

JEAN-CLAUDE MEYNARD

Historical References

Introduction

Jean-Claude Meynard was born in 1951. His works range from hyper-realism to fractal geometry and computer art. He is one of the signatories of the Fractalist Manifesto. His creations are focused on the exploration of the complexity of reality and the updating of the geometrical worlds which prefigured the visual founding of the 21st century.

The nucleus and referential geometrical figure of his works is the human silhouette.

Critics usually organize the works into 4 large cycles: IDENTITIES (1973-80), BODIES (1980-92), FRACTAL MAN (1992-2012) and METAMORPHOSES (2012 to present).

The succession of these 4 cycles, which structure the works, is like a fractal branch system in constant evolution, moving from one modus operandi to another – pictorial, sculptural, scenographic or digital creations – and from one formal representation to another, all in constant renewal.

By elaborating these new settings for Man within the complexity of reality, Meynard projects Man onto a new scale and reveals the imagination of tomorrow.

As the works appeared, critics noted iconic figures and the first of the “Identities”, where Man moves about in exemplary sharpness in the fuzziness of existentialist enquiry, then the “Bodies”, where human silhouettes appear and disappear in ceaseless renewal, then “Fractal Man”, both rebus and puzzle, and today, the large cycle of “Metamorphoses”, with a human identity deploying into new bodies.

The artist says, “Within the world’s complexity, Man can only reformulate himself.”

This pictorial reformulation runs throughout the artist’s works, but from hyper-realism to fractal the eye can identify the project’s permanence:

“The aim is to look at the world in a non-finite way, or not definitively finite, to afford possibilities of composition and recomposition, therefore, of life.”*

In this sense, the works’ timeline, as presented here, is problematic by the very fact of its chronology. To explain Meynard’s works year by year is practical, but also erroneous, since one could get the feeling of ruptures and discordance, while in fact the works are of a striking coherence.

In 2010, for a large retrospective exhibition at the Centre d’Art Villa Tamaris, a show bringing together 35 years of paintings, the Director Robert Bonaccorsi chose to organize the scenography not chronologically but in mixing eras, thus illustrating matching visual echoes and pictorial resonances running through the entirety of the works, as well as certain hybridisation effects amongst the works themselves.

Since then, these hybridisation effects, virtual during the exhibition, have been materialised by the artist, now shown under the general title of “Metamorphoses, Hybrids and Mutations”.

In 2016, the artist extended the concept of Metamorphoses to animal figures, creating a Fractal Bestiary from algorithms of human silhouettes already present in his works, which confirms the very dynamic of the development: from the start, Jean-Claude Meynard has been composing a body of work which is self-generative and metamorphic.

This Fractal Bestiary has produced two videos, “The Fractal Animal That I Am” and “Infinite Metamorphoses”. For the first time, these films “visually” process Meynard’s work as permanent metamorphosis.

**Extract from an interview made by Henri-François Debailleux for the book “MEYNARD”, Edition Fragments, 2004.*

It is with the artist's agreement that his works be presented here chronologically in four large cycles.

THE LARGE CYCLES

Identities 1973 - 1980 Bodies 1980 - 1994
Fractal Man 1994 – 2012 Metamorphoses 2012 ...

Identities 1973 - 1980

Hyper-realism



Hyperstreet, acrylic painting on canvas - 1 metre X 7 metres - 1974

From the beginning of his artistic development in the 1970s, at 22, Meynard has been confronting the complexity of reality through its most exhaustive figuration: hyper-realism. His canvases, which represent emblematic scenes of society in those years (neighbourhood movie theatres, bars, pinball machines, newsstands), are not photographic records but a pictorial work consisting in representing reality with a superabundance of visual elements, so that our perception is both satiated and surprised. In fact, Meynard is not reproducing reality but is organizing "a reality effect".

To obtain this reality effect, leaving the Euclidian world behind, he has created a composition bereft of hierarchy and focal point; the most infinitesimal details are shown at the same level of reality, and from near or far have the same focal point. The spectator's gaze can then seize simultaneously the whole and the particular, the macro and the micro, the foreground and background, a total vision but a false one. The major work in this series is the painting "Hyper Street"* which, over 7 metres in length, shows a Paris street.

