Pierre Courthion was born in Geneva on January 14, 1902 to Louis and Elisa Courthion. His father was a writer and editor of the local newspaper, the *Journal de Gèneve*. Courthion attended secondary school in Schwyz, Switzerland. He then attended the Université de Gèneve and received a scholarship to study painting at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where he became acquainted with and developed friendships with artists such as Alberto Giacometti and Kurt Seligmann. While in Paris, Courthion spent time in Montmartre and encountered many of the artists living and working there, some of whom would be the focus of his later publications. At the age of 19, Courthion was traveled to Italy. He would later marry Pierrette, a woman of Swiss descent, and welcome the birth of his daughter, Sabine. Courthion was a student at the Louvre and did his doctoral work on the painter, Jean-Étienne Liotard. During World War II, Pierre and his wife fled to Geneva and participated in the resistance and later in his life, Courthion visited Auschwitz. In 1950, Pierre Courthion became a citizen of France. He lived and worked in France for most of his life. He died in 1988 at the age of 86.

Other seminal activities in Courthion’s life include his service as a functionary of the Society of Nations. In 1934, Courthion was named *archaéologue cantonal* of Valais and director of the Musée Archéologique de Valère. He served as the director of the Swiss Foundation at the Cité Universitaire of Paris from 1933-1939. He was also vice-president of the Syndicat de la presse artistique française, founding member of the Association internationale des critiques d’art (AICA), and member of the Société des ecrivans suisses. Courthion received several prestigious awards.

Over the course of his career, Courthion traveled widely. He performed research, participated in professional activities and gave conferences and lectures around the world from Europe and the U.S. to Brazil and Venezuela and Japan and Korea. In the U.S., Courthion participated as a member of the jury for the prestigious Guggenheim Prize of 1960.

**Writing Career and Achievements:**

Courthion began his professional career in Paris as an editor of the journal, *L’Éclair*. Surrounded by the art of Paris and Montparnasse, Courthion got his start as a *critique d’art*. His monographs, contributions and direction of reviews, catalogs, contributions and collaborations began appearing en masse after 1925 and received widespread international acclaim. Courthion not only associated with artists, but also with well-known writers and poets such as Ramuz, Pierre-Jean Jouve, Marcel Raymond, Albert Béguin, Maurice Chappaz, and Henri Michaux, many of whom contributed to one of the reviews he directed, *Lettres*, which was published in Geneva between 1943-1947. He was also the director of the collection, *Le cri de la France* (1943-1948) and the sixteen-volume collection, *Les grands artistes racontés (vus) par eux-mêmes et leurs amis* (1945-1960). Courthion’s major projects focused on the history of French and European art, the history and art of France, Paris and Montmartre, Romanticism and Realism, and the history of the Impressionist movement, Swiss art, American art, and the contemporary art of his time.

Courthion researched and wrote prodigiously. His writings on 19th and 20th century art attest especially to the inspiration he drew from the artistic climate of Paris and his associations with notable artists,
writers and cultural figures of the time. In Courthion’s autobiography, he recounts some of his most formative and memorable experiences, along with his acquaintance with artistic, literary and cultural luminaries and political dignitaries such as Fernand Léger, André Lhote, Zadkine, Ramuz, Giorgio de Chirico, Salvador Dali and Artaud, Jacques Villon, Marcel DuChamp, Pablo Gargallo, Hans Arp, Eugenio D’Ors, and René Auberjonois. Later acquaintances and interviews included Herman Hesse and Carl Jung, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Pierre Bonnard, Jean Lurçat, Alberto Giacometti, Nicolas de Staël, Georges Braque, Raoul Dufy, Blaise Cendrars, Olivier Debré, Robert Lacoste, Georges Rouault, Léon Zack and Maurice Estève. Courthion heavily researched many other artists of his time such as Gino Severini, Elena Schiavi, Chaîm Soutine, Iberê Camargo and Llorens Artigas.

Publications:


For a complete bibliography of Pierre Courthion’s works, consult his autobiography which was published after his death: Courthion, Pierre, D’une palette à l’autre: mémoires d’un critique d’art (Genève : La Bacoennerie /arts, 2004).