

François Heaulmé was born in the Haute-Savoie at Saint-Jorioz on 26th September 1927. He studied classics at Thônes Comprehensive School and then in Paris at Lycée Michelet.

He frequented the Louvre from his early youth, where he “studied” painting before the “motif”. The “motif” in this case was not an exterior subject to be represented but the basic subject of all painting, in other words, painting itself. This was a exercise in looking to understand what painting was really all about. The painter enquires into/explores (Italians use the word *indagare*) the many-faceted reality of the painters’ subject to make their secrets his own and to find the alchemy of this particular substance.

Living first in Paris and then in the Champagne district, he settled in the Lot, near Cahors, in 1967. That year he became interested, alongside oils on canvas, in monotype techniques. This was to enrich his aesthetic resources throughout his career, as can be seen in the remarkable series of pictures inspired by Oscar Wilde’s *Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

After the Expressionist period of his early exhibitions, when he primarily used full brush technique, François Heaulmé developed another style and a different treatment of space, starting in the 70s. Canvasses from this period represent theatrical settings, more or less empty or full of strange “beings”: men, animals, and sometimes leaves.. As if disciplined, his brush bent to a new askesis. The picture became dense and profound, and his touch emaciated. Flesh is certainly still in his painting but less tactile; it vibrates in unison with subtle essentiality. The painter explains what he means in *The Pastrycook’s Dog*, a text he wrote for the retrospective in the Saint-Denis Museum (1986).

During the 80s and until now he has continued his quest for the essentials, giving up the thick brushwork and brilliancy of his early years. The presence of this essentialness can be seen in the light, even the grain of the animated canvas, reanimated by the light virtuoso brushwork.

And twenty years later, the artist’s words are an echo of those used in *The Pastrycook’s Dog*. The text entitled *Twenty Years On* was published in the catalogue of the Henri-Martin Museum, Cahors (18th March – 6th June 2005).

Jeanne Heaulmé
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