The fascination with the infinitely small and the infinitely big, with nature and the cosmos, has accompanied mankind since the dawn of time. For Raynaud, creating is the continuity of his alliance with the largest scale of all -- the universe. He develops, through an almost visceral need for plastic expression, his own language, always anchored in a mental approach of overcoming.

A French visual artist, born in 1939, his uncompromising work obsessively uses motifs and objects for their purely formal value. Raynaud is an artist in perpetual movement in an art of the present. A serial hijacker, he points to, records, assigns and signs. He conveys a disappearance, feels an emptiness and suffocates it in a need for perfection.

 From pots suspended in space alongside cosmonauts to the blank spaces of mental collages, it is an artistic approach based on a seriality that emerges from the work. An aesthetics based on repetition, its dynamic is established in the relationship between unit and number.

The artist takes us on a personal adventure beyond the limits in a very mental approach.

In Jean Pierre Raynaud's work, from his earliest works to his most recent, two extremes appear: creation and death. All of Raynaud's work plays with these extreme ambivalences. The objects Raynaud appropriates, all the situations he imagines and the images he creates draw their strength from the constant simultaneous interpretation of these two concepts. And from his Venetian work death emerges and, contrary to popular belief, it does not diminish man, but magnifies and elevates him. Creation, on the other hand, appears as a necessity of expression. Both ends are as present as white and black, colors that are both life and death, nothingness and creation. It is a relationship with otherness, the overcoming of conscious and subconscious limits that emerges from the artist's works.

It is this same tension between the micro and the macro that accompanies Raynaud's approach.

From an interest in going beyond all limits comes the fascination for the cosmos and the relationship with otherness, the exterior and the unknown or even the game. Raynaud's mental collages create a world of their own.

In space or in the city, from nature to the urban jungle, his forms appear as if mystified by the tension that settles in. As if drawn from image banks, the mental collages, like assemblages, flirt with the artificial. The treatment of the industrial world is defined by Pierre Restany as an "exploration of a second nature".

For nature is well and truly present even if tamed, reduced to a concrete vehicle for germination. It is inert matter and living matter that interact in his artworks.

A true leitmotif, the flowerpot developed in the 1960s is elevated to the status of a symbol and is portrayed in a variety of colors. As an allusion to his past as a horticulture student, the pot, filled with cement, is neutralized to assert its value as a sign. A vehicle of life, the pot is like the very essence of nature that it evokes while rendering it abstract.

Idyllic or dystopian, the assemblages lead us to a strange observation: with the work of the artist, nature and the cosmos seem almost less natural than cities with their never-ending skyscrapers. With their imposing presence, the inserted symbols remind us of our ephemeral condition and return us to the proper cycle of life. This is the point where modern industrial nature meets the universe, the cosmos.

Between violence and pure plastic expression, the artist summarizes the constraints set before human beings and presents a fertile dialectic between hygiene and cruelty, creation and destruction, life and death. These are all existential questions raised about our contemporary society.

**Alma Sammel**