

In 1986, Kijno declared: *“I spent my youth stealing light from the pockets of poets. It was perhaps for me, the son of an immigrant, the only way to survive in a world whose horror of violence I already felt in my deepest self. I was literally suffocating from this society of prohibition...”*<sup>1</sup>.

From the 1950s, Kijno worked on major literary texts such as *Homo hellenicus* by Nikos Kazantzakis or *The Islands* by Jean Grenier, which gave birth to unique specimens of crumpled papers or paintings.

**I. We will limit ourselves** here in this brief presentation to poets in the strict sense, thus leaving aside writers in general. The forms are multiple:

- painted manuscripts like Aragon’s *Brocéliande*;
- isolated works such as those dedicated to Juliette Darle;
- a set of works devoted to a well-known poet like *Neruda’s Theatre*;
- isolated prints;
- original artistic interventions in the limited edition of poetry collections;
- Kijno’s works reproduced on the covers of poetry books, in regular editions of collections or in poetry magazines...

Ladislav KIJNO and Raoul-Jean MOULIN

Exhibition “The Painter and the Poet” June 6, 1995

Maison du livre, de l’image et du son - Villeurbanne

*Photos: André Rochedy*

**II. What are the characteristics** of this companionship with poets?

1. First of all, it should be noted that it is permanent. It begins in 1942 with the portrait of Paul Claudel <sup>2</sup> and continues until the painter’s last breath. While the early years were marked by interruptions due to illness, from the early 1960s, the association with poets became uninterrupted.

2. Kijno puts unknown poets (like Françoise Poiret) and famous poets (like Aragon or Neruda) on the same level. Only the means and the material importance of the painted work change.

3. Kijno responds to requests from both recognized publishers (like *Maeght*) and lesser-known publishers (like *Au Fil de l'Encre*).

4. Kijno can spend several years on a poet's work. This is the case with Aragon (1944-1980) or Ponge (1943-1980). To name just these two poets.

### **III. To continue...**

Many poetry books enhanced by Kijno can be consulted upon request at the Artoiscomm branch in Nœux-les-Mines, which houses the Kijno donation...<sup>3</sup>

In the editorial of issue 1 of the magazine "*Confluences poétiques*" dated March 2006, directed by Luis Mizon, whom Kijno cites among the poets and writers he is in contact with (in *Kijno the great works*, catalog of the Cannes / La Malmaison exhibition, 2011, p 95), Mizon notes: "*The French language is the place of our convergence. Poetry is the place of our recognition*". Convergence and recognition are words that Kijno, *the light thief*, would not have rejected...

### **Lucien WASSELIN.**

Lucien Wasselin is a poet, essayist, and columnist. He has published about thirty works (including 9 as artist's books) and several hundred reading notes or articles devoted to literature (especially poetry), new music or songs, and visual arts in various publications (print and electronic)...

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### **Notes.**

1. *Ladislav Kijno's words transcribed by Malou Kijno in Raoul-Jean Moulin, Kijno, Le Cercle d'Art publisher, Paris, 1994, p 225.*

2. *Raoul-Jean Moulin, op. cit., p 19.*

3. *address: 138 bis, rue Léon Blum. 62290 Nœux-les-Mines. Tel: 03 21 54 78 23.*

*Photography Laurence Sudre - René Veignant*

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# Tribute to Ladislav Kijno

## *From Pebble to Stars*

**March 23 - August 4, 2024**

**The Urban Community of Béthune-Bruay, Artois Lys Romane, the city of Béthune, and the Bina Endowment Fund are pleased to announce for spring-summer 2024, the largest retrospective of Ladislav Kijno (1921-2012) since the painter's death. The "event unfolds across six exhibitions at six sites and includes a rich program of cultural activities offered to all audiences throughout the urban community".**

This ambitious retrospective celebrates the return of this "*son of Flanders*" to his homeland. Its title, *From Pebble to Stars*, is inspired by one of the artist's famous aphorisms: "*The painter must become a diver to descend to the foundations of the world and an astronaut to ascend to the stars.*" and its purpose is to pay homage to a body of work that has ceaselessly proclaimed a fighting humanity.

**At Labanque (Béthune)**, no less than one hundred and fifty works by the artist are displayed in the vast exhibition spaces of the art center. Here, it's the pebbles from the seabed that welcome the visitor. It's from this primary ovoid shape that the artist will develop his entire approach. The visitor's journey then testifies to the artist's attachment to the North. Finally, from room to room, the master's poetic galaxy unfolds, formally marked by the use of aerosol spray strokes on the canvas like so many stars. The painter-philosopher's "paths of humanism" are punctuated by tributes to Guillaume Apollinaire, Francis Ponge, Pablo Neruda,

Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Eric Satie... as well as to his friend, the activist and philosopher Angela Davis.

**The cultural Saint Pry space (Béthune)** hosts the *Stations of the Cross* created with Robert Combas, at Kijno's request from 2003. In total, there are 14 paintings for 14 stations of a large-format Stations of the Cross that will be the fruit of their crossed works which, while preserving the identity of their respective writing, deliver a synthesis of their "mental speleology". This was the beginning of a surprising artistic and spiritual adventure between these two artists of different generations and artistic planets, free figuration for Combas and abstraction for Kijno.

**The Kijno Donation (Nœux-les-Mines)** offers visitors keys to understanding both the messages delivered by this committed artist and the multiple techniques he invented to serve them: use of spray paint (Kijno is considered the father of French street art), drips, crumpled paper... The works presented here are part of the collection of about sixty pieces that the artist decided to donate to his childhood land, Nœux-les-Mines, at the height of his international fame. "It is not enough to give men a roof and bread, we must put Gauguin on the plates and Rimbaud in the glasses", declared Ladislav Kijno. Through this journey, the public encounters this explorer seeking to unravel the mystery of the world, a Kijno who recounts his travels, denounces the dark side of Man (war, racism, dictatorships, injustices...) and pays tribute to the "Great Men" who fight against these scourges (Louise Michel, Gandhi, Pablo Neruda, Nelson Mandela, Angela Davis).

Three satellite and complementary exhibitions are also offered at the Cité des Électriciens, the Comédie de Béthune, and the Maison de la Poésie.

**The Cité des Électriciens (Bruay-La-Buissière)** presents, from March 23 to June 30, 2024, an intimate exhibition highlighting the technique of crumpled papers on canvas in the artist's work and develops a cultural season with the theme of "Crumpled/Uncrumpled".

