**Michaux, Henri (1899 - 1984)**

Henri Michaux was an idiosyncratic Belgian artist and writer who can be roughly situated at the borders of Aurrealism and Art Informel. At the age of twenty he dropped out of medical school in order to sail the world, setting in motion a restless series of ‘voyages of expatriation’ that took him not only to South America, Asia, and finally to Paris, but eventually through several artistic mediums: poems, fantastic tales, drawings, paintings, and even one film. In terms of style and inspiration, he especially proclaimed his debt to the works of Comte de Lautréamont and Paul Klee. In the late 1950s, he experimented heavily with various drugs - most notoriously mescaline - not in a hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, but rather in search of a kind of poetico-scientific knowledge of the strange inner movements of the mind, which he referred to as the ‘marvelous normal’ contrary to Andre Breton’s *absolute* marvellous. Although Michaux is perhaps most well known for his stories about a pseudo-autobiographical anti-hero named *Plume*, the entire trajectory of his visual work *-* first in his invented hieroglyphic *Alphabets*, then in his tachist paintings and mescaline drawings - can be seen as a series of failed attempts to create a means of expression adequate to this marvellous normal.

Jay Hetrick

**References and further reading**

Bowie, Malcolm, *Henri Michaux: A Study of his Literary Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973)

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Michaux, Henri, *Darkness Moves: An Henri Michaux Anthology 1927-1984*, ed. and trans. David Ball (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994)

Michaux, Henri, *Untitled Passages*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (New York: The Drawing Center, 2000)

**Suggested image**

*Mescaline Drawing*, 1959, india ink, 32 x 24 cm

Musée national d’art modern, Paris (Fonds D.B.C. AM 1976 – 1169 D)