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olivier debré
la peinture en scène

4 avril - 2 novembre 2025

press release

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olivier debré

la peinture en scène

4 april -
2 november 2025

opening 3rd april 2025
black gallery

Curator:
Marine Rochard

Inaugurated in 1987, the stage curtain for the Comédie-Française - the first of four created by Olivier Debré - was removed in 2020 to allow work to be carried out on the theatre rigging system. The Cnap, which owns it, welcomed the opportunity to have the curtain restored after more than thirty years of use. The restoration, carried out by Marc Philippe near Tours, began in May 2023 and lasted three months. The piece of work was finally able to return to its original setting and audience in September 2023.

This special event was an opportunity for the CCCOD to take a close look at this commission and delve into the related archives. The research was also extended to the three other stage curtains designed by Debré, making it possible to identify a significant number of preparatory sketches and to note their diversity and rich visual impact. This new exhibition came about quite naturally from a research process aimed at documenting these large-scale projects.

For the first time with 'la peinture en scène' ('stage painting'), Debré's works are presented not in the white gallery, as the public of the art centre is accustomed to, but in the **black gallery**, a space that evokes more directly the theatrical atmosphere inherent to the stage curtain.

The exhibition is divided into four sections, logically embodying the four curtains: **the Comédie-Française Theatre (Paris, 1987)**, **the Hong Kong Opera House (1989)**, **the Abbesses Theatre (Paris, 1996)** and **the Shanghai Opera House (1998)**. The exhibition highlights the specific features of each of these four commissions, as well as the differences between them. Of the **seventy preparatory works exhibited at the CCCOD** - ten of which have been restored by Marc Philippe - half relate to the Comédie-Française, for which the artist produced a total of around one hundred sketches (compared with around twenty for Shanghai, for example). The exhibition also brings out the identity of each of the curtains, expressed by the artist through a wide variety of colour schemes.

This exhibition is an opportunity to discover a new facet of Olivier Debré's work, which depends less on sensations and landscapes than on in-depth plastic and conceptual reflection in response to a specific commission.



Stage curtain for the Comédie-Française,
©Vincent Royer / OpenUp Studio

la peinture en scène

intention

Throughout his career, Olivier Debré has taken on numerous commissions, most of which were public projects carried out as part of the 1% artistic scheme¹. For him, this was an opportunity to produce large, sometimes monumental, oil paintings as part of new architectural programmes, such as middle schools or high schools.

In 1982, when the French Embassy in Washington commissioned a large painting for the hall of its new chancellery, the artist travelled to the site and first drew the building exactly as it was. In this way, he filled almost an entire sketchbook, each page being occupied by a drawing of the same building, through the bay window from which a different sketch can be seen each time.

These work drawings are very simple: they merely give an idea of the dominant colour scheme envisaged and the lines of force of the composition, the dynamics of which are designed to accompany the movement of the visitor, since, it should be remembered, the painting is intended to be placed in the hall, a huge space for circulation and distribution.

This type of procedure is very rare in Debré's work, and he only resorts to this type of sketch when the commissioned work must be designed and placed in situ to blend in with the new space.

As far as the preparatory work for the various stage curtains is concerned, there are very few rough sketches on paper, but more 'maquettes' or 'drafts', according to the words used by the artist in his archives. The paintings in question are technically related to the rest of his work, i.e. oils on canvas in various formats².

¹ This measure for contemporary artistic creation was initiated by the Ministry of Culture and Communication in 1951; it allows 1% of the cost of public building work to be used for the purchase or commissioning of works of art specially designed to be incorporated into a public building.

² This suggestion needs to be qualified: while the sketches for the stage curtains at the Hong Kong (1989) and Shanghai (1998) Opera houses are all oils on stretched canvas, those for the curtain at the Théâtre des Abbesses (1996) are sometimes interspersed with paper cut-outs. On the other hand, the preparatory works for the stage curtain at the Comédie-Française (1987) - Debré's first curtain - are more varied, starting with the formats, which range from around ten centimetres to over a metre in height. In terms of technique, there are a few oil paintings on stretched canvas, but most are mounted on plywood, which gives them a different materiality, bringing them closer to the idea of a maquette (an aspect further enhanced by the half-moon shape of the mantling).

la peinture en scène

intention

The term 'maquette' is commonly used to refer to the reproduction of an architectural object on a smaller scale, or the design of a theatrical set. A maquette can be a stage in the creative process, in which case it is a prototype, or a small-scale reproduction of an existing building or object, in which case it is a scale model³.

In Debré's case, these were prototypes to be presented to the client, who chose which would be produced in full scale. The commission from the Ministry of Culture for **the Comédie-Française theatre in Paris**, initiated in 1985, involved three elements: the **stage curtain** (a flexible fabric), the **safety curtain** (a heavy, rigid element used to prevent the spread of fire) and the **mantling** (a fixed, rounded upper part).

As part of the visual research for these pieces, Debré produced **dozens and dozens of models** of all kinds.



