



# WOMEN GALLERISTS of Post-War Paris

Denise René  
Colette Allendy  
Iris Clert  
Lydia Conti  
Nina Dausset  
Jeanne Bucher  
Myriam Prévot  
Florence Bank  
Denise Breteau  
Suzanne de Coninck  
Michèle Orlando  
Katia Granoff  
Louise Leiris  
Dina Vierny  
Jeanne Facchetti  
Christiane Colin  
Henriette Niepce  
Marguerite Fos  
Jeanne Castel  
Simone Heller  
Suzanne Michel  
Marguerite Maeght  
Denise Majorel

Photo: A. Moran

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# Women Gallerists of Post-War Paris

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## WOMEN GALLERISTS IN POST-WAR PARIS

### A Sociological Perspective

In 1951, Paris counted some 168 modern and contemporary art galleries with one in three being run by a woman. This was, of course, not unnoticed by the French press, who stylised these women art dealers as 'les papesses de l'art abstrait' in several features. Loosely translating into the high priestesses of abstract art, insinuating that their role was a subordinated one and not to be taken seriously in the male-dominated realm of the art business. The exhibition at HFA seeks to dispel this myth by inviting a look 'behind the scenes' of the Parisian art world to discover the personalities and undertakings of women gallerists, who contributed significantly to writing art history in France as we know it today.

Largely drawn from HFA's collection, the exhibition celebrates the achievements of the most significant Parisian women art dealers of the time, particularly those who championed a new painting style and dealt with emerging artists: BERTHE WEILL, JEANNE BUCHER, JEANNE CASTEL, LOUISE LEIRIS, SUZANNE DE CONINCK, DENISE RENE, COLETTE ALLENDY, LYDIA CONTI, MYRIAM PREVOT, IRIS CLERT, NINA DAUSSET, FLORENCE BANK, DENISE BRETEAU, HENRIETTE NIEPCE and DINA VIERNY.

Whilst the term 'gallerist(e)' in the French language only came into fashion in the late sixties or early seventies, having appeared in 1963 for the first time, there have been women patrons and gallerists operating in Paris for centuries. For the earlier twentieth century, the three prominent examples in the exhibition at HFA are JEANNE CASTEL, BERTHE WEILL (1865-1951) and JEANNE BUCHER (1872-1946) – although much remains unknown about these intriguing figures to this day.

The husband-and-wife duo JEANNE and Marcel CASTEL were, for many years, strong supporters and promoters of contemporary art in France (especially of Jean Fautrier). They opened a gallery on rue du Général Beuret in the 1920's.

BERTHE WEILL who spent her dowry of 4,000 francs on her first gallery on rue Victor Massé, sold works of Pablo Picasso to the poet and collector Gertrude Stein. Alfred Roth frequently exhibited with her. During Occupation, Weill was forced to close her gallery, but her loyal artists teamed up and auctioned works to support her financially in the years leading up to her death.

JEANNE BUCHER first opened her gallery on boulevard du Montparnasse in 1925. She also published notable art books, Max Ernst's *L'histoire naturelle*, amongst others. During Occupation, she defied censorship and continued to show contemporary art. She also lent active support to her artists. After the wars, her commitment to contemporary art resumed with an international dimension (she expanded to NYC). Her nephew Jean-François Jaeger took over the gallery's management in 1947 at the age of twenty-three and continued Bucher's legacy.

Two French sociologists, Raymonde Moulin and Julie Verlaine, created profiles of the French art market in the seventies and the early 2000s. Whilst Moulin worked with anonymised interviews, Verlaine's profiles were not so restricted, allowing more information to be published on the gallerists in this exhibition.

The first point of departure was to identify patterns in the avenues each gallerist pursued. The most obvious was to take over a family gallery. LOUISE GODON, later LEIRIS (1902-1988) is exemplary here in the exhibition at HFA. Following her mother Lucie's marriage to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler in 1904, himself a famous art dealer of the interwar period, she joined the family business at Galerie Simon on rue d'Argon in 1921. Kahnweiler was recognised for his services to artists and set a prominent example for future art dealers by offering his artists working contracts and by buying their current works to allow them creative freedom. Leiris continued his legacy, and from 1941 onwards, the gallery operated under her name, showing modern masters until her death in 1988.

SUZANNE DE CONINCK was the daughter of a Belgian collector of ancient art. She used her family relations to open a gallery and publishing house on rue de Beaune in 1949, which contributed to the contemporary art discourse. There, she exhibited many abstract artists, Marie Raymond amongst others with solo presentations in 1949 and 1951 and dedicated several other exhibitions to the work of women. Most notably was that de Coninck's exhibition programme dedicated an equal share to men and women artists. The links between the gallery and the publishing house were visible but discreet, and around ten publications per year followed the exhibition cycle. She edited essays on the then-contemporary abstract art discourse by Charles Estienne and Roger van Gindertael as well as the re-edition of Kandinsky's *The Spiritual in Art*. A second gallery on rue de Verneuil, dedicated to contemporary sculpture and cybernetic art, was opened in 1955.

