PARIS 1964 - 1977

Olivier Mosset (b. 1944) set his sights on a career as an artist after attending an exhibition of works by Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg in Bern, in his native Switzerland, in 1962. Early the following year, Mosset headed to Paris to work as an assistant to Jean Tinguely, who introduced him to other members of the Nouveau Réalisme movement—Mosset would later spend brief spells working under Niki de Saint Phalle and Daniel Spoerri—as well as to Otto Hahn, Alain Jouffroy, and other influential critics. Tinguely also arranged for Mosset to meet Andy Warhol in New York.

After mixing in these circles, Mosset soon formed his own opinions about the artistic debates of the time: wary of lyrical abstraction (the School of Paris), nonplussed by kinetic art, and a keen follower of the emerging Pop art movement. These opinions were reflected in the series of monochrome paintings, each featuring a circle, that he began producing in 1966. And they were views he shared with Daniel Buren, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni. Together, in 1967, the four artists held a series of exhibitions—known as "manifestations"—that would
ultimately write their names into the art history books.

More generally, the 1960s was a time of great upheaval as the protagonists of the Parisian cultural and political scenes railed against the conservatism of the De Gaulle era. The French New Wave film movement, in its rejection of established narrative conventions, encapsulatedthis quest for renewal. Mosset was a particular fan, spending time mixing in Parisian experimental film circles. He was a member of the Zanzibar Group, a film production company that shared the same building as his studio, on Rue de l'Echaudé in the Latin Quarter. The buildingwould go on to serve as a meeting point during the May '68 uprisings, putting Mosset at the heart of the action.

Mosset gained critical acclaim for his circles in the early 1970s, to such an extent that the motif became his trademark. Keen not to be pigeonholed, however, he set out in a new direction, abandoning the circle in favor of vertical stripes. He continued in the same vein until 1977, when the French authorities refused to renew his residence permit because of his involvement in the events of May '68. Mosset subsequently left France and moved to New York.

NOUVEAU REALISME

The term "Nouveau Réalisme" was coined by critic Pierre Restany during a 1960 group exhibition at Galleria Apollinaire in Milan. In October of that year, the original members of the group—Yves Klein, Arman, François Dufrêne, Raymond Hains, Martial Raysse, Pierre Restany, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely, and Jacques Villeglé—signed the simple Nouveau *Réalisme Manifesto*, which read, in French: "On Thursday, October 27, 1960, the Nouveaux Réalistes became conscious of their collective identity. Nouveau Réalisme = new perceptions of the real." César, Mimmo Rotella, Niki de Saint Phalle, and Gérard Deschamps added their names in 1961. The group, led by Restany, organized a string of joint exhibitions before disbanding in 1966. A series of events took place across Europe in 1970 to mark ten years since the movement's founding. Tinguely unveiled one of his trademark self-destructing sculptures outside Milan Cat-

hedral—a gigantic golden phallus that consumed itself in a few minutes amid fireworks and smoke. Behind the jubilation accompanying such an affront, the work also celebrated the group's self-destruction.

For the Nouveaux Réalistes, art was about appropriating, assembling and accumulating—or, as Restany would later describe it, "a poetic recycling of urban, industrial and advertising reality." This interest in the everyday, in consumerist culture, in repurposing the unwanted, inevitably drew parallels with the British and American Pop art movement. In 1962, the Sidney Janis Gallery held an exhibition entitled New Realists, showing works by French artists alongside pieces by names such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Claes Oldenburg.

Yves Klein signed the manifesto as "Yves the Monochrome," just a few months after patenting International Klein Blue (IKB), a deep blue hue he had used in close to 200 paintings. Klein, clearly more conceptual and mystical than the other members, parted company with the Nouveaux Réalistes in 1961, although the same sampling and printing techniques remained features of his work until his premature death in 1962. In addition to producing monochromes, Klein also used his trademark blue to depict weather patterns (*Cosmogonie de la pluie*) and to capture the forms of human bodies during performances (*Anthropométries*).

