

MARC CAMILLE CHAIMOWICZ

YOUR PLACE OR MINE ...

Jewish Museum

ON VIEW

March 16–August 5, 2018

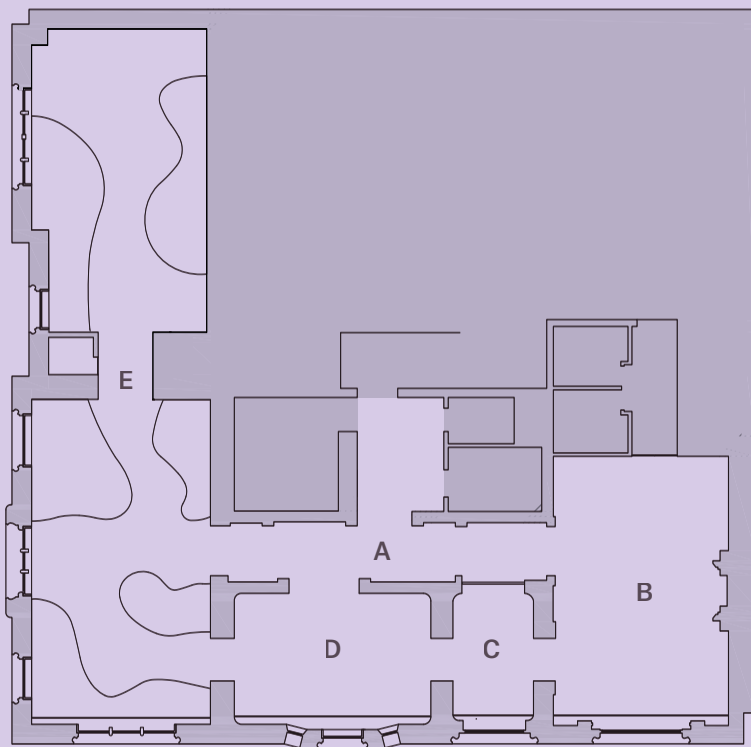
This booklet has been published in conjunction with the exhibition *Marc Camille Chaimowicz: Your Place or Mine . . .*, organized by the Jewish Museum in association with the Serpentine Galleries, London.

Introduction

Marc Camille Chaimowicz was born in postwar Paris to a Polish Jewish father and French Catholic mother. The family moved to England when the artist was eight years old and soon settled in London, where he still lives and works. Chaimowicz's continuous negotiation of two cultures and languages quietly reverberates throughout his pluralistic practice. He embraces both the fine and applied arts and challenges the categorical divisions between masculine and feminine, public and private, past and present.

In *Your Place or Mine . . .*, the titles of the galleries are in French, Chaimowicz's first and "interior language, directly associated with creativity." They are L'Entrée, La Bibliothèque, Ici et Là . . . , Le Salon, and Le Jardin Publique. In these places interiority and contemplation are as likely as sociability and distraction. Fittingly, the title *Your Place or Mine . . .* suggests a double meaning: the exhibition is a rendezvous in a space that is both ours and the artist's. Chaimowicz offers us a temporary connection to his world and the possibility to reimagine our own.

Kelly Taxter
Associate Curator
The Jewish Museum



- A. L'Entrée (The Entrance)
- B. La Bibliothèque (The Library)
- C. Ici et Là . . . (Here and There . . .)
- D. Le Salon (The Salon)
- E. Le Jardin Publique (The Public Garden)

Gallery A

L'ENTRÉE

The Entrance

Chaimowicz has lived in three apartments over the last forty years, consequential spaces that have served as both subject and source for his work. A rack for coats and hats is the first item one sees upon entering his home; likewise, this exhibition begins with *Bespoke Coat Hanger for Decorated Items* (2011). Each of its pegs holds a piece of outerwear worn and adorned by Chaimowicz. It hangs on a wall painted with a patterned roller, which he designed in the 1970s while living in a two-room, government-subsidized flat for artists.

The cheap and cheerful alternative to wallpaper was inspired by a Central European working-class decorating tradition. It marks the beginning of Chaimowicz's investigation of alternative painting modes derived from decorative techniques. During this period he immersed himself in domestic space and rituals, posing questions related to gender binaries and the division between fine art and craft. His fluid, nonhierarchical approach and the hybrid works that he created tested the boundaries that separate painting, sculpture, decoration, furniture, home, studio, work, leisure, masculine, and feminine.