Taking over a family business could also require transforming another business like a millinery workshop into a gallery, as with the example of DENISE RENÉ, née BLEIBTREU (1913-2012). From 1944 onwards, her gallery on rue la Boétie defended geometric and kinetic art with a particular interest in broadening the audience for contemporary art. René regularly organised presentations of abstract works, amongst others by Vasarely, Dewasne, and Deyrolle. In 1951, she also arranged the travelling exhibition "Operation Klar Form" held in Copenhagen, Liège and other European cities, which introduced abstract art to the contemporary European art market. René opened a second gallery on boulevard Saint-Germain in 1966 as well as further branches in Düsseldorf (Germany) and New York City.

Returning to Verlaine's sociological profile: this lists other factors conducive to opening an art gallery as a woman. A transfer from the artist's to the dealer's side of the business, symbolising the frustrated artistic ambition. COLETTE ALLENDY (1895-1960) trained as a painter and frequented the theatre scene, before she turned her home on rue de l'Assomption into an art gallery, following the death of her husband René in 1946. There, she offered a new outlook on the Parisian art scene of the time with her exhibitions but leaned towards non-figurative art. Her exhibition schedule of eight exhibitions per year allowed her a significant exposure to emerging artists. In 1948, she presented the show "HWPSMTB" – an acronym of the participating artists' first names (Hartung, Wols, Picabia, Stahly, Mathieu, Tapié and Bryen) – which foreshadowed the Art Informel movement. In

the same year, she also organised a show by women, including Christine Bourmeester. During the gallery's fifteen-year tenure, many emerging artists, who continue to be significant to this day, had their solo presentations at the gallery.

Another painter-turned-gallerist is DENISE BRETEAU (1915-2005). She married the gallerist René Breteau with whom she ran a gallery since 1937 with a particular focus on the artistic life in Paris. Artists on the roster included Henri Goetz, Emile Gillioli and Marcel Pouget. From 1957 until 1987, Denise Breteau joined the administrative side full-time and dedicated a series of exhibitions to what was then contemporary art. After her husband's death in 1972, Breteau continued to lead the gallery on rue Bonaparte until 1987.

The painter HENRIETTE NIEPCE (1916-2010) also held a short-lived gallery with an illustrious profile on rue Rousselet between 1951 and 1953. There, she frequently collaborated with the critic Robert Lebel, who published the first monograph on Marcel Duchamp. The death of her father put an end to her curatorial ambition, and she returned home to take care of his vineyard.

Thirdly, the sociological profile emphasised the pivotal role of the world wars in enabling these women art dealers to change their course of profession. MYRIAM PRÉVOT, whose father fled to Brazil during the Second World War, worked as an assistant to René Drouin. It was there that she met her future collaborator, Gildo Caputo, with whom she founded the gallery Billiet-Caputo in 1946 and later Galerie de France, both on rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré. Both galleries had a contemporary focus: they showed Soulages and Zao Wou-Ki, as well as Léon Gischia in 1948 and 1949 at a defining moment of his career, whilst he was preparing the French Pavillion for Venice Biennale. Prévot's tragic suicide in 1977 put an end to the gallery's activity.

The wealth of international women art dealers who populated the cultural landscape of Paris is a fourth criterion of the sociological profile. The exhibition at HFA highlights the American FLORENCE BANK, later HOUSTON-BROWN, the Greek IRIS CLERT and the Russian émigrés NINA DAUSSET and DINA VIERNY in particular. They all settled in Paris and ran successful galleries.

FLORENCE BANK made use of her expatriate status and opened a contemporary gallery in a rather unusual location: on quai aux Fleurs along the river Seine. Belonging neither to the left nor the right bank of the river, which famously divide the French capital. Between 1948 and 1952, Bank dedicated her exhibition programme to abstract painting and frequently collaborated with the renowned art critic Michel Seuphor, who prefaced several of her catalogues. In 1948 Bank presented an influential show "White & Black" with Fautrier, Wols, Mathieu and Germain. She also frequently presented the work of women, Christine Bourmeester, amongst others. When Bank became Houston-Brown by marriage, a new gallery in her name was opened on rue du Pré-aux-Clercs until 1968.

The Greek IRIS CLERT (1917-1986) treated her gallery on rue des Beaux-Arts as a platform for new ideas and spatial concepts, which quickly transformed into a celebrity haunt. She treated her gallery as a laboratory, for experimental artists such as Fontana, Klein and Tinguely. She threw unforgettable opening parties for her exhibitions and subsequently published the photos in her magazine IRIS-TIME, a curious marriage between a tabloid and an academic journal.