Tinguely's gargantuan sculpture *Cercle et carré éclatés* (1981) serves as a reminder of his close relationship with Mosset, a fellow Swiss. In 1966, Mosset helped Tinguely build the vast machines that formed the backdrop for Roland Petit's ballet *L'Eloge de la folie*, and the two worked together on *Le Paradis Fantastique*, a set of sculptures produced for Expo 67 in Montreal. The title of the piece is also an allusion to Constructivism (*Cercle et Carré* was the name of a group of artists in the early 20th century), as if "burst" (*éclatés*) when the heavy-duty metal machine grinds into action. This playful, anarchistic take on the avantgarde movement finds its echoes in Mosset's work—and could perhaps provide insights into the meaning behind the artist's early pieces.

EARLY WORKS, 1964–1966

In 1964, while serving as an assistant to Tinguely, Mosset produced his first two paintings, one stating the words "The End" and the other "RIP." These works, neither of which survives, were early signs of his antagonistic stance towards pictorial art. Further evidence of the young artist's musings on the nature of painting—and his interest in Buddhist philosophy— can be seen in *Koan* (1964): a fake-gilt frame mounted on a wooden panel, now entirely matte black but once painted white (as Mosset's own photographs from the time show).

In 1966, Jacques Villeglé invited Mosset to exhibit at the *Salon Comparaisons*. The artist unveiled a piece featuring the letter A—the first in a series of "zero degree" paintings featuring dots, letters and numbers, in different formats. But it wasn't until later in 1966, when he painted his first circle, that Mosset settled on a motif he was satisfied with.

BUREN, MOSSET, PARMENTIER, TORONI, 1967

In 1966, art critic Otto Hahn introduced Mosset to Daniel Buren, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni. The artists soon found they had much in common: a preference for minimalist, neutral, repetitive patterns, and an eschewal of established ideas of artis-

tic authorship. The four met regularly and decided to hold a series of manifestations, or joint exhibitions. It is worth stressing that the artists never intended to operate as a formal collective. The term "BMPT" was coined retrospectively by art critics; they never adopted the name themselves.

Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni staged their first manifestation in January 1967 at the , an exhibition for young artists. The artists live-painted their works on the opening day of the exhibition, revealing their methods to the watching public. At the end of the day, they removed the finished canvases and replaced them with a banner that read, in French: "BUREN, MOSSET, PARMENTIER, TORONI DO NOT EXHIBIT."

For their second manifestation, they published an open letter criticizing the Paris salons. The ensuing scandal catapulted the four artists to the forefront of the Parisian art scene. For their third manifestation, on 2 June 1967, the collective hung four paintings, without fanfare, above
the stage in the lecture theater of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. After paying good money to enter the theater, and waiting an hour for a "happening" that never materialized, the assembled audience members received a sheet of paper telling them they were merely there to admire the artists' works.

BMPT held their fourth manifestation at the Fifth Biennale de Paris, which ran from September to November 1967. Once again, the artists exhibited four canvases, this time with an accompanying soundtrack and slideshow that poked fun at preconceived ideas of painting and stressed how their works were different.

The fifth manifestation, in December that year, proved to be the last, with the four artists falling out and deciding to go their separate ways. Although the collective disbanded after barely a year together, they left an indelible mark on the art scene of the 1960s.

CIRCLES, 1966–1974

Between 1966 and 1974, Mosset produced between 150 and 200 identical, untitled and unsigned paintings. Each featured a small black circle, with an outline 3.3 cm thick, in the center of a 100 - 100 cm frame. He also painted around a dozen larger versions. For Mosset, this minimalist design was unsurpassable in its perfection. He saw no reason to paint anything else.

The composition was so unsettlingly radical that it remains one of the most talked-about series of the post-war Abstraction movement— not just because the artist's pursuit of neutrality conveyed a sense of detachment, but also because the canvases echoed Mosset's condemnation of the art world and modern consumerism in general. The abstract, repetitive patterns took their cues from American Pop art. Reproducing the same motif over and over again, on an almost industrial scale, was a technique previously employed by Jasper Johns in his targets and by Andy Warhol in his silkscreen prints.
The series was Mosset's idiosyncratic take on the kinetic art movement that was so popular at the time (such as the larger-than-life example by Tinguely on display here). By immobilizing the circles in paint and reproducing them unceasingly, Mosset stripped them of all intentionality.

