

"Jean Cocteau"  
★

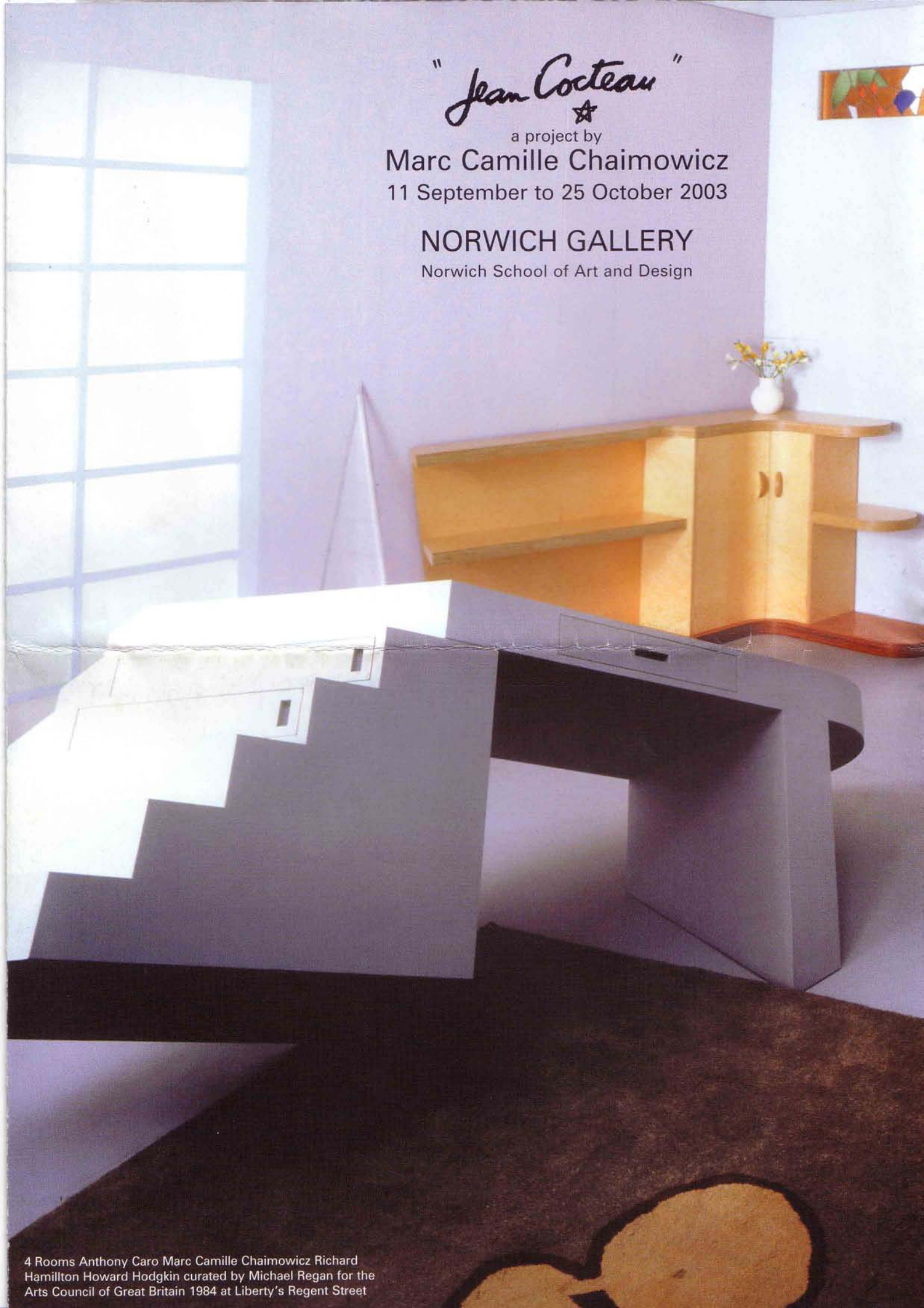
a project by

Marc Camille Chaimowicz

11 September to 25 October 2003

NORWICH GALLERY

Norwich School of Art and Design





DISPATCH 095

" Jean Cocteau " ★

a project by  
Marc Camille Chaimowicz

featuring  
Marcel Breuer  
Stephen Buckley  
Enrico David  
Cerith Wyn Evans  
Alberto and Diego Giacometti  
Tom of Finland  
Isokon  
Marie Laurencin  
Paulina Olowska  
Nadia Wallis  
Andy Warhol

