

Homage to Julio Le Parc, Pioneer of Op Art and Kinetic Art



BRAFA 2017 pays homage to an artist who is a major influence behind contemporary art, Julio Le Parc.

Born in 1928, a pioneer of Op Art and Kinetic Art, a founder member of G.R.A.V. (Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel), winner of the international Grand Prize in Painting at the Venice 1966 Biennale, Julio Le Parc is a forthright, committed artist.

His abundant work, in its many forms, imbued with a spirit of research and experimentation, explores the visual field, movement, light, and the relationship between the work and the viewer.

A Short Biography

Julio Le Parc, the second son of a family of modest means, was born on 23rd September 1928 in the town of Mendoza at the foot of the Andes, 1,100 km from Buenos Aires. At school he proved to be particularly gifted at drawing, and he started work when he was very young, doing minor jobs. His family moved to Buenos Aires in 1942, and he attended evening classes at the School of Fine Arts there, where his teacher was Lucio Fontana, the founder of Spatialism. He very soon became interested in avant-garde art movements, while creating his first paintings, engravings and monotypes. He moved to Paris in 1958 with the help of a scholarship from the French Embassy Cultural Service, and there he studied the works of contemporary and avant-garde artists. In 1960, he co-founded the G.R.A.V (Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel) with Horacio Garcia Rossi, François Morellet, Francisco Sobrino, Joël Stein, and Yvaral. The aim of the G.R.A.V was to create art that was accessible to everyone, where the viewer can touch and handle the works, as declared in their manifesto (entitled 'Assez de mystifications' [Enough with Mystification]) presented at the third Paris Biennale in October 1963.

"We want to interest spectators, release them from their inhibitions, make them relax.

We want to get them to participate.

We want to put them in a situation which they themselves initiate and transform.

We want them to be oriented towards interaction with other spectators.

We want to develop a great capacity for perception and action in the spectator."

He carried out many experiments with depth, light, colours, and mobiles, turning towards "perceptual" art. His first solo exhibition was held in 1966 at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York, followed by the Denise René Gallery in France. This was the year when he won the International Grand Prize for painting at the Venice Biennale. He was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 1967 by André Malraux, the French Minister of Culture. He was expelled from France following the May 1968 upheaval, in which he took an active part (a poster workshop), but returned to Paris a few months later following the protests of French artists and intellectuals. The G.R.A.V. was wound up shortly afterwards. He disagreed with the artistic precepts of the period, cancelled his participation in Documenta and boycotted the Sao Paulo Biennale. In 1970, although his studio was at Cachan in the Paris suburbs, he set out for Central America to support the struggle for freedom of the Latin American peoples. The Düsseldorf Kunsthalle gave him his first major retrospective in 1972, but he turned down another at the Paris Musée d'Art Moderne – on the toss of a coin! He joined the artists mobilised to oppose the new Georges Pompidou National Art Centre. Although out of favour with many conservators and directors of cultural institutions, Julio Le Parc continued to work and produce from his studio. He won the First Prize at the American Art Biennial at Cuenca, Ecuador, in 1989; he gave half the prize money to the people of Nicaragua and the other half to the Cuenca Biennale to create two prizes to be awarded to young Latin American artists.

He first reappeared on the international scene in 2005, thanks to the Daros Foundation in Zurich, which brought together 45 works under the title '*Le Parc Lumière*'. In 2012, he took part in '*Erre, variations labyrinthiques*', a joint exhibition at the Metz Pompidou Centre. In 2013, Jean de Loisy, who was reopening the Palais de Tokyo after a ten-year closure, offered him 2,000 m² over the 500 m² initially visualised. An accolade with a delighted press, and an immense popular success.

In 2014, he was awarded the Légion d'Honneur and held a solo exhibition for the first time in the United Kingdom, at the Serpentine Gallery in London. In 2015, he was declared '*an outstanding contributor to Argentine Culture*'. In the same year, after a successful collaboration with artists such as Josef Albers, Daniel Buren, and Hiroshi Sugimoto, Hermès produced an edition of 60 unique variations of its emblematic scarves, based on his work *La Longue Marche*, at the initiative of Pierre-Alexis Dumas.