Through this urban vision, Meynard shows us the consumer society with all its emblems, goods, media, and coveted objects which are exaggerated and garish -- a society all in images and spectacle -- where Man himself also becomes an image, neither more alive nor more real than any of the other pieces of the puzzle with whom he shares the same degree of life.

From here on it will be this "degree" of the life of Man that Meynard's painting will query.

There is this ontological questioning: hyper-realism reminds Man of his outer surface, while Meynard's future series will smudge this image.

** "Hyper Street" (1975) is a 7-metre long acrylic painting on canvas in the form of a quadriptych. This work was presented for the first time at the FIAC in 1975. It has belonged to the same collector since then.*

Schizophrenia



Paintings, acrylic on canvas

From 1975, Meynard has been exploring the interior shapes of human identity. His craft, losing nothing of its accuracy, is smudged, blurred and diffracted with near movie-like framing effects and compositions. Reality or virtual reality?

Série Noire (Detective Story)



Paintings, acrylic on canvas

He puts into painting a cross-over of appearances: reality becomes phantasm and identity enigma. Hyper-realism's super-conspicuous Man, the Man of exemplary sharpness becomes a blurred figure in the centre of a composition which plays on the ambiguity of reality and dreams.

The Game



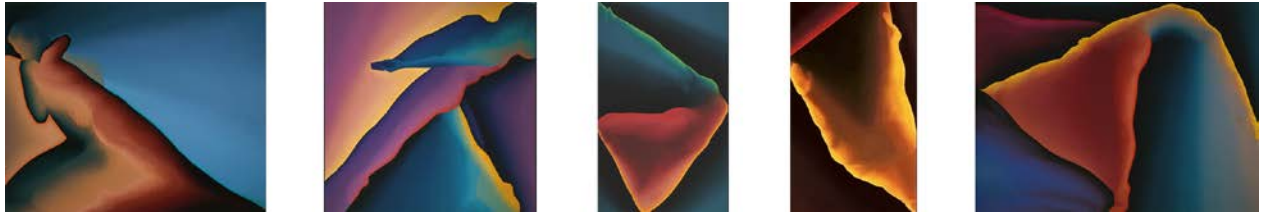
Paintings, acrylic on canvas

In "The Game", human presences are doubled and tripled identically, as if they were fractalised, so true is it that it's not about playing one against the other, but against one's self.

The titles "Schizophrenia", "Série Noire" and "The Game", which will be together in a book entitled "Geometry of Enigmas", reveals a figuration of the Other, the Doppelgänger, where Meynard paints in the reflection mode, with shadows and doubles, by favouring night scenes whose artificial lighting underlines the world's effect of irreality.

Bodies 1980 - 1992

Bodies & Graphics



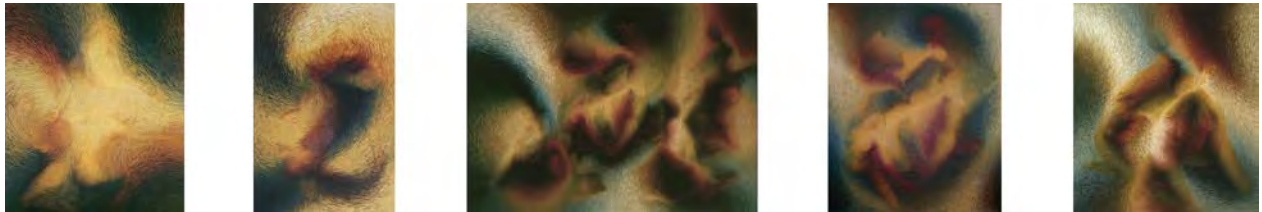
Paintings, acrylic on canvas

From the 80's, Meynard has been detaching himself from all narration, from any back story, in order to have only the human presence pop into the limelight.

The two series, Dance, then Hero-Dynamism, show iridescent bodies filling the pictorial scene. The bodies are painted like rays of light, with luminescent lines and curves. Light alone creates the individuality of the shape, so the bodies become luminous impressions, like the persistence of a vision.

Meynard questions the human presence: is its figuration still definable? And the shapes he paints look like fleeting apparitions.