11 September to 25 October 2003  
Vernissage Thursday 11 September 6.00 to 8.00pm 2003

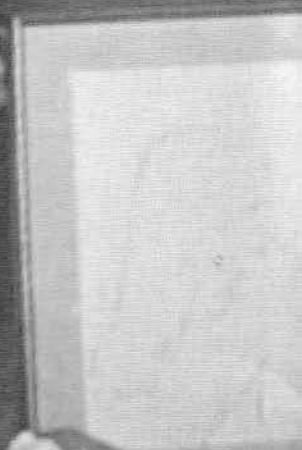
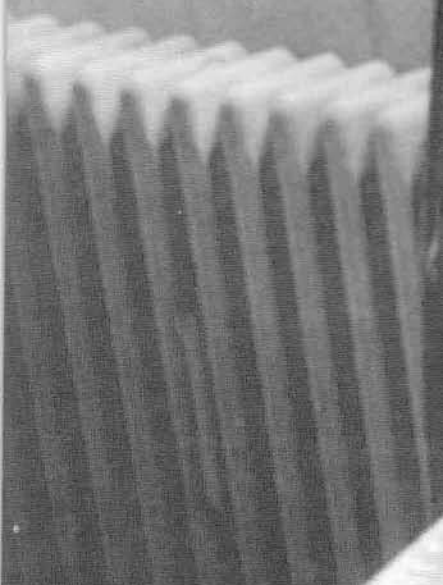
Sunday 12 October 3.00pm  
Jean Cocteau Cinema City Norwich  
*LE SANG D'UN POÈTE* 1930 (The Blood of a Poet)  
*LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE* 1946 (Beauty and the Beast)  
interval conversation Marc Camille Chaimowicz and Krzysztof Fijalkowski

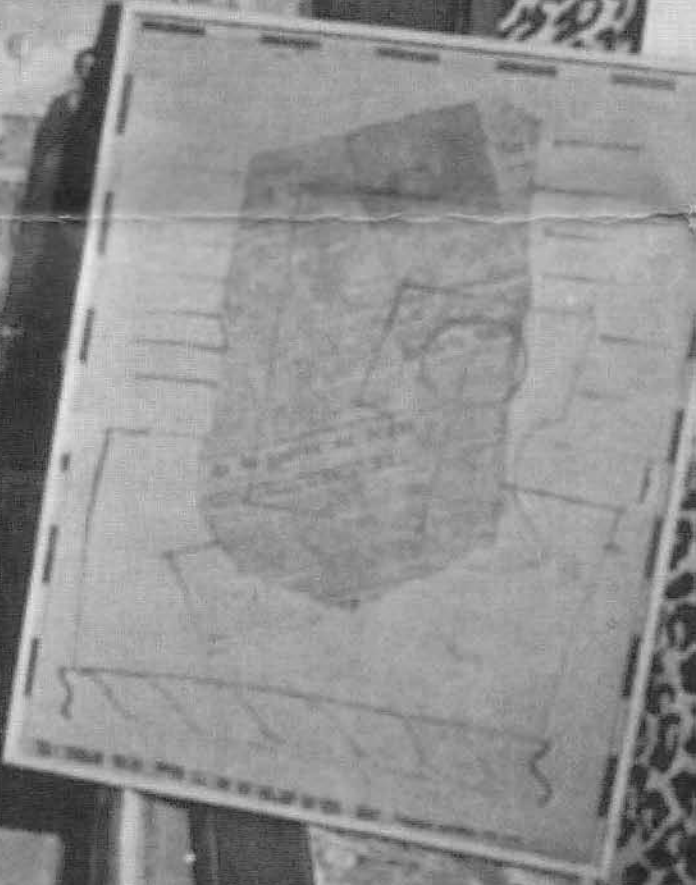
## NORWICH GALLERY

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the artist is represented by Cabinet Gallery, London







