



Bouclier urbain, 1986. Stamping of a bronze manhole cover on paper, Indian ink and acrylic on paper mounted on canvas. 190 x 97 cm © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. RMN-GP

GLOSSARY

COBRA

Cobra was an international artistic avant-garde movement, initiated in 1948 and dissolved in 1951. The name is a contraction of the native cities of its founding members (Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam), which included Karel Appel, Christian Dotremont, Constant and Asger Jorn, among others. Against the notion of “academic art”, their desire was to return to popular traditions, advocating spontaneity and refusing specialisation. At the age of 21, Alechinsky became one of Cobra’s most active members. The ideas defended by the movement played a key role in the future direction of his work.

MARGINAL REMARKS

A term borrowed from the artistic tradition of the print, marginal remarks are drawings around the edge of a general composition, with or without a link to the former. Alechinsky’s

first painting to include marginal remarks dates from 1965: *Central Park*. These vignettes surrounding a central motif also recall the panels of comic books, a popular genre in Belgium, the artist’s native country. This work on the margins, edge and borders became a characteristic feature of the artist’s style.

MAROUFLAGE

Marouflage or mounting consists in affixing the original support of a painting or drawing onto another support, using a strong adhesive. The second support must be rigid and thicker, and can be made of canvas, wood, chipboard or metal. Alechinsky taught himself the technique of marouflage using paper in 1965. To create the iconic work *Central Park*, he glued his acrylic painting on paper onto a canvas and around it his Indian ink drawings on long strips of Japanese paper.

INDIAN INK

Indian ink is a black dye used for writing, drawing and printing. It is made from soot, oil, rubber, camphor and binding agents. It was first introduced to Europe in the Middle Ages and is a highly popular ink with artists, thanks to its colour, versatility and resistance to light. It was invented in China several centuries BC. It is called Indian ink in English due to its transit via India in the 17th century. Alechinsky, influenced by his contact with Japanese calligraphers, used Indian ink increasingly as of 1952.

ACRYLIC

Acrylic paint is composed of synthetic resins generally mixed with highly colourful pigments. It enables painters to work quickly and can be used on a wide range of supports. Originally used in the building sector in the years 1955 to 1960, acrylic paint became available for artistic use in 1958 in the USA and then in Europe, particularly after the 1960s. Walasse Ting introduced Alechinsky to acrylic painting in New York in 1965; it offered him a way to loosen up his technique and enabled a continuity between drawing and painting.

TEAM

CENTRE POMPIDOU

CURATOR

Jonas Storsve, Keeper of the Cabinet d’art graphique, Mnam-Cci

COLLECTION MANAGER

Aurélie Sahuqué

REGISTRAR

Marion Julien

ART RESTAURATION

Anne-Catherine Prud’Hom

WRITTEN MEDIATION

Celia Crétien

CENTRE POMPIDOU MÁLAGA

Public Agency for the Management of the Casa Natal of Pablo Ruiz Picasso and Other Museum and Cultural Facilities, Málaga City Council

COLLECTION MANAGER

Elena Robles García

ARCHITECTURE AND SCENOGRAPHY

El Taller de Gráfica y Comunicación

CONSERVATION

Paula Coarasa Lobato
Laura Gaviño Fernández
Elisa Quiles Faz

INSTALLATION

Installation team of the Agency

CORPORATE IDENTITY

Gloria Rueda Chaves

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CATALOGUE

Alechinsky en el país de la tinta / in Inkland

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INFORMATION

OPENING HOURS

9.30 a.m. to 8.00 p.m., every day

Ticket offices close at 7:30 p.m.

The museum is closed on Tuesdays (except holidays and days before holidays), 1 January and 25 December

PRICES

Entry to permanent exhibitions:

€7, concessions: €4

Entry to temporary exhibitions:

€4, concessions: €2.50

Entry to permanent and temporary exhibitions:

€9, concessions: €5.50

CONTACT

Pasaje doctor Carrillo Casaux, s/n
(Muelle Uno, Puerto de Málaga)
T.(+34) 951 926 200
info.centrepompidou@malaga.eu
educacion.centrepompidou@malaga.eu

ALECHINSKY IN INKLAND

19 DECEMBER 2019 – 12 APRIL 2020

Through a selection of seventy-five works on paper from the Centre Pompidou collections, the exhibition “Alechinsky in Inkland” presents an almost seventy-year review of the artist’s career. The outstanding set of drawings kept in the Cabinet d’art graphique (Department of drawings), constituted thanks to the generosity of Pierre Alechinsky, has already been the subject of several exhibitions. However, it is the first time that such a rich and comprehensive panorama of this collection is presented outside France.

