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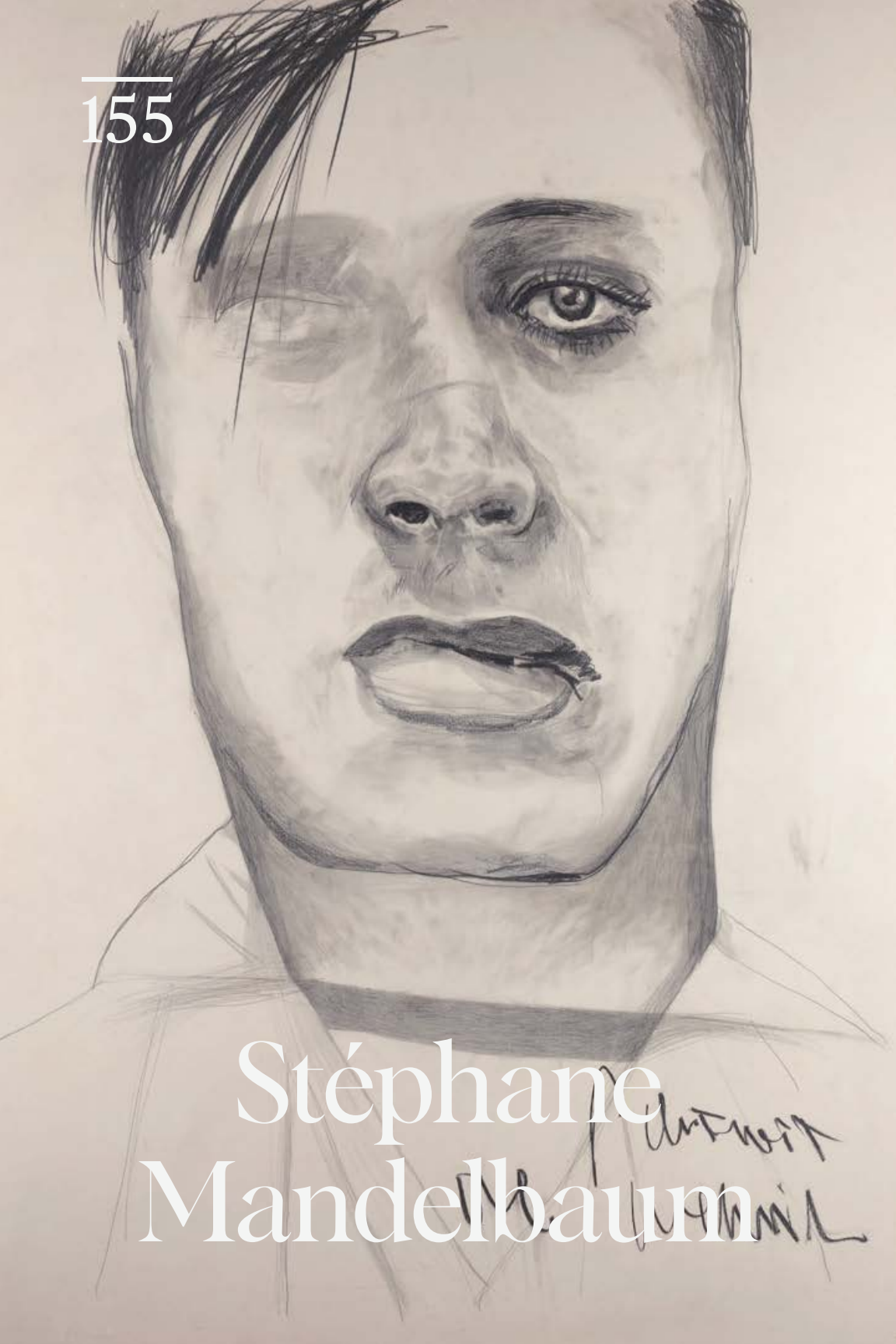

# Stéphane Mandelbaum

PREVIOUS
Stéphane Mandelbaum, c. 1978, photograph by Pierre Thoma

Stéphane Mandelbaum

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The Drawing Center

# Stéphane Mandelbaum

Laura Hoptman

with contributions by
Leslie Camhi
Isabella Kapur

*For my mother, Ania, who persisted*

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# Acknowledgments

Laura Hoptman



Artists are rarely discovered by chance; more often, we are made aware of their achievements by others who have known and admired their work. Indeed, Stéphane Mandelbaum's drawing oeuvre was introduced to me by the eminent Paris-based art historian Margit Rowell, who sent me several catalogs through the mail with little explanation. None was necessary, as the work was as compelling as it was disturbing. I saw some of the work in person a short time later in Frankfurt at the Museum für Moderne Kunst. Susanne Pfeffer, the director of the museum and a curator whom I deeply admire for her almost unbroken series of astonishing exhibitions over the past several years, had organized a survey of Mandelbaum's career in the spring of 2022, which upon seeing, I resolved to bring in some form to New York. The exhibition at The Drawing Center is the result, and I owe both these colleagues my profound thanks and continued respect for what they have done to share Mandelbaum's work with an international audience.

As I began to concentrate on this project and acquire more context on the artist's life, my opinion on the obscurity of Mandelbaum's work began to change. There exists a substantial cohort of admirers, friends, and family members who have worked tirelessly over the decades since the artist's death in 1986 to promote his work, most avidly, Bruno Jean, the President of the Stéphane Mandelbaum Association. Jean, who recently published Mandelbaum's catalog raisonneé, was enormously helpful to The Drawing Center during the preparation of this exhibition, serving as a liaison with Mandelbaum's estate and with those who have his drawings in their collections. Curator Choghakate Kazarian has also published scholarship on Mandelbaum, and I thank her for taking time to discuss his work with me earlier this year.

Mandelbaum's family—his widow Claudia Bisiomi-Ngaliema and his daughter Nadine Mendelbaum, his brother Ariéh Mandelbaum, and his parents Arié and Pili Mandelbaum—were all exceedingly generous with loans and permissions, and we owe them a debt of gratitude. Yves Zlotowski, Director of Galerie Zlotowski, graciously facilitated a group of international loans for us. Other lenders to this exhibition (listed elsewhere) include friends and colleagues of Mandelbaum during his lifetime, several of whom have written about him, made films about him, and advocated for his work for many years.

The team at the MMK, including Katja Schmolke, Lukas Flygare, Nora Krause, and Nadine Hahn, were helpful to us as we created our own version of the exhibition that was originally presented in Frankfurt, working with a team from The Drawing Center that was helmed by our Registrar Sarah Fogel and our Deputy Director Olga Valle Tetkowski. Isabella Kapur contributed brilliant research and translations, writing exhibition texts and creating a chronology of Mandelbaum's life for this volume. She was supported by our polyglot interns, Lara Mashayekh, Concetta Luise, Jovanna Abdou, and Ariadne Diogenous. Rebecca Brickman and Tiffany Shi in our development department and Allison Underwood, Director of Communications and Marketing, contributed invaluable expertise to the project. Thanks are also due to Aimee Good, Director of Education, who worked tirelessly to create contextual materials and programs connected to the show. In this, she partnered with colleagues at the Museum of Jewish Heritage: Elizabeth Edelstein, Sara Softness, and Treva Walsh. We thank them for their collegiality as well as for their generosity in sharing some of their pedagogical methods. Aimee also arranged for a collaboration with Braden Paynter, Director, Methodology and Practice, at the organization Sites of Conscience, and we thank him for the day he spent with our staff. My biggest thanks for work on this project is owed to Rebecca DiGiovanna, art historian and administrator extraordinaire, whose calm and canny problem-solving ability touched every aspect of this exhibition.

Our catalog, the first monograph on Mandelbaum in English, was sensitively edited by Joanna Ahlberg and designed by Peter Ahlberg. We are also grateful to Leslie Camhi, journalist and writer with an expertise in Jewish history and a deep knowledge of the French language, for her moving essay that brings a refreshingly different perspective to Mandelbaum's body of work.

Developing an exhibition of a lesser-known European artist with an extremely truncated career at this moment in our cultural life has been enormously challenging, but to our minds, the message that Mandelbaum's work brings to our public is an urgent one. My personal thanks, and those on behalf of The Drawing Center and our community of artists, are due to those visionary donors who understood the importance of bringing the discussion of anti-Semitism to the table at exactly this moment in time. Alice and Tom Tisch and the Robert Lehman Foundation have provided major support and are lead sponsors. The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts has supported our larger exhibition program through a multi-year grant, but with special enthusiasm for the Stéphane Mandelbaum project. Christie's, Kathy and Dick Fuld, and Jill and Peter Kraus have generously given funds, as has an anonymous donor and our affiliate group, The Director's Circle. Additional support has been provided by Iris Zurawin Marden, and Harry Tappan Heher and Jean-Edouard van Praet d'Amerloo.



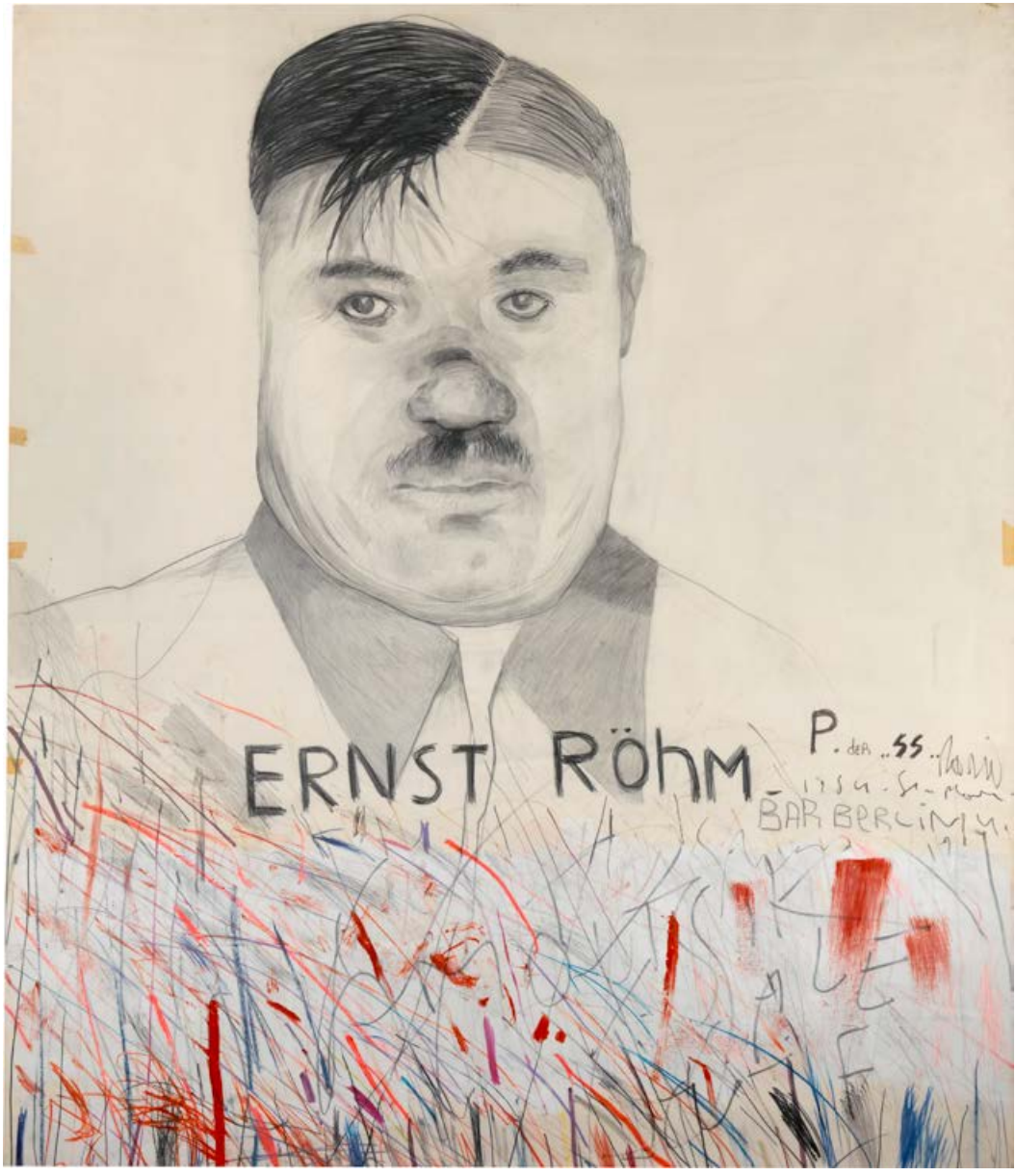
Finally, I wish to acknowledge the memory of Stéphane Mandelbaum, an artist who during his short time on earth created a body of drawing that is dramatic, consummate, and upsetting, but ultimately, I believe, reparative.

# Large Drawings


PL. 1
*Autoportrait (pour maman)* (Self-portrait [for mom]), 1979

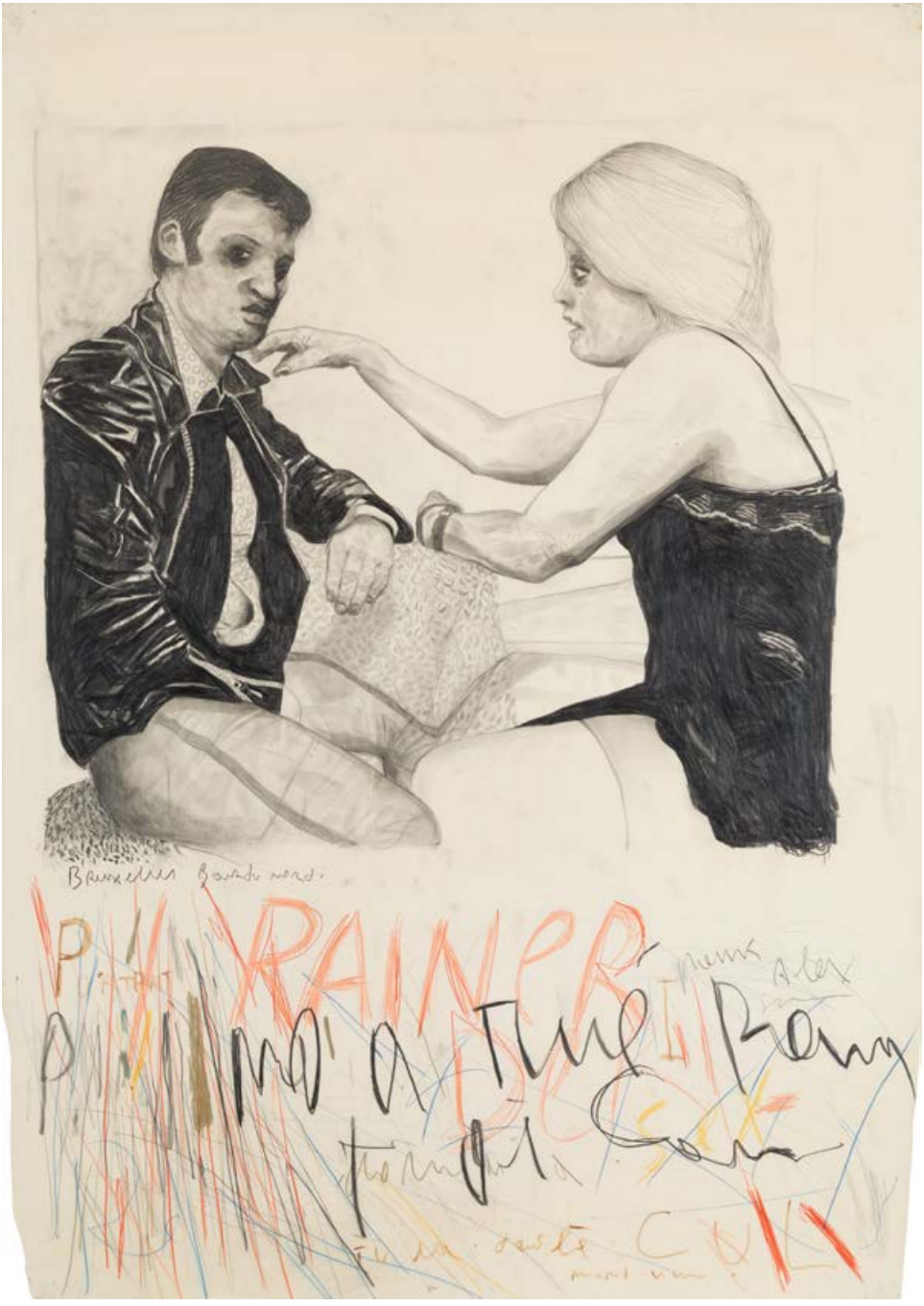

PL. 2
*Kismatores! (Portrait d'Arié Mandelbaum)*
(Kiss my ass! [Portrait of Arié Mandelbaum]), 1982


PL. 3
*Pierre Goldman*, 1980

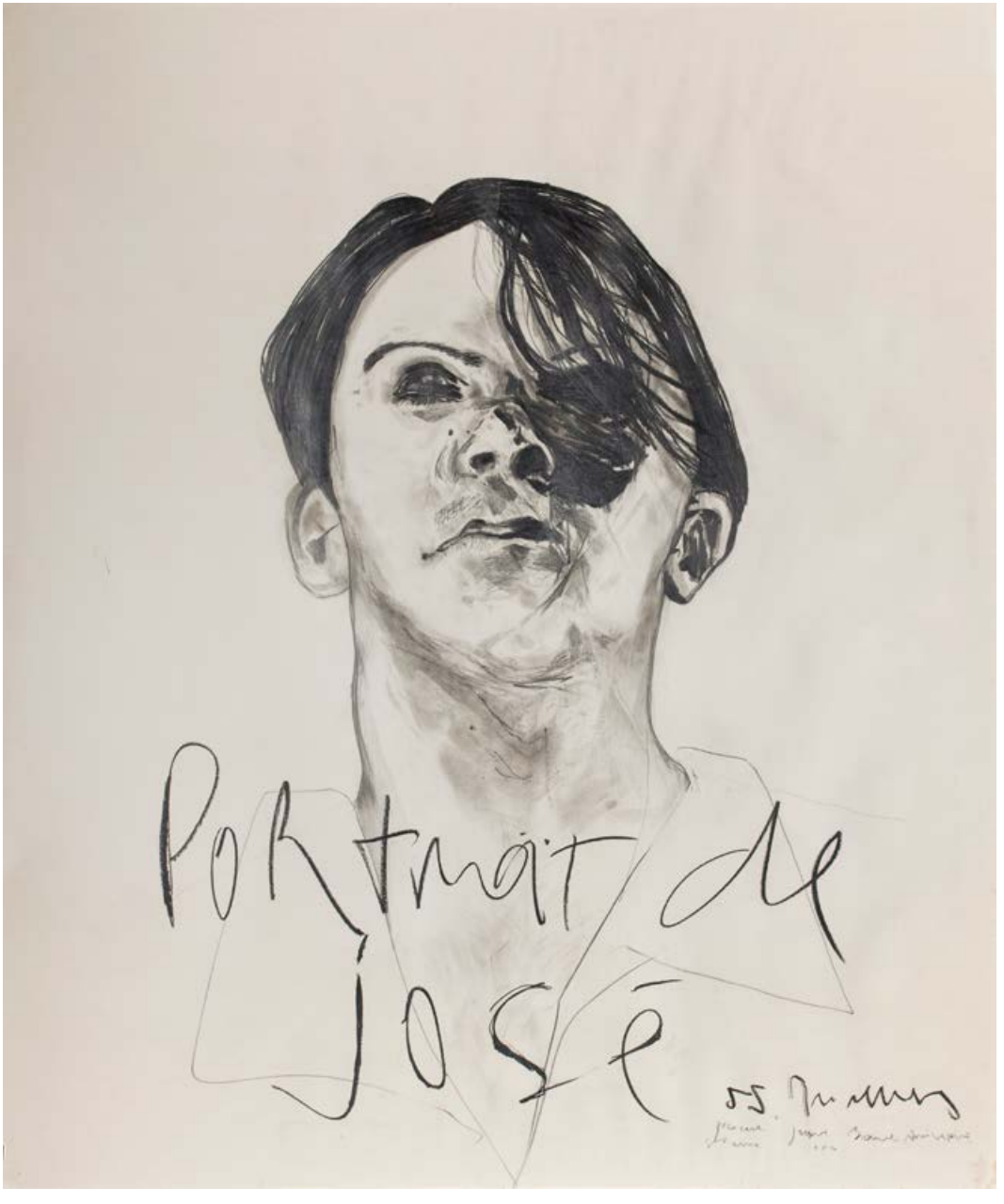



PL. 4
*Ernst Röhm*, 1981

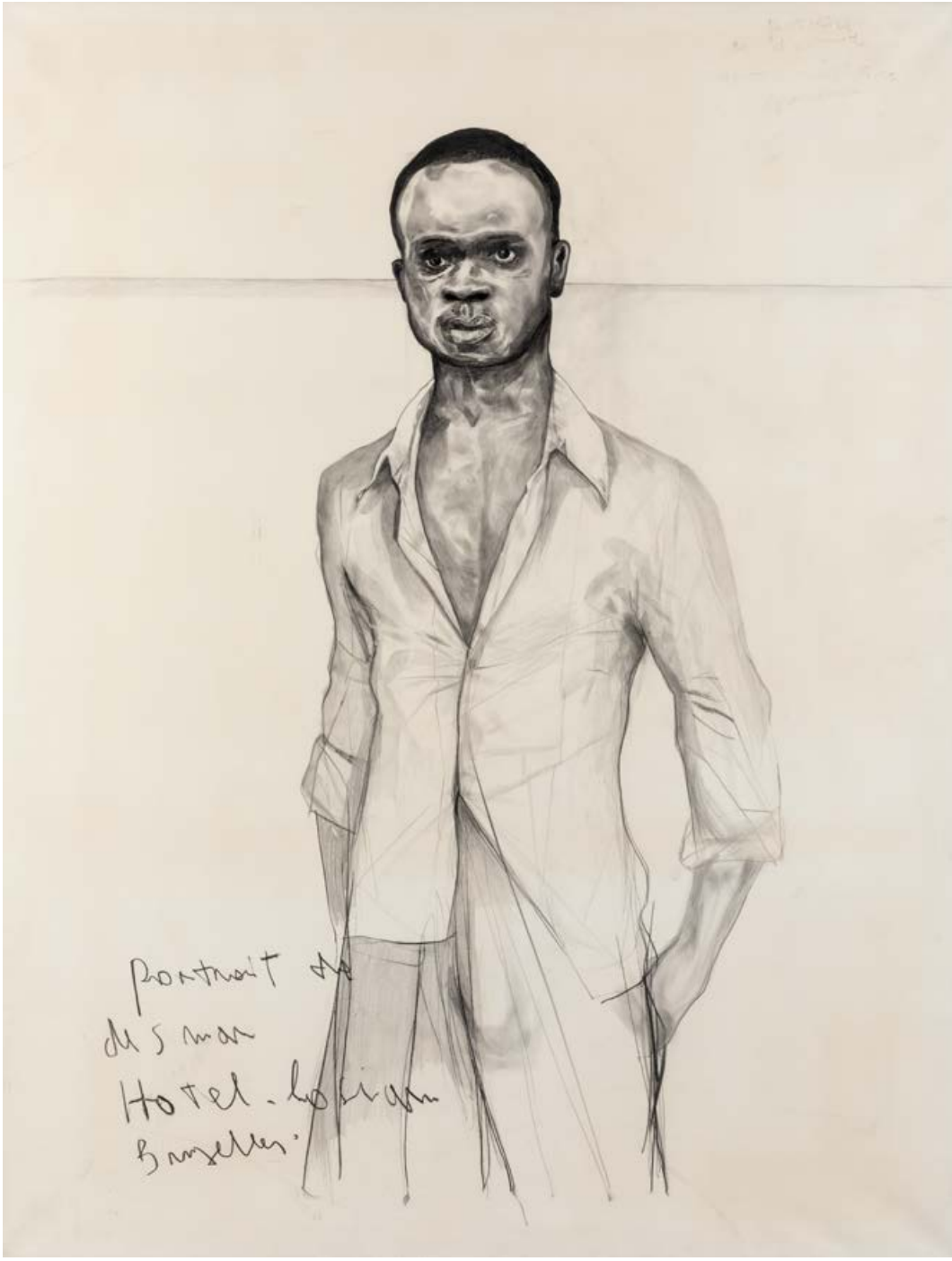

PL. 5
*P. Röm (N°1 / Portraït der Röm)* (P. Röm [N°1 / Portrait of Röm]), 1981




PL. 6
*Rainer (Portrait de Rainer Werner Fassbinder)* (Rainer [Portrait of Rainer Werner Fassbinder]), c. 1984