The Raft of the Muses



Paintings, acrylic on canvas

The "Raft of the Muses" series (1988) is painted in a riot of brush strokes that vibrate dizzily – between light and shadow, appearance and disappearance – the multitude of bodies riding on the raft: the Raft of Art. Nicolas Bourriaud discerned in this series both an homage and a farewell to "Big Painting", the conclusion of a cycle.

"This desperate attempt to rebuild the heroic body of painting is central with Meynard, who methodically, even coolly, works to recreate conditions propitious to its advent. If Meynard fascinates, it's because his work is the glacial inferno wherein the eloquence of painting crackles."

(Nicolas Bourriaud, preface for the catalogue of the Le Radeau des Muses exhibition, May, 1988)

"In the series of the Raft of the Muses, Meynard introduces an S-shaped plan of composition by building representation upon a double spiral, meaning the highly symbolic sign of life and death. This evolution continues to be like a movement of growth and loss, lifting and falling."

(Giovanni Lista, extract from the catalogue for the exhibition "Corps et Ames" March 1994)

Nicolas Bourriaud, museum curator, art critic, exhibition commissioner, art historian.

Giovanni Lista, art critic and historian of Italian art, specialist of futurism.

Bodies and Souls



Paintings, acrylic on canvas

In 1990, this series shows the fragility of human identity up to its doubling by the pictorial separation of drawing and colour. Meynard maps a place where man loses his contours, his organic outline, and lounges in a space which is now infinite.

A disassociated figure, unstable Man moves in a space which both contains him and frees him by erasing his limits.

This sharing of space is used by Meynard to show the creative process of shape: this dialectical tension which links one to everything, Man to the Universe; a fragile balance and a possible breakup.

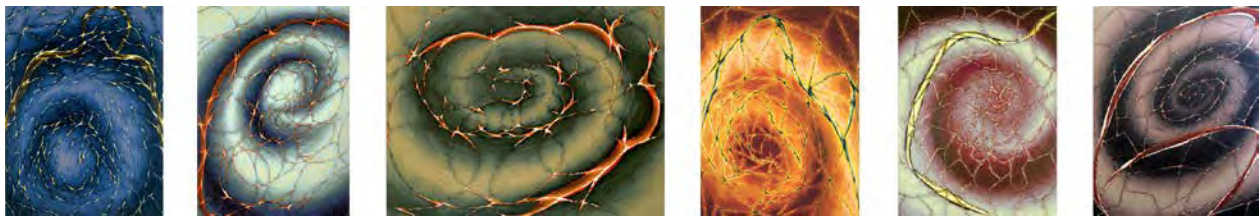
“All painters postulate the death of painting. In this sense, all painters are also executors of wills: art is set in the centre of a zone in movement, limited by the distance that the artist makes with his own corpse. Body, soul: the cartography of limits.”

(Nicolas Bourriaud, catalogue of the “Corps et Âmes” exhibition, April 1990)

“In this new attempt to reach the immaterial via the concreteness of painting, Meynard has chosen to integrate an main iconic material: the body as an ephemeral place of spiritual diffusion. Man appears but he is just a sign drawn by the wind, a phantasmal presence popping out of the continual work of matter/energy.”

(Giovanni Lista, catalogue of the “Corps et Âmes” exhibition, April 1990)

Echoes



Paintings, acrylic on canvas

In the series “Echoes” (1992) we see the disappearance of the anthropomorphic silhouette.

Man’s figuration appears dispersed within the fundamental elements of water, fire and air.

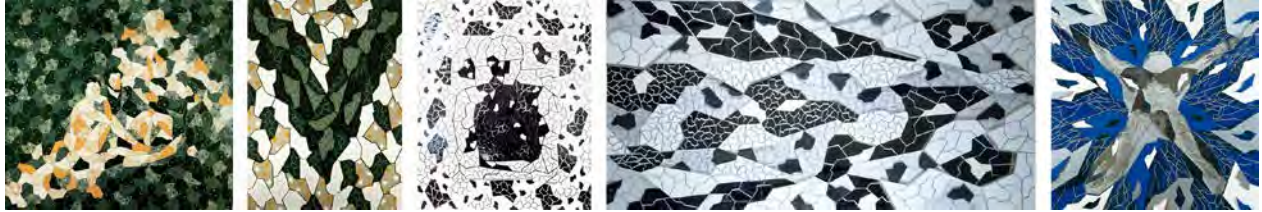
The body is still there, but only his cellular and neuronal geometry is shown.