Olivier Debré, *Maquette for the curtain of the Comédie-Française theatre*, 1987, oil on canvas mounted on plywood panel, 26,5 x 22,5 cm, Private collection, Paris

Predominantly red, the composition of the Comédie-Française stage curtain gains its impetus and dynamism from the contrasts that the artist slips into it in the form of multicoloured strips. Numerous preparatory studies reveal a small bluish area in the red background. This research is representative of the way the artist worked to match the curtain itself with the mantling, i.e. by making wooden models with small elements that could be easily combined to explore various arrangements.

³ On this subject, read Élie During's essay, *Le Monde doit être maquetisé* (published in David Zerbib (ed.), *In Octavo - des formats de l'art*, s.l., ESAAA / Les Presses du réel, 2015, pp.23-42), and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage*, Paris, Pocket, 2020 [Plon, 1962], in particular the first part ('La science du concret') and more specifically the passage on page 37 which presents a demonstration of the work of art as a reduced model.

la peinture en scène

intention

Here we can see the artist's trial and error, for whom this type of project was a first, a real challenge. For the curtain at the **Hong Kong Opera House** (1989) and the **Shanghai Opera House** (1998), he worked differently, perhaps with greater ease, proposing **around twenty sketches** (at least seventeen) in response to each of these two commissions.

For the curtain of the Hong Kong Opera House, donated by the Fondation Louis Vuitton and installed in 1989, Olivier Debré took a different approach: he went to China to gather information, intending to capture some of the cultural fundamentals that he wished to express in his work. This research trip is like the many artistic journeys the artist has made abroad. Yellow dominates both the final curtain and some of the sketches, yellow being the imperial colour in China. The other preparatory works for this curtain also show a recurring use of the colour red, which, in the artist's mind as well as in the collective unconscious, remains firmly linked to the world of the stage.



Olivier Debré, *Sketch for the Hong Kong Opera curtain*, 1989, oil on canvas, 27 x 45 cm, Collection Mr. and Mrs. Hanse

His contribution to the **Théâtre des Abbesses in Paris** (1996) was a little unusual in that he was entrusted with the creation of an entire set: he designed not only the stage curtain but also the decorative wall panels for the different tiers of balconies. To date, we have found **very little preparatory work** for this curtain.

The stage curtain at the Théâtre des Abbesses is the focal point of a whole series of wall decors also created by Debré. The comma-shaped brushstrokes in the decorations spread out like waves, as seen in the artist's various sketchbooks. They cross the entire auditorium and converge in the centre, within the curtain itself. As certain studies indicate, the work created for the Abbesses - a contemporary theatre - is much more refined and decorative. There's even a sense of playfulness in the three coloured strokes at its centre - evoking characters or even sign characters - whose precise position within the composition was chosen by the artist working with cut-out pieces of paper.



Olivier Debré, *Sketch for the théâtre des Abbesses curtain*, 1996, oil and collage on canvas, 28 x 55,5 cm, Private collection, France

la peinture en scène

intention

For this type of commission, **the technical challenges are enormous**. For example, the painting chosen to be the model for the Shanghai curtain measures approximately 80 x 140 centimetres, yet the final object measured 1400 x 2200 centimetres, an area of 340 square metres, the size of two basketball courts.

How Debré has chosen to proceed is reminiscent of the traditional technique of 'squaring', which first appeared in the Renaissance. It consists of applying a grid to the surface of the model and then transferring it to the appropriate scale, which, at the time of creation, will allow the image to be enlarged proportionally.



Olivier Debré, *Untitled (sketch for the Shanghai curtain)*, 1998, oil on canvas, 81 x 134 cm, Private collection, France

The stage curtain for the Shanghai Opera, donated to the city by LVMH, demonstrates the artist's greater freedom in the creative process and concerning the conventions of performance. The work is characterised by highly expressive colour contrasts, but also by a composition and gestural dynamism that bring it closer to his work of the 1990s. The stretched format is reminiscent of the large panoramic formats he created at the time on the banks of the Loire. While most of the preparatory studies for the Shanghai curtain are bright, lively and very cheerful, some of them also feature some strikingly pop colours.

For obvious reasons, the CCCOD will not be showing the stage curtains, but will be concentrating on these famous 'maquettes' or 'sketches'. Although this exhibition will not be limited to a game of spot the difference, it will of course be an opportunity to examine the similarities that persist from one to the next. Above all, it is a question of **looking at the creative process**, of studying how Debré seizes on a commission to carry out aesthetic research that is all his own.

la peinture en scène

intention

We are therefore looking at how he can **transform or exploit these projects** - which are, of course, subject to numerous constraints - so that they correspond as closely as possible to the concerns and pictorial experiments that were his at the time.

Another central point in the development of this exhibition project is the artist's approach to the **notion of series**⁴. We already know that he works almost exclusively in series, the essence of which is not necessarily to experiment with variations on the same motif.

In Debré's case, the works were created in parallel: he used to lay out several canvases of different sizes on the floor and work on them simultaneously. The pieces created in this way depend on the same temporality (time of day and season) and can therefore have similar lighting qualities.