Together with her medical doctor husband Jean Dausset, NINA DAUSSET opened a gallery on rue du Dragon in 1945, where she mounted several important surrealist exhibitions. The exhibition “Vehemences confrontées” marked a turning point for the gallery, transitioning from surrealism to abstraction and presenting works by Bryen, De Kooning, Hartung, Mathieu, and Pollock.

DINA VIERNY found refuge in France in 1925. A student of natural sciences, she frequented the surrealists and posed for sculptors, especially Aristide Maillol, whose moral rights she obtained after his death in 1944. In 1947, she opened a gallery on rue Jacob with a mixed programme of Maillol, Russian art and naïve art.

Returning to the introductory statement, which estimated that the role of women art dealers accounted for a third of the gallery scene in the French capital in 1951. As these intriguing life stories and short profiles above have shown, these women in the exhibition at HFA seized on the opportunities offered by their roles and demonstrated extraordinary business acumen and excellent connoisseurship, superseding that of their male counterparts. Scattered throughout the French capital and in close proximity to their competitors, they seemingly avoided conflict, finding their own niches. Examples from a generation which broke with amateurism and enjoyed an undeniable aesthetic and economic success. Working at a time of intense political polarisation, between the wars of French decolonisation and the Cold War, they did not hide behind convoluted theories but harnessed the creative potentials of the time.



# GALERIE COLETTE ALLENDY

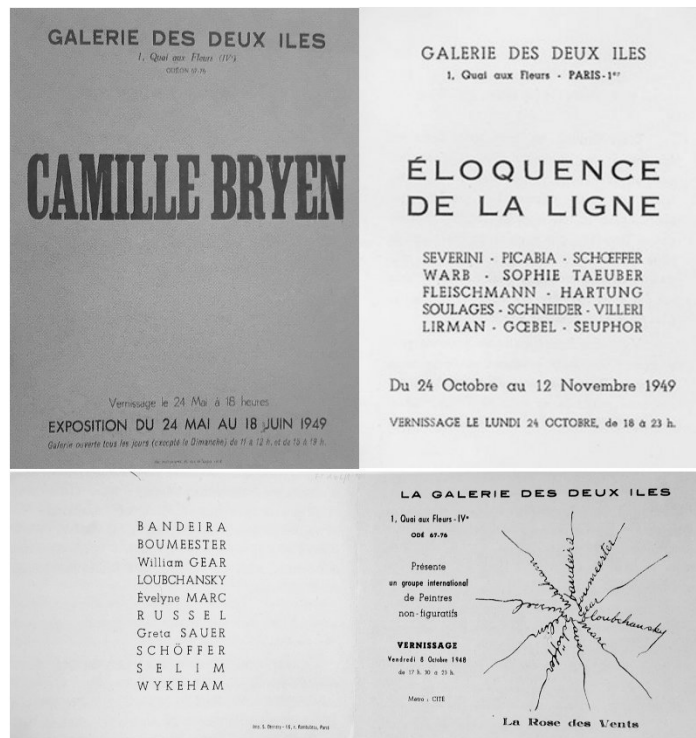


## COLETTE ALLENDY - Galerie Colette Allendy

Colette Allendy (1895-1960), was raised in an illustrious and artistic family, the daughter of painter Marie-Edmée Nel-Cougny and sister of the theatre woman and art critic Yvonne Nel-Dumouchel. Colette studied art in Paris. After the death of her husband, the psychoanalyst René Allendy, Colette turned her home at 67 rue de l'Assomption into a gallery in 1946, where she held the ground-breaking Art Informel show "*HWPSMTB*" (Hartung, Wols, Picabia, Stahly, Mathieu, Tapié, Bryen) in 1948.



