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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

## Pope Paul VI and Jacques Maritain

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On the occasion of the Jubilee Year 2025, the Vatican Museums pay homage to the famous French philosopher Jacques Maritain and his special bond with Saint Paul VI and the world of art with the exhibition curated by Micol Forti, Head of the Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art of the Vatican Museums, and set up in the heart of the exhibition itinerary dedicated to the art of the present, halfway between

the Raphael Rooms and the Sistine Chapel. This is a plural occasion to celebrate several important anniversaries: the eightieth anniversary of the appointment of Jacques Maritain as Ambassador of France to the Holy See, in 1945; the foundation, almost contextual, of the Cultural Center of San Luigi dei Francesi; the sixtieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, in December 1965; and the Collection of Modern Religious Art, desired and inaugurated by Pope Montini in June 1973.

Jacques Maritain, heir and updater of Thomist thought, where is an intimate relationship between the expression of beauty and spiritual experience. At the same time, artistic activity is "a virtue of the practical intellect" that presupposes both manual experience and culture. In this sense, art always relates to the world in a profound and essential dimension of "spiritual contemporaneity".

Exceptional interlocutors in the central years of the Maritains life, as well as recipients of extensive correspondence, Rouault, Chagall and Severini were bound by a sincere and lasting friendship with the philosopher and his wife Raïssa. The three masters understood and interpreted Maritain's thought more than anyone else and, conversely,

their artistic vision helped to shape and broaden the reference framework for the philosopher, who, after *Art et Scolastique* (1920), moved on to *L'intuition créatrice dans l'art et dans la poésie* (1953) and *La responsabilité de l'artiste* (1960).

Rouault was probably the closest artist to Maritain, and mutual influence between the two has been the subject of numerous studies. They met shortly after the philosopher's conversion, and in 1910 Maritain wrote an introduction to the painter's work under a pseudonym, demonstrating that he already understood the full potential and authenticity of Rouault's work, expressed above all in his search for a new representation of Christ in a contemporary and deeply moving manner.

Raïssa, née Oumançoff, a poet of Russian origin and Maritain's fellow student at the Sorbonne, became

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**Redaktioneller Programmdienst:  
European News Agency**

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16  
D-85055 Ingolstadt  
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660  
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661  
Email: [contact@european-news-agency.com](mailto:contact@european-news-agency.com)  
Internet: [european-news-agency.com](http://european-news-agency.com)

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enthusiastic about the work of Chagall, who, like her, was of Jewish origin; with him, in 1948 she produced a volume of verse and prose entitled Chagall ou l'orage enchanté.

For Severini and his wife, their encounter with the Maritains marked the beginning of a new artistic and spiritual journey: Jacques himself would encourage the painter to take part in the competition for the decoration of the church of Semsales in Switzerland in 1924, opening a new season dedicated to the decoration of churches in Switzerland and Italy. In his writings, Maritain also addressed the fundamental theme of the artist's freedom, rejecting subordination

to politics and religious authority but at the same time highlighting the "moral responsibility of the artist", who cannot be accountable to himself alone, since art is always deeply connected to society and collective needs.

These aspects of Maritain's thinking immediately resonated with Montini's ideas about the functions and value of contemporary art in the religious and social spheres. It is no coincidence that many works by artists close to the Maritains were included in the Collection of Modern Religious Art commissioned by St. Paul VI and inaugurated in 1973 in the Vatican Museums, only a few months after the philosopher's death.

On that occasion and in the years immediately preceding the opening of the Collection to the public, the "Cercle d'études Jacques et Raissa Maritain" donated a series of particularly significant works to the Pope, such as the watercolour and ink drawing that the poet and artist Jean Cocteau had donated and dedicated to the Maritains in memory of his conversion to Christianity, which took place under their spiritual influence in 1925.

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V.i.S.d.P. und gem. § 6 MDSStV: Dr. Carlo Marino

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European News Agency**

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16  
D-85055 Ingolstadt  
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660  
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661  
Email: [contact@european-news-agency.com](mailto:contact@european-news-agency.com)  
Internet: [european-news-agency.com](http://european-news-agency.com)

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