Why did the painter choose to proceed in this way? The vital importance of capturing the light perceived in the moment encouraged him to undertake several canvases at once, thereby multiplying his chances of having at least one that is 'good', and successful.

Less prosaically, this way of working also gave him an opportunity, as in a patchwork or even a musical score, to capture in each of the canvases in the series one or other of the luminous and coloured inflexions that he undoubtedly detected by the dozen. Debré transformed and conveyed this frustration, which is no doubt common to all painters, into a universe of potential, with the intention - even more so as he painted quickly - of bringing the slightest sense of atmosphere to life.

But what about the preparatory work for major commissions? Were they carried out in the comfort of the studio or outside? Did it depend on reflection or a preliminary intention, or is it, like the rest of the artist's work, the result of an instinctive process that drives the flow of emotions to the canvas in the form of coloured traces?

⁴An interesting expression when we consider that the industry uses the same word in the radically opposite notion of mass production. Latin etymology also informs us about other concepts that we would like to study in relation to the production of Debré. If the common name *series* refers logically enough to a sequence, a chain of objects or a row, it can also refer to interlacing, the verb *serere* signifying 'tie together'.

la peinture en scène

intention

The maquettes of the stage curtains have no title other than that which characterises them rather arbitrarily, for example, 'maquette' or 'sketch Hong Kong curtain' followed by an indication of numbering. While this gives us information and reinforces the idea that this is indeed a series for the artist, we have no clue as to the time or place in which the creation took place⁵.

If we look closely at Debré's paintings, we realise that nothing is self-evident, whether we are talking about the idea of a model or that of a series. **Is the real stage curtain, as the last object - and the chosen one at that - in the series, the only one that can lay claim to the status of a work of art, or is it simply another object in the series?** Do the models not chosen to be made to the same scale lose not only their status as works of art but also their importance in the creative process?⁶

If the artist titled, then offered or sold some of these paintings not chosen by the commissioner, it is likely that he did not consider them any different from the rest of his work. Above all, what is surprising, given the frequency with which Debré agrees to accept such commissions, is that **this exercise appears to be in total contradiction with the way he works**, i.e. with no preconceived intentions and as much spontaneity as possible.

⁵ Does this mean that each commission is an isolated event in the artist's output? Nothing is less certain if we look at another commission, this time for a much smaller object: a stamp. In this case, the numerous models dated 1992 are small (from 18 x 27 cm to 35 x 54.5 cm), but their scale is much larger than that of the final object (3.7 x 4.8 cm). What interests me about this commission is that the artist's preparatory works are not numbered. The only indications that they belong to the same series are their dimensions - the format is the same as that of the stamp, which the artist has used little or not at all in any other context - and the clues left by Debré who, in his archives, simply refers to these canvases, reputedly untitled, as sketches for the stamp. Where things get tricky is when we manage to track down and find these canvases, which have now been dispersed: most of them bear a title in the artist's own handwriting on the reverse side, a title that refers, as usual, to various elements that are important to him: the plastic means (for example, 'big blue'), the temporality ('morning mist') or the place ('port of Royan').

⁶ Élie During, 'Le Monde doit être maquettisé' (*op.cit.*).

la peinture en scène

intention



I paint large canvases, it's a way of expressing yourself in space, a physical way of feeling colour; you enter a painting with your whole body and so does the viewer. You shouldn't be guided by ideas, and even less by people who think they have ideas. Creation is all about discovery; you don't need to know in advance where you're going...⁷



Focusing on the gap between what is possible and what is real, this exhibition of maquettes explores the artist's creative process, his authenticity and the signs of series-based thinking.

The CCCOD would like to thank: the beneficiaries of the artist, Sylvie Huerre-Debré & Patrice Debré; the scientific committee of the CCCOD for its wise recommendations; the private collections that have agreed to entrust us with their works during the exhibition and, sometimes, brought to our knowledge information and archives essential in the construction of our project; la galerie Berès (Paris), le Cnap (Paris) for the provision of its resources; Vincent Royer for his invaluable help; la Collection Louis Vuitton; as well as the few auctioneers and gallerists who have given us a valuable help to find certain pieces (Agnès Aittoures, galerie AB ; Jessica Cavaleiro, Artcurial ; Camille Maujean, Ader ; Adrien Serien, Millon).

Associated programming:
choreographic piece by Michele Murray,
Duos / collisions et combustions, programmed by
the CCNT as part of its *Tours d'horizons* festival
on Saturday, May 31, 2025 and Sunday, June 1, 2025

⁷ Olivier Debré, remarks made in May 1977 and reproduced in *Aspects de l'art en France 1950 to 1980* (exhibition catalogue), Montauban, Musée Ingres, 1985, p.23.

