

# Jean Cocteau and Michèle Kleijnen, departures and imaginary journeys

The exhibition tour opens with a theme of departures and the fields of possibilities, real or imaginary openings.

Contemporary artist Michèle Kleijnen was invited to the museum to pay tribute to Jean Cocteau. A colorist artist from Menton, she created installations for this exhibition that echo those of the poet.

Jean Cocteau began his travels in the 1910's to the South. Greece inspired him to write his tragedies by revisiting the great myths (see Cocteau's drawings on the staircase illustrating ancient characters: **Antigone**).

But it was finally on the "Côte d'Azur" that he settled down. From the Villa Santo Sospir (St Jean Cap Ferrat) where he stayed from 1950 to 1962, he was able to shine and undertake a work of mural paintings on ladders that inspired Michèle Kleijnen (**En lien** "It was when I saw Jean Cocteau photographed on painter's ladders during his work for the decoration of the wedding hall in the Menton Town Hall that I had the idea of installing my ladders at the Bastion in order to create an imaginary link with Jean Cocteau's quote "I remain with you").

The Poet's travels were often professional but the sites visited also became vacation spots for him.

Villefranche-sur-Mer and Menton were the main construction sites he undertook, leaving behind some very beautiful works: the Fishermen's Chapel and the wedding hall. To illustrate this sequence, we present **lithographs** of the two sites (1956-1958).

On the theme of departure, starts with a project for an advertising poster that he designed for **Air France** and a small drawing representing a hot air balloon. It is a **Hommage à Jules Verne [Tribute to Jules Verne]** and a nod to the round-the-world trip he undertook in 1936 with Marcel Khill (Passepartout), for which he published a story with Gallimard.

Michèle Kleijnen's work **L'Infini [Infinity]** is freely inspired by this flagship book of the exhibition: "For the creation of this work, I was inspired by Jean Cocteau's book 'Around the World in 80 Days'. The symbolism of the number 8, of infinity, of departure and return reconnected me to my own travels and their many stopovers." MK

The contemporary artist also created **Malles [Trunks]**: "In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, sailing to the colonies and places of exploration, trunks were made directly at the harbours with exotic woods brought back by ships returning from their journeys. These, as I was told, transported earthenware from Asia. Flat-shaped on top, they could have been stacked. As usual, I added my color to be part of the journey." MK

... She personalized a jute bag **Escales et trésors [Stopovers and treasures]**: "During this creation, I chose the long term. The jute bag had already traveled carrying coffee beans from the island of Haiti. I transformed it into a sailor's bag, I sewed a large number of wooden buttons to symbolize the stopovers and the treasures gleaned along the way. Sewing is a very slow gesture, its long rhythm has taken me from stopover to stopover into an inner journey." MK

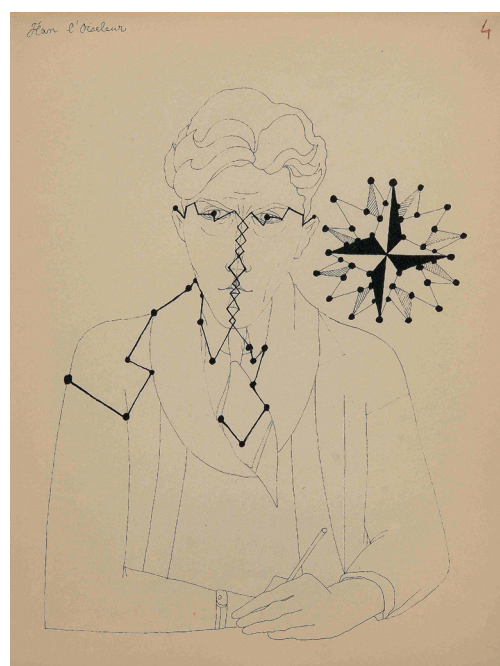
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This first sequence is also devoted to imaginary journeys, which is why Jean Cocteau's self-portraits welcome us. From the series **Le Mystère de Jean l'Oiseleur** [**The Mystery of Jean l'Oiseleur**] (1925), these collotypes respond to Michèle's diptych **la Traversée des miroirs** [**Crossing the Mirrors**]: "I propose a diptych in volume, in connection with Cocteau's cinema and imagination. The mirror is far more simple than a reflective object. It becomes a portal to the invisible, a way to transcend reality. Crossing the mirror, an emblematic scene in his films, the one where a character passes through a mirror to access another world. Quotes: 'Mirrors should think a little more before sending us images.' 'The film is directly inspired by the myth of Orpheus, transposed into the contemporary world. Jean Cocteau explains that he wanted to "mix myths and intertwine them' (Cahiers du cinéma). He develops a rich symbolism: 'Mirrors are the doors through which death enters.' 'Look at yourself all your life in a mirror and you will see death working on you' JC." MK

The imagination is creative with Michèle Kleijnen's bundle of pencils, **Tout reste à imaginer** [**It's all up to the imagination**] echoing the photograph of the Poet on his fresco: "The idea is to resonate with Jean Cocteau's work such as 'La Conquête de l'Inconnu' with my colored pencils in order to allow the visitor to access all the possible imaginations."