# FLORENCE BANK

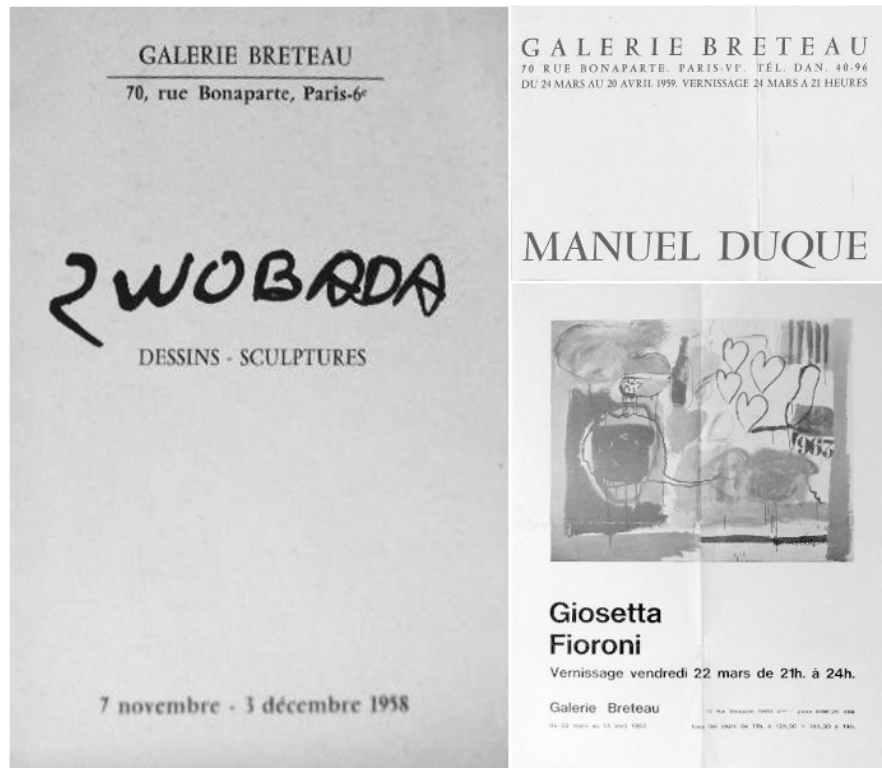


## FLORENCE BANK - Galerie des Deux-Îles, Galerie Houston-Brown

Florence Bank was American, and opened her Galerie des Deux Îles in 1946, presenting in 1948 an influential show *"White and Black"* with Fautrier, Mathieu, Wols and Germain. The gallery ran until 1952, then she re-opened under her married name Houston-Brown in 1960 on rue du Pré-aux Clercs until 1968.



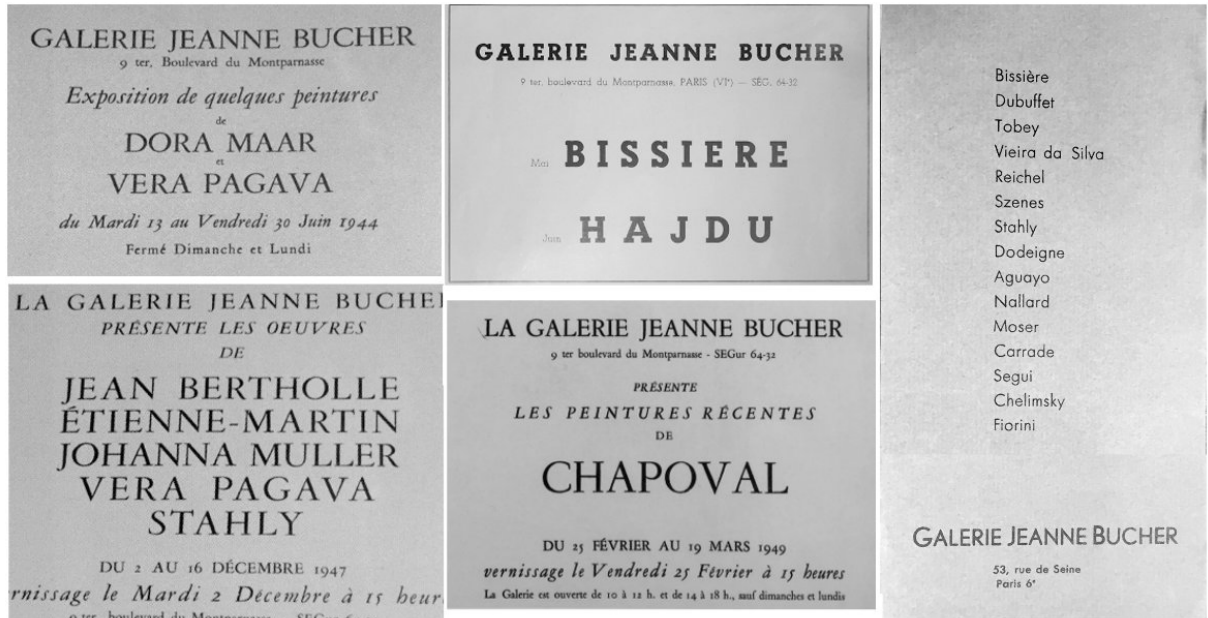
# G A L E R I E DENISE BRETEAU



## DENISE BRETEAU - Galerie Breteau (& René Breteau)

Denise Breteau (1915-2005) née Vrigny, was an artist herself and co-directed Galerie Breteau with her husband René, showing a range of artists including Goetz, Maryan, Pouget and Smadja. After her husband's death in 1972, she continued to lead the gallery until 1987.

