

# Exhibition guide

EN

Kiki Smith.

Hearing You with My Eyes

9.10.2020 – 10.1.2021

ENNASUAL  
STRA-XAEB  
SED  
TANONTAC  
EÉSUNZ

# Kiki Smith.

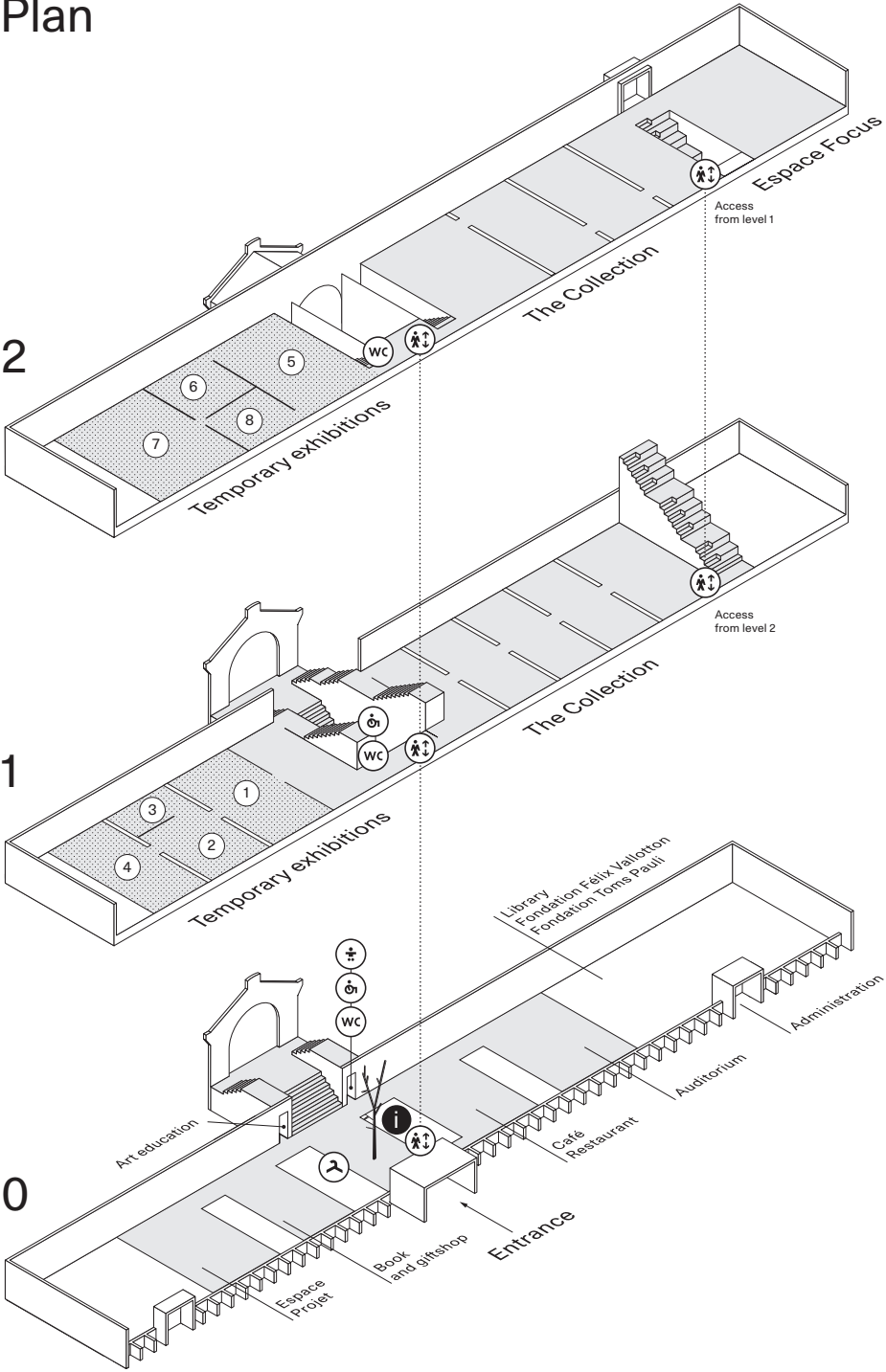
## Hearing You with My Eyes

The human body, its functioning, depictions—especially symbolic ones—and status in society are central to the work of the American artist Kiki Smith (born in 1954). Since the early 1980s, Smith has observed the body with a curiosity fostered by the urge to understand herself and transmit a form of benevolence regarding this structure we inhabit. It is a structure that keeps us alive while remaining foreign to us in certain ways.

Smith began by describing the body fragment by fragment, working from books on anatomy. She then shifted her focus to the skin, which led her to depict the body as a whole and consider society's view of it. Starting in the mid-1990s, the artist broadened her interests to include human beings' relationship with animals, nature, and the cosmos, and eventually phenomena of extrasensory perception as so many ways of communicating beyond language and showing oneself sensitive to the world around us.

The exhibition goes over these different themes while following a thread that runs through the works selected for the show, namely sensory perception. The artist indeed attaches great importance to the senses, especially sight, hearing, and touch, whether it is the subjects she tackles or the often artisanal techniques and highly tactile materials she uses. She points up their interconnection, as the title of the show, *Hearing You with My Eyes*, suggests. Smith thus invites visitors to become aware of their body and put in perspective their own connection with the world of the living.

