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Mosset, Olivier, *Prophyltex*, 1988, acrylique sur toile, 210 x 202 cm (Objektmass), Privatbesitz

Documentation level

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Name

Mosset, Olivier

Dates of birth and death

* 5.11.1944 Berne

Municipality of origin (CH)

Villiers (NE)

Nationality

CH

Brief biography

Peintre. Adepté d'une peinture abstraite, monochrome et géométrique

Fields of activity

peinture à l'acryl, peinture

Lexicon article

Son of a chemical engineer, Olivier Mosset followed classical studies at the secondary school in Neuchâtel. In 1963, already interested in painting, he visited the first Salon international des galeries-pilotes in Lausanne, where works by Lucio Del Pezzo, Alain Jacquet, Jasper Johns and Frank Stella attracted his attention. He became [Jean Tinguely's](#) assistant after visiting the artist in Paris. Tinguely introduced him to the work of Marcel Duchamp, and initiated him to the writings of Mikhail Bakunin, Max Stirner and Leon Trotsky. Mosset moved definitively to Paris in 1965, after a brief return to Switzerland where he earned a matriculation standard. He then acquainted himself with the Nouveaux Réalistes and assisted [Daniel Spoerri](#), while painting white canvases with letters, numbers or dots. In 1966, he presented a canvas with two A's at the Salon Comparaison at the

Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris. The German critic Otto Hahn purchased one of his first black circles on white backdrop, which he later reproduced almost two hundred times until 1972. It is thanks to Hahn that he met the painter Daniel Buren, as well as Michel Parmentier and [Niele Toroni](#), who created the BMPT group by using the first letter of their family names. In 1967 they organized four public events at which they polemically asserted their wish to break from the dominant painterly styles, for example. the Ecole de Paris and Abstract Expressionism. Their ambition was thus to begin painting from scratch. During a brief stay in New York, Mosset met Andy Warhol and visited an exhibition by Robert Ryman. Mosset's collaboration with BMPT ended in 1968. He turned to political action, becoming involved with Paris May Revolt and Hells Angels. His first personal exhibit, at Galerie Rive Droite in Paris, followed his *Catalogue n°1*, which featured an imaginary interview with film director and actor Serge Bard. In 1972 he began painting canvases with vertical stripes, «borrowing» from Buren, and showed them at Galerie Daniel Templon in Paris and at Galerie Média in Neuchâtel. For the Paris Biennial in 1977, he painted a red canvas as large as the wall on which it hung, where pencil tracings left vertical stripes. This work inaugurated the monochrome series, which continued until 1986, in varying colours and sizes. In 1980, Les Editions Médias produced the artist's first prints, among which four monochrome serigraphs.

Mosset moved to New York in 1977 and shared a studio on Broadway with [Grégoire Müller](#). Along with American and European artists – Marcia Hafif, Joseph Marioni, Phil Smith, Günther Umberg and Jerry Zeniuk – he participated in the *New Abstraction* exhibit at Sidney Janis gallery in 1983, in New York, and the following year, in Williamstown, at the Williams College Museum of Art exhibit *Radical Painting*. His first retrospective exhibit was held in Poitiers and in Châteauroux in France, at the Musée de beaux-arts de la Chaux-de-Fonds in 1985, and at the Kunsthau Aarau in 1986. That same year, in Geneva, he participated in the *Peinture abstraite* show at the Galerie Ecart and presented large-scale geometric compositions at the Centre d'art contemporain. He was also included with John M Armleder and Helmut Federle at the Kunsthalle in Zurich. His work progressively earned recognition in Switzerland from then onwards, and its influence grew on a new generation of French-speaking Swiss artists. In 1989, he carried out his first public commission – a strip of aluminium fixed diagonally across a façade – for the telecommunications building in Neuchâtel. The following year he represented Switzerland at the *Venice Biennale*. After having introduced shaped canvases in his painting, he explored the links between painting and sculpture. As a regular guest at the sculpture show in Môtiers, he created three-dimensional works with found objects: a concrete pipe, white picture

rails, a skateboard ramp, and his famous *Toblerones*, cardboard copies of Swiss anti-tank blocks; these were presented at the Musée cantonal des beaux-arts in Sion in 1994, and later moulded in ice. Between 1995 and 1996, he headed a workshop at the Ecole Supérieure d'Art Visuel (ESAV) in Geneva, before settling down in Tucson, Arizona. He nonetheless remained active in Switzerland, especially by winning a competition in 2002 and thereby intervening on three hundred doors of the Swiss National Library in Bern. In 2007, he donated a collection of works by his Swiss and American friends to the Musée des beaux-arts in La Chaux-de-Fonds, featuring John M Armleder, Carl André, Sol Lewitt and Peter Halley. Expanding his collaborations, he conceived the stage set of *Sous Apparence* (2012), a choreography by Marie-Agnès Gillot, which premiered at the Opéra Garnier in Paris. From then on, Mosset has been systemizing his collaborations with other artists, a process he initiated in the 1990s with John M Armleder and Steven Parrino. *Olivier Mosset Collaborations* is the title of an exhibition that was housed at the Centre culturel Suisse in Paris in 2014. Continuously travelling the world for his shows, Mosset has two homes: his studio in Tucson and his farm in Villiers, near Neuchâtel.

Several periods can be mapped out in his practice, all of which correspond to the various places that fostered it. The first one, centred on circles, is linked to the 1960s Parisian context: militant and situationist, it owes a lot to the BMPT collective. Mosset indeed found in the group's strategy a framework that led to his search for a neutral, anonymous painting, in tune with the aesthetic of indifference promoted by John Cage and American Pop Art. By repeating the same motif, Mosset likewise denounced the capitalist and bourgeois notions of originality, uniqueness, and novelty in the work of art, thereby exposing its status as a social object and its political dimension.

His second period began in New York and essentially encompasses his practice of monochrome painting. As with the minimalist artists, the work's internal dialectic seems to take precedence over external circumstances: not only through the unfolding of colour and format, but also through the autonomy granted by «painting that is only painting» – neither figurative nor metaphorical – and by its specificity as such.

The return to geometric painting inaugurates a third period, that of the synthesis of American and European art. In embracing the conventions of abstraction, as in the Néo-géo movement, in exploring new territories as painting-as-object or ready-made sculpture, by giving a title to his works, by collaborating with other artists and even by «recycling» their works, Mosset displays the coded nature of the artwork. He thus demonstrates how meaning is not only present in the making or the production of the artwork, but also in the way it is perceived, interpreted and integrated. In fact, its literalness and its muteness, which Mosset values above all, enable him to emphasize in a most discretely efficient way the artwork's relationship to history and to the art system.

Works: Aarau, Aargauer Kunsthhaus; Genève, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (Mamco),; La Chaux-de-Fonds, Musée des beaux-arts; Lausanne, Musée cantonal des beaux-arts; Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich.

Edmond Charrière, 2014
Translation: Sarah Burkhalter

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