



HERVÉ TÉLÉMAQUE

A HOPSCOTCH
OF THE MIND

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SERPENTINE

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1937 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Hervé Télémaque left for New York in 1957, when former president François Duvalier was elected to power, to study at the Art Students League under painter Julian Edwin Levi. Entering into an art scene dominated by Abstract Expressionism, Télémaque became interested in the approaches of artists like Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, while simultaneously feeling limited by these early influences: ‘this thoroughly New York school seemed inadequate for me to express where I came from and who I was.’

In 1961, Télémaque moved permanently to Paris, associating with the Surrealists and later co-founding the Narrative Figuration movement in France with art critic Gérard Gassiot-Talabot and artist Bernard Rancillac through the manifesto exhibition, *Mythologies quotidiennes* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1964. A reaction against the dominant trend towards Abstract art and the developing movement of Pop art in North America, Télémaque's Narrative Figuration often results in works with a Pop sensibility combined with an astute criticality, producing work in dialogue with current events, such as the Cold War, the Cuban missile crisis, US intervention in the Dominican Republic, and contemporary French politics. As the artist

states: ‘I employed signs and consumer objects, but I did so while attempting to introduce therein something fictional, a directed...critical narrative.’

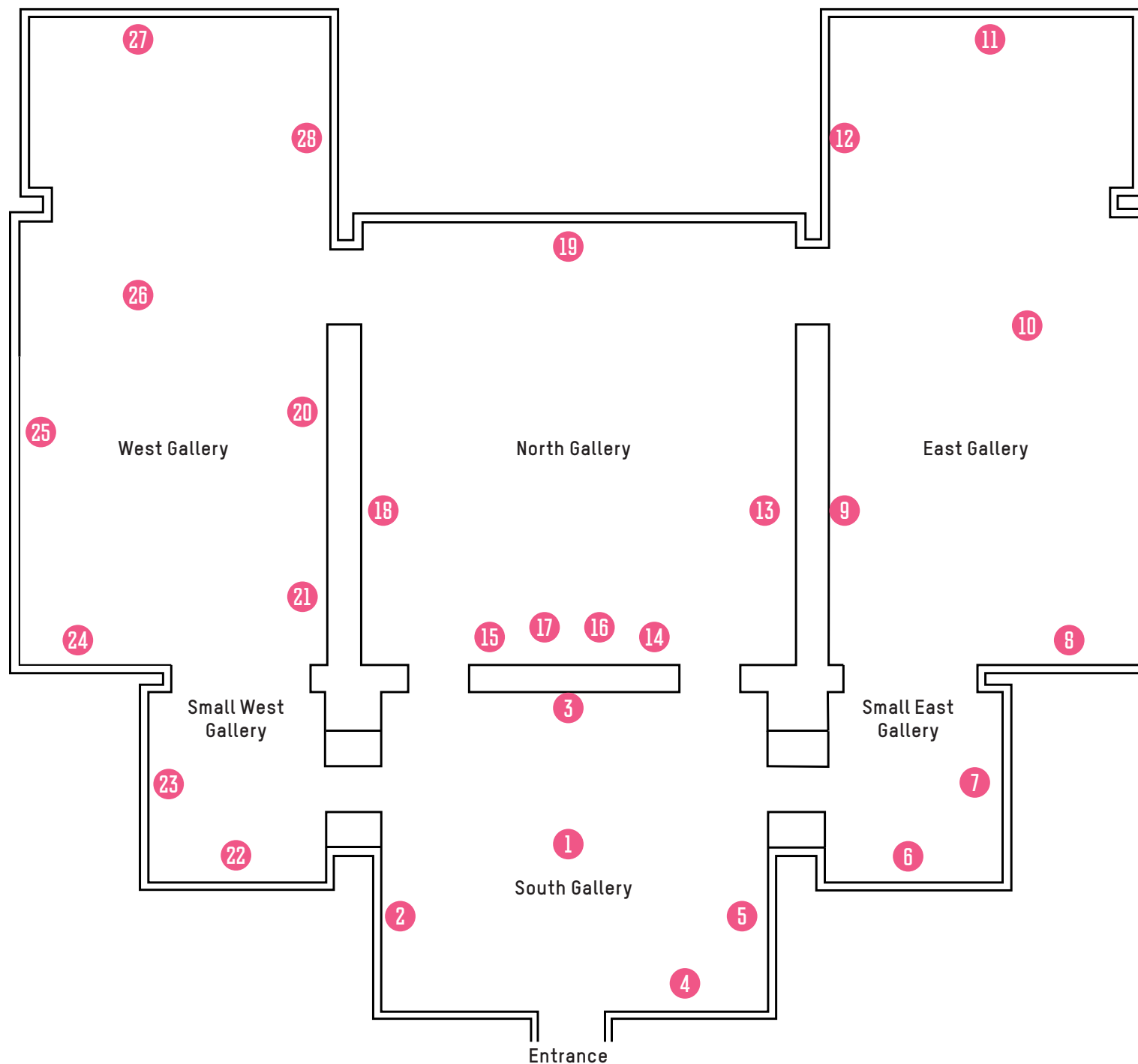
In 1964, Télémaque discovered the opaque projector, which enabled him to project images directly onto the canvas and render them with acrylic paint. This ‘clear line’ painting technique common within cartoon illustration, involving strong lines of similar width and minimal contrast, was a style that he appropriated from the Belgian cartoonist, Hergé. The graphic and cartoon-like images that developed from this moment led to the production of works loaded with political messages that still resonate powerfully today. Throughout his career, Télémaque would continue to highlight the histories and legacies of racism and colonialism with works that intimate the insidious ways that these structures continue to permeate our everyday lives.