**The Comédie de Béthune** welcomes in its Hall the series "The Art of Love by Ovid" created by Kijno, paying tribute to the famous text of the 1st century Latin poet. There are many fascinating links between Kijno's painting and literature; to this effect, a monumental canvas by Kijno paying homage to Pablo Neruda is also on display here. Kijno has indeed dedicated several works to this great poet of

love and struggle, including the famous “Neruda’s Theatre”, a labyrinth of gigantic canvases, which the artist presented in 1980 for the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and which is now visible at Lille Grand Palais.

**The Maison de la Poésie (Beuvry)** will provide an opportunity to discover Kijno through illustrated works, deluxe editions, rare catalogs, manuscripts, as well as the book that philosopher Bernard Vasseur devoted to the artist’s connections with poetry. Ladislav Kijno liked to say that he had spent his youth “stealing light from the poets’ pockets” and he added: “It was perhaps for me, the son of an immigrant, the only way to survive in a world whose horror of violence I was already feeling in my deepest self. I was literally suffocating from this society of prohibition...” His entire production would pay homage to authors: Ovid, Ronsard, Hugo, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Valéry, Mayakovsky, Éluard, Tzara, Artaud, Saint-Exupéry, Aragon, Ponge, Neruda, Jean Grenier, Nikos Kazantzakis, Salah Stétié, etc.

**And throughout the duration of the retrospective, an abundant program of cultural activities (no less than 150 events: workshops, residencies, urban walks, shows, concerts, conferences...) is offered to all audiences, amateurs and newcomers alike, both in the exhibition venues and off-site, throughout the territory of the Béthune-Bruay, Artois Lys Romane Urban Community.**

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**“The people who have had the greatest impact on  
you?”**

**...my wife, [...] who holds my life together...”**

**Ladislav Kijno**

# 1921

Malou was born on October 27, 1921 in Miliana, ALGERIA.

She has a sister, Marie-Joseph, nicknamed Jobic.

While the KERDAVID family traveled a lot, both in France and abroad, following the assignments of Malou's father, Louis KERDAVID, who was a career military man, Malou and Jobic returned each summer to their home base in CHATEAUNEUF DU FAOU in FINISTÈRE, where their mother, Louise LE DREAU, was from. The two sisters spent time there with their cousins, to whom they were very close.

Later, Malou would meet her nieces there, Anne, Catherine, and Claude, to whom she would be very close throughout her life.

*Her father, her mother, and her sister Marie-Joseph*

*Malou's nieces: Anne, Claude, and Catherine*

Malou would say of this childhood that it was happy, bathed in the affection and attention of her loved ones.

## **1946**

In April 1946, Malou was among the first flight attendants recruited by Air France.

Unfortunately, a few months later, tragedy struck: on September 4, 1946, the Air France DC3 on which she boarded, operating the PARIS-LONDON flight, crashed on takeoff at LE BOURGET. Read the 1946 article - France Soir

She was the only survivor of this horrific air disaster.

On February 14, 1951, she was awarded the aeronautics medal, before receiving the gold medal for civic service on June 7, 1953.

## **1954**

It was on April 12, 1954, that Ladislav KIJNO married Marie Louise KERDAVID, known as MALOU, who would accompany him throughout his life. After their marriage in 1954, the KIJNOs left the Plateau d'Assy and settled in Brittany;

## **1958**

In 1958, Ladislav KIJNO and Malou settled in PARIS, at 12 bis rue du Val de Grâce.

# 1959

It was during this time that Ladislav KIJNO painted "Homage to Malou" (1959).

# 1960

In 1960, the KIJNO couple left PARIS for CONDÉ-SUR-VEGREGRE in the YVELINES.

Of this period in the KIJNOs' life, Raoul JEAN MOULIN, in his biography published in 1970, writes: "Since June 1960, the KIJNOs have retired outside of PARIS, in the YVELINES, to CONDÉ-SUR-VEGREGRE, a small town near the forest of Rambouillet, on the edge of a site that housed, in the first half of the 19th century, a Fourierist phalanstery, the Colony, whose associationist system of life and production revived the libertarian memory of the artist's grandfather. Lad and Malou live in an old house, which was the church rectory and which opens at the back onto a deep, wooded garden, each finding there village and neighborhood habits already experienced in Brittany, in Normandy, and he his daily walks, the obligatory discussions at the café-tobacco shop..."

# 1974

1974 is an important year, it sees the KIJNOs settle in SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE, in a house in the heart of the city, where KIJNO sets up his studio.

While Lad worked in his studio located on the top floor of the house, Malou spent long hours tending to the garden of which she was very proud, assisted by her faithful gardener, Philippe.







*Photo credits: Misha Labruyère*

## **1983**

In 1983, Maria ANTUNES entered the service of the KIJNOs, more than a housekeeper, she would become a friend and confidant, accompanying them for nearly 40 years.

# 2020

It is in her house in SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE that Malou passed away on March 8, 2020.

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“Every day of my life with Lad has been caviar at every meal”