**stage
curtains**

comédie-française theatre

Paris - 1987

march 1985

Initiated by Jack Lang, then Minister of Culture, the public commission includes the following components:

- stage curtain, linen 1000 x 1300 cm
- fire curtain, linen mounted on metal, 800 x 1100 cm
- mantling, 580 x 1100 cm

january -
july 1987

After making around a hundred models, Debré works with the help of three assistants (Marc Bonnet, Alberto Cont and Saadi Souami) in a hangar loaned by the UTA air transport company at Le Bourget: the artist needs five hundred square metres of floor space.

He has to extend his gestures beyond the limits of his own body, an unprecedented experience for him. The photographs of this period show Debré surrounded by colour and walking through his own creation, armed with the long brooms he used to paint.

16 september
1987

The stage curtain is unveiled in the presence of François Léotard, Minister for Culture and Communication, and Jean Le Poulain, Administrator of the Comédie-Française.

Based on these curtains, the artist then makes two rugs for the CRC studio: Comédie-Française stage left (300 x 200 cm) and Comédie-Française stage right (200 x 146 cm).

2023

The stage curtain, which is part of the CNAP collections, is restored in Tours by Marc Philippe before being reinstalled in the theatre.

cnap.fr/le-rideau-dolivier-debre-rejoint-les-reserves-du-cnap-pour-sa-restauration

youtube.com/watch?v=7mcPshohH5g

comédie-française theatre

Paris - 1987

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The distinctive feature of the work we produced was its size. In a painting, even a large one, you can usually directly infuse the canvas with your own strength.

But when the size is so great, for example, thirteen metres high, you have to transpose the feeling of strength you want to convey. Whatever strength you put into your gesture, it's not enough on such a scale. You can have enough strength to work on canvases two, three or four metres high, but when the canvas is thirteen metres high everything is different.

In this case, it could perhaps be said that we are dealing with architectural problems rather than painting problems strictly speaking. The strength you have has to be slightly calculated, transposed into colours, but direct strength is not enough, whatever the size of the elements you use.

So, you have to train yourself to multiply, so to speak, the impression, to double the conception you have of the work you want to achieve. The same applies to the problem of time: what you can normally do in a minute, now takes two or three days. With a certain amount of practice, you end up achieving it.⁸

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⁸Olivier Debré, interviewed by Michel Archimbaud, *Le Rideau de la Comédie-Française*, Paris, Librairie Séguier, 1987.

hong kong opera

1989

february
1989

The Louis Vuitton Foundation for Opera and Music (created by Henry Racamier) decides to donate a stage curtain to the new Hong Kong Opera House. The building, designed by José Lei, chief architect for the city's municipal services, is a cultural centre housing several halls for a variety of uses.

Olivier Debré is commissioned to create the opera curtain. Debré paints around twenty sketches in Paris, then travels to Hong Kong and Beijing (where he visits the Forbidden City and appreciates its golden yellow, red and green colours).

He presents his various designs in Hong Kong: the one that is unanimously chosen is predominantly golden yellow (which corresponds to the colours of the Forbidden City and refers to the colour that was once reserved for the Emperor in China).

april - august
1989

Debré works with three assistants on the chosen project, the same people who had worked on the curtain for the Comédie-Française. To enable the artist to paint the work (900 x 1500 cm), Vuitton has a 500 square metre transparent geodesic structure specially built in Issy-les-Moulineaux, on a sports field loaned by the local council. The work is then rolled up and placed in an eighteen-metre-long crate to be flown to Hong Kong.

6 november
1889

The unveiling of the curtain is presided over by Prince Charles and Princess Diana of England, with a performance of Beethoven's *Fidelio*. The entire building is officially opened on 8 November.

25 november -
30 december 1989

Galerie Daniel Templon, in Paris, presents an exhibition of preliminary sketches of the stage curtain.

july 1990

As part of the 3rd Contemporary French Theatre Festival, an exhibition entitled 'Olivier Debré. L'opéra de la vie' takes place at La Seyne-sur-Mer (Fort Napoléon).

hong kong opera

1989

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A significant part of the exercise is to increase one's own strength. What's interesting about this attempt is that gestures can become a kind of structure in space and that the trace of a personal expression can be transformed into a solid architecture that fits into a space like a hill in a landscape.

The notion that this emotion, these palpitations, this transposed time, this timeless thing, becomes a real space. The whole body is immersed in it through the eye, like a natural place, if you manage to move on from immediate sensitivity and therefore emotion, and that's a really exciting thing. The direct gesture doesn't work, no matter how hard you push, like a small painting, if you press down, the pressure stays.

So for this monumental work, there's a transposition, a bit like in architecture. [...] I adapt my gestures to the space of the painting. [...] It is a painting, but a painting that has a certain role, it heralds the play to come. It is part of the theatre; it imposes a rhythm. It has a precise function; it announces and ends a show. So it's a bit different from an ordinary painting.⁹

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⁹ Remarks by Olivier Debré taken from the press kit published by the Fondation Louis Vuitton at the time of the inauguration of the Hong Kong curtain.

théâtre des abbesses

1996

When the theatre opens its doors on 18 November 1996, it is nearly ten years since the project was initiated by the Paris City Council, which saw this facility as a second venue for the Théâtre de la Ville.

