



Michel Debiève

1931–2021

Michel Debiève was born on May 29, 1931, in a working-class suburb of Maubeuge in northern France, the twin brother of fellow artist Raymond Debiève. Their father Émile, a foundry worker, died during the war, and the brothers were separated for several years before being reunited under the care of their mother Madeleine and her second husband, Lucien Henneuse, who gave the boys their first paints and built them a shared studio at home, along with a forge in the garage where Raymond and Michel sculpted metal, created jewelry, and learned ceramic modeling from an early age.

On the recommendation of the painter Charles Bétrémieux, both brothers enrolled at the École des Beaux-Arts in Valenciennes, where they won successive prizes each year in the Concours d'Encouragement à l'Art. In 1953, the twins entered the studio of master glazier Paul Ducatez and spent two years producing stained glass for churches in the region, working closely with the Abbé Mériaux, founder of the Sars-Poteries Glass Museum. That same year, Raymond and Michel together decorated the bar of champion boxer Georges Carpentier in Paris. By the mid-1950s both brothers were exhibiting in Paris, at the Galerie Mai and Galerie du Siècle, with their metal sculptures selling quickly.

The 1960s brought a separation of paths. Raymond moved to Provence; Michel settled in Orvault, near Nantes, where he would remain for the rest of his life, working from the same address for more than forty years. A 1970 guide to French artisans described him as “sculpteur sur fer, peintre et brodeur,” noting works that spanned wool embroidery, images on glass and wood, wrought iron, and painting, a range that captured the breadth of a practice rooted equally in fine art and the traditions of popular craft.

Michel exhibited widely across Paris and western France, showing at the Galerie Mai, Galerie du Siècle, and Galerie La Demeure in Paris, as well as Galerie des Flandres in Lille and, in Nantes, at Galerie Michel Columb, Galerie Bourlaouen, and Galerie Art Espace, where he was a permanent artist. His exhibitions included joint shows with Alberto Giacometti in Cannes in 1953 and with Jean Lurçat at Galerie La Demeure in Paris, as well as group exhibitions at Galeries Michel Columb alongside Chaissac and Paessant. His work is held in the permanent collections of the Musée des Beaux-Arts in both Nantes and Valenciennes. He is listed in Davenport's and Bénézit's Dictionnaire des peintres.

Deeply marked by popular art traditions encountered during his Beaux-Arts years, Michel continued painting, drawing, and working across multiple media with undiminished energy until the end of his life. He died on December 19, 2021. A posthumous retrospective, organized by his wife Andrée and daughters Soazig and Rozenn in collaboration with the City of Orvault, honored a career of more than half a century devoted entirely to art.