PL. 7
*Portrait de José* (Portrait of José), 1985

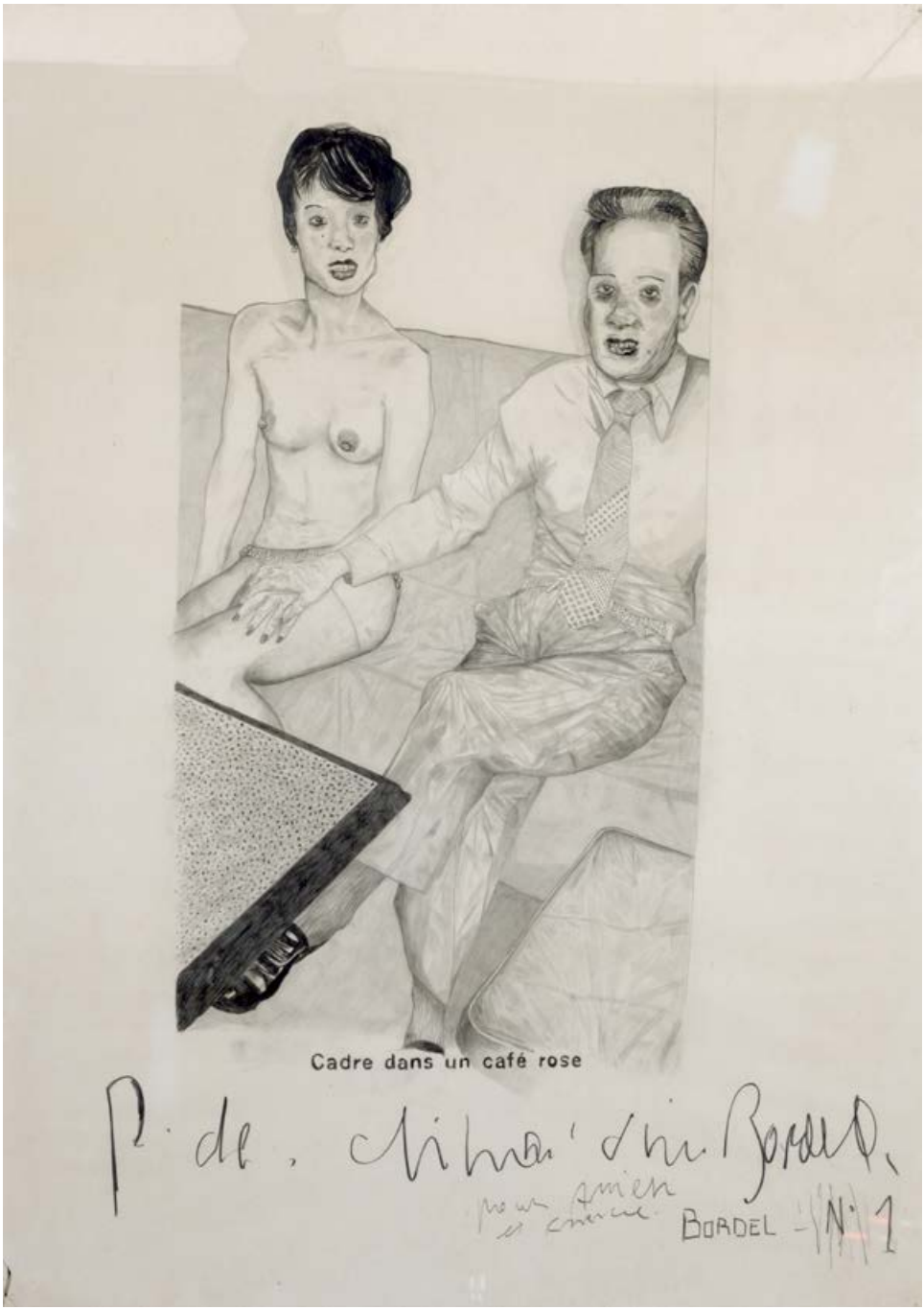



PL. 8
*Portrait de Ousman* (Portrait of Ousman), 1985

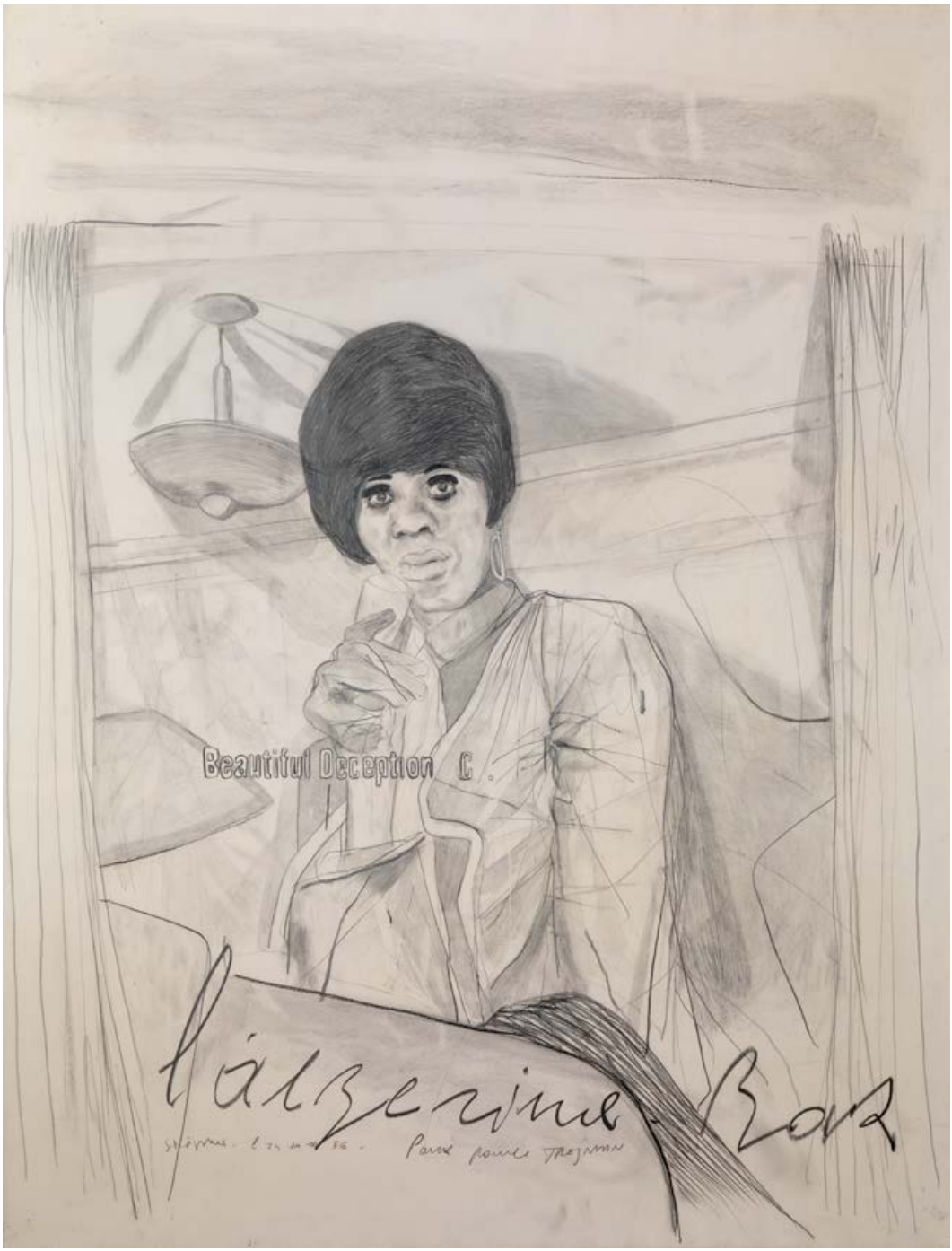

PL. 9
*George Dyer*, 1982


PL. 10
*Portrait de Max* (Portrait of Max), 1984


PL. 11
*Portrait von punk türk (Hugo)* (Portrait of a Turkish punk [Hugo]), 1984




PL. 12
*Cadre dans un café rose* (Executive in a red light café), 1984




PL. 13
*L'Albertine Bar (Beautiful Deception)* (Albertine Bar [Beautiful Deception]), 1986

PL. 14
*Bar Albertine Bruxelles Nord* (Bar Albertine North Brussels), 1985

PL. 15
*Portrait de Meknil* (Portrait of Meknil), 1985

PL. 16
*Autoportrait* (Self-portrait), c. 1980

# Stéphane Mandelbaum: Artist, Iconoclast, Jew

Laura Hoptman



*I write because they left in me their indelible mark, whose trace is writing. Their memory is dead in writing; writing is the memory of their death and the assertion of my life.*
—GEORGES PEREC[1]

I studied the history of art in the middle of the 1980s, a time when our field had begun to reject the strictures of pure formal analysis and reassess the importance of historical context and biography—of artists but also of the writers, critics, and appreciators who chose which works to write about, exhibit, or buy. This is my intellectual context, and I state it at the outset of this essay because biography plays a crucial role in the story of the artist Stéphane Mandelbaum, born in Brussels in 1961. Mandelbaum's career was brutally short; it lasted barely a decade as the artist was murdered in 1986 at the age of twenty-five. Mandelbaum's violent end made the newspapers in Belgium and France, resulting in a tragic but international name recognition for an artist whose work had been publicly exhibited at small local venues only three times in his lifetime. However, Mandelbaum's demise is not the only thing that has kept his memory alive for almost forty years. The several hundred drawings, paintings, prints, and notebooks that Mandelbaum left behind are proof of a prodigious and astonishing talent. He was a consummate draftsperson who used his drawing skills to monumentalize his portrait subjects. Mandelbaum's subject matter was beyond edgy; born to a family of Holocaust survivors and descendants of survivors of the Armenian genocide, Mandelbaum chose to plumb the depths

1 Georges Perec, *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (Paris: Denoël, 1975), 59.

of human depravity, linking violence with sexuality, lawlessness, and sometimes with artistic genius.

Mandelbaum's talent was recognized at a young age by his family and his peers. The son of two artists, he started to draw at the age of seven and continued this practice—at times obsessively—until his death eighteen years later. As a result of his truncated career, we can consider Mandelbaum's mature oeuvre to have commenced when he was still a teenager. By the age of seventeen he was already deploying his protean draftsmanship to explore themes that would remain consistent over the next decade. It is generally agreed upon that his most significant works are the forty-five or so large-scale charcoal and graphite portrait drawings that he created from around 1980 to 1986 [PLS. 1–16]. These highly finished realistic drawings, some of which are over five feet in height, were in general inspired by photographs, but Mandelbaum took license to modify the likenesses of familiar and in many cases infamous characters from twentieth-century history and culture, using his deviations from his sources as a way to subtly transform his images into grotesques. In these works, admiration and disgust, satire and direct denunciation coexist. Francis Bacon, an artist whose work Mandelbaum revered, is depicted with the same brutality and attention to detail as the younger artist's portraits of the infamous Nazi Ernst Röhm.



Imposing size and startling subject matter give Mandelbaum's portrait drawings the power of a punch to the gut—a metaphor used advisedly, because the images are meant to provoke, even to bully. This grandson of a Holocaust survivor consciously chose to emphasize his Jewishness in his work, though the religion and the culture of Judaism were foreign to his family. Despite reports that Mandelbaum had severe learning disabilities that impeded his ability to learn to read and to write, he taught himself basic Yiddish, a language that in its spoken form is related to German but in written form uses the Hebrew alphabet. Mandelbaum began his Jewish studies as a teenager, around the same time that he began to produce his first mature works, deploying Yiddish words and phrases in juxtaposition to his drawn images. Most viewers will not be able to decipher these messages in Yiddish, but the addition of language that gives voice to an all but vanished European Jewry is meant less to convey vital information than to cause an emotional jolt. As the art historian Lisa Saltzman has observed of the use of the Hebrew alphabet by artists like Anselm Kiefer, "It could be argued that the migration of the Hebrew language is a marker not only of the absent Jewish culture…but [also] of the absent reader, the Jew, the reader of

Hebrew."[2] Words "that no one can read," she continues, "[perform] the task of making the absent once again present."[3] Mandelbaum tended to use common Yiddish words and phrases in his work, but even the highly recognizable word "kosher" that appears in many notebook compositions as well as finished drawings was deployed to evoke in the viewer the discomfort of this absence, if not also feelings of an ingrained repulsion, or maybe even guilt. For Mandelbaum, Yiddish, like some of his subject matter, seems to have been used with a deliberate aggression and a desire to destabilize and discomfit.

During his lifetime, although his artistic facility was acknowledged by his family and a small circle of friends, Mandelbaum's work did not receive significant recognition by any art community, local, national, or international; initially, it was only after his well-publicized murder—by criminals with whom the artist may have been involved—that his name became more widely known in Belgium and in France. In later years, Mandelbaum's friends and associates honored his memory by circulating his story and by promoting his drawings. Mandelbaum's detailed and emotional realism recalls the work of prewar European artists like George Grosz and Egon Schiele and does not appear at first glance to be contemporary. In hindsight though, it can be argued that his body of work is very much of its time; and also, of ours. Emerging at a moment when abstraction and conceptualism were dominant in the art discourse in Europe and the United States, his work was part of a growing return to figuration in European (and American) painting in the 1980s that arose, Saltzman has posited, as a result of increasing interest among artists to define their identities.[4] This stylistic swerve from abstraction and idea-based artwork to narrative has culminated in the broad tendency towards autobiographical and identity-based subject matter that has dominated the art discussion since the turn of the twenty-first century.



The rejection of narrative figuration and the embrace of pure form captured the imagination of artists all over the world from the 1930s through the 1970s. In German art history, particularly in the work of artists of the Nachgeborenen generation—those born right after the Second World War—there was a marked turn against realism and towards an abstraction that some saw as the style least liable to

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2 Lisa Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art After Auschwitz* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 43.

3 Saltzman, 43-44.

4 Saltzman, 5, 43-44.

FIG. 1 Gerhard Richter, *Uncle Rudi*, 1965

conjure memories of the war.[5] Few artists chose to wrestle with the legacy of the Second World War, and even fewer institutions chose (and still choose) to organize exhibitions around its study. According to the late curator and director of Munich's Haus der Kunst, Okwui Enwezor, there was only one exhibition that touched on the subject of World War II at this major German museum from 1945 to 1962.[6] Tellingly, it would take fifty-five more years for the Haus der Kunst to present another exhibition on that subject, Enwezor's *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945-1965* (2017).

That said, there are several notable European artists, most of them German and most from the Nachgeborenen generation, who have grappled with the legacy of the Holocaust. Gerhard Richter's 1965 portrait of his Uncle Rudi in his Wehrmacht uniform is a bold statement of familial complicity that at the same time explores the banality of such a connection to the Third Reich [FIG. 1]. Richter based his painting on a black-and-white photograph, choosing a grisaille palette to emphasize the historical nature of the subject. Flying in the face of the commemorative and venerable aura that still surrounds a portrait painting, Richter's *Uncle Rudi* is quiet, quotidian, and almost matter-of-fact. It isn't a fond memorial to a relation lost in a war; rather, it is a painting of a faded photo

5 Saltzman, 11-12.

6 Okwui Enwezor, "The Judgement of Art: Postwar and Artistic Worldliness," in Okwui Enwezor, Katy Siegel, Ulrich Wilmes, eds. *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945-1965* (Munich: Haus der Kunst, 2017), 23-24.

that represents a shameful memory, one that would be more comfortable to forget. *Uncle Rudi* is also though a painting about the painful history shared by legions of postwar Germans, a quietly fierce example of a personal but also collective shame. Richter's dispassionate presentation of his country's (and his family's) horrible history as embodied in *Uncle Rudi* seems like an implicit acknowledgement of Theodor Adorno's much parsed 1949 comment that, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." For Benjamin Buchloh, German art historian and a Nachgeborenen himself, Richter's painting succeeds in "concretizing" another trope created in the hope of understanding how a genocide can occur, Hannah Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil."[7]

Anselm Kiefer is an artist who has spent many years working with themes that emerge from the history of the Shoah, but he has a much less confessional attitude toward the topic. Born in Berlin in 1945, Kiefer has devoted a substantial portion of his artistic career to making monumental artworks about historical trauma and its manifestations across generations.[8] Far from implicating himself, his family, or his countrymen as active or passive collaborators in the twelve-year-long Nazi regime, Kiefer uses cultural tropes from German history and folklore juxtaposed with symbols of the Holocaust, transforming the former into allegories and the latter into metaphors. Akin to the novels of his literary contemporaries Walter Abish and Günter Grass, Kiefer's paintings explore the notion of what it is to be German a generation after the depredations of the Third Reich, a regime whose fascist ideology appropriated and weaponized an already highly nationalist cultural vocabulary. Influenced by his study of the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah, Kiefer attempts to make the Holocaust emblematic of apocalyptic, universal catastrophe. Lisa Saltzman has described Kiefer's entire artistic project as an "act of mourning,"[9] but not as an acknowledgment of guilt. Rather she sees the work as an almost therapeutic expiation by a second generation German traumatized by the crimes of his elders.



Kiefer was a student of the Conceptual artist and activist Joseph Beuys, who was in the German air force during the war and was one of the first German artists to attempt to come to terms with his and

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7 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Divided Memory and Post Traditional Identity: Gerhard Richter's Work of Mourning," *October* 75 (Winter 1996): 64.

8 Saltzman, 2.

9 Saltzman, 4. The German word for this is *trauerarbeit*, literally, the "work of mourning."

FIG. 2 Joseph Beuys, *Sled #1*, 1969



his country's recent past, twinning them to depict a kind of anti-hero's journey through the display of manufactured artifacts [FIG. 2]. That Beuys was a first-generation witness to and participant in the war is an important distinction; as Saltzman points out in her observations about the work of his student Kiefer, for the second generation, "history can be confronted, but never reclaimed as a primary experience."[10] The work of both Beuys and Kiefer has been criticized for being merely melancholic—a state of sadness, according to Sigmund Freud, that occurs out of an inability to mourn.[11] Neither perform the duties of a witness; nor do they harness their work to the service of memory. In contrast to Richter's choice to memorialize what can be seen as evidence of his family's concrete involvement in the Third Reich, Beuys, who in fact served in the Nazi air force, chose in his work to allegorize his history as a German soldier. Like his teacher, Kiefer transforms the recent history of his country into something mythic—even universal. Like Beuys, but unlike Richter, Kiefer chooses not to explore his own personal relationship to the Third Reich, World War II, or the Holocaust, focusing instead on building a broad idea of Germanness and what it means to be from a country with so tainted a recent past.

*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past, remains a struggle not only for German artists born in the ruins of the Third Reich but also for a group whose work has been much less studied: that of the children and the grandchildren of the victims

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10 Saltzman, 15.
11 Saltzman, 75-76.

of the Nazis. Mandelbaum's work falls into this category, though his Jewish perspective was less inherited than a conscious creation of the artist himself, donned like armor in a battle to examine the cultural results of inherited trauma. There is a tendency to view the artwork of postwar Jewish artists as expressions of victimhood, or in a larger sense, injustice, entangling the ethics of the Jewish religion with historical instances of persecution of Jews as a people. The question of whom memories of the Shoah belong to—and in a larger sense who should be considered a Jew in contemporary society—remain difficult to answer in broad strokes.

