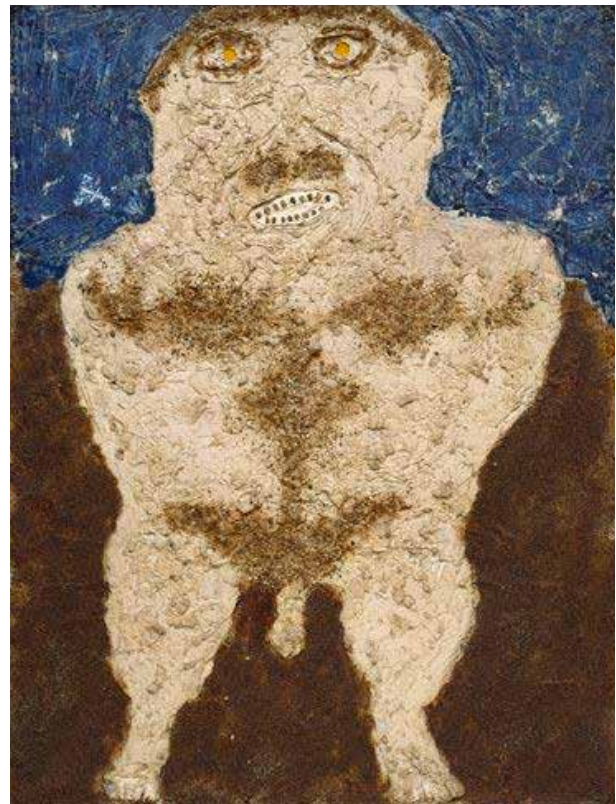


Fig. 8.1 *Will to Power*. January 1946. Oil with pebbles, sand, glass, and rope on canvas, 45 3/4 × 35" (116.2 × 88.9 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. 74.2076

Ungrounded, disoriented, and disorienting—to establish any stable spatial or psychological relationship to these figures is nearly impossible.⁷ Finally, the women of the Corps de dames are most saliently defined by their very fact of being exposed. Subject to the violence of vision and representation, attacked and scraped in the process of their making, Dubuffet's women are at the most vulnerable threshold of the human. Pressing, top and bottom and even to the sides, at the limits of their pictorial frame, these figures spread out across the paper flex between terrified



Pl. 8.1 *Corps de Dame*. June–December 1950. Ink on paper. 10 5/8 x 8 3/8" (27.0 x 21.2 cm). The Joan and Lester Avnet Collection. 54.1978

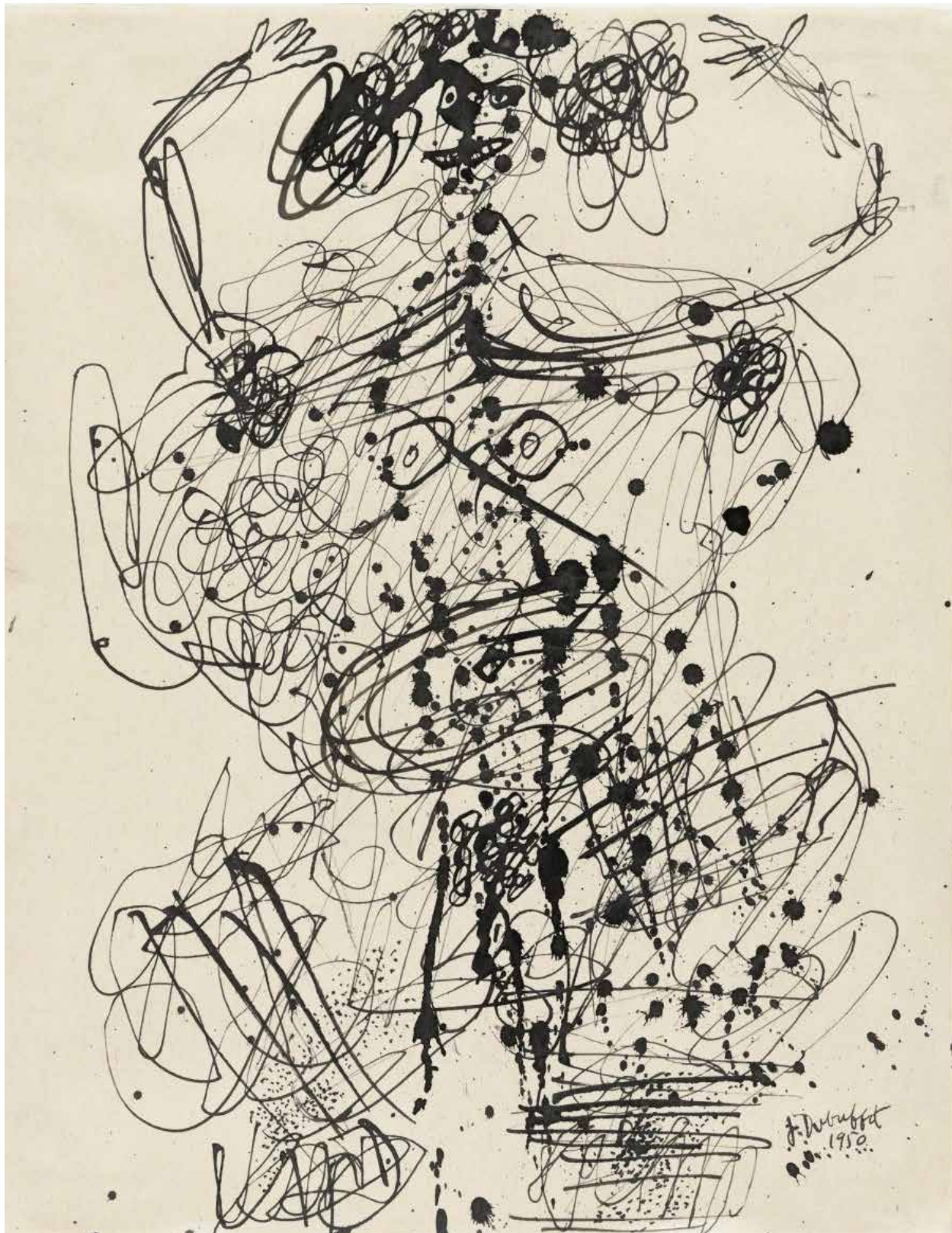
submission and open embrace. As subjects, their exposure is extreme: stripped to a state of nudity, both splayed and on display. If there's a life here, it is a bare life. For Giorgio Agamben, bare life is the form of life exposed to death—a life that can be taken without penal or sacrificial (and thus redemptive) consequences.⁸

Here the bodily interiority of the drawings assumes importance: such figures are reduced to mere anatomy—modern *écorché*. Whether the figures represented in Dubuffet's Corps de dames series are alive at all can be doubted. The specter of death looms over the series. Rather than invoking art historical genre of *le nu*, the titles' nomination of the figure as *un corps* places the accent on the body as material—a material condition in which the possibility of death is always implicit. Dubuffet's series thus leaves open the possibility that the *corps* is also a corpse.⁹

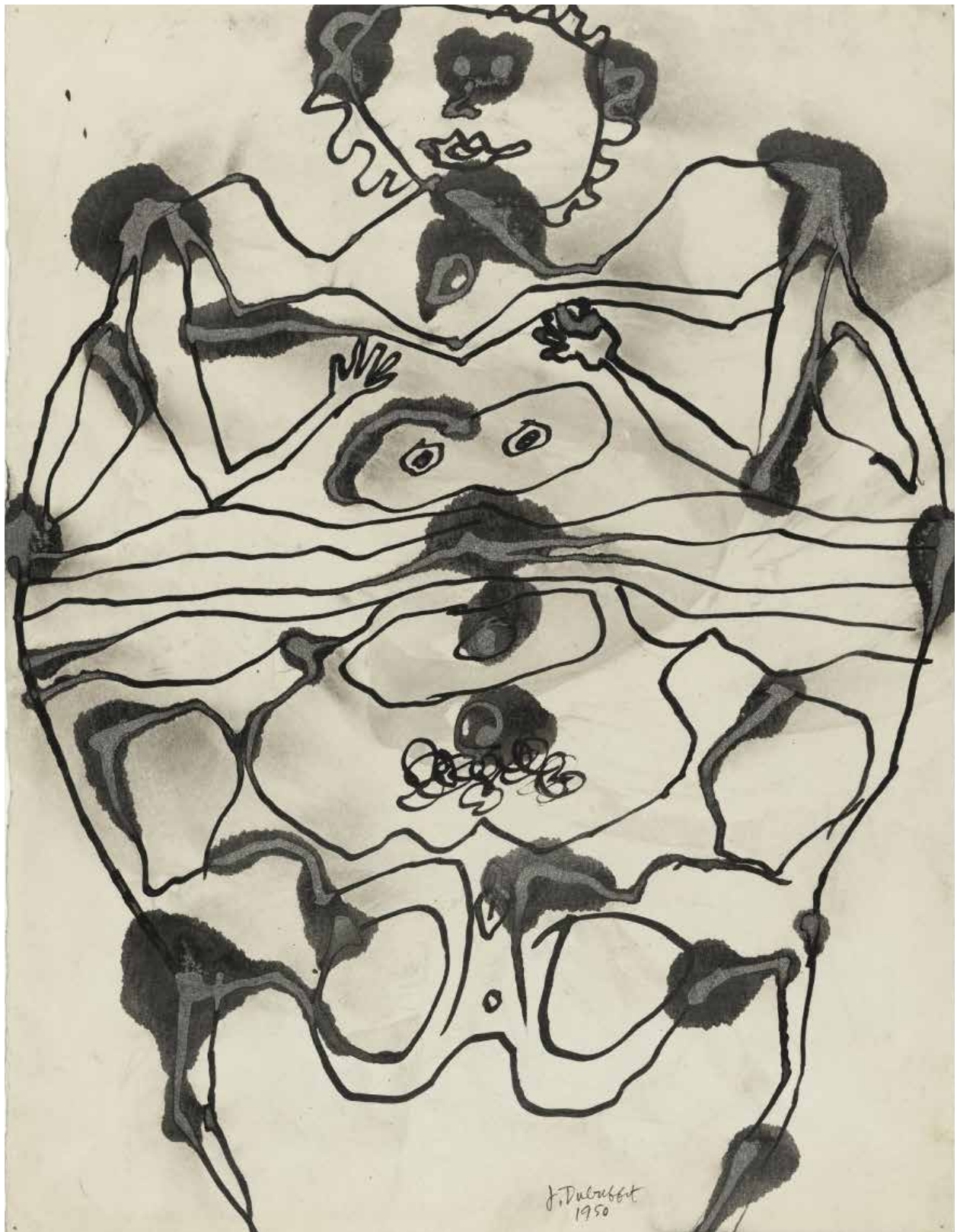
More than the avowed attack on the nude as embodiment of classical Western aesthetic values claimed by Dubuffet, what may be radically disruptive is the presence of death in the Corps de dames.¹⁰ It is perhaps this unstated core that seems to constantly frustrate the work of identification for a viewer standing before the pictures. As if their deviations of form disqualified them from being recognized as human, early critics saw instead monsters, “terrestrial slime, the substance of mountains and moors,” deserts, and “large flowers of ectoplasm.”¹¹ This strikes me as a symptomatic evasion of the problematic crux of the series. For in their frontality the Corps de dames also stage a confrontation with the viewer, demanding to be looked at as a human body, while troubling the very process of coming into a relation, thus destabilizing our own subjectivity. How, then, to identify with a corpse?

Building on Walter Benjamin's suggestion that bare life (*bloßes Leben*) links law and violence, Agamben argues that bare life has provided the foundation for modern politics.¹² A proximate term used to approach this condition of vulnerability and exposure, advanced by Judith Butler, is “precarious life;” to bolster the argument that the artist was concerned with such figures in the postwar era, we might here merely recall Dubuffet's series of assemblages, *Petites statues de la vie précaire* (1954).¹³ In suggesting that the Corps de dames may represent a state of bare life, I hope to open an additional path for considering the role of the political in Dubuffet's work. The implication of *la vita nuda* remains to be elaborated for the other central aspect of Dubuffet's motifs: that the Corps de dames series exclusively represents women.¹⁴

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Pl. 8.2 *Corps de Dame*. June–December 1950. Ink on paper, 10 3/4 x 8 3/8" (27.2 x 21.1 cm). The Joan and Lester Avnet Collection. 55.1978



Pl. 8.3 *Corps de Dame*. June–December 1950. Ink on paper. 12 3/4 x 9 7/8" (32.3 x 24.9 cm). The Joan and Lester Avnet Collection. 56.1978

NOTES

1. This task constitutes the central theme of Smith's beautiful essay-review of a Luca Signorelli drawing, the first two volumes of Karl Ove Knausgaard's *My Struggle*, and Tao Lin's *Taipei*. As shall become evident, I think it quite relevant for thinking about Dubuffet's *Corps de dames*. Zadie Smith, "Man vs. Corpse." *New York Review of Books*, December 5, 2013, last accessed June 11, 2014. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/dec/05/zadie-smith-man-vs-corpse/>.
2. The ideas presented here were developed in close dialogue with Stephanie O'Rourke as she engaged with the two paintings from the *Corps de dames* series held in the Museum's collection. My thinking on these works also benefited from the questions from and conversations with Leah Dickerman, Hal Foster, David Joselit, Kent Minturn, and Alex Potts offered in the discussion and privately during the MRC Study Sessions on May 15 and 16, 2014.
3. See Fascicule VI of the catalogue raisonné of Dubuffet's works, which is devoted to the *Corps de dames*. Max Loreau, *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet: Corps des dames*. Fasc. VI, (Paris, 1965).
4. Daniel Cordier, *The Drawings of Jean Dubuffet*, trans. Cecily Mackworth (New York: G. Braziller, 1960), n.p.
5. Georges Limbour, *Table bon levain à vous de cuire la pâte* (Paris: René Drouin, 1953), 66.
6. Several of the paintings provide a clearer indication, as in an outlier such as *Olympia* (1950), but the cultivation of perspectival ambiguity also seen in *Childbirth* (1944) is more typical in the canvases as well, as they lack horizon lines or other pictorial features or objects that might conventionally shape space within the frame.
7. By contrast, in *Volonté de puissance* (1946) the unclothed male body is insistently phallic, solidly grounded, and includes a horizon line (fig. 8.1).
8. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). In the original Italian, bare life is "*la vita nuda*."
9. Defined in explicit opposition to *âme* or *esprit*, *corps* takes *cadavre* as a synonym.
10. Sarah Rich considers the role of death and the disintegration of the subject with regards to Dubuffet's butterfly works in "Jean Dubuffet: The Butterfly Man," October 119 (Winter 2007): 46-74. In the 1952 text "Landscape Tables, Landscapes of the Mind, Stones of Philosophy," Dubuffet wrote, "the female body, of all the objects in the world, is the one that has long been associated (for Occidentals) with a very specious notion of beauty (inherited from the Greeks and cultivated by the magazine covers); now it pleases me to protest against this aesthetics [sic], which I find miserable and most depressing." Reproduced in Peter Selz, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 63-72.
11. The first two descriptions come from Georges Limbour, who suggests that the *Corps de dames* are women "only in part." Georges Limbour. March 1958. *Jean Dubuffet, Paintings 1943-1957*, exh. cat. (London: Arthur Tooth and Sons Ltd., 1960), n.p. The second two descriptions are by James Fitzsimmons, from an essay reproduced in Loreau, 112.
12. The encoding of bare life in modern politics, according to Agamben, is implicated in the 1679 writ of *habeas corpus*. "Whatever the origin of this formula, used as early as the eighteenth century to assure the physical presence of a person before a court of justice, it is significant that at its center is neither the old subject of feudal relations and liberties nor the future *citoyen*, but rather a pure and simple *corpus*." Agamben, 123.
13. Parsing the stakes of these different terms and their genealogies is unfortunately far beyond the limited scope of this essay. However, given the convergence of some of those terms I have sought to introduce, Butler's consideration of the role of the image is worth noting: "No understanding of the relationship between the image and humanization can take place without a consideration of the conditions and meanings of identification and disidentification. It is worth noting, however, that identification always relies upon a difference that it seeks to overcome, and that its aim is accomplished by reintroducing the difference it claims to have vanquished. The one with whom I identify is not me, and that 'not being me' is the condition of the identification." Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso Books, 2004), 145.
14. This is only the most glaring lack in what I have been able to address here. Likewise, following Agamben's lead, a historicization of bare life and the biopolitical with regards to Dubuffet's immediate milieu is necessary. Many of the key texts that Agamben builds upon are either roughly contemporaneous with the artist's work or more directly relatable to Dubuffet's circles. For Agamben, Nazi Germany represents the most radical advancement of modern politics as biopolitics, with the sovereign decision of Carl Schmitt becoming the decision on the value or non-value of life, or, a life not worth living. Bringing Dubuffet's formal and thematic concerns into dialogue with the biopolitical and the traumas of World War II, whatever his own (often disturbing) autobiographical positions, might be profitably explored in relationship to other implications of Agamben's argument that more directly concern images and representation. These are not limited to but include the structural symmetry linking *homo sacer* and the figure of the sovereign; the latter is explicitly addressed in terms of "picture magic" and Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies*. This line of thinking bare life in relationship to postwar figuration seems to have the potential for broader applicability, as suggested by a quick survey of Leon Golub's *Damaged Man* or Leonard Baskin's *Great Dead Man*, each included along with a Dubuffet *Corps de dame* in Peter Selz's 1959 exhibition *New Images of Man* at The Museum of Modern Art. As a direct precedent for Dubuffet, Jean Fautrier's *Otages* supply an important reference; these include a *Corps d'otage* (1945) and *L'écorché* (1942).