From the late 1960s through to the 90s, Télémaque continued to develop an experimental practice, bringing together sculptural and collage elements with materials such as charcoal, salvaged wood and coffee grounds. In the 2000s, his works began to incorporate more explicit references to Haiti, his position as part of the Caribbean diaspora within France, and his African heritage. This was triggered by an

interest in the literary movement of Négritude, which began among French-speaking African and Caribbean writers living in Paris in the 1930s, 40s and 50s as a protest against colonial rule. This movement is often characterised by a self-affirmation of Black consciousness amongst the thinkers who define it. By drawing upon notions of home, returning and belonging as it relates to the African continent, several writers of the Négritude movement highlight the significance of a grounded sense of being amongst people who identify as part of the African diaspora across the world. These themes are explored in several works by Télémaque during this period, in particular the most recent and largest work in the exhibition, *Al l'en Guinée* (2019).

Although often explicit in their factual grounding, Télémaque's complex compositions invite us to decode their many symbols, references and connections like a puzzle. Rather than adhering to a chronological display, this exhibition proposes a similarly playful approach to Télémaque's body of work. *A Hopscotch of the Mind* is an invitation for viewers to carve out their own pathways through the artist's visual language, forming new associations based on their own experiences and perceptions. Recurring throughout the artist's career

regardless of medium or period are what he calls '*objets devenus langage*' (objects-become-language), elements such as the cane, the nail and the bra; a group of signifiers that act as poetic shortcuts for certain narratives or trains of thought. Once deciphered, these motifs help anchor each work in the themes that are central to Télémaque's practice. Recurring throughout the works displayed are meditations on the artist's life story; the histories and contemporary experiences of racism and colonialism; sexuality and desire; the presence of violence within the everyday, and contemporary politics and news media. As he says: 'I drew on my life as a Haitian of mixed race to construct a double language based on both the political and social, the question of identity...racism, and sexuality.'