Zahava Seewald, a curator at the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels, has observed that among postwar Belgian Jewish artists, "We see…a complication of the notion of Jewish identity where each individual is guided by their subjectivity as much as by their personal history, choosing to invent a Judaism 'a la cart.' Contemporary Jewish artists do not escape from this new reality."[12] Throughout his life, Mandelbaum was close to his father's father, Polish-born Szulim (Salomon) Mandelbaum, who was a source of information about their family's Jewish roots. Despite the presence of his grandfather, Mandelbaum wasn't raised as a Jew. His mother Pili, a Belgian with Armenian parentage, observed that as a teenager her son began to take on a "Jewish air."[13] As the curator Isabelle Derveaux points out, Mandelbaum considered himself culturally Jewish—as she puts it, "'a Jew' which is distinct from being 'Jewish.'"[14] Evincing little interest in the religion, he immersed himself in the cultural elements of Jewish life, from the cuisine to the language. Beginning his study of Yiddish as a seventeen-year old, Mandelbaum, according to Gilles Sebhan, "was undoubtedly the most Jewish of his family," moving to the Jewish neighborhood of Saint-Gilles as soon as he came of age.[15] A fellow resident in that neighborhood, Preszow met Mandelbaum in 1982 when he interviewed him for a Jewish magazine. In 1979, Mandelbaum's father Arié gave him a copy of the book *Dim Memories of a Polish Jew Born in France* by the French Jewish



12 Zahava Seewald, "Stéphane Mandelbaum: un artiste résolument juif," *Les Cahiers de la Mémoire Contemporaine* 14 (2020): 297. Translation from the original French is my own.

13 Gilles Sebhan, *Mandelbaum ou le rêve d'Auschwitz* (Brussels: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2014), 19. Translation is my own.

14 Isabelle Derveaux, "'Celui qui aime écrit sur les murs' Graffiti et autofiction dans les portraits de Mandelbaum," in *Stéphane Mandelbaum: Une monographie*, ed. Bruno Jean (Paris: Les Éditions Martin de Halleux, 2022), 19.

15 Sebhan, 82.

activist Pierre Goldman. A hero of the demonstrations of May 1968 in Paris, Goldman was assassinated in 1979 by an unnamed and as yet unprosecuted right-wing gang. Goldman presented "models of a societal heretic" in the characters he created in his novels and his own life.[16] As such, he seems to have joined Mandelbaum's growing pantheon of hero iconoclast portrait subjects. The German critic Diedrich Diederichsen sees Mandelbaum's portrait of Goldman as a work that "explicitly connected the struggle against bourgeois society and its state to his Jewish identity." Goldman saw his own identity as a postwar European Jew—a survivor to some—as a weapon, and Diederichsen posits that Mandelbaum might have taken Goldman as an inspiration for his own embrace of Judaism in the name of "international solidarity of all opponents of the status quo."[17]



This aggressive use of Jewish identity marks a distinctly different way to confront the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust than that of the non-Jewish artists of the Nachgeborenen—one based not on defeat but on the defiant victory of *persisting*. While Kiefer attempts to incorporate imagery associated with the Third Reich as an act of rebellion against Adorno's dictate opposing the aestheticization of taboo imagery, passing the burden of interpreting this information in the "correct" way to the viewer,[18] Mandelbaum goads his viewers to revel in the wrongness of his sometimes horrifying images. Works like his portraits of the Nazis Joseph Goebbels and Ernst Röhm, his use of pornographic images both drawn and cut from magazines, and his mixture of profanity and words transliterated into a sacred alphabet are meant to shock. This said, they also graphically encourage pleasures in common fetishes: sadomasochism, uniforms, guns, lawlessness, and gratuitous violence. In Mandelbaum's oeuvre, shock and guilt are weapons to extinguish what the work of artists like Kiefer encourages—pity.

Mandelbaum's juxtaposition of pornographic images with those of Nazis follows a well-worn form of sadomasochistic pornography that achieved popularity in the late 1950s in Israel but quickly traveled to Europe and the United States. Seewald, the Belgian scholar of Jewish culture, identifies the origin of this

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16 Thomas Nolden, "Pierre Goldman and the Beginnings of 'jeune littérature juive,'" *French Forum* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 74.

17 Diedrich Diederichsen, "A History of Violence in Europe since the Holocaust, Unfinished," in *Stéphane Mandelbaum* (Frankfurt: Museum MMK für Moderne Kunst, 2022), n.p.

18 Saltzman, 23.

strain of fetishism in the publication of cheap novels called "Stalag fiction" that became popular in Israel before being banned after the 1962 trials of the infamous Nazi Adolf Eichmann. Despite its interdiction, Stalag fiction—erotic pulp fiction that featured Nazi characters—spread in translation to Europe and America, inspiring well-known cultural products like the films *The Night Porter* (1974), which Mandelbaum saw in 1976, and the tongue in cheek film *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS* (1975). Stalag fiction was the stuff of adolescent boys, and it is instructive to remember that Mandelbaum was one of them when he began to draw Nazis. He first drew the image of a ranting Goebbels, taken from a much-reproduced 1933 photo, when he was seventeen. His incorporation of pornography into his large-scale portraits can be explained as a youthful blow against bourgeois prudery, but it can also be interpreted as a strategy to force a strong reaction—disgust, horror, or desire. It is interesting and important to note that Mandelbaum began to draw Nazis roughly at the same moment that he started to draw Jewish heroes and patriarchs from his own family. Portraits of his grandfather Szulim date from 1980 and 1981 [PLS. 34, 35]; he drew Pierre Goldman in 1980 [PL. 3] and his father, Arié, accompanied by the cheeky caption in Yiddish "Kiss my ass," in 1982 [PL. 2]. Mandelbaum's largest and most finished portrait of Ernst Röhm was drawn in 1981; it is accompanied by the enormously provocative epithet "dirty Jew" (*sale juif*) scrawled in a corner beneath the image of the smirking, mustachioed founder of the SA [PL. 4]. This repulsive curse, scribbled on his own drawing like a vandal's graffito, does not refer to Röhm; rather it is a description of the artist himself as one who dares to exhume the memories of those monsters who deserve to be erased from historical memory. As the French writer Gilles Sebhan has noted, Mandelbaum was well aware that by "representing the executioners" rather than the victims of the Holocaust, he was "breaking a rule." Sebhan, who knew Mandelbaum in his lifetime, recalls that "many witnesses remember his nervousness while waiting…for his grandfather to come to his first major exhibition." For Mandelbaum, according to Sebhan, "Szulim Mandelbaum, symboliz(ed) Jewish law, Polish exile, the memory of the camps."[19] Mercifully it seems, Mandelbaum *grand-père* admired his grandson's portraits of Nazi criminals even as they were juxtaposed with portraits of himself and his son Arié. Neither offended or shocked, this elderly Pole who spent the war in



19 Sebhan, 82. Translation is my own.

hiding seems to have understood Mandelbaum *grand-fils*' work as a show of strength in the face of a history of disaster, a way to force his viewers to confront "those responsible for genocide."[20] As Belgian philosopher Véronique Bergen writes, "He approached the terrible, that which others don't want to see."[21] As Mandelbaum himself declared in one of his notebooks: "On my pages the 20th century vomits out its murders."[22] Making clear that he saw his drawings of Nazis both as transgressive and as striking a blow against fascism and hate, he continued, "I have a disgust for what I've done, and also a respect."[23]

Mandelbaum's large-scale drawings of Goebbels and Röhm, Szulim and Arié Mandelbaum, and Pierre Goldman can all be considered part of the artist's aim to appropriate and weaponize images of Nazi perpetrators and the Jews who stood up to their threats of annihilation. Some of Mandelbaum's own self-portraits seem to emphasize what can be considered his Semitic features. In several drawings he gives himself a bulbous nose, hooded eyes, and a heavy forehead. Shortly before his death in 1986, with strange prescience, the artist even created a mock epitaph for himself, identifying himself as a victim of the Shoah:



Stéphane Mandelbaum
1901-1944
Jew who died in the camps
By Nazi Germany

Art historian Choghakate Kazarian sees this gesture as stemming from a desire to legitimize his Jewish identity by "joining" his grandfather's martyred relatives, but Mandelbaum's admittedly morbid fantasy also emphasizes the notion of resurrection; killed by the Nazis, the entity Stéphane Mandelbaum persists forty years later as a witness and as an avenger. As Gilles Sebhan wrote recently, "In Mandelbaum's world, everything is reversible. The victim becomes the executioner. The weak (individual) metamorphizes and imposes

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20 Véronique Bergen, "Hé les ombres, je vous ai tendu la main," in Jean, *Stéphane Mandelbaum: Une monographie*, 534. Translation is my own.
21 Bergen, 533. Translation is my own.
22 Stéphane Mandelbaum, quoted in Bergen, 533.
23 Stéphane Mandelbaum, in a letter to Gérard Preszow, circa 1985, in Jean, *Stéphane Mandelbaum: Une monographie*, 52.

his strength."[24] Gérard Preszow sees Mandelbaum's fascination with Judaism as yet another "fetish" among many that the artist acquired and encouraged in his life. Diedrich Diederichsen has recently gone even further, positing that Mandelbaum's embrace of Jewish identity was part and parcel of his adolescent fetishization of "radicality and transgression for their own sake," equating his Jewishness with Mandelbaum's other outlaw preoccupations at the time, including thievery, pornography, drugs, and alcohol.[25] That Diederichsen assumes a general acceptance of the notion of Jewish identity as countercultural, even nefarious, is genuinely disturbing. His point that the Belgian artist was crafting an artistic identity that derived power from its iconoclastic subject matter, however, seems crucial to understanding the goal of Mandelbaum's work then, and its impact now.



According to Mandelbaum's friends and associates, during his lifetime he was not a participant in the mainstream contemporary art community in Brussels or Antwerp. He did travel to other European cities: Rome in 1978, sleeping on a beach in Ostia Antica as an homage to the site of the murder of Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Paris to see the film *Apocalypse Now* and a show of Hokusai prints. Fascinated by the work of Francis Bacon, Mandelbaum apparently attempted a correspondence with the British artist, writing to his London gallery and enclosing, it has been reported, several drawings. Although Mandelbaum never received a response, Bacon and his companion George Dyer, who committed suicide in 1971, were frequent subjects of the younger artist's portraiture. Mandelbaum's work was exhibited only a few times during his lifetime; one show contextualized his work as that of a Jewish artist and another included him as part of a cohort of artists who were painting and drawing realistically. There was an identified artistic trend in Brussels that some have retrospectively called "Ugly Realism" or "Dirty Realism," which featured the work of painters who mixed Neo-Expressionism with recognizable figures.[26] But there is little visual connection to Mandelbaum's hyper-realist drawing style. Besides

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24 Gilles Sebhan, "Le Témoin Impossible," in *Stéphane Mandelbaum* (Paris: Galerie Zlotowski, 2019), n.p. Published in conjunction with the exhibition "Stéphane Mandelbaum" curated by Bruno Jean at Galerie Zlotowski, May 18-July 6, 2019. Translation is my own.

25 Diedrich Diederichsen, "A History of Violence," n.p.

26 Werner Mannaers, "Ugly Realism," in *Aspects of Belgian Art after 1945, Part I*, ed. Willem Elias (Ghent: Snoeck, 2005), 222-33.

FIG. 3 Arié Mandelbaum, *Portrait of Stéphane*, 1976

his aforementioned and obvious indebtedness to the German Neu Sachlichkeit, Mandelbaum's biggest stylistic influence was the work of his father, the painter Arié Mandelbaum, who was a member of the faculty at the École des Arts plastiques et visuels d'Uccle, where Stéphane studied and then worked [FIG. 3]. Mandelbaum *fils*' drawings share the exacting draftsmanship and old-master-like shading techniques that appear in his father's work, which, during the period of their convergence at the École des Arts also included portraiture, but this is where the resemblance ends. The younger Mandelbaum's choice of subject matter—coupled with his inclusion of words and collaged images that serve as captions or even commentary on his subjects—sets his work apart from that of his father, reinforcing that the connection between the two oeuvres exists primarily in a shared realist vocabulary.

As part of the rediscovery and reassessment of Stéphane Mandelbaum's work, art historians have endeavored to connect his oeuvre to the work of better-known artists of the same generation who practiced in other European cities or in the United States. Gilles Sebhan notes that Mandelbaum's free-form doodles on his drawings link his work to that of his chronological contemporary, the American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat.[27] Though Mandelbaum's larger works are examples of an "academic" style that was antiquated if

27 Gilles Sebhan, "Mandelbaum, la vie écrite," in Jean, *Stéphane Mandelbaum: Une monographie*, 59.

not reactionary in 1980s Europe, the way the Belgian artist's notes and scribbles intrude upon his portraits in particular is akin to the way that an artist like Basquiat deployed the language of graffiti in his paintings. Similarly, Isabelle Derveaux notes that this kind of drawing has "connotations of rebellion, vandalism and debauchery," themes that are echoed in Mandelbaum's central subject matter.[28] But Mandelbaum's incorporation of words and phrases in French, Yiddish, and English, and lists of objects, anonymous people, and concentration camps differs in a significant manner from Basquiat's incorporation of song and album titles, names, and tags. Mandelbaum's words are often difficult to decipher because of their size, the artist's orthography, or the language in which they are written. They are not public or even quasi-public proclamations like graffiti nor are they transgressing a space where they might not belong, as the appearance of a "tag" on a wall or on the surface of an oil painting hanging in a gallery may be. Significantly, Mandelbaum chose not to use language in his paintings. Words only appear in his drawings and mostly in those sketches that are or were formerly sketchbook pages. Diederichsen contextualizes Mandelbaum's work with two other near contemporaries whose paintings and drawings feature words along with images: the American Raymond Pettibon and the Cologne-based painter Martin Kippenberger—two artists who worked on different continents but whose artistic practices characterize a punkish, adolescent aesthetic that incorporated sexual and violent images culled from pop cultural sources. In terms of German artists working in the 1980s, Mandelbaum's work can perhaps be more fruitfully compared to that of Cologne-born Kai Althoff (b. 1968), whose astonishingly precise draftsmanship and fetishistic obsessions with criminality, sexuality, Hasidism, and neo-Nazism have a pseudomorphic though ex post facto relationship with Mandelbaum's drawings. Although less than a generation divides their dates of birth, Althoff's mature work emerged close to a decade after Mandelbaum's death. The two artists share a sexually-tinged fascination with Europe's Nazi past, but the fact that Althoff is not Jewish casts his use of this profane imagery in perhaps a more sinister light.



The contexts of contemporary Belgian realism and German or American contemporary art in the 1980s do not quite fit Mandelbaum's strange oeuvre. A productive connection to make

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28 Derveaux, "Celui qui aime écrit sur les murs," 18.

instead is between Mandelbaum's project and that of Luc Tuymans, a painter from Antwerp born three years before Mandelbaum. Entering the Antwerp art scene when the Brussels-based Mandelbaum was still alive, Tuymans had heard of Mandelbaum's work but saw it only after his death. Although Tuymans's allusive, indistinct paintings and gouaches have little in common stylistically with Mandelbaum's realistic depictions, both artists grapple with the images that haunt postwar European history. Tuymans is not Jewish; nor does he link his personal biography with his choice of subject matter. Still, he is obsessed with historical memory and the contested symbols of national character, from flags to the faces of politicians.

Belgium remains to this day a culturally bifurcated country, and this division between French and Flemish speakers, and Brussels–

the capital–and Antwerp, where there was a strong connection through commercial galleries to the international contemporary art world, was a politically rabid reality in the 1970s when there was a resurgence of activity among Belgian nationalists and fascists. A "radicalized" police force as well as not infrequent anonymous terrorist activity throughout the country created, in the words of the gallerist Frank Demaegd, who opened his legendary gallery Zeno X in Antwerp in 1981, a "climate of terror" in Belgium that mirrored a similarly precarious period around the world.[29] In Belgium at the beginning of the 1980s, there were two art worlds: one in French-speaking Brussels and the other in Flemish-speaking Antwerp. They did not mix. As one cultural historian put it in a 2005 study of Belgian art after World War II: "The contemporary man stays inflexibly attached to the character of his own subculture and identity… certainly in Belgium, specific products of each territory are favored… We continue to cultivate our own dialects, our own drinks… and our own regional dishes. The great richness of our country is precisely this differentiation between cults, styles, life… and artistic production."[30]

Demaegd had heard about Mandelbaum's work and also saw the media coverage of his violent death. To present it though was

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29 Frank Demaegd, co-founder of Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, in conversation with the author, May 2023. The 1970s and early 1980s was a period when left and right wing paramilitary revolutionary movements were active internationally, with the Red Army Faction (Baader Meinhoff Group) in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy, the PFLP in Palestine, the Symbionese Liberation Army in the United States, and the Red Army in Japan.

30 Florent Bex, *L'art en Belgique depuis 1975* (Anvers: Fonds Mercator, 2001), 19. My own translation.

FIG. 4 Luc Tuymans, *Gaskamer*, 1986



an unlikely choice for Zeno X, a hip venue for emerging art aimed at an international audience. According to Demaegd, there was little discussion, let alone commerce between the art communities of Brussels and Antwerp. In Demaegd's view, art from Brussels seemed provincial, with an audience that was primarily local. In terms of the larger discourse, while Flemish speaking contemporary artists had a context in which to exhibit their work, Francophone Belgians were by and large "on their own."[31] Demaegd recalls that when his gallery opened, it looked like "painting was dead" not only in the Belgian art world but in the European and American ones as well.[32] Going against the grain, he began representing Tuymans, a painter from Antwerp with a background in film and a deep knowledge of German art—Gerhard Richter in particular. In the early 1980s, Tuymans began painting portraits of "criminal cops" in faded tones applied with regular horizontal brushstrokes that created a deadpan effect despite the incendiary subject matter. Mid-decade, Tuymans started to paint in thematic series, presenting evocative, even disturbing objects and settings in the dispassionate, muted manner that would become his signature style. In the 1980s, Tuymans frequently chose images that evoked the Holocaust. A series from the middle of the decade included paintings like *Gaskamer* [Gas Chamber] (1986) [FIG. 4]; *Our New Quarters*, a small painting depicting a bank of wooden bunk beds also from 1986; and *The Time* (1988), which depicts, according to

31 Demaegd in conversation with the author, May 2023.
32 Ibid.

the artist, "spinach pills," but seems to refer to Zyklon B, the tablets that produced the poison that gassed hundreds of thousands during the Shoah. Tuymans almost matter-of-factly presented these deeply disturbing images on small, dull canvases covered in inexpressive brushstrokes horizontally layered like bricks. "People were not ready for this," recalled Demaegd of his Belgian audience, but these works earned Tuymans an early international reputation as a European artist who dared to take on the inchoate and unpicturable horrors of Europe's recent past.[33]

There is a thematic connection between Tuymans's paintings of the late 1980s and Mandelbaum's contemporaneously created drawings, but this was not the main reason that Demaegd opted to exhibit Mandelbaum's work in 1997, a decade after the Brussels artist's death. Mandelbaum's "type of work is not the type of work we were showing," he has emphasized, adding that Mandelbaum's work was unknown in art circles anywhere in the country until his spectacular demise was covered by Belgian and French newspapers. Despite these caveats, Demaegd believed that Mandelbaum's drawings were consummate and, more importantly perhaps, edgy enough to make sense in the context of an internationally significant contemporary art gallery that featured work by Tuymans as well as South African-born, Amsterdam-based artist Marlene Dumas. Demaegd remembers that Chris Dercon, at that time the Director of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam and a curator with a significant international reputation, traveled to Antwerp to see the Mandelbaum show and subsequently included his work in an exhibition he was curating in Mexico City. This kind of international interest in Mandelbaum quickly subsided, not to be revived until a modest exhibition of his drawings was organized by the graphics department of the Centre Pompidou in Paris almost thirty years later, in 2019.



I began this essay by framing my point of view in the realm of history and biography. This last term referred to the fascinating and ultimately tragic story of Stéphane Mandelbaum's life. But the circumstances of his death are not the most important biographical facts as they only influence the reception of Mandelbaum's work, not the work itself. Far more important for the artist during his lifetime was his family history of surviving the Shoah. It was a touchstone for his artistic practice, and he spent the decade of his adulthood

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33 Ibid.

building an artistic persona centered around being a Jew in postwar Europe at the end of the twentieth century. He adopted the persona of a Jew not as a bid for sympathy but as a kind of armor, donned in preparation for battle against the tropes of victimhood that surrounded and still surround our notion of survivorship, seizing on and weaponizing the dangerous cliché of the Jew as an outsider, a stateless iconoclast, and member of a shady cabal with its own secret language. Mandelbaum's large-scale portrait drawings are in some cases extravagant moments of Dreyfusard *J'accuse*: depicting the hysterical marketer of death Joseph Goebbels in full rant or the willing patsy, SA leader Ernst Röhm, whose adoration for Adolf Hitler did not save him from assassination by his own loathsome party. As if to counter these depictions of evil, Mandelbaum drew his heroes, beginning with his survivor grandfather and his artist father, and adding avenging Jewish figures from recent history like the French radical Pierre Goldman. Other characters that Mandelbaum chose as subjects included artists with infamy attached to their names: Francis Bacon, whose visceral manner of painting and violent biography influenced the younger artist; Pier Paolo Pasolini, the film director who was killed by a male prostitute on the beaches of Ostia; and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, whose brilliance flamed out in early death.



For me, Mandelbaum's oeuvre represents one of a very few credible attempts to create a contemporary art that wrestles with the history of the Holocaust, a history that doesn't so much haunt as twist our perspective on the act of making art in the context of an unimaginably violent recent history. That this attempt came from a young artist who self-identified as the Jewish grandson of a survivor is very rare; the majority of the major artistic monuments that grapple with the legacy of the Holocaust have emanated from German artists who were part of the generation born at the end of or directly after the war. Mandelbaum's demons were inherited, but they were present enough to have given him his purpose.

