



musée soulages
RODEZ

press release

MIGUEL CHEVALIER
PIXELS NOIR LUMIERE 2019

SOULAGES MUSEUM, RODEZ
19 APRIL - 26 MAY 2019

OPENING THURSDAY 18 APRIL 2019

Throughout 2019, "Siècle Soulages" under the aegis of Rodez agglomeration and the City of Rodez, will be rounding up different regional cultural stakeholders to pay tribute to the life and work of Pierre Soulages, a source of inspiration for artists across the generations, celebrating his 100th birthday on 24 December 2019.

The Soulages Museum obviously spearheads this programme and features in its line-up, the **Miguel Chevalier, Pixels Noir Lumière 2019** exhibition from 20 April to 26 May 2019.

In honour of Pierre Soulages, Miguel Chevalier respectfully takes over the temporary exhibition room of the Eponymous Museum and highlights his admiration for this iconic artist with such an innovative and radical artistic approach, firmly leaving his stamp on the history of art in the second half of the 20th century.

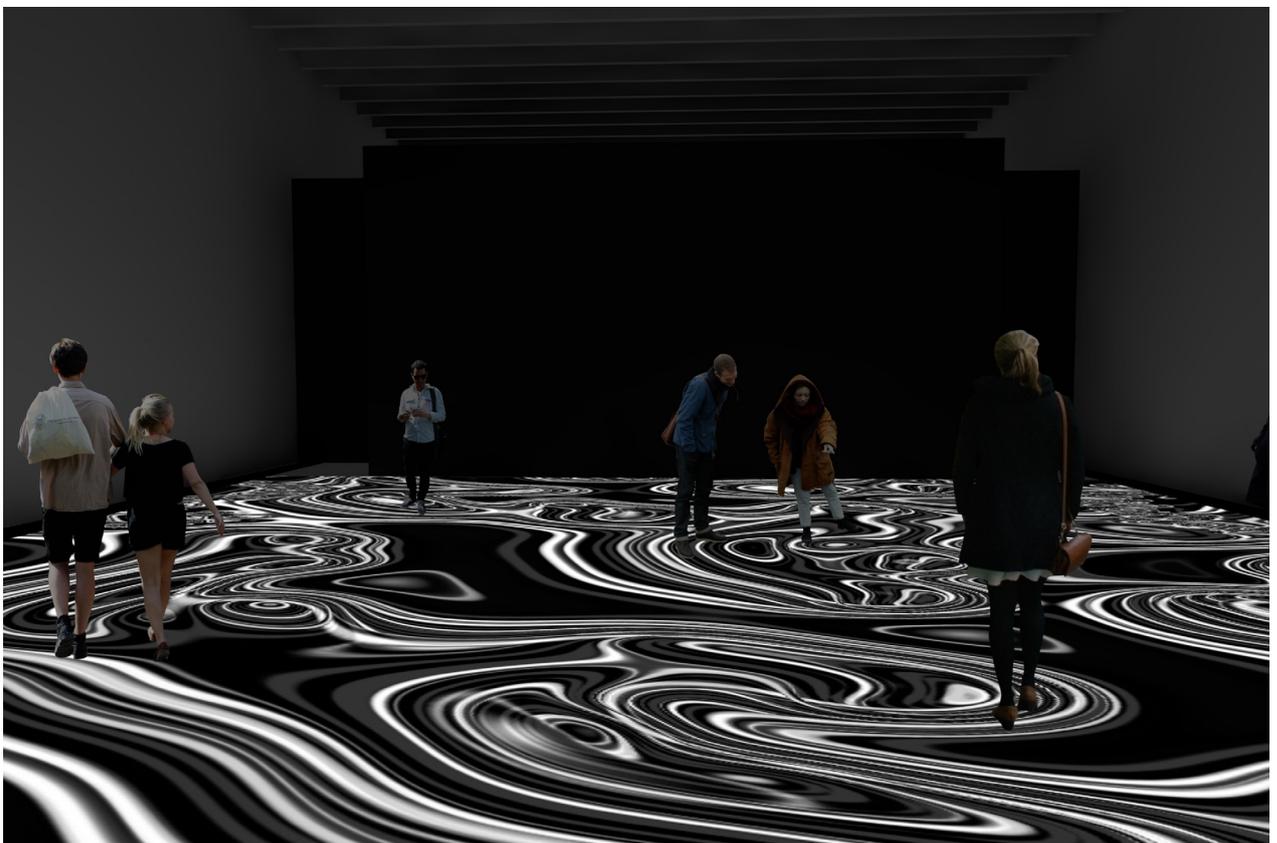
Miguel Chevalier, Pixels Noir Lumière 2019

Exhibition curator: :
Christophe Hazemann, Deputy Director of the Soulages
Museum

Hence the bold arrival of digital art at the Soulages Museum. Some may be surprised by the choice of an artist representing a seemingly very contemporary, 21st century art form to celebrate the hundredth birthday of Pierre Soulages, resolutely a painter, using a wide range of self-invented tools, far removed from the virtual creations of computers, interfaces and networks used by Miguel Chevalier.