# Plan



# 1<sup>st</sup> Floor | Gallery 1

In 1979, Kiki Smith was given a copy of the British surgeon Henry Gray's treatise *Anatomy: Descriptive and Surgical*, the first edition of which dates from 1858. Later the work came to be widely known as *Gray's Anatomy*. Prey to many questions about her own body, Smith copied out the book's illustrations as if to find a way to understand and fashion an objective connection with herself. She thus inaugurated a repertory of forms borrowed from the invisible inner body (cycles of the body, organs and cells making it up, systems governing it), which she would develop until the early 1990s. She redrew these forms without introducing any sort of modification while lending them new meanings or values in several ways, for example through their material treatment, their title, or their formal similarities with natural objects and elements.

The artist's approach is the same in sculpture as in printmaking and drawing. She has created life-size reproductions of the oral cavity and the auditory system but never as they are seen in reality (*Mouth*, 1993, and *Ear*, 1996). In *Untitled (Bosoms #3)* (1994), for instance, she brings out the resemblance between a woman's breast and the Moon. In the series *Possession Is Nine-Tenths of the Law*, which originally dealt with organs that are either hollow (the heart and intestines) or solid (the liver and pancreas), she introduces a reflection on a legal question by way of the title, i.e., to whom does our body belong? For Smith, art and life are one and the same, and she has always worked where she lives. She produced the *Possession* edition, for instance, on her kitchen table. Through her work Smith thus pays homage to manual labor and the fact that these artisanal techniques are handed down from generation to generation and persist through time.

And just as simply, along a wall and across two galleries Smith unrolls the nine meters or so of the small and large intestines, along with the tongue, stomach, and gallbladder, going right up to the anus. The piece allows us to size up their impressive length, which is normally compressed in the torso (*Intestine*, 1992). She likewise explores the material dimension of the body and its artificial extension in space, moving away from the observed biological truth of the outset.

After focusing on a fragmented study of the body, Smith went on to introduce the standing figure in her art, getting to this point by way of the skin, the largest and heaviest human organ. She was struck by the fact that the skin is a membrane that is porous, and therefore vulnerable, but also solid. Smith manages to transmit that dual quality by creating sculptures from paper, a material that is itself simultaneously strong and fragile, as in *Untitled* (1992), located in the

center of the gallery. This sculpture emphasizes our main veins while the viscera, shaped from ribbons and string, symbolically are pulled out of the belly and put in contact with the world.

*Tongue and Hand*, 1985; *Mouth*, 1993; *Blind Ear*, 1994; *Ear*, 1996

This showcase features different life-size sculptures, archetypes from the start of Smith's career when the artist borrowed her forms from human anatomy. The ear is depicted in its entirety, not only the pinna, the exterior part, but the whole auditory system, while the mouth is only an opening, together with those fleshy parts that are the lips, but it is displayed directly facing down, with the floor of the mouth and the palate both easy to see. In a clinical, neutral way, the artist shows us more than the ordinary depiction of organs and makes us acutely aware of the complexity of our body and how it works. Smith also draws unusual parallels, by revealing, for example, a formal analogy between two parts of the body – here the position of the hand, which imitates a tongue sticking out – or broadening the register of biological concordances – in this instance, by setting an ear in a hand, as if the latter could in fact hear. Without asserting that the body is able to develop new functions, she suggests that these functions are indeed already at work since there exists a true cooperation between the different ways of the senses.

*Untitled*, 1980-1982

In 1982 Smith mounted her first solo show, *Life Wants to Live* in the alternative New York art space called The Kitchen. The artist exhibited a multimedia installation of the same name, revealing her intense interest in the human body, which she saw as fragmented and approached from an anatomical point of view. This piece raises the question of domestic violence as well. Close-up photographs feature her hands and those of her friend the artist David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992), smeared in pig blood and seemingly caught in gestures of attack or defense while gripping inner organs like livers, hearts, and intestines. The frame isolates their gestures to the point of blurring the limit between inside and outside the body. Backlit like medical scans, they already establish a connection between the private and the political, a theme that runs throughout Smith's work.

*The Blue Feet*, 2003

*The Blue Feet* is an artist's book that can be read in two ways thanks to the so called "French fold" method of folding the pages and cutting the central fold, i.e., by turning the pages as in a traditional book but also by folding out the single sheet of paper that forms the work. This approach shows the artist's interest in the very materiality of a book. Done in dry point and printed on blue paper in book format, this composition stands at the crossroads of a reflection on nature and the cosmos fueled by a text from the works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648/1651-1695). The 17<sup>th</sup>-century Mexican poet and scholar is one of the first women of letters on the American continent. Smith reproduces one of her poems on the union of the four elements, which she associates with a starry sky and a pair of bare feet. She also alludes to the Virgin Mary and her blue cloak. These motifs suggest, if not an ascension, then at least a communion of a flesh-and-blood body with its natural and heavenly surroundings.

*Untitled (Bosom #3)*, 1994

Smith often plays on the formal similarity between certain parts of the body and elements from nature to produce mimetic images. In this lithograph, the isolated photocopied images of the artist's breasts have been done numerous times, piled up in various orientations, and printed on wrinkled paper. We don't necessarily identify the breasts immediately by their shape but rather see them as moons. The clarification that comes with the title serves to confirm our intuition. The connection made between the human breast and the largest object in the night sky brings to light the interdependence of the elements making up nature and suggests their harmonious balance. It also points to the symbolic association between the female and the Moon that is present in various cultures.