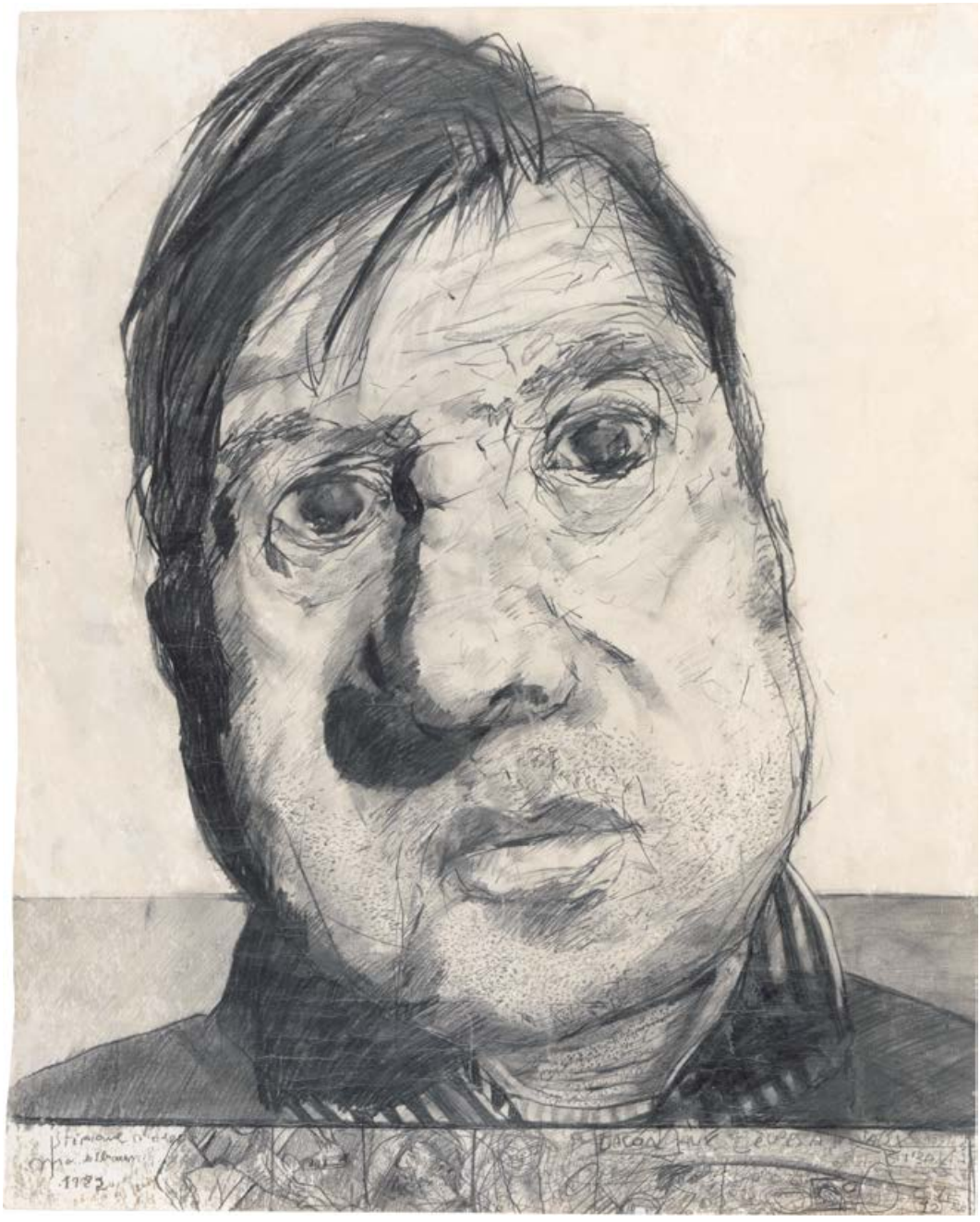
Psychologists have recognized the inheritability of trauma since the turn of the century, thanks in large measure to the work of the father of psychoanalysis, the Viennese Jew Sigmund Freud. I have not turned to psychoanalytic theory in this analysis, but I have brought my own inherited trauma to my interpretation of Mandelbaum's drawings. I am the daughter of a Holocaust survivor who experienced slave labor and numerous incarcerations in a series of death camps that began with Mauthausen and concluded with liberation from Treblinka with a stay in Auschwitz in between.

The Holocaust, or my mother's experience living through it, was not a topic of conversation in my household when I was growing up, but the presence of that history was like a subtle shadow cast over every event, joyful or mournful. Mandelbaum's body of work has caused me to recognize the presence of my family history in–and impact on–my own work over the past three decades. My personal relationship to the subject of this work was an impetus for my interest in Mandelbaum. Significant too, is that the exhibition is being presented at The Drawing Center, a platform in a city that is both a center of the international artistic discourse as well as Jewish life and culture in the twenty-first century. We are presently at a time in US history when many artists, educators, and scholars are reassessing the impact of identity in its broadest sense on cultural production, from paintings to television shows. It is also a time that has seen a resurgence in incidents of anti-Semitism that have ranged from attacks on houses of worship and deadly protests of fascist cadres to political diatribes spouted by leading presidential candidates. These phenomena make the work of Stéphane Mandelbaum relevant to our historical moment; his crusading, transgressive images are still strong enough to elicit shock, still familiar enough to cause shame or ignite fury against injustice. In a letter to his friend Gérard Preszow, Mandelbaum characterized himself as "a good for nothing capable of everything."[34] When he died at age twenty-five, he was just beginning to explore how his extraordinary talent for drawing could serve as a platform for his righteous anger and as a weapon against the erasure of an entire people from the collective European memory.

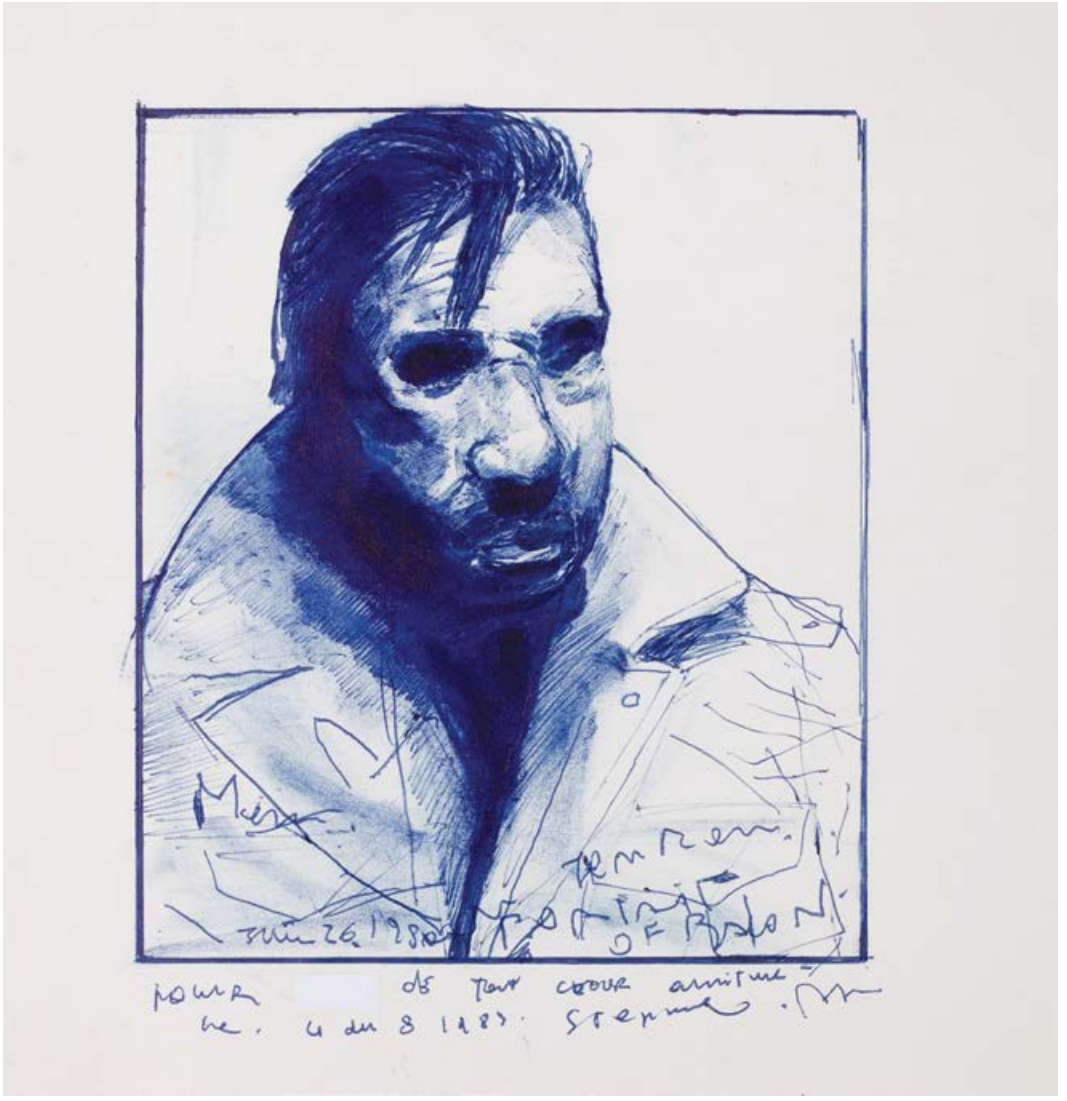


34 Stéphane Mandelbaum, quoted in an undated letter to Gérard Preszow in Jean, *Stéphane Mandelbaum: Une monographie*, 556.

# Small Drawings



PL. 17
*Bacon et prédelle avec portrait d'Arié* (Bacon and predella with portrait of Arié), 1982



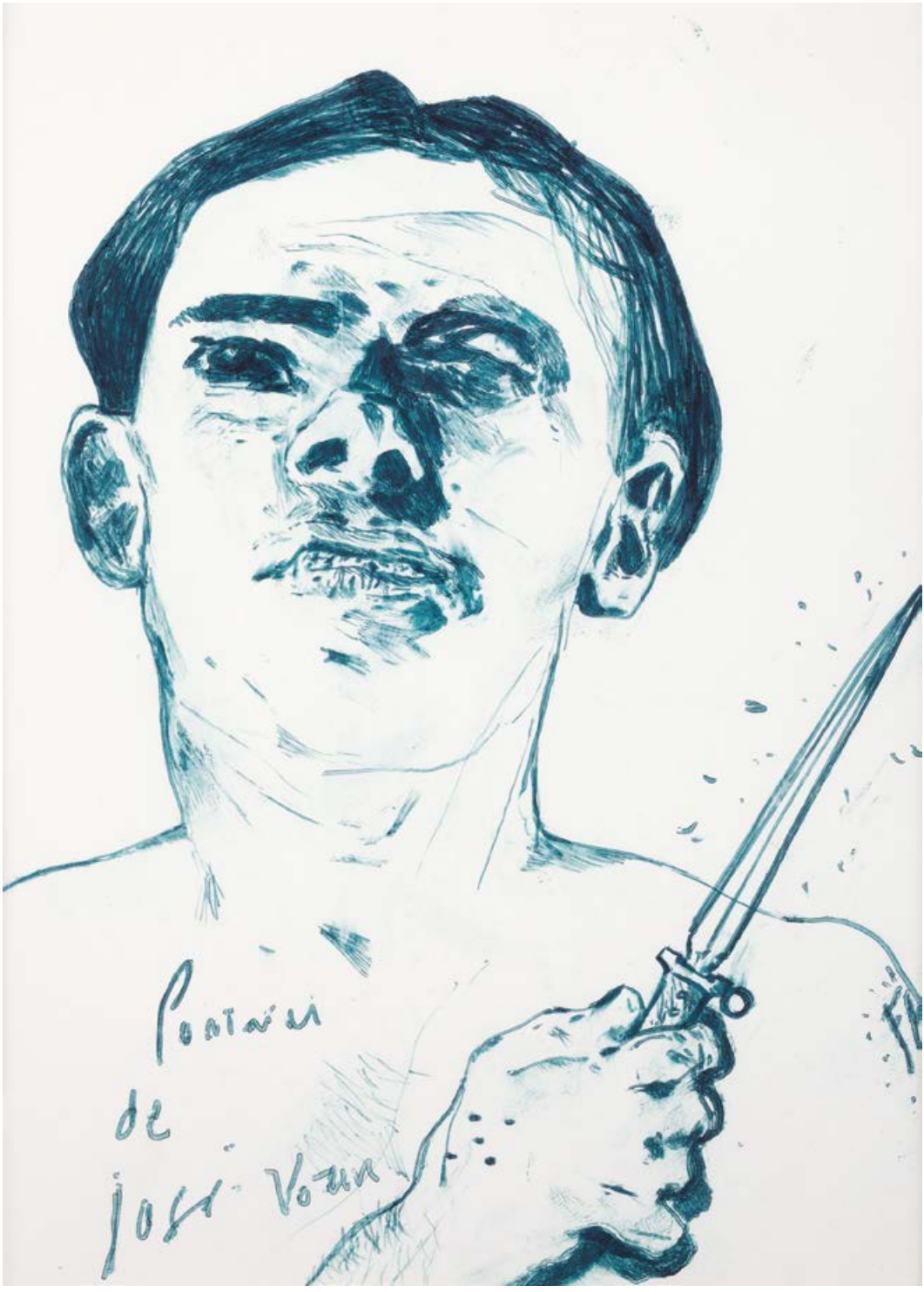
PL. 18
*Portrait of Bacon*, 1980


PL. 19
*Composition (Portrait of Bacon)*, 1980

PL. 20
*Francis Bacon*, 1980

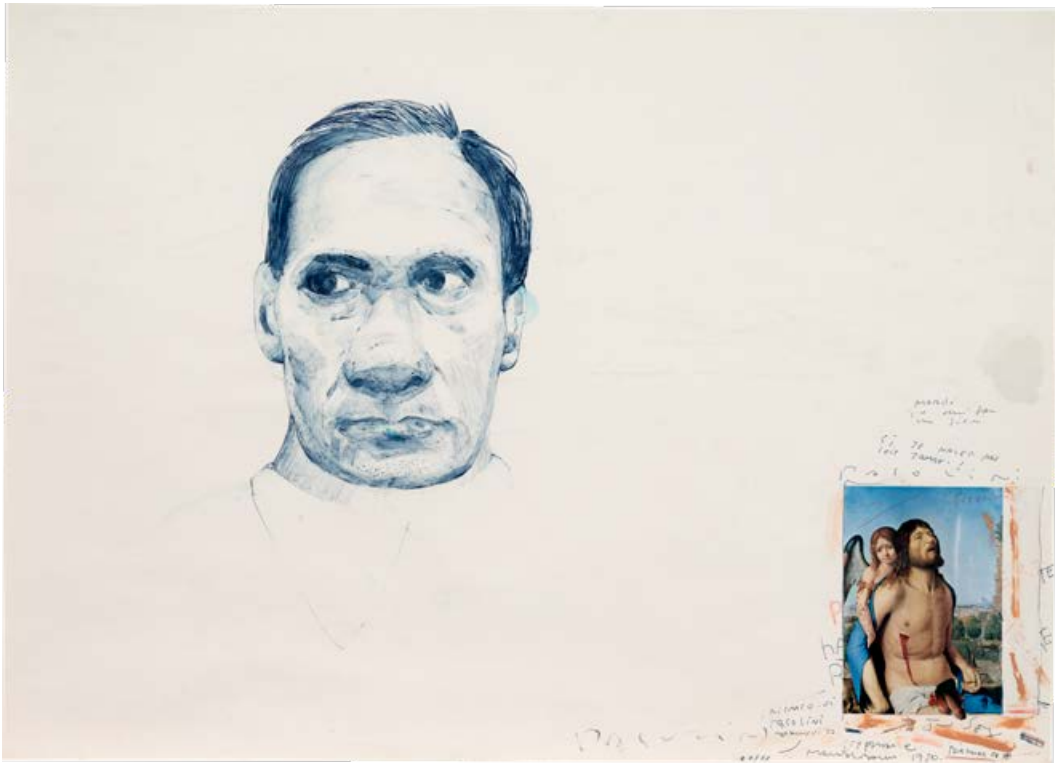
PL. 21
*Portrait of Bacon*, 1980

PL. 22
*Luis Buñuel* from the "Postcard Series," 1985

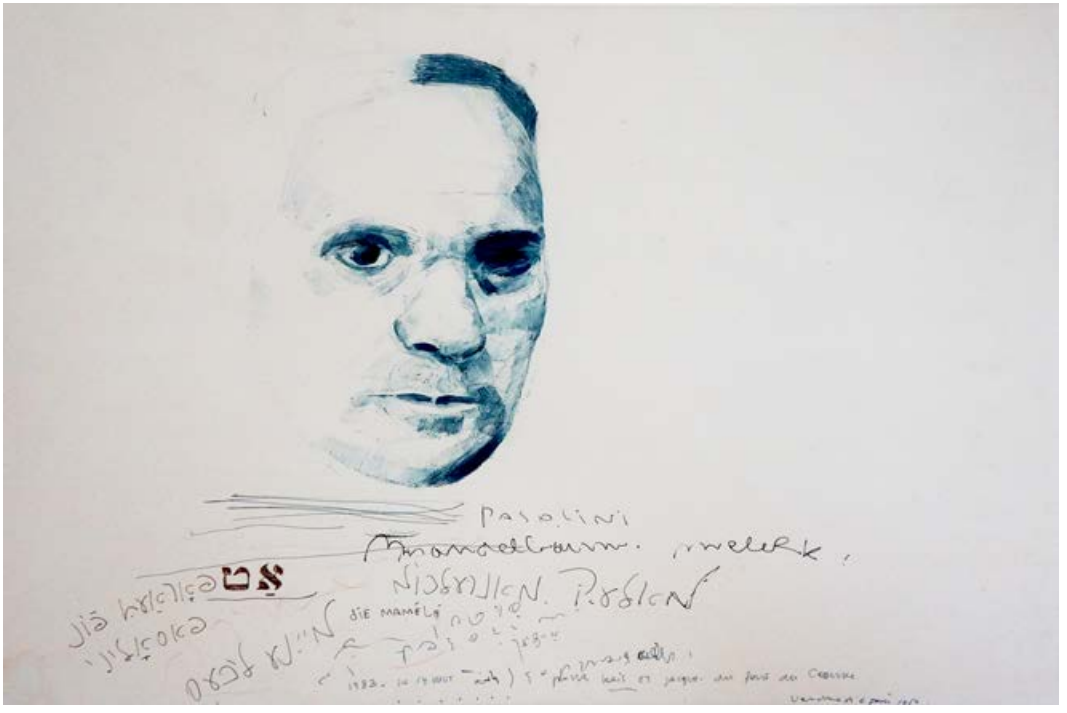



PL. 23
*José* from the "Postcard Series," 1985

**PL. 24**
*Pasolini n° 8*, 1980



PL. 25
*Pier Paolo Pasolini (Antonello de Messine, Pietà, 1477-1478)*, 1980




PL. 26
*Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 1980

PL. 27
*Pasolini*, 1980


PL. 28
*Composition (Mishima, Bacon…)*, 1980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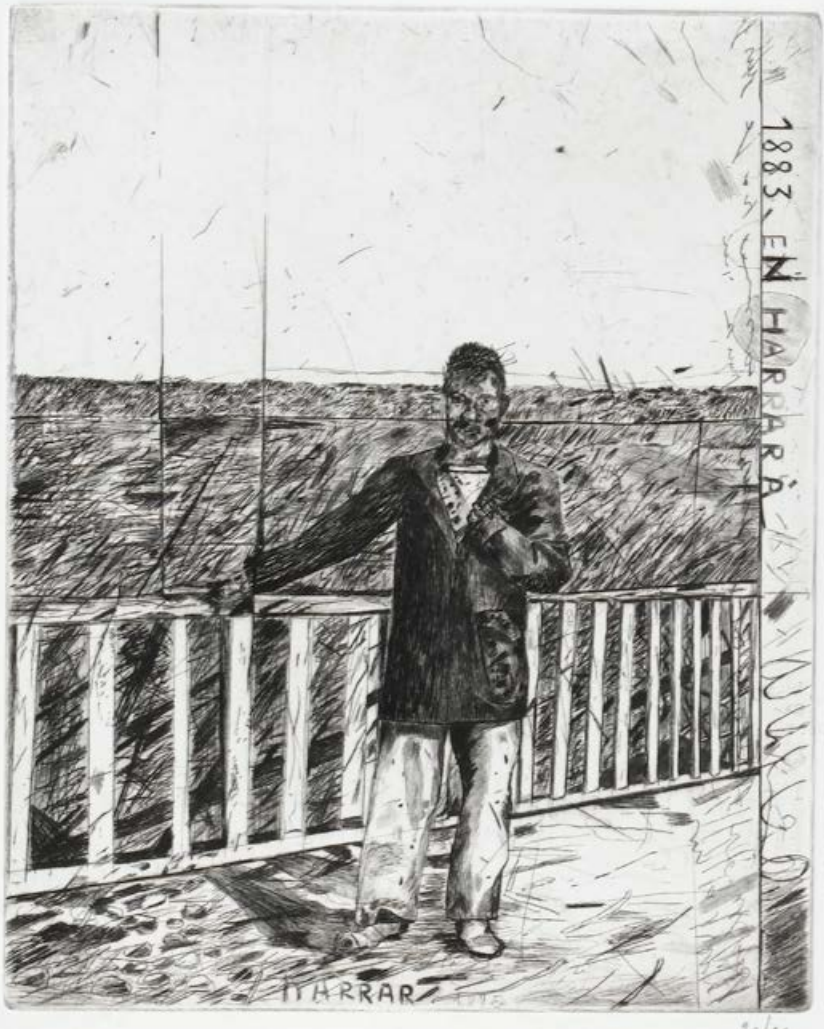
MÉLEK STÉPHANE MONDELBAUM 1980


