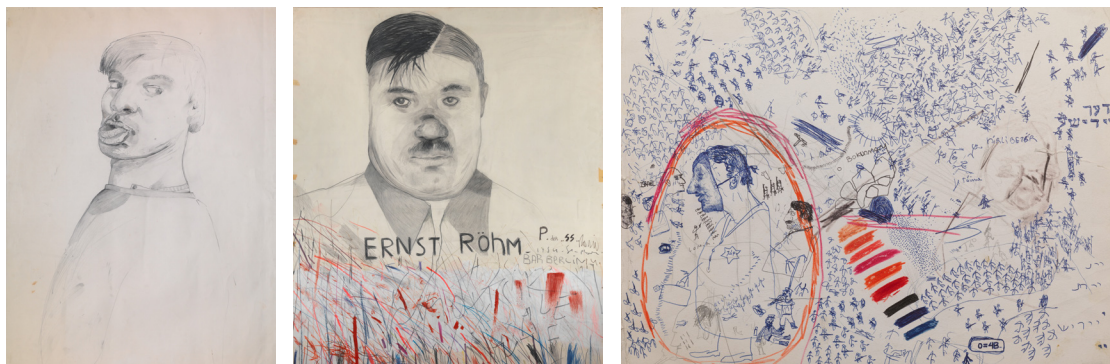


# Stéphane Mandelbaum

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**Free Admission**  
Wednesday-Sunday: 12–6pm

New York, NY... Ranging from large-scale portraits to small sketches, Stéphane Mandelbaum's drawings of historic figures, friends, and anonymous characters who populated Brussels's subcultures are consummate in technique and deeply disturbing in subject matter. A native of Brussels, Mandelbaum made art for ten years, but in that time he created hundreds of drawings. Mandelbaum sought to capture the essence of his subject's characters with a ballpoint pen, graphite, and color pencil, often adding collaged magazine clippings, scribbles, lists, and text in French, Yiddish, Italian, and German. The first solo exhibition of the artist's drawings in the United States, *Stéphane Mandelbaum* will feature more than fifty works on paper, including sixteen large-scale portraits, and will occupy the entirety of The Drawing Center's exhibition space.

A precocious and skillful draftsman, Mandelbaum used his artistry to probe the depths of his own persona by conjuring some of the darkest visages of the twentieth century in Europe. His drawings are inhabited by figures from his nightmares like the German Nazis Joseph Goebbels and Ernst Röhm, as well as those from his fantasies like Arthur Rimbaud and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Raised in a Jewish household impacted by the Holocaust, Mandelbaum's subjects are often Jewish figures, and his pages are filled with words in Yiddish, a language that the artist had taught to himself. The presence of the Hebrew alphabet juxtaposed with images of Nazis and underworld characters give his drawings a patina of menace and even violence, which was tragically borne out by the artist's assassination by a criminal syndicate in 1986 at age twenty-five. Mandelbaum's sensational end is a coda to an artistic life lived on the edges of society.

Mandelbaum's career was obscured by his early death, and his work has remained virtually unknown until recently. Now admired and collected by major European institutions, Mandelbaum "has emerged as a singular figure; one who dared to address the generational trauma of survival from a contemporary Jewish perspective," as Laura Hoptman, the Executive Director of The Drawing Center and organizer of this presentation, has commented.

A grandson of survivors, Mandelbaum made a conscious choice to grapple with the weight of the Shoah by aggressively appropriating images of Nazis, boldly drawing them over life-size and placing them in juxtaposition with snippets of pornography, derisive caricatures, doodles, and random lists. The representation of images that most people would prefer to avoid was an act of identity-building for a young, rebellious artist hoping to shock. But it was also an act of ownership of a history that Mandelbaum refused to allow to be buried.

However transgressive in subject matter, Mandelbaum's drawings represent a singular graphic talent. Taken together, they offer some of the most distinctive examples of post-Holocaust artmaking, surprisingly, by the hand of an artist separated from the depredations of World War II by two generations.

*Stéphane Mandelbaum* is organized by Laura Hoptman, The Drawing Center's Executive Director, in collaboration with Susanne Pfeffer, Director of the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, where the exhibition debuted in 2022.

### Artist Biography

Born in Brussels in 1961, Stéphane Mandelbaum (d. 1986) was the son of a Jewish father, painter Arié Mandelbaum, and an Armenian mother, illustrator Pili Mandelbaum. Tutored in drawing from an early age, Mandelbaum attended an alternative boarding school as a young boy to accommodate his severe dyslexia. Learning to write was difficult, and he soon turned to drawing as a more accessible means of expression, though the text in his drawings was frequently riddled with spelling errors, both intentional and unintentional. At fifteen, Mandelbaum began studying at the Academy of Drawing and Decorative Arts of Watermael-Boitsfort. In 1979, he transferred to the School of Plastic and Visual Arts in Uccle, Belgium, where his father served as Director until 2004. Fascinated with the brilliant and tragic histories of artistic forebearers like Egon Schiele and Francis Bacon, Mandelbaum drew and painted numerous portraits of prominent cultural figures accompanied by derisive scribbles, names, slogans, and Yiddish graffiti. Deeply affected by the wartime tribulations of his paternal grandfather Szulim, a Polish Jew who escaped the Holocaust, Mandelbaum was fascinated by the faces of some of the most notorious Nazis. In 1985, he had his first exhibitions—one at the Galerie Hugo Godderis in Veurne in northwest Belgium and another at the Galerie Christine Colmant in Brussels. Mandelbaum's life was cut short when he was murdered, the result of his obscure involvement with a trafficked artwork. Though he never achieved financial or critical acclaim during his lifetime, Mandelbaum and his body of work were recognized in 2019 in a retrospective organized by the Centre Pompidou in Paris. His work is also the subject of a comprehensive monograph published by les Éditions Martin de Halleux.

### Publication

*Stéphane Mandelbaum* will be accompanied by a new edition of the Drawing Papers series. The first English-language publication to focus on the artist's work, it will feature full-color illustrations of all of the works on view as well as essays by The Drawing Center's Executive Director Laura Hoptman and by writer Leslie Camhi. The publication will be available for purchase at The Drawing Center and in its online bookstore at [drawingcenter.org](http://drawingcenter.org). As with every publication produced by The Drawing Center, it will also be available to read in a digital format, free of charge.

### Images

Stéphane Mandelbaum, *Self-portrait*, c. 1980. Graphite on paper, 30 3/8 × 18 7/8 inches (77 × 48 cm). DNA Collection. Photo by Philippe Migeat © Stéphane Mandelbaum Estate.

Stéphane Mandelbaum, *Ernst Röhm*, 1981. Graphite, gouache, marker and colored pencil on paper, 54.72 × 47.24 inches (139 × 120 cm). Collection Bilinelli, Milan. Photo by Philippe Migeat © Stéphane Mandelbaum Estate.

Stéphane Mandelbaum, *Composition (mask figure)*, c. 1981. Ballpoint pen, colored pencil and graphite on paper, 10 5/8 × 14 9/16 inches (27 × 37 cm). Private Collection, Belgium. Photo by Philippe Migeat © Stéphane Mandelbaum Estate.