



**JOHN COPLANS**  
**LA VIE DES FORMES**

FONDATION HCB  
OCTOBER 5 2021 - JANUARY 16 2022



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## PRESS OPENING

MONDAY, OCTOBER 4 FROM 2.30PM TO 4PM

79 rue des Archives – 75003 Paris

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henricartierbresson.org

## PRESS CONTACT

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## OPENING HOURS

Tuesday - Sunday : 11am – 7pm

## RATES

Full rate 9€ / Concessions 5€

## SOCIAL NETWORKS



Cover:  
Back with Arms Above, 1984  
© The John Coplans Trust



## FOREWORD

Coming out of a long and difficult period of closure, we cannot hide our joy at seeing the public's desire for cultural venues ever since May's reopening. Fondation HCB has had exceptional numbers of visitors, with a relatively young public attending the exhibition Eugène Atget - *Voir Paris*, and even greater numbers attending Henri Cartier-Bresson - *Paris Revisited* at Musée Carnavalet – Histoire de Paris.

Delays caused by Covid led to these two shows coinciding with the exhibition *Le Grand Jeu* at the Bibliothèque nationale de France - François Mitterrand, following its success at Palazzo Grassi in Venice. More of a retrospective on Henri Cartier-Bresson, this exhibition is a look at the Master Collection by five curators, with one series acquired by François Pinault.

In early October, the new exhibition on John Coplans will open at Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson, curated by Jean-François Chevrier and Élia Pijollet. It stands out through its selection and conversations with artists that Coplans admired, such as Brancusi, Weegee, Walker Evans, Lee Friedlander, Philip Guston and Jan Groover.

A formal and fearless photographer, Coplans uses his naked body as the sole material for his sensual, disconcerting, radical and personal compositions. Comprised of original works on loan from numerous French institutions and private lenders, this exhibition breaks new ground for the Fondation HCB, with a rare bird from the history of photography.

The work of Fondation HCB does not stop at Rue des Archives, Paris. For the first time, in Rabat, Morocco, we are pleased to be showing the exhibition *Henri Cartier-Bresson Photographe* at Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art from November 23, 2021 to January 31, 2022.

François Hébel  
Director



# JOHN COPLANS LA VIE DES FORMES

OCTOBER 5 2021  
JANUARY 16 2022

## EXHIBITION

Fondation HCB is presenting a remarkable exhibition on the œuvre of John Coplans (1920-2003), in collaboration with Le Point du Jour, Centre d'Art Éditeur in Cherbourg-en-Cotentin. Works on show here, on loan from French collections, testify to the audacity of this British artist, known for uncompromising representations of his body.

Coplans, who emigrated to the United States at the start of the 1960s, was at first painter, art critic, museum director and curator before devoting himself fully to photography in the early 1980s. At sixty years old, after twenty years of promoting the work of other artists, he retired to take up a life in art. He then developed a photography practice in which he represented himself nude, in black and white and often fragmented, his head always out of frame. To all these images, produced between 1984 and 2002, he attributed the generic title *Self Portrait*; descriptive titles and subtitles specify the body part depicted or the posture.



*Body Parts, No. 8, 2001*  
© The John Coplans Trust

As a primary, unique and impersonal object, the body is a medium for jubilant, ever-renewed explorations of the life of form. Coplans' work, often reductively seen as a representation of the aging body, has lighter, more universal ambitions and inscribes in a long history of art forms through its metaphorical connections to nature or sculpture. His œuvre redefines the meaning of age, no longer

a progression towards the end of life, instead, an opportunity for a long-term record of humankind and an initiative for recollecting primitive forms.

The absence of the face, and the choice of the fragment as plastic element released a flood of inventions and formal analogies that seemed inexhaustible, only stopping with the artist's passing. Coplans' images are by turns subdued and explosive, funny, provocative and always carefully considered. They answer to a demand for clarity that transfigures expressionist pathos.