PL. 29
*A. Rimbaud*, 1980


PL. 30
*Arthur Rimbaud*, 1980

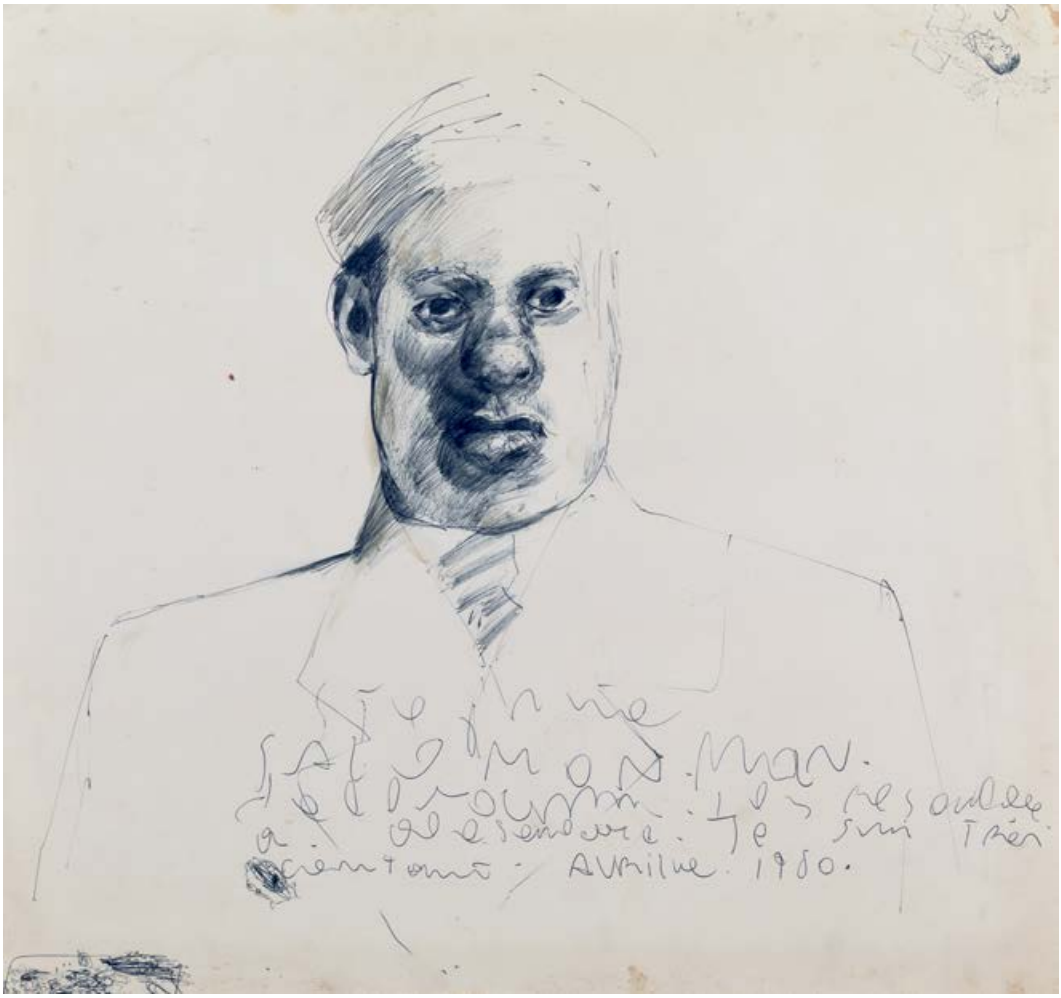



PL. 31
*Arthur Rimbaud I*, 1980

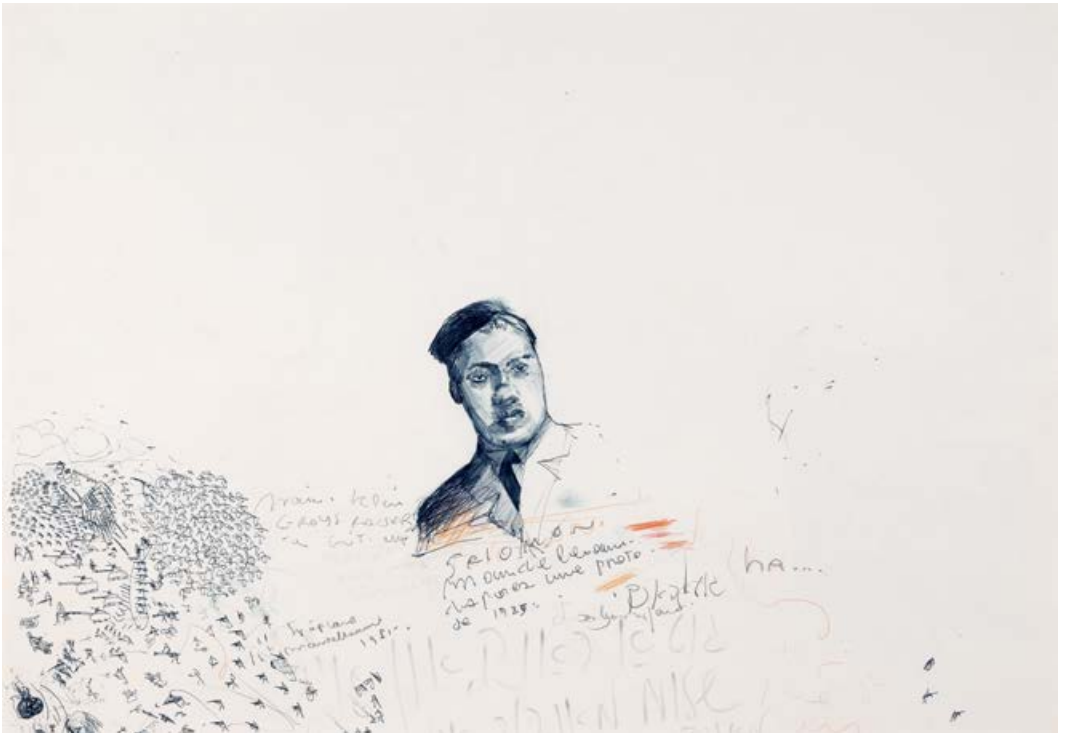
PL. 32
*Portrait von Rimbaud* (Portrait of Rimbaud), c. 1980

PL. 33
*Composition (Goldman, L'Empire des sens, Guernica)* (Composition [Goldman, *In the Realm of the Senses*, *Guernica*), c. 1980

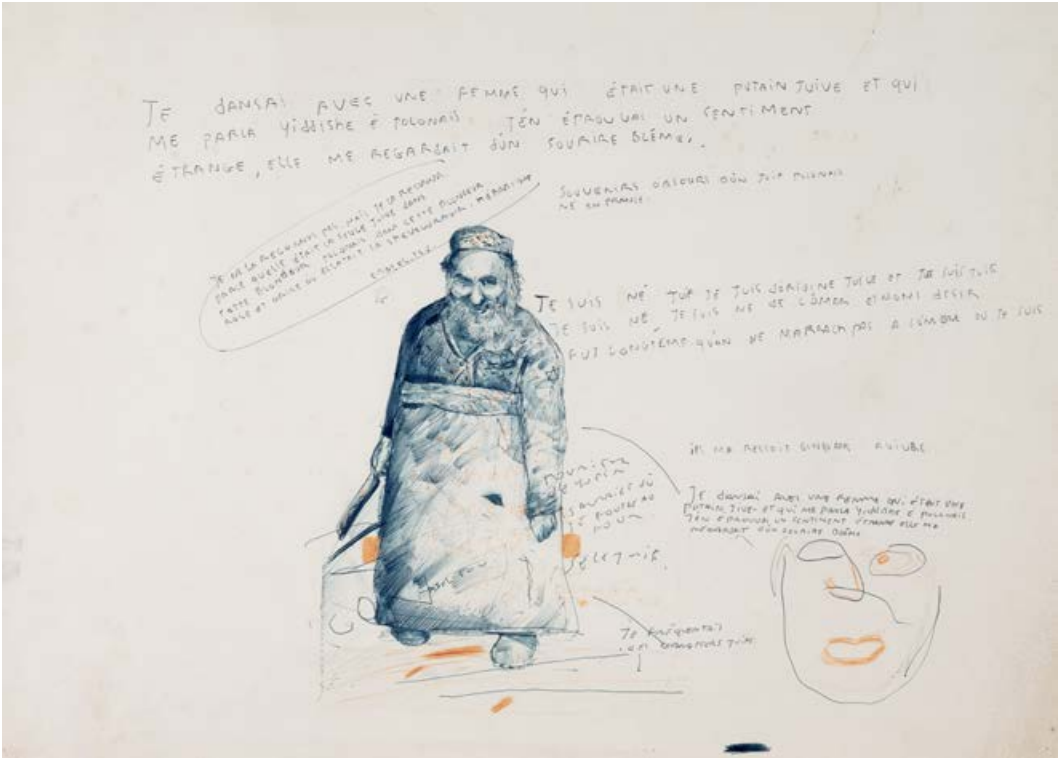

PIERRE GOLDMAN ASSASSINÉ
צרכאוושיאלום



PL. 34
*Salomon Mandelbaum*, 1980




PL. 35
*Salomon Mandelbaum (d'après une photo de 1929)* (Salomon Mandelbaum [from a 1929 photo]), 1981




PL. 36
*Shohet*, 1980

PL. 37
*Goebbels* [recto], 1980

PL. 38
*Goebbels*, 1980

PL. 39
*Composition (Cul-de-jatte au brassard à croix gammée)* (Composition [legless person with swastika armband]), 1980

PL. 40
*Composition à la figure rouge* (Red figure composition), 1984


PL. 41
*Composition (Figure au masque)* (Composition [mask figure]), c. 1981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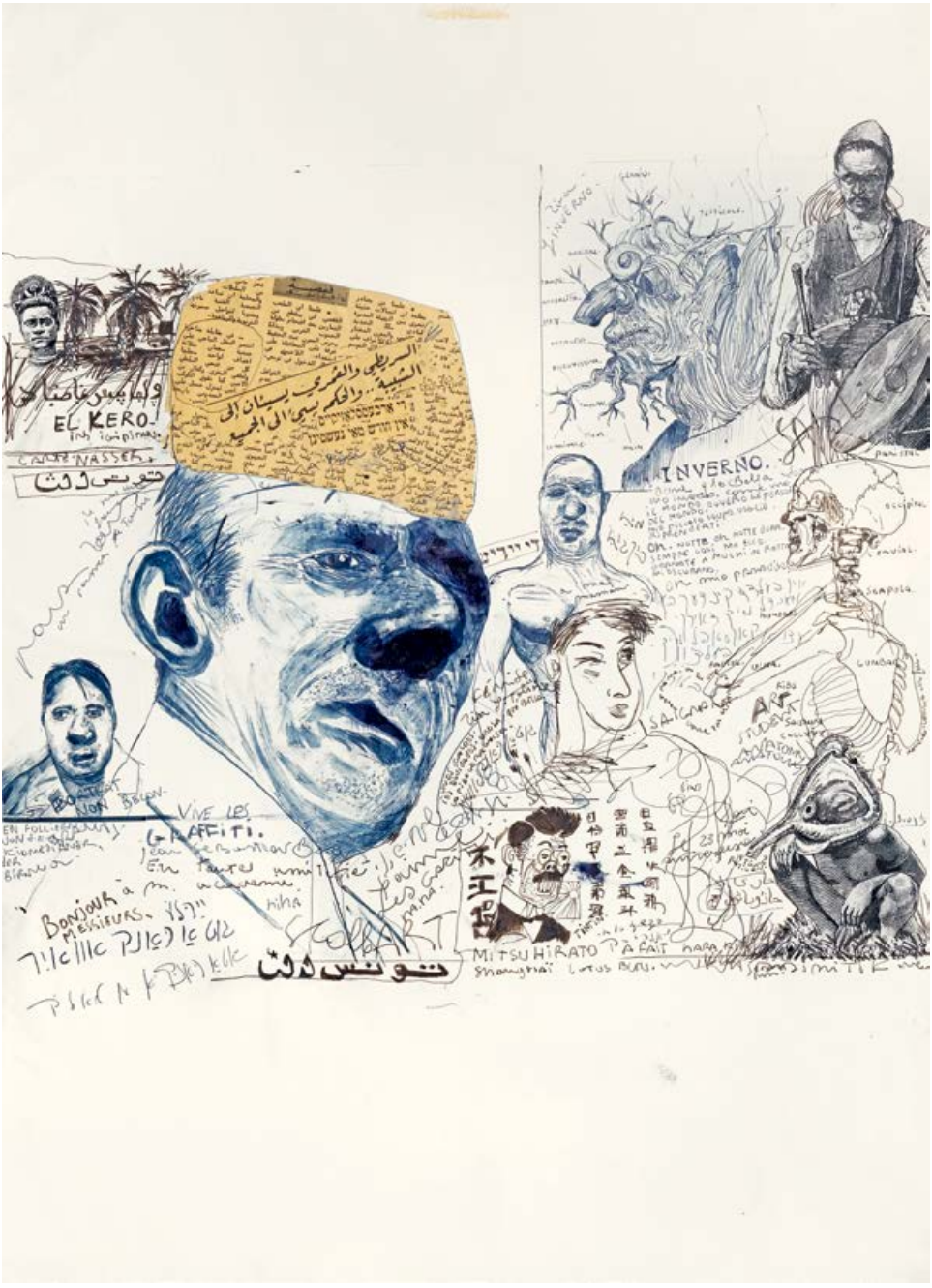
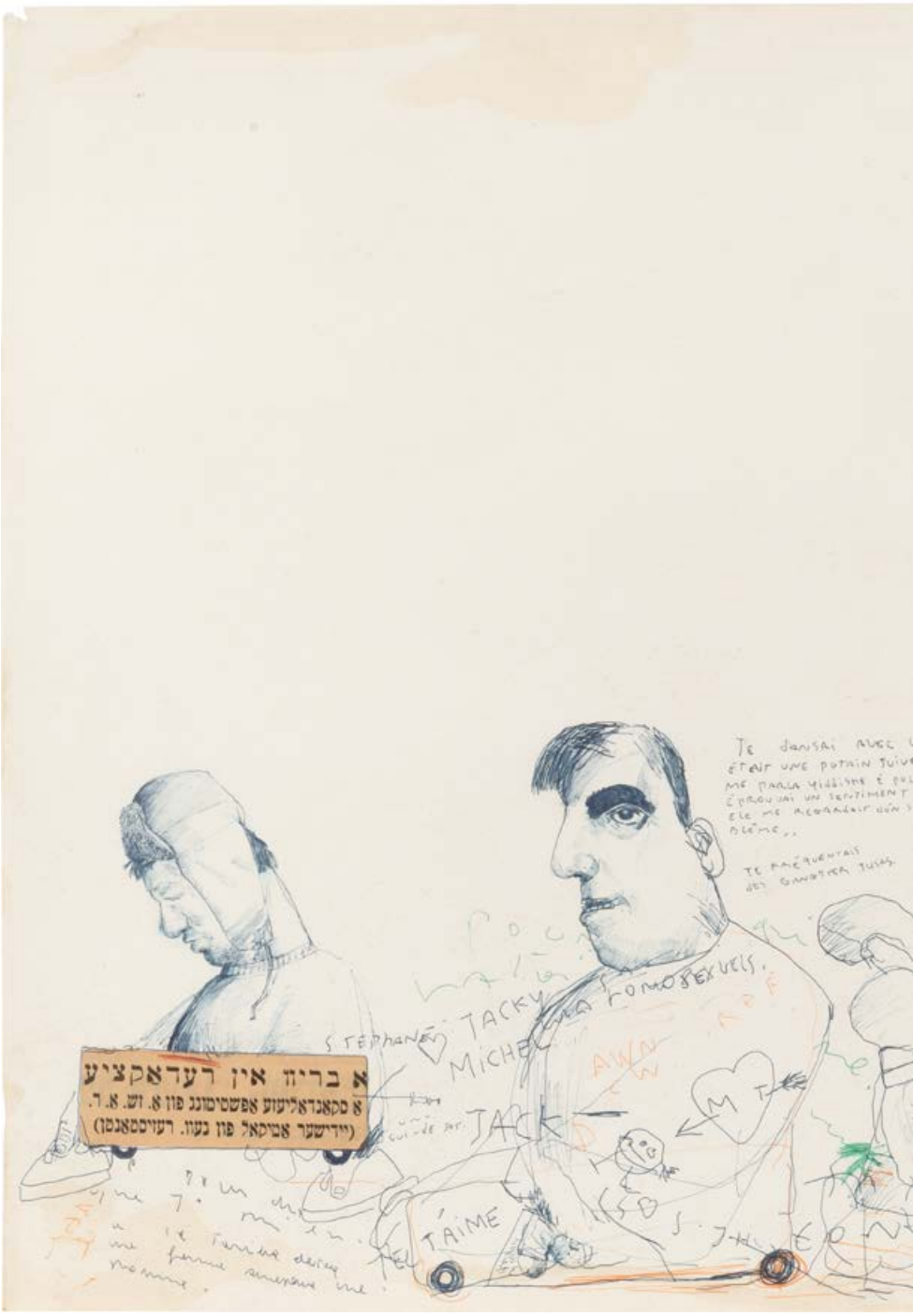
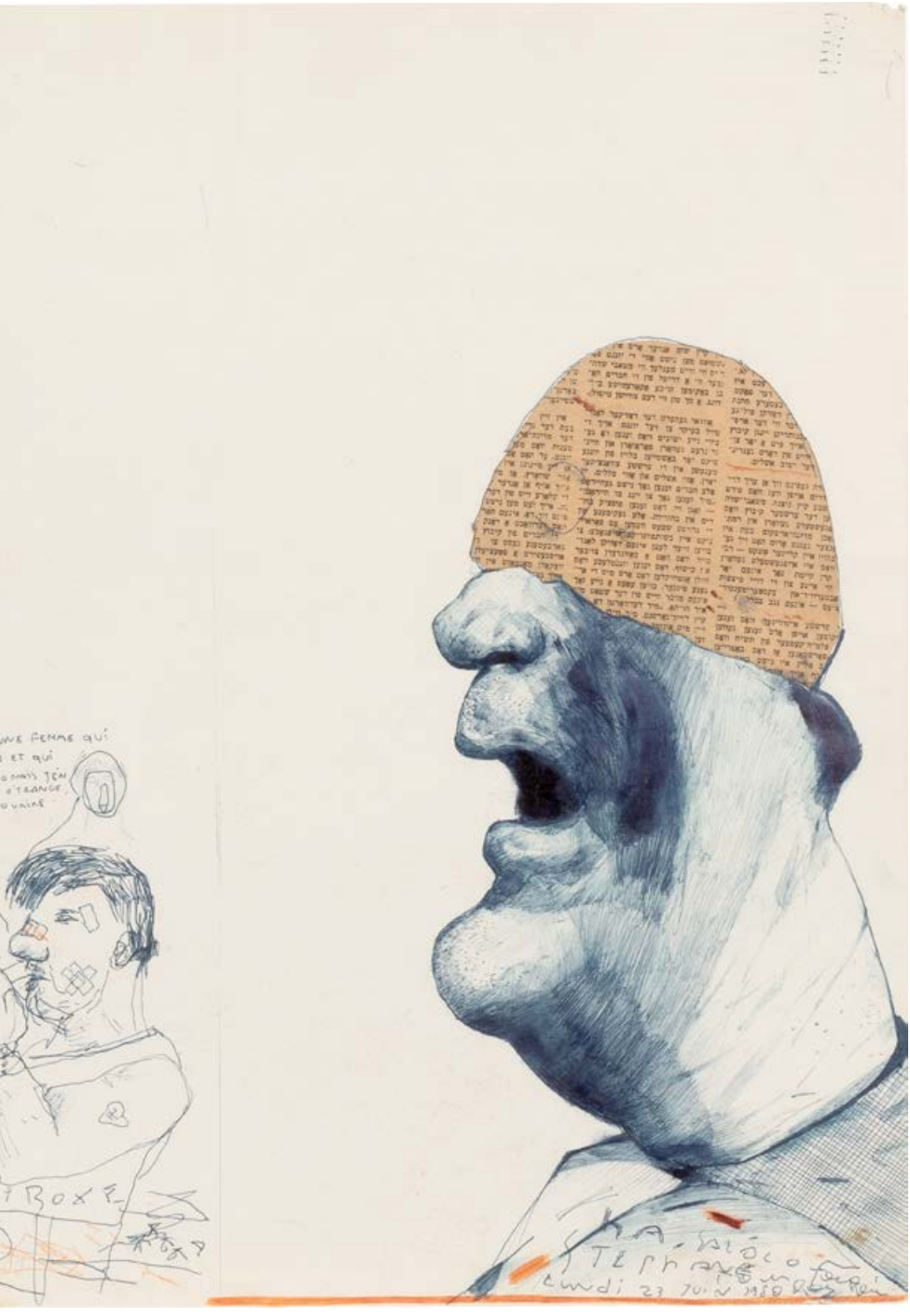



PL. 42
*Composition (El Kero)*, 1981




PL. 43
*Gueule cassée et autoportrait* (Broken face and self-portrait), 1980



# Meshugge: Stéphane Mandelbaum's Pages Torn from Life

Leslie Camhi



Is it possible to separate a consideration of Stéphane Mandelbaum's art from an account of his tragically brief life? The lurid and sensational details of the Belgian artist's death in 1986, at age twenty-five–murdered, it is suspected, by his accomplices in the theft of a Modigliani painting–risk overshadowing critical insight into his art. Yet this is only one of the difficulties presented by the profusion of drawings Mandelbaum produced within the span of a single decade, drawings that can appear both formally accomplished and dizzyingly improvisational, at once inviting and off-putting, startlingly mature and informed by art history, yet outsider-ish and punctuated with adolescent provocations–an oeuvre in which closely-observed reality and fantasy are continually trading places. Life and art were deeply intertwined in his work.