### ***The Vitreous Body, 2001***

In this book, Smith reproduces a fragment from the second part of *On Nature* by Parmenides of Elea (late 6th century BCE – mid-5<sup>th</sup> century BCE), dealing with the perception of being and the cosmos. In contrast to this ancient text, which exposes the truth of the world “such as it unfolds,” Smith sets a graphic interpretation of the meaning of sight based on medical images of the human eye. The artisanal workmanship of these woodcuts juxtaposes a subjective reality and the mathematical mind of the philosopher. Engravings of eye sockets are inserted throughout the text, which ventures page by page further into the immensity of the cosmos, while the anatomical cutouts move progressively towards the center of the eye. Translucent like membranes or skin, the book's pages boast die-cut holes known as windows, which open onto the text, adding a sculptural dimension to this artist's book.

### ***Endocrinology, 1997***

The result of several years of working with the poet Mei-mei Berssenbrugge (\*1947), this artist's book joins text and image in an organic whole. The subject is the endocrine system – which includes the organs that release hormones in the body – and the lymphatic system – which helps to detoxify the body and facilitates the circulation of hormones. The creases and stretch marks on the book pages bear witness to the physical process – the artisanal production of the parts, the series of hands-on operations – that yielded the work of art. Inspired by a coloring book on anatomy, Smith did cutout silhouettes of organs which she reproduced on a very light, transparent paper stock. A parade of kidneys, ovaries, and spleen appears on page after page in a network of textual fragments drawn from a poem by Berssenbrugge. The verses, on slips of paper cut out from white industrial stock, seem to respond to the illustrations as much as they summon them. Their layout was also done by hand. Finally, the cutouts of words that Smith wrote out by hand lend the book a visceral, intimate aspect.

### ***My Blue Lake, 1995***

In this self-portrait, Smith's face and upper torso look as if they have been scalped and laid out flat. The artist had herself photographed by a periphery camera that makes it possible to shoot 360° panoramic views. At the time when the work was shot, there only existed three cameras of this type in the world, including this one, which belonged to the British Museum in London. The naked body, covered in blue, is transformed into a lake surface – reminding us that the adult body is 60% water – while the red hair becomes a landmass. This print then is a cartographic representation of a landscape. The inking of the plate *à la poupée* – that is, all the colors are applied to the matrix (the plate) at the same time and printed together – helps to point up the harmonious union of all of the body's parts, right down to the technique used here.

### ***Untitled (Skins), 1992***

Impressed by the human body's most extensive organ (for an average adult its surface measures between 1.5 and 2 m<sup>2</sup>), Smith has sought different ways of “unfolding” our skin. Here she offers us a topographic version. After taking an impression of her neighbor's body, she spread it out flat and rearranged it into a double rectangular shape of small fragments of equal size. Looking closely at these small patches, we catch sight of familiar details like fingers, eyes, ears, and many folds and striae (stripes or streaks). This geometrical format and its subdivision into two equal parts – a purely pragmatic choice on the artist's part since it became easier for her to transport the smaller rectangles – introduce a certain distance with the original object while linking it with the history of sculpture, in particular minimalist pieces (and their sharp neutral serial forms) which the marks and irregularities tone down.

### ***Daisy Chain, 1992***

This depiction of a female body, reducing it to a little heap of fragments chained together, has a macabre aspect. It references domestic violence and the tragic, sometimes lethal fate of its victims. The expression *Daisy Chain* of the title signifies a garland but the flowery positive connotation is immediately offset by the chain connecting the head and lower and upper limbs, which suggest both the difficulty of fleeing and human remains that have been left on the ground. With this piece,

Smith lends a symbolic, political, and narrative dimension to the representation of the body, while making clear her commitment to defending women's rights.

### *Sueño, 1992*

Smith often depicts her own body in her works. She doesn't do this in the spirit of self-portraiture, though; she has tapped her own body simply to make things easier. Rather than count on models, whose availability is always limited of course, or who might let their impatience show during a work session, Smith employs what she has permanently on hand – literally. Yet for all that, the artist doesn't view her body as a universal template but rather as a research site, the equivalent of any other. To produce this print whose Spanish title means “dream,” she lay down on the metal plate and had the printer Craig Zammiello (\*1955) trace the outline of her body. She then engraved the details of her musculature. The fetal position of the body, which is curled up on itself, expresses a vulnerability in striking contrast to its flayed appearance, like an écorché on the page.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Floor | Gallery 2

In this gallery, the body is truly plastic (in the sense of something capable of being shaped and formed) and its depiction molded and manipulated in different ways, as in the three deformed heads of *I Am* (1994). It is also an object of pleasure, notably in terms of sensations and the senses (squeeze, bite, lick, pinch, knock over, etc.).

Smith has often made her casts from nature in order to lend her works both a realist dimension and human scale (*Curled Up Body*, 1995). Her sculptures show the body in funny or vulgar positions, rather unusual in the realm of art and representation, in attitudes that speak of humility, and in poses borrowed from Christian iconography. Her focus on the natural process of aging induced her, moreover, shortly after she turned 40, to stop employing models for her sculptures. Smith no longer felt at one with bodies that were younger than hers. She was to devote herself more to drawing after this. The shift to representing the body sparked a more direct reflection on women and led Smith to lend her figures the traits and trappings of Biblical and mythological characters. In the late 1990s, she introduced the imagery of fairytales. She appropriated, for example, the figure of the witch in the series *Into the Woods* (2000), and that of St. Genevieve, the patron saint of Paris, who appears in *Rapture* (2001), a sculpture on display in the fourth gallery. The saint is shown triumphantly emerging from the body of a wolf.