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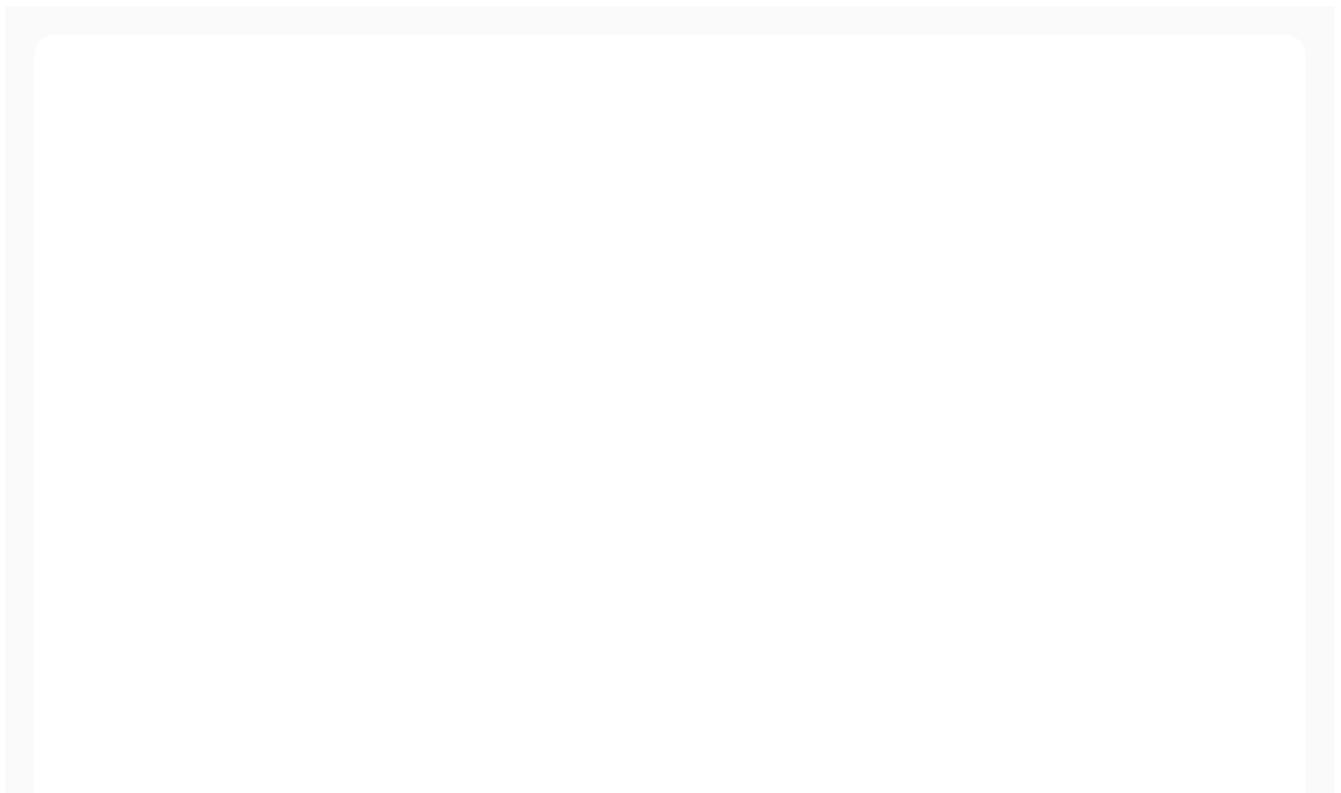
**“Isn’t the great revelation of painting the revelation of those places,  
that one wouldn’t seek if one hadn’t already found them?  
One must be where one ought to be”**

### Numa Hambursin *June 2017*

Sitting cross-legged on my bed, about to start these few lines, my back slightly creased, the computer balanced on a cushion, I dive into Kijno's painting that has accompanied my nights for nine years, the "the age of my son Galien to whom it is addressed. It's a Buddha in profile on a black background, the face crossed by lines and dotted with primary color spots, red, blue, yellow, white spray-painted stars, like a harmonious constellation that" blossoms into a unique being. I have never set foot in China, and yet... No matter the angle from which one wishes to approach it, Kijno's work breathes an invitation to travel. If I "feel a form of shame in using an expression so overused and clichéd, I cannot find a more adequate one. From the wounded ghosts of Easter Island to the garden of Ryoan-ji in Kyoto, from American struggles to Andrei Rublev's icons in Moscow, from his native Poland to the chimeras of Tahiti, from eternal China to the New Hebrides, from ancient Tuscany to the ancient Nile Valley, Ladislav Kijno wanted to embrace the world."

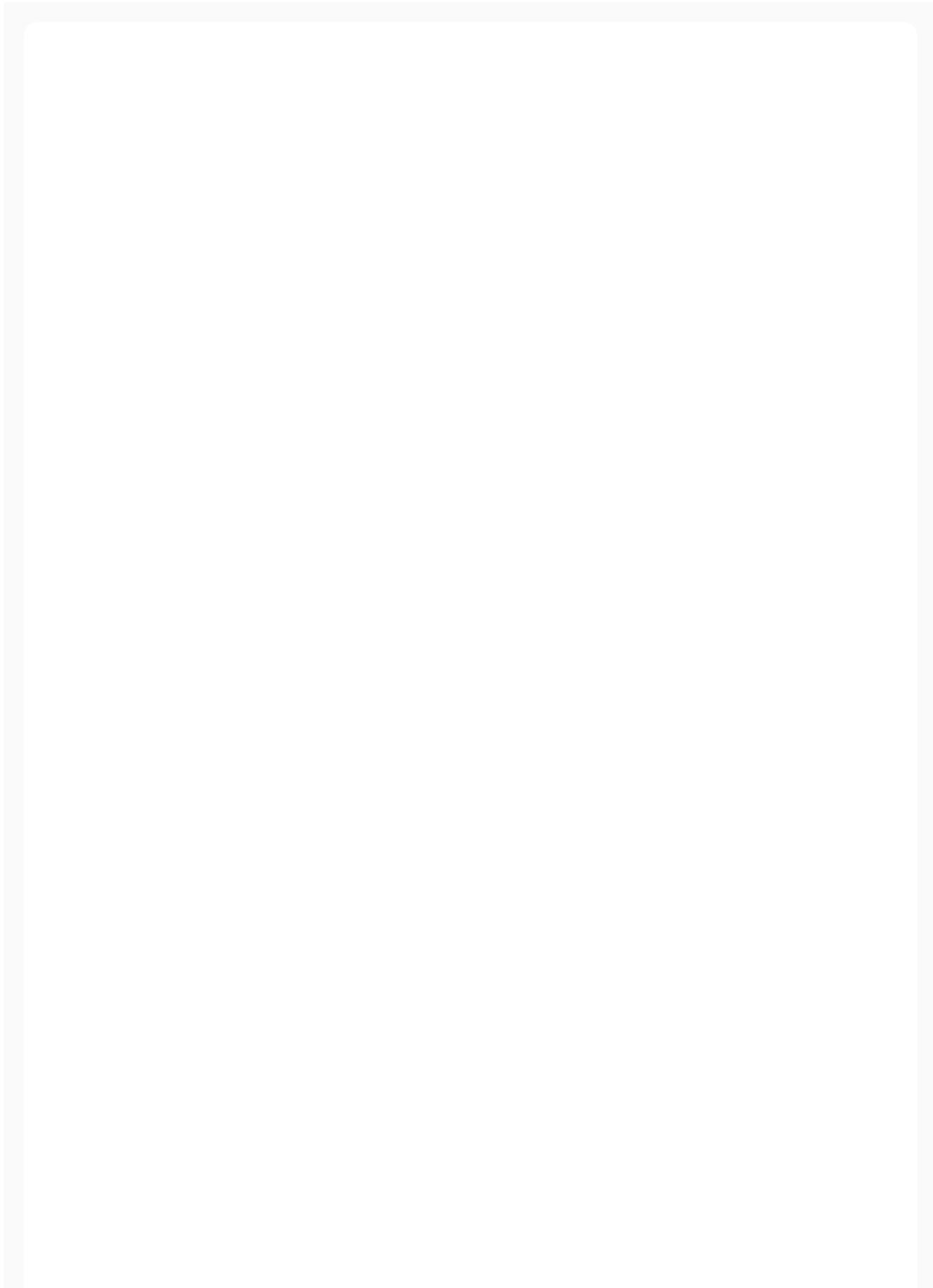
The tensions and faults of space had as little relief for this man as those of time. Giotto and the anonymous sculptor of an archipelago lost in the middle of the Pacific were his contemporaries and neighbors, just like Germaine Richier and Combas. He didn't need to draw inspiration from their vocabulary since ultimately he spoke the same language. Administrative boundaries had as little substance in his eyes as the school chronologies in which artistic movements succeed one another, in contempt of the flesh and soul of the works. One could compare his state of mind to that of Malraux, if the adventurer's actions had shown the virtues of his writings. He lived in a century that saw many walls erected and many walls swept away, so much so that Rostropovich was a part of him, like Mandela and Angela Davis occupying a central place in the *Kijnosphere*. When Kijno goes to meet the Australian Aborigines, he is neither a tourist nor an ethnographer, he doesn't chase after folklore or adventure, he doesn't seek the souvenir photo or the change of scenery, he simply encounters his fellow human beings.