Gallery B

LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE

The Library

La Bibliothèque focuses on Chaimowicz's artist's books, a form he has explored throughout his career, beginning in 1977 with the modest publication *Dream . . . an Anecdote*. Its narrator recounts a nightmare: his sanctuary-like home, described as his "shelter from the external world," is broken into and ransacked while he is traveling and homesick. When the tale ends, his voice abruptly switches to the third person. This is a typical move by the artist, who revels in confusions between author and character, documentarian and storyteller. Years later, Chaimowicz published *Café du Rêve* (1985), equal parts travelogue, love letter, and diary. "Le Désert," the first of its seven chapters, is displayed here. It introduces an author / subject who has come to realize that sustained interiority will eventually yield utter loneliness, leaving him adrift in a desert of the self.

Chaimowicz continued to experiment with narrative, design, and the domestic for the next twenty-one years. His home became an ever-evolving project and expanding archive, filled with his artwork, furniture, textiles, and collections. It was featured in the

April 2006 issue of *The World of Interiors*, a sumptuous British interiors and decoration magazine. The publication laid bare Chaimowicz's private world, an intrusion perhaps not dissimilar to that decades-old nightmare. In response, he composed a collage of each page of the issue. This appropriative reclamation resulted in 218 new works, which he then published as an artist's book, giving it the same title as the periodical. His *World of Interiors* expands on the notion that an artist's home offers a window onto his creativity and can be considered a guidebook to his practice. Spanning his many works and influences, its fifteen chapters include such titles as "Wallpapers and Carpets," "Here and There . . .," "Jean Cocteau, a Provisional Interior," and "Madame Bovary."

Gallery C

ICI ET LÀ...

Here and There . . .

I organized the space to deal with questions related to identity, to gender (masculine/feminine), and to politics. The Seventies were deeply politicized. My select political position was summarized in the formula: Personal is political. I subscribed to the idea that our internal behavior can have a political dimension.

Chaimowicz holds a master's degree in painting from the Slade School of Fine Art in London. He was due to graduate in spring 1968, but delayed in order to travel to Paris to witness the revolts of that May, a defining political moment for his generation. Acutely influenced by the unrest in France, he burned his student work and took up a new approach that merged art, politics, and everyday life. The 1972 exhibition *3 Life Situations*, at Gallery House London, included Chaimowicz, Stuart Brisley, and Gustav Metzger, who lived, worked, and exhibited on separate floors of the run-down mansion-turned-squat. There, Chaimowicz presented his breakthrough performative installation,

Celebration? Realife, which was made up of scattered ad hoc objects, theatrical lighting, disco balls, music, and the artist himself, serving tea and conversing daily with visitors. The project posed a radical challenge to both the autonomy of the artist and the primacy of painting and sculpture.

Afterward, contemplating the fallout from communal living and hypersociability, Chaimowicz made an about-face. In 1974 he retreated to an apartment on the Approach Road in East London, where he entertained visitors infrequently. The artist dedicated himself to creating an idealized environment, designing and fabricating wall patterns, draperies, and bed coverings as well as folding screens, tables, and chairs. Within this slowly evolving total work of art, he brought gravitas to his daily rituals and quotidian pursuits. He arranged still-life tableaux, in and around which he recorded himself, often in partial view. The oblique, suggestive images create a characteristic uncertainty—is the artist author or actor; is the work fact or fiction? Likewise, his home played the dual roles of subject and object, as much defined by Chaimowicz as defining him. The intensity and solitude of this period privileged intimacy and subjectivity, and the artist had to tackle the difficulty of translating interiority into form.

Here and There . . . articulates a dialogue between self and other and gives shape to the dialectic of one's

personal, interior world (“Here”) with the neutralized space of an exhibition (“There”). This work marks the beginning of Chaimowicz’s sustained inquiry into the value of decoration, the possibilities for painting, and the potential of intimacy.