# G A L E R I E JEANNE BUCHER



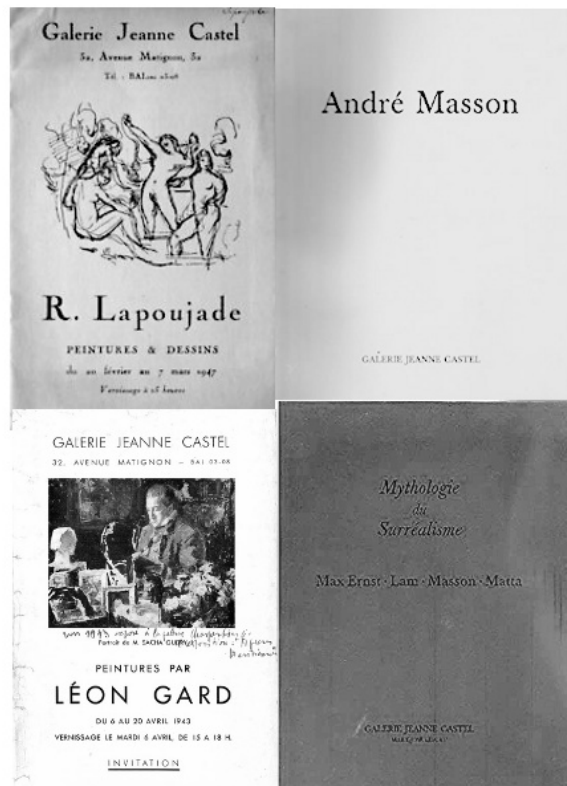
## JEANNE BUCHER - Galerie Jeanne Bucher

Jeanne Bucher (1872-1946), born in Germany. The matriarch of women gallerists, she first opened her gallery in Paris in 1929, at rue du Cherche-Midi and then together with Marie Cuttoli at boulevard du Montparnasse from 1936. Under the Occupation, her gallery's activities continued in defiance of censorship. She exhibited Nicolas de Stael, Vieira da Silva, Chapoval and Lansky amongst many others. She was also an editor of art books such as Max Ernst's "L'Histoire naturelle". Her spirit continued in her nephew after her death.



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# G A L E R I E JEANNE CASTEL



## JEANNE CASTEL – Galerie Jeanne Castel

Jeanne Castel originally opened her gallery in the 1920's on rue du Général Beuret, and went on to show many high-profile artists, including Fautrier.

# G A L E R I E IRIS CLERT



## IRIS CLERT - Galerie Iris Clert

Iris Clert (1917-1986) born in Greece, she opened a gallery in Paris in 1955 which became renowned for showing radical artists such as Fontana, Yves Klein and Jean Tinguely, she treated the gallery as a laboratory, and published the journal "*Iris-Time*" mixing artworld gossip and avant-garde polemics.

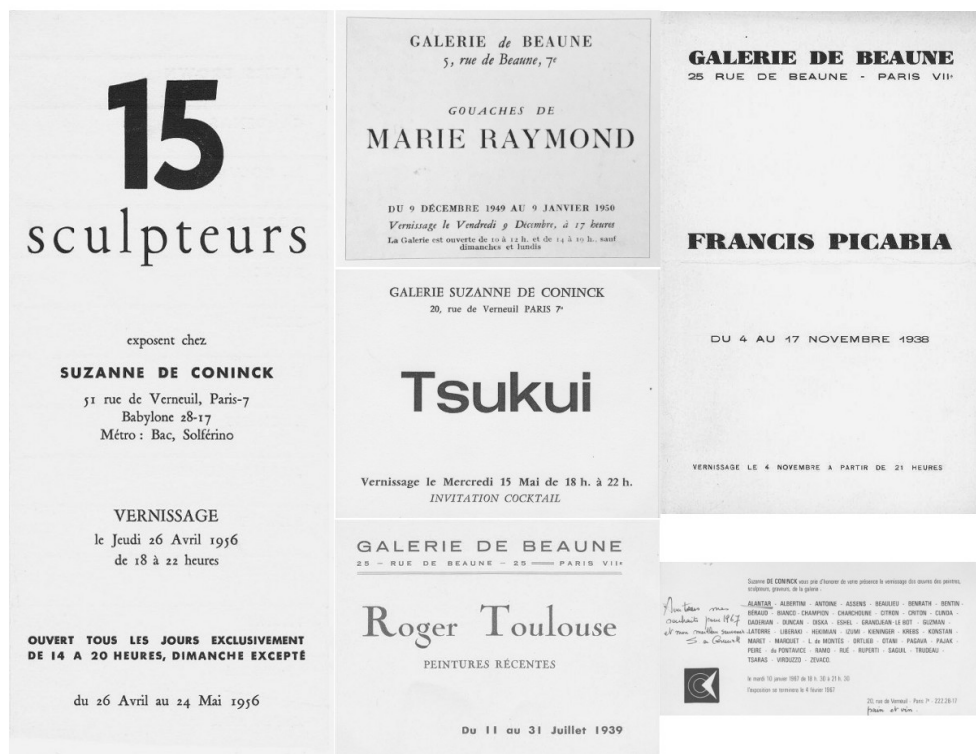


G A L E R I E  
**CHRISTIANE COLIN**



CHRISTIANE COLIN – Galerie Christiane Colin

# SUZANNE DE CONINCK



**SUZANNE DE CONINCK - Galerie de Beaune, Galerie Suzanne de Coninck**

Suzanne de Coninck was the daughter of a Belgian collector of ancient art, and she studied archaeology in Brussels before turning to the visual arts. She then opened Galerie de Beaune in 1949 which she also used as a publishing house, exhibiting masters such as Kandinsky, as well as supporting young female artists like Marie Raymond and Aurélie Nemours. In 1955, Suzanne de Coninck opened a second gallery dedicated to the pursuit of sculpture in contemporary art, this became the centre of cybernetic art in 1962.



