

AM CB

ANNETTE MESSENGER CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI

Exhibition from 20.11 2025 to 6.04 2026

Annette Messenger (born in 1943 in Berck, France) and Christian Boltanski (1944–2021, Paris) met in Paris in 1970. These two major French artists became life partners and were recognised on the international scene from the 1970s on. Very early, they decided to separate their careers in order to develop independently from one another. Their works were presented in a few group exhibitions in the 1970s, then shown together more sporadically.

This exhibition aims to restore a dialogue between their work by revealing its affinities, which have been little analysed due to a lack of opportunities to bring their pieces together. Around thirty works, mainly from the Centre Pompidou collection and created between 1968 and 2022, reflect their shared languages, interests and methods. From the artist's book, home to the strangest inventories, to display cases created to collect traces of fictional stories, along with experimental use of photography, utilisation of similar objects and materials, and falsely autobiographical installations, Messenger and Boltanski stimulated each other in the aim of surpassing themselves throughout their lives.

Beyond certain themes that occupied each one individually, like destiny and the human condition for Boltanski and women's role in society for Messenger, what appears clearly over time is the absence of the body for one and its presence for the other.

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Annette Messenger Collector, 1971-1974

In the 1970s, Annette Messenger gave herself multiple titles, added to her surname, dividing her personality into various separate identities: Annette Messenger Collector, Artist, DIYer, Practical Woman, Forger, Peddler... Her work develops in the form of a fictional autobiography, in constant renewal. She created around 60 *Albums-collections* and small notebooks combining photos, press cuttings, sketches, notes and so on, which she organised by theme. As an ensemble, it describes stereotypes related to the role of women in society.

The sketch titled *The Apartment of Annette Messenger Collector*, and *Annette Messenger Artist* came from the *Album-collection* accompanying *Les Pensionnaires* (The Boarders). It officially marked the first two titles that Annette Messenger gave to herself. The drawing shows the floor plan of her apartment according to her two activities, as an artist and as a collector. It is divided between a room for collecting, accumulating and mess, and a room for putting in order, assembling and creating. In this way, the artist shows how she works, creating two physical spaces dedicated to different mental operations.

Christian Boltanski, *Recherche et présentation de tout ce qui reste de mon enfance, 1969*

[Research and Presentation of All
that Remains of My Childhood]

Bibliothèque Kandinsky

From 1969 on, Boltanski worked on different ways of avoiding death and oblivion, by developing memory preservation systems. This quest took multiple forms: bringing together elements of his past, reconstituting events and reproducing objects that belonged to him in modelling clay. This book of nine photocopied pages, which the artist sent by post, represents his first attempt at reconstitution. It includes a text and photographs of his class, of a reading book, of a piece of a jumper and of a dictation. It is the first of many artist books produced by Boltanski.

This introductory text marks the foundation of his work, which unfolded around memory and the life cycle, to the point of laying individual experience over the top of collective experience. Like a manifesto, the text announces the artist's aim to guarantee his reality, opposing the inexorable loss that death implies.

Christian Boltanski, films, 1969-1970

Digitised 16 mm films,
black and white and colour, sound
Purchases, 1975



L'Homme qui tousse [The Coughing Man], 1969
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**Annette Messager, *Perdu dans les limbes*
(*Cheveux*), 2018**

[Lost in Limbo (Hair)]

Video installation, colour, silent, 55"
Courtesy Annette Messager
and Marian Goodman Gallery

Perdu dans les limbes is the first video installation created by Annette Messager. The work is haunted by the presence/absence of ghostly images. Fragments of bodies seem to emerge from the walls, as if walking through them. Hair flies, caressed by wandering hands, sparking a particular tactile sensation in the viewer and awakening both the pleasure and frustration of a furtive grasp. Tension sets in, between desire and abandon, love and death.



Courtesy Annette Messager and Marian Goodman Gallery

Between 1969 and 1973, Boltanski created a series of short films, Expressionist in tone, with very simple means. One of the first is *L'Homme qui tousse* (The Coughing Man), which depicts a man – played by the artist's brother – sitting in a small, dilapidated room. He coughs until he spits up a torrent of red liquid, spilling onto his legs and staining his clothes. The coughed-up “blood” is paint, which was the first medium used by Boltanski, soon given up in preference of others that allow for exploration of all the senses, as evoked by these films. The short format, as well as the intensity of the image, make them resemble the mental flash typical of reminiscence.