Located on the Butte Montmartre and seating around 400, the building was designed by Belgian architect Charles Vandenhove as a **collective work**. He called on several artists:

- Olivier Debré for the paintings on the balconies and the stage curtain;
- Robert Barry for the sandblasted glass balustrade;
- Daniel Buren for a large painting located outside;
- Jean-Charles Blais for the paintings on the grand staircase;
- Loïck Le Groumellec for the entrance hall;
- Patrick Corillon for the dance studio corridors.

The architect regularly invites artists to work with him on his projects. He has already collaborated with Debré on several occasions:

- 1980, Liège Hospital: Debré creates the decorative panelling developed in practice (100 x 1200 cm);
- 1982, restoration of Hôtel Torrentius, Liège.

For the various levels of balconies, Debré created **decorative wall panels** that developed gestural and colourful variations in the form of commas. Like waves in reverse, they are directed and converge towards the stage, where the curtain unfolds in red and pink.

Although the composition is horizontal rather than vertical, **it is based on the fundamentals of the Comédie-Française**, i.e. the evocation of two red curtains spreading out from the centre. Here, however, the expression is more direct - one would be tempted to say more pure and raw - almost schematic. Beneath this great red canopy is a flat pink surface, against which primary-coloured shapes stand out, suggesting both brushstrokes and characters gathered on stage.

Here we are closer to the aesthetic that would be chosen for the sets and costumes of the ballet *Signes*, in 1997, whether in terms of the finished project or the creative process. Although **there are very few sketches for this curtain**, one of them, an oil on canvas, is also embellished with paper cut-outs glued to its surface. These paper elements, reminiscent of characters, were also used by the artist in models for the creation of the ballet's mobile sets.

shanghai opera

1998

1994 French architect Jean-Marie Charpentier wins the international competition launched for the construction of the new Shanghai Opera House. Once again, the LVMH group wants to provide a curtain (1400 x 2200 cm) for this room and calls on Debré.

15 november 1998 The stage curtain is unveiled. This is **the last major creation by the artist**, who dies in 1999.

This time, the curtain is created in China rather than in Paris. Debré is assisted by two young Chinese painters, Jing Shijian and Xu Jiang, with whom he works on the piece in the Hangzhou gymnasium, which is made available for the purpose.

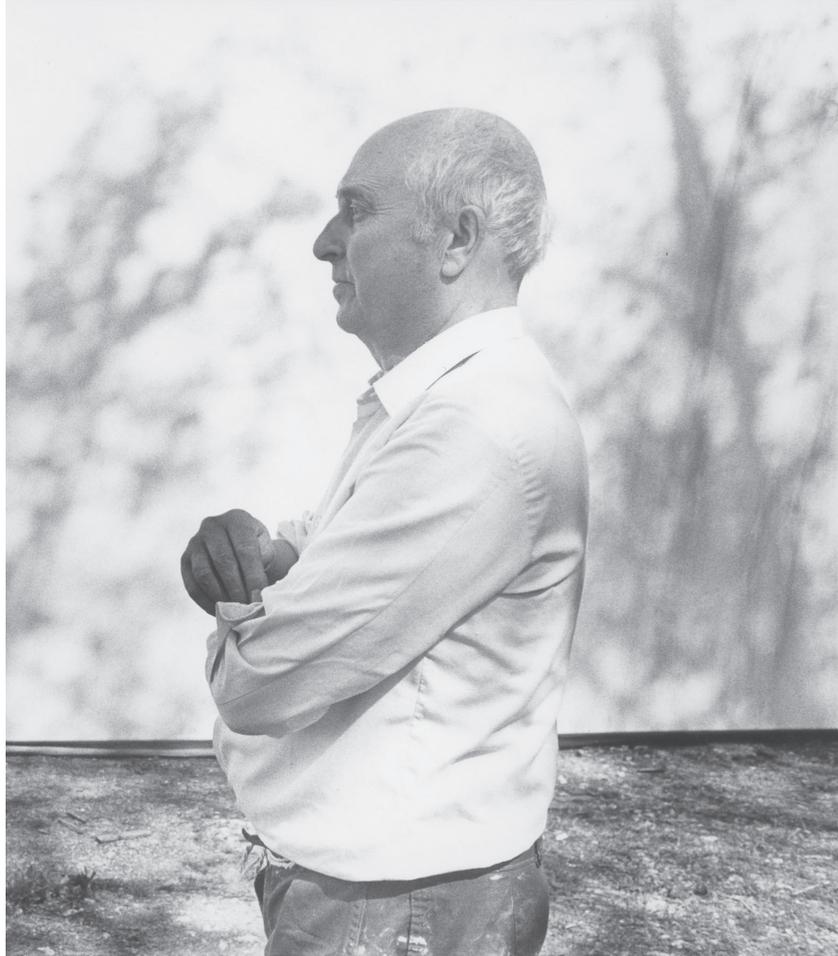
As usual, he also takes advantage of this trip to work on the creation of small canvases in the parks and surrounding areas of Shanghai¹⁰. Photographer Marc Deville is asked to accompany the painter during his stay to produce a visual record of the commission.