Observe physical distancing when moving through the exhibition and follow guidelines on signage and from members of staff

Please do not touch the artworks or surfaces throughout the exhibition

Please hold onto this guide or dispose of it responsibly after your visit



CONFIDENCE, (SECRET)

1965, acrylic on canvas, painter's stepladder,
carpenter's hammer, rod and ropes

With its confrontational position upon entering the gallery, this autobiographical work by Télémaque takes us back to his childhood. A fragment of text reads '13 years old / to be a trapeze artist,' while the girdle in the top right corner of the work refers to a hernia suffered as a teenager, which ended his promising career as a high jumper. Several long nails also appear in the composition. They represent the memory, recovered through psychoanalysis, of a childhood injury to the artist's left hand. As a child, Télémaque was naturally left-handed, but like many of his generation was made to write and draw with his right hand. The nail becomes a symbol of trauma for Télémaque, an 'object-become-language,' as he calls it, that re-appears throughout his work.



Confidence (Secret), 1965 © Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Genève. Photograph: Jean-Louis Losi.
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BANANIA I

1964, oil on canvas

In the opening lines of *White Skin, Black Masks* (1952), psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon wrote of the Black experience in 1952: ‘here I am an object among other objects.’ In the *Banania* series, Télémaque tackles the racist aspects of French culture, which he sees as more insidious and pervasive than the overt discrimination he encountered in New York in the late 1950s. Recurring in these works is the ‘Bonhomme Banania’: the face of a ‘*tirailleur sénégalais*’ (Senegalese infantryman) – a generic name for Black colonial troops that fought in the French army from 1857 until the end of the Second World War. This derogatory term would become translated into popular culture as the logo of what remains one of the most popular French brands of hot chocolate. At the centre of the work depictions of kitchen utensils mingle with those of weapons, intimating how racism is often embedded within the everyday.

PETIT CÉLIBATAIRE UN PEU NÈGRE ET ASSEZ JOYEUX, (LITTLE BACHELOR A LITTLE NEGRO AND QUITE HAPPY)

1965, oil on canvas

In this playful self-portrait, Télémaque made use of an opaque projector to paint in the ‘clear line’ technique pioneered by Belgian cartoonist Hergé, involving strong lines of similar width, minimal contrast, and in this case, a bright colour palette. Embracing the round format of the projector, he creates a visual short-circuit through a Pop aesthetic by the simple act of layering two pairs of men’s underwear over his own caricatured face. In the latter part of his career, Hergé was accused of racism due to his portrayal of various ethnic groups, in particular within one of his most famous works, *The Adventures of Tintin*. Through its stylistic appropriation and rendering of the artist as a cartoon character, this work and many others by Télémaque raise questions around the visual language of cartoons and caricatures and the potential for racist and xenophobic stereotypes within this mode of representation.

VÉNUS HOTTENTOTE, (HOTTENTOT VENUS)

1962, oil on canvas

Sarah Baartman, born around 1789 among the Khoikhoi people in modern-day South Africa, was brought to Europe by a British doctor in the nineteenth century. She was dubbed the ‘Hottentot Venus’ and exhibited as an attraction in what were known as ‘ethnological displays’. Her features were caricatured and fetishised in satirical drawings made of her at the time. When she died at the young age of 25, her body parts were preserved in jars at an anthropology museum in Paris (the Musée de l’Homme), where her skeleton remained on show until 1974. It is there that Téliémaque came across her story and proclaimed that from then onwards, ‘every one of my female models will look like her.’ Téliémaque pays homage to Sarah Baartman within this work, but also draws our attention to the inhumane nature of her treatment and her significance as a symbol of colonial and racist brutality.

MÈRE-AFRIQUE, (MOTHER AFRICA)

1982, collage of coloured papers, leather whip, torn papers, drawing on tracing paper, black and white photography

This collage was created by Téliémaque in response to an invitation from the United Nations to take part in the *Arts Against Apartheid* exhibition that opened in Paris in 1983. Téliémaque superimposes a 1970 image captured by photographer Kay Muldoon of a Black nanny in Apartheid South Africa, walking the children in her care into a ‘whites only’ zone, with the caricatures of two Black men lifted from the famous jazz-age posters by Paul Colin promoting the 1920s music-hall La Revue Nègre. Rather than images of violence and conflict, in this work Téliémaque identifies two familiar sites of interaction between Black and white people within racially segregated societies – the Black nanny in a white family and the Black entertainer – as pressure points. In the middle, a horse whip acts as a forceful reminder of the context of slavery which underpins these relations, next to which appears scribbled out text reading as the artist’s voice: ‘Un haitien contre apartheid’ (‘a Haitian against apartheid’).