# G A L E R I E LYDIA CONTI



## LYDIA CONTI - Galerie Lydia Conti

Lydia Conti was from a wealthy banking family and opened her gallery in 1947 immediately exhibiting the likes of Hartung and Soulages. Although she was forced to close the gallery in 1949 due to family pressures she continued to be an influential curator and dealer, primarily with Galerie Louis Carré.

# G A L E R I E NINA DAUSSET



## NINA DAUSSET - Galerie Nina Dausset, Galerie La Dragonne

Nina Dausset was a Russian émigré and opened her gallery in 1945 (also for a while called Galerie La Dragonne), initially showing surrealists, in 1951 she organised the ground-breaking abstract show "*Véhémences Confrontées*" with Bryen, Hartung, Pollock and de Kooning. The gallery ran until 1954.



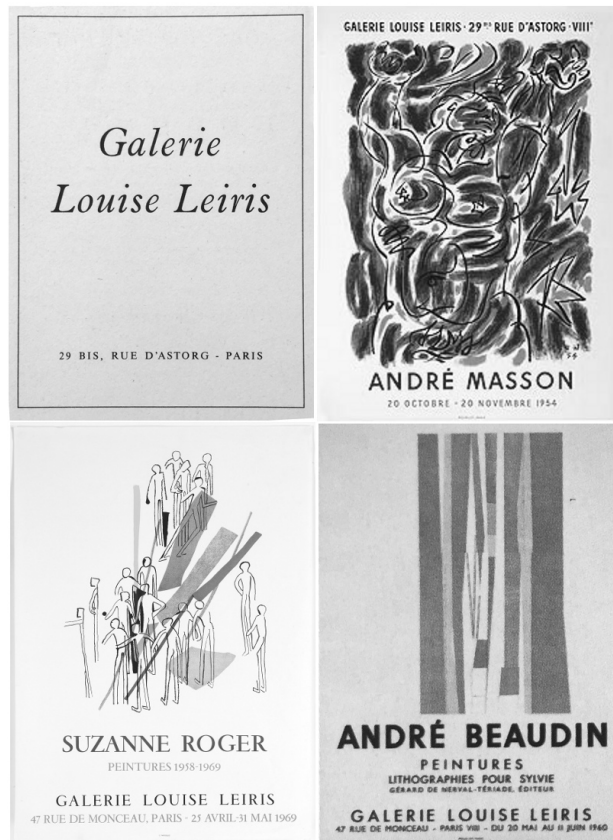
# GALERIE KATIA GRANOFF



## KATIA GRANOFF – Galerie Katia Granoff

Katia Granoff (1895–1989) was a Russian émigré, orphaned at the age of sixteen, she studied in Switzerland, before opening her first gallery in Paris in 1926. She was the first to show Monet's waterlilies, and supported female artists such as Chana Orloff and Valentine Prax. She later opened further galleries in Honfleur and Cannes.

# G A L E R I E LOUISE LEIRIS



## LOUISE LEIRIS - Galerie Louise Leiris

Louise Leiris was the step-daughter of Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler and took over one of the family galleries in 1941, showing Modern Masters.