The canvases are entitled: “Fragment I, Fragment II, Fragment III, etc.” to indicate their purely geometrical identity.

Fractal Man 1994 - 2012

From 1994 Jean-Claude Meynard broke with Euclidean perspective in favour of the principles of expansion, saturation and of infinite networks, thus eschewing the basics of classical planar representation of space in order to create images enabling the apprehension of the world in the 21st century. Henceforth he would use fractal geometry to represent the human being within the complexity of reality. In 1997, he cosigned the Fractalist Manifesto, which would be published in November 1997 in ART PRESS magazine.

Recomposed Bodies



Paintings, acrylic on canvas

In the series Scribes and Pharaos, Man becomes a fragmented composition, a mesh of structures. Meynard's paintings become a puzzle and a visual Man-Rebus, whose decryption is playful but also metaphysical:

What if Man were finally just an accident of matter ?

“Between a puzzle and a labyrinth, Meynard's images metamorphise, thus rendering any unequivocal reading of his work impossible. Both topographical and formalised, his works are metaphores, representations of the spirit's fractality, with its ability to split and break apart and to take new forms before reassembling into a new state. Meynard's work reflects the idea of the individual as being dynamic, being depicted as a continuity in flux, both turbulent and static, the human state where ecstasy and despair coexist and permutate between themselves.”

(Susan Condé, extract from the book "Fractality in Contemporary Art" published by La Différence 2001)

Infinities



Architectures, digital creations in plexiglas

In 2001, Meynard took on the concept of infinity as a testimony to the birth of a fractal object. Using as a matrix the graphic architecture from his own face, he spread out this architecture onto different scales and with no limits over the entire area of the work. It's like going from a simple ID card to portraying someone increasingly complex as if they were a living and boundless tree of life. This expansion process enables the awareness of Man in his figuration in a non finite way, allowing for vistas of composition and recompositions for painting – as in life.

The 99



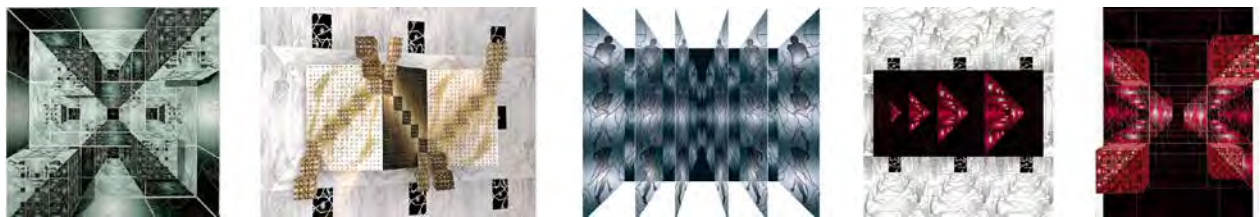
Digital creations in plexiglas

In 2004, for the main publication of a fractal monograph which was a consecration for him pour (for the years 1990 - 2004) Meynard created 99 original works included in plexiglas, each one inserted into a book/box numbered from 1 to 99.

This publication, called "The 99" is out of print today.

A new series of The 99 is being printed which presents the different fractal geometries done by the artist since then, on themes like Fractal Abodes, Silhouettes and Developments, Ascensions, Babel, etc.

Meta or Recomposed Space



Architectures, Digital creations in plexiglas

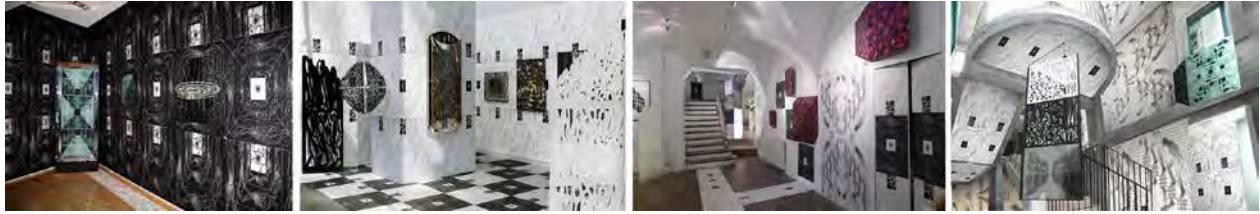
In 2005, Meynard addressed the image of the body in all senses of the term – the human body, the urban body, the body politic – and he exposed his fractal universes for five months at the Musée d'Evreux and at the Maison des Arts. Rebuilding the exhibition rooms, he invited the spectator to come on a voyage to the very heart of his fractal universes, where each element gave birth to another and wove a pathway.