ZANZIBAR GROUP, 1986–1970

In early 1968, Mosset met Sylvina Boissonnas and, later, Serge Bard. Together, they began shooting films, forming what would eventually become the Zanzibar Group. Bo-

issonnas, the heiress of a wealthy family of art benefactors, lavished funds on young filmmakers. A proponent of creative freedom, she set no boundaries for her beneficiaries, affording them carte blanche to write, film and edit as they pleased.
The so-called Zanzibar films—from people like Pierre Clémenti, Jackie Raynal, Patrick Deval, and Philippe Garrel—were all made in and around May '68. These films have since gained critical acclaim not just because they foreshadowed the momentous events of that year, but also for their distinctive aesthetic qualities, blending features from the French New Wave with the experimental filmmaking of Warhol's The Factory studio in New York.

In *Fun and Games for Everyone*, Serge Bard documented the opening of Mosset's first exhibition at the Galerie Rive Droite in December 1968. The cast list was a who's who of the art and film scene of the time, featuring names like César, Salvador Dali, Amanda Lear, Mijanou Bardot, Patrick Bauchau, Peter Stämpfli, Jacques Monory, and Jean-Pierre Raynaud. Bard deliberately pushed the contrast to the maximum, producing a solarized effect in which the protagonists and their environment seem to exist on the same plane as Mosset's paintings. The conversations were drowned out by an improvised, psychedelic soundtrack from jazz saxophonist Barney Wilen.

CATALOGUE NO. 1, 1968

In 1968, with Boissonnas' support, Mosset published a catalogue for a non-existent exhibition. The catalogue, with the involvement of Serge Bard, was an exercise in both conceptual art and nihilism.

Critic Alain Jouffroy, the author of a treatise entitled "L'Abolition de l'art" (The Abolition of Art), penned a review for influential art review *Opus International*, calling Mosset's catalogue a practical embodiment of his theory and heralding it as "the greatest exhibition of paintings Paris has seen in recent times."

Mosset's catalogue was not the first print-only exhibition. Earlier that same year in the United States, Seth Siegelaub had published the famous *Xerox Book*, inviting artists to contribute works that responded to the standardized photocopy format.

GALERIE RIVE DROITE, 1968/1969

Mosset held his first proper solo show in Paris at Jean Larcade's Galerie Rive Droite in December 1968. This was followed by a second exhibition in December 1969. Both were identical, each featuring a dozen of Mosset's "circles." The 1968 exhibition (captured for posterity in Serge Bard's film *Fun and Games for Everyone*) drew huge crowds. The 1969 re-run, by contrast, was deserted. The catalogue for the second exhibition came with a red cover and a text by Marxist philosopher Jean-Paul Dollé, who stressed the political dimension of the circles. Dollé argued that Mosset's works "questioned the very conditions in which art comes into being—in other words, the processes by which it is made." For Dollé, Mosset's circle was the symbol of revolution.

VERTICAL STRIPES, 1974–1977

By 1973, Mosset had produced close to 200 identical paintings and his stock was on the rise. Realizing that the circle had become his calling card, and gained a cult following, Mosset came to the conclusion that it was no longer neutral enough to serve

his purposes. Recalling his earlier manifestations with Buren, Parmentier and Toroni, he decided to "appropriate" Buren's vertical stripes—a pattern that itself had become indissociable from its creator. In doing so, Mosset once again chose the path of anonymity, seeking to strip away identity from his paintings.

Between 1974 and 1977, Mosset produced around 50 canvases featuring vertical stripes, all similar in size. Early examples were gray and white, with Mosset adding color from 1975 onwards. As with his circles, Mosset held two almost identical exhibitions of his vertical stripe paintings— this time at Galerie Daniel Templon, in 1974 and 1976.

The first was a controversial affair. Ahead of the exhibition, Mosset circulated a fake invitation card referring to the show as an "Homage to Daniel Buren." Then, the day before the opening, an open letter purporting to be from Buren himself (again fake) was sent to various prominent figures in the art world. The confusion was complete when Buren issued a rebuttal and demanded that it be displayed in the gallery—which it never was. Mosset's vertical stripes were an early example of appropriation art. And although the forger was never formally identified, the scandal brought the practice, and the questions it raised, into sharp relief. A decade later, the technique would be adopted by artists such as Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince.