The strangest thing in all this is that Kijno's body initially betrayed his aspirations. As a young man with tuberculosis, he had to multiply his stays in sanatoriums and become a stationary traveler, thanks to literature and philosophy. He's not the only one, it's in a similar setting that Gala and Eluard met. Kijno managed to tame the disease, he married Malou, a muse who brought him closer to the skies, and set out to discover the world he had imagined. One can be sadly homebound and have itchy feet. Going to the Seychelles, Cuba, Santo Domingo or Bali, to park oneself in hotels where you'll only meet your compatriots. A bit of beach, a bit of pool, some music, a pinch of cultural visit to justify the twelve-hour flight, a few welcome and farewell cocktails, wrap it up and weigh it. One can run to contemporary art fairs in the four corners of the globe, Basel, Miami, Chicago, London, Dubai, Hong Kong, and still only meet the same collectors, the same gallerists, the same artists, the same curators. One can stay in Venice without being pierced by the breath of the lagoon and Bellini, one can go to the Marquesas without crossing paths with Melville and Gauguin, one can cross Lough Cullin without thinking of the monsters that haunt its dark waters. One can eternally fly over the vast world. Not everyone can be Hemingway, a gun in the left hand, a Daiquiri in the right. But one can also take inspiration from Kijno, think of travel as a metaphysical wandering, accept being the vagabond who lets himself be drawn in, and draw from elsewhere what devours you inside.