Marc Deville's series of seventeen photographs gives us an idea of the size of a stage curtain. The series is of great interest because it allows us to observe the painter's gestures, the way he uses his tools and his entire creative process.

The oversized tools the artist uses to complete this project are undoubtedly not easy to handle. But this in no way detracts from the apparent spontaneity of the composition as a whole. We can see that even in monumental formats, the artist manages to retranscribe all the pictorial gestuality that characterises his own work.

¹⁰ There are at least fifty paintings produced in China over the course of five different trips, in formats no larger than 100 x 100 cm. In 1989, he travelled to the Hong Kong region and painted the Guilin Mountains in particular. He returned the following year, in 1990. In 1996, he travelled and painted near Beijing. In 1997 he turned his attention to Hangzhou Lake, a destination to which he returned in 1998, as well as Hong Kong and Shanghai.

olivier debré



Olivier Debré was born in Paris into a family of doctors and artists. He started painting and drawing as a child, and then turned to a career as an architect. In 1938, he entered the Paris school of Fine Arts in the architecture section. However, he decided to devote himself to painting in the early 1940s.

His pictorial expression, initially inspired by impressionism, evolved towards more airy compositions with large colored surfaces, making Debré one of the representatives of gestural abstraction. In spite of numerous trips around the world, he often returned to paint near the Loire, in Vernou-sur-Brenne, near Tours, in the property of 'Les Madères' (Touraine) where he had set up one of his studios.

Photo : François Poivret

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CCC OD • exhibition *la peinture en scène* • curator: Marine Rochard • from 4 april to 2 november 2025

olivier debré

olivier debré in a few dates

1920-1999 (Paris)

- 1941** Debré presented a few paintings for the first time in the Paris gallery of Georges Aubry. He painted in a figurative vein derived from Impressionism, which nevertheless attracted the attention of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). The two artists became acquainted with each other and met several times thereafter. In the 1940s, the young artist took a more structured approach to painting: his constructed, angular and rhythmic compositions evolved away from a fully realistic expression towards abstraction, as evidenced by his first solo exhibition at the Bing Gallery in June 1949. Like many artists of his generation, he introduced symbols - or 'signs' - into his painting, a reference to the shock of the discovery of the concentration camps.
- 1950** Debré frequently exhibited at the Parisian art fairs. He developed an increasingly thick and regular quadrangular brushstroke, arranged in the form of vertical stacks. These create an architectural composition and give the painting a monumental presence. The symbol of the human figure becomes recurrent in the *Sign characters*. These evocative silhouettes, which are increasingly abstract, are most often executed on rectangular formats stretched to the highest point, in which dark, muted colours dominate. This subject - restricted pictorially to his works of the 1950s - remained a recurring theme in his production of prints and drawings until the 1990s.
- 1959** The artist presented his first solo exhibition in New York at the Knoedler Gallery. It consisted largely of very dense abstract compositions with a built-up surface. Debré had recently begun experimenting with different ways of lightening his palette and thinning the paint layer. During his trip to the United States, he had an opportunity to meet Mark Rothko (1903-1970), an artist who worked with colourful lights radiating from large formats. It is impossible to know whether this encounter was decisive for the French painter. The fact remains that in contact with nature, on his travels, in his garden in Cachan (Val-de-Marne) or even in the 'Les Madères' (Touraine), his gestures developed in a more versatile way through formats that were initially square, then increasingly large and stretched in width.

olivier debré

- 1966** In 1966, the artist was offered his first retrospective in a French institution. 'Olivier Debré. Peintures 1943-1966', presented at the museum of Fine Arts in Le Havre, enabling his artistic career to be retraced and to see that his use of materials shifted towards greater fluidity. It is also the first time that some of his drawings were exhibited. Following this initial step towards public recognition, Debré was increasingly called upon to create monumental compositions and large architectural settings. In 1967, for example, he participated in the creation of the French Pavilion at the Montreal International Exhibition ('Expo 67. Terre des hommes'). In the hall of the building designed by the architect Jean Faugeron, he created a monumental painting that he called *Signe d'homme* (250 x 500 cm).
- 1979** Debré was appointed head of the mural art studio at the school of Fine Arts in Paris, where he taught until 1985. He had already produced several decorative paintings integrated into architectural programmes, for example at the Lycée Rabelais in Chinon (1975). He even had an opportunity to create monumental ceramics, as was the case at the European Pavilion of the Osaka International Exhibition in Japan (1970). At the same time, during the 1970s and 1980s, his gestures became freer, and he used increasingly large formats: canvases between five and six metres wide became frequent throughout his artistic production. The very fluid material provided a play of coloured transparencies, made possible by the 'washes' that the artist allowed to flow freely over the surface of the canvas in succession.
- 1987** Thanks to a public commission initiated in 1985 by Jack Lang, then Minister of Culture, the artist created the new stage curtain for the Comédie-Française (1000 x 1300 cm). To fulfil this commission, Debré needed a floor space of five hundred square metres to paint, which he found at Le Bourget, in a hangar lent to him for two months by an airline company. With the help of three assistants, the artist had to extend his gestures beyond the limits of his own body, an unprecedented experience for him. The photographs of this period show Debré surrounded by colour and walking through his own creation, armed with the long brooms that enabled him to paint. In 1989 and 1998, he created the stage curtains for the Hong Kong (1500 x 1900 cm) and Shanghai (1400 x 2200 cm) opera houses.

