



**Michel Parmentier**

*Ce silence nous regarde*

Une œuvre, un film - 1994

**Press release**

# Michel Parmentier

## *Ce silence nous regarde*

Une œuvre, un film - 1994

Exhibition at the Michel Journiac Gallery of the Sorbonne School of Arts, University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, from Friday, February 2, 2024, to Thursday, February 29, 2024.

A two-part scientific event, combining painting and cinema, supported by the ACTE Institute and the Michel Parmentier Association, presents:

— Michel Parmentier's painting exhibition: *20 janvier 1994*, oil bar antique white on Herculene tracing paper, 304 x 308 cm, Brussels, 1994 (Stéphan Uhoda Collection), and the screening of the documentary film by Bernard Bloch: "304 cm x 308 cm Presque le silence, Michel Parmentier, Brussels, 1994."

— A meeting/debate titled "Ce silence nous regarde Une œuvre, un film - 1994" on the boundary-crossing experience between two mediums - painting and cinema - featuring a presentation by Bernard Bloch and Agnès Foiret in a roundtable discussion with specialists from both fields. This event will take place on Thursday, February 29, 2024, from 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM, concluding the exhibition.

An unprecedented documentary archive completes the exhibition: the preparatory film *Repérage, Presque le silence* Beta/SP color, duration: 19 minutes, 1993, directed by Bernard Bloch in Guy Massaux's studio in Brussels.

The meeting/debate dedicated to Michel Parmentier's painting in action will explore several points: the critical stakes of Michel Parmentier's refusal of the film; the commitment to the repetition of the same as a shared act between the filmmaker and the painter; the challenge posed by visually representing a painting that claims pictorial nullity; the specific function of the creation narrative; the development of a material device that allows one to see what the process of painting does not show; transparency and disappearance as narrative driving forces.

Michel Parmentier stands out as a central figure due to his radical approach, yet his atypicality lies in his marginality within the panorama of the abstraction of the recent historical avant-gardes in France, which can be perplexing. He immerses us in uncertainty when we attempt to comprehend the relationship he maintains with his own painting in this endeavor towards a practice of silence.

What is this silence made of? This attempt to move towards impoverishment in painting, opposing the sovereignty of the monochrome that he ironically describes as a splendid success, all forms an inextricable complexity that will never be fully clarified, only approached. Parmentier claims to touch upon the question of painting by implementing pictorial nullity.

In 1994, from March 17 to May 15, Michel Parmentier exhibited a series of paintings using oil bar antique and titanium white on polyester tracing paper at the Carré des Arts in the city of Paris. White dominates in a low-lying, delicate, and feverish visibility. In a text from the catalog dated January 26, 1994, he writes: "To produce again, from time to time, this little (this too much again) without a recipient, which exists in the process of being made (and is not justified for that reason), which derealizes itself, contradicts itself, unravels in the it is done; empties itself too, I hope, in a result that is not one. To produce to end again."

1994 is also the year when the film *304 cm x 308 cm Presque le silence*, Michel Parmentier by Bernard Bloch was made.

"304 cm x 308 cm" refers to the format of Michel Parmentier's paintings and articulates the intention to reduce the expressive gap to the minimum between the two mediums: thinking about the surface, recording indifference, approaching painting as closely as possible through the camera. Does the moving image express or show silence? How can one understand the call for this silence as something other than a projection? Why strive to account for a meaningless painting rather than an invisible one, irreducible to any magnification of silence, neutralizing even the idea of painting?

Michel Parmentier in Guy Massaux's studio, Marconi Street, Brussels, Repérage April 23, 1993.



There is almost insolence in using the term "work" to describe Parmentier's repetition of blind and obstinate gestures, applied to paint in white. It is a foolish, sustained action that neither scorns nor delegates the "doing." One should not expect to find in it the highlighting of the ultimate gesture any more than a critical proposition of what might still be said with the means of painting.

Parmentier persists in undermining the project, whether one chooses to adhere to its necessity of impoverishment or not. Where is he when he paints? No answer. He is not there. Deficiency in production, confusion in presence. Presence reduced to an intermittent and aphasic excess, a few days per year. Present in the act of painting and absent from the painting.

The execution of such an obsession with nullity opens no path, not even to the mutual redefinition of presence and absence. If absence watches, it makes no claims. What is this determination to say nothing, to paint for nothing? To methodically practice not overcoming failure.

Because it excludes all statements, Parmentier's painting eliminates the nothing that absolves from nothing and gives an account of nothing. Beached in resistance to demand, releasing a burst of unusable refusals, this hiccup of insignificance.

Perhaps it is the insistence of attention to a little nothing, the everyday, the nameless, to what is worthless and that neither can prevent itself nor marvel at its disappearance.

### Agnès Foiret

Excerpt from the catalog of the **Michel Parmentier** exhibition  
March 17 - May 15, 1994, Carré des Arts, City of Paris,  
Curated by Marie-Odile Van Caeneghem.

Michel Parmentier, repérage April 23, 1993.





© Agnès Foiret

Michel Parmentier, repérage April 23, 1993.