The work **Hors cadre** [**Out of frame**] takes us to the museum upper floor: "For this creation, I combined materials, deliberately went beyond the frames, explored spaces and limits. I was inspired by Jean Cocteau, who was often 'out of the box' himself, a free spirited artist who didn't fit into any box, unclassifiable, a jack-of-all-trades, at once a poet, painter, draughtsman, playwright and even a filmmaker. Through this work, I'm expressing the artist's freedom going beyond all frames, overflowing and being where you least expect him to be." MK



# Egypt and Spain



*“In 1936, I traveled around the world in 80 days, following in the footsteps of Phileas Fogg, and despite the speed to which my bet with Jean Prouvost (Paris-Soir) condemned me, I have preserved memories that evoke the charming anecdote of the little boy who is told that his uncle has traveled around the world and who asks: ‘How many times?’ These fast-paced struck me all the more because they had to be immediately shocked. A French person travels a little and, moreover, the wonders of the world flatter his laziness, because they reach him translated by radio, television, film, transistor radio, and magazines. But beauty requires that we make the effort to go and pay tribute to it. An object, a temple, a statue, an orchestra, possess a secret power that machines do not record.”*  
Jean Cocteau, 1963

The upper floor transports you to five countries through the works of the two artists, Jean Cocteau and Michèle Kleijnen: Egypt, Spain, India, Japan and Italy. Five selected stopovers inspired the lines of the Poet’s drawings, enhanced by the bright colours of Michèle Kleijnen’s installations with a maritime scenography imagined by the artist, in collaboration with the curator team of the Jean Cocteau Museum, around an internship study by Ambre Pennino (student at the Pavillon Bosio, Monaco).

All these countries were discovered or rediscovered (Italy and Greece) by Jean Cocteau during his world tour (except Spain).

## **The main room (upstairs) is dedicated to Egypt and Spain.**

The Poet went to **Egypt** for the first time during his world tour. He returned there in 1949 during his theatre tour, after which he published a story in 1950, *Maalesh, Journal d’une tournée de théâtre*. During his travels in this country, he had only one goal: to cross the mirror of the Orient and the centuries searching for the mythical character of Scheherazade. Cocteau’s mythology thrives abundantly on the legend of the Sphinx, the mystery of the pyramids and the intrigues of the pharaohs.

Jean Cocteau’s famous **Sphinx** series (1957-1958) rubs shoulders with Michèle Kleijnen’s **animaux fantastiques** [**fantastic animals**]. “Jean Cocteau said about his universe: ‘I have always preferred mythology to History because History is made of truths that become lies and mythology is made of lies that become truths.’” >> MK

**Les Palmiers dattiers** [**The Date Palms**] and **Les poissons** [**The Fish**] of the contemporary artist were inspired by the Egyptian universe of the Poet.

“Here I am inspired by Jean Cocteau’s theatrical tour in Egypt, Lebanon and Turkey. From this tour, he brought back a journal entitled ‘Maalesh’, which relates his experiences and observations during this theatrical journey. Maalesh being a local word that is constantly used for everything, to say ‘it doesn’t matter’ or ‘it’s nothing, it’s not serious’. I propose here through this creation a somewhat theatrical link between the **palm trees**, desert trees and their painted stems representing for me the expression of fireworks and applause collected.” MK

*“My fish live through my work since my maritime adolescence and meeting on the occasion of this exhibition meet the dreamlike universe of Jean Cocteau.”* MK



**Spain** presents works on the theme of Jean Cocteau's **Danseurs de Flamenco [Flamenco Dancers]** (1954-1960) accompanied by Michèle Kleijnen's **La danse [Dance]**.