### *How I Know I'm Here, 1985/2002*

This series of four linocuts was done in 1985 but only printed in 2002. It deals with the five usual senses, i.e., sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. What first strikes viewers is a network of viscera, ligaments, veins, and organs, which indeed stands out because it is in white. Then eyes, ears, noses and mouths, shown as if involved in some activity, gradually come into view. A face winks, fingers scratch a hairy head, a hand cupped behind an ear wants to hear better, and a mouth bites into a

piece of fruit held in the hands. The white line method – lines are cut into the linoleum rather than left in relief by removing material around them – allowed the artist to create this feeling of a nighttime vision, which is reinforced by the choice of a dark blue ink, suggesting that our perception of the world is sharper in the dark. The meaning of the title is clear then. It is through our senses and the workings of our inner organs that we are made aware of our presence in the world.

### ***Untitled (Pink Bosoms), 1990/1992***

For her 1990 show at the Centre d'art contemporain in Geneva, Smith designed a poster inspired by Peter Paul Rubens' painting *The Origin of the Milky Way* (1636-1638, Madrid, Prado Museum), which she stuck up on the city's walls. In the piece she borrows a detail from the painting in which the goddess Hera uses her hand to squeeze milk from one breast into the mouth of her son. Re-imagined a year later, these four silkscreens vary the same motif on magenta paper – the color is a stereotype associated with femininity. Here, though, the mother's milk secreted by the breasts – an eroticized and erogenous part of the body – doesn't flow to be shared. It spills out in vain, nourishing nobody. It sheds its symbolic sense of fertility and the giving of oneself. From sensual and altruistic, lactation becomes a self-centered experience, one that a woman can share with her own body.

### ***I Am, 1994***

This piece is Smith's initial attempt both to map her own head, a year before doing *My Blue Lake* (1994) (displayed in the first gallery of the first floor), and to employ special technology to obtain a panoramic or surround-view image of her body. Here the artist had her head photographed from different points of view, then mounted these images on a spherical form to lend the head the volume it loses in a normally flat image. Once again the depiction swings between a humorous side (playing off her own image and a joyful disfiguration) and a dark, even macabre one (suggestions of hanging). In its solemn declaration the title evokes the humility of accepting oneself for what one is, while the artist takes pleasure in deforming her face and hence her identity thanks to this liberation of her own image.

### ***Out of the Woods, 2002***

Sporting a black cape, long dress and heavy boots, the artist is disguised as a witch. She strikes several theatrical poses against a dark neutral background to which the technique of photogravure adds density and depth. This feeling of strangeness is heightened by the digital manipulation of the five photographs. The subject's head looks enlarged while the size of her hands shrinks to minuscule proportions. Each of the plates, moreover, is accompanied by a text written by the artist herself dealing with the five senses. These words lend a narrative cast to a series that draws its references from the world of fairytales. But where fantastic stories peddle the image of a vengeful powerful demonic witch, Smith humanizes the figure by embodying her. She thus pays homage to the solitude of the witch as well as her vulnerability with respect to the world and a nature that she understands and sees with painful clarity.

### ***Puppet, 1994***

This print features three images aligned top to bottom. The first two above are old photographs of the artist that have already served as sources for the 1985 series *How I Know I'm Here* (1985/2002), while the third at the bottom is of her niece, Antonia, with her claw-like hands and head shown upside down vis-à-vis the viewer. The images suggest taste, touch, and hearing through the depiction of simple almost animal acts (devouring, licking, howling, etc.). The naturalness of these attitudes point us back to childhood and the pleasures of discovery, the naivety of games, and a certain amount of innocence. The addition of small blue collage figures, inspired by a Dutch magazine's coverage of a nudist camp, and string – like the puppets conjured up in the title of the piece – reinforces the re-creation of the days of childhood. Although it looks like a disparate jumble because of the different elements making it up, the composition isn't devoid of thematic coherence, the result of the artist's working process. Smith not only reuses motifs, she often works as well from old elements, trial proofs, and scraps she brings home from the printer's.



### ***Teeth Drawing 5 und Teeth Drawing 7, 1983***

In 1979 Smith began to study a medical treatise, *Anatomy: Descriptive and Surgical* (1858), by the surgeon Henry Gray (1827-1861), copying out certain anatomical plates with the aim of seeing her own body from an outside point of view. The series titled *Teeth Drawings* is part of this approach of dissecting human anatomy by working from medical images. Organ by organ, the artist isolates fragments of the body from the system surrounding them and reproduces them in series (in her first engravings or in drawings, as here). In this way, she renders them foreign. The jaw and mouth, body parts that are internal and hence hidden from view, are superimposed on other normally visible parts of our anatomy, such as a face shown in profile or a pair of ears. Smith doesn't look to recreate a clinical image of the jaw but rather conjures up its functionality (mastication) and movement. She reveals a mechanical body that is vulnerable, powerful, and repulsive at one and the same time. Its workings, governed by our reflexes, escape our control.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Floor | Gallery 3

If life is a central theme in Smith's work, its corollary, death, is as well. Just when her artwork began to blossom, she was deeply affected by the death of her father, Tony Smith (1980), and later by the deaths of her sister Béatrice (1988), her friend David Wojnarowicz (1992), and her first gallerist, Joe Fawbush (1995), all three of whom died of AIDS. She tackled this inescapable issue head-on, as in her large installation called *Untitled* (1990). Smith did so, however, without any excessive torment, drawing her inspiration from the ceremony surrounding the Day of the Dead, which she experienced firsthand in Mexico in 1984. She was struck by the vitality of the rituals she observed.