ECART, 1976

In November 1976, Mosset was invited to exhibit at Ecart in Geneva. The exhibition featured a single painting: white stripes on a white background. As Mosset himself later explained: "My idea was to take something reminiscent of the commercial gallery's white cube into a slightly underground space. That let me have it both ways: I could show a work of supposedly high art in a place that just didn't care; critique the sublime nature of painting with the "Nouveau Réaliste" touch of an emptygallery; and then critique that very approach with a specific object, a painting, that, in the end, meant nothing to anyone but me—surface problems."

The stripes were practically invisible, and the canvas, bordering on monochrome, marked the beginning of a new period in the artist's work. Mosset went on to produce a second white-on-white painting, followed by two gray-on-gray canvases, which he showed at Galerie Média in Neuchâtel shortly after the exhibition in Geneva.

NEW YORK, 1977–1986

In 1977, Mosset moved to New York, where he linked up with his friend and fellow Swiss artist Grégoire Müller. For a time, the two shared a studio in SoHo. In the US, Mosset rekindled his love for Abstract Expressionism—and artists like Pollock, Newman, Still, and, closer to home, Stella. After meeting Marcia Hafif in 1978 and talking to other members of the Radical Painting group, Mosset began to rethink his use of color and the size of his paintings.

Mosset produced only monochromes until 1986, holding his first exhibition at Tony Shafrazi Gallery in 1979. From his New York base, he made regular trips back to Europe. In 1980, he exhibited for the first time at Galerie Marika Malacorda in Geneva—the start of a decade-long relationship with the gallery.

Despite his radical take on art, Mosset was open to collaborations with artists from other disciplines. As a real-estate crisis gripped New York, SoHo felt very much like a village. Mosset was close to members of the New Wave film and music scenes, hosting regular concerts and screenings at his studio. He also got to know graffiti

artist and hip-hop pioneer Fred Brathwaite, better known as Fab 5 Freddy. Together they produced a series of paintings, none of which survive, that artist Christopher Wool would later acknowledge as a defining influence. In 1982, Mosset held a joint exhibition with Sarah Charlesworth at the Olsen Gallery, and became close to Sherrie Levine, Cady Noland, and other members of the "Pictures generation" group.

In the mid-1980s, a series of independent exhibitions curated by Collins & Milazzo and Bob Nickas brought a new generation of artists to prominence, including Jeff Koons, Peter Halley, Philip Taaffe, Louise Lawler, Wallace & Donohue, Laurie Simmons, Haim Steinbach, and Steven Parrino (with whom Mosset would share a studio for many years). This eclectic group of artists achieved commercial success and critical acclaim, not least under the banner of the Neo-Geo movement. Although still painting monochromes, Mosset's links with Nickas and Collins & Milazzo meant his works were exhibited alongside pieces by other members of the group. In this setting, his monochromes took on a certain ironic edge—a far cry from the sincerity that characterized the Radical Painting group. For Mosset, this was the start of a new chapter, and he decided to begin painting geometric patterns once again.

RADICAL PAINTING, 1978–1984

In September 1978, Marcia Hafif published a seminal essay in Artforum magazine, entitled "Beginning Again." Hafif observed that the "enterprise of painting"—and abstract painting in particular—was "under erasure," and argued for artists to "give it new energy" by taking a more analytical approach and "turning to the basic question of what painting is." After reading the essay, Mosset reached out to Hafif and suggested forming a group of artists with similar concerns.

The first meeting was held in October 1978 and, although numbers varied, the group convened once or twice a month until 1983. Aside from Mosset and Hafif, other attendees included Stephen Rosenthal, Doug Sanderson, Jerry Zeniuk, Phil Sims, Raimund Girke, Carmengloria Morales, Robert Ryman, Susanna Tanger, and Howard Smith.