Born in Brussels in 1927, Pierre Alechinsky develops a highly personal and independent body of work since the late 1940s. He became a member of the Cobra group in 1949 and moved to Paris in 1951, where he forged numerous relationships and collaborations with fellow artists.

Through experimentation with unconventional media and diverse techniques, his works blend humour and poetry. He notably developed a practice with gouache and Indian ink, before discovering acrylics in 1965. These techniques facilitated the spontaneity of brushstrokes and fluid movement characteristic of oriental calligraphy, which principles he adopted in the mid-1950’s. Dreamlike landscapes, mischievous or grotesque beings, chimeras and fantastical figures proliferate in his works, drawn occasionally on old manuscripts, stock market shares or geographical maps.

‘To draw is to question’, wrote Alechinsky, who composes his works as glosses, enigmas and games born out of the pleasure and intensity of drawing.

In collaboration with:



AGENCIA PÚBLICA PARA LA GESTIÓN DE LA CASA NATAL DE PABLO RUIZ PICASSO Y OTROS EQUIPAMIENTOS MUSEÍSTICOS Y CULTURALES

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Málaga

“With the tip of my paintbrush, I sometimes - I live for those moments - invent a stroke. Sweetness, sharing: recognising a brushstroke!” Pierre Alechinsky

THE EARLY DAYS

In 1944, Pierre Alechinsky entered La Cambre school of art in Brussels, where he learnt the techniques of printing, illustration and typography. He discovered Henri Michaux, Jean Dubuffet and the surrealists, and began self-teaching painting in 1946. A decisive moment came when he met Christian Dotremont, poet and founding member of the Cobra* group. Alechinsky joined the avant-garde movement in 1949 and became closely involved, organising exhibitions and contributing to the *Cobra* magazine.



Ombre supportée, 1959. Indian ink on Chinese paper laid down on card. 53 × 37,5 cm © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Georges Meguerditchian/Dist. RMN-GP

FIRST ROOM: THE 1950s AND 1960s

The 1950s and 60s were a watershed period during which the artist was to define the bases of his work. The Cobra* group was dissolved in 1951 and Alechinsky left Brussels for Paris, where he mingled with numerous artists, such as Alberto Giacometti, Bram van Velde or Victor Brauner. He took an interest in a variety of techniques, such as engraving, which he experimented at Stanley William Hayter’s workshop; or Japanese calligraphy, which he explored through his correspondence with the master calligrapher Shiryu Morita. Thanks to Morita, he gradually left aside oil paint for Indian ink*, which is more versatile and rapid, and used paper increasingly.

His encounter with Walasse Ting in 1954 marked a turning point; the Chinese-American artist taught him the Chinese method of painting, using a bowl of ink with the support laid on the ground. This horizontal position of the paper opened up new perspectives for Alechinsky, leading him to a more ample and spontaneous technique. He compared the calligrapher’s improvisation to that of a jazz musician; while the latter is supported by the rhythm section, the calligrapher is supported by the mental representation of the ideogram. Oriental calligraphy even influenced Alechinsky’s choice of tools, as he adopted goat hair brushes and used paper from China, Japan, Taiwan and Korea.

The 1960s were also prolific years in Alechinsky’s career. Invitations to exhibit his work in museums and galleries multiplied and he was able to afford a real studio, first in Paris and then in a village in the Oise department.

In 1961 Alechinsky went to New York, a city he would return to regularly, and painted in the studio of his friend Walasse Ting. In 1965, Ting introduced Alechinsky to acrylic painting and he adopted this technique for its almost ink-like fluidity. He then acquired the technique of marouflage*. These innovations resulted in a decisive work, *Central Park* (1965), the first painting with ‘marginal remarks’*, i.e. the vignettes drawn around a central motif and adding to the meaning of the work. From then on, his work was to become a constant exploration of the border and overlapping of images.

SECOND ROOM: THE 1970s

In the late 1960s, Alechinsky found interest for old papers, drawn to their texture and quality. He began to paint on old manuscripts, playing around with the unevenness of the paper.

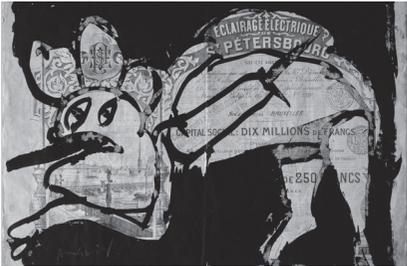
This technique fascinated the artist, who experimented with a variety of forms; in colour, with marginal remarks*, with Indian ink, water colour or acrylic paint, etc. The works presented here are made with Indian ink on administrative documents from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, in which he occasionally framed texts and surrounded them with mysterious, fantastic creatures. For the *Kratch* series, he painted hybrid and terrifying creatures on stock market shares dating from the early 20th century. The solemn and serious nature of these documents (debts, leases and invoices, etc.) strikes a contrast with the humour and light-heartedness of the figures woven around the letters. With a touch of mischief, Alechinsky breathed new life into these papers heavy with memories.