### ***Untitled, 1990***

Although she had viewed the body in a fragmentary way up to this point, depicting its organs, viscera, and even its limbs separately, Smith began doing her first standing figures in the late 1980s. For this she used a range of materials (wax and even paper, as is the case here), which are often of little value, visibly fragile, but able to suggest the human body mimetically. Associated with the household, they are more suited, as the artist sees it, to suggesting the precariousness of life and the aging of the human body. The delicate and easily creased materiality of paper, along with how well it lends itself to shaping and molding, allows her to create sculptures whose subject is the skin. When fashioned from papier mâché (a handicraft), the body becomes a mere envelope void of additional substance, the skin being nothing more than the membrane containing human anatomy. These body-envelopes, weighted by gravity alone, hang from the ceiling like the dead, suspended between the terrestrial and spiritual worlds. On the walls, panels inked in red are counterparts to each of the bodies and surely reference the blood – life – they have been emptied of.

# 1<sup>st</sup> Floor | Gallery 4

From her very first works of art, Smith forged a link between human beings and their natural environment, seeing them as inseparable. The question of the cosmos allowed her to deal with the theme of death once again, but in terms of memory now. This field of stars (*Rogue Stars*, 2012), fashioned from snippets of faces and bodies, keeps alive the remembrance of those who have passed away. Other compositions express in a more elementary fashion the symbiosis of the living. In *Promise* (2012), a naked man seated on wooden planks is surrounded by blue flowers, which the artist added to the drawing using collage; or in *My Back Brain* (2006), a woman sitting in an abstract space is surrounded by stars, birds, and a predator. Her skin is covered in diamond shapes, like so many scales; these allude to Smith's own body, for the artist indeed sports a number of tattoos, motifs that include a daisy, a butterfly, stars, and various animals. She sees her tattoos as a way of recalling that she belongs to a group that is greater than us.

The links between animals and humans summon the same strategies of merging things that are seen in the plant and astral motifs. It is fur and hair that enabled the artist to shift the focus of her art from individual human beings to animals. In *Las Animas* (1997), Smith lets a repressed bestiality explode. In *Untitled (Hair)* (1990), she emphasizes her hair by doubling it with a wig to create a luxuriant and indistinct furry mass, from which a few facial details emerge. It is hair, moreover, that enabled the artist to move from individuals to animals in her depictions. The artist heightens individual hairs and wrinkles, as she does here in *Worm* (1992), to assert not only the animal nature of the body, but its temporal one as well.

Smith even pushes the increasingly close connection of human and animal to the point of fusing the two. In *Worm* again, the artist indeed takes on the form of a worm by piecing together bits of her own body – a new body that conjures up both the serpent, which pressed Eve to taste of the forbidden fruit, according to the story in Genesis, and the guilt brought down upon all women because they are the root of original sin. In *Peacock* (1994), female genitalia are associated with the eyespot that adorns the tail feathers of a peacock and, by the same token, a physical eye. The figure stares at her vulva, multiplied many times, and her vulva stares back at her, and at us as well. The large drawing titled *Sleeping Woman with Peacock* (2004) is another example of this possible fusion. The figure wears a dress that blends in with the feathers of the peacock's "train," or tail. The figure's two hands, palms turned back toward her, lie on her right shoulder while the bird's feet rest on her left. Like the fusion of the bodies, this symmetrical effect

suggests that we are much closer to animals than we think, regardless of the type of connection we have with them – harmonious, as is the case here, or brutal, as with the standing sculpture called *Rapture* (2001).

#### *Las Animas*, 1997

The artist here shows herself in aggressive and wild poses, so much so that she seems to be openly challenging the two photographers who recorded her image. Brought together in one and the same composition, these shots alternate portraits and close-ups (body hair, hair on the head, a bulging network of veins). Such details emphasize an animality that is often associated with harmful female urges – the opposite of idealized docile virginal bodies – which has accordingly been erased from the depictions of women over the centuries. Reacting to that, Smith maps on her own body the tokens and traces of this forbidden savagery while underscoring its power and beauty. She depicts then not only her body, which is aging, changing and even weakening, but also that which rises to its surface, her soul. Independently of the body, it has grown and blossomed over time, as the Spanish title of this print suggests, *Las Animas* ("The Souls").

#### *Worm*, 1992

This composition joins two images of Smith. The first reproduces the negative of a photograph of the artist in the fetal position – recalling her *Sueño* print (in Gallery 1) – with her body seemingly lighted from within. The second is a grotesque collection of fragments of her limbs placed end to end that is capped by her face shown from below. Her chin topped by her nose forms the head of the *Worm* indicated in the title. This worm no doubt also recalls the serpent that seduced Eve, offering an ironic rereading of female Biblical imagery. Thoroughly transformed here, the body draws on a number of things at once, realism and the artisanal gesture, the abject and the sensual. The artist sets these dualities off against an imagery of the plant world and the cosmos, suggested in the background by cutouts and collages of decorative motifs.