The group published essays and treatises, organized talks and worked on a handful of projects together. Their efforts culminated in a spring 1984 exhibition, entitled *Radical Painting*, at the Williams College Museum of Art in Williamstown, Massachusetts, curated by Thomas Krens. Each artist penned a short text for the accompanying catalogue. Mosset's piece expressed a growing apathy towards the exploration of painting as an end in itself. The exhibition signaled the end—more than a celebration—of the group.

In hindsight, the Radical Painting group might have had greater traction in Europe than in the United States. That said, it remains one of the most valiant attempts by abstract artists to push back against the figurative wave sweeping through the art world at the time.

RED, 1986

For the Tenth Biennale de Paris (1977), Mosset produced a vast canvas featuring red stripes on a red background. Measuring 300 - 600 cm, it was designed to cover the entire wall. The piece was damaged during installation, and when Mosset redid the painting, he left out the stripes altogether, resulting in his first monochrome. He went on to produce several other large-scale red monochromes.

In June 1986, curator Bob Nickas organized an exhibition entitled *The Red Show*

at New York's Massimo Audiello Gallery. The idea, proposed by Mosset himself, was simple: to showcase red paintings and sculptures by local contemporary artists. As Nickas explained: "Everything in this exhibition is red, but the color isn't the point. Because when you fill a room with red paintings and objects, nothing really appears red. Here, the color is a mask that lends legitimacy to the staging of a series of works in an otherwise improbable – and for some, still questionable—setting."

STEVEN PARINO/CADY NOLAND

Olivier Mosset met Steven Parrino (1958–2005) in 1984, at the Nature Morte Gallery in New York. The pair hit it off immediately, even putting on a joint exhibition at Galerie Pierre Huber in Geneva in 1990, and remained close until Parrino's untimely death in 2005. Mosset and Parrino had much in common, including a studio and an interest in monochrome compositions and radical art. They also shared a love of biker subculture—a theme reflected in Parrino's misshapen paintings, which suggested both a destructive relationship with 20th-century painting and the crumpled body of cars after an accident.

Parrino's use of industrial lacquer, and on occasion engine oil, added a touch of distance and coldness to the sense of implied violence. Fabrice Stroun, who curated a 2006 retrospective of Parrino's works at MAMCO, explained: "Back in the early 1980s, when the word on the street was that painting was dead, rather than join the flock of mourners Parrino took a shot at necrophilia."

Bound by a relentless pursuit of "zero degree" painting, Mosset and Parrino collaborated on several occasions, producing monochrome diptychs that defied all notions of authorship. One of the pieces, *Untitled* (*66/88*) (1989), featured the letter A on both panels—a nod to the motif employed by Mosset in some of his earliest works. And by putting the A inside a circle, the painter alludes to the widely recognized anarchist symbol.

Mosset's involvement in a series of group exhibitions curated by Bob Nickas also saw him become close to Cady Noland and other members of the Pictures Generation group..In her exploration of what she calls "The American Nightmare," Noland harnesses the same air of brooding menace typical of Parrino's works.

These cross collaborations reveal an artistic community that inherited its radical principles from both its avant-garde forbears and the counterculture, and sought to perpetuate that legacy while forging its own, distinctive path.

OMAGGIO, 1989

In 1989, Mosset produced his first purpose-designed installation for an exhibition at New York's John Gibson Gallery. The piece—a giant sofa replete with mirrors and a Western-style frame—was in fact a repurposed bar counter from his Brooklyn studio. Mosset had removed the original frame, wrapped the base in a striped facing, and constructed a bench seat, covering it with a large sheet of trimmed red fabric.

The installation, which in many aspects drew directly from Mosset's formal vocabulary, also featured a series of mirrors that reflected the other pieces in the exhibition. The reference to Allan McCollum's *Plaster Surrogates* (depicted here in *trompe-l'oeil*) is unmistakable, as is Mosset's appropriation of Armleder's *Furniture Sculptures*. The piece's title—"homage"— points to Mosset's admiration for two artists who, each in their own way, had questioned the objectification of artworks.

TIMES SQUARE SHOW, 1980

In June 1980, Mosset took part in the *Times Square Show*, an event that *The Village Voice* called the "first radical art show of the '80s." The show, run by Collaborative Projects Inc. (Colab), opened in a former massage parlor on Seventh Avenue, just a few blocks from Times Square. For the entire month of June, the *Times Square Show* was open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, featuring works by around 100 artists spanning art, graffiti, fashion, music, performance art and experimental film. The show included paintings, sculptures, a fashion lounge, a silkscreen workshop where artists made posters, and even a souvenir shop selling tourist trinkets.