## 1975 - Egypte





**1983 - Crète**



## 1983 - Chine

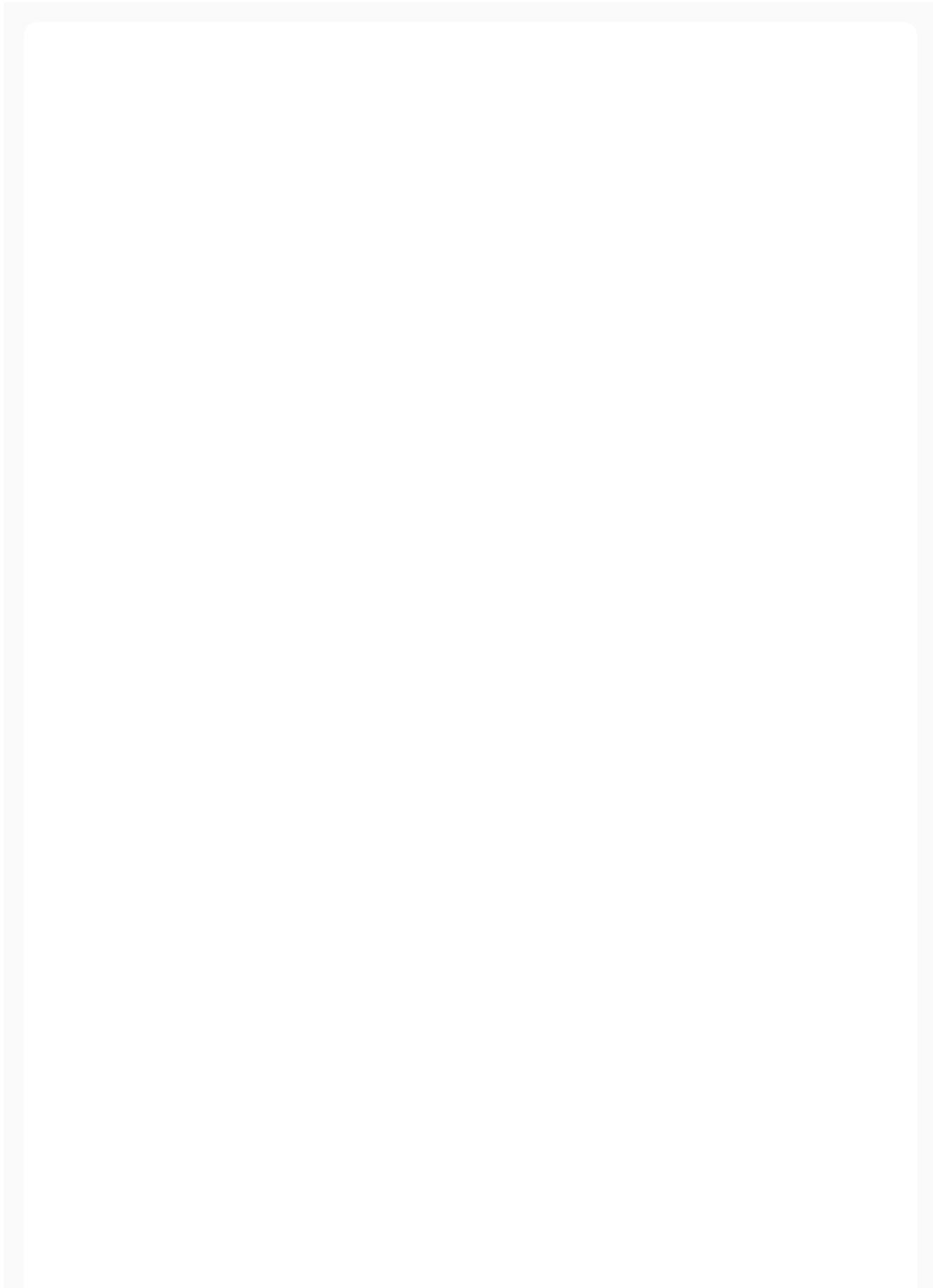




**1985 - Guadeloupe**



## 1989 - Île de Pâques

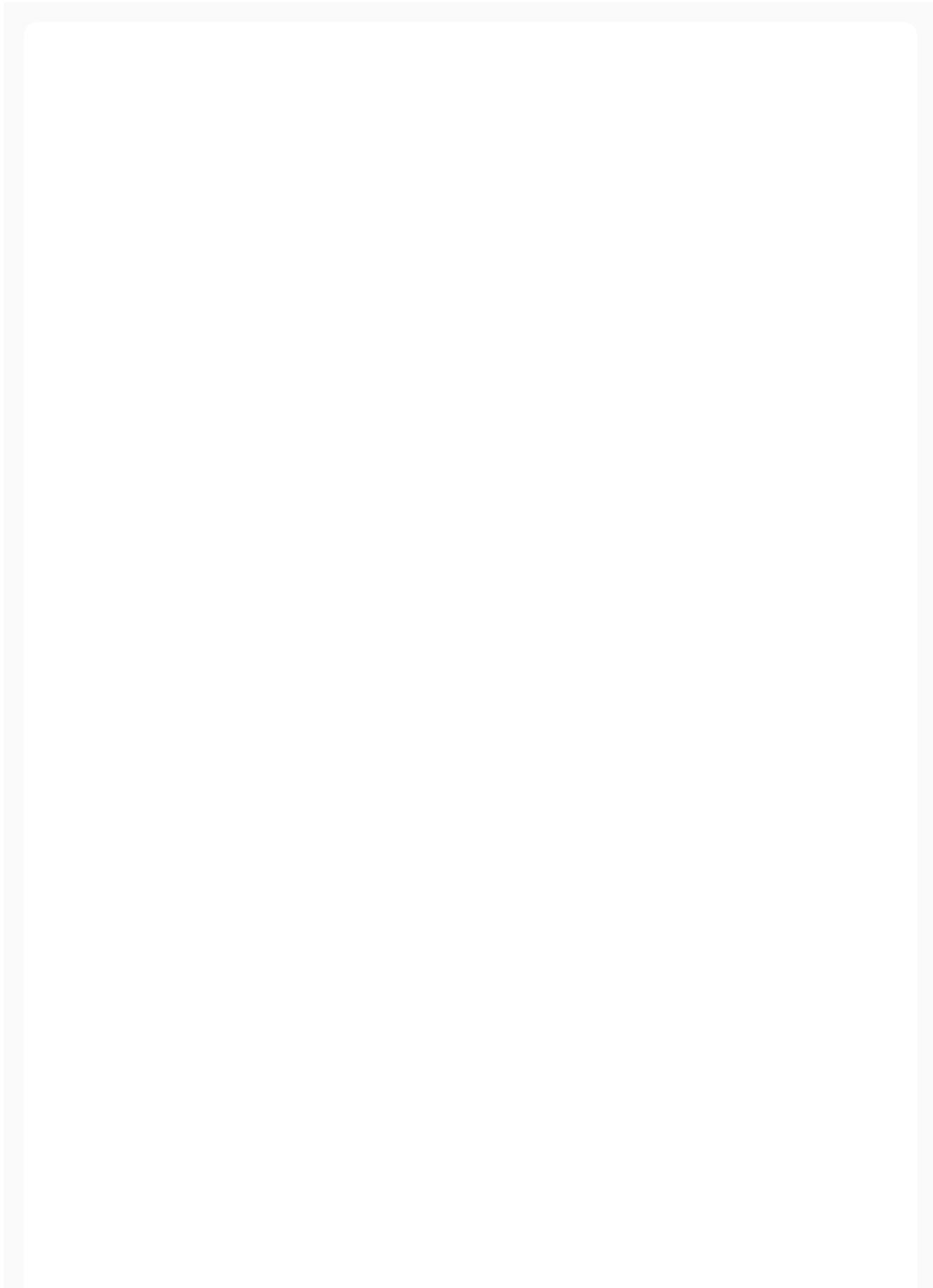




**1989 - Courchevel**



## 1989 - St Tropez

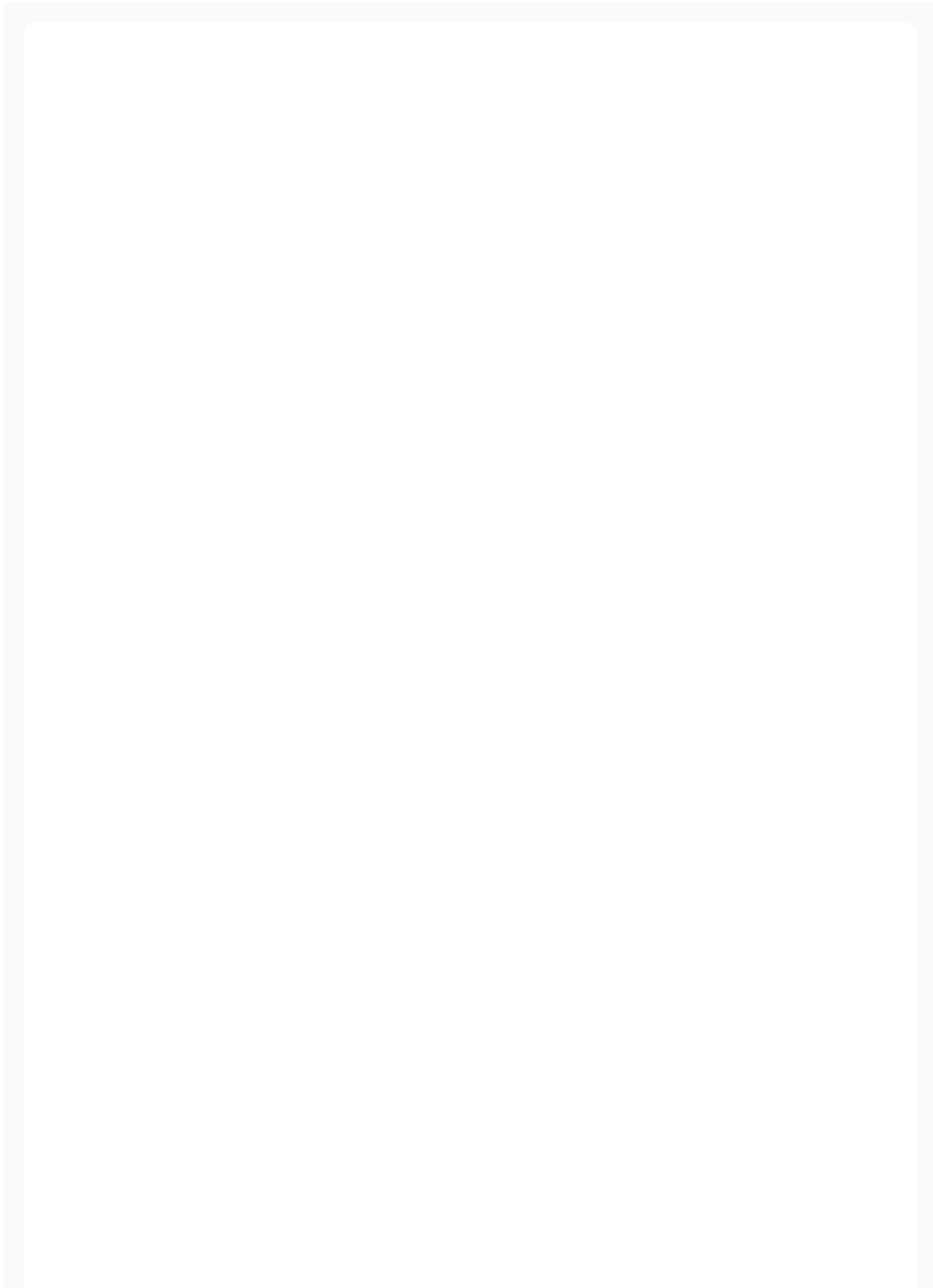