#### *Peacock*, 1994

The papier mâché sculpture titled *Peacock* is based on a formal resemblance between female genitals and the eyespot adorning the tail feathers of the bird that gives its name to this work. Indeed, if we look closely at the motifs here, we can see that the eyespots on the feathers are vaginas actually. In this mimetic image, Smith makes use of the glances "shooting out" from the spread tail feathers of the peacock. These eyes seem to be staring at both a female figure seated on the ground, her arms hugging her bent legs in a position of withdrawal or introspection, and visitors to the show. The 28 eyes allude to the average length of the menstrual cycle of 28 days. The allusion forces us to face what remains a taboo in society. These exchanged glances remind us as well that we observe a work of art as much as it observes us.

#### *Rapture*, 2001

Starting in the late 1990s, Smith gradually turned to the world of fairytales and mythology, which she links to the lives of Christian saints and figures from the Bible and Western literature (the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Eve, etc.). The female figures adopted by the artist spring from popular and widely shared stories, and exist at the limits of transgression. They prove disobedient at times or are said to renounce the things of this world. In Smith's works, their stories are combined and melded, and as such they offer us a rewriting of myths. Such is the case with St. Genevieve, the patron saint of Paris, who exuded such love that she was able to tame wolves. In this sculpture, Smith conflates the story of the saint, the tale of Little Red Riding Hood's encounter with the wolf, and the iconographies associated with the Birth of Venus and the Woman of the Apocalypse. The nude figure was modeled on the body of Smith's artist friend Geneviève Cadieux (\*1955). Proud, dignified, she is depicted stepping out of the belly of a wolf – alluding as well to St. Marguerite, the patron saint of pregnant women, who, as legend has it, emerged unscathed from a dragon that had swallowed her. The rebirth or redemption conjured up by this figure suggests that her passage through the body of an animal conferred on her new physical and spiritual strengths. Titled *Rapture*, this piece reverses the usual power relations.

### *Rogue Stars, 2012*

Thanks to commissions, Smith would develop her work on glass on a large scale, notably designing a window for the Museum at Eldridge Street, New York, in 2010. Each of the six stars comprising this group is made up of glass panels depicting a range of characters we can guess at through details in their faces, clothing, and bodies. These stars that have come down to earth form a kind of memory forest, conveying the presence and memory of dozens of individuals. They also remind us of the British tradition of piecing together the stained-glass windows of destroyed churches, making it possible to create new decorative forms.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor | Galleries 5 – 8

The second floor is subdivided into four parts, picking up on the themes developed on the lower one but now articulating the concepts of weight and height. The first of these sections (Gallery 5), for example, features the wall display of a group of twelve tapestries that were produced between 2012 and 2017, offering a synthesis of the various themes that run through Kiki Smith's art. Each of these pieces describes a scene borrowed from the natural world in which harmony reigns. The artist wanted to lend them a luxurious aspect worthy of medieval pageantry or the spectacles of the 1920s, hence the many glinting effects of light. Treating the entire surface of the piece decoratively, Smith saturated her first tapestries with details (e.g., *Sky*, 2012), before moving on to calmer, more abstract compositions (e.g., *Visitor*, 2015, and *Parliament*, 2017). Most of the wall hangings borrow motifs from earlier works, offering us here again a reformulation of the vocabulary used by the artist throughout her career. At the center of the space surrounding by the tapestries, 247 glass drops form the piece called *Brown Water* (1999).

To the right of the space (Gallery 6), a woman bent double exposes her genitals while around her body lies a network of glass beads suggesting a puddle. This provocative sculpture draws a connection between a vertical body, complete and self-contained, and its horizontal extension, indefinite and uncontrollable, and it makes this link via a fluid, a loss of a small part of oneself. She engages visitors' own bodies by summoning their kinesthetic memory, that is, the memory of movement. This bond is of an empathetic nature and introduces us into the realm of sensations. The series of drawings called *Whisper Drawings* (2000) reminds us that depictions of noise or sound-related scenes mobilize sensory phenomena (here notably our senses of hearing and touch), which are recorded in our brain. In a way then, we do hear these figures whispering. And viewing the bouquets of dried flowers from the *Touch* series (2006) primes us to remember their fragility and subtly rough quality, feel it, and even make out the rustling sound of when a hand brushes over them. Finally, a dozen or so eyes suggesting loose stones or mussels seem to inhabit one of the walls and are bringing it to life with their discrete presence (*Sight Line I* and *Sight Line II* (2012). In Gallery 7,

the sculptures *Moon on Crutches* (2002) and *Red Standing Moon* (2003) are struggling against gravity, it seems, thanks to the structures lifting them up, as if to put them in orbit – the Moon being of course the natural permanent satellite revolving around the Earth. They are surrounded by drawings that explore different relational situations. In *Coming Forth* (2008), a woman balances in the air on the body of another figure seated in a chair and staring vacantly ahead. Is this a spirit or does some spell enable the figure to float there? As in the drawing titled *Telepathic* (2009), different interpretations are possible. To these forms of extrasensory perception we can also add the visual (e.g., *Vision*, 2009). The latter is everywhere in Smith's work and lies at the root of different interactions between species or the members of one and the same community. The question of the gaze, the view, thus comes to supplant the initial motif of the anatomical eye. In the last section of the show (Gallery 8), five flat sculptures take up the subject of extrasensory perception that has occupied Smith since the late 2000s. The subject has led her to observe the world with the same compassion and commitment she applied to herself at the outset of her career.

