

Jean Dubuffet: The Last 10 Years

Waddington Custot, London

13 April–13 June 2026

The electrifying final decade of Jean Dubuffet's career.

Waddington Custot is proud to present its 14th solo exhibition of works by French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901–85), a celebration of the gallery's longstanding relationship with the artist and his Estate, spanning over 50 years since hosting his first British show in 1972.

'Jean Dubuffet: The Last 10 Years' brings together a focused selection of paintings from the radical final chapter of his career. Dubuffet remained remarkably productive right up to the end of his life, creating works that push artistic boundaries and challenge the way we see the world. Presenting 17 pivotal paintings made between 1975 and 1984, the exhibition highlights a period of great experimentation. Dubuffet re-examines the visual language developed over four decades, loosening previous structures, exploring new colours and blending abstraction with figuration in ways that are thought-provoking and full of vitality.

The earliest paintings on display, 'Paysage avec 6 personnages' and 'Paysage avec 4 personnages', both from 1975, depict figures embedded within abstracted landscapes, the perennial theme of Dubuffet's long career. Beneath a high horizon line, terrain is painted as layered bands of form and colour, the figures immersed in and at one with the soil. These paintings are notable for their vibrant and explosive use of yellow and pink, colours largely absent during the previous series *L'Hourloupe* (1963–74), when white and black, blue and red dominated. Dubuffet's vocabulary begins to loosen: landscapes and figures coexist in fluid systems.

Four collage pieces from the *Théâtre de la Mémoire* series (mid-late 1970s) find Dubuffet revisiting earlier motifs; painted onto pieces of paper, cut and assembled into layered compositions, characters float in untethered landscapes, the separation between figure and background seemingly interchangeable. The highlight is 'Le Malentendu' (23 December 1976), a masterpiece of layered colour, fragmentary forms and temporal freedom.

Next, we show four paintings from Dubuffet's *Partitions* series (1980–81), the last major series painted directly onto canvas. Harking back to paintings from the early 50's, the field patterns of the earlier works are replaced here with simple outline boxes, each containing one or more figures, seemingly

caught within the terrain within which they exist, reinforcing the bond between the body and the earth.

Dubuffet's *Sites* and *Psycho-sites* series (1981–82), represented by four paintings, transport viewers into imagined, indeterminate spaces. Figures float through elusive landscapes coloured in expressive palettes. Dubuffet described these works as representing “ideas of characters who populate ideas of *sites*... an enterprise aimed at escaping the reasonable, at freeing the figuration and hence the vision.” In ‘Site aléatoire avec 6 personnages’ (5 May 1982), he blurs the line between figure and landscape to such an extent that figures fuse with ground, hovering ghost-like on the verge of disappearance. At the threshold of abstraction, they form a meditation on presence, absence and our connection to the earth.

In two rare, large works from the *Mires* series (1983), Dubuffet experiments with immersive colour fields, collapsing space and time in abstract compositions where line, volume, void and colour intermingle. The bright yellow ‘Mire G 136 (Kowloon)’ evokes Dubuffet’s imagined impressions of Chinese shop signs and ceremonial banners in Hong Kong. ‘Mire (Boléro)’, a deep, resonant red, depicts a fragmented pictorial space and hums with latent heat. These paintings, fully abstract, the figures entirely dissolved, buzz with an almost atomic energy. Dubuffet seems to be reducing the world to an elemental level, capturing a sense of intensity and unstoppable motion.

‘The Last 10 Years’ concludes with ‘Champ Psychophysique’ from 1984, part of Dubuffet’s *Non-lieux* series. It represents a psychophysical field, merging perception, sensation and material reality, evoking cycles of emergence, presence and disappearance. The work reflects Dubuffet’s interest in terroir and our inseparable bond with the land – his last meditation on how humans emerge from, inhabit and eventually reabsorb into their environment.

A fearless iconoclast, Jean Dubuffet emerged from the devastation of the Second World War with a single determination: to obliterate tradition and remake art on his own terms. He rejected academic polish and conventional beauty, favoring raw, immediate and often confrontational expression. His late paintings concentrate this radicalism to its purest form, creating psychological landscapes that defy literal representation. ‘Jean Dubuffet: The Last 10 Years’ reveals an artist who never ceased to reinvent himself, pushing Art Brut to new extremes, mining the raw energy of human experience and challenging the very foundations of how we see and feel the world, right up to the final moments of his life.

'Jean Dubuffet: The Last 10 Years' coincides with an exhibition on the same defining years, 'Pulsions, Jean Dubuffet, the final years (1974-1985)', at the Fondation Dubuffet, Paris, France, opening on 16 April 2026.

IMAGES

Courtesy Waddington Custot, London Paris Dubai



'Le malentendu 23 décembre 1976'

1976

acrylic on collaged canvas-backed paper mounted on canvas

27 3/4 x 40 1/4 in / 70.4 x 102.2 cm



'Mire G 136 (Kowloon) 25 septembre 1983'

1983

acrylic on canvas backed paper

52 3/4 x 78 3/4 in / 134 x 200 cm



'L'heure de pointe 8 décembre 1980'

1980

acrylic on canvas

39 3/8 x 31 7/8 in / 100 x 81 cm

NOTES TO EDITORS

Credit Line

'Jean Dubuffet: The Last 10 Years', 13 April–13 June 2026 waddingtoncustot.com

About Waddington Custot

Waddington Custot was formed through the partnership of French art dealer Stephane Custot and long time London art dealer Leslie Waddington, in 2010. Located in Cork Street since 1958, formerly as Waddington Galleries, the gallery has a rich heritage and an international reputation for quality and expertise in works by modern and contemporary masters, with a particular focus on monumental sculpture. The gallery has cemented its reputation over several decades for high quality and well-researched exhibitions of significant artists operating in the mid-twentieth century and beyond.

About Jean Dubuffet

Jean Dubuffet was born in Le Havre in 1901. After briefly studying at the Académie Julian in Paris, he worked in the wine trade before dedicating himself fully to painting in 1942. His first solo exhibition took place in Paris in 1944, followed by his New York debut in 1947. Major exhibitions during his lifetime included the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (1960–61), the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1962), Tate Gallery, London (1966), the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1973),

and the Akademie der Künste, Berlin (1980). Since his death in 1985, his work has continued to be the subject of major international exhibitions.

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