LE LIVRE: PORTRAIT D'ANDRÉ BRETON, (THE BOOK: PORTRAIT OF ANDRÉ BRETON)

1966, vinyl and acrylic painting on canvas, assemblage
(feather duster, book, paper, ribbon, newspaper)

Painted the year of the Surrealist writer André Breton's death, this work is based on the 1922 photograph taken by Man Ray of Breton posing in front of Giorgio De Chirico's painting *L'Énigme d'une Journée* (1914). In front of it is a wrapped book gifted to Télémaque by his friend José Pierre as an introduction to Surrealism. It is connected to a feather duster, which acts as an invitation to unpack and dust-off the layers of meaning in the work of Breton as well as in the layered Surrealist references of the painting. Positioned next to the work *Le Voyage d'Hector Hyppolite en Afrique*, the work also speaks to the influences and legacies of this art movement pioneered by Breton, who famously travelled to Haiti in 1945 and declared artist Hector Hyppolite a Surrealist.

LE VOYAGE D'HECTOR HYPPOLITE EN AFRIQUE, (THE VOYAGE OF HECTOR HYPPOLITE IN AFRICA)

2000, acrylic on canvas

Hector Hyppolite was a Haitian painter and houngan (a voodoo priest), closely associated with the Centre d'Art, a studio-gallery established in Port-au-Prince in 1944 by DeWitt Peters as a generative space for the promotion of Haitian artistic practices. Hyppolite's work was particularly admired by writer André Breton, who came across his paintings on his visit to Haiti in 1945 and famously described him as 'the guardian of a secret'. Within this painting, Télémaque draws our attention to this sense of mystery and myth-making that surrounds the figure of Hyppolite, as well as his connection to traditional Haitian Vodou practices. Hyppolite is pictured as the Baron Samedi, a Haitian spirit (*loa*) of the dead, with his top hat and tails embroidered with skulls and crosses. 'I made Hector Hyppolite a zombie that would travel to Africa,' the artist explains, referencing his desire to return to the land of ancestors that connects the diasporic experience. On the blackboard to the top right of the canvas, names of African dictators are scribbled, while in the corner appears what could be the blue and red of the Haitian flag.

L'ANNONCE FAITE À MARIE, [THE ANNOUNCEMENT TO MARY]

1959, oil on canvas

This painting was realised just two years after Téliémaque left Haiti for New York and is the earliest work in the exhibition. Graffiti-like writing emerges through expressive layers of paint, with the most prominent word 'MAËL', spelled in yellow capital letters, invoking the name of his wife, Maël Pilié, who he had married that same year. Immediately beside her name, what look like breasts and a nude female figure introduce the theme of desire that runs through several works in the exhibition, while a cross lies in the bottom right corner of the canvas.



PORTRAIT DE FAMILLE, [FAMILY PORTRAIT]

1962 – 1963, oil on canvas

A frenetic and charged depiction of domesticity, the fragmented composition of *Portrait de Famille* is an early example of Télémaque's Narrative Figuration. Each element, from the mouth with mangled teeth to the bra, arrows and cartoon-like characters, borrows from the visual language of comic books, taking us on a journey of association through the various images and pieces of text that populate the work. The cartoon-like style, which would become characteristic of many of the artist's subsequent works, is part of his desire to create a direct, powerful and at times confrontational visual language.