#### Series of 12 tapestries, 2012-2015

Over the course of her career, Kiki Smith has adopted a number of techniques used in handicrafts, in particular woodcut engraving and painting on glass. As she sees it, practicing such techniques and therefore perpetuating them creates a link with earlier generations. The chance to work in tapestry arose in the 2010s. The artist, however, had been interested in the medium long before that. Around the age of 30, traveling in Europe, she went to the Château d'Angers to see the *Apocalypse Tapestry* (commissioned around 1375 by Louis I, Duke of Anjou). Smith also discovered during the same trip the work of the Frenchman Jean Lurçat (1892-1966), who was himself deeply influenced by the same late-14<sup>th</sup>-century wall hanging, which convinced him of his vocation as a tapestry maker. Working with Magnolia Editions in Oakland, California, enabled Smith to realize her dream and offered her a foray into color. She had long limited her palette to the natural hues of the materials employed and sky blue. Each tapestry was woven on a Jacquard loom, the mechanical system invented in 1801 that works with perforated cards. The artist initially furnished a 1:1 scale collage made up of different bits of drawings and lithographs; this collage was then photographed, digitally processed, and finally worked by hand. The first three tapestries that were done (*Earth*, *Sky*, and *Underground*) form a series on the four elements (air, fire, water, earth). The nine others, also remaining close to the same theme, were inspired by the artist's life in the country, where she dealt directly with nature and could take the time to observe it. Each of these shimmering tapestries abounding in details offers in a fragmented space a synthesis of the subjects seen throughout Smith's work. All of them celebrate the symbiosis of humans, animals, minerals, and plants.

#### *Brown Water*, 1999

Smith has constantly sought to vary the ways of depicting the body's fluids and secretions which, escaping our corporal envelope, communicate with the outer world independently of our will. The material chosen to make them concrete varies according to the spiritual and psychological meanings the artist wants to associate them with. For Smith, glass is a metaphor of water and the sky. Laid out directly on the floor and forming a liquid landscape, the 247 tears or drops of this sculptural installation thus achieve their independence from the body that secreted them, the emotion that gave rise to them, or the cloud that formed them and let them fall. Colored brown, they look dirty, soiled, even polluted, while their number submerges the singular in the multitude. As a fluid at very high temperatures that becomes hard and fragile once cooled down, glass petrifies what ought to be fleeting, ephemeral. The materiality of these drops is transformed and consequently their relationship to our senses is modified.

### ***Untitled III (Upside-Down Body with Beads), 1993***

This woman is presented to viewers both standing in a way that shuts her off – only her ears are visible and seemingly still able to take in something of the surrounding world, if not her skin – and striking a pose that is obscene – she is naked and displays her genitals openly, like a kind of *Sheela na gig* (from the Irish *Síle na gciach*, “Sheila [or Julia] of the breasts”), a form of female statuary with grotesque features. Yet this shameless abject body that is curled inward on itself might also reference a pose in yoga, *Uttanasana* (the Standing Forward Bend). Her position here was inspired by a postcard featuring a gargoyle carved on the façade of a cathedral; rainwater is channeled through its rear end and thus the figure appears to urinate on passers-by. It was in the early 1990s that Smith first became interested in orifices and the fluids the human body exudes. Generally considered disgusting and repellent, the liquids we produce are nevertheless important to the healthy functioning of our physical being. The glass beads in the netting spread over the floor represent an unidentified fluid, like another part of oneself. They lend a precious note to this detail and the piece overall, offering us a chance to confront that part of us.

### ***Touch, 2006***

This series of four-color prints was done by Smith shortly after the death of her mother, Jane Lawrence Smith, in the summer of 2005. The bouquets depicted in these pieces were among those decorating the house of the artist's mother; they had been sent to the family by friends and relatives to express their condolences. Each floral composition is isolated, becoming an image of a moment out of time. Frozen between life and death, and transformed by the passage of time – notably the loss of color – these lilies, gladioluses and different hyacinths were engraved on copperplates from life and later from photographs. The artist drew inspiration from both the tradition of the *memento mori*, often symbolized in painting by flowers, which are destined to fade and wither; and the sepia photographs of the French photographer Adolphe Braun (1812-1877) and his album *Fleurs photographiées* (1854), which provided industry with models. The “touch” of the title refers as much to the fragile material-ness of dried flowers as to the links forged within a family simply with a hand brushing over the skin or hair. The dark scratches are often seen in worn engraving plates. They heighten this tactile feeling while suggesting other marks of Time's passage like wrinkles.

### ***Telepathic, 2009***

For Smith, extrasensory abilities like intuition or clairvoyance, often associated with the female, have been devalued in our society, even when they broaden our experience of ourselves, others, and the world. Indeed, it is possible to “sit around someplace and learn things through osmosis,” the artist explains, because the simple fact of being alive gives us access to “enormous quantities of information.” In the same spirit, this drawing takes on the subject of telepathy, that is, the science of transmitting thoughts through means other than the senses. Three women seated in chairs stare straight ahead and seem to be linked by one and the same flow of energy, while an empty chair has been tipped over, sparking different interpretations.