***Jewish Woman* (1950) and *Blue Short-Circuit* (1951)**

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Jewish Woman (*La Juive*, 1950)¹ and *Blue Short-Circuit* (*Court-circuit bleu*, 1951) were among several dozen works in Jean Dubuffet's *Corps de Dames* series produced between April 1950 and February 1951. First exhibited by Pierre Matisse in his New York gallery, the nudes were met with a critical response that was equivocal and at times even hostile.² Dubuffet began the series with painted textural accretions of pigment and viscera, which were later reimagined as messy skeins of ink on paper. This shift from painting to drawing announced the artist's willingness to undermine the sequentiality of traditional studio practice and anticipated his serial work in the late 1950s.

Although unified in their chaotic, haptic depiction, the nudes are assigned—at least nominally—to distinctive typologies.³ *La Juive* in particular invites a dialogue with Jean Fautrier's 1943 painting of the same title, which insists upon a body that is emphatically incompatible with the aesthetic conventions of a hygienic, classical nude privileged within Nazi art, and similarly opposed to the healthy, athletic body of the soldier.⁴ *Blue Short-Circuit*, in contrast, speaks to a less explicit social or racial identity; instead, it presents the confused circuitry of the body's interior, an interconnected landscape of richly layered carnal hues. Yet it is an interior that is not materially or formally differentiated from its exterior, an interior that discloses no interiority.

Both paintings were executed in Dubuffet's *hautes pâtes* technique—aptly described as “the violent encounter between subject and material”⁵—in which the canvas is obscured by a dense, impasto-like accumulation of pigment. Dubuffet applied a thick, matte paint resembling plaster; as it dried he excavated the nude form, scraping away portions to modify the contours of the body. This subtractive modeling leaves traces of pigmented material in place (especially visible in the lower body of *Blue Short-Circuit*), creating a dramatic ambiguity of form in which “the human and inhuman are indistinguishable.”⁶ The tenuous boundary between figure and ground becomes a mere pause inserted into a continuous field of materiality. In this sense the series invites a discussion of Julia Kristeva's theorization of the abject, which threatens the border between self and other, subject and object.⁷

It speaks to the repulsive and material baseness of a boundary that is both constitutive of the self and against which, or through the expulsion of which, the self is made possible.

The female figure is flattened, splayed, disfigured. Its highly schematic rendering recalls the near-contemporary gestural nudes of Willem de Kooning (e.g. *Woman I*, 1950-52). Like de Kooning, Dubuffet references the oft-beleaguered female nude as a site of modernist intervention, whose violent disarticulation serves to undermine an entire formation of aesthetic conventions.⁸ Dubuffet himself argued that, “the female body, of all objects in the world, is one that has long been associated (for Occidentals) with a very specious notion of beauty (inherited from the Greeks and cultivated by the magazine covers); now it pleases me to protest against this aesthetic.”⁹

Instead Dubuffet creates an alternative genealogy of the female nude defined by temporalities of a radically different order. Evoking Paleolithic sculptures, but also “terrestrial slime, the substance of mountains and moors,”¹⁰ the highly schematized figure and its frothy material density suggest a past outside of historical time, one that is anthropological or even geological. However, this remote temporality is also psychological, a self of instinctual, pre-rational cognition and nascent sexual differentiation.

“My intention,” Dubuffet writes of the series, “was for the line not to give the figure any definitive form, but that it should, on the contrary, prevent the figure from taking a specific shape, so that it would be maintained as a general concept in a state of immateriality.”¹¹ The unstable boundary between figure and ground, their embeddedness in one another, suggests a paradox: the indistinct, unresolved, “immaterial” figure is expressed in the formal and technical language of the *hautes pâtes*—which is to say, using the artistic vocabulary of the most emphatic and literal material presence. *La Juive* presents a body of granular pigment, refined contours, and anatomical elements laden with both sexually and racially explicit connotations—a body overdetermined by both its physicality and its historical position. *Blue Short-Circuit*, in contrast,



Pl. 9.1 *The Jewish Woman*. October 1950. Oil on canvas, 45 3/4x 35" (116.2 x 88.7 cm). Gift of Pierre Matisse. 1512.1968

is defined by its emphatic lack of fixity. Concerned with circulation both physiological and electric, *Blue Short-Circuit* points toward a body that is defined as a disruption within such circuits and, crucially, toward a subjectivity that is contingent and provisional, the temporary alignment of material effects and states whose contours, like those of the nude, remain unbounded.

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Pl. 9.2 *Blue Short Circuit*. February 1951. Oil on canvas, 46 1/8 x 35 1/4" (117 x 89.4 cm). The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection. 593.1967

NOTES

1. *La Juive* can also be translated as *The Jewess*, a title which more effectively captures the anti-Semitic connotations that inhere in the original French.
2. One review even accused the artist of flattening Parisians into the form of their beloved crepes. H. McBride, *Art News*, January 1951. As quoted in Daniel Abadie, ed., *Jean Dubuffet*, exh. cat., (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2001), 372.
3. In this sense the *Corps de Dames* can be read as a foil to the pantheon of male thinkers both enshrined and caricatured by Dubuffet in his earlier portrait series; such a comparison would invite a more critical, and undoubtedly important, reconsideration of the role of gender in these works. Although it necessarily falls beyond the purview of this brief text, such a reading would need to consider, among other things, the fantasy of a female body defined by its total and unmitigated visual availability, the grotesque formal violence by which this is achieved, and also the implicit gendering of physicality itself as feminine in contrast to a male portrait subject defined by his intellectual pursuits.
4. Rachel E. Perry, "Jean Fautrier's *Jolies Juives*," *October* 108 (2004): 51-72.
5. "Le rencontre violente entre sujet et matière." Renato Barilli, "Les Chemins de l'oeuvre," *L'Arc* 35, "Jean Dubuffet: Culture et Subversion" (2006): 15. It is worth noting that neither painting belongs to Dubuffet's earlier *hautes pâtes* "period," in which the canvas was even more richly and densely encrusted. *La Juive* and *Court-circuit bleu* evince a flatter and more restrained materiality when compared with these earlier works.
6. "L'humain ne se distingue pas de l'inhumain." Gilbert Lascault, "Une revolution permanente et morcelée," *L'Arc* 35, "Jean Dubuffet: Culture et Subversion" (2006): 47.
7. Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
8. The inclusion of an Olympia, 1950, in the series suggests that Dubuffet explicitly cites the formal disruptions and "female pulchritude" mined by Édouard Manet. Helen Franc argues that the nudes of the *Corps de dames* are "even more shockingly repellent" than those of Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Helen M. Franc, *An Invitation to See* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991).
9. "Landscape Tables, Landscapes of the Mind, Stones of Philosophy," trans. Jean Dubuffet and Marcel Duchamp, in Peter Selz and Jean Dubuffet, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 64.
10. Georges Limbour, March 1958. *Jean Dubuffet, Paintings 1943-1957*, exh. cat. (London: Arthur Tooth and Sons Ltd., 1960).
11. Dubuffet, "Corps de Dames" in Georges Limbour, *Table bon levain à vous de cuire la pâte* (Paris: René Drouin, 1953), 94-5. Translation has been taken from Selz et al., *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, 53.

The Magician and The Ragman (1954)

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The Magician and *The Ragman* (pls. 10.1 and 10.2) belong to the *Petites statues de la vie précaire*, a series of sculptures Dubuffet began in March 1954, which were exhibited for the first time at the Galerie Rive Gauche in October of that same year.¹ Dubuffet recalled how he created these works through a process of “assemblage” using various materials he had collected over the course of the year, beginning with papier mâché and steel wool, then urban debris such as car parts and clinkers, and finally employing natural materials such as sponges, sticks, and various kinds of stone.²

Of course, Dubuffet’s statements about his working method and aesthetic philosophy must be taken with a grain of salt. That MoMA’s sculpture conservator Lynda Zyckerman has found *The Ragman* to contain a wire armature, complicates its status as “assemblage,” and while the work comprises supposedly “found” material, which Zyckerman suspects to be coal slag used in concrete reinforcement, it has perhaps been assembled from several pieces, manipulated and painted, yet gives the appearance of a cohesive whole.³ Dubuffet’s description of his working method therefore characteristically oversimplifies a complex and highly contrived process.

MoMA’s description of both these sculptures as “slag” also oversimplifies their material specificity. When first exhibited *The Magician* was listed as *scories et racines* while *The Ragman*’s materials were given as *mâchefer*.⁴ “*Scories*” and “*mâchefer*” can be translated as “slag,” but also respectively as “scoria” and “clinker.” This difference underscores the method by which Dubuffet collected these materials. *The Ragman* dates from when Dubuffet describes collecting “clinkers I picked out of the trash cans in the apartment house where I was living [...] as well as ... different kinds of rubbish (old trampled cords, broken glass, big rusty nails) in the railroad yards of Montrouge.”⁵ *The Magician* on the other hand dates from a moment when he used “scoria, pieces of lava, and volcanic stone picked up in Auvergne.”⁶ It is important to distinguish between these works as comprising, on the one hand, an industrial waste material collected in Paris, and on the other, a natural substance formed thousands of years ago in France’s countryside.

Materially, Dubuffet’s sculptures make fascinating case

studies for interrogating the figure-ground relationship so central to criticism of his work. While in many of Dubuffet’s paintings and works on paper, an ambiguity exists between where figures begin and their surroundings end, here there is no doubt: the body has become landscape, and the landscape has materialized as body. It is in this way that their materials become significant: *The Ragman* is the body as urban detritus—a Pompeiian figure of the modern metropolis—and *The Magician* an ancient and sublime landscape. As is typical with Dubuffet’s work, our vision vacillates between the microscopic and macroscopic when we view these works up-close; they are both monumental, craggy surfaces, while remaining minute and granular.

It is productive to compare these figures to those of the most prominent sculptor in Paris at the time, Alberto Giacometti. Giacometti’s bodies seem to dwindle increasingly to the point of almost disappearing, while Dubuffet’s works seem to accumulate, aggregate, grow, and extend into space. That Dubuffet entitled these works “small statues of precarious life,” implies that entropy was built into their system. They deteriorate as they dissipate into space; their chaos of form becoming more, rather than less apparent.

Dubuffet never expounded on his choice of subjects and titles for this series, yet they are far from arbitrary. For example, the Morvan region, where Dubuffet supposedly collected roots for works like *The Magician* in spring 1954, was a key supplier of charcoal and firewood to Paris, and was the site of a major folk culture revival after World War II, known for its strong adherence to curious and outmoded cultural traditions.⁷ Dubuffet was undoubtedly aware of *L’Ame du Morvan*, a quasi-anthropological study of the Morvan region, written partly in the local patois and published in 1923 by Alfred Guillaume. It was after this text that he named another of his *Petites statues* held in the Hirshhorn collection, described in their 1993 retrospective as “half-peasant, half-sorcerer.”⁸

As Guillaume noted in 1923, in this region where “life was hard but close to nature” and man had “equal regard for animals as for man,” “scarcely fifty years ago, across the whole extent of the Morvan region, sorcerers, ghosts and evil emanations were believed in.”⁹ Guillaume reported that



Pl. 10.1 *The Magician*. September 1954. Slag and grapevines, 43 1/2 x 19 x 8 1/4" (109.8 x 48.2 x 21 cm) including slag base. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. N. Richard Miller and Mr. and Mrs. Alex L. Hillman and Samuel Girard Funds. 871.1968



Pl. 10.2 *The Ragman*. April 1954. Slag on cast stone base, 27 1/2 x 9 1/2 x 7 1/4" (69.4 x 24.2 x 18.6 cm) including base. Nina and Gordon Bunshaft Bequest. 627.1994

such sorcerers still existed even in the 1920s in the form of witch-doctors who sold their consultations in Paris, characters he describes as “Merlins in clogs.”¹⁰ Such individuals could undoubtedly have appealed to Dubuffet’s almost anthropological interest in marginal figures and so-called primitive cultures, through which he sought to access a form of expression unencumbered by bourgeois convention.

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NOTES

1. Jean Dubuffet, “Memoire on the Development of My Work from 1952” (1960), trans. Louise Varese, in Peter Selz, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 87. *The Magician* (Le Magicien) is listed as no. 39 in the catalogue and *The Ragman* (Le Dépenaillé) as no. 7. See *Petites statues de la vie précaire de Jean Dubuffet* (Paris: Galerie Rive Gauche, 1954).

2. Dubuffet, 87-90.

3. Lynda Zyckerman in conversation at the 2014 MRC Study Sessions, January 23, 2014, The Museum of Modern Art.

4. *Petites statues de la vie précaire de Jean Dubuffet*.

5. Dubuffet, 87-90.

6. Ibid.

7. James T. Demetrian, “L’Âme du Morvan,” in *Jean Dubuffet 1943-1963: Paintings, Sculptures, Assemblages: An Exhibition* (Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, in association with the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 94.

8. Ibid.

9. Alfred Guillaume, *L’Âme du Morvan: Contes, légendes, chansons, prières, proverbes et dictons, en patois, croyances, costumes, préjugés etc.* (1923), ed. Les Amis du Vieux Saulieu, (Avallon, 1970), 116. Author’s own translation.