The filming strategy for the movie *304 cm x 308 cm Presque le silence*

To capture the non-painting pictorial gesture and meet the painter's radical requirements centered on the impossibility of painting. The specifications were clear: use a stapler with 6mm staples, minimize dialogue, incorporate a few lyrical effects, precisely depict the various stages of the process (folding layers, stapling, oil bar applications) to emphasize the concept of the visible and the invisible in the artwork, and highlight folding as a method. This was the strict set of guidelines for documenting the process.

The filming location was a large white space, an old factory in Brussels, lent by Parmentier's friend Guy Massaux. Parmentier wore a white work suit, the oil bars were white, creating an atmosphere of disappearance into the white. The 16/9 format was proportional to the dimensions of the layers, and 35mm black and white film was chosen to capture the nuances of gray. The various moments of non-painting followed the same repetitive ritual, making it easy to determine the frames and changes in perspective. I created a storyboard based on video footage, and sound recording considered the quality of silent intervals.

I suggested that the layers be taped to a transparent surface for shooting in field and counter-field. On this point, Parmentier's refusal was categorical: "I cannot deviate from my practice with my stapler on a plywood surface." It took me several months to find a solution to this injunction. While passing through a factory airlock, I got the idea to order a thick, transparent material that functions as doors in the form of strips. The manufacturer delivered strips thick enough to receive staples, cut to the dimensions of the folded layers. Parmentier could no longer refuse. We affixed these translucent surfaces to large glass areas enclosed in a large wooden frame. The device was thus set up. Unlike Henri Georges Clouzot filming Picasso's creativity, our device revealed the minimal commitment of his painting act, which he called nullity and without affect. The film team had to limit themselves to a constant framing, recording the surface work to allow for an indexical analysis in the editing, considering an invariable rhythmic partition in the mechanics of the gesture.

*Presque le silence* was the second title I wanted to give to the film, but Parmentier preferred *304 cm x 308 cm*.

### **Bernard Bloch**

"Michel Parmentier doesn't like to be given importance.

He needs to feel forgotten.

He is a painter.

He has never done anything else.

He paints a few rare days per year.

When he doesn't paint,

it's the same weakness.

It can last for years."

### **Agnès Foiret**

Excerpt from the screenplay of the film.

Michel Parmentier (1938-2000) was the recipient of the Lefranc Prize in 1963, a period during which his works were regularly seen at Jeune Peinture or the Biennale de Paris.

In October and November 1965, through his refusal of expressive and meaningful representation, Michel Parmentier initially resolved the adequacy of the form/content relationship in canvases stretched on frames. He achieved this through the alternation of horizontally irregularly painted strips of various colors, delineated by masking tape, with strips painted in white. These paintings are considered part of the few works that laid the groundwork for the gradual development of folding.

In December 1965, Michel Parmentier embarked on a radical approach through folding, borrowed from Simon Hantai, which would now constitute his sole pictorial work: horizontal strips of a single color, 38 cm wide, alternating with identical strips but protected from paint projection by prior folding. The unfolding of the support would reveal, in one piece, the alternation of painted and unpainted strips. This method would be tirelessly practiced until his last work on polyester tracing paper dated November 20, 1999.

From late 1965, Parmentier repeated this work for three years, changing only the color, which arbitrarily shifted from one year to the next: blue in 1966, gray in 1967, red in 1968. On the back of the canvases, each work would be signed and dated by a date stamp that served as the title.

Starting in 1966, he exhibited primarily alongside Daniel Buren. Throughout 1967, he joined Buren, Mosset, and Toroni in various events of the eponymous group, marked by public actions. At the end of the same year, he announced through a leaflet that "The Buren - Mosset - Parmentier - Toroni Group no longer exists."

Parmentier ceased painting in 1968.

In 1972, invited to the exhibition *Douze ans d'art contemporain en France* at the Grand Palais, he nevertheless agreed to exhibit one copy of each of his paintings (1966, 67, 68) and published in the catalog an "open letter to François Mathey," the general commissioner of the exhibition. Stating the reasons for agreeing to exhibit work of "objectively subversive quality," he concluded: "Cessation, on the other hand, is irrecoverable subversion."

In 1978, he exhibited three of his earlier paintings (1966, 67, 68) at the Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert gallery. In the announcement on the invitation card, an asterisk points to the following warning: "Michel Parmentier definitively ceased painting in the year 1968."

In September 1983, after a fifteen-year hiatus, he resumed painting from where he had left off: "I have definitively stopped painting. This means precisely that I can relapse whenever I want and without being accountable." He then created black and white paintings similar to the previous ones for two years.

In April 1986, he began a series of works on paper and tracing paper where, still based on folding, pencil strokes, rubbed charcoal, repeated patches of white or gray pastel, and oil bar were applied to different supports where the trace left progressively identified with its erasure and tended to disappear. In 1988, the Centre National des Arts Plastiques (curator: Alfred Pacquement) dedicated an exhibition and his first monograph to him.