Gallery D

LE SALON

The Salon

Chaimowicz’s earliest works were grounded in performativity and subjectivity; since then, he has continued to investigate the play of discourse and collaboration within his practice. Le Salon represents both the artist’s lounge and an area for display, a staged space in which to receive and confront the other. Here, the roles of guest and host intermingle, and hospitality takes on a sensual charge. The central work, *North* (1984–2018), appears to be remnants of an event just ended, perhaps a long phone call at day’s end to a lover, conducted while luxuriously supine in the soft light. This implied narrative dimension extends to the works on paper, named by the places and times of their making: *Series One, Drawing No. 8 (London, August)* or *Series One, Drawing No. 2 (Athens, July 9th–London, August 5th)*, both from 1995. Their softly rendered gestures and pastel, fleshy tones recall body parts and bits of flora—a vague eroticism that is echoed in the nuances of *North*. The forms and titles of Chaimowicz’s work, with their allusions to close encounters and rendezvous, often conjure a spectral presence.

Chaimowicz also requires direct collaboration with craftspeople to turn an idea into a realized object. In his only definitive statement about design he writes that it is “not so much for myself and the other . . . that given it includes the skills of others.” He engages artisans, such as ceramicists and glassmakers in Italy, a Swiss textile consultant, and a London architect. He relishes the often-surprising ways these partners contribute: the impact of their practicality, the differences in their interpretations, or even the miscommunications that arise in the process of working with them. The company Art of Wallpaper, a frequent collaborator, produced *Vasque*, the new paper on view in this gallery. Chaimowicz first experimented with wall treatments by using a patterned paint roller—a convenient, inexpensive technique. These investigations migrated from his apartment walls to movable plywood panels that he arranged and employed as both painting and partition. He purposefully upturned the modernist, masculinist qualities of painting by flirting with the effeminate, decorative taboo; he developed a new approach that accommodated other elements, such as photocollage or glass, and responsively expanded or contracted to fit the scale of any site. *Concerto for New York* (2014) is arranged to suit this space, a performance to the room itself.

Gallery E

LE JARDIN PUBLICQUE

The Public Garden

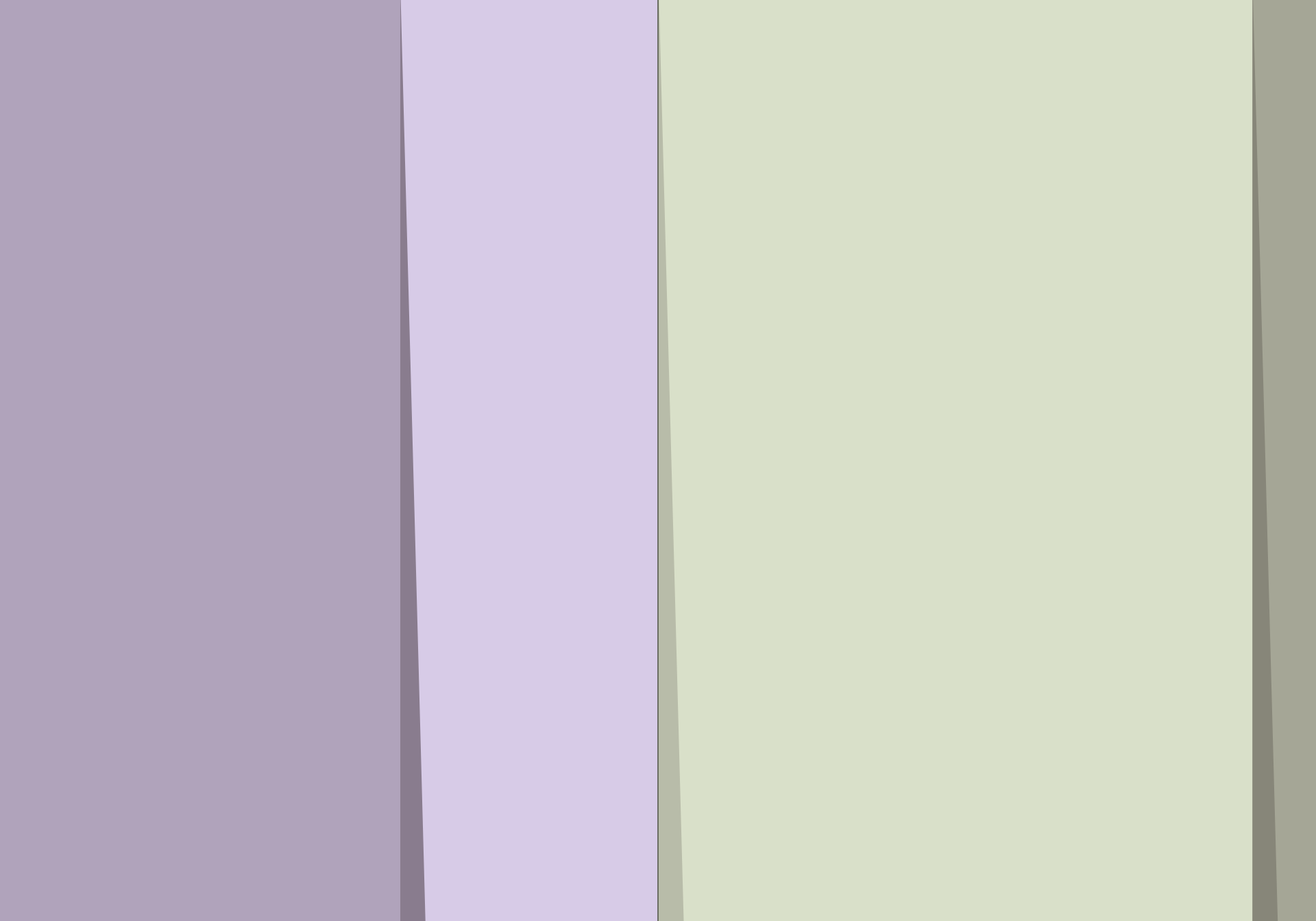
Chaimowicz’s process intertwines work with pleasure and calls upon the powerful influences of daydreaming, contemplation, and intimacy. The objects collected here suggest self-reflection and hospitality: a bookcase, dressing table, desk, chairs, love seat, and coffee table are all things that furnish a home in which solitude and conviviality occur in equal measure. Here, as throughout the exhibition, the fine and applied arts, fantasy and reality, public and private are purposefully merged, reflecting Chaimowicz’s interest in dualities.