10. Guillaume, 117.

Cursed Gossip (1954)

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Jean Dubuffet created *Cursed Gossip* as one in a series of 44 sculptures made during the spring and summer of 1954. These *Petites statues de la vie précaire* were all, save one (*L'Âme du Morvan*), single figures and heads. Roughly textured, they were compiled of “non-art” material, accumulated into vaguely anthropomorphic accretions. Beginning with sculpted newsprint (*Grouloulou*) and steel wool (*Gigoton*), the series exploited natural, industrial, and waste materials like slag, sponge, and charcoal (the medium used for *Cursed Gossip*). Dubuffet had long been intrigued by found material, purportedly collecting from childhood objects of refuse, mineral samples, and even fossils.¹ He had gone prospecting in the flea market at St. Ouen, like André Breton and countless others, and was personally connected to Surrealism and its love of chance.² His sculptures moved from *objet trouvé* toward a base materialism, “letting the materials speak out with their own voice.”³

Dubuffet was explicit that his little statues, bleak but humorous, had developed from previous two-dimensional assemblages: “It should be noted that these works borrowed my method of assemblage, and may, therefore, be considered a development of the butterfly-wing collages, of the lithographs made of super-posed and glued fragments, and of the *Assemblages d’empreintes*.”⁴ During 1954, while working on the *Petites statues de la vie précaire*, Dubuffet continued to experiment with figures in quick-drying enamel on canvas. The *Statues* group, then, is one example of Dubuffet’s simultaneous interrogation of themes across media. He would return to sculpture in 1959 with another group of heads of the same title, made from papier mâché.

Cursed Gossip is compounded of one large piece and a few smaller chunks of charcoal from the Morvan in Burgundy, set into a cement base. Dubuffet possibly used that same cement or a glue to adhere multiple charcoal pieces together, to coax the appearance of a grotesque human face. The subject may represent the eponymous gossipier, but it may also be read as a nude torso with breasts and thighs. It is more often discussed as a head, but referred to by at least one owner as *La Venus Noire*,⁵ although not by the artist himself. A “Black Venus” subject matter would call up a host of art historical associations from the Classical nude through Gauguin and, later, Nikki de St. Phalle, perhaps erroneously.

Dubuffet famously rejected Classical beauty, proportion, and the nude. He also courted confusion. We may be excused for perceiving multiple, shifting forms in *Cursed Gossip*.

Charcoal lends to *Cursed Gossip* a linear quality absent in the related slag and sponge works, and a range in depth of surface where the charcoal has cracked. It also offers up a variety of black textures that must have titillated the artist, “because such things as luster, gloss, polish, roughness and delicacy are extremely important.”⁶ It is tempting to read a kind of perverse poetics into the choice of charcoal, here blunt and awkward, and opposed to its refined state as a traditional artist’s material.

It is barely debatable that the work of Art Brut artists directly inspired the aesthetic of this sculpture series. It certainly encouraged Dubuffet’s spirit of bricolage. By 1954 Dubuffet had a substantial Art Brut collection sitting in limbo at Alfonso Ossorio’s Long Island estate, and he had shown outsider work at René Drouin Gallery, Paris, as early as 1947.⁷ Convincing morphological comparisons have been drawn between his *Petites statues de la vie précaire* and small-scale sculptures by Gaston Chaissac, Maurice Baskine, Pascal Maisonneuve, and *Juva*, as well as works of a type known as *Les Barbus Müller*, all by then in his Art Brut collection.⁸

Dubuffet appropriated an Art Brut aesthetic as part of his anti-cultural program. There were, however, obvious differences between the Art Brut works Dubuffet collected and his own little sculptures. Notably, his own works were structurally set into cement bases, rendering his figures permanently vertical. It amounts to the difference between a fetish and a statue of a fetish.⁹ The *Petites Statues* may be read as a reification of Dubuffet’s ideas of Art Brut in his collection’s absence. Those ideas had gained some traction by 1954. The statues might also memorialize Dubuffet’s role as the creator and conduit of the Art Brut genre. Because Art Brut artists were, by definition, mentally, physically, or spiritually isolated, Dubuffet acted both as an umbrella and a base, legitimating—advocating for?—his Outsiders with a narrative of discovery.

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Pl. 11 *Cursed Gossip*. June 1954. Charcoal on cast stone base, 13 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2" (33.2 x 9 x 9 cm) including base. Gift of Henry Slesar. 298.1975

NOTES

1. Thomas Messer, "Introduction," in *Jean Dubuffet and Art Brut: from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Pierre Matisse, and Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1986), 9.
2. Jean Dubuffet, "Saint-Ouen—Le Marché," *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants* 1, ed. Hubert Damisch (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).
3. Andreas Franzke, "Jean Dubuffet: *Petites Statues de la Vie Précaire*," trans. John William Gabriel (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1988), 6.
4. Jean Dubuffet, "Memoire of the Development of My Work from 1952," trans. Louise Varese, in *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, ed. Peter Selz (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 89.
5. Robert Broglia, attorney of Marc Berlet, letter to Pierre Matisse Gallery, 26 June 1970, in the Pierre Matisse Gallery Archives. MA 5020. Department of Literary and Historical Manuscripts, The Morgan Library & Museum. New York.
6. Jean Dubuffet, "Notes for the Well-Read," reprinted in *Jean Dubuffet: Towards an Alternate Reality*, ed. Mildred Glimcher (New York: ace Publications, 1987), 68.
7. Jill Shaw, who authored a 2013 dissertation, "A Coat That Doesn't Fit: Dubuffet in Retrospect 1944-51," concurred during the second meeting of the MRC Study Sessions on May 15, 2014: "I think this work must be reviewed within the context of Dubuffet's complicated relationship with Art Brut at this time." Shaw stressed the physical absence of Dubuffet's collection in 1954 while he was making the *Petites Statues*, and Kent Minturn further clarified the 1951 dissolution of the Compagnie de l'Art Brut after Dubuffet's falling out with Breton. I am particularly grateful for Jill Shaw's encouragement in my consideration of the *Petite Statues* as reifications of Dubuffet's idea of Art Brut.
8. See Lucienne Peiry, *Art Brut: The Origins of Outsider Art* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006).
9. On this point, Hal Foster cautioned, at the May meeting of the MRC Study Sessions, against the term "totem," that I had originally used. Here "fetish," broadly defined as an object held in superstitious reverence or obsessive devotion, does not accurately apply to all of Dubuffet's Art Brut, but certainly some. For example, Baskine's sculptures—*Cursed Gossip* in particular resembles these—were forged from the artist's interest in the occult, and may be assumed to have held some magical power for Baskine. See *Maurice Baskine (1901-1968): rétrospective exposition du 27 juin au 2 septembre 2003: Maison Fonpeyrouse Maison des Surréalistes*, exh. cat. (Cordes sur Ciel: OMT, 2003).

The Cow with the Subtile Nose (1954)

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Jean Dubuffet painted *Vache au nez subtil* (*The Cow with the Subtile Nose*) in September 1954, during a period when his wife Lili was convalescing in the countryside of Puy-de-Dôme, Auvergne. Encountering cows during his walks through the surrounding environs, the artist began making images that featured the animal, including at least sixteen paintings created between August and December, as well as 15 gouaches, 39 drawings, and a notebook of sketches.¹ Having previously painted scenes with cows in the 1940s, Dubuffet maintained that he returned to the subject because he enjoyed observing the placid creature in its pasture. But he generated the finished works in the studio—using, he claimed, mostly his memory to produce the pictures.²

In *The Cow with the Subtile Nose*, Dubuffet incorporates enamels manufactured for industrial applications onto his canvas, combining them with oil paint on the support. The artist exploited the differences of the media by playing with the timing of and methods for introducing them in his composition, deliberately creating crazing and other cracks.³ To achieve the cow's marbled flesh, Dubuffet could have used various techniques—such as thinning his paints in order to mottle the tawny hues.⁴ Diluted blues and soft networks of lines give an appearance of internal structure and differentiate the bovine's head from its body. The title of the painting seems to play with that relationship between form and technique—*subtil* meaning both “understated” and “skilled”. Yet Dubuffet often breaches the dark blue contour giving the beast its shape. Browns and beiges slip over the boundary, as does the verdant substance covering the composition's background.

The transgression of the line creates a slippage between the spaces on the canvas.⁵ Dubuffet introduces other kinds of ambiguity as well. The cow's legs seem too short to support its heft, but the disparate scales of the trunk and limbs helps to create a perspectival effect. At the same time, the background undoes any clear sense of pictorial depth, even as it reveals the material layers of the composition. Scratches and gouges in the green paint expose the dark brown underpainting and canvas support. The roughened plane reads both as a grassy pasture and as a vertical surface reminiscent of the walls in Dubuffet's earlier

compositions—or even of images of cave paintings, such as those in Lascaux, that captured the interest of so many in the artist's circle.

The Cow, however, blends the primordial (or “primitive”) with the pastoral to comedic effect. Unlike the prehistoric cattle and other ruminants of Lascaux, the creature depicted here appears to be a domesticated farm animal, with the udder and teats of a lactating female.⁶ This particular feature is highlighted by Georges Limbour who, writing generally of Dubuffet's cow pictures from the period, would describe the animal as a noble if also unfortunate beast: burdened by an awkward body and piebald coat (making it “un peu clownesque”), its udder was always being milked, both figuratively by the artist and literally by an imagined dairymaid.⁷ The author conjures an amusingly psychoanalytic scene when he likens Dubuffet to a snake in the grass seeking an opportunity to latch onto the cow's glands before the milkmaid starts her work. The teats hanging from the organ can be read as sexually ambiguous protuberances, both mammary and phallic in form. Limbour thus gives us a more bodily possibility for interpreting the interaction of fluids and other materials on Dubuffet's canvas.

Dubuffet, too, would talk about the humorous qualities of his cows. In his *Mémoire sur le développement de mes travaux à partir de 1952* (1957), Dubuffet suggests that he sought to inspire an ambivalent reaction in the viewer by treating many of his cows like “une espèce de guignol saugrenu” and the related pastoral scenes as “une sorte theater grotesque, de clownerie de cirque”—characteristics that he hoped would seem unexpected for the subject matter. To that end, he equates his ambitions for his cow pictures to those in the *Portraits*, the *Arabs*, the *Corps de Dames*, and the *Paysages Grotesques*.⁹ In the series, however, the animal becomes the subject of the painting, substituting the human figure with a different creaturely form. Indeed, Dubuffet characterizes “les grotesques «Vaches» de 1954” as evincing “l'humeur humanisante et interventionniste,” qualities the painter believes he can achieve by making the non-human seem surprisingly human.¹⁰ The wide-eyed gaze of *The Cow* seems to register the very reaction that Dubuffet wants to elicit from the viewer—a “shock” of recognition, however absurd.¹¹ Yet there is also



Pl. 12 *The Cow with the Subtle Nose*. September 1954. Oil and enamel on canvas, 35 x 45 3/4" (88.9 x 116.1 cm). Benjamin Scharps and David Scharps Fund. 288.1956

something distinctly bovine about that stare—evoking other usages of the word “vache” as both a pejorative and an exclamation in French.¹² What sort of laughter does this “humanized” cow generate, and at whose expense is the joke? What exactly is the nature of Dubuffet’s humor?

A critic writing in 1955 hints that Dubuffet is lampooning taste. On the artist’s exhibition in London, Alexandre Vialatte comments that two cartoonish cow paintings inspired “un groupe de riches fromagers” to form a “société pour exploiter le fromage des vaches de Dubuffet. On penche à croire qu’il aurait le goût de Chester, d’autres experts veulent savoir qu’au contraire ce serait le produit laitier le plus incroyable du marché.”¹³ Although the author pokes fun at a favorable British review, his words also reveal broader concerns about consumption in postwar France in which the aesthetic and gastronomic often overlapped. In deliberate contrast to depictions of cattle in the French tradition, such as the well-formed livestock in the pastorals of the Barbizon School or in the workaday scenes of Realism, the expression of Dubuffet’s subject befits an animal that spends much of its day grazing on grass, chewing cud, and making cowpats on the farm. (As others have suggested, the question of materiality in Dubuffet’s art is often also one of scatology.¹⁴)

What makes *The Cow* grotesque is not simply the relationship between painted ground and fertilized soil. In June 1954, three months before Dubuffet made his picture, Pierre Mendès-France was elected prime minister. Known for his predilection for drinking dairy, Mendès-France began trying to stem the national production and consumption of wine by the fall—increasingly advocating for milk instead. The ascetic measure outraged the public, but it especially galvanized far right groups such as the Union for the Defense of Merchants and Artisans led by Pierre Poujade, known for his anti-Semitic and xenophobic populism. The Poujadists comprised members of the petit bourgeois like shopkeepers, farmers, and perhaps even cheesemakers—classes typically associated with the consumption of kitsch, the market of bad taste, and “ersatz culture.”¹⁵ Dubuffet, ostensible enemy of culture and its imitations, was vague about his own ideological positions.¹⁶ Still, the conservative rhetoric about the *petit gars* in national debates about the changing economy raises the question of what becomes of the artist’s “common man.”¹⁷ The political landscape surrounding the production of the painting reminds us that the cow is an animal between nature and culture, especially in Dubuffet’s work.

In the essay “Wine and Milk,” first printed in the April 1955 issue of *Les lettres nouvelles*, Roland Barthes suggests that milk was a social palliative. With a “creamy and therefore

sopitive nature,” it “is cosmetic, it fastens, covers up, restores.” It, Barthes suggests, distracts from the ethical dilemmas of wine production, an industry entangled in “French capitalism” and colonialism, two issues made urgent by the time of publication in the Algerian War.¹⁸ Always ambivalent, Dubuffet was willing to exploit the “calm and serenity” that cows, like milk, seemed to evoke.¹⁹ In *The Cow*, however, Dubuffet grants himself license to play with such associations by using mimetic strategies he otherwise rejects in his human figures. Admixtures of oil and enamel become milky; the browns, blues, and greens are vulgar approximations of naturalistic palettes. That glassy stare—the last detail Dubuffet painted on the canvas—fixes us. Perhaps because we are all cows in the eyes of the artist.