However, when you look at the question up close, this alliance could well become clear. Let's start by pointing out that since the early 1980s, Miguel Chevalier has developed an artistic approach using the computer

as main medium but in a constant dialogue with painting and light. He explores and experiments a new pictorial language where the pixel becomes the equivalent of the pictorial representation. The artist has never concealed his interest in the 1950s abstract paintings of Pierre Soulages, Jackson Pollock and Sam Francis. In homage to these artists, he notably developed the "electronic dripping" technique following on from "action painting", made apparent in the Pixels liquides installation. Leaving the relationship of the painting, the spectator is no longer part of the canvas but the screen space (13.40 m x 7.80 m).



Miguel Chevalier, Pixels Noir Lumière 2019

Multiple intergenerational bridges are created and links forged between Miguel Chevalier, the experimental "painter" of a virtual painting of permanently flowing light and Pierre Soulages, a radical experimental abstract painter mixing black, matter and light.

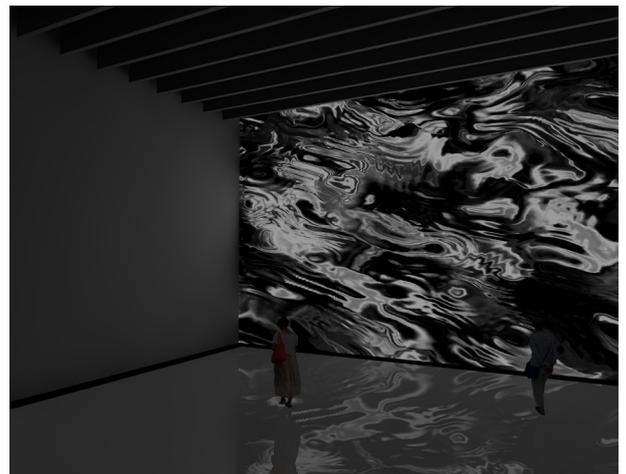
- **Art and science, science and art**

The end of the Second World War marked a new period in the art world, reflected, in part, in abstract painting with no reference to the outside world. Pierre Soulages was one of the trailblazers on this collective journey and very quickly gained himself a stand-out reputation. Through perseverance, he has carved himself out and appropriated a territory over more than 70 years of intense work, creating a very personal universe, a writing in itself, in a form of abstraction with the black and beyond. With *Outrenoir* (beyond black), this artist seeks to treat light as a material. No other painter has ever tackled light in their paintings as he does. Based on lengthy practice and his incessant questioning of its means, his approach as an artist resembles in many respects the actual scientific understanding. Working from this observation, at the end of 2016 in Lausanne, the *Noir, c'est noir ?* curatorial project set its sights on creating an innovative intersection of art and science. Five laboratories of the Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) and start-ups that have emerged from this school, teamed up to put their computer graphics-centric research and technologies to use to develop a transversal approach to *Outrenoir*, that of digital natives.

Miguel Chevalier is a mover and shaker of an era that experienced a shift in the history of art at the end of the 1970s, when an information society, computer and digital sciences stirred. This (re)emerging art is centred around the state of the art of its time, it is dependent on material and technological progress evolving at an explosive rate, creating artificial intelligence that challenges science, society and the artist all at once. After graduating from the *École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris* and the *École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs*, Miguel gradually made an impact on the international stage as a pioneer of virtual and digital art from 1980. He was proactive in tackling the question of how to fit these technologies into art today: simple communication media, tools, supports, devices. He quickly made a name for himself and used these tools, not to glamorise them but in a bid to develop his own kind of expression incorporating all the other artistic forms we know (painting, photography, video and digital).

Miguel Chevalier works with digital light as an artistic material to create new experiences and sensations beyond the optical phenomenon. The *Origine du Monde 2019* (the origin of the world 2019), is a generative and interactive virtual reality installation offering visitors an immersive

experience by way of a monumental projection on the ground (12 x 7.50 m), which changes in real time by reacting to the spectators' movements. Sensors detect their movements which generate interference, undulations, even turbulence making for new visual experiences under their feet, playing with perceptions and sensations. Microorganisms and cellular automata multiply, divide, merge and spread at a pace that is sometimes slow, sometimes fast. This synthetic, artificial universe seems to find its way back to life, but soon mingles with a universe of swirling unstable black and white megapixels. The title of the installation seems to solve the puzzle of the appearance of life on Earth. It brings us back to the basics: the cells that make up matter. The artist blends them with the pixels making up the basic elements of virtual "life". Half scientist, half alchemist of hybridization, Miguel Chevalier creates a computer-synthesized "primordial soup" of life, like a scene from the Anthropocene³, where man comes along and disrupts the natural cycle of life.



