

Pierre De Maria (1896 -1984)



He was born in Paris, the son of a conservative though open-minded middle-class family. His father runs the family business of optical equipment but he's also a theatre lover, an author and a poet. He gives his son a strict education and the boy will feel closer to his mother. Pierre De Maria will become a honest, straightforward man, uncompromising to himself and the others. He is very particular about his appearance and, as a child of the "Belle époque" takes up to a kind of dandysm.

A cousin of his, Jacques Camoreyt (a pupil of Albert Maignan) teaches him how to master pictorial techniques along with the rather academic education in Arts he is going through. From 1907 to 1914 he is a student at the Lycée Condorcet, first graduates in science and languages, then at the Engineering College just before World War 1.

The sight of atrocities will leave a deep scar in his memory. He has a miraculous escape from the war and finds a job in the family firm. He soon realizes he hates everything related to engineering and decides to launch on into painting. He works as a scene painter with Ronsin and Laverdet workshop and on stage with "avant-garde" drama companies. In the same time, he shows his work at the "Salon d'Automne" in 1923 and gets a honour prize in the modern painting department.



In 1925 he takes up to boxing and creates some polychromatic facades with Djo Bourgeois, then gets into the Art Deco trend as an architect and a decorator. Henri-Pierre Roché, a writer (Jules et Jim) a painter and an art collector close to the cubists has already discovered talents (Brancusi, Wols...) and takes an in interest in Pierre De Maria.



Autoportrait
1967

In 1926 (the "Années Folles "in Paris) Pierre De Maria meets Marcel Duchamp, Brancusi and the surrealist gang he enjoys but never joins. " *They were friends and I was curious but I never liked the hint of complaisance I saw in their work*" He then starts some technical research in collages as shown in his first exhibition of "pasted gouaches" in Princess' Murat's gallery in Paris. ("Fermé la nuit")

"I never thought I'd make money with my paintings. I took to painting as I would have taken holy orders"

He works as a journalist for Marianne and Vu magazines (1932-1933) and writes a detailed report about the Maelström in Norway and the soviet Movies. He has the opportunity to meet Eisenstein and Poudovkine in Sovietic Russia and thinks of making a name for himself in the Movie industry.

In 1939 Pierre De Maria meets Germaine Pellegrino who becomes his wife a year later. They'll have two sons : Jacques born 1942 and François born 1943. The family settle in Geneva at the end of 1943.

During those years he writes an unpublished autobiographical novel ("*Tir à volonté*") as well as a collection of thoughts about various topics such as war.

He also writes poems and a play (as his father had done) "*Cornelius' death*", in a rather humorous manner. "*He who conveys the opinion of fools makes certain to get the majority of votes.*"

In 1944 he is back in Paris, leaving his wife.



He'll settle in Nice in 1953 and starts his mechanical period there with the recurrent theme of machinery in his painting.

In 1958 he has his second exhibition in Paris (JC de Chaudun's gallery) and shows a series of lino-engravings done after some drawings of his : he then begins being acknowledged by his contemporaries, his fellow-painters and the Parisian artistic circle.



Jacques Prévert even dedicates him a poem. ("*Les Machinoutis*") Henri Pierre Roché,

Henri-Pieyre de Mandiargues, Yves Taillandier contribute to the catalogue, well received by the press.

In the meantime, he has his works exhibited at the Salon d'Automne, the Salon de Mai, and the Salon Comparaison.

In 1963, Flemish wood-engraver Frans Masereel, and Professor Gowa, the curator of the Offenbach Fine Arts, both introduce Pierre De Maria successfully in Germany, allowing him to become famous abroad.

The Homo Atomicus Exhibition gathers 45 paintings, recounting the artist's progress over the past ten years. He's then nicknamed the "Atomic age Hyperonymus Bosch". !

In 1964, Greek gallery owner Iris Clert finds him out and helps him into a new career. He is then 68. Iris Clert, as a specialist in Contemporary Art has contributed to the coming out of the New Realism movement through her most spectacular and mediatical exhibitions.

She takes a fancy to Pierre De Maria 's work : "*The visit of his studio turned my love at first sight into a cutainty : he uses the technique from the Ancients to express Future.*"

Afterwards, both get into intense collaboration so that the painter is allowed to use the gallery owner's european and international net.



In 1966, his work's dedicated a research published in *Connaissance des Arts Magazine* n° 70 : "A foreground study of Pierre De Maria in this month issue". Later an article in *International Art*.

In 1969 he turns 73 and he can see his first retrospective exhibition in Nice at the Ponchettes Gallery (about 60 paintings).



At 76, he meets artist H el ene Bottet, from then on allowing humour to take over violence in his art. Machines don't frighten him anymore, he's now able to mock them even through they remain at the core of his paintings, in spite of the mechanical Art of the Twenties having long ago been left behind by its creators.

In 1974, Jean Selz writes a chapter about "machines and sandhills" in his book *"Le dire et le faire"*.

That very year, he gets the President of the Republic Prize at the International Art Salon in Toulon for the *"Burst Head"* (*La T ete  clat ee*)

In 1980, Jean Roger Soubiran has a new retrospective of his works organized in Marseilles Contemporary Art Centre. He gathers over a hundred paintings. It will be his last personal exhibition : he is 84.

He dies in 1984, an old, secret, bright and educated person. His life was a poetical adventure, successively an engineer, an architect, a reporter, a writer, a dandy, a Don Juan. Most of all he devoted himself to making his art the ideal of a life freed of any dogma.

He has left about 450 works. They can be seen at the New York NOMA (1968), at the Teheran Museum (1969), at the National contemporary Art foundation in Paris (1968), at the Cannes Museum (1982) and at the Quebec Museum.