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NOTES

1. In a questionnaire provided by The Museum of Modern Art, Dubuffet estimates that he painted around twenty images. My numbers are culled from the *Catalogue des travaux*. “Artists Questionnaire,” Collection Files, 288.1956, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1; *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet, élaboré par Max Loreau*, vol. X (Lausanne: Weber éditeur, 1969), 77–116.
2. Dubuffet confirmed that *The Cow with the Subtle Nose* was painted in Paris. “Artists Questionnaire,” 1; Jean Dubuffet, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, ed. Peter Selz (New York: The Museum of Modern Art; distributed by Doubleday, Garden City, 1962), 96–97.
3. The artist noted that the work is an oil made “avec mélanges de peintures industrielles dites ‘peintures laquées’ probablement glycerol phtaliques.” Ibid. See also Dubuffet, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, 92, 103.
4. I am indebted to conservators Anny Aviram and Chris McGlinchey for the observations they shared at the MRC Study Sessions, at MoMA, on January 23, 2014.
5. My use of the word “transgression” is a deliberate reference to Georges Bataille’s *Lascaux*, or *The Birth of Art*, published in 1955, a year after Dubuffet painted *The Cow with the Subtle Nose*. Bataille’s notion of transgression, of course, differs from Dubuffet’s rule breaking as I describe it here as matters of form (figure/ground) and of material (the interactions of paint and enamel). But Bataille establishes relationships between work and play, human and animal, death and desire that could be productive contrasts for analyzing the humor of Dubuffet’s *Cow* considered later. Georges Bataille, *Lascaux; or, The Birth of Art: Prehistoric Painting* (Lausanne: Skira, 1955), 32–37.
6. While the images in Dubuffet’s sketchbook from Durtol (Puy-de-Dôme) in September 1954 show cattle with and without udders, nearly all of the cows in the paintings, gouaches, and drawings are depicted with those sex characteristics in the *Catalogue des travaux*. Earlier paintings of cows from 1943 include milking scenes, as in *Trayeuse au Turban* and *Grante Traite Solitaire*. *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet, élaboré par Max Loreau*, vol. I (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1964), 108; *Catalogue des travaux*, X: 77–116.
7. Georges Limbour, “Extrait de Georges Limbour, «le Recensement universel, deserts et peuplements de Jean Dubuffet»” in *Catalogue des travaux*, X: 126.
8. See, for example, the confusion of a young boy about the relationship between udder and penis in Sigmund Freud, “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy [‘Little Hans’] in The ‘Wolfman’ and Other Cases, trans. Louise Adey Huish, general ed. Adam Phillips (New York: Penguin, 2003), 4–5. Dubuffet’s brief comparisons between his method of drawing and those of children in his descriptions of the cow images may therefore be more meaningful than they first seem. See *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, 101–102. I am grateful to Sarah Rich for pointing out the udder’s double reference.
9. Jean Dubuffet, “Mémoire sur le développement de mes travaux à partir de 1952,” in *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 105, 541. See also Dubuffet, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, 103.
10. Dubuffet, “Mémoire,” 131; Dubuffet, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, 138.
11. Dubuffet wants the “presence” of his “objects” to “come as a shock” (but in French “surgesse avec plus de force”). Ibid., 105; ibid., 103.
12. I am grateful to Phil Taylor for pointing out the phrase “La vache!” to me.
13. Vialatte refers to *Vaches au pré* (1954) and *Vache la belle allègre* (1954), both exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Art. Alexandre Vialatte, *Chroniques de la montagne*, vol. 1 (1952–1961), Bouquins (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000), 282.
14. See, for example, the entry on base materialism in Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (New York: Zone Books; Cambridge: distributed by MIT Press, 1997), 59, 62.
15. And also bad politics, per Clement Greenberg in “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 10.
16. I thank Romy Golan, Sarah Rich, and AnnMarie Perl for their suggestions regarding the French political context in relation to Dubuffet’s life, work, and ambivalent political positions. As Perl pointed out, Mendès-France’s initiative could have been anathema to Dubuffet, who took over the family wine business before and during the Occupation. For a history of Mendès-France’s battle on wine and the response to it, see Joseph Estle Bohling, “The Sober Revolution: The Political and Moral Economy of Alcohol in Modern France, 1954–1976” (Ph.D., University of California, 2012), 54–80.
17. I borrow Poujade’s “petit gars” quote from Roger Eatwell, “Poujadism and Neo-Poujadism: From Revolt to Reconciliation,” in *Social Movements and Protest in France*, ed. Philip G. Cerny (London: Frances Pinter, 1982), 75.
18. Roland Barthes, “Wine and Milk” in *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 82.
19. Dubuffet, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, 103.

Dubuffet's New Naturalism: *My Cart, My Garden and Post at the Foot of a Wall* (1955)

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In January 1955, Jean Dubuffet moved to Vence, a small town nestled in the stony hills west of Nice. His rural surroundings served as inspiration for his work, exemplified by MoMA's *My Cart, My Garden and Post at the Foot of a Wall* of June 1955. In Vence, he quickly became preoccupied with the gardens that surrounded the town's many villas, which he described as "badly kept and running wild," filled with twigs, dead leaves, and "tiny plants mixed with little stones."¹ He also became fascinated by what he described as "the tiny botanical world at the foot of the walls, worthless and charming, overrunning the side of the road among little stones, and mixed with the dusty trash that collects along neglected roadways."²

From his writings we know that Dubuffet rejected traditional Western notions of beauty.³ In 1952 he wrote, "The beauty for which I aim needs little to appear—unbelievably little. Any place—the most destitute—is good enough for it. I would like people to look at my work as an enterprise for the rehabilitation of scorned values."⁴ Thus, it is no surprise that he was attracted to these overlooked, neglected, and untamed patches of land and selected them as the subjects for the paintings, drawings, watercolors, *assemblages d'empreintes*, butterfly wing paintings, and *tableaux d'assemblages* that he made over the course of his first year in Vence.⁵

For Dubuffet, together the two subjects of the overgrown, weed- and stone-filled gardens and "the little plants growing along the roadside" provided "an occasion for musing on the tenuous and somewhat absurd character of the trouble man takes to plant these gardens which are so soon victoriously taken over by unbridled Nature, and also for wondering at the sumptuous richness and variety of one small square meter of cracked asphalt where bits of grass are growing."⁶ Clearly, his choice of subject is tinged with irony—the absurdity and futility of the gardener's labor in Vence is what he finds so engaging about this landscape. It is precisely this tension between the gardener's desire to cultivate this harsh land and his ultimate failure to do so that appealed to Dubuffet.

Perhaps in order to capture these particular qualities of the terrain, in Vence he often worked from life, treating

the earth and its inhabitants in a relatively naturalistic manner that prefigured his mimetic transcription of the soil in the *Materiologies* and *Texturologies* of the late 1950s. He described studying and making "patient pencil sketches" of the stone wall in front of his house, as well as taking a folding stool and sketchbook around Vence to "make detailed notes" in front of "these tiny spectacles."⁷ *Post at the Foot of a Wall* seems to be one of these drawing he made in a sketchbook *en pleine air*, given the meticulous detail with which he described the small pebbles and clumps of grass in the foreground and the jagged stones that make up the wall behind.⁸ This drawing is highly unusual in Dubuffet's oeuvre in that it served as a preparatory sketch for a gouache with an almost identical composition.⁹

His work in Vence also betrays a growing enthusiasm for botany, given his descriptions of the diverse vegetation he encountered there including "tufts of grass, lowly weeds that look like stars, such as plantains, thistles or dandelions," as well as "thyme, mosses, lichens."¹⁰ This attention to different vegetal species finds its apotheosis in the series of *Botanical Elements* of 1959, which he assembled from an assortment of dried plants.¹¹

In *My Cart, My Garden* and several other paintings in the series "*Charrettes, Jardins*" of May to June 1955, Dubuffet developed a unique method of creating various textures in relief by pressing tools he bought at hardware and department stores into fresh paste he had slathered across the entire surface of the canvas.¹² "Cake molds, various household and kitchen utensils, salad baskets, a soap dish, a ribbed rubber mat, sacking with a very large mesh" are apparently some of the implements he employed.¹³ Many of the imprints made with these items take the form of repetitive, regularly spaced cross-hatchings and round perforations. After the paste had dried, with a fine brush he delineated the stones and plants like those observed in the gardens of Vence. Yet his initial impressions do not exactly correspond to these later outlines. They sometimes enhance but more often distract from the depicted plants. Rather than further describing the ground's vegetal and mineral components, the impressions seem to represent the gardener's visible attempts to cultivate the inhospitable, hostile soil by raking and aerating it. Thus, the gardener's



Pl. 13.1 *My Cart, My Garden*. June 1955. Oil on canvas, 35 1/8 x 45 3/4" (89.2 x 115.9 cm). James Thrall Soby Bequest. 1219.1979



Pl. 13.2 *Post at the Foot of a Wall*. 1955. Pencil on paper, 12 5/8 x 9 1/4" (32.0 x 23.5 cm). The Joan and Lester Avnet Collection. 67.1978

attempted cultivation of the wild terrain of Venice is conflated with the artist's "cultivation" of his unruly materials to create this picture. In other words, the depicted trace of the gardener's labor is identified with the actual trace of the artist's process.

Post at the Foot of a Wall similarly aligns represented and literal indexical marks, apparent in the wheel tracks in the foreground. The theme of indexical signification is not unique to these works—it can be found earlier in Dubuffet's output as well. The artist was intrigued by graffiti on walls, hopscotch drawings that children made on the pavement, and, in North Africa, the imprint of human tracks in the sand.¹⁴ His interest in index as a subject is understandable given his desire to keep the viewer aware of his artistic process. From his writings we know that he saw his work as a collaboration with his malleable materials, partly controlled by him and partly dependent on their inherent physical qualities. By emphasizing his materials and providing the visible trace of his labor, the viewer is challenged to recognize the artist's working process, and consequently his physical and mental engagement with the materials.¹⁵

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NOTES

1. Jean Dubuffet, "Memoir on the Development of My Work from 1952," trans. Louise Varèse, in *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, ed. Peter Selz (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 110.
2. Ibid.
3. For instance, see Jean Dubuffet, "Anticultural Positions," lecture given at the Arts Club of Chicago, December 20, 1951, in *Jean Dubuffet: Works, Writings and Interviews*, ed. Valérie Da Costa and Fabrice Hergott (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2006), 117-119.
4. Jean Dubuffet, "Landscaped Tables, Landscapes of the Mind, Stones of Philosophy," trans. Jean Dubuffet and Marcel Duchamp, in *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, ed. Peter Selz (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 64.
5. See Max Loreau, ed., *Charrettes, jardins, personnages monolithes*, vol. 11 of *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet* (Paris: Weber, 1969).
6. Dubuffet, "Memoir," 112.
7. Ibid., 110.
8. The serrated left edge also suggests the sheet was torn out of a sketchbook.
9. *Pied d'un poteau devant un mur (Chemin du calvaire)*, June 1955, cat. no. 90, in Loreau, *Charrettes*, 71.
10. Dubuffet, "Memoir," 109.
11. See, for instance, MoMA's *Baptism of Fire* (September 1959).
12. These paintings make up a subset of the works grouped under the heading "*Herbes, Charrettes, Terres herbeuses*" in Loreau, *Charrettes*, 46-65. Dubuffet considered *My Cart, My Garden* the most representative work of this series. "Artist Questionnaire," Collection files 1219.1979, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
13. Dubuffet, "Memoir," 106.
14. We also find depicted traces in MoMA's *Les Murs* (1950), *Wall with Inscriptions* (April 1945), and *Nomads with Camel* (May-June 1948).
15. This idea is recurrent in Dubuffet's writings. See, for instance, Jean Dubuffet, "Notes for the Well-Read" (1945), trans. Joachim Neugroschel, in *Jean Dubuffet: Towards an Alternative Reality*, ed. Marc Glimcher (New York: Pace Publications, 1987), 67-86. For a discussion of the similarity between Dubuffet's view and Harold Rosenberg's landmark essay, "American Action Painters," see Aruna D'Souza, "'I Think Your Work Looks a Lot Like Dubuffet': Dubuffet and America, 1946-1962," *Oxford Art Journal* 20, no. 2 (1997): 63-64.

Stone Transcription (1958) and Epidermis (1960)

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In 1950, Jean Dubuffet painted *The Geologist* (Le Géologue), in which a figure in a landscape peers through a magnifying glass at the ground below. Over the following decade, Dubuffet frequently depicted the world as if seen through such a lens: a homogenous, unremarkable patch of ground, viewed from above and cropped from a potentially infinite expanse. Two ink on paper drawings, *Stone Transcription* (Transcription aux pierres) (November 1958) and *Epidermis* (Épiderme) (October-November 1960), and their respective series, constitute the culmination of Dubuffet's engagement with this motif.

Stone Transcription (pl. 14.1) belongs to Dubuffet's Texturologies series (1957-59), works that represent expanses of organic matter without formal articulation or composition.¹ While most of these are made using layered paint and collage, *Stone Transcription* is one of a sub-series of six Drawings Made with a Fine Point (Dessins au petit point) which approach the same subject through graphic means. Using India ink applied with a fine, metal-nibbed pen, Dubuffet covered the small rectangle of paper in a dense, layered network of intersecting and divergent lines.² The resulting spaces are crowded with tiny irregular shapes, suggesting an intimate view of an erratic, cellular substance.

Two years later, Dubuffet employed a markedly different technique to create the larger drawing, *Epidermis* (pl. 14.2). After applying a pattern of droplets of diluted gray ink across the paper, he added a haze of smaller, darker, more concentrated ink drops, likely using a brush or stiff bristle to spray the ink and perhaps tilting the paper to allow the liquid to run.³ Within the Materiologies (1959-60), a series of two- and three-dimensional representations of organic matter in artificial media, *Epidermis* is one of a sub-series, the Spaces and Sites (Aires et sites), which translate the surface of paintings into graphic form. But the dappled layers of *Epidermis* suggest not the transcription of one medium's "skin" into another but an experiment in equivalent effect.

Stone Transcription and *Epidermis* demonstrate the complex role of drawing in Dubuffet's oeuvre. From 1942 to 1960, he made approximately 500 drawings, most in India ink applied with pen, reed pen, or brush.⁴ While some of

these works were preparatory, many, like *Stone Transcription* and *Epidermis*, constituted the extension of a thematic already addressed in paint. By the late 1950s, Dubuffet was also experimenting extensively with prints, testing the representation of matter in series such as the Phenomena lithographs and the Texturological Imprints left by ink-coated foil. Together, these paintings, drawings, and prints comprise a systematic investigation into the capacity for various media to visually approximate organic matter. *Stone Transcription* and *Epidermis* extend this experimentation into different techniques within a medium. The former makes use of ink's capacity for linear, manually controlled marks; the latter treats ink as a fluid, subject to dilution and random dispersion by gravity. Each takes a different approach to visualizing an all-over organic expanse.

Wary of the vogue for Abstract Expressionism, Dubuffet counseled against reading such works as abstractions, asserting that they show "Nothing but perpendicular views of small pieces of ground."⁵ Motivating this insistence on realism was a belief that his subjects—the ordinary organic surfaces that we regularly overlook—relate to the tenets of Art Brut. As a painter of the earth, Dubuffet professed himself to be "a glutton for banality;" to see in his works anything more than ground would be to reject his invitation to revel in the banal.⁶ His titles reinforce such a reading by invoking scientific precision and objectivity, as though the artist has become, like his geologist of 1950, merely a faithful observer and recorder of nature.

And yet, both Dubuffet's titles and his insistence on realism veil a more complex interplay between artist, medium, subject, and viewer. The decontextualized, vertical views of the Materiologies and Texturologies series inevitably court perceptual and perspectival slippage. Is this the magnified surface of a stone, a distant galaxy, or simply ink splattered on paper? Interestingly, Dubuffet himself relished what he called this "vertigo caused by the ambiguity of dimension."⁷ Further still, he pursued his medium's capacity to simultaneously conjure "a world of fantasmagoric irregularity" while also depicting a patch of ground.⁸

Dubuffet's stated interest in the viewer's ambiguous relation to perceptual experience echoes his interest



Pl. 14.1 *Stone Transcription*. 1958. Ink on paper on board, 9 1/8 x 14 1/4" (23.2 x 36.2 cm).
The Joan and Lester Avnet Collection. 69.1978



Pl. 14.2 *Epidermis*. 1958. Ink on paper, 19 7/8 x 26 1/2" (50.5 x 67.2 cm). Gift in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. 1316.1968

in the *artist's* ambiguous relation to medium and process. Pursuing what he described as a “duet between the artist and the material,” he sought to partially cede creative agency to the accidents and forces of material process.⁹ *Stone Transcription* and *Epidermis* appear as the results of two different experiments in relinquishing artistic control—first through the semi-automatic creation of a network of lines, and then through the semi-random technique of splattering. Dubuffet's pursuit of such ambiguous states for both artist and viewer are underpinned by his interest in phenomenology—by the examination of things as they appear in and through experience. *Stone Transcription* and *Epidermis* position us, as viewers, in the unstable terrain carved out by their maker, one in which boundaries—between subject and object, macro and micro, internal and external—blur and at times dissolve.