The *Times Square Show* was an irreverent display of defiance against the established art world. Amid the chaos, the building even played host to events that transformed the space into a forum for discussion and debate.

The show was the first outing for many artists, including Jean- Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, yet it also played host to works by more established names such as David Hammons, Jenny Holzer, Joel Shapiro, Walter Robinson, Alex Katz and Kiki Smith. Mosset's contribution— a black monochrome—was somewhat lost among the piles of clothes in the open-air fashion lounge, where it hung next to the first Basquiat to go on public display.

SINCE 1986

From 1966 to 1986, Mosset's work underwent little variation: after his circles came striped canvases and then monochromes, as the artist sought to produce effects of distance and neutrality. Paradoxically enough, his paintings' very refusal to describe inspired a host of descriptions, including "minimalist," "conceptual," "appropriative," "radical," and "neo-geo." Mosset has never objected to the importance accorded to context. On the contrary, in defiance of modernist dogma, it was context that allowed him to see pictorial autonomy as relative. For Mosset, paintings simultaneously refer to both themselves and the world at large.

It was this notion of relative autonomy that inspired him to exhibit two large monochromes at the Rex cinema in Neuchâtel in 1983, during screenings of the James Bond film *Octopussy*, "so that people who had come to watch a blockbuster film might just see paintings as well." The idea was not to criticize popular spectacle, but rather to expose the viewer to two different ways of seeing—a choice symbolically represented by the double arrow-shaped *Rustoleum*. Mosset never stopped adjusting his work based on the social and material contingencies of its creation and reception.

His 1986 exhibition at the Centre d'art contemporain in Geneva marked a turning point in his work. Aware that abstract art now had a history, in a sense making each abstract painting an "image" of a past abstraction, he temporarily abandoned monochromes and returned to geometric compositions. He also gave his paintings titles for the first time. This "step backwards," to quote one of his titles, opened him up to new forms and techniques.

Over the following years, Mosset began to experiment with the fundamental building blocks of painting itself. First, its dimensions: as Switzerland's representative at the 1990 Venice Biennale, he presented gigantic works of architectural proportions. Then, its form: in the 1990s, he began to produce shaped canvases in which the painting-as-object is pushed to the limits of sculpture. Lastly, its materials: having previously worked in acrylic and oil, he now began to experiment with formica, polyurethane and various industrial lacquers.

His compositions also began to feature references to art history as well as more

trivial motifs, examples of what Collins & Milazzo call "found abstraction." We also find motifs from his own early work: letters, circles and stripes, all revisited as references and adapted to current tastes. Such "remakes" ultimately lend an iterative aspect to Mosset's work, as already seen in his black circles of the 1960s.

A STEP BACKWARDS, 1986

In early 1986, Mosset presented a series of large paintings at the Centre d'art contemporain in Geneva. For the first time, he gave his works titles. These included *A Step Backwards* (1985), in an apparent reference to his move away from monochromatic works and a "return" to compositions, albeit minimalist ones. The painting features a white border along the top and sides of the composition; according to Mosset, it was inspired by soccer goals painted on the walls of a prison yard. His return to composition thus had a somewhat playful relationship to illusion.

Mosset was also taking a "step backwards" to re-examine twenty years of artistic practice. *G's Mission*, another painting shown at the same exhibition, is composed of white circles on a white background, as if the artist had assembled all the circles he had painted between 1966 and 1974. In its divergence from his previous work, particularly through the use of titles, the Geneva exhibition marked a turning point in Mosset's practice and opened up a wider range of pictorial possibilities.

VENICE BIENNALE, 1990

When Mosset was chosen to represent Switzerland at the Venice Biennale in 1990, he created six monumental paintings of a size commensurate to the honor and occasion. His exploration of scale, which began with his first monochromatic works, had reached its climax. These gigantic works impress physically upon the viewer and invite particular intimacy with the paint itself.