In 2006, his creations were presented in a space where the initial matrix of his works spread out continually in the form of silkscreens on all the walls of the gallery and all of the surrounding spaces, including out in the street. Every delineation, path, bifurcation and intersection could also be found in Nature (hence "Meta") or in Culture (memory, history, etc.) and technology (the Web, networks, etc.)

"Entering into Meynard's fractal world entraps our certainties. His works make us physically experience the space. Under the pressure of geometrical fragmentation, a choreography of folds, spirals, straight lines, diagonal lines and curves carries us away into a spin whose result is a space-time vertigo."

Lydia Harambourg, extract from the article from the Gazette Drouot for Meynard's exhibition at the Musée d'Evreux 2005. Lydia Harambourg is a journalist and art critic for the Gazette Drouot.

Fractal Abodes



In 2006, Jean-Claude Meynard undertook large installations which he called “Fractales Abodes”. Totally occupying an entire space (Galerie Maretti Arte Monaco, Monaco 2006 ; Espace Riff Art Projects, Paris 2009 ; Grand Palais, Art Paris 2010 ; Centre d’Art de Brignoles, Var, France 2011; Maison des Comtes, Sauve, Gard, France 2012), broke with geometry and multiplied perspectives, planes and spaces. At the core of this organized destructuring, he inserted paintings, sculptures, reliefs and digital architecture as spaces of possibility and imagination, echoing amongst themselves.

In these Fractal Abodes, the only visual cue is a human silhouette : a presence ambling within complexity, captured and freed into and out of networks, a visual of interdependence between Man and space.

About the Fractal Abode in Brignoles, Marie Pierre Paulicevich * writes :

“Setting contemporary art and geometry into a Medieval setting was risky (...) Jean-Claude Meynard spent three months installing his works around and inside the famous stairway, on the ceilings, on the floor and also in the basement (...) the building itself gradually turned into a brilliant work of art, a one-off show we will never see again.”

* *Marie Pierre Paulicevich, journalist and art critic*

The Babels



The series of Babels started in 2007, the year when Meynard conceived the matrix : a fractal of human silhouettes standing together who, replicated and multiplied, graphically made up the signs of writing system.

First worked upon in the form of black and white lithography, this fractal quickly becomes the very sign of Babel, its algorithm from which Meynard will think about his future sculptures. While, in the legend, Babel is an unfinished human construction because of disunity, he decides to make a united Babel through this one motif, this fractal of human silhouettes, whose repetition, ad libitum, composes the graphic line of a writing system. People become infinite sentences, and if the legendary Babel showed them disunited by languages, Meynard will present them as a chain of humanity belonging to the same signs.

To free this Babel from any historical or geographic references confining them in identity space-time, Meynard designs it as being protean: towers, pyramids, glass blades, quadrilaterals, spheres, etc.

The series of Babels: Sculpture World



The World is the latest Babel sculpture.

It's a 2.80m-diameter spherical sculpture sitting on a cradle of steel whose body is entirely made up of human silhouettes standing together.

It evokes, in its construction, a compass whose one cardinal direction is Man.

These different Babel sculptures were presented in China (Shenzhen 2008), Turkey (Istanbul 2009), Italy (Venice 2007, Sirmione 2009) and France (Paris, Grand Palais 2010) (Var, Villa Tamaris 2010).

Today, four Babels are installed on the coast of the Mediterranean.

Metamorphoses 2012...

Hybridation



Quadriphonia 1976 Ondes 2005

Identité 2001

Judas 1977

Architecture 2004

Le Flipper 1975

Throughout his work on the complexity of reality and Man's place within this complexity, Meynard has updated pictorial worlds coming from very different craft techniques.