olivier debré

1991 More actively present in Touraine for several years, Debré established a relationship with the Centre de création contemporaine (ccc, Tours). In 1990, the art centre commissioned him to create four canvases designed to fit the four walls of the centre (400 x 915 cm) for an exhibition that was to take place in the summer of 1991. Six large paintings were created by the artist; four of them were chosen to be exhibited, thus replacing the walls of the art centre for a few months. Today, five of these monumental paintings, the largest oil paintings ever produced by the artist, are kept at the CCCOD, the last one belonging to the European Investment Bank (Luxembourg). In 2018, this series was presented for the first time in its entirety at the CCCOD, in the exhibition 'Les Nymphéas d'Olivier Debré'.

1995 Art historian Daniel Abadie, then director of the National Gallery of the Jeu de Paume (Paris), organizes a major retrospective of the artist's work with whom he has already collaborated on numerous occasions. This exhibition brings together more than sixty artworks dating from the 1940s to the 1990s and gives an account of the different forms experienced on a career scale. This exhibition will travel around the world.

During this decade, Debré continued to respond to large-scale public and private commissions, the most notable of which was undoubtedly *Signes*. For this ballet by the US choreographer Carolyn Carlson, he creates all the sets and costumes; the show is itself structured in seven paintings, each of them referring to a pictorial work. Presented for the first time at the Opéra Bastille (Paris) in 1997, it is then replayed several times, most recently in 2023.

Olivier Debré died in Paris on 1 June 1999 shortly after being elected a member of the painting section at the Académie des Beaux-Arts of the Institut de France.

olivier debré

main orders

- 1965** Royan (France), highschool Cordouan (architects: Guillaume Gillet and Bernard Cayla) - two large decorative canvases and a sculpture created as part of the 1% artistic (respectively 180 x 880 cm and 180 x 1500 cm)
- 1967** Montreal (Canada), French pavilion's hall (architect: Jean Faugeron), International Exhibition ('Expo 67. Terre des hommes', 28 April - 30 October)
- 1970** Osaka (Japan), European Communities Pavilion, International Exhibition monumental ceramics inaugurated on March 15, 1970 and destroyed at the end of the exhibition (400 x 1800 cm)
- 1971** Olivier Debré paints two large canvases commissioned by the town of Amboise
- 1975** Chinon (France), Rabelais High School (architect: Henri Madelain) monumental decorative painting (180 x 800 cm)
- 1987** Paris (France), Comédie-Française (commission from the French ministry of culture) - stage curtain (1000 x 1300 cm), iron curtain (800 x 1100 cm), lambrequin (580 x 1100 cm) inaugurated on September 16 1987
- 1989** Hongkong (China), Opera (commission from the Louis Vuitton Foundation) - stage curtain (900 x 1500 cm) inaugurated on November 6 1989
- 1998** Shanghai (China), Opera (commission from the Louis Vuitton Foundation) stage curtain (1400 x 2200 cm) inaugurated on November 15 1989

Olivier Debré's works are held in numerous French public collections, as well as in several institutions in Europe (Norway, Belgium, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland, etc.) and around the world (Canada, the United States, Brazil, India, Israel, Jordan, etc.).

The artist has also produced numerous monumental works (paintings, sculptures, ceramics) for public commissions (notably in France under the 1% artistic scheme, but also abroad). Over the course of his career, he has also created a number of stage curtains, theatre sets and costumes, and stained-glass windows. He has also designed two buildings as an architect (a building of artists' studios and residences in Paris and a church in Compiègne).

the CCCOD and olivier debré

Since 2016, the CCCOD has curated and displayed a Debré donation. The art center promotes Olivier Debré's works through regularly scheduled temporary exhibitions (on and off-site; solo and group shows). Research on the artist work is ongoing, with the CCCOD writing on the catalogue raisonné of his paintings.

The Debré donation in 2008 gave birth to a new project for the eponymous center for contemporary creation. The idea was to bring together in one place the collection of an historical artist and the experimental mission that the art center had already been pursuing since 1985. Olivier Debré's heirs donated some of their father's works to Tours Métropole Val de Loire, owner of the CCCOD building. The donation comprises 5 monumental paintings (400 x 915 cm) and a graphic ensemble of 155 pieces.