Even Mandelbaum's choice of drawing as a medium and his primary tools–banal and readily accessible pencils or ballpoint pens–shortened the distances between his mind, his hand, and the page, between his art and imagined or lived experience. At times he drew in a diaristic manner and (he claimed) almost as a bodily effusion, a release for his prodigious, quasi-anarchic energy, with heroes and demons occupying equal place on his pages. "I'm disgusted by what I create but I also respect it–it empties my whole body, like when I ejaculate," he wrote to a friend.[1]

His notebooks are covered with marks representing armies in battle [PL. 41], the names of Nazi death camps [PL. 45] or his feminine

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1 Stéphane Mandelbaum, letter to Gérard Preszow, read aloud in *La sainteté Stéphane (1961-1986)*, documentary short directed by Gérard Preszow (Cobra Films, 1993).

conquests (the latter real or imagined), guns and knives, men's suits, African masks [PLS. 54, 55], furniture for apartments he dreamed of inhabiting. Today they seem the work of an artist in a hurry, a perception partly due to hindsight (knowing as we do that his end was fast approaching) but also to an urgent quality in the work itself, the sense of an imagination tugging at the shirtsleeves of and nudging its way into reality.

Then there are his more formal and carefully prepared, sometimes over-life-sized portraits based on photographs-a rogue's gallery of anti-bourgeois artists and political subversives alongside some genuine evil-doers. That he drew his artistic heroes [PL. 6], notorious Nazis [PL. 4], and denizens of the Belgian demimonde and nightlife [PL. 13], according to each the same careful and sustained attention, also gives one pause. And then, few of his more famous subjects (all of them men) died quietly in their beds. Most of their lives ended prematurely and in violence. So it's a little too easy, if also heartbreaking, to see his death as mirroring his artistic obsessions.



"It is only at the point of death," one of Mandelbaum's recurrent subjects, the poet, radical intellectual, and visionary Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini [PLS. 24–27] said in a 1967 interview, "that our life, to that point ambiguous, undecipherable, suspended-acquires a meaning." Mandelbaum's death made at least one thing clear. He was mistaken in imagining himself a hardened criminal or even a bona fide member of the Belgian immigrant underworld that so fascinated him and from which, in his later years, he also drew inspiration for his work. He remained an artist, an outsider, in that world too.

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So let's begin again, this time at the beginning. Stéphane Mandelbaum was born in Brussels in 1961 to Arié Mandelbaum, a Belgian Jewish painter hailed early in his career as "a new Soutine," and Pili Mandelbaum, an illustrator of Armenian descent. He grew up as the middle child of three boys, and his parents divorced while he was still in school. Dyslexic, he struggled academically, eventually learning to read at Le Snark, an alternative and therapeutic boarding school for troubled students, which he attended from ages eleven to fifteen.

From his earliest years, he took refuge in drawing and in the idea of art as a vocation. He was nine years old when he first exhibited his drawings amid the bohemian ambiance of Le Chat

écarlate, a cabaret theater in Brussels devoted to the emerging stars of Belgian song. After Le Snark, Mandelbaum studied at the Académie des Beaux-Arts of Watermael-Boitsfort, a suburb of Brussels, where he attended life drawing classes and fell under the sway of Lucien Braet, a charismatic teacher. Braet introduced him to works by the Viennese Expressionists who had fallen out of fashion in the museum culture of the day, especially drawings by Egon Schiele and that master of the fin-de-siècle macabre, Alfred Kubin.

He began travelling to look at art: Amsterdam for the Rembrandts and Van Goghs; Venice, Florence, Pietrasanta, and Ostia, where he insisted on sleeping on the beach where just a few years earlier Pasolini had been murdered.[2] On a later trip to Paris, an exhibition of prints by Hokusai impressed him deeply. Back in Brussels, with a friend and fellow student, he spent days drawing (as the painter Chaïm Soutine had once done) in slaughterhouses. "Our obsessions," his friend Pierre Thoma recalled, "were meat and death."[3]



After three years, Mandelbaum broke with Braet and joined the École des Arts plastiques et visuels in Uccle, where his father Arié had been promoted to director. He soon began assisting in his father's courses. He had been a frail adolescent, but in those years he transformed himself physically, running and boxing. He also began teaching himself Yiddish and delving into his Jewish roots, his deepening engagement with a Jewish culture that had been decimated in the Shoah (including klezmer music, which he listened to while working)[4] and his development of his own capacities for physical force advancing on separate but parallel tracks.

• • •

He became particularly attached to and drew several portraits of his paternal grandfather, Szulim (Salomon) Mandelbaum, a leather craftsman who had left Poland in the early 1920s to work in the mines of Charleroi, Belgium. Szulim and his wife Ruchla moved to Brussels in the 1930s, but during the war he evaded the Gestapo by returning to work in the mines at Seraing. Meanwhile, in Poland,

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2 Anne Montfort, "Je ne sera plus qu'un autre," in *Stéphane Mandelbaum*, catalog published on the occasion of the exhibition at the Centre Pompidou (Paris: Éditions Dilecta/Centre Pompidou, 2019), 33. Many details concerning Mandelbaum's life are drawn from this catalog's chronology.

3 Bruno Jean and Pierre Thoma, "Entrevue," in *Stéphane Mandelbaum*, 121.

4 Montfort, 15.

one of his brothers was murdered in Auschwitz; his other brother, who had somehow escaped deportation, was killed by Poles while returning to reclaim his home.

Victoria Aarons, a scholar specializing in literary representations of the Holocaust, has explained that "one of the questions that the third generation [descendants of survivors of the Shoah] implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) asks is, 'Where am I in this history?' In other words, 'How has this traumatic event informed my identity?'"[5] The question haunts Mandelbaum's oeuvre. Sometimes it is addressed explicitly, as in a double portrait from 1981, a page divided like a cinematic split screen.[6] On the left, Szulim wears a suit and tie, arms crossed and seemingly implacable-a drawing based, perhaps, on a prewar photography studio portrait. On the right, the young artist appears as his ancestor's mussed and scrambled reflection, his image scrawled with graffiti including insults and curses ("*sale juif*" [dirty Jew]) singling him out as a Jew.



A similar dichotomy besets Mandelbaum's 1982 portrait of his father, the painter Arié Mandelbaum [PL. 2]. The formal image of the older artist in a suit and tie, eyes gazing warily toward some unseen threat but hair combed and beard neatly trimmed, is profaned by the inscription beneath him, carefully traced in Yiddish calligraphy-"*Kishmatores*!" (Kiss my ass!). Scribbled in the margins (where in a Jewish religious text, rabbinical commentary would appear) are fragmentary phrases in German, French, Hebrew, and Yiddish–both curses ("*sale juif*") and words of hope ("*die Kinder Lebt/ein zwei drei fir*" [the children are alive/one two three four]). A small collage set amidst the graffitti, in which the head of a grinning Nazi officer is pasted onto a beaver shot taken from a porn magazine, further pollutes the image of this *paterfamilias*. (The ironic designation "*pas cacher*"–not kosher–is affixed to this collage.) Are these the phrases and figures that haunt his father's dreams? How complex and layered is the paternal legacy as Mandelbaum envisions it-a legacy of dignity and profanation, of survival and provocation.

It's helpful to remember that Mandelbaum was working in a Europe still divided by an Iron Curtain into zones of influence between East and West, and where the wounds of war, though papered over with oblivion, were still relatively fresh. The elderly baker who handed you your morning pastry in Brussels or Antwerp

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5 Victoria Aarons, email exchange with the author, May 1, 2023.

6 Pictured in *Stéphane Mandelbaum*, Centre Pompidou catalog, 16.

might have a number tattooed on their arm. Daily life had proceeded, but the ripple effects of trauma were washing over a new generation while those who looked intently were still finding fascists, both lurking on the margins of and occupying high positions in society.

Were neofascist, right-wing forces responsible for Pasolini's 1975 murder, ostensibly the outcome of a homosexual tryst gone wrong? And who had killed another of Mandelbaum's heroes and recurrent subjects, the philosopher, political activist, and former small-time criminal Pierre Goldman [PL. 3]? Goldman, thirty-five years old, had been gunned down in 1979 while leaving his home in Paris. An indistinct far-right group, Honneur de la police, had claimed responsibility, but no one has ever been tried for the crime.

Arié Mandelbaum had given Stéphane a copy of Goldman's remarkable 1975 memoir, *Souvenirs obscurs d'un juif polonais né en France* (*Dim Memories of a Polish Jew Born in France*). Born during the war, the son of two Polish Jewish Resistance fighters, and shadowed for years by the memory of his parents' wartime daring, Goldman spent much of his adult life searching for a heroic destiny of his own. During the general strikes of May 1968 in Paris, for example, while cooling his heels and waiting to join the armed movement for revolution in Venezuela, he found the Parisian students' protests puerile. He proposed that, to defend the Sorbonne, they launch grenades rather than paving stones.[7]



"I was possessed with a taste for action," Goldman wrote, "invaded by the dream and desire for history, and I wanted that history to be violent, to liberate myself from the bruise of my identity as a Jew…"[8] His fascination with violence also led him to commit armed robbery, though his memoir, penned while serving a life sentence in prison, helped earn him a retrial, acquittal, and release after he was unjustly convicted of murder. Peripatetic and a perpetual outsider, Goldman often sought refuge among the Guadeloupian community in Paris, just as Mandelbaum–triply an outsider, with his Jewish roots, dyslexia, and identity as an artist–would later seek relief and eventually marry among the Congolese immigrant community in Brussels.

Mandelbaum drew three portraits of Goldman and included text from his memoir in a 1980 drawing [PL. 36], where above the image

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7 Pierre Goldman, *Souvenirs obscurs d'un juif polonais né en France* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), 74–75.

8 Ibid., 34. My translation.

of a grinning kosher butcher, we read: "I was dancing with a woman who was a Jewish whore and who spoke to me in Yiddish and Polish. I felt strange. She looked at me with a pallid smile." The blasphemous language (Jewish whore), the sense of uncanniness and dislocation, the surprise of finding an intimate connection to family history in an alien context-all of it relates to the profound estrangement from society at large that was an integral part of their Jewish heritage for both men. The "butcher" evokes both Mandelbaum's studies in the Brussels slaughterhouses and also the mohel who presides at a Jewish baby boy's circumcision, a rite traditionally performed eight days after birth and marking him according to the covenant of Jewish law-sealing his identity with an act of contained and ritualized violence.

Goldman and Mandelbaum were not alone in responding to the memory of the Shoah with violence, whether real or imagined. In *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors*, Helen Epstein recounts a 1977 meeting in Toronto with Eli Rubenstein, a PhD student in Philosophy, devout Jew, and the son of Hungarian Jewish survivors. "When you live after the fact, you feel an impotent rage," Rubenstein said. "You ask, why didn't anyone do something to stop it?...One of my fantasies today, something I still have at the age of twenty-nine, is getting my hands on a Nazi. I think of all of them as one person who killed my family. I would like to torture and mutilate him. It scares me when I have thoughts like that. It shocks me because I am not a violent person. In normal circumstances I can't imagine myself doing violence to any other human being."[9]



As an artist, Stéphane Mandelbaum's first impulse was to put his fantasies on the page. Portraiture, his primary genre, was démodé in the art world of the day, and drawing itself was still considered a minor practice. Yet in his focus on faces and reliance on photography Mandelbaum was also in step with a number of artists and filmmakers working with memory and loss in that era. In Paris, Christian Boltanski had begun creating installations based on found photographs, often of prewar European Jewish children, their faces enlarged (sometimes beyond recognition) and illuminated in makeshift altars. Later on, in Germany toward the end of the 1980s, Gerhard Richter would begin an elegiac series of blurry, black-and-white portraits based on newspaper photographs of members of the

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9 Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), 21.

Baader-Meinhof Group, an extremist, left-wing terrorist organization also known as the Red Army Faction and active in West Germany since the early 1970s. After their arrest, several of its members had been found dead in their prison cells.

And in the '70s and early '80s, the director Claude Lanzmann was at work on his epic film, *Shoah*, which told the story of the destruction of European Jewry through the testimony of both the survivors of the Nazi death camps and their executioners. *Shoah* is above all a drama of words and faces. Mandelbaum saw the over-nine-hour film multiple times upon its release in 1985, and cited the names of survivors whom Lanzmann interviewed and of the death camps in his drawings.

Meanwhile, in London, Francis Bacon was remaking Expressionism, painting from photographs of his subjects, who included his lovers and friends. The photographs, he said, afforded him the necessary distance to "injure" them in paint, twisting and deforming their features.[10] Mandelbaum read Bacon's interviews with the art critic David Sylvester and repeatedly portrayed both Bacon [PLS. 17–21] and his favorite model and muse, the dapper East Ender and one-time petty criminal George Dyer [PL. 9], another figure marked by a tragic destiny.[11]



Perhaps it was this desire to "injure" his subjects, or for control and mastery over the troubled family history he had inherited, that prompted Mandelbaum's repeated drawings of Joseph Goebbels (Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda under the Third Reich) and Ernst Röhm (head of the notoriously violent SA militia, aka brownshirts, and executed by Hitler, who used the excuse of Röhm's homosexuality to snuff out a potential rival.)

Goebbels is depicted in mid-scream [PL. 38], an image based upon a photograph taken during a speech he gave in Berlin on May 1, 1933, following which, nine days later, right-wing German students would burn close to 25,000 "un-German" books-by Jews, leftists, modernists, and others-in Berlin and in dozens of university towns across Germany.[12]

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10 David Sylvester, *Francis Bacon: Interviewed by David Sylvester* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 41.

11 Dyer met Bacon in 1963, and toward the end of their seven-year liaison, he died of an overdose in their Paris hotel room on the eve of Bacon's retrospective at the Grand Palais.

12 "Book Burning," Holocaust Encyclopedia, website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/book-burning.

In Mandelbaum's portrait, Goebbels appears consumed by his own words. The mouth is often a site of tension in Mandelbaum's self-portraits, the organ of language and of appetites that had tormented him. Here Goebbel's prodigious hunger for dominance and control, expressed through language, is made chillingly manifest. The content of his speech, the words he is pronouncing, seem almost irrelevant. (When the drawing was first exhibited in the corridors of the art school at Uccle, a fellow student had defaced it with a speech bubble containing the words, "Job, I'm thirsty." Mandelbaum had covered the graffiti with white, using it to highlight the blankness of Goebbels's speech.) The Nazi dignitary's rapacious desire to bend others to his will is everything.

If drawing Goebbels was also a way of silencing the deafening roar of his propagandistic speech, in other drawings by Mandelbaum written language intervenes into the visual landscape–a slippery decoy, multiple, sometimes defiling, with idiosyncratic or phonetic spellings pointing to the primacy of oral speech, and certainly not always to be believed. It's as if, with logorrhea, he were attempting to recreate for the viewer the scrambled and elusive textual puzzles that confronted him for years as, dyslexic, he struggled to learn to read.



Consider his late portrait of a hauntingly beautiful, dark-eyed, androgynous figure with sensual lips, where low on the page, we read: "Portrait of Annie, Homosexual, Jewish Whore," and under that, "Mad in Polen." Are these accurate verbal descriptions or projections of a fantasy world onto a real-life model? Polen = Poland (in German), Mad = Made (in dyslexic English spelling) or perhaps Maid. The various slippages of meaning and reference remind us that, despite the aesthetic distance separating the two artists, we are in the country of Magritte and his *The Treachery of Images*, aka *Ceci n'est pas un pipe*.

Mandelbaum continued delving deeply into Yiddish. Despite the challenges of dyslexia and inspired by existing translations, in 1984 he translated and illustrated a volume of poems by Peretz Markish, a Russian Jewish Yiddish Expressionist and a victim of Stalinist pogroms. That same year he married Claudia Bisiono-Nagliema, a Congolese emmigré whom he met in Brussels, and adopted her young daughter, Nadine, to whom he taught Yiddish through the medium of drawing. (A Yiddish glossary may be found among his scribbles [PL. 40].)

At some point–perhaps it was when he and his father exhibited and led a series of workshops in a prison at Arlon–he began to make contact with a nighttime underworld of criminals that existed

alongside his daylight hours of teaching and artmaking. Who knows exactly when he had begun to feel its pull? And this shadow world of prostitutes and gangsters also began to people his drawings. In 1985, he was accorded two one-person exhibitions of drawings in galleries in Furnes and Brussels, but sales of his art were few. The following year he traveled with his wife to meet her family in Congo, and with a scheme for trafficking in African art, but that bore little fruit. That same year he was involved in two thefts; the last one in October, of a painting by Modligliani (another Jewish *artiste maudit*) entitled *La Femme au camée*, from an elderly woman in Ixelles, an affluent suburb of Brussels. The painting, also reputed to be a forgery, has never been recovered. The theft cost Mandelbaum his life. But his work remains, a series of pages torn from a life of singular passions, haunted by the rebellious ghosts of history.[13]



13 Stéphane Mandelbaum disappeared on December 1, 1986. The following January his body was found by children playing near a rocky cave in Namur, in central Belgium. He had been killed by a blow to the head, then shot, and his face disfigured with acid, perhaps to make the body harder to identify.

# Sketches

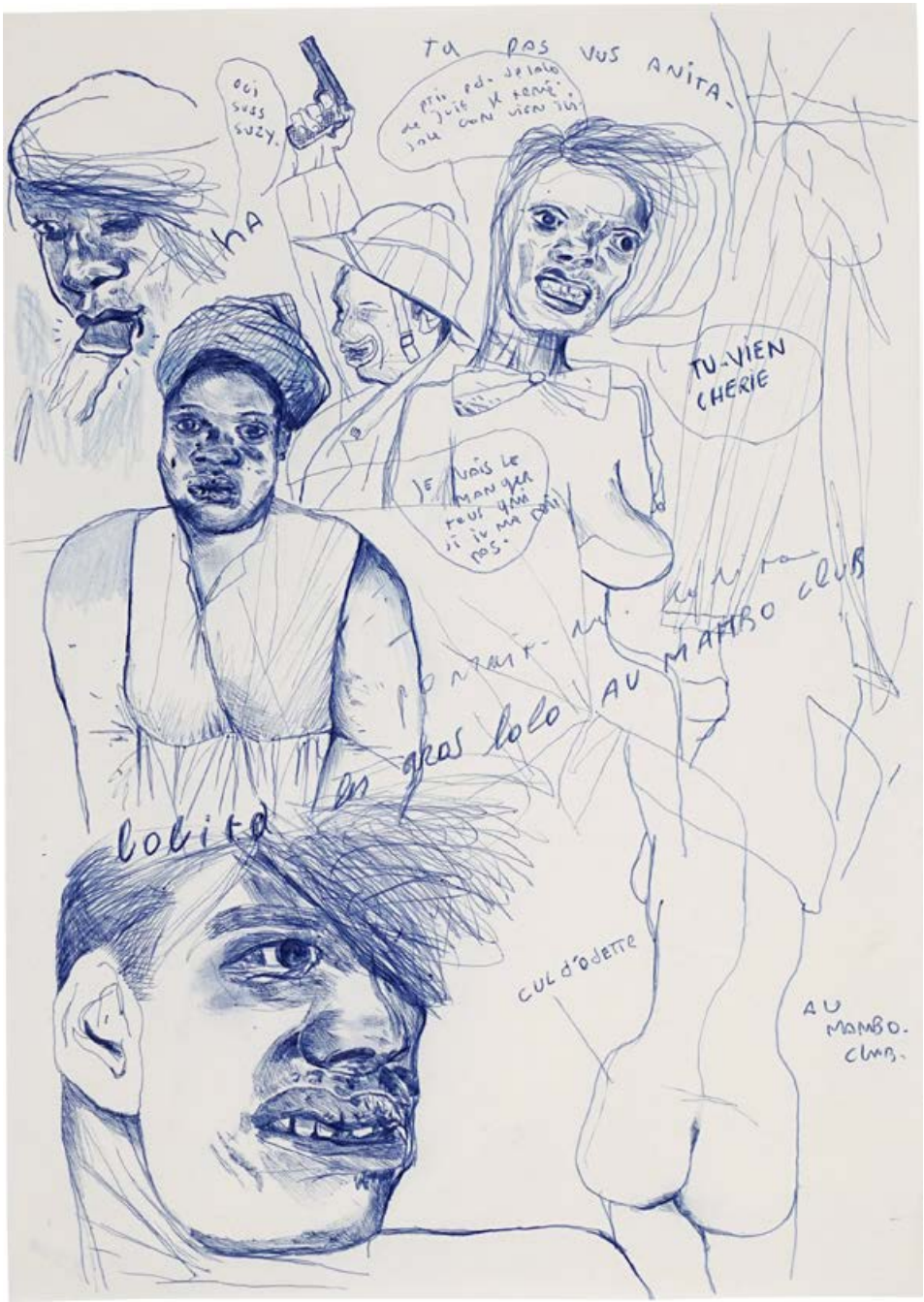

PL. 44
*Untitled*, 1985-86


PL. 45
*Untitled* (from the series "l'oeuvre intime" [intimate work]), 1985-86

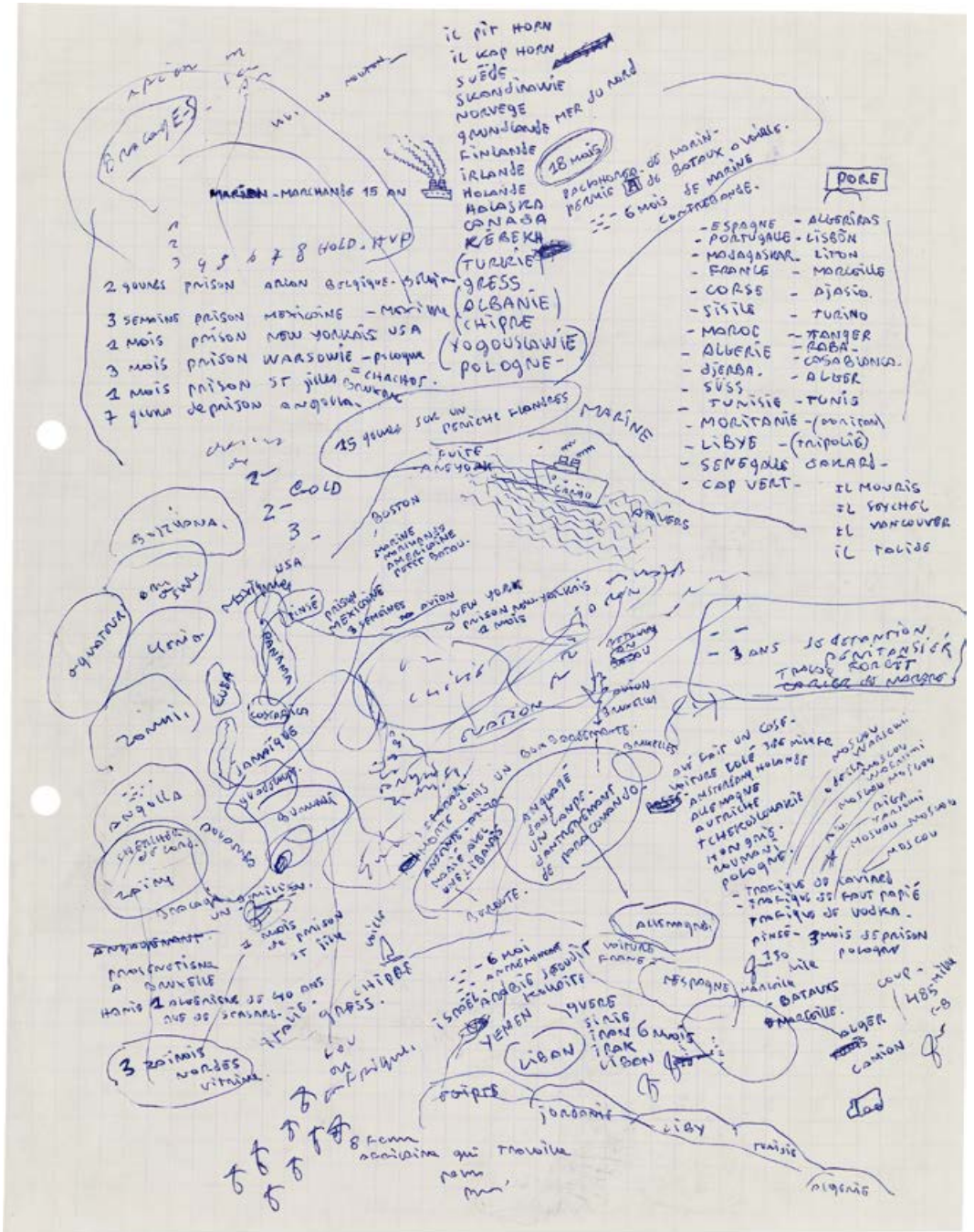

PL. 46
*Blue Note*, 1985


PL. 47
*Rovné (Henri Gerro Rosita Londner au Mambo Club)* (Rovné [Henri Gerro Rosita Londner at the Mambo Club]), 1985

