

ARTFORUM

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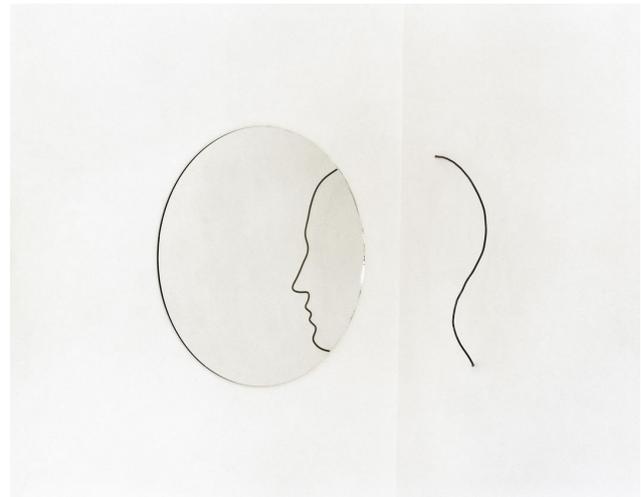
MARKUS RAETZ (1941–2020)

Contemporary Swiss artist Markus Raetz, best known for his illusory sculptural works that play with human perception, has died. Galleria Monica De Cardenas in Milan, which has represented the artist for twenty-five years, confirmed his passing. “Raetz speaks to the mind and heart with essential and poetic images,” said dealer Monica De Cardenas. “The mechanisms of representation and the plurality of vision are the themes around which his artistic path unfolds.”

Raetz, whose extensive output consists of more than thirty thousand paintings and prints produced before he shifted to sculpture in the 1970s, was born in the small town of Büren an der Aare, near Bern, Switzerland, on June 6, 1941. Raetz studied art for only six months at the Reitveld Academy in Amsterdam, where he learned etching, and had no other formal artistic training. He then pursued a career as a primary school teacher. He had his first solo show at the Galerie Toni Gerber in Bern in 1966 and his first institutional exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel in 1972.

Since the early 1990s, Raetz had focused on creating a series of sculptures that appeared as different forms depending on where the viewer stood. For the artist, the movement of the spectator around the work was essential. He once compared these visually elusive sculptures to the Greek myth *Metamorphoses*, in which the nymph Daphne transforms into a laurel tree. Raetz explained that “it is not the two images—of the woman and the tree—that are interesting. The moment of change is the most fantastic.”

Featuring prominently in his two- and three-dimensional works, which can be found in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Tate Gallery in London, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris, as well as most major Swiss museums, are motifs of Mickey Mouse, faces, twigs, and pipes such as in *Nichtpfeife (Non Pipe)*, 1992. Inspired by René Magritte’s famous painting of a pipe inscribed “*Ceci n’ est pas une pipe*,” which is French for “This is not a pipe,” the cast-iron work seems to be of a rusty swirl but also becomes the silhouette of a pipe. Other works that achieve this



Markus Raetz, *Looking Glass*, 1988–92.
Courtesy of Galleria Monica De Cardenas, Milan.

effect are *Metamorphose 1*, 1991, which is both a rabbit and a man with a hat, and *Yes–No*, 2003, which manages to make both words appear to the viewer.

Over the years, Raetz participated in numerous international exhibitions. He represented Switzerland at the Venice Biennale in 1988 and participated in the 1968, 1972, and 1982 editions of Documenta in Kassel. He has also had exhibitions at the Kunsthaus in Zurich (1975), the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (1979), the New Museum in New York (1988), the Serpentine Gallery in London (1993), the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg (2006), the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (2011), and the MAMCO in Geneva (2011), among other galleries and museums. Most recently, a retrospective of Raetz’s drawings was staged at the Kunstmuseum Basel in 2012–13, and a monographic exhibition of over 150 works was presented at the MASJ of Lugano in 2016. In 2006, he was one of the laureates of the Prix Meret Oppenheim, administered by Switzerland’s Federal Office of Culture.

“Raetz has been an artist of perception from the beginning, one who manipulates images in order to affect our very faculty of vision,” Stefan Zucker wrote in a review of the artist’s work for the December 2005 issue of *Artforum*. “Even his early paintings from the ‘70s, in which he tested himself even more thoroughly than Sigmar Polke in various printing and painting techniques, allow one to sense his virtuosic handling of light and material. Raetz seduces us with his photograms, reliefs, and mirror installations, which demand precise observation of the viewer.”