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NOTES

1. Dubuffet grouped the Texturologies with the concurrent Topographies under the umbrella title of Celebration of the Soil (Célébration du sol).
2. I am indebted to paper conservator Scott Gerson, paper conservator for his observations and analysis of *Stone Transcription* and *Epidermis* at the January 2014 MRC Study Sessions at The Museum of Modern Art.
3. See previous note.
4. By 1960, Dubuffet's work as a draftsman was sufficiently established that the gallerist Daniel Cordier (who purchased 400 black and white drawings and gouaches from his atelier in 1956) produced a large retrospective exhibition and catalogue raisonné of the drawings.
5. Jean Dubuffet, “Topographies, texturologies” (1959) in *Jean Dubuffet*, ed. Andreas Franzke (Basel: Editions Beyeler, 976), 161-62.
6. Dubuffet, “Topographies,” 162.
7. Ibid.
8. Jean Dubuffet, “Landscaped Tables, Landscapes of the Mind, Stones of Philosophy” (1952), trans. Dubuffet and Marcel Duchamp, in *The Work of Jean Dubuffet*, ed. Peter Selz (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 66.
9. Jean Dubuffet, “Notes for the Well-Read” (1945), in Mildred Glimcher, *Jean Dubuffet: Towards an Alternative Reality* (New York: Pace Publications, Inc., 198), 69.

Soul of the Underground (1947)

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Soul of the Underground (L'Âme des sous-sols) is the first work in Jean Dubuffet's *Matériologie* series, created in the artist's Vence studio in December of 1959. In it, Dubuffet glued fragments of crumpled and flattened aluminum foil of varying thicknesses onto composition board. Oil paint was irregularly applied on top of the foil, and then the surface of the work was ragged to remove most of the paint. The repeated application of paint darkened the lower layers of foil, while the topmost layers retain a more vibrant sheen. This process emphasizes the irregular patterning of the foil and recalls the artist's *Éléments botaniques*, especially *Botanical Element: Baptism of Fire* (completed just several months earlier), where Dubuffet used a similar painting and ragging technique to showcase the veiny undersides of leaves. In *Soul* (pl. 15), Dubuffet's examination of aluminum may begin with its visual effects, like its ability to mimic complicated patterned surfaces occurring in nature that Dubuffet first simulated with paint and then co-opted by incorporating leaves and butterflies into his work. However, this meditation on material also engages the symbolic and cultural value of paintings, using aluminum to destabilize the methods by which paintings signal their value, from use of precious materials to association with theoretical models of contemporary painting.

In 1959, aluminum was divested of major symbolic value when the French government ended a nineteen-year policy (begun during the war) that made it the base metal of the national currency.¹ While aluminum is less ephemeral than the biological material Dubuffet previously favored, it had become undeniably disposable by the end of the Fifties. Once hoarded as part of the war effort, it was now ubiquitous trash, used for everything from food containers to paint trays. Dubuffet plays with the devaluing of this material—both aesthetic and economic—by using it to imitate gilding, exchanging cheap aluminum for the traditional thin sheets of precious metal. The ragging away of the oil paint on the surface of the foil creates a simulated patina that mimics the dull sheen of precious metal subjected to the effects of time. The effect is beautiful, but it is a destabilizing beauty: if foil shines like precious metal, the hierarchy of materials is undermined. Discarded aluminum foil dulls and accretes dirt; in contrast to the patina on a bronze statue, this aging process is not understood as an indicator of value.

Furthermore, Dubuffet uses the logic of the assemblage (building up of material) to destabilize the values of contemporary art theory. First, *Soul* is Dubuffet's engagement with "all-over" painting, presenting an alternative to strictly visual experience defined by Clement Greenberg.² *Soul* is built up of fragments that deny visual coherency. The artist manipulates the sensation of depth in the work by overpainting the top layer of foil in some areas. This overpainting subverts the possibility of creating a narrative of the work's making where darkened foil was applied earlier in the process. *Soul* technically fulfills the requirements of "all-over" painting because it is composed of similar, repeating elements across the entire surface of the work, but these elements have literal depth of accumulated material. Also, *Soul* can be considered a painting only in a very broad sense. Its variegated surface creates shifting interplays of texture and light, where the accumulation of sensation is both tactile and visual. The logic of *Soul* is both additive and subtractive: the artist builds up layers of foil, coats them with paint, and then rags the paint away. This building up of material and its attendant accumulation of effect resonate with both natural and man-made accretive processes; the painting resembles many sorts of detritus, including dead leaves, sediment, and trash.

Dubuffet demonstrates an interest in accumulation in his work in several different mediums during this time. Just prior to the *Matériologies* series, the artist made freestanding sculptures combining scavenged materials with papier-mâché. Some of these sculptures are blackened with paint or shoe polish, and a few even include torn aluminum foil. Dubuffet was also one of the key interlocutors in Leo Steinberg's development of the theory of the flatbed picture plane—art that references a horizontal surface subjected to accumulation.³ This connection is particularly interesting given Dubuffet's printmaking practice. The artist was completing a series of lithographs at the same time as *Soul*, and though lithography is a planographic process, Dubuffet's experiments with it were unconventional, including making prints from a lithographic plate covered with torn fragments of transfer paper. Thus, the ragging away of oil paint from the surface of the foil in *Soul* mimics the logic of printmaking, where an oil-based ink adheres to the surface of the printing plate. It should also be noted that cheap commercial



Pl. 15 *Soul of the Underground*. December 1959. Oil on aluminum foil on composition board, 58 7/8" x 6' 4 3/4" (149.6 x 195 cm). Mary Sisler Bequest. 668.1990

lithography often uses aluminum plates for printing, so this material facilitates the production and circulation of the most common kind of urban trash: pamphlets, newspapers, and disposable publications that build up and accrete in public spaces. In *Soul of the Underground* material is a tool for destabilization: undermining perception, indications of value, and art theory. In this first work of his *Matériologies* series, Dubuffet uses a common material to disrupt conceptions of value—both symbolic and economic—in painting. Materiality and visuality exist in state of tension, and it is this tension that is the enduring legacy of Dubuffet's work.

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NOTES

1. Aluminum was used as the base for the 50 centime, 1 franc, 2 franc, and 5 franc coins from 1941-59.

2. "This tendency appears in the all-over, 'decentralized,' 'polyphonic' picture that relies on a surface knit together of identical or closely similar elements which repeat themselves without marked variation from one edge of the picture to the other." Clement Greenberg, "The Crisis of Easel Painting," [1948] in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 155.

3. "The flatbed picture plane makes its symbolic allusion to hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards—any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed—whether coherently or in confusion." Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 84.

The Taker of Imprints (1959)

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Le Preneur d'empreintes (The Taker of Imprints), 1959, is a portfolio of eighteen black-and-white lithographs. This group of prints is in turn the fourth album of the larger series *Les Phénomènes* (Phenomena), 1958-62, which consists of 362 plates arranged in 24 albums. This vast undertaking is a significant document of the artist's ongoing collaboration with the Mourlot printmaking studio in Paris.¹ Jean Paulhan introduced Dubuffet to the studio's proprietor, Fernand Mourlot, in 1944. The artist's initial experiments with the medium of lithography occurred soon thereafter; his first lithographic album, *Matière et mémoire* (with a text by Francis Ponge), followed later the same year.² From this moment onward, Dubuffet's work at Mourlot was to be especially distinguished by his use of atypical methods, such as scratching, scraping, or rubbing the surface of the lithographic plate.

Le Preneur d'empreintes further extends Dubuffet's interest in unconventional printmaking techniques. His basic procedure descends from the Surrealist device of frottage, originally developed by Max Ernst in the 1920s. Dubuffet sometimes applied various materials, such as pebbles or shreds of paper, directly to the stone or zinc plate, and then allowed the textures thereby produced to dictate the appearance of the mark (pl. 16.1). Others images were generated by applying rubbings made with transfer paper to the plate, in effect lifting instances of frottage from their point of origin to a mediated second order of mark-making. In these instances the act of preparing the plate was itself already a form of imprinting.³

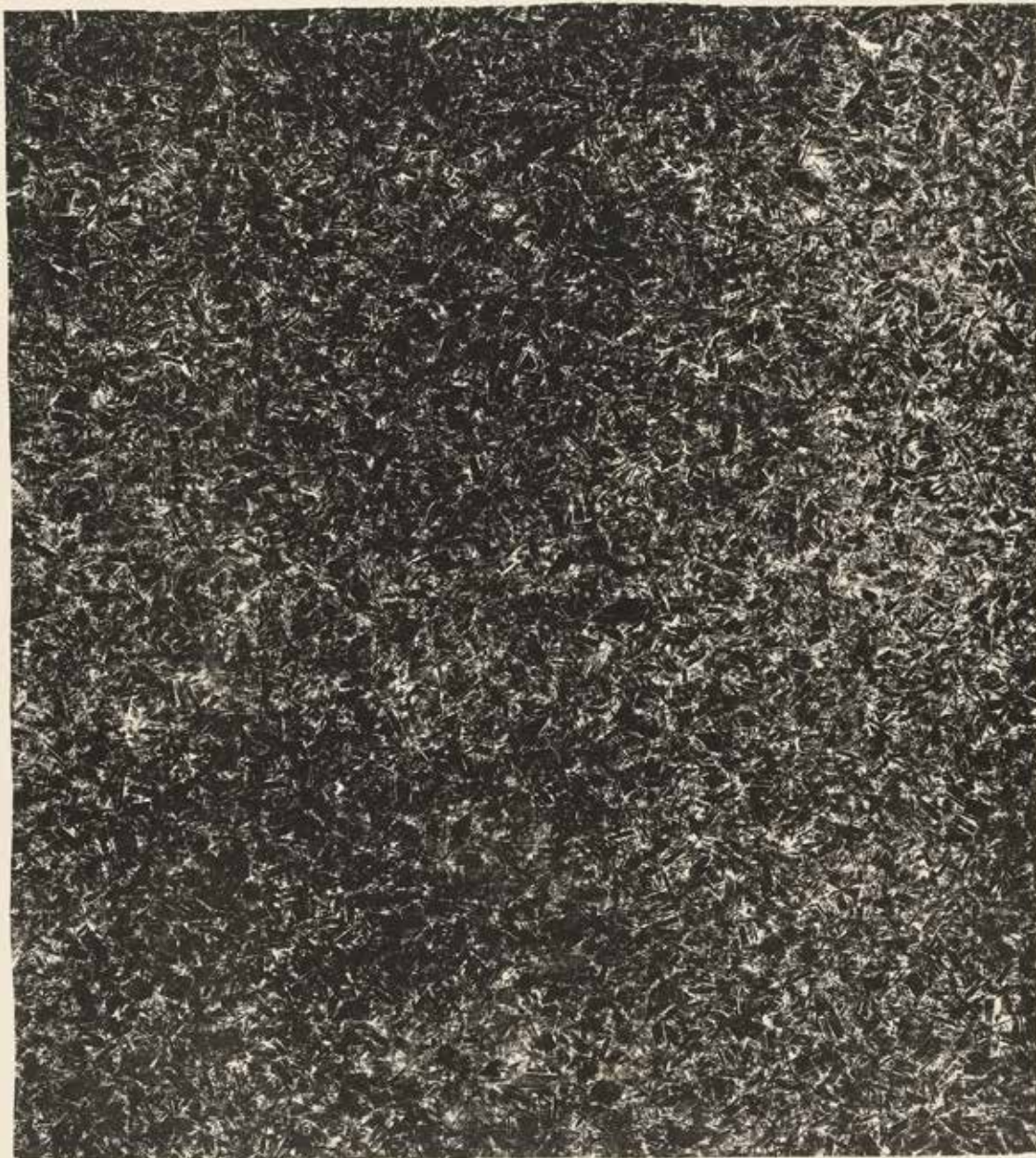
Dubuffet described the logic of his process as follows in a text of 1962:

Anyone having to do with printing shops has noticed that the waste, or test sheets on which plates of various colors are superimposed by chance and therefore with no effort at arrangement, are generally more interesting and pleasurable to look at than painstakingly contrived lithographs. To my mind these test sheets reveal the special language of lithography. One should learn from these unpremeditated superimpositions, arrived at accidentally, rather than from models,

by trying to reproduce them, or at least by borrowing their structure in order to obtain similar results. One must, therefore, improvise, become a hunter of images taken by surprise [...].⁴