THE LOVE SONG (T. S. ELIOT)

1994, coffee grounds on wood

‘I have my life measured out with coffee spoons’; this verse from the seventh stanza of T. S. Eliot’s poem ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ (1915) seems to echo the artist’s fragmented sense of identity. Made of wood and painted with a mixture of coffee grounds and purple pigment, the object’s material conjures certain colonial histories relating to the production of coffee. A silhouetted landscape is depicted on the wood’s surface as a visual nod to the topography of Haiti and the artist’s memories of living on this island. For the artist, the use of coffee grounds as a pigment also echoes traditional painterly practices: ‘It’s a way to add to the nobility of the artistic act. It erases the details, and it provides a noble colour.’

DÉRIVE N1, (DRIFT N1)

1985, acrylic on canvas

Writing plays is an important part of Télémaque’s work, sometimes adding to the fragmented narrative and sometimes helping elucidate the imagery. In *Dérive n1*, the handwritten inscription states ‘the column seemed to be moving away, he looked again to the side.’ The title of the work is a reference to the continental drift, which separated the American and African continents that were once attached.

RABAT, [FLAP]

1998, acrylic and coffee grounds on wood

A rare instance of the artist saturating the visual field and thereby conjuring the sense of an image that has been erased, *Rabat* has been described as a fold in a magistrate's robe. Situated somewhere between a painting and a sculpture, the 'flap' of wood that covers most of the composition appears to hide an image underneath that is inaccessible to the viewer, while loose geometric lines float on its surface.

ONE OF THE 36,000 MARINES OVER OUR ANTILLES

1965, oil on canvas

In 1965, American troops landed in the Dominican Republic. They were sent by President Lyndon B. Johnson in a proclaimed attempt to forestall the formation of a new communist regime in the Caribbean. Displayed in the same year at the exhibition *La Figuration narrative dans l'art contemporain* at Galerie Creuze in Paris, it is Télémaque's most explicitly political work to date. With the allusion to the French Revolution through the inclusion of the date '1789' in the composition, the artist not only intimates his support for the revolutionary cause, but also highlights through the title of the work the sense of collectivity that is embedded within the notion of 'our Antilles' and its people. The connected nature of the Caribbean islands is evident in the artist's reflections on the moment at which he was painting and the context of the Cuban missile crisis: 'Back in those years, Fidel Castro appeared to North Americans as the devil incarnate, and one couldn't read in the *New York Times* any serious, objective news about the situation in Cuba. We were in the archaicism of the traditional American way. Faced with this lack of understanding on the part of American imperialism, which refused to grant that an island of five million inhabitants might choose its destiny.'

UN CLOU (AYANT DE LA RÉPARTIE), (A NAIL (WITH A QUICK WIT))

1968, metal and wood

A bent and fragmented nail, a recurring symbol of trauma within Télémaque's visual vocabulary, articulates and multiplies itself in this sculpture. The title of this series of objects, *Sculptures maigres* ('lean sculptures'), intentionally sounds like '*sculptures nègres*', a reference to the artforms of sub-Saharan Africa that gained increased appreciation and concomitant aestheticisation within the first half of the twentieth century in Western cultural discourse. In each of these works, their apparent minimalism belies their political subtext, as simple everyday forms take on different meanings.

TERRITOIRE, (TERRITORY)

1968, metal, string, paint, tape, sponge and wood

The white cane as a motif in Télémaque's imaginary carries a number of associations: it is a blind man's walking stick, a metaphysical object derived from the umbrella motif featured in several paintings by the Surrealist painter, René Magritte, and a symbol of death and resurrection when carried by the Haitian spirit of the dead, Baron Samedi. In this sculpture, the broken canes become a pair of knitting needles, half-nail, half-cane, somewhere between reference and representation.

FATALITÉ N1 AND N2, (FATALITY N1 AND N2)

1968, metal and wood

Influenced by the Italian art movement *arte povera*, whose first exhibition took place in 1967, Télémaque refers to works like *Fatalité n1* as '*sculptures maigres*' or lean sculptures. The movement was a reaction to the increased commodification of art and its participants took to using everyday, humble materials to make works they considered 'unsellable.' Here, Télémaque renders three-dimensional the nail that is a recurring motif in his paintings. Standing alone, the object generates its own associations through the ambiguity of its size and function: from a domestic tool to a weapon of war.