In 1975, Alechinsky travelled to the USA with his wife. During this trip he visited Niagara Falls, which made a great impression on him. This vision was the inspiration for two large ink drawings, *Niagara de jour* and *Niagara de nuit*. The first was composed of a few brush-strokes representing the waterfall landscapes, the clouds and a huge black sun framed by a rectangle. In the second work, the ink and ink wash cover the paper to reveal an eerie night landscape, in which the black sky occupies half of the composition.

The water element, which bears a relation to ink, plays an essential role in Alechinsky’s work. Especially, in the three ink drawings *Fata Morgana*, representing mermaids, ink wash and splashes are highly present. As symbol of renewal and rebirth, water is “the perfect binder for painting understood as an experimental activity”, Claire Stoullig writes in the exhibition catalogue.

During the mid-1970s Alechinsky devoted time to “inventory” or “tidying up” his work. In 1975, he unapologetically burned roughly two hundred unfinished paintings; in 1976 and 1978, he made his first two donations of drawings to the Cabinet d’art graphique of the Musée National d’Art Moderne in Paris.

“Drawing is writing stripped bare and renewed differently” P. A.



Kratch, 1976. Indian ink on a stock certificate of the Electric Lighting Company of St. Petersburg from 1902. 29,8 × 39,3 cm © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Georges Meguerditchian/Dist. RMN-GP

DIALOGUES WITH WORDS

Pierre Alechinsky’s work is a constant dialogue between drawings and words. The influence of surrealism with its word plays and the writer-artists of Cobra* are primordial. For the artist, drawing is a form of writing and writing, a form of drawing. With early training in the printing world, then a passion for Oriental calligraphy, graphics form an essential element of his work. Narration is also key; Alechinsky is himself a writer and a poet. He has written at length about his own work, but also about artists he admires (Christian Dotremont, Henri Michaux and Bram van Velde, among others). The titles of his works are often a reference to literature and are highly poetic; in fact, he sometimes asks writer friends to create his titles. Since his early career, he has worked with numerous writers - Pierre-André Benoît, Yves Bonnefoy, Michel Butor, Roger Caillois, Cioran, Christian Dotremont, Eugène Ionesco, Joyce Mansour and Jean Tardieu - in particular by illustrating their publications. All of Alechinsky’s work is a reflection on the meaning of writing compared to that of the drawn line.

“I draw as I can’t say it in words.” P. A.

THIRD ROOM: FROM THE 1980s TO THE PRESENT

Major institutional recognition arrived in the 1980s for Alechinsky: he managed a painting workshop at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts in Paris (1983-1987), was awarded the National Prize for Arts and Letters for painting, decorated the waiting room of the Ministry for Culture and had a travelling retrospective in 1987 at the Guggenheim New York, the Kunstverein in Hanover and the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.

In the early 1980s, Alechinsky produced his first inks on city maps, geographical maps and maritime or aviation navigational charts. In *Boréalité sibérienne* and *Forêt engloutie*, organic forms overlap with aerial views and play with the various zones of the maps. Later, in 1989-1990, the artist used military maps found in a 17th century atlas to create *Le Secteur de Loches* or *La Poche de Dunquerque*, introducing human figures and evoking war.



Boréalité sibérienne, 1982-1983. Indian ink on pilot’s navigation chart, with a predella on paper mounted on canvas. 134 × 138 cm © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. RMN-GP

In 1983, a new technique entered Alechinsky’s formal vocabulary: stamping. It consists in rubbing a surface on paper, to reveal the reversibility of the imprint, which appears as a negative of the original surface. Alechinsky experimented with this technique on features of urban furniture, such as manhole covers in *Bouclier urbain* and *Chien libre*, or a bench or tree well, to obtain concentric shapes in Indian ink*. Depending on what he painted in the centre or around the stamping, “it will speak of a star, an octave or a mandala...”.

In 1988, Alechinsky set up a new studio in Provence. The 1990s and 2000s were rich with exhibitions, publications, collaborations and commissions. In 1996 and 2003, the artist made new donations to the Musée National d’Art Moderne.

Flora Danica is a series composed of around a hundred drawings on the prints of a Danish floral encyclopaedia, published between 1761 and 1883 at the request of various Kings of Denmark. The artist found original copies in flea markets. The accurate scientific illustrations of this botanical work are transformed into body fragments of hybrid figures.

As it journeys through seven decades, the exhibition reflects the strength, complexity and playfulness of Pierre Alechinsky’s work. Resulting from an uninterrupted dialogue between the fluidity of ink and the spontaneity of movement, his motifs, landscapes and figures are all signs to be deciphered.