*"Through my bamboo ballet, I create a link between dance, movement, the place of each person in space, but also music, theatre, the art of cinema, architecture, literature or the visual arts and the place of art in the city. With this installation in the centre of the upper main room of the Jean Cocteau-Le Bastion Museum, we find this notion of participation, immersion and theatricality."* MK

The Poet's attraction for Spain was above all determined by his meeting with Pablo Picasso and their long friendship that followed. He devoted many writings to it: *Poésie* in 1920, *Le Mythe du Greco* in 1943 before even really discovering this mythical land for the first time in the summer of 1953. On this occasion, he wrote *La Corrida du 1<sup>er</sup> mai* (published in 1957). He would return there several times until his death, with a predilection, however, for Catalonia and Andalusia. He was fascinated: the first reaction of surprise – *"Spain is nothing like what I had been told about it"* – was followed by an admiration constantly fueled by his now two major passions for flamenco and bullfighting. Both would nourish many of his poems up until *Cérémonie espagnole du phénix* (1961) and *Le Requiem* (1962).

*"The Spaniard lives in the minute. Sensation controls him. He is always at the extreme. Its intensity comes from there,"* he wrote in *Passé défini II*, 1953.

He insists above all on another lesson he received from Spain. It's a lesson in writing learned from flamenco. "My great discovery in Spain: flamenco is not a rhythm, it's a syntax... Flamenco and the translation of certain Spanish poems gave me a syntax – the syntax of my latest poems."

*"All that's left of this spilt milk is the jug and its scattered shards. A Spanish strawberry with its saw teeth. And the gypsy lady sitting in the shade of the ramparts"* Jean Cocteau, *Fraise espagnole*, 1958



# India and Japan



The side room on the upper floor is dedicated to Asia: India and Japan with drawings of **Hindu couples** by Cocteau and photographs of his Japanese friends, the oars decorated with fish by Michèle Kleijnen, her **Matelotage** [**Ropework**] and her **cabinet de curiosités** [**cabinet of curiosities**].

Cocteau's first visit to India was in 1936, during his 80-day round-the-world trip. To reach this country, he passed through *Aden, the vestibule of India*, on April 12, 1936.

He describes the Hindu elegance that he observes and that can be found in his drawings of Hindu couples inspired by the statues of the temples: *"Nothing is less simple than Hindu simplicity. If a Hindu gets dressed, he lets his European shirttail hanging over the dhoti, a piece of linen, fitting tightly the rump, draped over the legs of the canopies where the air and the gaze circulate."*\*

India is the obligatory passage to go to Singapore. The Poet will only see Bombay and Calcutta. On April the 17<sup>th</sup> he has four hours to visit Bombay, then he will take the Imperial Mail train to Calcutta where he will board a boat for Rangoon.

He describes the streets of this city: *"They entangle gods with elephant trunks, Shivas charming tigers and playing the flute, crossed-legs, innumerable goddesses surrounded by a cruel fan of arms."*\*

Cocteau is in Calcutta on April 19<sup>th</sup>. He is impressed by the Hindus bathing in the Ganges.

Then, he arrives in Rangoon (capital of the former Burma). Upon his arrival, he visits a temple that probably inspired him for the voluptuous bodies in his drawings.

*"Inside these dwellings house are alabaster Buddhas of all sizes, Buddha candelabras, assemblies of moon men, tribunals of pale colossi, massacres of snow statues and, sometimes, at the back of a kiosk, a god..."*\*

\*Jean Cocteau, *Mon premier voyage, Tour du monde en 80 jours*, éditions Gallimard, 1936

The theme of Hindu lovers was addressed by Jean Cocteau from 1959 onwards. Initially, he produced drawings from which silkscreens and ceramics were made between 1958 and 1962. In this room, we present a study for a plate. About fifteen of these potteries exist, with evocative titles: *Danseuses hindoues, Jeune-fille à l'œil, Le ménage hindou, Indes médiévales, Couple aux rayons...*

Therefore Cocteau mentions this work: *"The Hindu Suite (ceramics)." Le Passé défini, Volume VI, 1958-1959, January 1959, p. 414, NRF, Gallimard*

In this diary, he once again approaches India but from religious perspective: *"At least the charming Ramakrishna (who had dabbled in all religions, always denying the previous one by his enthusiasm for the newcomer) recognized his god in virtue as in vice, in the saint as in the criminal. He had understood that one cannot separate the shadow from the sun. Christ whiped every day, crowned with thorns, crucified by the Church. At least in the religions of India, there is no martyr to be martyred."*