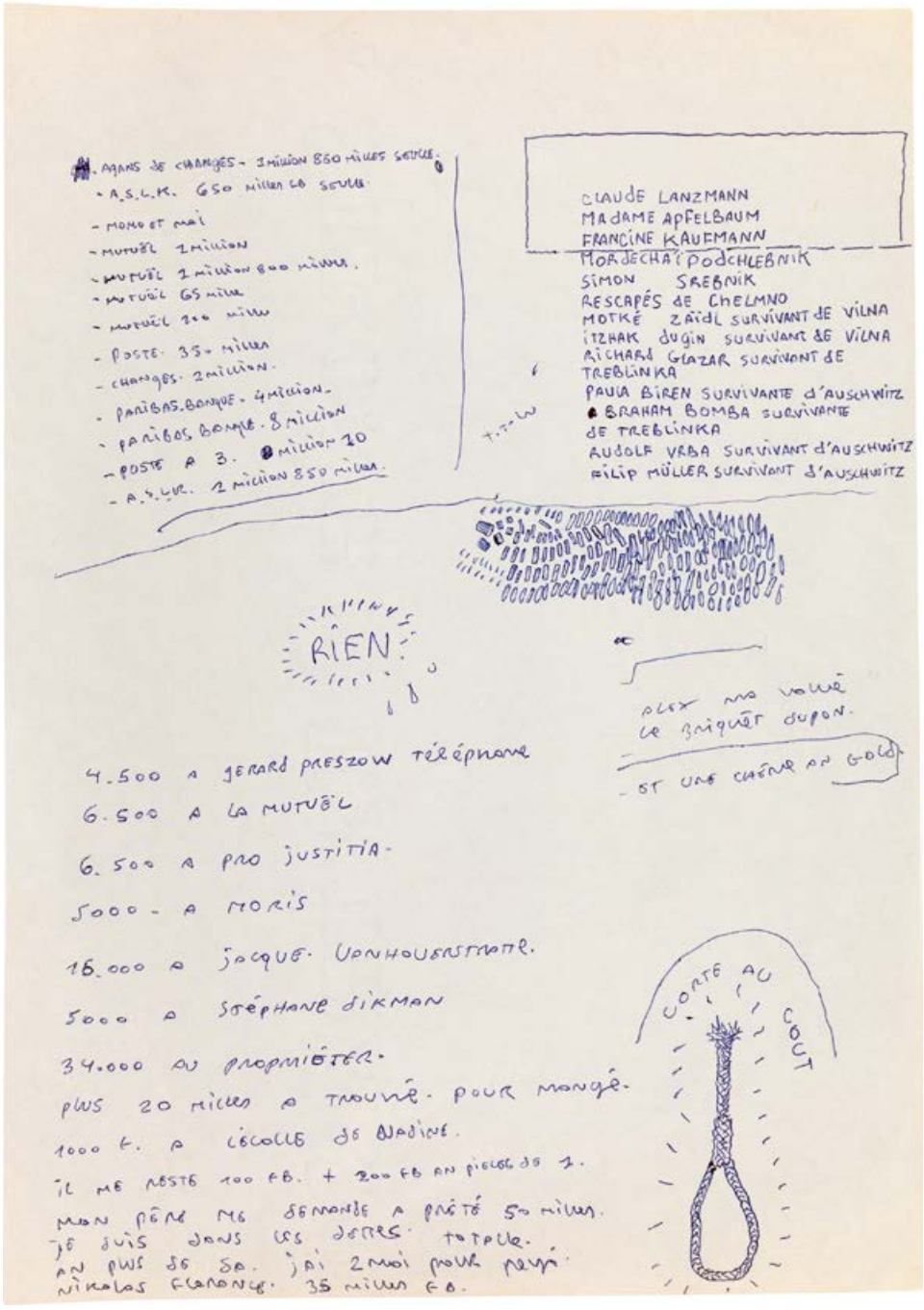

PL. 48
*Mambo Club soirée (Portrait de Delval Mambo)* (Mambo Club Party [Portrait of Delval Mambo]), 1985



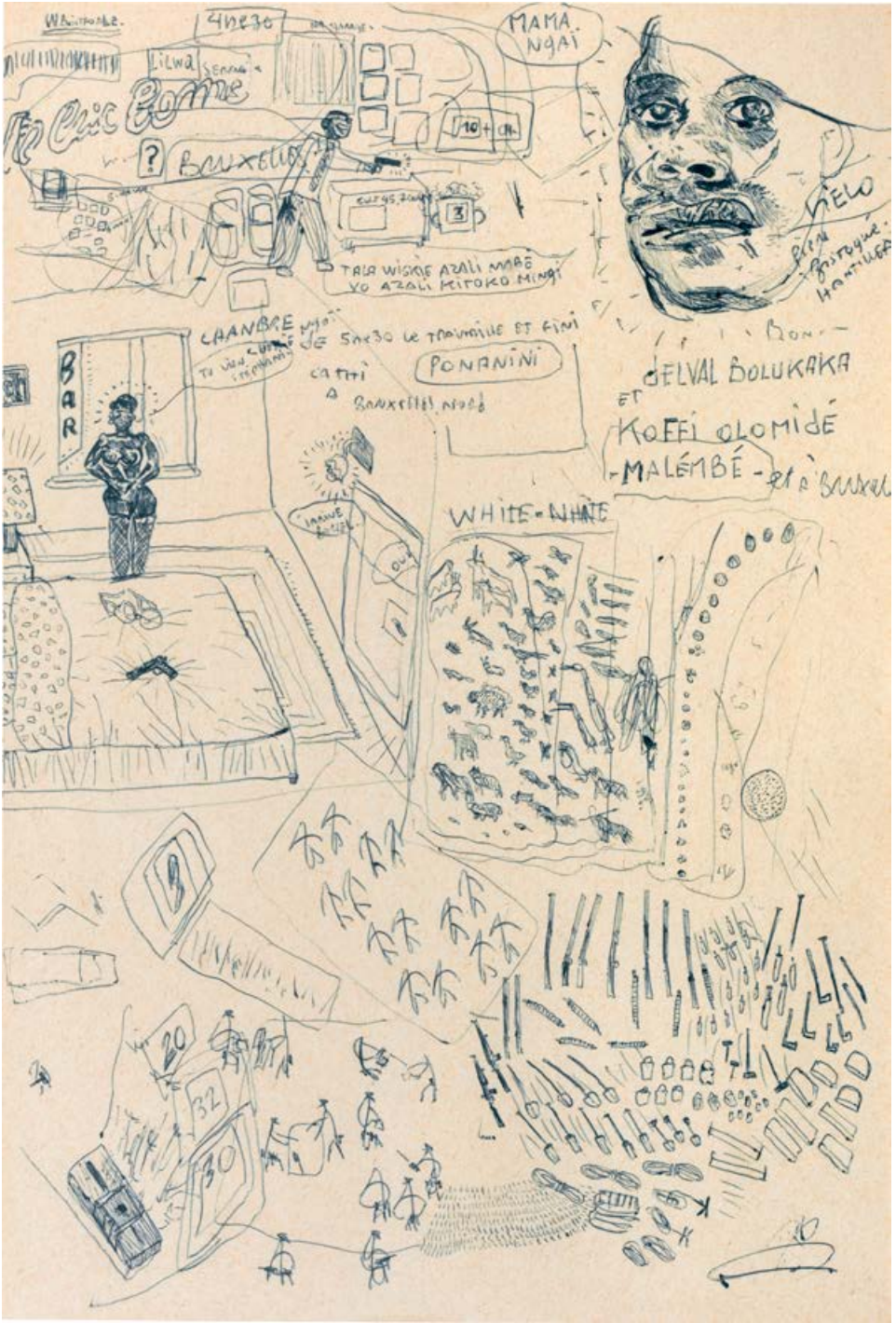

PL. 49
*Lolita les gros lolos au Mambo Club* (Lolita with the big boobs at the Mambo Club), 1985



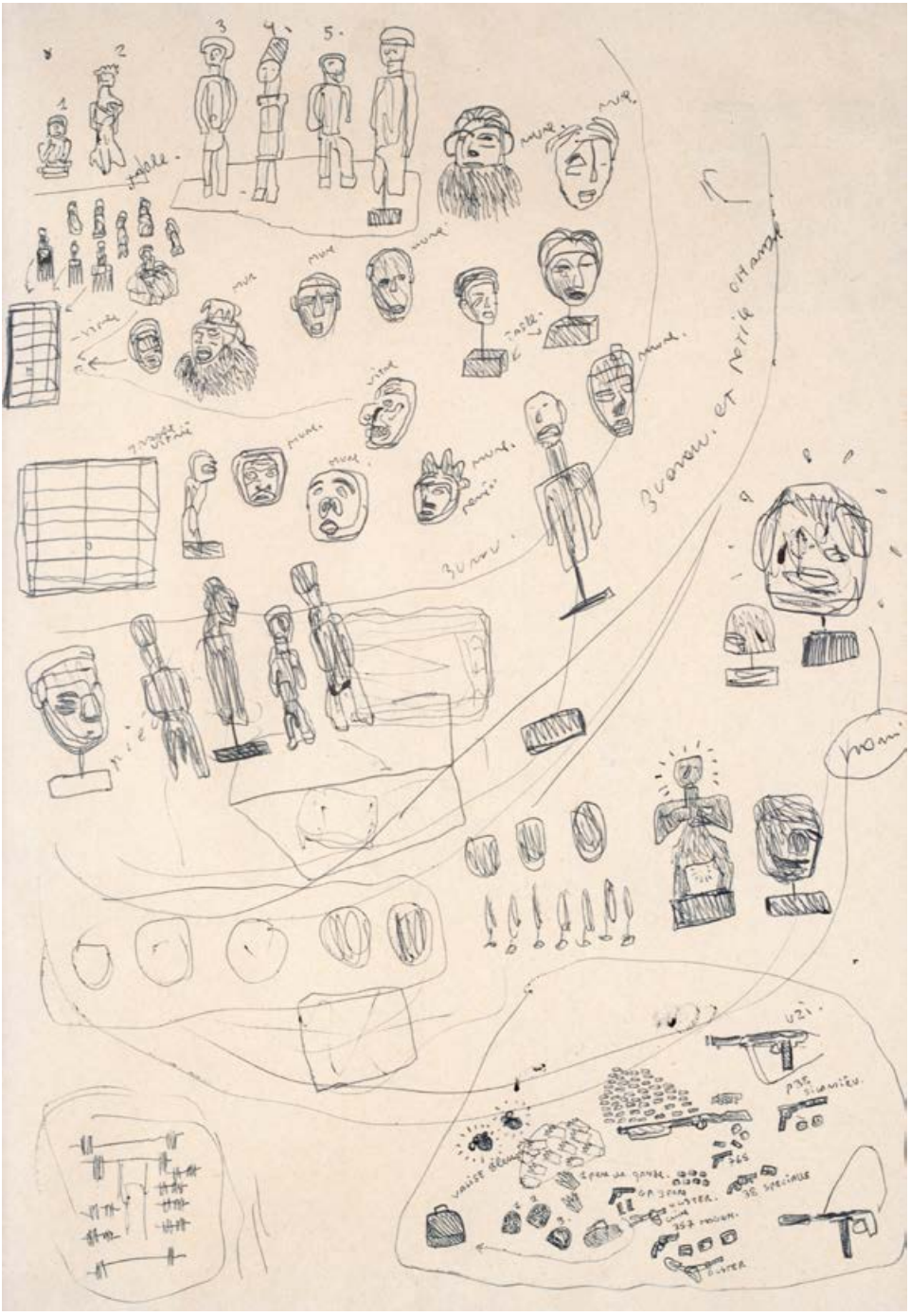
PL. 50
*Untitled*, 1985-86




PL. 51
*Untitled*, 1985-86

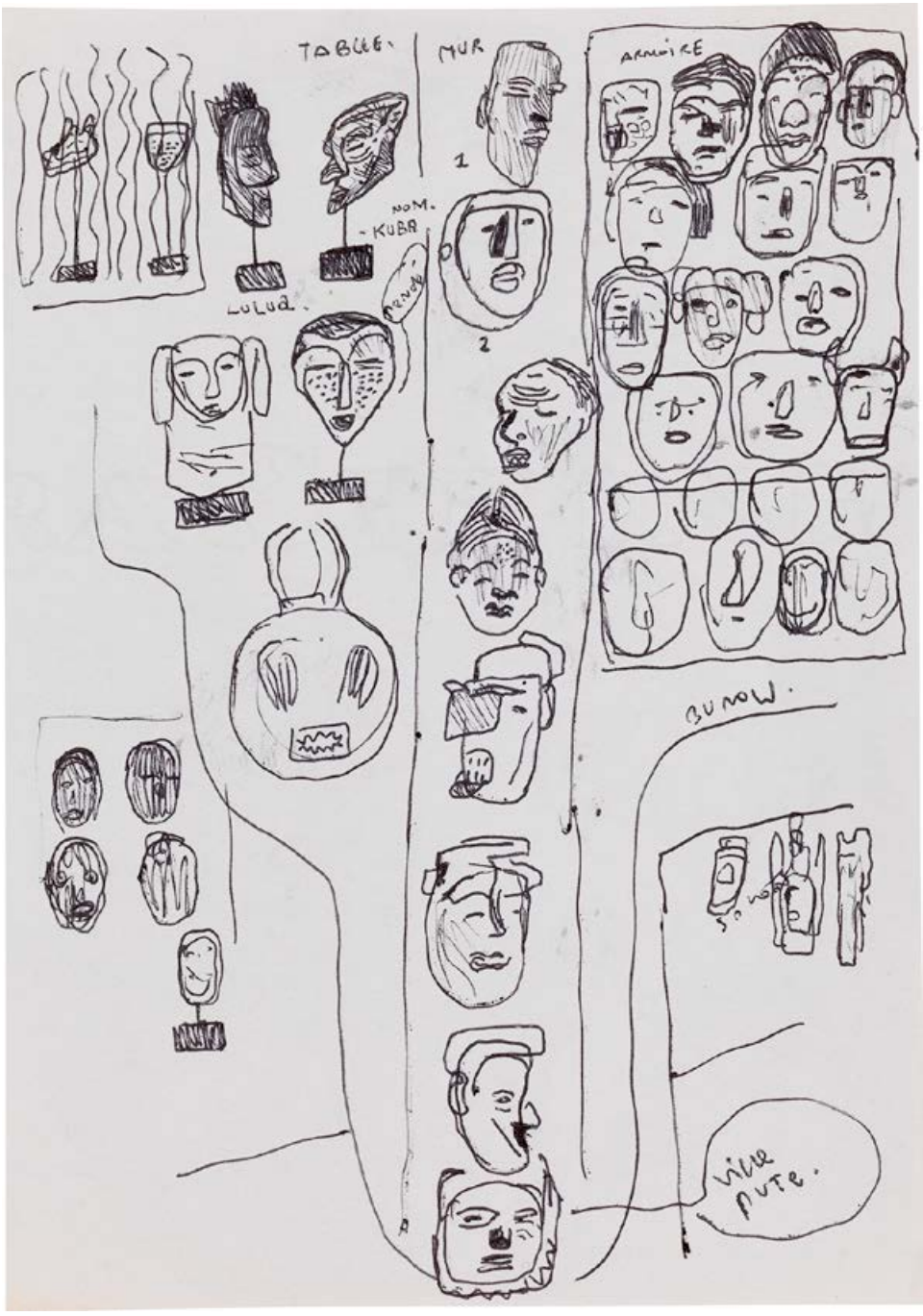



PL. 52
*Mama Ngaï*, 1985-86



PL. 53
*Untitled*, 1985-86


PL. 54
*Untitled*, 1985-86




PL. 55
*Untitled*, 1985-86


PL. 56
*Chez Léon Ficherman* (At Léon Ficherman's), 1985

# A Chronology of Stéphane Mandelbaum's Life and Work

Isabella Kapur



**1961**

Stéphane Mandelbaum is born on March 8 in Brussels, Belgium, to parents Arié Mandelbaum, a painter, and Pili Mandelbaum, an illustrator. He is the second-born of their three sons, between his elder brother Ariéh and his younger brother Alexandre. Of Armenian descent on his mother's side and Polish Jewish descent on his father's, Stéphane eventually connects to his Jewish identity through his paternal grandfather, Szulim, who immigrated to Belgium in 1924.

**1968** / 7 YEARS OLD

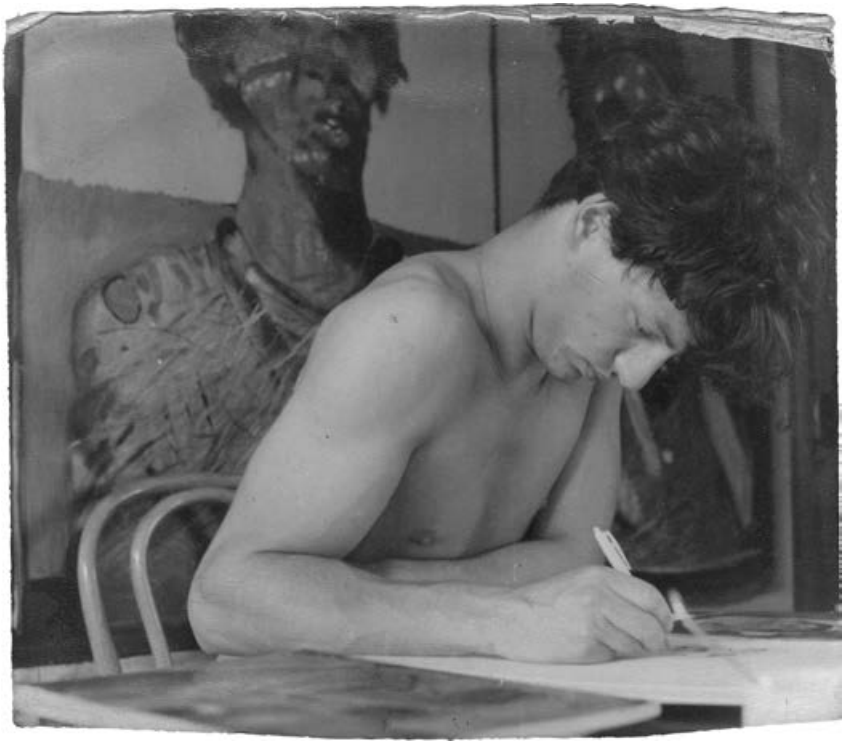
Mandelbaum begins drawing constantly. He develops some of the motifs that will continue to appear in his future drawings, in particular scribbled soldiers that resemble the number "4." Battle and war are prevalent in his drawings from this time.

**1970** / 9 YEARS OLD

Mandelbaum's work is exhibited at *Le Chat écarlate*, a performance space in Brussels. Around this time, Pili and Arié Mandelbaum separate.

**1972** / 11 YEARS OLD

Struggling with traditional schooling, in part due to his dyslexia, Mandelbaum is sent to an alternative boarding school, Le Snark, south of Brussels. He attends Le Snark for four years, during which time his writing improves. The comics he reads as a child, like *The Adventures of Tintin* and *Les Pieds Nickelés*, influence how he draws and will be referenced in his later artworks.



