

## BIOGRAPHY

### EARLY LIFE

Jean-Michel Folon was born in Brussels on 1 March 1934. He was the first of three children of a paper merchant. The young Folon showed little interest in studying, preferring to spend all his time drawing. He firstly completed an architecture course and then, in 1954, went to study at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Visuels de La Cambre (Brussels).

In 1955, he went hitchhiking in France and stayed there for some time. He settled in Bougival, not far from Paris. During the five years he spent there, he drew every day.

### THE 1960s

Folon sent his drawings to various magazines in New York, such as *Horizon*, *Esquire*, *The New Yorker*, which were all enthusiastic about his work. His success in the USA provided a route into the galleries and the European press. He often travelled to Italy, where he met the writer Giorgio Soavi, artistic director at Olivetti for whom he conceived several advertising campaigns. In 1961, he married the French artist Colette Portal. The couple had two children. In 1968, after living in Paris for a while, Folon bought an old house in Burcy, in the Beauce region of France. The open and gently undulating landscape gradually encouraged him to turn his hand to watercolour painting.

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### THE 1970s

In 1970 he met his second wife, Paola Ghiringhelli. Folon exhibited his work at the Galleria del Milione in Milan. Some of the great museums held exhibitions of his work: The Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris (1971), The Museum of Fine-Arts in Bruxelles (1975), The Bojmans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam (1976), The Deutsches Plakatmuseum in Essen, The Institute of Contemporary Art in London (1977). He represented Belgium in two Biennials – in Venice in 1971 and in São Paulo, where he won the first prize. Folon continued his work as an illustrator by designing magazine covers. At the request of various publishers, he illustrated literature and poetry of the 19th century.

### THE 1980s

Folon assembled and transformed objects, taking his first steps on the way to becoming a monumental sculptor. He lived in the seaside on the French Riviera, then moved to Monaco (1985). As a poster artist and illustrator, he campaigned for causes that were close to his heart such as Greenpeace and UNICEF. In 1989, he designed the logo for the Bicentenary of the French Revolution. In 1981, he was commis-

sioned to create theatre and opera sets. He exhibited his work widely: La Poste's Museum in Paris and the Ingres Museum in Montauban (1982), the Museum Picasso in Antibes (1984), a retrospective in Tokyo, Osaka and Kamakura in Japan (1985), the Correr Museum in Venice (1985), the National Museum of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires and Le Botanique cultural art center in Brussels (1987).

## THE 1990s

During this decade, Folon developed a passion for sculpture. In 1997, he erected a bronze sculpture by the sea in the Belgian resort of Knokke. Entitled *The Sea, that great sculptor*, the figure of a man is submerged at high tide. Many exhibitions are dedicated to his work around the world: The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1990), the Marino Marini Museum in Florence (1990), La Pedrera in Barcelona (1993), a retrospective in Shizuoka, at Bunkamura Museum in Tokyo and in Kyoto in Japan (1995), the Olympic Museum in Lausanne (1996), the Morandi Museum in Bologna (1996). He also kept up his campaigning work, chiefly on behalf of the environment, and continued working as an illustrator. He created the cartoons for the stained glass windows in several chapels in France and Italy.

## THE 2000s

During this period, Folon was the recipient of a number of awards. He was appointed as ambassador for UNICEF and was awarded the Legion of Honor in France (2003). In 2000, he set up his foundation in La Hulpe, just outside Brussels. He exhibited his work in prestigious locations: the grounds of the Sao Jorge Castle in Lisbon (2001), the Ducal Palace in Lucca (2003). His last retrospective takes place at the Palazzo Vecchio and at the Forte di Belvedere in Florence in 2005.

He created the sets and costumes for *La Bobème* at the Puccini Festival in Torre del Lago, in Italy (2003). He designed the stained glass windows in Waha Church in Belgium and redesigned the Chapelle des Pénitents Blancs in Saint-Paul de Vence (2003). Folon died on 20 October 2005, at the age of 71.