Like Jean Cocteau, Michèle Kleijnen travelled a lot. She spent her early years on boats where she began painting in her teens. Apart from a short stay in Morocco, Scandinavia and then Canada in 1974, it was not until 1976 that she began to settle for a longer period in the Antilles (7 years), whose harbour is a logistical hub between Asia, Europe and North America. Her **Matelotage** is the symbol of her stopovers: *"During my adolescence, I had the chance to live aboard several 'old rigging' type boats. It was during these various trips and their stopovers between the Scandinavian countries, the European coasts, the crossing of the Atlantic via the Canary Islands and numerous encounters that I was able to learn the art of seamanship. Today, I revisit these calm and repetitive movements that bring another form of travel, a journey suspended in space and time."*

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Her painted oars entitled **Retrouvons notre enfance** [**Let's rediscover our childhood**] address the same theme: *"It is a tribute to the articles by Jean Cocteau published in the daily newspaper Paris-Soir in August 1935 and entitled 'Retrouvons notre enfance' that I named my installation thus. Having myself discovered this maritime universe as a teenager, I find there signs, gangways, seamanship gestures, ropes, mechanics, meteorology, sails, many other maritime universes and Mediterranean then transatlantic voyages but also imaginary voyages."*

When Cocteau visited Hong Kong during his 1936 trip, he compared its port to those of Toulon and Marseille: *"Toulon and Marseille often strike Asian chords, by dint of being the refuge of sailors..."* He discovered Japan, after Bombay, Calcutta, Rangoon, Penang, Malacca, Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai. He described this country in a very poetic way: *"Japan comes out of the sea. The sea rejected it like a mother-of-pearl shell. The sea retains the right to destroy it and take it back. Having been at the origin of the decorative spots of Japanese art, the pale fish, flecked with black and red, seem to obey the national style..."* We cannot talk about Japan without mentioning the Poet's Japanese friends and especially the painter Foujita. In 1955, the two artists published a book, **Le Dragon des mers**, whose text is based on the Japanese pages of his 1936 world tour illustrated with twenty-five Foujita engravings. We are exhibiting a letter displayed under glass.

The Poet would retain a special attachment to this island throughout his life, a prodigy of elegance and perfumes recognized among a thousand...

We are also presenting two photographs: **Cocteau avec une artiste japonaise** [**Cocteau with a Japanese artist**] and **le danseur Misho Ito** [**the dancer Misho Ito**] (1892-1961) who lived in New York from 1916 to 1929.

Mirroring the contemplative Japanese works, Michèle Kleijnen is exhibiting a **Cabinet de curiosités**: *"I'm back here with an evolving piece of work begun in 2008, a cabinet of curiosities in which are deposited many small harvests gathered and painted according to my discoveries. It's a way of catching a glimpse of the richness of the details we notice on our walks."* MK



# Italy, Venice



This room of the oven is dedicated to Italy (Venice) with lithographs of **gondoliers** by Jean Cocteau and **glass slabs** created in Murano to which the palm barks entitled **Venice** by Michèle Kleijnen and her installation of 300 brushes, **Balade chromatique**, respond to.

As for Greece, Cocteau went to Italy in the 1910's and stayed there regularly. Rome was his first stopover during his world tour in 1936. He then went to Athens and Rhodes.

In 1908 Jean Cocteau made his first trip to Italy with his mother, passing through Milan, Lake Maggiore, Verona and Padua and finally arriving in Venice. This path was traced by a 19-year-old man through his first collection of poems, *La Lampe d'Aladin* (1909), evoking for example "*The mysterious hour when, the slender gondolas/Confusing their moving darkness with the black canal,/The white gondoliers are flying ghosts.*" (*Promenade*).

While staying in Venice, Cocteau followed by the footsteps of many writers: Chateaubriand, Stendhal, Balzac... The city's history and the wealth of architectural heritage attracted equally as the European dandies visitors who hurried to be there.

Jacques, the young hero of his novel *Le Grand Écart* (1923), travels to Venice with his mother. "*Venice had disappointed Jacques like a warped décor by the dint of being used, because each artist sets it up for at least one act of his life. [...] He admired the strength of the couples who visit Venice compared with the activity of insects.*"

Jean Cocteau returned to Italy in the 1950's. Sitting on café terraces, he liked to draw monuments or passers-by's caricature. But he also evoked the stormy love affair between the famous **George Sand and Alfred de Musset** in 1833 (see the lithograph near the oven).

Indeed, in parallel with his traditional drawing skills, Cocteau created a large number of drawings for lithography. These were produced by applying lithographic pencils on special paper supplied by his lithographer, Fernand Mourlot. This technique produces a line quality similar to a drawing on paper. Cocteau used lithography to produce portfolios with limited editions, such as "*25 lithographies originales*", published in 1975, from which the works presented here are taken.