The British School at Rome 1998

Marc Camille Chaimowicz in conversation with Krzysztof Fijalkowski

*KF: You've agreed to curate an exhibition evoking the work and style of Jean Cocteau, and he is shortly to be honoured with a major retrospective at the Centre Pompidou. What is it about Cocteau that might appeal to you today?*

MCC: I had not thought about Cocteau in recent years but when we first started to talk about an exhibition Lynda Morris reminded me of a visit we made in the 1970's to the French Church in Soho to see his wonderful murals. In retrospect this secret marvel has had an impact on me and it's been curious to re-engage with his work. The Beaubourg show confirms his rehabilitation by the French who had pretty much excluded him, and had tried to erase him as a major figure. And it's a good example of the contention that he can be seen as a kind of postmodernist thinker before his time in terms of his approach and way of living. There's a topicality about his multidisciplinary sensibilities which were frowned upon, certainly when I was a student, which is partly why he was intriguing to me. There's also a fiction around Cocteau's imagined study – a furnished interior that obliquely references his poetics – and this naturally implies some treasure and the esoteric.

We all have phantom figures that accompany us in our formative years. I wonder in retrospect whether he wasn't important for me largely because he was everything that a relatively formalist English art education despised, notably at Camberwell, which of course I contested. I think in that sense Cocteau was very exotic, firstly because of the ease whereby he could seemingly effortlessly deal with poetry, filmmaking, theatre, drawing and journalism. His cosmopolitan, suave nature would have been very attractive to me, and of course the fact that he was sexually ambiguous. He was also a celebrity, forming a link between Dalí and Warhol; the French see him as a dandy, a Wilde like figure, as somebody whose life was bigger than his work, a kind of cross between an aesthete and a dilettante.

*KF: Certainly he seems to be remembered now as a kind of insider's outsider, at the crossroads between many of the great figures of modern European culture, just as you've chosen to curate this exhibition by bringing together and collaborating with a group of individuals rather than only using your own work.*

MCC: Is this not an extended metaphor for his sociability and interest in creative dialogue? Pierre Berger refers to him as a companion to modernity, and not just within the plastic arts; he worked with everyone, with Picasso and Diaghilev, Satie, with Coco Chanel ... was close to Collete and Edith Piaf. But Cocteau was also contentious – André Gide couldn't bear him, the Surrealists detested him, and he was also hated by the Right. He was a taboo figure, dealing with issues that weren't acceptable within a Modernist agenda. As he rejects Modernist values and therefore finds the neoclassical as an alternative premise for practice, so it enables him to deal with the big questions, with life and death, with how the poet can avoid mortality, which were not very fashionable ideas at the time.

*KF: In a way he could be seen as a consummate bricoleur, someone who surrounded himself with interesting people, absorbed what was interesting from them and reassembled it, in ways perhaps not unlike Warhol or David Bowie.*

MCC: What's interesting is that he's had such an impact for the Bowie generation. He was attractive to people who were attempting to negotiate a dialogue between low and high culture - because after all we were as drawn to low culture, and to the rock music scene, as we were to high culture. Many of us were torn, partly through sheer hedonism and partly because of one's socio-political engagement: to what extent did we want to perpetuate elitist practice? Although Cocteau is the supreme caricature of elitism, as a Modern nonetheless he was accessible to rock culture because the work is very straightforward; yet in a way it is often also constructed, as it is, on artifice, transparently fake, so he was very liberational.

London July 2003