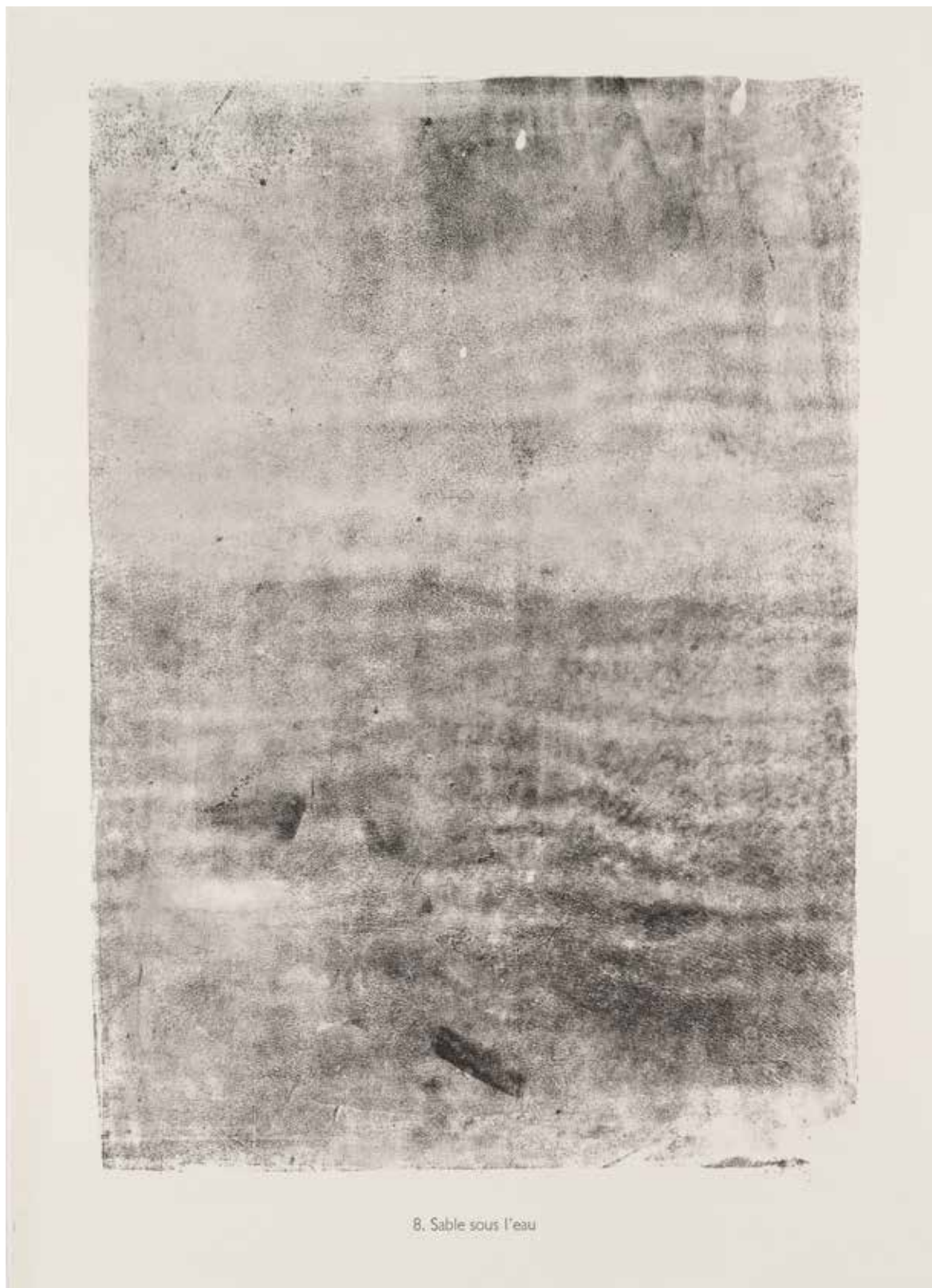
In *Les Phénomènes*, Dubuffet explored the various kinds of interference that can intrude between the gesture of the artist and its transfer to paper. By the same measure he also tested the boundaries of the lithograph's materiality. His marks exhibit no trace of the grease crayon or brush—Dubuffet did not use these traditional implements—but are rather analogized to natural processes of sedimentation, erosion, flow, and coagulation (pl. 16.2). Coupled with the actual appearance of the works, Dubuffet's use of the term “phenomena” suggests the emergence of images that have, so to speak, nothing *behind* them—neither a referent (something represented) nor even the artist's subjectivity. His prints radicalize Surrealist chance procedures by opening the image even further to processes at the outermost limit of the maker's conscious control.

Les Phénomènes marks a clear break with Dubuffet's lithographic practice of the preceding years, and not only in terms of the project's scale. Where the artist's work in the earlier 1950s tended to retain a degree of figurative content—depicted human beings or animals, references to graffiti, or natural forms such as leaves—the 1958-62 series instead evacuates the image of any but the most tenuous suggestions of recognizable form. We see not individual motifs but rather what look like, if anything, patches of dirt, stretches of pavement, or decaying walls (pls. 16.3 and 16.4). The series thus perhaps refuses what we can call, after Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the “facialization” of the signifier—a dynamic that Daniel Marcus has argued is central to Dubuffet's work.⁵ The lithographs hold back from the imposition of identity by means of representation in favor of a geological imaginary of metamorphic flux (pl. 16.5). On the other hand, the phrase “Taker of Imprints”—the last word could also be translated as “fingerprints,” a token of identity—stresses the indexical relay between that which imprints and that which is imprinted. This would seem to reinstate a hierarchy between original and copy. In the absence of a closed form or figure that is to be conveyed, however, indexical transmission is here cut loose from its



12. La paille hachée

Pl. 16.1 *Ground Straw* (La Paille hachée) from the portfolio *The Taker of Imprints* (Le Preneur d'empreintes) from *Phenomena* (Les Phénomènes). 1958. One from a portfolio of eighteen lithographs, composition (irregular): 17 5/8 x 15 11/16" (44.7 x 39.8 cm); sheet: 25 3/16 x 17 3/4" (64 x 45.1 cm). Publisher: Jean Dubuffet, Paris. Printer: Jean Dubuffet, Paris. Edition: 19. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. 722.1965.12



Pl. 16.2 *Underwater Sand* (Sable sous l'eau) from the portfolio *The Taker of Imprints* (Le Preneur d'empreintes) from *Phenomena* (Les Phénomènes). 1958. One from a portfolio of eighteen lithographs, composition (irregular): 21 1/4 x 14 5/8" (54 x 37.2 cm); sheet: 24 15/16 x 17 11/16" (63.4 x 45 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. 722.1965.8



Pl. 16.3 *Wall with Memories* (Mur aux souvenirs) from the portfolio *The Taker of Imprints* (Le Preneur d'empreintes) from *Phenomena* (Les Phénomènes). 1958. One from a portfolio of eighteen lithographs, composition (irregular): 18 15/16 x 15 7/8" (48.1 x 40.4 cm); sheet: 25 x 17 11/16" (63.5 x 45 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. 722.1965.5



7. L'humus

Pl. 16.4 *Humus (L'Humus)* from the portfolio *The Taker of Imprints (Le Preneur d'empreintes)* from *Phenomena (Les Phénomènes)*, 1958. One from a portfolio of eighteen lithographs, composition (irregular): 18 15/16 x 15 7/8" (46.5 x 40.3 cm); sheet: 24 15/16 x 17 11/16" (63.3 x 45 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. 722.1965.7

representational function. It becomes mimesis without an original.⁶

The prints from *Les Phénomènes* are contemporaneous with the *Matérialogies* and *Textuologies* paintings. *Le Preneur d'empreintes* is clearly in dialogue with these works. This period marks a (temporary) shift of emphasis away from the primitivist figuration that had dominated the artist's earlier production. If these works approach all-over abstraction, however, they could hardly be more emphatic in rejecting the value of exclusive opticality that Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried were soon to affirm as that mode's crowning achievement. In both paintings and prints, Dubuffet instead insists on highlighting the raw substance of the picture's ground.⁷

Le Preneur d'empreintes belongs to the first group of 13 albums out of the 24 in *Les Phénomènes* that consist entirely of black-and-white prints. Nine of the remaining albums introduce colored ink; two further black-and-white albums are designated "rejected plates" but nonetheless form part of the series. Dubuffet's intention had originally been to produce a relatively small number of plates as "primary matrices" that would then provide the basic material for practically infinite combination and transformation.⁸ He especially hoped to experiment with the superimposition of different plates on a single page, as well as with variable color schemes and even the physical collaging of fragments of earlier lithographs in order to produce new "matrices" for transfer to additional plates. (The latter is a procedure he had already essayed in the lithographic "assemblages" of 1958.)⁹ In the event, however, Dubuffet's plan never came to complete fruition: the majority of prints in *Les Phénomènes* are straightforward black-and-white impressions.

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NOTES

1. Sophie Webel, *L'Oeuvre Gravé et les Livres Illustrés par Jean Dubuffet: Catalogue Raisonné* (Paris: Baudouin Lebon, 1991), 134-202. Note that plates 4 and 6 in *Le Preneur d'empreintes* were printed on Dubuffet's personal press rather than at the Mourlot atelier. The scale of *Les Phénomènes* in fact exceeded the capacities of any one studio. The first publication to document *Le Preneur d'empreintes* is Noël Arnaud, *Jean Dubuffet, gravures et lithographies* (Silkeborg: Musée de Silkeborg, 1961).
2. Andreas Franzke and Sophie Webel, *Jean Dubuffet: Künstlerbücher* (Cologne: Walther König, 2009), 67.
3. Especially useful is the artist's description of his process in a text dated January, 1962: Jean Dubuffet, "Notes sur les lithographies par reports d'assemblage et sur la suite des 'Phénomènes,'" in Webel, *L'Oeuvre Gravé*, 127-33; translated as "Notes on Lithographs by Transfers of Assemblages, and on the 'Phenomena' Series," in *The Lithographs of Jean Dubuffet*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1964), n.p. See also Audrey Isselbacher, "Jean Dubuffet: A Hunter of Images," in *Dubuffet Prints from The Museum of Modern Art* (Fort Worth, TX: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 1989), 5-15.
4. Dubuffet, "Notes on Lithographs," n.p.
5. Marcus, "Eyes in the Heat," *Artforum* XLIX, no. 10 (Summer 2011): 366-75.
6. In this respect, Dubuffet's nonstandard printmaking techniques bear comparison to the even more unusual medium of butterfly-wing collage that Sarah K. Rich discusses in her article "Jean Dubuffet: The Butterfly Man," *October* 119 (Winter 2007): 6-74. Both procedures push mimetic repetition to the delirious point at which it begins to dissolve identity.
7. Hubert Damisch emphasizes the significance of the "ground" for Dubuffet's art in his "Dubuffet or the Reading of the World," *Art de France* 2 (1962), 337-46, translation by Kent Minturn and Priya Wadhera, circulated at the 2014 MRC Study Sessions.
8. "Notes on Lithographs." Isselbacher, "A Hunter of Images," also provides a description of the techniques used in *Les Phénomènes*, albeit one highly dependent on Dubuffet's own account in "Notes."
9. Reproduced and documented in Webel, *L'Oeuvre Gravé*, 97-123.

The Fashionableness of Dubuffet¹

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What is so striking about *Baptism of Fire* (September 1959) and *Place for Awakenings* (1960) is how quickly and completely the artist rejected this avenue of research, arduously developed over the course of a decade, only to revive instead from 1961 onward a version of his earliest successful series under the theme of the Paris Circus. As a pair, these works allow us to pose the question of Dubuffet's relation to his time with special acuity.

It is firstly worth insisting that *Baptism of Fire* and *Place for Awakenings* belong to the same body of works, which began with *The Geologist* (1950), even though *Baptism of Fire* has been assigned to the Botanical Elements series and *Place for Awakenings* to the Materiologies. The distinctions that Dubuffet made between these series are superficial, when compared to the deep coherence of the project.² Emphasizing, moreover, the internal variability of these works may have served to insulate them from the kinds of comparisons to contemporary art that follow here.

Formally, both works are carefully composed, with relatively uneventful centers as anchors. Although the large tobacco leaf provides a dominant horizontal in *Baptism of Fire*, echoing the format of the support, the dynamic created by the main veins of the leaves is centrifugal, so that the very center of the composition, which is vacuous, seems to recede in a whirlpool. There are no lines, comparable to the leaves' veins, in *Place for Awakenings*, although the areas of more and less textural density and pigment—the work is painted—are balanced diagonally and thus cohere the composition from opposing corners across the center. Further, there is a marked continuity in the progressions between *Baptism of Fire* and *Place for Awakenings*, respectively: in material from organic to inorganic, both being emphatically natural; in support from paper to composition board; in technique from collage to assemblage; and in adhesion from glue to more elaborate pasting (with polyester resins, vinyl and plastic pastes, paper-mâché, ground mica, and sand).³ *Place for Awakenings* is basically a more physically robust version of *Baptism of Fire*.

In terms of genre, both are pointed collapses between still-life and landscape. Conceptually, both are condensations or intensifications of nature through art, or a higher realism



Fig. 17.1. Simon Hantaï. *Untitled (Sans titre)*. 1958-59. Oil on canvas, 119 x 79 1/10" (302.5 x 201 cm). Musée national d'Art moderne—Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

through abstraction, which, however paradoxical it sounds, was present at the time in France. In this respect, *Baptism of Fire* seems Mannerist but has been rationalized through phenomenology: The leaves add up to a forest, and at once the experience of looking across the forest, up at its canopy, and down at its carpet of leaves.⁴ *Place for Awakenings* meanwhile approaches *trompe l'oeil*, nearly—only nearly, however, and antithetically, with apparent pigment, patterns of impressions, and the material itself being represented on display, so that the work is not illusionistic but rather an artful, hyper re-presentation of nature, arguably, the antithesis of and a rebuttal to the readymade, which had become trendy again. These works are sophisticated in their games and powerfully evocative, truly cosmic, given also the Biblical, spiritual, and military connotations of the titles, which are sustained in the works: *Baptism of Fire* with its desiccated, fallen leaves connotes death; while, with equal violence, *Place for Awakenings* alludes to a spiritual awakening, only to register as military alarm (a distinct form of awakening, or *éveil*), as if under threat of attack in concrete barracks.

The richness and expressive power of these works makes it all the more surprising that Dubuffet chose to abandon them so soon after their completion. The pressing question is: Why did Dubuffet stop, after so much work, time, and success, only to return (retreat) to a version of his Occupation debut works?



Pl. 17.1 *Baptism of Fire* (Baptême du feu). 1959. Pasted leaves with oil on paper, mounted on board, 21 5/8 x 27 1/8" (54.9 x 68.9 cm). The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection. 594.1967

Dubuffet's unexpected return to the figure, to the urban, to the popular demanded an explanation on the occasion of the major retrospective exhibition of Dubuffet's work that was being organized at The Museum of Modern Art in 1961. In a letter to the exhibition's organizer, Peter Selz, Dubuffet offered two related reasons:

I believe more and more that my paintings of the previous years avoided in subject and execution specific human motivations. To paint the earth the painter tended to become the earth and to cease to be man—that is, to be painter. In reaction against this absenteeist tendency my paintings of this year [1961] put into play in all respects a very insistent intervention. The presence in them of the painter now is constant, even exaggerated.⁵

And further, secondly:

Besides I should mention that the imitations, developments and variations which have been made from my paintings of the "materiologic" type by so many painters in these last years have contributed, no doubt, in turning me from this path and sending me in the opposite direction. My Haute-Pâtes of 1945 and the following years, then my Sols et Terrains of 1951 and 1952 had at the time an extraordinary and supernatural character which enchanted me. However, they no longer have this power for me, now that one finds in the windows of all the art galleries of the world paintings stemming from the same spiritual positions, and which have more or less borrowed their themes, style, color, and composition.⁶

Was Dubuffet the originator, as he imagines, or the follower? Of what apparently global fashion or fashions exactly?

Clearly, from the American perspective, Dubuffet was of central importance in the postwar period: he encouraged the materiality of the Abstract Expressionists; in 1953, he invented the term "assemblage," which would be adopted in 1961 for William Seitz's landmark exhibition at MoMA on the New Realists and Neo Dadaists; and in 1962, Dubuffet was honored with a MoMA retrospective—the first postwar French artist, during the postwar period, when feelings of nationalism were intensified. In the United States in general and at MoMA in particular, Dubuffet consistently had relevance and a certain utility. Indeed, critics and historians have noted these works' typically American "all-over" quality.⁷ It is possible that after Dubuffet influenced Abstract Expressionism, it influenced him in a positive feedback loop—although the formal analysis above indicates that

Baptism of Fire and *Place for Awakenings* are both rigorously composed. Indisputably, these works were made at the height of Abstract Expressionism's global power, and Dubuffet had to prove his originality, the existence of which was very much at stake in the MoMA retrospective. It thus might have been that Dubuffet was thinking about the fashion of Abstract Expressionism in his statement to Selz.