Stéphane Mandelbaum drawing, c. 1979

**1976** / 15 YEARS OLD

Mandelbaum enrolls at the Académie des Beaux-Arts de Watermael-Boitsfort in Brussels and takes night classes, including figure drawing taught by artist Lucien Braet. At the Académie des Beaux-Arts Mandelbaum befriends Pierre Thoma and Alain Thorez, the latter of whom shares his fascination with crime, especially theft. During this period he learns about painter Francis Bacon, who will influence both the subject matter and form of Mandelbaum's work throughout his career. He also spends time visiting slaughterhouses and drawing what he sees there– hooks and raw meat begin to appear in his paintings. Mandelbaum primarily works in oil paint during this period, drawing only as a casual practice and throwing away the sketches. When friends show an interest in the drawings, he begins to keep them intact and share them with others.



**1978** / 17 YEARS OLD

Mandelbaum, along with his then girlfriend Catherine Vanandruel, visits Italy to see pre-Renaissance and early Renaissance art. The two spend a night on a beach in Ostia, where Mandelbaum believes poet and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, one of his idol-subjects, was murdered just three years prior. Around this time, he develops a series of habits and routines for making art, including wearing various pieces of headwear that relate to his subjects–for instance, a headband reminiscent of Pasolini in *The Decameron* and of the most famous image of Yukio Mishima. Mandelbaum sees several films, both violent and erotic in nature, that make their way into his work, including Pasolini's *Pigsty*, Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter*, Nagisa Oshima's *In the Realm of the Senses*, and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. The Académie des Beaux-Arts arranges a trip to Paris, where Mandelbaum meets Birgit Eggers, with whom he will later become romantically involved.

**1979** / 18 YEARS OLD

Mandelbaum leaves the Académie des Beaux-Arts de Watermael-Boitsfort following an argument with instructor Lucien Braet. He enrolls at the École des Arts in Uccle (Brussels), where his father has been the director since 1966. In addition to attending the school, he often acts as his father's teaching assistant. Among his courses are figure drawing and an engraving workshop led by Anne Wolfers. Between 1979 and 1981 he creates a large number of drypoint prints

based on Wolfers's workshop, including distorted self-portraits, erotic images, portraits of Francis Bacon and his grandfather Szulim Mandelbaum, and war scenes. During this time, he also begins to learn Yiddish, influenced in part by his grandfather, and begins boxing, transforming his body from slim to muscular in a matter of months.

**1980** / 19 YEARS OLD

Mandelbaum wins the Trait-Couleur-Volume arts competition of the Crédit Communal de Belgique. While visiting Paris, Mandelbaum sees an exhibition of the work of Hokusai. He starts dating Birgit Eggers, whose name appears in some of his drawings.



**1981** / 20 YEARS OLD

Mandelbaum participates in the exhibitions *Neuf peintres juifs* (Cercle Ben Gourion, Brussels) and *Uccle-Veurne* (Galerie Hugo Godderis, Veurne). He completes his schooling at the École des Arts in Uccle. Adopting the name Malek in some social settings, Mandelbaum also signs some of his work Stéphane Malek Mandelbaum.

**1982** / 21 YEARS OLD

Mandelbaum participates in the exhibition *Nouveau mouvement réaliste* at the Galerie Rencontres in Brussels. In May, he exhibits drawings at the bookshop L'Île lettrée in Virton.

**1983** / 22 YEARS OLD

Alongside his father, Mandelbaum exhibits at the Arlon prison. He begins to draw anonymous subjects, people he meets through his underworld connections, rather than the well-known figures from the past who have previously occupied his work. Many of these drawings make reference to the bars and clubs he frequents, including Mambo Club and Bar Albertine.

**1984** / 23 YEARS OLD

Mandelbaum marries Claudia Bisiono-Nagliema and adopts her daughter, Nadine. He teaches Nadine Yiddish through drawing. Mandelbaum's illustrated translation of the poems of Soviet Jewish playwright Peretz Markish is published in the journal *Revue et corrigée* (no. 17, winter 1984–1985). For work he assists his father at the École d'Art.

Stéphane Mandelbaum and Claudia Bisiono-Nagliema, 1985

**1985** / 24 YEARS OLD

Exhibitions of Mandelbaum's work are held at the Galerie Hugo Godderis in Veurne and at the Galerie Christine Colmant in Brussels in November. Stéphane invites his grandfather Szulim to the exhibition at Galerie Christine Colmant, anxious for his grandfather's opinion on his provocative subject matter. Following the exhibition, Szulim notes to Arié Mandelbaum that Stéphane "has gold in his fingertips."

**1986** / 25 YEARS OLD

Mandelbaum writes his own obituary, which includes a drawing of a family tree. Throughout his life he makes it clear he believes he will die young, much like the majority of the subjects of his drawings.



From April to May Mandelbaum travels with Claudia to her home town in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Finding little success or recognition for his art, Mandelbaum begins to commit burglaries. On August 29, he steals netsuke statuettes from a home in Auderghem. Mandelbaum is then hired to steal a Modigliani from a woman in Ixelles, and he commits the theft on October 12. The painting turns out to be a fake, and Ram Weinbaum, who hired Mandelbaum and his associates to steal the painting, refuses to pay them. When Mandelbaum insists on his payment, Weinbaum orders his murder. Mandelbaum disappears on December 1. Sixteen days later, the Mandelbaum family receives a fake message suggesting that Stéphane is detained in a jail in Beirut, though in reality, he has already died.

**1987**

In January children find Mandelbaum's body beneath a bridge near Namur, Belgium. An autopsy reveals that his murderers smashed him over the head, shot him, and burned his face with acid.

**1993**

Gérard Preszow releases his film about Stéphane Mandelbaum and his art, *La Sainteté Stéphane*.

**1996**

*Stéphane Mandelbaum*, a film by Jean-Pierre Sougy, is released.

**2000**

The documentary *Mad in Polen, Portrait de Stéphane Mandelbaum* by Stéphane Collin is released.

**2014**

Based on interviews with the artist's friends, family, and romantic partners, Gilles Sebhan's novel about Mandelbaum's life, *Mandelbaum ou le rêve d'Auschwitz,* is published.

**2019**

The Centre Pompidou in Paris holds an exhibition of Stéphane Mandelbaum's work from March 6 to May 20. Mandelbaum's work is also shown at Musée Juif de Belgique in Brussels.

**2022**

The exhibition *Stéphane Mandelbaum* opens at Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK) in Frankfurt, Germany, on April 14. It remains on view until January 1, 2023.



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## Works in the Exhibition

PL. 1
*Autoportrait (pour maman)*
(Self-portrait [for mom]), 1979
Graphite on paper
37 5/16 x 25 5/8 inches (95 x 65 cm)
Mandelbaum Estate Collection

PL. 2
*Kismatores! (Portrait d'Arié Mandelbaum)*
(Kiss my Ass! [Portrait
of Arié Mandelbaum]), 1982
Graphite lead, color pencil, and
collage on paper
59 x 46 7/16 inches (150 x 118 cm)
Private collection

PL. 3
*Pierre Goldman*, 1980
Graphite and collage on paper
mounted on canvas
59 1/16 x 43 3/8 inches (150 x 110 cm)
Bernard Prévot Collection, Brussels

PL. 4
*Ernst Röhm*, 1981
Graphite, gouache, marker, and
color pencil on paper
54 3/4 x 47 1/4 inches (139 x 120 cm)
Collection Bilinelli, Milan

PL. 5
*P. Röm (N°1 / Porträit der Röm)*
(P. Röm [N°1 / Portrait of Röm]), 1981
Graphite, charcoal, and color pencil
on paper
59 7/8 x 45 1/4 inches (152 x 115 cm)
Museum für Moderne Kunst,
Frankfurt am Main

PL. 6
*Rainer (Portrait de Rainer Werner
Fassbinder)* (Rainer [Portrait of Rainer
Werner Fassbinder]), c. 1984
Graphite, charcoal, and color pencil
on paper
58 1/4 x 42 9/16 inches (148 x 108.5 cm)
Private collection

PL. 7
*Portrait de José* (Portrait of José), 1985
Graphite on paper
63 x 52 3/4 inches (160.5 x 134 cm)
Antoine de Galbert Collection, Paris

PL. 8
*Portrait de Ousman*
(Portrait of Ousman), 1985
Graphite on paper
68 1/2 x 52 3/4 inches (174 x 134 cm)
Museum für Moderne Kunst,
Frankfurt am Main

PL. 9
*George Dyer*, 1982
Graphite on paper
59 x 47 1/4 inches (150 x 120 cm)
Collection Bilinelli, Milan

PL. 10
*Portrait de Max* (Portrait of Max), 1984
Graphite on paper
59 1/16 x 47 1/4 inches (150 x 120 cm)
Museum für Moderne Kunst,
Frankfurt am Main

PL. 11
*Portrait von punk türk (Hugo)*
(Portrait of a Turkish punk [Hugo]), 1984
Felt pen, color pencil, graphite lead,
and collage on paper
58 7/16 x 46 7/8 inches (148.5 x 119 cm)
Collection of Gil Weiss, Brussels

PL. 12
*Cadre dans un café rose*
(Executive in a red-light café), 1984
Graphite on paper
59 x 43 inches (150 x 109 cm)
Private collection

PL. 13
*L'Albertine Bar (Beautiful Deception)* (Albertine Bar [Beautiful Deception]), 1986
Charcoal and graphite on paper
59 x 45 1/4 inches (150 x 115 cm)
Private collection, France

PL. 14
*Bar Albertine Bruxelles Nord* (Bar Albertine North Brussels), 1985
Graphite on paper
58 1/4 x 49 5/8 inches (148 x 126 cm)
Private collection, Brussels

PL. 15
*Portrait de Meknil* (Portrait of Meknil), 1985
Graphite on paper
67 x 51 1/8 inches (170 x 130 cm)
Private collection

PL. 16
*Autoportrait* (Self-portrait), c. 1980
Graphite on paper
30 3/8 x 18 7/8 inches (77 x 48 cm)
DNA Collection

PL. 17
*Bacon et prédelle avec portrait d'Arié* (Bacon and predella with portrait of Arié), 1982
Graphite on paper
23 1/2 x 19 inches (59.6 x 48.3 cm)
Collection of Paula Hauser, Brussels

PL. 18
*Portrait of Bacon*, 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
9 7/8 x 10 7/16 inches (25 x 26.5 cm)
Private collection, Paris, France

PL. 19
*Composition (Portrait of Bacon)*, 1980
Ballpoint pen and color marker on paper
19 11/16 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Private collection, Brussels

PL. 20
*Francis Bacon*, 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 13/16 x 15 3/4 inches (30 x 40 cm)
Collection K. Hoss, Meudon

PL. 21
*Portrait of Bacon*, 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
18 1/2 x 27 1/8 inches (47 x 69 cm)
Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main

PL. 22
*Luis Buñuel* from the "Postcard Series," 1985
Ballpoint pen on paper
5 1/2 x 4 1/8 inches (14 x 10.5 cm)
Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main

PL. 23
*José* from the "Postcard Series," 1985
Ballpoint pen on paper
5 1/2 x 4 1/8 inches (14 x 10.5 cm)
Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main

PL. 24
*Pasolini n° 8*, 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
19 11/16 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Collection C. J. J., Brussels

PL. 25
*Pier Paolo Pasolini (Antonello de Messine, Pietà, 1477-1478)*, 1980
Ballpoint pen, marker, and collage on paper
20 3/8 x 28 inches (51.7 x 71.2 cm)
Courtesy of Galerie Zlotowski

PL. 26
*Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 1980
Ballpoint pen and marker on paper
19 11/16 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Collection of Robert Combas

PL. 27
*Pasolini*, 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
19 11/16 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Private collection, Brussels

PL. 28
*Composition (Mishima, Bacon…)*, 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
6 9/16 x 9 1/4 inches (16.7 x 23.5 cm)
Collection K. Hoss, Meudon

PL. 29
*A. Rimbaud*, 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
19 11/16 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Mandelbaum Estate Collection

PL. 30
*Arthur Rimbaud*, 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
19 3/4 x 27 5/8 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Quenza Collection, USA

PL. 31
*Arthur Rimbaud I*, 1980
Drypoint on zinc printed on paper
9 5/8 x 7 7/8 inches (24.6 x 19.9 cm)
Mandelbaum Estate Collection

PL. 32
*Portrait von Rimbaud*
(Portrait of Rimbaud), c. 1980
India ink, ink, and ballpoint pen
19 5/8 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Collection of Lucien Bilinelli, Milan

PL. 33
*Composition (Goldman, L'Empire des sens, Guernica)* (Composition [Goldman, In the Realm of the Senses, Guernica]), c. 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
19 11/16 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Collection of Thierry de Valeriola

PL. 34
*Salomon Mandelbaum*, 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
21 1/4 x 22 7/8 inches (54 x 58 cm)
Mandelbaum Estate Collection

PL. 35
*Salomon Mandelbaum (d'après une photo de 1929)* (Salomon Mandelbaum [from a 1929 photo]), 1981
Ballpoint pen on paper
19 11/16 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Private collection, Brussels

PL. 36
*Shohet*, 1980
Ballpoint pen and marker on paper
19 11/16 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Private collection, Brussels

PL. 37
*Goebbels* [recto], 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
19 11/16 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Antoine de Galbert Collection, Paris

PL. 38
*Goebbels*, 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
18 1/2 x 21 9/16 inches (47 x 55 cm)
Private collection

PL. 39
*Composition (Cul-de-jatte au brassard à croix gammée)* (Composition [legless person with swastika armband]), 1980
Ballpoint pen on paper
19 11/16 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Antoine de Galbert Collection, Paris

PL. 40
*Composition à la figure rouge*
(Red figure composition), 1984
Ballpoint pen, marker, and gouache on paper
18 1/8 x 24 inches (46 x 61 cm)
Private collection, Brussels

PL. 41
*Composition (Figure au masque)*
(Composition [Mask figure]), c. 1981
Ballpoint pen, color pencil, and graphite on paper
10 5/8 x 14 9/16 inches (27 x 37 cm)
Private collection, Belgium

PL. 42
*Composition (El Kero)*, 1981
Ballpoint pen, marker, and collage on paper
27 1/2 x 19 11/16 inches (69.8 x 50 cm)
Antoine de Galbert Collection, Paris

PL. 43
*Gueule cassée et autoportrait*
(Broken face and self-portrait), 1980
Ballpoint pen and collage on paper
19 11/16 x 27 1/2 inches (50 x 70 cm)
Private collection, Brussels

PL. 44
*Untitled*, 1985–86
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 5/8 x 8 1/4 inches (29.5 x 21 cm)
Courtesy Galerie Zlotowski

PL. 45
*Untitled* from the series "L'oeuvre intime" (intimate work), 1985–86
Ballpoint pen and felt on paper
11 11/16 x 21 1/4 inches (29.7 x 21 cm)
Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main

PL. 46
*Blue Note*, 1985
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 7/16 x 8 1/4 inches (29 x 21 cm)
Collection of Gil Weiss, Brussels

PL. 47
*Rovné (Henri Gerro Rosita Londner au Mambo Club)* (Rovné [Henri Gerro Rosita Londner at the Mambo Club]), 1985
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 3/8 x 8 1/4 inches (29 x 21 cm)
Collection of Gil Weiss, Brussels

PL. 48
*Mambo Club soirée (Portrait de Delval Mambo)* (Mambo Club Party [Portrait of Delval Mambo]), 1985
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 7/16 x 8 1/4 inches (29 x 21 cm)
Collection of Gil Weiss, Brussels

PL. 49
*Lolita les gros lolos au Mambo Club* (Lolita with the big boobs at the Mambo Club), 1985
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 3/8 x 8 1/4 inches (29 x 21 cm)
Collection of Gil Weiss, Brussels

PL. 50
*Untitled*, 1985–86
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 5/8 x 8 1/4 inches (29.5 x 21 cm)
Collection of Gérard Preszow

PL. 51
*Untitled*, 1985–86
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 5/8 x 8 1/4 inches (29.5 x 21 cm)
Collection of Gérard Preszow

PL. 52
*Mama Ngaï*, 1985–86
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 5/8 x 8 1/4 inches (29.5 x 21 cm)
Collection Dario Preszow, Brussels

PL. 53
*Untitled*, 1985–86
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 5/8 x 8 1/4 inches (29.5 x 21 cm)
Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main

PL. 54
*Untitled*, 1985–86
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 5/8 x 8 1/4 inches (29.5 x 21 cm)
Collection of Gérard Preszow

PL. 55
*Untitled*, 1985–86
Ballpoint pen on paper
11 5/8 x 8 1/4 inches (29.5 x 21 cm)
Collection of Gérard Preszow

PL. 56
*Chez Léon Ficherman* (At Léon Ficherman's), 1985
Ballpoint pen on paper
13 1/8 x 8 7/16 inches (33.3 x 21.5 cm)
Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main

PL. 57
*Autoportrait "aux crochets"* (Self-portrait "with hooks"), 1976
Oil on canvas
64 15/16 x 34 5/16 inches (165 x 88 cm)
Collection Dario Preszow, Brussels

## Figures

Gerhard Richter
*Uncle Rudi*, 1965
Oil on canvas
34 1/4 x 19 1/2 x 1 inches
(87 x 49.5 x 2.5 cm)
Památník Lidice / Lidice Memorial,
RIC.006 © Gerhard Richter 2022
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Joseph Beuys
*Sled #1*, 1969
Wood and metal sled, felt blanket,
canvas straps, flashlight, fat
15 1/2 x 35 1/2 x 14 inches
(39.4 x 90.2 x 35.6 cm)
Davis Museum at Wellesley College /
Art Resource, NY

Arié Mandelbaum
*Portrait of Stéphane*, 1976
Charcoal on cardboard
39 3/8 x 25 5/8 inches (100 x 65 cm)
Image courtesy of the artist

Luc Tuymans
*Gaskamer*, 1986
Oil on canvas
24 x 32 1/2 inches (61 x 82.5 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner
© Luc Tuymans
Photograph by Ben Blackwell

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Photograph by Philippe Migeat

PLS. 5, 10, 18, 20–23, 44, 53
Photograph by Bertrand Michau

PL. 12
Photograph by Félix Tirry

PLS. 11, 46–49
Photograph by Marc Lavand'homme

PLS. 3, 6, 8, 33
Photograph by Vincent Everarts

PLS. 19, 25, 36
Photograph by Frédéric Dehaen

PLS. 37, 39, 56
Photograph by Jean-Louis Losi

PL. 43
Photograph by Brice Vandermeeren

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Photograph by Michel Zavagno,
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PL. 30
Image © Bertrand Hugues,
Courtesy Quenza Collection, USA

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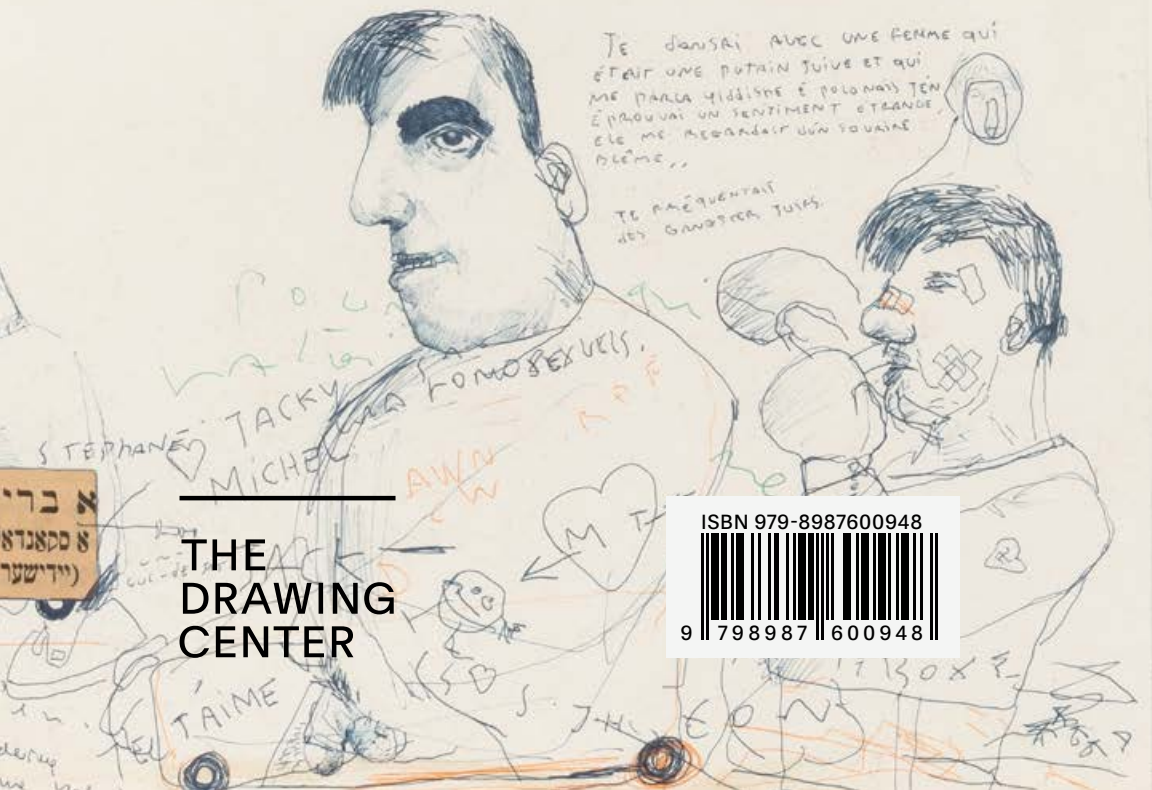
PL. 57 (FOLLOWING)
*Autoportrait "aux crochets"* (Self-portrait "with hooks"), 1976

# Stéphane Mandelbaum

A native of Brussels, Stéphane Mandelbaum (1961–1986) 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 Nazis Joseph Goebbels and Ernst Röhm as well as those from his fantasies like Arthur Rimbaud and Pier Paolo Pasolini. A grandson of Holocaust survivors, Mandelbaum aggressively appropriated images of Nazis, boldly drawing them over-life-size and juxtaposing them with Yiddish text, snippets of pornography, derisive caricatures, doodles, and lists. The representation of images that most people would prefer to avoid was an act of identity-building for a young, rebellious artist, but it was also an act of ownership of a history that Mandelbaum refused to allow to be buried.

Texts by Laura Hoptman, Leslie Camhi, and Isabella Kapur

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