Christian Boltanski,
Les Images modèles, 1975
[The Model Images]

Chromogenic prints
Purchase, 1977



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Annette Messager,
Le Bonheur illustré, 1975-1976
[Illustrated Happiness]

Coloured pencil on paper
Gifts from the artist, 1982 and 1999



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One of the few joint presentations of their work was “Messenger/Boltanski, Modelbilder” at Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Bonn (Germany) in 1976, their only exhibition in dialogue with each other. There, they showed *Les Images modèles* and *Le Bonheur illustré*, the last works in which they openly expressed their mutual influence. In these ensembles, Boltanski and Messager respectively explore the cliché themes of happiness, imitating amateur style, a distracted and random approach, and a familiar and reassuring appearance. Located between the desirable and the conventional, these images symbolise the difficulty of satisfying an eternal aspiration to happiness. During their careers, the two artists constantly stimulated one another and encouraged each other to surpass themselves. In 2022, after Christian Boltanski’s death, Annette Messager created the installation *Ensemble*, a circle made up of their pairs of shoes fitted together, chasing each other infinitely.

Annette Messager,
Ensemble AM-CB, 2022
[Together AM-CB]

Shoes
Courtesy Annette Messager
and Marian Goodman Gallery



Courtesy Annette Messager and Marian Goodman Gallery



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**Annette Messager,
Les Pensionnaires, 1971-1972
[The Boarders]**

Glass, metal, stuffed birds, graphite, feathers,
paper, wool, photograph, cotton sheet
Purchase, 1999

In the early 1970s, in close relation with the “Individual Mythologies” movement, Messager replayed the happiness and drama of the human condition in a disconcerting in-between space, shifting between fantasy and madness. “This piece was born from a banal incident: in the middle of summer in Paris, barefoot, I stepped on a dead sparrow. The sensation was strange, indescribable, and I said to myself: they’re close to us but we know nothing about them, no more than we know our neighbours, so I decided to domesticate them, in my own way. There is just as much misunderstanding between these familiar birds and human beings as between a man and a woman.”

Christian Boltanski, *L’Album de la famille D., entre 1939 et 1964, 1971*

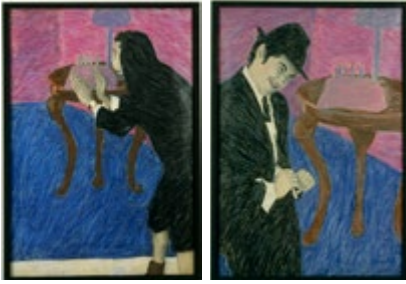
[The D. Family Album, Between 1939 and 1964]

150 gelatin silver prints, tinplate frames
Gift of Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert, 2023

The subject of this iconic work by Christian Boltanski is the albums of the Durand family, which the artist borrowed from his friend Michel, co-founder of the famous Galerie Durand-Dessert with his wife in Paris. Boltanski chose 150 images, which he blew up and slightly blurred, then slid into tin frames, evoking those hung in train compartments back then. Everyone can see themselves in these family photos, becoming universal codes through their ability to solicit common memories.



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Christian Boltanski,
Saynètes comiques. L'Anniversaire, 1974
 [Comic Sketches. The Birthday]

Photographs enhanced with pastel
 and gouache on cardboard
 Purchases, 1984

Is it an event in Boltanski's life or a made-up story? In his *Saynètes comiques*, Boltanski, dressed in a dark suit, plays out key moments of childhood. He interprets every role, including that of a little boy, his jacket on his head. This narrative work is structured in four tableaux, with captions evoking title cards in silent movies. He drew inspiration from the famous actor Karl Valentin (1882-1948), a genius of burlesque theatre. Boltanski parodies his own photo albums through a clown whose memories he invented. The pastel he overlays on the photo creates a mise en abyme of the reality of memory.

Annette Messenger,
Les Variétés, 1980 [Varieties]

Acrylic paint, oil on black and white photographs
 mounted on canvas
 Purchase, 1982

Annette Messenger created the series *Les Variétés* during a grant-funded trip to New York. It features compositions in different forms – spirals, arrows, hearts, arabesques, friezes, anthropomorphic shapes, and so on – created from fragments of photos of faces and body features, inspired by close-up shots in movies. The artist added different zones of colour, which partly hide the photographed subject. With these works, she tests a new approach to space: forms unfold on the wall freely, going from one wall to another, and sometimes creeping onto the ceiling.