FONDS D'ACTUALITÉ, N1, (CURRENT AFFAIRS, N1)

2002, acrylic on canvas

In 2002, Jacques Chirac was re-elected for a second term as French president in a landslide victory against far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. This marked an important moment in French politics, and, as Télémaque recounts it, 'getting 82.1% of the vote; I thought that deserved a painting.' One half of the canvas is covered in reproductions of caricatures of Chirac by *Le Monde* cartoonists Plantu and Pancho alongside references to the democratic process with an urn, voting ballot and allusions to campaign posters. 'Coming from Haiti, where voting is an unusual, unfamiliar act,' explains Télémaque, 'I find a particular joy in the democratic process.' On the bottom left of the canvas, an homage to African American artist Jacob Lawrence's painting *Although the Negro was used to lynching, he found this an opportune time for him to leave where one had occurred* (1940-41), complicates the work's message, bringing forward an ambivalence that is characteristic of Télémaque's social commentary.

AL L'EN GUINÉE, (GOING TO GUINEA)

2019, acrylic on canvas

The Creole expression '*al l'en Guinée*', meaning 'going to Guinea', refers to the myth of the return to West Africa for the descendants of slaves – a poetic euphemism that means both death and paradise simultaneously. In this ten-metre-long painting at the centre of the exhibition, Télémaque invites the viewer to follow the character on the far left on a 'hike through life'. The first vignette takes the traveller from the hills of Haiti through Lake Toba, in Indonesia – the site of a volcanic eruption some 75,000 years ago, that some say caused the most recent natural extinction event – and around the Taklamakan Desert in China, also known as 'the sea of death'. At the centre of the painting, what the artist describes as a blue portal leads to the grey dried salt lakes of South Africa. To the right, a blaring trumpet and dice lead to a brightly coloured double bar line that punctuates the work. For the artist, his most recent work is 'both a bleak and happy song...it's death, but also paradise...I'm talking about death, about the end of the game, but it's a happy end.'

NATURE VOUS PARLE, (NATURE SPEAKS TO YOU)

1967, acrylic on canvas, wood, piece of cloth (bra)

Télémaque has taken the title of this work from a quote by an early leader of the French Revolution, Honoré-Gabriel de Riqueti comte de Mirabeau: 'If nature speaks to you, invites you, is your system of disobedience not a rebellion, a crime against it?' The passage was seen as a criticism of the catholic church's policy of enforcing the celibacy of priests.

INVENTAIRE, UN HOMME D'INTÉRIEUR, [INVENTORY, AN INTERIOR MAN]

1966, acrylic on canvas

For Télémaque, the tent is ‘a strictly metaphysical sign of the human dwelling’ borrowed from artist Giorgio De Chirico’s visual language. Works like *Inventaire, un homme d'intérieur*, evoke the psychoanalysis undergone by the artist in New York with George Devereux, the father of ethnopsychiatry. At the core of this practice is the understanding of a person’s psychology through the lens of their culture and customs. This process had a profound impact on Télémaque, whose lifelong exploration of the self and cultural identity permeates his entire body of work.

GOLDEN GATE STORY

1979, collage

This work is part of a series of collages realised by Télémaque in the late 1970s. ‘It’s an imaginary journey on horseback,’ explains the artist, pointing out the black asphalt paper at the top of the work and the drawings of saddles fixed to the red background on the lower part of the collage. The saddle plays an important part in Télémaque’s visual lexicon because of its elliptical qualities. The artist relates this to the underwear and girdles he had been painting for many years; it is, ‘a condensation of sex. It’s an envelope that inverts itself, the saddle envelops the horse, the person envelops the horse.’ In Creole, the metaphor extends to voodoo spirits, or loas, that are described as riding the people they possess. They, in turn, are referred to as ‘*chwal*’ or ‘horses’.

