Online Viewing Room

**Raymond Hains**

*Saffa, 1971*

17 September – 1 October 2020
Raymond Hains
Saffa, 1971
lacquered wood, sandpaper
98.5 x 95 x 11.5 cm.;
38 3/4 x 37 3/8 x 4 1/2 in.
signed and titled (on the reverse)

Provenance
Gallery Orler, Madonna di Campiglio
Private Collection, Naples
Anon. Sale, Cornette de St Cyr, Brussels,
3 December 2017, lot 113
Private Collection

Exhibited
Paris, Galerie Max Hetzler,
Raymond Hains: Saffa | Seita,
September – October 2018
RAYMOND HAINS
1926 – 2005
lived and worked in Paris, France

“The continuous act of shifting, drifting and inflecting through different spaces, images, words and signification is perhaps where Hains retains his extraordinary relevance, not only to current art production but also to the slippery malleability and ever-changing nature of our contemporary environment.”1

Hans Ulrich Obrist

Saffa, 1971, belongs to Raymond Hains’ seminal matches series. A primary example of a wall-mounted matchbook, it encapsulates the Pop Art aesthetic and minimalist qualities of this iconic body of work, examples of which were exhibited at documenta IV, Kassel in 1968 and are represented in major international collections including MoMA, New York; Musée national d’Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris; MAMAC, Nice; Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and Museum Ludwig, Cologne.

A central figure in post-war French art, Raymond Hains developed an artistic universe that playfully borrows from the real world and explores the visual and metaphoric possibilities of linguistic frameworks. Together with Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely and Jacques Villeglé, Hains was a founding member of Nouveau Réalisme, the French counterpart to Pop Art established in 1960. Even though the group was short-lived and came into existence at an early stage of Hains’ career, the values of connecting the traditions of fine art with popular culture accompanied the artist throughout his career.

Hains initiated his matches series in 1964 while residing in Italy. After seeing Claes Oldenburg’s work exhibited at the Venice Biennale the same year, Hains began the production of oversized matchbooks and matches (fig. 1). Existing in both free-standing and mural form, the works bridge the gap between sculpture and painting, reflecting the artist’s awareness of contemporary discourses around Minimalism. Hains attributed this body of work to two fictional artists, “Saffa” and “Seita”, whose names were based on the acronyms of the Italian and French national tobacco monopolies of the time. Following the first exhibition of this body of work at Galleria del Leone in Venice in 1964, Hains nurtured the myth of the two invented artists through numerous exhibitions, signing works in their name and presenting himself as their agent. Humorously taking on different roles and identities of the art world, Hains questioned the artist’s status and how it was being instrumentalised by society.
The matchbooks were produced by a carpenter from an existing model, following Hain's instructions. By delegating the production of the matches, Hains further challenged the role of the artist in creating both work and meaning. In addition to questioning the concept of authorship in his own work, Hains also wanted to pay tribute to the Byzantine concept of *acheiropoieta*, which argues that works are more valuable when untouched by human hand. Similar to Hains’ *affiches lacérées* (torn posters) and *palissades*, which used found materials such as advertisements, political posters and boarding fences collected from the street, the matches battle “for the elimination of the personal signature and the refusal of the romantic figure of the artist creator” (figs. 2 and 3).²

The choice of matchbooks, which are trivial objects often used as advertisement gifts, allowed Hains to monumentalise everyday objects in artistic form. By using wood for their fabrication—an inexpensive material rarely used in fine art—the artist honours the original material of matchbooks. Critically exploring and incorporating consumer goods in his works, Hains turned the mundane into “objets d’art”. Playing with the legacy of the ready-made, Saffa navigates between humour and seriousness, familiarity and aesthetic duty.
“I was looking at a book of matches produced by the French tobacco company with Lafontaine’s fable ‘The ass in the lion’s skin”; I noticed it on the table, just like that, when we were having a drink in the cafés, and it occurred to me that it would be funny to have enlarged matchbooks, the other way around, hanging on the wall. This was at the time of the 1964 Venice Biennale and the exhibition of Pop Art. I took my inspiration from one of Oldenburg’s ideas. In Italy there were matches with yellow ends, in bright colours of the Klein and Matisse kind. I should also add that at the restaurants, at Il Angelo or La Colomba, for example, photographers took pictures of people during the meal and, by the time of the dessert, brought back their portrait stuck to a box of matches. All that explains how I got around to this business. So I imagined two artists who each had a monopoly on matchboxes. They were gadgets to illustrate Nouveau Réalisme, which could have been called Personified Abstractions.”

Raymond Hains
Raymond Hains, Viva Arte Viva, 57th Venice Biennale, Venice, 2017
Comparable Works in Museum Collections

**Saffa Super Matchbox**, 1965
polyvinyl acetate paint on plywood
115.5 x 86.9 x 7.5 cm.; 45 1/2 x 34 1/4 x 3 in.
Acc. no.: 782.1969.
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gift of Philip Johnson.

**Saffa**, 1964
painted wood on plywood
128 x 100 x 7 cm.; 50 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 2 3/4 in.
Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris

**Seita**, 1970
mixed media on wood
98 x 80 x 20 cm.; 38 5/8 x 31 1/2 x 7 7/8 in.
Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon

**Saffa**, 1965
polyvinyl acetate paint on plywood
115.5 x 86.9 x 7.5 cm.; 45 1/2 x 34 1/4 x 3 in.
Acc. no.: 782.1969.
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gift of Philip Johnson.

**Seita**, 1970
painted wood,
93 x 80 x 47 cm.; 36 5/8 x 31 1/2 x 18 1/2 in.
Museum Ludwig, Cologne

**Saffa**, 1964
painted wood
128 x 100 x 7 cm.; 50 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 2 3/4 in.
Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris

**Seita, 1971**
giant matchbox in melamine and painted wood, emery cloth
98 x 80 x 25 cm.; 38 5/8 x 31 1/2 x 9 7/8 in.
Musée d’art moderne et d’art contemporain, Nice

**Allumettes blanches**, 1965
painted wood
95 x 84 x 13 cm.; 37 3/8 x 33 1/8 x 5 1/8 in.
Modern museet, Stockholm

**Pochette d’allumettes (Matchbox)**, 1971
acrylic, sandpaper and wood on plywood tablex
100 x 94.7 x 9 cm.; 39 3/8 x 37 1/4 x 3 1/2 in.
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid
From Bauhaus to Pop: Masterworks given by Philip Johnson,
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1996
LOOK

WATCH

DISCOVER

The artist’s work is held in various museum collections including the Musée national d’Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris; Musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; Fondation Cartier, Paris; MAMAC, Nice; MoMA, New York; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Sprengel Museum, Hannover; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; Fundação Serralves, Porto; Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon; MACBA, Barcelona; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; MUMOK, Vienna; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Saffa (detail), 1971
Saffa | Seita, Galerie Max Hetzler, Paris, 2018
Footnotes

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Saffa, 1971, Photo: Charles Duprat.
Allumette Seita, 2005, Photo: Charles Duprat.
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