# G A L E R I E HENRIETTE NIEPCE

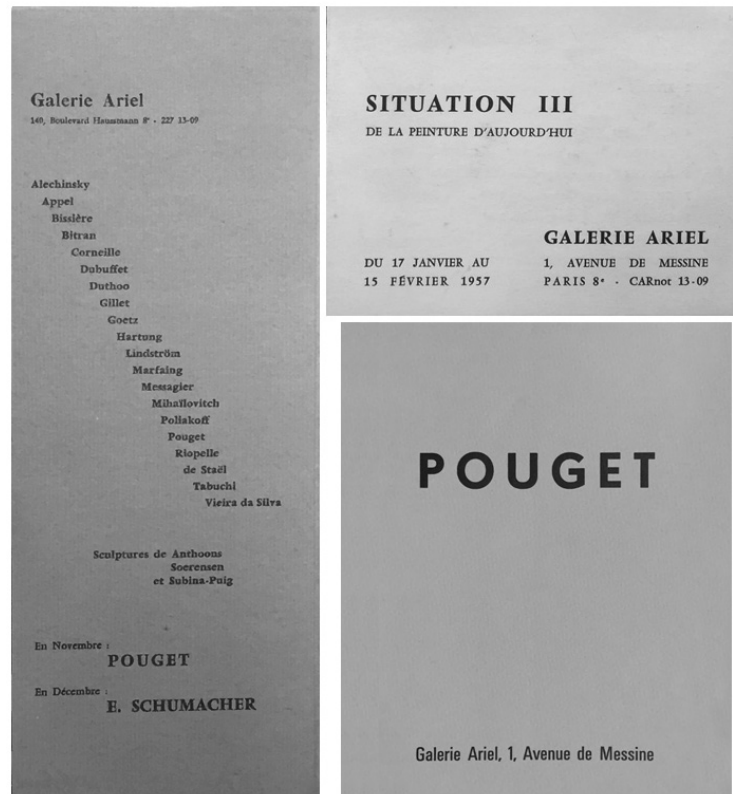


## HENRIETTE NIEPCE - Galerie Henriette Niepce

Henriette Niepce (1916-2010) was an artist and political activist and opened a gallery in 1951, where she was one of the first to exhibit Riopelle in 1952, before having to close it due to family obligations following the death of her father.



# MICHELE ORLANDO

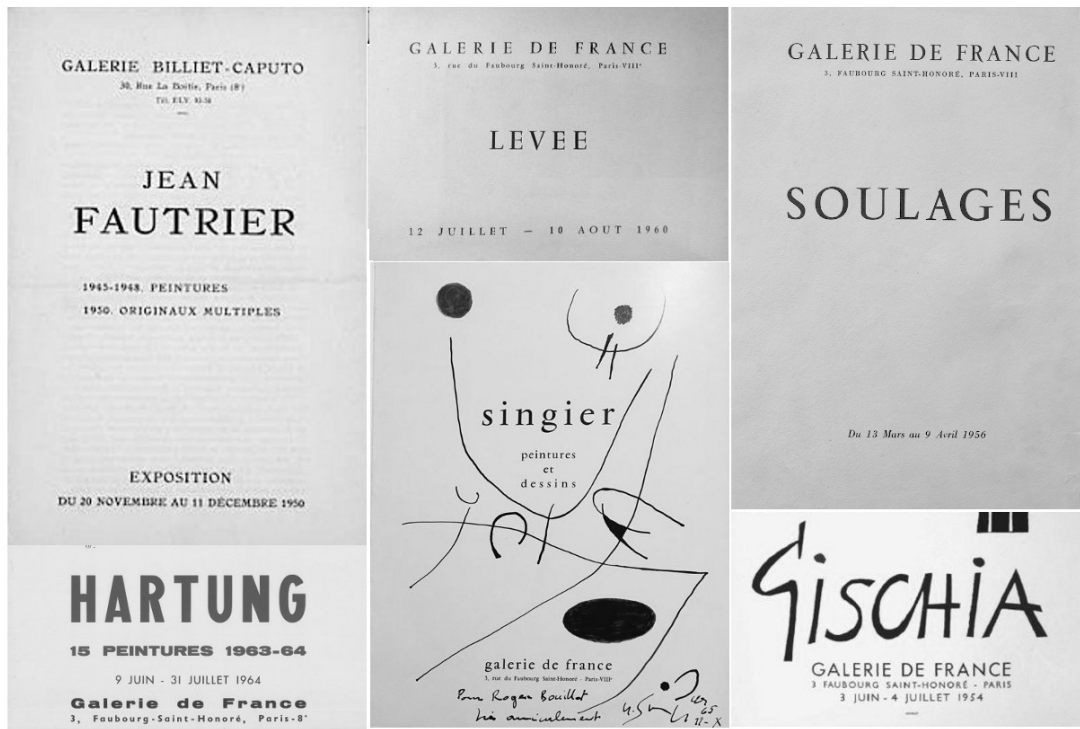


## MICHELE ORLANDO – Galerie Ariel

**Michèle Orlando** co-directed Galerie Ariel with Lucian Durand, and Jean Pollak; showing Art Brut and Cobra artists such as Dubuffet and Alechinsky.