However, when one gets closer to his seemingly so distinct works from periods sometimes very far from each other -- from hyper-realism to fractal geometry -- one can notice a remarkable phenomenon: the works enter into visual echoes and pictorial resonances, seeming to feed off each other up to the point of composing new works.

This process, illustrated during the exhibition at the Villa Tamaris (La Seyne-sur-Mer 2010), was posited in a book called "Babel, la Géométrie des Enigmes" ("Babel, the Geometry of Enigmas").

Meynard would later enrich the experience by creating hybrids from different works from his artistic journey.

Hybrids



Lithographs

The virtual hybridisations at the Villa Tamaris were materialised by the artist in his “**Hybrids**” series, according to the principles of fractal vision : “In the order-disorder spiral, the work is the ephemeral emergence of a hybridisation : a transition.”

In fact, between hyper-reality and fractal geometry, Meynard shows that a shape is always emerging into transformation and renewal.

With his hybrids, he is exploring the shape of his work *per se*. Through the algebraic combinatorics he has implemented, he attaches, matches, reformulates and recomposes his own painting, making of his work its own raw material and his testing ground.

Metamorphoses, and other Mutations...



Digital creations in plexiglas

Over the last five years, Meynard’s work has been built around a triple concept he calls “Metamorphoses, Hybrids, and other Mutations”.

Around this concept were organized a series of exhibitions **(1)** in 2014 and 2015 in France (Paris) then in the U.S.A (Miami), presenting a series of works which were all from the same matrix of human silhouettes.

The artist then widened this concept of infinite metamorphoses to animal figures and, in 2014, he started to compose the Fractal Bestiary.

In the meantime, two films were made: “L’Animal Fractal que Je Suis” (“The Fractal Animal that I Am”) and “Infinies Métamorphoses” (“Infinite Metamorphoses”). For the first time, these films approach Meynard’s works in their continuity as a permanent metamorphosis.

(1) Art Paris Grand Palais 2014 - Scope Miami Beach Art Fair, U.S.A. 2014 - The Art of Infinity, Gallery Mordoch, Paris and Miami 2015.

The Fractal Bestiary



Digital creations in plexiglas

Meynard conceived his Fractal Bestiary from algorithms of human silhouettes already present in his works. On the other hand, his Bestiary, which is a powerful implementation of the fractal principle, integrates the exact same system of creation. Order, chaos, order. "Creative disturbances" as the artist says, who keeps playing with this order and chaos so that, from upheaval rises a new, as yet unknown image. Thusly, through a disturbance which will break up an initial order, that metamorphosis will be able to be set in motion and can generate an unsuspected representation.

Meynard's animal figures emerge therefore from a cleverly organized disorder by the artist in order to interrupt the conventional order of life, this great cleavage: Man/Animal, and show life as an endless, limitless algorithm, an immense fractal, made up of flows and tree branching from which spring at times an "identifiable figure", but which soon escapes to another metamorphosis.

In this Bestiary, Animal is no longer completely Animal, but Man, or more like an emerging Man, or an Animal becoming an Animal – life is no longer in a still image, but in movement and flux. Meynard thus provides us with a view onto the passage towards life, from one state to another, the back and forth between Man and Animal within the tremulous limits of life.

At the boundary between Man and Animal, does nature hesitate ?

There is a melding of territories and an abolition of borders which command a new way of seeing and a new intelligence: where does the Animal begin and where does Man end?

"*L'Animal fractal que je suis*" (1) Meynard would say, so signifying the ontological uncertainty of all identity, the possible slide from one form to another, as if this concept of metamorphosis were henceforth inscribed into a living being's DNA: "I am therefore I change."

Here is a playground dreamt up for an artist who can thus recompose life and reprogram life to the point of inventing a new mythology.

As Gian Carlo Pagliasso (2) wrote: "Meynard's animals revive traditional iconography by making the articulation between nature and history perceptible, the symbolism of reality. This is how his work is the most remarkable: making an outline of the insertion of infinity into the finite, rather than presenting a definitive shape, closed off from any interpretation.

Among the first in France to have seized the possibilities of the fractal method in artistic creation, he has also explored all its implications by using it as a research and discovery tool. In this way he has been able to enquire into the complexity and the chaotic character of life to better understand the world.