His Works

Julio Le Parc creates interactive social art. His works are more than a simple play of light, form, and colour; they are activated by the physical interaction of the observer – movements of the retina, the body, and so on. His paintings, sculptures, and animated installations seek, as the artist says "*to provoke different behaviour in the spectator (...) to seek with the spectator ways of combatting passiveness, dependency or ideological conditioning by developing capacities for reflection, comparison, analysis, creation, and action*".

Le Parc seeks to provoke a specific reaction: on seeing his work, the viewer will lose his bearings, and will look around to create a new perspective. His '*jeux de lumière*' – play with light – for example, is more than a simple visual effect; it questions our relationship with the world. And light itself is more than a simple medium; it allows Le Parc to achieve his aim and create a work that is constantly changing. The result is an unforeseeable and infinite play of light and shade. For visitors, it is an immersive aesthetic experience. For the artist, it is a matter of '*initiating and pursuing the demolition of the traditional concepts of art, its construction, its presentation, and its appreciation*'.

For more than 60 years, this relentless worker has worked in a multiplicity of formats, where texts, speeches, games, inventions, interventions, initiatives, posters, drawings, investigations, and visual

and tactile explorations rub shoulders with each other. There is a great coherence between his personal and collective activities, where the underlying theme is the querying of the concept of hierarchy, of the passive viewer, of the power relations between art officials and artists.

His works are on display in many museums and collections all over the world, from Latin America to Europe and the USA.

Kinetic Art and Op Art

Kinetic Art (or Kineticism) is defined by works which are moved either in whole or in part either by natural means such as the wind or gravity, or with human intervention such as an engine or the spectator himself. The first experiments go back to Futurism in the first decade of the 20th Century, followed by certain works of Marcel Duchamp. Later, Alexandre Calder invented his famous mobiles, air sculptures made up of wires and metal pieces in a range of forms moved by the fluctuations of the ambient air.

Optic, or Op Art, is a term relating to artistic research which takes advantage of the fallibility of the eye through optical illusions or games. Here, there is no actual physical movement, only what our brains perceive to be movement. This illusion can be created in several different ways: manipulation of geometrical drawings, juxtaposition of black and white lines or intense colours, and so on. Op Art works are essentially abstract. Their origins go back to the visual theories developed by Kandinsky and other artists in the 1920s, in particular by Josef Albers and the Bauhaus. The movement acquired international recognition in 1965 with an exhibition at the New York MoMA entitled '*The Responsive Eye*'. Its most representative artists are Victor Vasarely (1906-1997), the founders of the G.R.A.V (Garcia-Rossi, Le Parc, François Morellet, Francisco Sobrino, and Jean-Pierre Vasarely aka Yvaral), and Bridget Riley. In the 1960s, this art was a great hit with cultural institutions, critics, and the general public, in particular at the great exhibitions that marked that decade. It became popular thanks the visual processes of these artists being adopted by the world of fashion and graphic design. It is only recently that it has been really rediscovered and restored little by little to its true place in the history of art.

The taste for large-scale works has been a constant in many of these artists who, in the wake of constructive art, became interested in the incorporation of their works in architecture.

The great artists of this movement include Victor Vasarely, Yaacov Agam, Jesús Rafael Soto, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Karl Gerstner, Antonio Asis, Joël Stein, Frank Malina, Horacio Garcia-Rossi, Hugo Demarco, Francisco Sobrino, Ludwig Wilding, Mariano Carrera, Angel Duarte, Marta Boto, Nino Calos and, last but not least, Julio Le Parc.

At BRAFA

The tribute to Julio Le Parc at BRAFA will consist of the inclusion of 4 works at strategic points of the Fair; a large-scale *Continuel Mobile* from 1963 at the main entrance to the Fair, with *Surface Couleur*, a 1970 acrylic on canvas, at the centre, and, finally, two *Sphères*, with diameters of 2.10 m, on each patio at the ends of the aisles. These works will integrate with great impact into the general design of the Fair, which will be taking Kinetic Art as its theme.