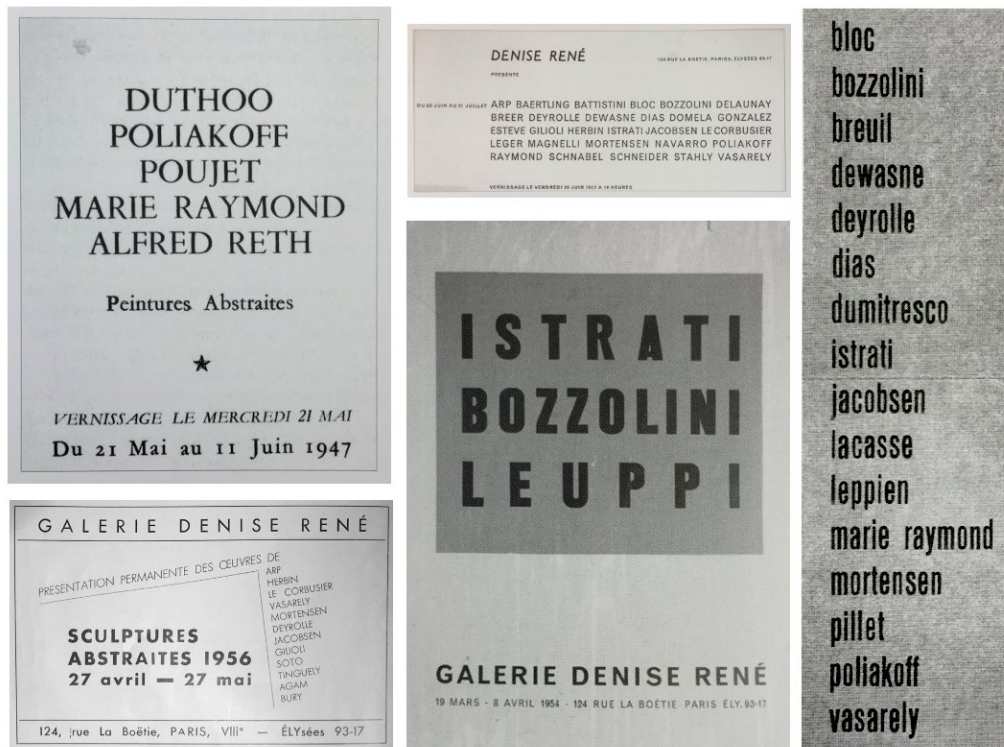
# MYRIAM PRÉVOT



## MYRIAM PRÉVOT - Galerie Billiet-Caputo, Galerie de France

Myriam Prévot (1919-1977) née Silberstein, initially worked for René Drouin before collaborating with Gildo Caputo to set up Galerie Billiet, and then Galerie de France in 1951, with a substantial exhibition program of artists from Soulages and Zao Wou-ki to Singier and Gischia. A pillar of the Parisian artworld, her life tragically ended in suicide in 1977.

# G A L E R I E DENISE RENÉ



## DENISE RENÉ - Galerie Denise René

Denise René (1913-2012), daughter of a Lyon industrialist, née Bleibtreu. The eminent "Papesse de l'Abstrait", opened her gallery in her family millinery workshop on rue La Boétie in 1944, presenting numerous influential exhibitions championing geometric abstract artists, such as Vasarely, Poliakoff, Gilioli, Deyrolle and Dewasne. She later opened galleries in New York and Dusseldorf.



# G A L E R I E DINA VIERNY



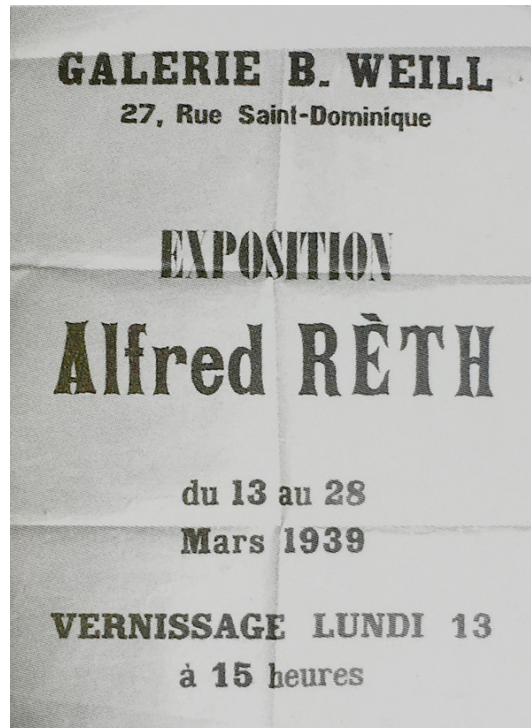
## DINA VIERNY - Galerie Dina Vierny

Dina Vierny (1919-2009) born in Moldova, she emigrated to France in 1925 and participated in the October Group, and became Maillol's muse, before inheriting his estate. In 1947 she opened a gallery at 36 rue Jacob, showing naive art as well as émigrés such as Serge Poliakoff.



# G A L E R I E

# BERTHE WEILL



## BERTHE WEILL – Galerie Berthe Weill

Berthe Weill (1865-1961) the godmother of women gallerists, spent her dowry on opening a gallery in 1901 being one of the first to sell Picasso's work, she went on to show, Matisse, Modigliani. Leger...et al. But was forced to close due to the Occupation. She only survived financially in her later years with the support of her loyal artists donating artworks.