Meynard's Fractal Bestiary questions identity and the legitimacy of Man's place in the world. " (3)

The Fractal Bestiary has been the object of many international exhibitions. (4)

(1) « *L'animal fractal que Je suis* » is a recreation of the title of Jacques Derrida's last book : " *L'Animal que donc Je suis* "

(2) GianCarlo Pagliasso, Italian art critic and a professor in the esthetics of art.

(3) Extract from GianCarlo Pagliasso's preface for the exhibition catalogue for « *L'Animal Fractal que Je Suis* », Palais Tagliaferro, Andorra, Italie 2015

(4) China, Shanghai, Galerie Dumonteil 2016 - China, Hong Kong for the Art Fair Central Hong Kong 2016 - China, Beijing, for Art Fair Art Beijing 2016 - Italy, Andorra, Palazzo Tagliaferro « *L'Animal Fractal que Je suis* » 2015 - China, Hong Kong, presentation of the work "Pégase" at Fine Art Asia 2015 - France, Paris, Galerie Dumonteil 2015

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- 1992 Interview - journal de Paris Première
- 1999 *L'Art contemporain français*, édition Artcom
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- 2005 *Meynard au Musée d'Evreux*, film by Jennifer Lund
- 2009 *Meynard et la complexité des apparences*, directed by Gilles Bastianelli
- 2009 *Meynard Babel*, film direction by G.Bastianelli
- 2010 *Babel, la Géométrie des Enigmes* film direction by G.Bastianelli
- 2011 *L'Escalier Fractal de Jean-Claude Meynard*, film direction by G.Bastianelli (English, Italian and Russian versions).
- 2012 *Le Papillon Fractal de Tamaris à Istanbul*, film direction by Gilles Bastianelli
- 2012 *Demeure Fractale à Sauve*, film direction by G.Bastianelli
- 2012 *Fractal House"*, film by Ethan Mark.
- 2013 *La World, Sculpture Fractale à Valbonne*, film direction by G.Bastianelli
- 2013 *Le Bus Fractal de Jean-Claude Meynard*, film direction by G.Bastianelli
- 2014 *Interview de Jean-Claude Meynard*, directed by E.Patou and E.Petitbon for NewsArtToday.TV
- 2014 *Comment regarder une oeuvre d'art*, directed by Ethan Mark
- 2015 *L'Animal Fractal que Je suis*, directed by Ethan Mark
- 2015 *Infinies Métamorphoses*, directed by Ethan Mark

All of these videos are viewable on Jean-Claude Meynard's Youtube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/JCMeynard75>

LINKS

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Theory of Fractals and Fractal Art

The theory of fractals was posited for the first time by the mathematician Benoît Mandelbrot and presented in 1975 in his foundational book "Fractal Objects".

This mathematical theory, which sought to make sense of complex figures and objects, was then extended to numerous disciplines, including art.

Fractal Art has therefore become a new current in creation, a new visual code like Cubism, Abstraction, Kinetic Art or Concrete Art.

1994 was when the « Fractalists » were born, and in 1997 Art Press magazine (N°229) published the fractal movement's Manifesto with twelve signatory artists, including Jean-Claude Meynard, Carlos Ginsburg, Miguel Chevalier, etc.

Fractal Art and the decoding of the world

Classically, the world is decoded through Euclid's eyes, by using ideas of plane, straight lines, surfaces, length, width or height.

But this Euclidean geometry is tied to the simple world of Ancient Greece where it was born in 300 BC : a world organized around one sea, the Mediterranean, on which a man like Ulysses could sail for 10 years without being noticed.

Today, using only Euclid's geometry is not enough to decode the world's complexity: its expansion, its globalisation, its chaos, its butterfly-wing effects, etc.

Today's world lives in other dimensions, and fractal artists, like the Cubists in their time, work to represent this new reality.

By studying their works (paintings, sculptures, digital creations, installations, etc.) one constant appears: a multiplied representation of reality, a reality infinitely repeated but still with different scales. In this way the fractal artist shows new dimensions of our world: a world which has lost its centre, a world which replicates and clones itself, which keeps multiplying, being unmade and being remade.