In 1947 Cocteau stayed with Jean Marais, and again in 1951 with Francine Weisweiler and Édouard Dermit.

On several occasions, he attended the Venice Biennale. He was awarded the International Critics' Prize at the 11<sup>th</sup> Venice Film Festival in 1950 for his film *Orphée*. The same year, he collaborated on the short film *Venise et ses amants* by Luciano Emmer and Enrico Gras (for which he wrote the commentary).

Venice is also about glasswork: in the 1950's, the glassmaker Egidio Costantini (1912-2007) decided to collaborate with renowned artists. Founder of the Centro Studio Pittori nell'Arate del Vetro di Murano, he wanted to raise the craft of glassblowing to the same level as sculpture or painting. Glass then brought volume, light, and transparency to the great masters of modern art drawings: Braque, Ernst, Picasso, Chagall, Arp, Calder.

Jean Cocteau took a glassmaking course in Murano. Seduced by Costantini's passionate personality, he invented a name for the glass workshop: la Fucina degli Angeli – the Foundry of Angels. "*Egidio Costantini thinks with his heart, and it is with the breath of his heart's forges that he prolongs the transparent and graceful audacities of Venice*", said the poet.

"*Of all the artists I've worked with, Cocteau was the greatest,*" declared the glassmaker, who allowed the artist to stay at the furnaces to help create the pieces of work.

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About 10 of glass models were created in collaboration between Egidio Costantini and Jean Cocteau, including *Faune-plante* (a 1.80 m piece, a stem of leaves ending in a faun's head), *La Main-œil* (1956), a vase with three faces in blown glass (1962), and lovers' faces in pressed glass.

You can see two of the three works among the pieces of the Jean Cocteau's Séverin Wunderman collection: ***Icare***, ***La Madone et l'Enfant***. The technique used here consists in transposing the artist's drawing into a terracotta model, then into a bronze mold, into which the glass was molten.

Michèle Kleijnen was also inspired by Venice. Her gondolas installation entitled ***Venice*** seems to float in the room. "For this work, I was inspired by Jean Cocteau's drawings of Venice. Venice was one of the main maritime and commercial powers, its armed convoys crisscrossing the Adriatic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, laden with silk, pearls and spices. Its merchants feel right at home everywhere." "The Legend also says that Goulimine beads, made by venetian glass, were used as a bartering system. Paying with Goulimine beads these multicoloured rolls of glass casting, served as currency in the Sahara and parts of sub-Saharan Africa."

On the ceiling, the contemporary artist has installed colored paintbrushes, ***Balade chromatique***: "It was during the global pandemic under lockdown that I had the idea of colouring the painting brushes to repaint the world in another way, in any case, more poetic and more colourful! After my major exhibition at the Château Lascaris in Gorbio in 2022, my paint brushes are back in Menton in the room of the oven of the Musée Cocteau le Bastion. A work of art designed in three dimensions alters the perception of the space in which it is installed. The installation of several hundred brushes summons, for the viewer, notions of participation, immersion and theatricality."





# Venise que j'aime



Jean Cocteau composes **Venise que j'aime**, an unpublished song preserved at the Fond Jacques Doucet in Paris. It is also the title of a book of photographs by Jean Imbert, presented by Jean Cocteau, narrated by André Fraigneau and captioned by Michel Déon (Éditions Sun, Paris, 1957).

## **Venice that I love**

Jean Cocteau

Venice of water and arches  
Serious walking pigeons  
And flying lions  
The heart beats slower  
But like wildfire it blazes  
On the water where your legs dance  
The bird of peace, the dove nests  
In the head curled with a thousand cornices  
The dark moire  
Around your black gondolas  
Drap your mourning, oh melancholy  
And the young oarsmen  
Strike the grief that dies  
At the bottom of your water of oblivion

Venice that I love  
Your dear silence adorned with song  
Remains the same  
With its distorting mirrors  
Since a thousand and thousand lovers  
Have known you lie  
Venice your dream  
Is dreaming without being asleep  
A reflection completes  
Your beautiful female body half  
And siren from below  
You take us in your arms

Receive my praise  
Daughter of wave and air  
And of this sea  
Married to the old doge  
For a ring of gold  
For life and for death  
Venice that sleeps  
Of your sleep are we the dreams  
Make my heart dive  
Into the false prison  
Where the dance of your houses  
Dances to the point of madness

I want to sleep again  
In the canal where your body  
Every night lies  
And live your poem  
Venice that I love.

