

# WIDEWALLS

## Visiting Jean Dubuffet's Monumental Tour Aux Récits at Smithson Plaza



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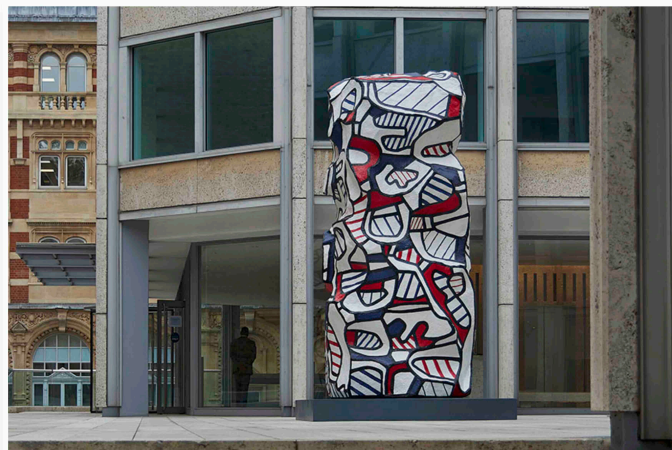
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Londoners hunting for outdoor art experiences will delight at the recent installation of the Jean Dubuffet sculpture *Tour aux récits* in Smithson Plaza — that is, if they can find it.

The small square is surrounded by a trio of commercial high rises near Buckingham Palace. Smithson Plaza was originally built to house the offices of The Economist newspaper. It now houses various real estate and investment concerns. The sculpture is tucked away along the tight, pedestrian walkway that winds through the concrete plaza, where it stands out among the three brutalist towers like a hyper-imaginative stalagmite, its whimsical presence a pleasant foil to whatever tightly regulated and sensible activities are no doubt happening within the surrounding offices.

*Tour aux récits* belongs to the part of the Dubuffet oeuvre known as his *Hourloupe Cycle*, the series that marked the moment Dubuffet departed from painting and drawing and expanded into the three-dimensional realm. "Hourloupe" is a nonsense word Dubuffet invented as a catch-all utterance combining his associations with other unsettling French words and phrases, such as "hurler" (to roar), "hululer" (to hoot), "loup" (wolf), "riquet à la houppé" (fairy tale), and "Le Horla," another made-up word used as the title of a book by the French writer Guy de Maupassant about an alien being.

The works in the *Hourloupe Cycle* are abstract, but they tend to convey the feeling of chaotic cityscapes teeming with creatures and machines. There is something mysterious, even monstrous about these works. They feel distorted, and always seem to be in the process of metamorphosing into something else. The appearance of a work from the series in this particular place at this time of economic and political uncertainty could not be more appropriate. Dubuffet considered this series his attempt to offer an alternative interpretation of reality. In short, he hoped it would change the world.



Jean Dubuffet - *Tour aux récits*, Installation View at Smithson Plaza. Photo by Barney Hindle, Courtesy Waddington Custot and Encounter Contemporary