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**Annette Messager,
Mes Vœux, 1989 [My Vows]**

Gelatin silver prints
Purchase, 1990

Inspired by *ex-voto* offerings, the works in the *Mes Vœux* series are made from a vast number of close-up photographs of facial and body features. They are suspended by string to form simple geometric shapes, here a circle. Fragments of female and male bodies are side by side in an undefinable mix of genders. The fragmented, overlapping images, mass effect and sparkle of the glass plates can provoke, in the words of the artist, “an overflow, a spill [...], to the point of suffocation”.

**Christian Boltanski,
Monument, 1986**

Framed photographs, sockets, bulbs, cable
Courtesy Annette Messager
and Marian Goodman Gallery

This work belongs to the major series, *Monuments*, which was created after the death of the artist's father in 1984 and which represents a break in his career. The series “is probably linked to an imprecise religion and paying homage to the living, to death and to the deaths to come”. Inspired by religious and commemorative monuments, Boltanski's works celebrate ordinary people and are created with modest materials – paper, iron, cables, lightbulbs. From 1984 on, light became an integral part of the artist's works and a fundamental element of his vocabulary. Glow symbolises the fragility of existence and allows him to immerse the public in an emotionally charged atmosphere.



Courtesy Annette Messager and Marian Goodman Gallery



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**Christian Boltanski,
Les Archives de Christian Boltanski
1965-1988, 1989 [The Archives of
Christian Boltanski 1965-1988]**

646 metal boxes, lamps, electric wires, black and
white and colour photographs, paper
Purchase, 1989

From his earliest works, Boltanski created resonance between the history of humanity and the history of his own life, where the autobiographical becomes collective through his conventional character.

Following the genesis of his project –summarised in the introduction of *Recherche et présentation de tout ce qui reste de mon enfance* (1969)–, he created this installation, featuring 646 rusty biscuit tins, which supposedly contain 1200 photographs and 800 miscellaneous documents from his workshop. An entire section of the artist's life is consigned here, but hidden to the public and only present in his memory and personal life.

“I've decided to take on a project that's been close to my heart for a long time: preserving oneself whole, keeping a trace of all the moments of our lives, all the objects that have surrounded us, everything we've said and what's been said around us, that's my goal.” CB

Annette Messager,
***Mes Petites effigies, 1988* [My Little Effigies]**

Cuddly toys, black and white photographs
under glass, coloured pencil on wall
Purchase, 1988

From 1988 on, Annette Messager started to buy the stuffed animals that she would use in her works, at flea markets and second-hand shops. *Mes Petites effigies* is her first work staging these cuddly toys. Each one is combined with the photo of a fragment of a body and a word written directly on the wall and repeated multiple times, like a litany. These words evoke emotions and feelings (fear, desire, forgetting, and so on), forming drawings with geometric contours that act as a visual foundation for the stuffed animals.



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Christian Boltanski,
La vie impossible de C.B., 2001
[The Impossible Life of C.B.]

20 elements: wood, wire mesh, fluorescent lamp,
electric wire, paper, photographs
Purchase, 2004

This autobiographical work is based on the impossibility of being able to reconstruct everything that makes up a person's life from their archives and determining what was important in their eyes. Each display case houses multiple testimonies of Boltanski's life, both personal and mundane: train and laundry tickets alongside photos of his loved ones, letters from family and curators, and documents both legible and illegible. The installation is emblematic of the illusion of passing on his own life through these modest remnants.



