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# Drag, Lazy Art, and Belgian bohème: how three artists foreshadowed contemporary culture

In Art Basel's Feature sector, the works of Michel Journiac, Jean Dupuy, and Stéphane Mandelbaum emerge to forge new connections in 20th-century European art history

Who is Parisian artist **Michel Journiac** (1935–1995), whose Fluxus-adjacent performances were as crucial to their avant-garde impositions on his own body as they were for their documentary value? Or French painter-turned-conceptual-artist **Jean Dupuy** (1925–2021), whose later sculptural works, which he termed Lazy Art, required physical activation to be realized? Or Belgian artist **Stéphane Mandelbaum** (1961–1986) – born much later than Dupuy and Journiac – whose transgressive works on paper combined literary, cinematographic, and pictorial conventions, but who met with a tragic early demise?

With solo presentations in Art Basel in Basel's Features sector, all three artists are still relatively obscure within mainstream, mid-to-late 20th-century art-historical discourses. But each is significant, their techniques and methods now widespread in contemporary art in a reification of the importance of their groundbreaking work in their respective eras.



Left: Michel Journiac, *La Lessive*, 1974. Right: Michel Journiac, *La Femme travestie en homme*, 1974. Courtesy of Galerie Christophe Gaillard, Paris.

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Understanding Journiac, who performed wearing women's clothing and embodying 'women's roles,' means seeing how queer and feminist performance of the 1960s and 1970s departed from his happenings. Reaching the heart of Dupuy's oeuvre means reviewing his methods of refusal and interruption as they now manifest across contemporary installation work. And in Mandelbaum's case, collage and juxtaposition have developed to characterize today's racist absurdities, as the artist, too, witnessed in his time.

Born in Paris in 1935, Journiac is most remembered for his inappropriate, at times morbid, body art, rather than for its contribution to the burgeoning critical discourse on the politics of the gendered body. The tension between the artist's seemingly unassailable description of the body as a 'socialized, conscious meat' and his further claim that 'there is no such thing as an absolute body...it is linked to a whole series of contexts, objects, clothing, et cetera' sets up an oppositional framework in which to understand his body as an object, model, and identity marker.

**Galerie Christophe Gaillard** presents photographic documentation of Journiac's performative actions with *24 Heures de la vie d'une femme ordinaire. Réalités / Fantômes* (1974), allowing for a sweeping retrospective viewing of images of the artist performing works such as *La Femme travestie en homme* (1974) and *La Lessive* (1974). In the latter, Journiac, clothed as a woman, hangs pieces of washing labeled with artists' names he deemed worthy of attention, throwing the others into a laundry bin, making clear his method of imposing gender on his body through clothing and gesture to the point where social references become unintelligible. Though comparable to the work of fellow performance artist Vito Acconci, for whom controversy and transgression were endemic, Journiac's happenings are now notable for their more intelligent critiques of gender representation.

When Journiac's work involved harming himself, it was calculated and ritualistic, unlike the chaotic orgiastics of the Viennese Actionists who preceded him. Drastic works such as *Messe pour un corps* (1969), a mock communion in which the artist serves spectators pieces of grilled blood sausage made using his own blood, and *Initiation Ritual* (1986), which called for the artist to brand himself with a hot iron rod, the scars forming neat circles and triangles, speak to the extreme nature of Journiac's rituals. Beyond their gruesomeness, these are not dissimilar from the installations of fellow French artist Dupuy, whose assemblages also functioned according to deliberate programming and corporal interfaces.

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