ECLUSE, (LOCK)

1992, acrylic on canvas

Écluse, or the ‘lock’, is a reference to the Canal Saint Martin, a popular canal located in what was at the time one of the more working-class areas of Paris, ‘the real Paris’, as Télémaque calls it. For the artist, the image of interchanging water levels is also reminiscent of the diagrams showing the typical progression of HIV through the relation between the CD4 protein and the patient’s viral load before the availability of antiretroviral treatments. To the left of the barrage the water flows calmly up to the lock, but on the other side, it appears red and dangerous. Highlighting the ongoing spread of the virus during this time, Télémaque notes how ‘one can move from a pure, aesthetic happiness to a dark thought.’

BRISE, (BREEZE)

1965, oil on canvas

Layers of words and images come together in this work to create powerful associations. The title of the painting references the women’s underwear hanging outside an open window and the hand reaching for the underwear. Together, these images create a voyeuristic vignette that takes on a disturbing new dimension when juxtaposed against the two small photographs of a Black woman lying on the floor surrounded by white men. Here, Télémaque displays the power of ellipsis by presenting several elements on the canvas that sit together in an ambiguous relation between sexuality, desire and violence.

MY DARLING CLEMENTINE

1963, oil on canvas, papers glued, painted wooden box, rubber doll, Plexiglas

The title of this painting is borrowed from John Ford's classic 1946 American western film starring Henry Fonda. Télémaque pictures himself as the cowboy, a self-portrait that is simultaneously compared to and undermines Fonda's portrayal of the white cowboy in the film: 'John Ford's classic hero, restrained before his lady love, had to be pitted against a Black cowboy, who's lost a leg, with a crutch, his hair appropriately de-frizzed, vulgar, illuminated by anger! [...] that battered cowboy is me.' To the left, advertisements for hair-straightening products are contrasted with a caricatured depiction of a Black woman, designated as 'before'. To the left of the painting, a racist caricature doll of a Black boy holding a banana sits in a wooden box a few centimetres away from an inscription that reads 'Made in France.'

LA LETTRE, [THE LETTER]

1968, acrylic on canvas, wood, bulb

In 1968, Télémaque abandoned painting in favour of three-dimensional sculptural objects. 'I am someone who gets bored very quickly,' explains Télémaque, 'I have a need to renew myself by giving myself new means of operation. But in the end, like all artists, I'm always telling the same story.' *La Lettre* is part of a series of sculptures that evoke the themes of travel and movement. Unlike the lean sculptures, it retains the comic-book aesthetic of Pop art, made into a three-dimensional object with a lightbulb incorporated into its structure.

CONVERGENCE

1966, acrylic, glued papers and objects on canvas, skipping rope

This is a highly personal work for Télémaque in which he confronts his fraught relationship with his father, who was a doctor specialising in venereal diseases. Against a background that looks like a medical chart, Télémaque paints a self-portrait adapted from a photograph taken of him by artist and friend Gérard Gasiorowski. In front of it, he places a foot, 'which is both a hand and a foot,' Télémaque tells us, 'in order to make an attack against my father. It's a way of freeing myself from the Oedipus complex.' Elsewhere, references to the artist's childhood in Haiti are juxtaposed with photographs of American comedian Jerry Lewis, Surrealist writer André Breton and reports of police brutality from the 1965 Los Angeles riots. Two female figures in the left panel evoke the artist's mother and his wife, Maël Pilié. They are separated from the right-hand canvas by a skipping rope, creating a self-portrait made up of fragments of Télémaque's psyche.



L'ENFANT VOIT ROUGE, [THE CHILD SEES RED]

1966, acrylic and various objects on canvas

This is an example of a *Combine* work, a term coined by American artist Robert Rauschenberg to describe his practice of integrating real objects into a painting or drawing. Here, a trainer and a hand holding a net full of crumpled newspapers protrude from the canvas, bridging the gap between the real world and the objects inside the painting. The work features a recurring motif in Télémaque's work: the tent. This structure is a way of creating an inside space outside and functions for the artist as a metaphor for a state of being in-between, and for an individual's inner world.

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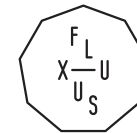
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