Abstraction, however, was by then already in crisis. In the United States and France, given these same artworks, Dubuffet was being grouped with the Neo-Dadaists and the New Realists.⁸ Such interpretations of Dubuffet as Duchampian emphasized Dubuffet's use of found objects at the expense of the rigorous technical and material experimentation that Dubuffet himself had stressed throughout the 1950s.⁹ Tellingly, the French painter Georges Mathieu's objection was nearly identical to that of the American critic Harold Rosenberg: "Dubuffet nous présente," Mathieu protested, "un morceau de terrain ou de macadam sous le nom d'œuvre d'art"; while Rosenberg characterized *Place of Awakenings* as "a segment of made terrain, as if a few square feet of earth were ordered from a landscape gardener," concluding that, "this blankness is typical of Dubuffet's 'texture' exercises."¹⁰ Mathieu and Rosenberg could for argument's sake take advantage of such works' artfulness to paradoxically claim their lack thereof and so group them with the most distant of Neo-Dadaist and New Realist fashions, neither of which was interested in nature, both of which depended heavily upon readymades. What is more unexpected is that Dubuffet essentially did the same in his statement on absenteeism to Selz—and at the same time updated in his turnaround to the contemporary Neo-Dadaist and New Realist fashions for the figure, the urban, the popular, when the old style of Dubuffet seemed new again.

This would not have been Dubuffet's first relevant update.

Conventionally, including by the artist, Dubuffet's work of the 1950s is explained biographically, by the fact that he left the city of Paris for the countryside near Vence. As conventionally, an art-historical source could be located for the Botanical Elements in the recent paper-cutouts of Matisse, the better-known resident of Vence, who had died the year before Dubuffet relocated there. In *Baptism of Fire*, leaves were gathered, dried, and pressed in makeshift presses, as a plant collector would have done, but then compromised for aesthetics: cut, arranged, and glued on paper. Dubuffet was handling leaves as Matisse had paper, which the modern master had often cut into the sinuous shapes of leaves. The French language even encouraged such punning, since the word *feuilles* denotes both the leaves of trees and leaves of paper. A work, such as *Baptism of Fire*, thus seems to have



Pl. 17.2 *Place for Awakenings*. November 1960. Pebbles, sand, and plastic paste on composition board, 34 7/8 x 45 3/8" (88.4 x 115.2 cm). Gift of the artist in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. 1293.1968

paid homage to the recently deceased Matisse. Contrary to his later description of an “absenteeist tendency,” at the time of its making, Dubuffet considered such work a philosophical rumination on the nature of vision based on first-hand experience.¹¹

The titles *Baptism of Fire* and *Place for Awakenings* hint at the twin fashions for the scientific and the religious or spiritual to which these works succumbed—in retrospect, surprisingly, given the primitivist and anti-cultural commitments of Art Brut. The scientific and the religious were often combined in postwar art, perhaps most notably in the Nuclear Mysticism of Dalí. Within abstraction, in what was arguably a period aesthetic, the formal affinities between, for examples, the aerial photographs of landscapes and the microscopic photographs of molecules, both in excess of human vision, both dependent on technology, easily assumed, through this dramatic collapse of scale, a cosmic, even supernatural significance.¹² The religious, the mystical, the spiritual were especially present in postwar France, where the works of Simon Hantaï, for instance, which did not borrow from Dubuffet’s, reached ostensibly similar conclusions by wholly other means and logic (fig. 17.1). While Dubuffet’s works and working process of the 1950s had a distinct scientific orientation—with an emphasis on technical and material experimentation, the precise recording of these experiments, so that they could be further developed, and a focus on nature—this would not have precluded Dubuffet from experiencing alongside his contemporaries the transcendental rapture induced by such collapses in scale and changes in orientation.

In the end, *Baptism of Fire* and *Place for Awakenings* most strongly resemble French abstraction of the 1950s, which was likewise saturated with religion, mysticism, and military metaphors, for instance, in the works of Hantaï, Mathieu, and Yves Klein, all of which Dubuffet would indeed have seen in “the windows of all the art galleries of the world.”¹³ Klein in particular was then ascending to world prominence, realizing his commission for the Gelsenkirchen Opera House, achieving a *succès de scandale* with his debut performance of the *Anthropometries* in Paris and beginning to exhibit in New York. It is possible that Dubuffet could simply not stand the sight of (among many potential examples) Klein’s famous blue sponges, first exhibited in June of 1959, Dubuffet himself having made sponge sculptures as early as 1954. Klein’s sponges were, moreover, maybe even more succinct and jarring confections of the natural and artificial, the real and abstract, the spiritual and intellectual. Certainly, as opposed to these others, Dubuffet the primitivist was conspicuously out of place. Whether Dubuffet’s artworks were sources, reflections, or parallels of such works, the affinities alone would have been distorting for them and distracting. One can imagine then the disenchantment that Dubuffet described to Selz: All of a sudden, he was horrified by his company, realizing also how he had compromised his identity, perhaps unconsciously carried away by the times. Given also what seemed to be coming next, the distress or any resistance on Dubuffet’s part may have seemed pointless, even counterproductive. Besides, all Dubuffet had to do was to turn back.

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NOTES

1. For the division of the series and Dubuffet's reasoning, see Jean Dubuffet, *Dubuffet: sols et terrains, 1956-1960* (Paris: Baudoin Lebon, 1987), 14-19. Dubuffet's *Mur végétal* (November 1959) is indicative of the incoherence of the distinctions between series, formally belonging to the Botanical Elements by content but to the Materiologies by technique. On *Mur végétal*, see Dubuffet, *Dubuffet: sols et terrains*, 96.
2. For an overview of Dubuffet's techniques, see *Dubuffet: sols et terrains*, 14-19; Max Loreau, *Jean Dubuffet: délits, déportements, lieux de haut jeu* (Lausanne: Weber Éditeur, 1971), 326-48.
3. Loreau, *Dubuffet: délits, déportements, lieux de haut jeu*, 328-29. Dubuffet describes the nature of his vision in *Dubuffet, Nouveaux tableaux de Jean Dubuffet sur le thème de la célébration du sol: du 28 avril au 7 juin 1959, Galerie Daniel Cordier* (Paris: La Galerie, 1959), n.p.; and in Dubuffet and Peter Selz, *The Work of Jean Dubuffet* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 128-29. Dubuffet's articulation of his shifts in perspective and orientation would help to serve as a basis for Leo Steinberg's thesis of the flatbed picture plane. Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 84.
4. Jean Dubuffet, "Statement on Paintings of 1961," in Dubuffet and Selz, 165. Italics in the original.
5. Dubuffet, "Statement on Paintings of 1961," 165.
6. The allover quality of Dubuffet's artworks of this period was discerned in the following contemporary criticism and The Museum of Modern Art exhibition catalogue: E.C. Goossen, "The Texturology of Jean Dubuffet," *Art International* 4, no. 8 (October 1960): 31-33; The Museum of Modern Art, *Three Generations of Twentieth-Century Art: The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 108. For a convincing study of the New York School's influence upon Dubuffet, see Andrea Nicole Maier, *Dubuffet's Decade*, Thesis (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2009), 312-74. It is worth additionally noting that *Baptism of Fire* is among the most abstract of the Botanical Elements, other works of the same series being metonymic plays on leaves arranged figuratively, as in Arcimboldesque portraits.
7. For examples: Georges Mathieu, *Au-delà du Tachisme* (Paris: R. Julliard, 1963), 263-64; William Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961), 84, 93-94, 150, fn. 5.
8. See excerpts from Dubuffet's *Carnet d'atelier* in Max Loreau, *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet*, Fasc. 13: *Célébrations du sol I, lieux cursifs, texturologies, topographies* (Paris: Weber, 1970).
9. Mathieu, 264. Rosenberg, 149-50. Already by 1962, these works had acquired an extra-artistic significance, serving as further evidence in Wylie Sypher's *Loss of The Self* for the de-humanization then occurring in all of culture and society. See Sypher, *Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art* (New York: Random House, 1962), 110-38.
10. Dubuffet, "Statement on Paintings of 1961," 165.
11. As influentially presented in: György Kepes, *The New Landscape: In Art and Science* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1956).
12. Dubuffet, "Statement on Paintings of 1961," 165.

Business Prospers and Baba Solstice (1961)

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As Jean Dubuffet resumed residency in Paris in 1961 after five years in rural Vence, he set to work on a series of modern cityscapes. Among these were the painting *Business Prospers* (pl. 18.1) and the gouache-watercolor drawing *Baba Solstice* (pl. 18.2), both from 1961. The series marked a return to the urban themes of Dubuffet's 1940s work, but also held the promise of a new beginning. "I live locked up in my studios doing, guess what?" Dubuffet asked in a 1961 letter. "Paintings in the spirit and style of those I was making in 1943. I have reversed gears after ending the *Matériologies* and have decided to start all over again."¹ The results went on show in the summer of 1962 at Galerie Daniel Cordier in Paris and subsequently at Cordier and Ekstrom Gallery in New York City under the title *Paris Circus*.²

Shop signs compete for space with cell-like buildings and vehicles in the agitated and labyrinthine urban scene of *Business Prospers*.³ The simple line drawing of *Baba Solstice* shows how pliable signs and figures are pushed out of shape by the pressure of their surroundings. In these compressed cityscapes, Dubuffet portrays the permeation of urban space by commercial exchange using the analogy of forms of circulation and containment. *Business Prospers* and *Baba Solstice* reflect the advance of consumer culture in the urban context experienced by Dubuffet upon his return to Paris. Another subtext, however, is the commercial success of the artist during the same period. Although he had exhibited for more than fifteen years, Dubuffet, in 1960, could still complain to his dealer Pierre Matisse about slow sales. By 1963, however, he was baffled by the high prices that his works were now commanding.⁴ Dubuffet had himself become a commodity.

At the time of painting *Paris Circus*, Dubuffet had ample opportunity to look at his past practice through the retrospective exhibitions of his work in Paris in 1960 and New York in 1962. Furthermore, Dubuffet was confronted by his own work through the younger artists who cited him, including Claes Oldenburg.⁵ Dubuffet's retrospection instigated a drastic revision. The *Paris Circus* series marked a shift both in terms of technique and subject matter.⁶ A subtractive method of incision and material imprint had dominated Dubuffet's work up to and including the 1959–60 *Matériologies* series. In *Business Prospers*, however,

the artist adopted an additive method of superimposing layers of color and outline.⁷ Cellular and anamorphic, outlines in *Baba Solstice* took on a caricature-like quality, denoting a fundamental reversal from the emphasis on the aesthetic efficiency of natural production in the *Texturologies* and *Matériologies* series that preceded *Paris Circus*.⁸

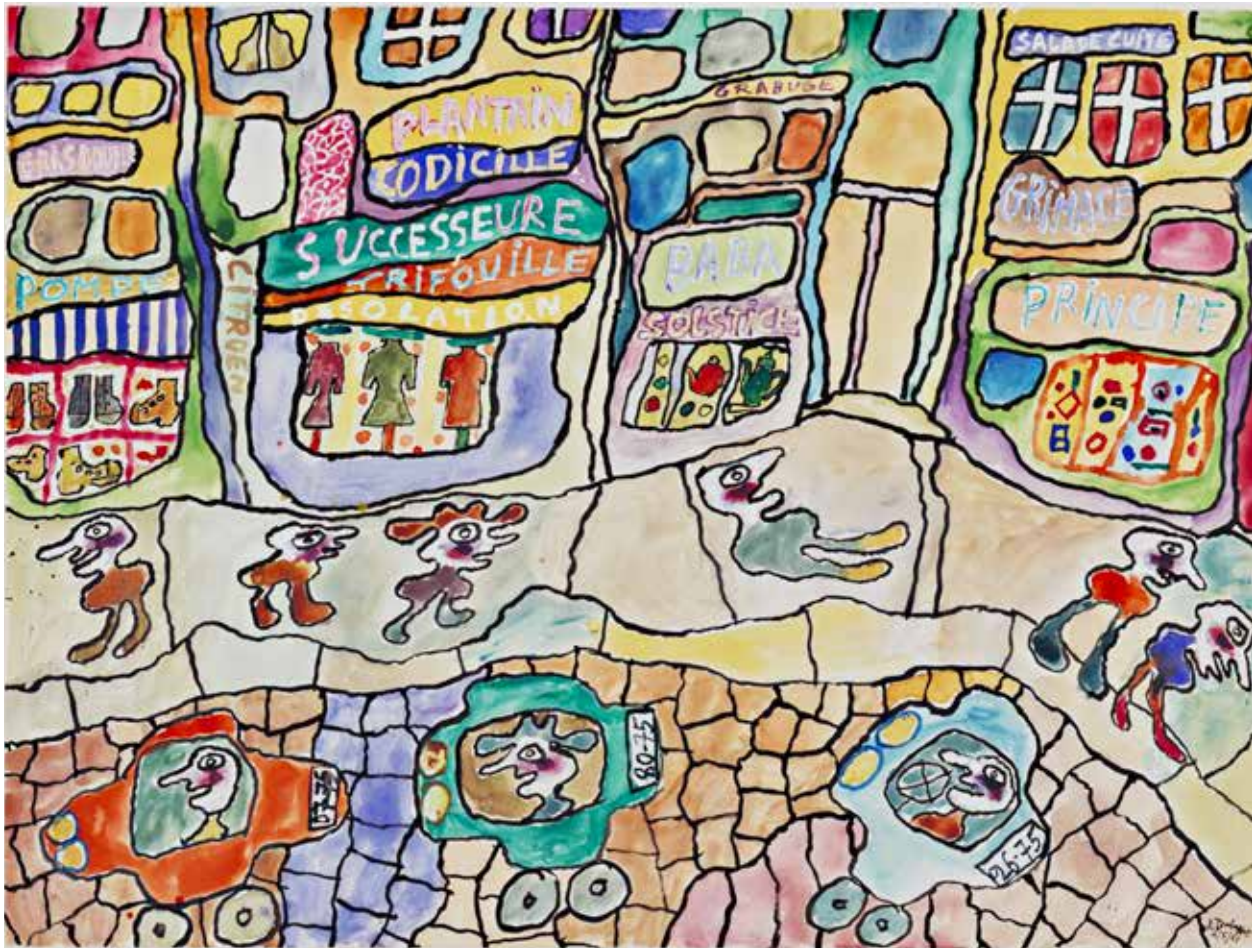
The shift of method prepared the subsuming of material facture and physical dimension by graphic contour in the subsequent *Hourloupe* forms that defined the artist's practice from 1962 to 1974.⁹ Dubuffet negotiated this transition, perhaps the most radical of his career, through a return to the urban subject matter of his 1940s series *Vue de Paris* (1943–44), *Façade d'immeubles* (1946) and *Métromanie* (1949). Still, as opposed to the schematic representation of space in the earlier works, contradictory orientations of figures confuse perspective in *Business Prospers*. The impenetrable facades of the *Façade d'immeubles* are replaced in *Paris Circus* by shop windows opening onto cavernous interiors. Finally, in a shift from the quotidian to the absurd and satirical, the generic shop signs figuring in the earlier works are transformed into a catalog of word play on corruption and fraud. In *Business Prospers* we are offered a Ministry of Bribes (*Ministère des Graisse Patte*), a Shameless Villain (*Effronté Canaille*) and the Bank of the Grotesque (*Banque la Grotesque*).

In his 1940s work, Dubuffet had evoked the oppression, violence and material shortage particular to everyday life in occupied Paris. In *Business Prospers* and *Baba Solstice*, color and liveliness clash with the corrosion of meaning and the dissolution of the figure. Critics of the time saw the series as celebratory.¹⁰ However, the *Paris Circus* works also signal the ambiguity with which Dubuffet confronted the phenomenon of the urban commercial thoroughfare.