The simplicity of their composition, however, produces a chilling effect. The paintings impose a distance that rebuffs a heroic interpretation or a "metaphysical, humanist declaration of classical abstract art," in the painter's words. Jean Baudrillard, in his catalogue of the exhibition, called them "paintings that are not paintings" in that they thwart what is traditionally expected of the medium. Baudrillard saw them as "an instrument of vengeance that ridicules all the ambient pathos of signs and messages."

GRIDS, MID-1980s

In the mid-1980s, Mosset returned to making striped paintings. This formal principal allowed him to avoid issues of form and substance in his compositions. But unlike in the 1970s, he now began painting stripes of varying thicknesses and colors and presenting them in different formats. The repetition of narrow stripes can be seen as a reference to optical art, whereas his grids evoke one of modernity's preferred motifs.

But here again, such references to the history of abstract art appear to be kept at a distance. Some of Mosset's intersecting lines produce crosses (as in *Sophie's Choice*), and indeed his titles, while they have no direct connection to the subject matter, link the works to particular contexts, thus underscoring abstraction's autonomy as being merely relative.

For example, *Pool and Second Harley* feature similar compositions, but were

painted for different reasons. Pool is a reference to a pool table in Mosset's former studio, and thus draws attention to the process of producing the painting; *Second Harley* refers to the motorcycle Mosset planned to buy if he sold the piece, thus equating it with its exchange value.

LETTERS, 1985–1990

In 1985, Mosset painted *C.B.G.B.*: three lines on a red background that intersect to form the letter 'Z'. The composition featuring a letter on a monochromatic background recalls his early paintings depicting the letter 'A'. The title is a reference to the famous New York club of the same name, an iconic part of the punk rock scene of the 1970s and 80s. It is also an anagram of "BCBG"—shorthand for bon chic, bon genre, a French epithet pointing to someone's sense of style and social respectability— and thus a discreet acknowledgement of his recent work's "acceptability" compared to the radical stance of his monochromes.

"Even a painting hoping to limit itself to its material reality as a painting always has some tie to the idea of representation," Mosset stated at the time. Several of his works play with the ambiguity between geometric compositions and linguistic (even logo-like) symbols, always made up of vertical, horizontal and oblique lines. In *Value-pack*, for instance, the letter 'W' formed from intersecting lines also evokes the logo of a well-known automobile company.

CIMAISES

Cognizant of his paintings' nature as objects, in the early 1990s Mosset began "sidestepping into the third dimension" from time to time by making sculptures. The most radical is almost certainly *Cimaises*—the French term for the picture rail used to hang artwork in a gallery—created in 1993. It is composed of five identical rectangular cuboids aligned to form a minimalist sculpture reminiscent of the work of Donald Judd or Carl Andre. Each part of the sculpture is made in the same dimensions and from the same materials as the partial walls on which art is sometimes displayed in museums, as if waiting to be hung with art. *Cimaises* invites us to imagine walls as paintings in and of themselves and to apply the same gaze to an artwork's surroundings as we do to the work itself.

This same mechanism is present in the double-arrow *Rustoleum*, which directs the eye to what is happening next to the painting. The piece, a shaped canvas painted with lacquer, is also highly sculptural. Mosset would go on to create other unusually shaped paintings using unconventional materials such as polyurethane and formica.

FOUND ABSTRACTION

Mosset began making shaped canvases in the early 1990s, updating a technique famously employed by painters such as Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly. Moving beyond the traditionally rectangular shape of the canvas—in a practice bordering on sculpture—Mosset not only reinterprets some of his recurring motifs (such as circles and stars) but also pays homage to other artists. *Black Square* is primarily a reference to Kazimir Malevich, but the square of the title is set within two semicircles, turning it into one of Richard Artschwager's signature blps.

Always attentive to the century-old question of how the abstract becomes image, Mosset's work is full of references to concepts both within painting and outside of it. In the 1990s, he created several works of what Collins and Milazzo call "found abstraction." These pieces incorporate geometric shapes and logos (such as in FAX and Corporate), as well as visual compositions drawn from everyday life (*Green Card*). When part of a polyptych, even a monochrome seems to be nothing more than a representation of itself.