- **The work, the spect-actor, the movement**

When the forerunner Pierre Soulages invented *Outrenoir* in 1979, he prompted the viewer to move into a total discovery of nuances generated by light to the rhythm of the materials chanting the compositions. Depending on where the viewer's is in front of the canvas, a light line on a dark surface can be reversed to become a dark line on a light surface. Soulages' paintings somehow "follow" the spectator so that they become both the tool and the painter of the light by their movements. The light rays project the work forward intangibly filling the space between the canvas and the viewer, thus creating an immersive dimension and the starting point of a pictorial experience.

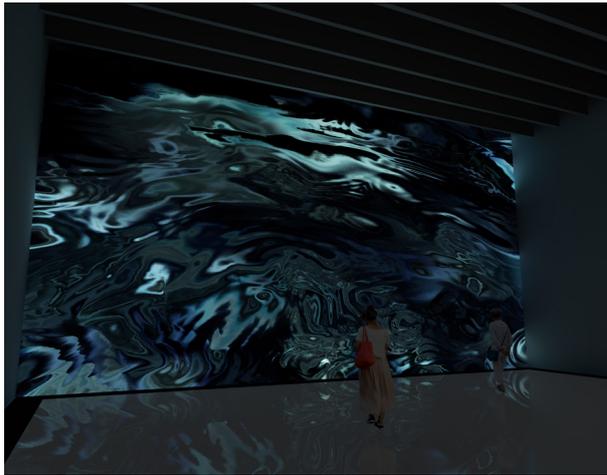
¹ Dripping is a gesture and pictorial technique designed to pour the paint randomly onto a substrate

² Action painting emphasises the physical act of painting, mixing abstraction and performative attitude

³ Concept derived from earth sciences, the notion of Anthropocene appeared at the beginning of the 21st century, penned by the Nobel Prize winner Paul Crutzen. It refers to the most recent period in the history of the earth during which the global «environment» is modified by human societies)

Miguel Chevalier, Pixels Noir Lumière 2019

This face-to-face encounter, bringing in movement as the third player, makes apparent a new form of interactive art which, from a "matrix" work, according to defined rules (external light, time of day, size of the viewer, angle of vision, etc.) can produce unique and personal variations every time. Everyone sees their own Outrenoir, sustained the time of the interaction. The experience is always one-off, it can change according to random values or an unstable environmental value.



Miguel Chevalier uses light, but in a different way. The light that emerges from a video projector to reveal, for example in Pixels Liquides 2019, a skin of black and blue pixels with surprising material and textural effects, changing autonomously within the pictorial framework of a 13.40 m x 7.80 m wall. It also involves the spectator's movement transforming the "light painting" into a backstory, instrumental in creating a unique and ephemeral moving variation that will eventually slowly fade away until another visitor comes along... Each spectator-actor body becomes a digital brush of a work in constant motion, immersive in the space and time of the interaction. One of the differences, however, is that the experience can be shared here by and between the different actors jointly changing the creation, while, with Soulages, the experience is always a solitary one. From one approach, the other is in the triangular "work, spect-actor, movement" relationship where the technique eventually disappears behind the sensation, going beyond the optical and playful aspect, paving the way to introspection, to emotion.

In addition to these two spectacular participatory installations prompting a sensory experience and reflection, the exhibition complementarily offers two screen works, one on an 82-inch vertical LCD screen and the other on a horizontal LED screen (320 cm x 64 cm) as well as a series of 7 fixed black and white works toying with matt and shiny variations. These works pay tribute to the elementary point of any digital image: the pixel. This is a trademark of Miguel Chevalier's work and research. He equates it to the pictorial touch. Here the overstretched pixel becomes self-sustaining making up abstract and very graphic worlds tinged with poetry.

At a time when a new generation of artists are seizing new digital tools, the virtual reality headset in particular, tempted by the complete dematerialisation of art, the paradoxical virtual reality work is no longer a material object that we come to look at but an experience to be immersed in. In stark contrast, Miguel Chevalier materialises the virtual with 3 laser cut plexiglass sculptures. Tackling the pixel theme in the same way, the superimposition of transparent openwork plates creates a game of hollows and solids, reinforced by the light going through the cuts. An aesthetic of the virtual emerges, mixing matter and pixels. The laser cutter turns out to be the ideal tool to achieve these ambitions of materialising the virtual showcasing the artist's work of abstract aesthetics.

With regard to this exhibition, Miguel Chevalier's work is as spectacular as it is experimental, bolstered here by Pierre Soulages' approach, from which he reformulates essential data, in his own way. His multidisciplinary work addresses in particular the question of virtuality in art, with generativity, interactivity and materiality.

The abstract and figurative images they deliver also perpetually challenge our senses in our relationship with the current and future technological world, eager to propel us into what will probably be part of the art of the 21st century.

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