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Pl. 18.1 *Business Prospers*. June 1961. Oil on canvas, 65 x 7' 2 5/8" (165.1 x 220 cm). Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund. 115.1962



Pl. 18.2 *Baba Solstice*. May 1, 1961. Gouache, watercolor, ink, and pencil on paper, 19 3/4 x 26 3/8" (50.0 x 66.8 cm). Gift of the artist, in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph F. Colin. 1321.1968

NOTES

1. Letter from Dubuffet to G. Bonnefoi, August 1961, in *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 479. Translation in Sophie Berrebi, "Paris Circus New York Junk: Jean Dubuffet and Claes Oldenburg, 1959–1962," *Art History* 29, no. 1 (February 2006).
2. The 1961 painting *Business Prospers* entered the MoMA collection in 1962 and has been shown only twice since, in 1987 and 2009. The 1961 gouache-watercolor drawing titled *Baba Solstice*, also from the Paris Circus series, was gifted to the Museum by the artist in 1968 and has been shown multiple times at MoMA and other museums.
3. Edith Boissonnas, "Dubuffet chez Cordier," *Nouvelle Revue Française* (August 1962), 370. Reprinted in *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet*, vol. XIX (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1965), 215.
4. In the meantime, Dubuffet had parted with Pierre Matisse and signed with Daniel Cordier. See John Russell, *Matisse: Father and Son* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 289. Dubuffet compared the prices of his own work to the prices of the work he was acquiring at the time for his collection of Art Brut. Lucienne Peiry, *Art Brut: The Origins of Outsider Art* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), 147–48. Citing letter from Dubuffet to Dr. P. Maunoury, Paris, July 1, 1963, Archives of the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne.
5. On the reverse Dubuffet–Oldenburg–Dubuffet influence, see Sophie Berrebi, "Paris Circus New York Junk," 82.
6. Jean Dubuffet, "Statement on Paintings of 1961," in Peter Selz ed., *The Work of Jean Dubuffet* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1962), 165.
7. Hubert Damisch, "Paris Circus," *XX Siècle* no. 20 (1962). Reprinted in *Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet*, vol. XIX, 214.
8. Ibid. and Hubert Damisch, "Dubuffet or the Reading of the World," *Art de France* 2 (1962): 337–46. Trans. Kent Minturn and Priya Wadhera, 2014.
9. Alan Bowness, *Jean Dubuffet: Paintings* (London: Tate Gallery of Britain, 1966), 57.
10. See, for instance, Lawrence Alloway, "Introduction," in *Jean Dubuffet: 1962–1966* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1967).

Cup of Tea II (1966)

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Jean Dubuffet's *Cup of Tea II* (conceived August 1966, cast May 1967) debuted in June 1967 at the Galerie Jean Bucher in Paris as part of the exhibition "Ustensils, Demeures, Escaliers." The next year, following a show in New York at Pace Gallery, the sculpture (pl. 19) entered the collection of The Museum of Modern Art, where it was on view as part of an exhibition dedicated to the artist's work, Dubuffet's second solo outing at MoMA that decade. A great deal had changed for the artist since his last exhibition at the museum six years prior; he had embarked on a new cycle of work, *L'Hourloupe*, a style as well as method of production that wouldn't cease until 1974. Although it would become Dubuffet's most visually iconic (and profitable) artistic venture, leading to numerous large-scale commissions in Europe and the United States, its origins are humble. The starting point was almost unremarkable: a series of ballpoint-pen doodles which the artist made while on the telephone in mid-July 1962. Struck by the open, organic forms of these automatic drawings, Dubuffet filled their empty cells with parallel lines of red and blue ink. Next, they were cut and collaged onto black paper, producing a stark contrast. In this series of quick gestures and decisions, Dubuffet arrived at the style that would occupy him for the next twelve years: organic contours; a cellular approach to creating and subdividing form; striped patterning; and a restricted color palette of bold industrial red, blue, black and white (one could see connections to late synthetic cubist Picasso, or early Léger). While the origin story of the Hourloupe problematically situates Dubuffet as the protean creator, devoid of any outside influence, it has not been disproved. Although most likely true, it still perpetuates a myth that the Hourloupe is Dubuffet's unique creation and without precedent, concepts crucial to the promotion, development, and eventual success of the series.

The Hourloupe debuted in 1963, when the ballpoint pen drawing/collages were assembled into a book and published under the eponymous title. Each page featured a single blue and red organic form, named with a phonetically playful pseudo-French word and inscribed in Dubuffet's bold handwriting; a curvo-linear form with an abstracted spout and handle is labelled "*Caftiaire*," a derivation of *cafetière* (coffee pot). Thus, at its inception, *L'Hourloupe* was focused on the reinvention of language—even the name

of the series itself is collaged together from existing words and phonemes.¹ In 1964, singular figures and utilitarian objects, like those included in the book, become the subject of Hourloupe paintings and drawings, the silhouette of the form providing a border for brightly colored cellular aggregations. At this moment, the original linguistic impetus of the project appears to depart. The primary job of signification becomes absorbed by the image of the object itself, and the only remnant of language is the calligraphic black outline of the Hourloupe, a ghost of handwriting. However, if these works of the Hourloupe function as icons or pictographic glyphs, what do they signify? In a catalogue essay for the 1966 Guggenheim exhibition dedicated to Dubuffet's work from 1962 to 1966, curator and critic Lawrence Alloway forges a connection between the Hourloupe and the artist's well-known collection of Art Brut, which had come back into the artist's possession in 1962.² According to Alloway, like much Art Brut, the Hourloupe functions as a tautological, self-referential system, the series being Dubuffet's attempt to "create an alien realm by means of a complex, self-referring system . . . an order that is closed to us, an order with hidden co-ordinates . . . [with emphasis on] the systematic and the linear."³ In the fourth volume of his *Prospectus et tous scrpts suivants*, Dubuffet makes the very same connection, noting that the Hourloupe, like Art Brut, is a "phantom world" which provided him with "a position of mental distance."⁴ Consequently, one can regard the Hourloupe as a language, but a distinctive and insular one forged by Dubuffet himself with no clear "meaning"; it serves only to communicate itself and replicate itself.

In the summer of 1966, Dubuffet brought the Hourloupe into three-dimensions, turning these icons of everyday objects and figures into a series of street sign-like double-sided reliefs and sculptures in the round. *Cup of Tea II* is one of the earliest of these *Sculptures peintes*, conceived and painted in August 1966, and cast and assembled in May 1967. Dubuffet began the making of the *Sculptures peintes* with rectilinear blocks of expanded polystyrene; with specially designed heating tools (including a knife and a wand), he would shave away thin layers of the material until the desired form appeared. He would then paint the surface with Flashe (an opaque vinyl emulsion), starting with the thick black contours and cells, then moving to color



Pl. 19 *Cup of Tea, II*. August 1966. Cast polyester resin and cloth with synthetic polymer paint, 6' 5 7/8" x 46 1/4" x 3 3/4" (197.8 x 117.3 x 9.5 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lester Avnet. 720.1968

with striped areas and solids. For Dubuffet, polystyrene was a revelation: “up until now there has never been a material that can be sliced so quickly and easily as polystyrene with a hot wire, and that this possibility of working so fast allows one to express oneself through forms with as much freedom and immediacy as with a pencil running over paper.”⁵ This increased speed of production allowed for the *Sculptures peintes*’ constant replication. Each object/utensil of the Hourloupe series exists as a series of unique copies (or versions) in an array of different media. For example, from 1964 to 1967, the “cup of tea” appears as the subject of numerous Flashe paintings, resin sculptures, felt-tip pen drawings and prints. Synthetic plastics such as polystyrene, polyester resin, and acrylic Flashe aided these series’ seemingly infinite replication and reinvention. As Roland Barthes states in *Mythologies*, “[M]ore than a substance, plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation; as its everyday name indicates, it is ubiquity made visible...it is less a thing than the trace of a movement.”⁶

While Dubuffet found the immediacy of polystyrene advantageous—and akin to the activity of drawing or writing—its impermanence presented challenges. Since it was easily susceptible to dents and scratches, a time-consuming method was eventually devised in which a plaster mold was made and the painted surface of the original was transferred to a more stable support of polyester resin and fiberglass. As part of this process, the sculpture had to be cut in half; the two distinct painted surfaces were molded, transferred, and then re-attached with adhesive, adding bits of painted canvas to help finish the seam.⁷ Thus, what remains in *Cup of Tea II* is the appearance of immediacy and speed. While the production of the *Sculptures peintes* was laborious, the use of plastics did benefit the artist in his act of creation. This rapid pace served the Hourloupe’s rigorous presentation schedule. Just in 1966, there were exhibitions of the series at the Guggenheim in New York, the Stedelijk in Amsterdam and Robert Fraser Gallery in London. These presentations, like many in Dubuffet’s career, came with a corresponding flurry of media, including posters, advertisements, and catalogues—a glut of information to promote the series.

In many ways, the iconic presence of the Hourloupe (even when in sculptural form), aided its circulation and promotion through channels of image-based media. In addition to catalogue reproductions, the “cup of tea” re-appears along-side other Hourloupe icons and subjects from Dubuffet’s artistic past in *Banque de L’Hourloupe/Algebra de L’Hourloupe*, a print series published in 1967 and comprised of 52 Goliath cardboard playing cards. As a “bank,” the prints are the collected sources of the entire series, a storehouse of information as well as value. The *Banque* opens with the following statement:

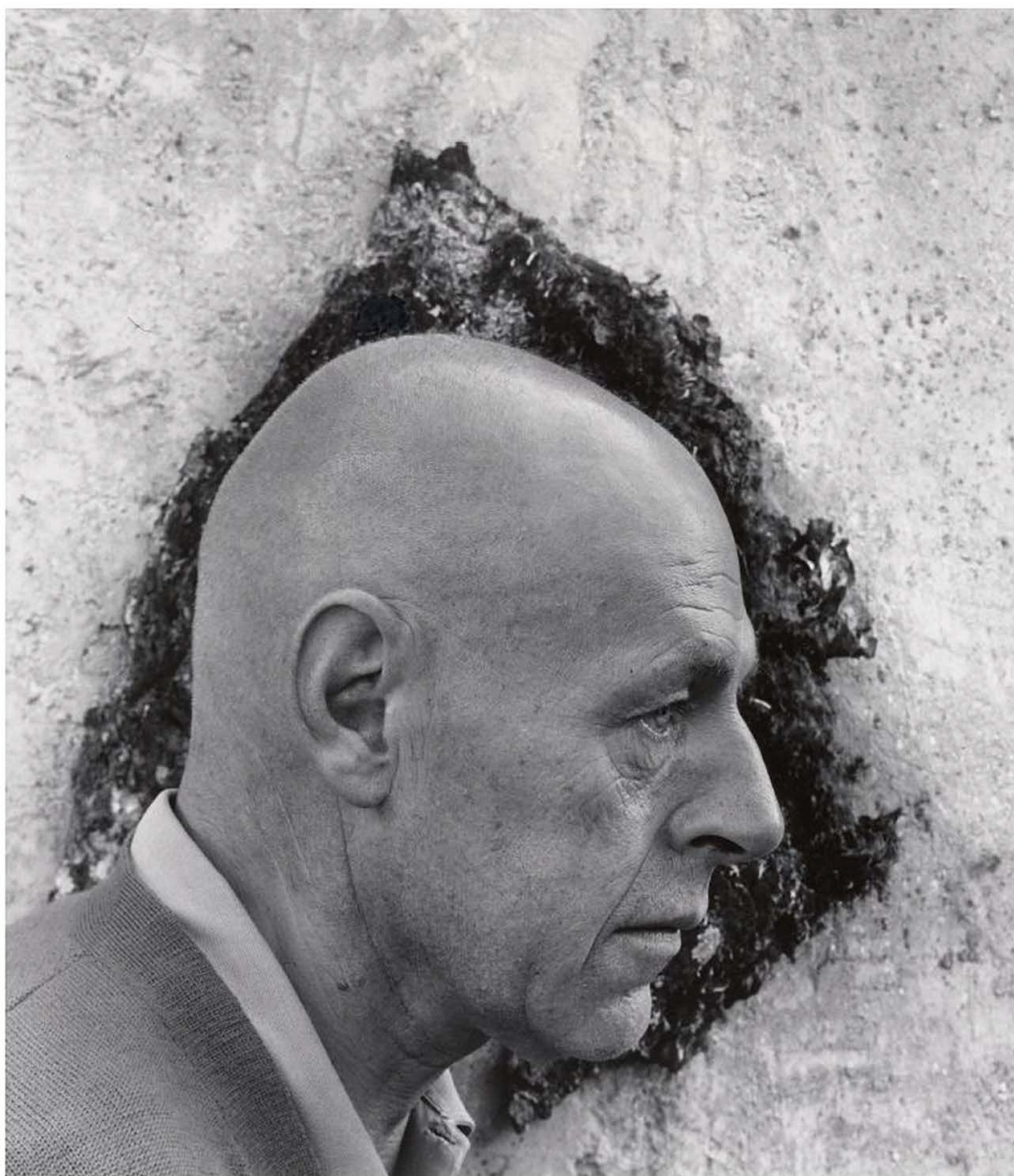
Our words—mirages of solid things, repositories of temporary combinations of thought which give us the illusion of carving up an uncarvable world . . . we are now going to translate them into playing cards, muddle them up, and then rearrange them in a different order; we will shuffle them and deal them back on the table of the spirit to make it fresh and green again.⁸

As a set of images, the prints offer a starting point for the constant regeneration of the Hourloupe, sparking a seemingly endless and constant process of replicating art objects, in a variety of media and formats. Thus, Dubuffet’s “new language” of the Hourloupe was far from a social endeavor. Rather, it served one purpose: to help generate a new brand of highly original, distinctive, and marketable artworks, which employed newly available materials to achieve great commercial success with great speed.

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NOTES

1. For Dubuffet, *Hourloupe* resembled the words *hurler* (to roar), *hululer* (to hoot), and *loup* (wolf). See *Jean Dubuffet: Painted Sculptures* (New York: Pace Gallery, 1968).
2. The collection entered the home of artist and collector Alfonso Ossorio in East Hampton, New York, in 1951, spending just over ten years there.
3. Lawrence Alloway, "Introduction" in *Jean Dubuffet: 1962-1966* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1966), 18.
4. Jean Dubuffet, *Prospectus et tous scrpts suivants, Tome IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 531.
5. Jean Dubuffet, "Notes on the Painted Polystyrene Hourloupe Pieces" (1969) in Tony Cragg, ed., *Jean Dubuffet: Writings on Sculpture* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2011), 58.
6. Roland Barthes, "Plastic" in Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972).
7. For further information on Dubuffet's process, please see Ellen Pratt, Patricia Houlihan and Eugena Ordonez, "An Investigation into a Transferred Paint/Cast Resin Sculpture by Jean Dubuffet" in Jackie Heuman, ed., *From Marble to Chocolate: The Conservation of Modern Sculpture* (London: Archtype Publications, 1995).
8. Jean Dubuffet, *Banque de L'Hourloupe* (London: Editions Alecto, 1967). Note that the word for carve here is *couper* which also translates as "to shear" or "to cut," similar to Dubuffet's method of sculpting polystyrene.



Arnold Newman (American, 1918-2006). *Jean Dubuffet*. 1956. Gelatin silver print. 9 7/16 x 7 7/16" (21.4 x 18.9 cm). Gift of the photographer. 299.1959