**1989 - Tahiti**



## 1990 - Japon





**1990 - Îles Marquises**



## 1990 - Tahiti





**1992 - Tunisie**



## 1993 - Canada





**1993 - Tahiti**



## 1994 - Canada (1)

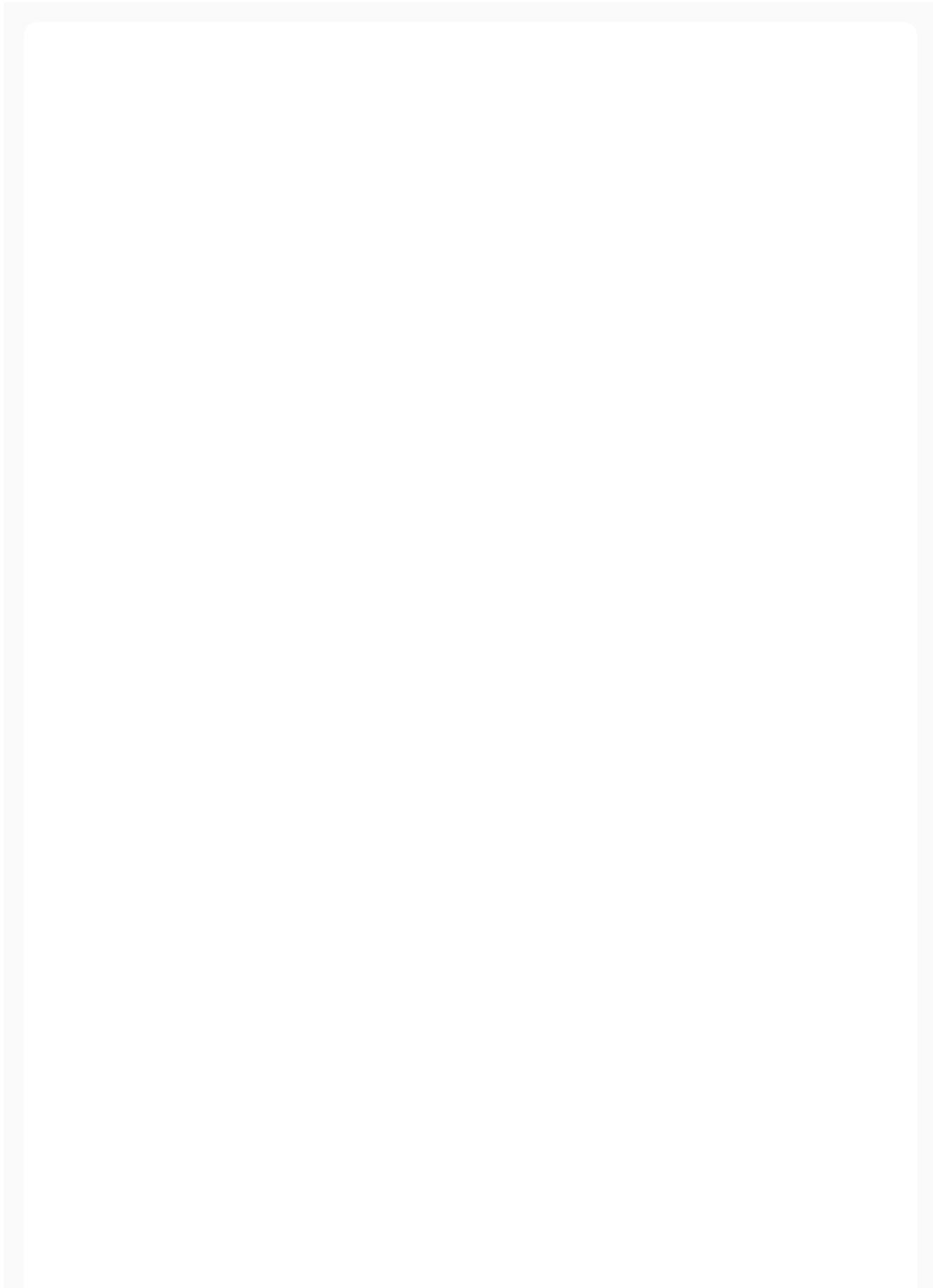