The exhibition *La Vie des Formes* is structured in three sets presented chronologically. First, small prints made at the start of Coplans' career in photography (*Torso, Back, Hands, Feet...*); followed by, in 1988, large formats and montage combining several body fragments to create a single but disjointed image; and finally, as a great connoisseur of art history, Coplans integrated research on artists he studied, exhibited and knew into his own work, and a selection of works by these artists (Brancusi, Carleton Watkins, Walker Evans, Lee Friedlander, Jan Groover, Weegee...) is presented.

## CURATION

Jean-François Chevrier and Élia Pijollet

## COPRODUCTION

The exhibition is coproduced with Le Point du Jour in Cherbourg-en-Cotentin. It will be shown from January 29 to May 15, 2022.



## BIOGRAPHY

John Coplans was born in London in 1920. The son of a doctor in medicine and art amateur, he spent most of his childhood between London and South Africa. In 1937, aware of the global danger posed by Nazi Germany, he joined the British army. He fought until 1945 in East Africa, then in India and Burma.

In 1946, John Coplans started an art degree but quickly gave up. He moved to London. For ten years or so, he has painted and contributed to the rise of abstract art, in the wake of lyrical abstraction, then Hard Edge. In 1960, Coplans emigrated to the United States and moved in San Francisco. In 1962, he participated in the creation of *Artforum*. The magazine quickly established itself as a monthly reference for art and creative news. The first of its kind on the West Coast, it supported and united artists, helping to bring out the “Los Angeles scene” and “West Coast art”. Coplans was its editor-in-chief from 1971 to 1977 (in New York, where the magazine moved in 1967).

John Coplans was also a curator, director of the Art Gallery of the University of California at Irvine (1965-1967) and Senior Curator of the Pasadena Art Museum (1967-1970). From 1978 to 1980, he directed the Akron Art Museum, Ohio. At this time, he began his first photographic experiments.

In 1980, he decided to cease these activities to become an artist again and to devote himself to photography. He moved to New York. From 1985 onwards, he exhibited regularly in France and Europe. In 1988, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) set up the first major exhibition of the photographer, which was then presented at the MoMA in New York the same year. John Coplans died in New York on August 21, 2003.



*Front Hand, Thumb Up, Middle, 1988*  
© The John Coplans Trust

## PUBLICATION

The exhibition will be accompanied by a book published by Le Point du Jour: *John Coplans. Un corps*, edited by Jean-François Chevrier.

Format: 14 x 20,5 cm (bound)

Around 40 illustrations

Around 196 pages

22 euros

ISBN : 978-2-912132-97-0

Publication: October 2021

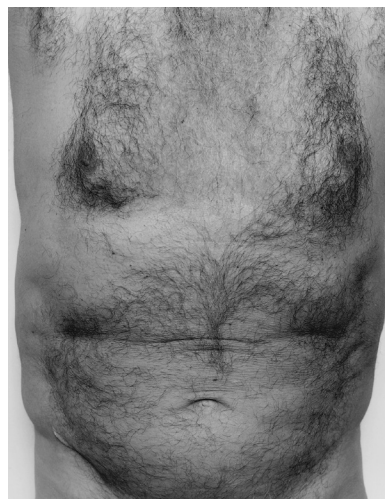
**PRESS IMAGES**  
**JOHN COPLANS**  
**LA VIE DES FORMES**

**PRESS IMAGES**

All visuals must be used with their captions and copyrights. No cropping is permitted.



