

## Michel Journiac, le Corps transfiguré at Galerie Christophe Gaillard



Michel Journiac Rituel du sang - Stigmates, 1976 / Courtesy Michel Journiac & Galerie Christophe Gaillard / Photo : Rebecca Fanuele

As one of the pioneers of the *Art Corporel* (Body Art) movement in the sixties, Journiac protested biopower in an expressive, tormented style: with flayed figures, revealing organs, viscera, flesh, veins, and **blood**. His practice can be understood as a form of transgressive **body art**, in which blasphemous, abject, and queer gestures operate as rituals of critique and re-invention of the sacred. An exhibition accompanying the publication of a new **monograph** is now on view at Galerie Christophe Gaillard.

Painter or Priest? Art as the ultimate trigger of questions of life and death. Sixteen-year-old Michel Journiac (1935–1995) believed in salvation from **God**. He was dedicated to his Catholic community and to becoming a **Priest**. But, he was queer and lived in times of systemic homophobia and criminalization. Knowing his Catholic peers would not accept him among them, he left and redefined the sacred, spiritual and divine in his own right.



Michel Journiac Interrogatoire du jeu d'échec de l'art et de la mort, 1993 / Courtesy Michel Journiac & Galerie Christophe Gaillard / Photo : Rebecca Fanuele

By 1962, Journiac fully pursued the spiritual and metaphysical quest which started his artistic journey. Now it was **art**, and no longer to **religion**, that he granted the genuine **power of mystery** to. From his early works on, his paintings drew on **religious iconography**, the suffering body and the color red. **Blood**, drawn from his own **body**, would later become a reoccurring motif in his oeuvre.

He saw art “as a means of salvation, as salvation itself, the only possible one,” “the project through which the artist [can] tear the world and human beings away from the absurd, that through which the universe [takes on] meaning.” (Lettre de Damas, *Écrits*, p. 21.)



Michel Journiac *Untitled*, circa 1967 / Courtesy Michel Journiac & Galerie Christophe Gaillard / Photo : Rebecca Fanuele



Michel Journiac *Hostie - Le pain peut-il devenir chair? le plomb peut-il devenir lumière?*, circa 1991-1994 / Courtesy Michel Journiac & Galerie Christophe Gaillard / Photo : Rebecca Fanuele



Michel Journiac *Untitled*, circa 1967 / Courtesy Michel Journiac & Galerie Christophe Gaillard / Photo : Rebecca Fanuele



Michel Journiac *Rituel pour un autre*, 1976 / Courtesy Michel Journiac & Galerie Christophe Gaillard / Photo : Rebecca Fanuele

Crash Magazine - Avril 2026  
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His work draws value from **cultural and social critique**, revealing the relations between the individual's autonomy and the systemic regulation of **bodies, sexuality and desire**. His approach became increasingly relevant in the **HIV/AIDS** epidemic, where homosexual corporeality was further marginalized and blood in its epistemic and metaphoric materiality became more and more **object**. In 1993, Journiac launched his final series with *La Monnaie du sang*: blood-soaked, laminated 100-franc bills mailed out to **protest** the blood-tainted scandal of the deathly political, medical and social systemic failure during the AIDS crisis.

During his lifetime, Journiac taught, and his practice developed, outside the **art market** and French institutions, which offered him little support. For several years, Galerie Christophe Gaillard has been compiling a detailed inventory of his work and a catalogue raisonné. The gallery has also been working to introduce Journiac into major **art collections**, such as that of **François Pinault**.

The exhibition at Galerie Christophe Gaillard ties into the new **book** *Michel Journiac, Le corps transfiguré*. It sheds fresh light on how his art connects the body and the sacred, especially through blood as a material, from his first paintings in 1957–58 to the late *Rituel de transmutation* (1993–95). The title, taken from Journiac himself, sums up his lifelong **quest** to fuse flesh and holiness in art.