**1994 - Canada (2)**



## 1995 - Indonésie

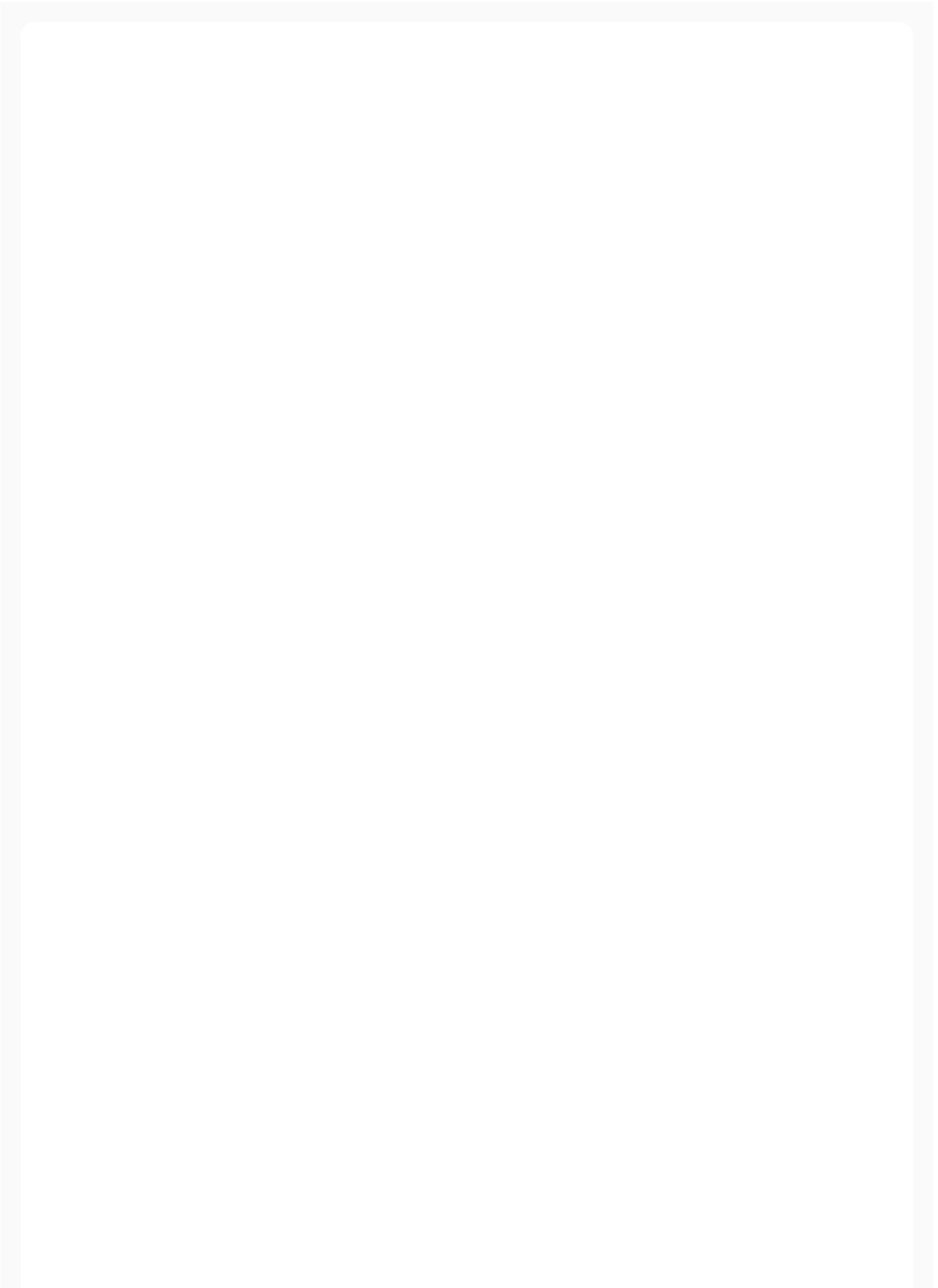


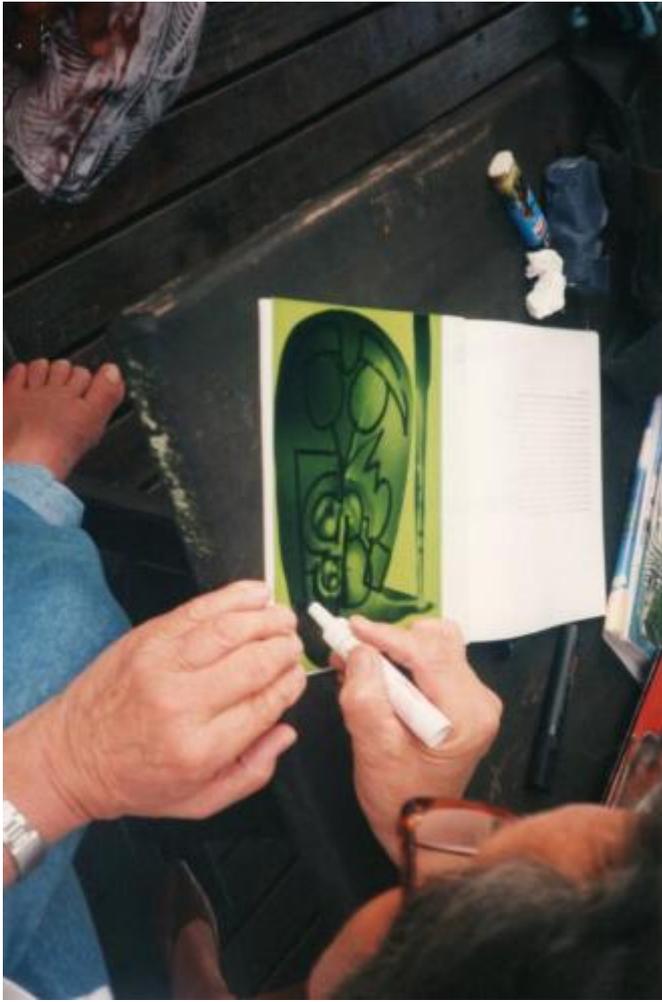


**1995 - Sydney**



## 1995 - Tahiti (1)

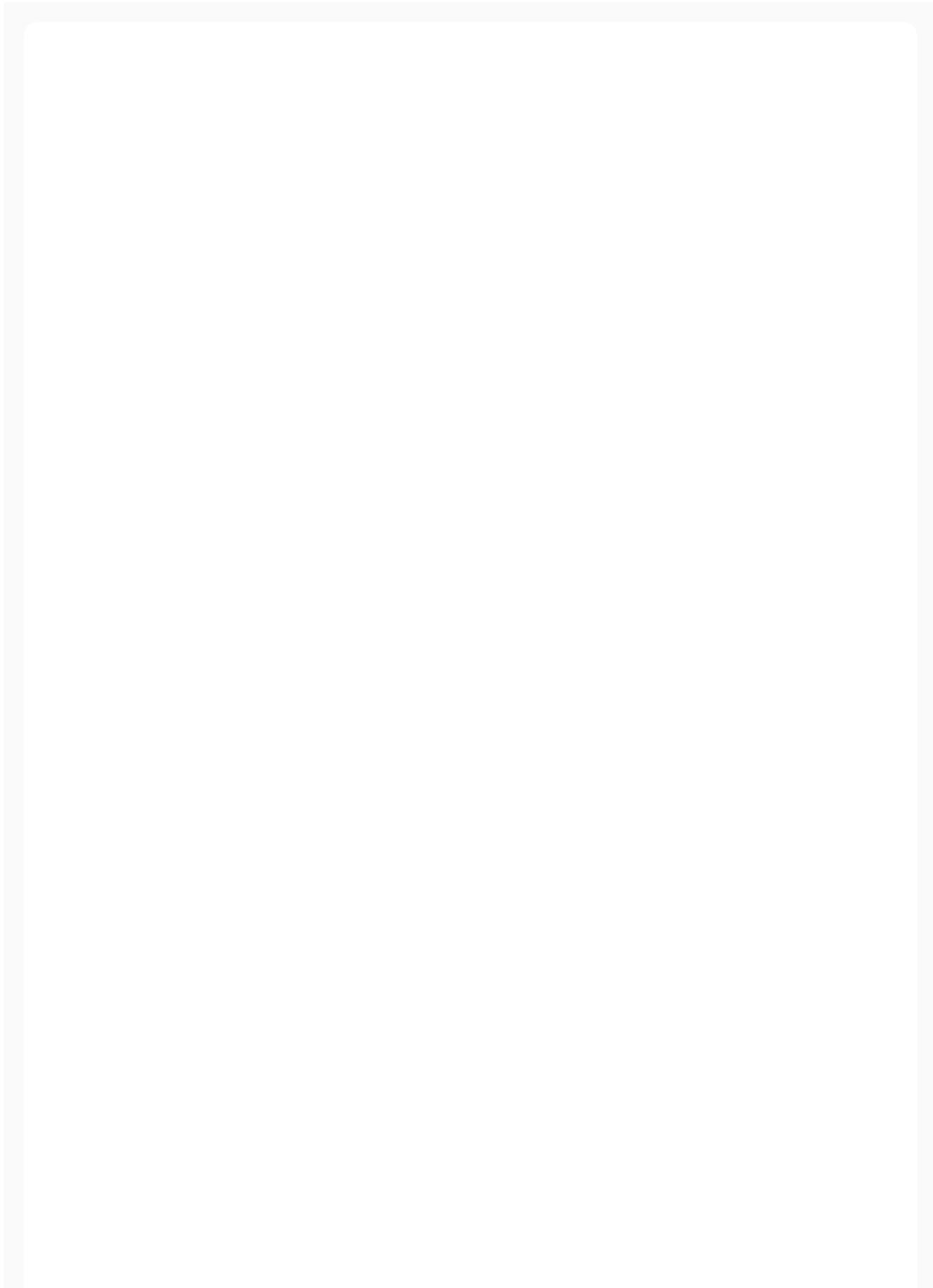




**1995 - Tahiti (2)**



## 1995 - Tahiti (3)



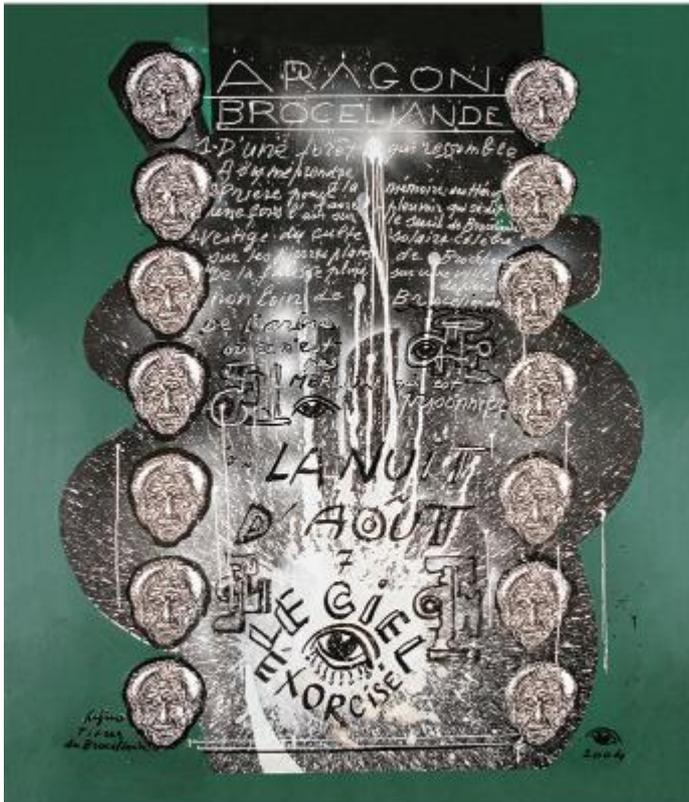


**Accueil**



**Oeuvres de 1930 à 1950**





## Brocéliande



**Oeuvres de 1951 à 1960**



**Oeuvres de 1961 à 1970**



**Oeuvres de 1971 à 1980**



**Oeuvres de 1981 à 1990**



**Oeuvres de 1991 à 2000**



**Oeuvres de 2001 à 2012**