**01**  
*Upside Down No.1*, 1992  
© The John Coplans Trust



**03**  
*Torso Front*, 1984  
© The John Coplans Trust



**02**  
*Front Hand, Thumb Up, Middle*, 1988  
© The John Coplans Trust



**04**  
*Body Parts, No. 8*, 2001  
© The John Coplans Trust

**PRESS IMAGES**  
**JOHN COPLANS**  
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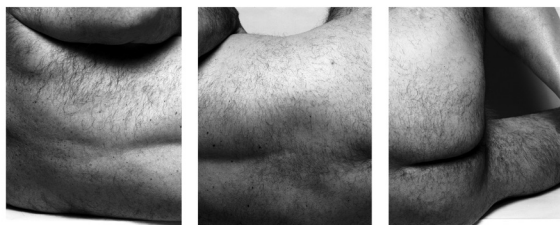
**05**  
*Lying Figure, Holding Leg, Four Panels, 1990*  
© The John Coplans Trust



**06**  
*Feet, Frontal, 1984*  
© The John Coplans Trust



**07**  
*Back with Arms Above, 1984*  
© The John Coplans Trust



**08**  
*Reclining Back, Three Panels, Left, 1990*  
© The John Coplans Trust



# EXHIBITIONS PROGRAMME

- **February 2022 / May 2022**

**Mathieu Pernot - La ruine de sa demeure**



*Beyrouth, 2020*  
© Mathieu Pernot

Winner of the 2019 HCB Award, Pernot presents a photo series taken over the last two years in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon on the ruins of geopolitical tensions and the traces of his family history. The Fondation d'entreprise Hermès is the patron of the HCB Award.

- **June 2022 / September 2022**

**Jan Groover - Laboratory of Forms**



*Jan Groover, Sans titre, ca.1978*  
© Musée de l'Élysée, Lausanne - Fonds Jan Groover

In collaboration with the Musée de l'Élysée in Lausanne, the Fondation is presenting an exhibition dedicated to the American photographer Jan Groover (1943-2012) for the first time in France. Through her constant experimentation with the photographic medium, Jan Groover's work features an exceptional diversity of subjects, format and technical processes.

## EVENTS

The Fondation HCB's mission is to become a place of exchange, education and dissemination of knowledge of photography for a variety of audiences. Each exhibition includes conferences, discussions, screenings and signings. Depending on the evolution of the health context, some of these events may be scheduled online. The events for the exhibition John Coplans - *La vie des formes* will be announced at [henricartierbresson.org](http://henricartierbresson.org).

## TRAVELLING EXHIBITIONS

Beyond its own site, the Fondation will continue to support the works of Henri Cartier-Bresson and Martine Franck being shown in many institutions around the world and promote the work of researchers by giving them the best access to archives. The Magnum Photos agency, created by Henri Cartier-Bresson, at the instigation of Robert Capa, along with George Rodger and David Seymour, continues to handle requests for copyright syndication.

- **April 13 / August 22, 2021**

**Henri Cartier-Bresson - Le Grand Jeu**

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France

- **June 15, 2021 / October 31, 2021**

**Henri Cartier-Bresson - Paris Revisited**

Musée Carnavalet - Histoire de Paris, Paris, France

- **November 23, 2021 / February 21, 2022**

**Henri Cartier-Bresson Photographer**

Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rabat, Morocco

- **February 23 / July 3, 2022**

**Henri Cartier-Bresson - China, 1948-49 | 1958**

MUDEC (Museo delle Culture), Milano, Italia

# PRESS IMAGES 79 RUE DES ARCHIVES



**001**  
Fondation HCB, 79 rue des Archives, November 2018  
Reception  
© Cyrille Weiner



**004**  
Fondation HCB, 79 rue des Archives, November 2018  
Martine Franck exhibition  
© Cyrille Weiner



**002**  
Fondation HCB, 79 rue des Archives, November 2018  
Pearls from the Archives  
© Cyrille Weiner



**005**  
Fondation HCB, 79 rue des Archives, October 2020  
Gregory Halpern exhibition  
© Hugo Hébrard



**003**  
Fondation HCB, 79 rue des Archives, June 2021  
Reception and bookshop  
© Hugo Hébrard



**006**  
Fondation HCB, 79 rue des Archives, June 2021  
Eugène Atget exhibition  
© Hugo Hébrard