In these galleries overlooking Central Park we are also asked to consider a pastoral dialectic, Chaimowicz’s oscillation between company and quietude. Interspersed with the furniture works are ornate parasols—decorative accessories meant for a stately walk outdoors. *Dans un Jardin Publicque à Paris (L’Arbre)* (1985), a panel piece that climbs up and down the wall, suggests the exuberant verticality of a tree in bloom. The park’s sinuous pathways influenced the curvilinear platforms that ground these works and allow for a meandering amble among small vignettes.

Within this setting, viewers possess the subjectivity critical to understanding Chaimowicz's project. We are encouraged to pass through, linger, double back, continue on, and finally to remember from where we came. Such is the particular nature of walking in a public park, where one may set a course but is easily diverted by daydreams and the unexpected.

The drapery in the Approach Road apartment inspired *A New Curtain for KT* (2018), which gently shades the windows and covers the rear wall of the final gallery. The exhibition closes with a reprise, a dedication, and a memento of its beginning. Echoes of Chaimowicz's past inflect his present—a continuum embodied by *end game* (2018), a pair of mirrored doors that imply a passage to somewhere else. This new work is an adaptation of similar doors in Chaimowicz's current home, located on the third floor of a twelve-sided building in south London. Wishing to correct an acute angle and to imply additional space, he created a shallow cupboard across a corner as a bit of practical trompe l'oeil. There the mirrors reflect the gardens outside; here they reflect the exhibition. Visitors catch fleeting glimpses of themselves and one another, moving along together or alone, for a short time at home in Chaimowicz's world.

The quotations on pages 3 and 8 are from Marc Camille Chaimowicz and Alain Coulange, "Conversation with Alain Coulange," in *Marc Camille Chaimowicz: Peintures et Objets*, exhibition catalogue (Dijon: Le Consortium; Quimper: Le Quartier, 1995), 74, 78. The quotation on page 12 is from Marc Camille Chaimowicz, "On the Dialectic between the Fine Arts and Design (1987)," in *To Give and to Take Meaning...; Fine and Applied Art: Marc Camille Chaimowicz, 1986–1990* (Cosne-Cours-sur-Loire: Musée de Cosne; London: Showroom, 1995), 13–14.



James H. Thompson