In 1990, Michel Parmentier and Daniel Buren co-signed a text in the catalog of the exhibition *Individualités: 14 artistes contemporains de France* (Toronto, Canada), which, due to its criticism of any idea of gathering under a national banner, sparked indignation in the French art world. In 1991, at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, he exhibited with Daniel Buren, and to accompany this exhibition, they published together *Propos délibérés*, interviews conducted by Anne Baldassari. Following a dispute over this publication with Michel Durand-Dessert, he left the gallery.

Until 1998, he regularly visited me in Brussels, where I welcomed him into my studio to allow him to work.

In 1995, at my initiative, a number of collectors mobilized to support Parmentier's work, leading to an exhibition (1997) at the Marconi studio where three of his foldings were displayed. In this same studio, the film *304 cm x 308 cm Presque le silence, Michel Parmentier* directed by Bernard Bloch was shot.

In 1994, at the initiative of Marie-Odile Van Caeneghem and Agnès Foiret, who wrote the critical text for the catalog, he exhibited at the Carré des Arts in the City of Paris a series of works on polyester tracing paper, a support he adopted from March 1993.

In November 1999, during an exhibition in Sittard (Netherlands), *tegenvleug/à rebrousse-poil posities in de schilderkunst* (curators: Luk Lambrecht and Guy Massaux), he executed on-site and exhibited what would become his last work: November 20, 1999. Among the exhibited works and artists, Simon Hantaï exceptionally lent his last painted work, "Tabula," 1982-1986.

Michel Parmentier died in June 2000 in Paris.

### **Guy Massaux,**

co-founder with **Bénédicte Victor-Pujebet**

(beneficiary) of the Michel Parmentier association

Curatorship of the exhibition: **Agnès Foiret-Collet** and **Bernard Bloch**

With the support of :

- galerie Michel Journiac : **Dominique Blais, Benjamin Sabatier, Véronique Verstraete**
- Institut ACTE : **José Moure**

With thanks to :

- **Stéphan Uhoda** (collector) and **Catherine Goffeau** (collection manager), Collection Uhoda, Liège, Belgique
- **Francis Mary**
- **Bénédicte Victor-Pujebet**
- **Guy Massaux**, Honorary professor at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, School of Fine Arts, co-founder with **Bénédicte Victor-Pujebet** of the Michel Parmentier Association, and **Alix Cantal** (documentalist).
- The team of students from the Michel Journiac Gallery

Stage management and conservation: **Cambyse Naddaf, Valérie Sizaire**

Graphic design: **Adam Houibi**

Managers: **Naila Fakhfakh, Belkis Smirnoff, Juliette Viviès, EAS** and **ACTE Institute** of Paris 1

Exhibition design: Caligraf Saint-Leu-La-Forêt, De toutes les couleurs Paris

**Michel Parmentier** is represented by Galerie **Loevenbruck**,  
6, rue Jacques-Callot, 75006 Paris.  
Exhibition MICHEL PARMENTIER February 15, 1984 - August 12, 1985.  
Artworks visible from February 2, 2024, to March 16, 2024.  
The exhibition brings together four paintings from the [black] period, January 25, 1983 - August 12, 1985.  
Contact: [contact@loevenbruck.com](mailto:contact@loevenbruck.com)

Film *304 cm x 308 cm Presque le silence*, Michel Parmentier

#### Technical Sheet :

Director: Bernard Bloch - Duration: 24 minutes - 35mm black and white  
Screenplay: Agnès Foiret and Bernard Bloch - Director of Photography: Michel Taburiaux - Camera: Bernard Bloch - Assistant Camera: Florent Henry - Sound Engineer: Claude Hivernon  
Chief Electrician: Olivier Barré - Set Construction: Olivier Seiler  
Digital Editing and Mixing: Nicolas Joly - Conformation: Rose Legrand - Color Grading: Dirk Van de Walle  
Lab: Futurimag - Production Manager: Pierre Mandrin  
Production Director: Muriel Bertucci -  
With the participation of the Ministry of Culture, Delegation to Plastic Arts - Thanks: Guy Massaux - Executive Producer Les Productions de l'Œil Sauvage - A film by Bernard Bloch - Copyright Les Productions de l'Œil Sauvage and Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995.

#### Broadcast :

Cinémathèque de Toulouse, 2000.  
Exhibition Centre Georges Pompidou, Simon Hantai, 2013.  
Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum Michigan, 2018.  
Circuit d'Art Contemporain Lausanne, 2019.  
Exhibition "Michel Parmentier, Dec.1985 - Nov.20,1999, a retrospective", Villa Tamaris, La Seyne-sur-Mer, 2014.  
International Colloquium "Criticism on Screen: Plastic Arts" University of Pau and the Pays de l'Adour, October 10, 2015.  
Exhibition Michel Parmentier Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris, 2019.  
Royal Academy of Fine Arts of the City of Brussels, 2019.  
Colloquium "Abstract Strategies of Contemporary Painting" organized by Sandrine Morsillo and Antoine Perrot, Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, February 8, 2020.

Documentary Archive: *Repérage Presque le silence* - Beta/SP color, duration: 19 minutes, 1993.

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Galerie Michel Journiac

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47, rue des Bergers, 75015 Paris  
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Opening Hours

Wednesday to Friday

2:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Saturday

12:00pm - 3:30pm

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