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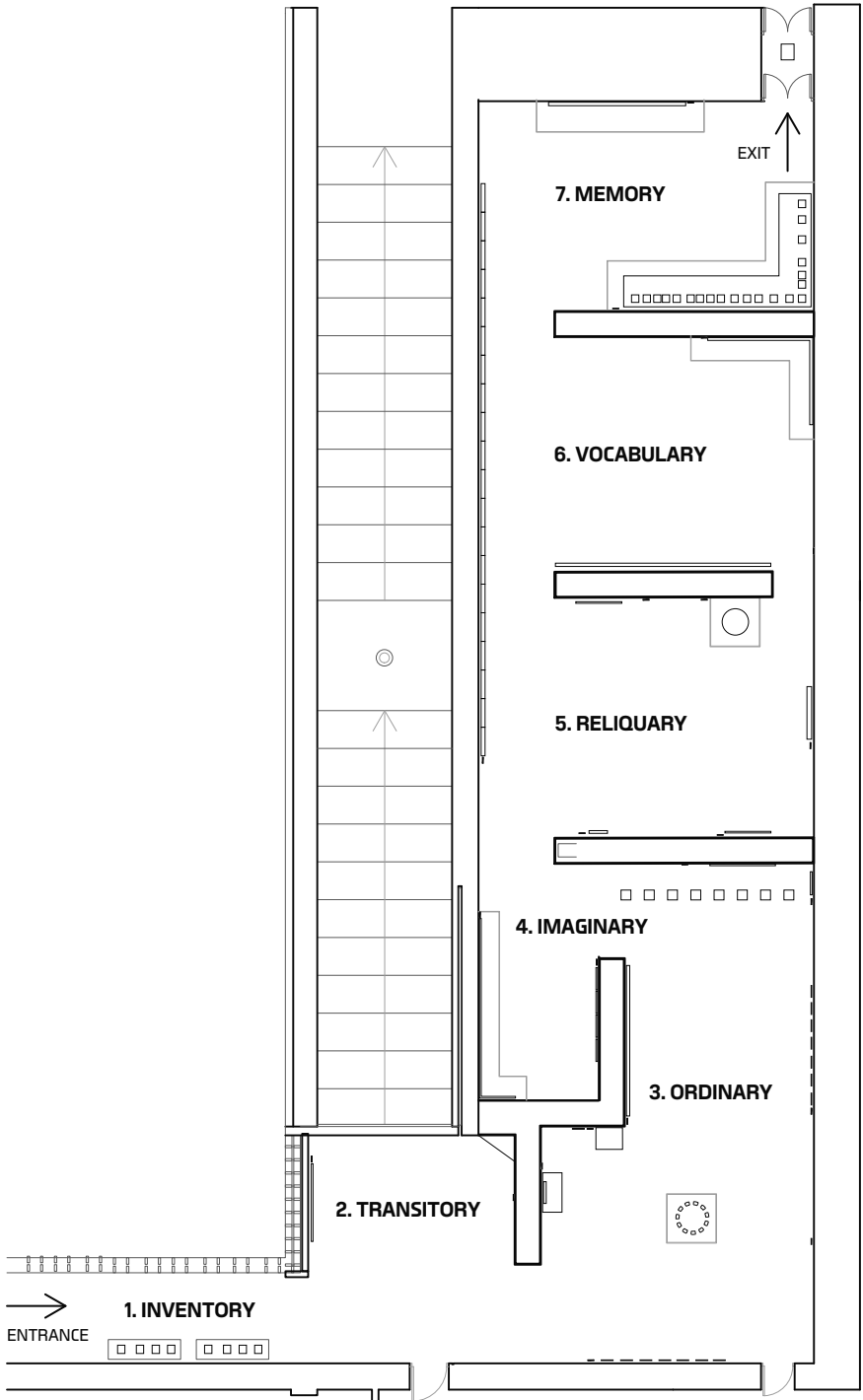
**Annette Messager,
Les Piques, 1992-1993 [The Spikes]**

Steel, coloured pencil and pastel on paper,
glass, fabric, nylon stockings, string, cuddly toys
Purchase, 1994

With *Les Piques*, Annette Messager powerfully affirms the artist's conscience, the necessary "witness of her time". Her childlike and nightmarish world underlies reflections

around feminine identity and the artist's role in society. She repaints images borrowed from the tragic global news, standing alongside hybrid impaled creatures, echoing the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution. Messager explores the dark face of humanity, indistinctly mixing victims and persecutors, reality and fiction, individual bodies and major history.

"I have taken many photographs of human bodies — of men, women and children — and accumulated them in such a way that it is no longer possible to tell whether they are male or female. (...) I think we only ever see bodies in fragments." AM



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A sheet designed for children is available at the beginning of the exhibition to help

families discover a selection of works throughout the tour.

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Included in the price of the ticket

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25 people maximum

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Discover all our activities (tours, workshops, events...) on our website: centrepompidou-malaga.eu

Information

Opening hours

9.30 am to 8.00 pm, every day

Ticket offices close at 7:30 pm

The museum is closed on

Tuesdays (except holidays

and days before holidays),

1 January and 25 December

Prices

Temporary exhibitions:

€4, concessions: €2.50

Semi-permanent exhibitions:

€7, concessions: €4

Semi-permanent and

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€9, concessions: €5.50

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