Exhibition view 'Les Nymphéas d'Olivier Debré', CCCOD - Tours, 2018-2019
© F.Fernandez, CCCOD, Tours

the CCCOD and olivier debré

research

the catalogue raisonné olivier debré

www.olivierdebre-catalogueraisonne.com

contact : *Marine Rochard* (m.rochard@cccod.fr)

In 2016, the CCCOD set up a research department whose project is to carry out in collaboration with the beneficiaries of the artist, his children Patrice Debré and Sylvie Debré-Huerre, the catalogue raisonné of Olivier Debré's paintings.

A catalogue raisonné identifies and locates all the works created by an artist. It draws up a complete history tracing the life of each of them (origins, exhibitions, bibliography), thus tending to the most complete knowledge possible of the Work, presented in a form that is at once descriptive, analytical and critical. Under the supervision of Sylvie Debré-Huerre, who authenticates the artworks and approves their inclusion in the catalogue raisonné with Patrice Debré, Marine Rochard, in charge of exhibitions and research at the CCCOD, researches, gathers, studies and verifies all scientific data contributing to the traceability of the canvases.

This online catalogue raisonné is accessible free of charge and by all audiences which makes it a dynamic search tool, constantly enriched, but also the vector of a better visibility of the artist's work. It consists of different geographical and thematic corpus that will be gradually published from 2023, starting with a first set of paintings produced in Scandinavia between 1971 and 1996 (published online in November 2023). This methodology corresponds with the way Olivier Debré worked, travelling around the world to paint in the heart of new landscapes. He titled and situated his paintings according to their place of creation, thus articulating his production into relevant and well-identified series.

- **november 2023:** online release of the paintings produced in Scandinavia between 1971 and 1996.
- **autumn - winter 2024:** online release of works created in the water's edge workshops (three series: Royan, Saint-Tropez, Loire-Touraine).
- **spring 2025:** online release of paintings corresponding to preparatory works for stage curtains, in connection with the exhibition 'la peinture en scène' presented at the CCCOD from April 2025.

the CCCOD



Maurizio Nannucci, *Listen to your eyes*, 2010, fnac 10-1055, collection du CNAP, 2018-2023. Photo F. Fernandez, CCCOD - Tours

Right in the historic centre of Tours, with its contemporary architecture designed by the Portuguese agency Aires Mateus, the Centre de Création contemporaine Olivier Debré is somewhere the public can come and make discoveries, share knowledge and experiences in an open setting. A contemporary art centre, it is also a multidisciplinary culture venue which engages with all local stakeholders in its ambition to explore new ground.

The CCCOD is now the custodian of a donation of works by the painter Olivier Debré who lived in Touraine from early childhood. Hosting a historic collection within a contemporary art centre throws up a whole host of unique possibilities for building bridges between past and present creation.

All year round, our Visitors' Department organises a wide range of activities for young and old alike, tailoring their options to suit individuals and different groups. An exciting and intriguing programme of cultural events can be enjoyed alongside the exhibitions, including conferences, encounters, performances and film screenings – all designed to awaken your senses and broaden your knowledge.

With an ambitious exhibition programme, the CCCOD is forging ever closer ties with its region whilst exploring international creation. Pioneering, inquisitive and ever mindful of the issues that matter today, it looks ahead with the artists who are constantly questioning our world in a different way.

practical information

olivier debré la peinture en scène 4 april - 2 november 2025

curator: Marine Rochard

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getting here

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5 minutes by tram from Tours train station,
stop Porte-de-Loire
1h10 from Paris by TGV
via the A10 motorway, exit Tours Centre

opening hours

wednesday-sunday 11am - 6pm
saturday until 7pm

entry fees

8,50 € (full price)
5,50 € (reduced price)
free access under 18

CCC OD LEPASS

unlimited access to exhibitions and events
valid for 1 year
27 € single pass
45 € duo pass
12 € for students / 7 € PCE

free access

the cafe restaurant

Le Café de Paula, is a friendly and welcoming place to enjoy quality coffee, a pastry, or a daily special, all made in-house with local and seasonal products.

Open Wednesday to Friday from 12pm to 6pm,
Saturday from 11am to 7pm, and Sunday from 11am to 6pm
paulacafetours@gmail.com

the bookstore - shop

Mailys, our bookseller, offers a wide selection of books specializing in art, architecture, and design, as well as books and games for children, postcards, and goodies...

Open Wednesday to Friday from 2pm to 6pm, and Saturday from 11am to 1pm and 2pm to 6pm.
07 85 93 42 93 / librairie@cccod.fr

facilities

the CCC OD is accessible to people with disabilities.

2 accessible parking spaces for people with reduced mobility (PRM) at Jardin François 1^{er}. Bicycle parking and car parking available at Porte-de-Loire, Place de la Résistance, and Rue du Commerce.

On-site services include: elevators, accessible toilets, stroller storage, baby changing facilities, and a wheelchair (available at reception upon request).

The CCC OD is a cultural equipment of Tours Métropole Val de Loire.
Its achievement was made possible thanks to the State and territorial collectivities support.