### ***Moon on Crutches, 2002***

In 2002, Smith created different sculptures depicting our nearest heavenly neighbor but on crutches. The Moon motif surfaces over and over in the artist's work. As in many mythologies, the artist sees the motif as a symbol of the female. Here several nude figures in aluminum have been carefully posed in different orientations on linear bronze structures. They all look rather unstable, caught in a precarious situation. With their rigid bodies, the figures appear to be floating thanks to the scaffoldings under them, as if the former were looking to escape gravity with their help. As is often the case, these sculptures initially took shape in papier mâché, which allows the artist to render them light and therefore easy to lift. Although not an especially heavy metal, aluminum does give off this feeling of weightiness. Besides the group of three women, there exist two independent figures on display here, one in blue and the other in red. They are connected with a sculpture series titled *Woman on Pyre* (2001), which shows a nude woman with her arms opened wide atop a heap of sticks, commemorating the figure of the witch led to the stake for specious reasons.

### ***Everywhere (Double Rabbit), 2010, and Hearing You with My Eyes, 2011***

Since 2009 Smith, in a range of works, has evoked the perceptual abilities possessed by animals which humans lack, have not learned to use, or have lost. The drawing titled *Hearing You with My Eyes* depicts two bats, each one endowed with an outsized human eye emitting colored rays. These mammals, the only mammalian order capable of true sustained flight, can navigate the world using their inner ear by analyzing the returning echoes produced by the ultrasounds they emit. Some blind humans also employ echolocation to move about and in a way see with their ears. Smith thus draws a connection with the Platonic theory of emission (also called extramission), that is, visual perception is the result of beams coming from the eyes and striking objects.

### ***Vision (1<sup>st</sup>–37<sup>th</sup> Hour), 2009***

Smith is fond of books of hours, those medieval manuals that guide the faithful in the performance of liturgical rites according to a precise calendar. She has produced some herself, including the series of 365 rubber stamps naming various liquids produced by the body called *Untitled (Book of Hours)* (1986 /2003, New York, Museum of Modern Art). Taking a similar approach, the nine drawings here come from a series whose 37 individual works count off as many hours while dealing with the same theme, i.e., sight and its perceptual organ the eye. The images feature eyes whose perception is indicated by rays going off in different directions. Not only is the sense of sight given tangible representation, but the black lines are also the expression of an extrasensory perception the artist tackles in other works. The title of the series, *Vision*, suggests a form of clairvoyance or intuition, moreover. Rational reality, which can be verified by our own eyes, embraces other things, alternative invisible realities or energy flows, suggested here by the recurrent motif of the lightbulb (which also figures in *Telepathic*, on display on the wall to the right).

### ***Totem, 2011***

We can make out at first glance the entwined bodies of a woman and a young girl. They are superimposed one atop the other in the same position but in opposite directions, as if they formed just one. Their legs floating in empty space intermingle with the legs of the bench. The rays shooting from these two figures might be interpreted as the expression of an extrasensory perception of the hereafter, an ability to communicate with beings who have left us, or even the experience of time, with the simultaneous perception of the past (childhood) and the future (adulthood).

### ***Series of 5 sculptures, 2015***

These flat sculptures return to a series of women's faces that first took shape as drawings before going through different variants in terms of techniques. The artist sees the repetition of motifs as a spiritual act that alludes to the fact that human and animal species are both unique and multiple, that is, singular in their diversity. Emanations are breathed out through the mouths of these figures and/or projected by their eyes. These exhalations symbolize the vital energy alive within us and the objects around us. The titles of these sculptures conjure up situations of receiving, taking in, or emitting – *Deliver, Sending, Accept, and Receiving* – hence our constant exchanges, whether conscious or unconscious, passive or active, with the outer world. These solitary figures look, hear, produce sounds, interact, communicate; they are alert to the world. The decision to work in three dimensions, but without a model, makes it possible to unify these emanations and their sources, as well as show that they are one and the same. In space, these sculptures carve out strange shapes.

**Exclusive interview: Kiki Smith about the exhibition and her work**  
→ [mcba.ch/kiki-smith](http://mcba.ch/kiki-smith)



# Artist's biography

- 1954** Chiara (Kiki) Lanier Smith was born in Nuremberg on 18 January 1954. Her mother, the opera singer Jane Lawrence Smith (1915-2005), was on tour in Europe at the time, where her husband, the artist, architect, and pioneering minimalist Tony Smith (1912-1980), had come to join her.
- 1955-1973** In the spring of 1955, the family settled in South Orange, New Jersey, shortly before the birth of her twin sisters, Seton (\*1955) and Beatrice, called Bebe, (1955-1988). During their childhood and adolescence, the Smith daughters helped their father create his artwork and met his artist friends, including Barnett Newman (1905-1970) and Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), as well as Richard Tuttle (\*1941), who was his assistant. The girls also regularly visited museums with their father. The parents read them fairytales and stories; the world of these fictions was to influence Kiki Smith's own work in no small way.
- 1973-1976** Kiki Smith moved to San Francisco, where she lived for a few months with her cousin the musician Prairie Prince (\*1950). She returned to the East Coast in 1974 and enrolled in the Hartford Art School in Connecticut. She dropped out after a year and a half, traveled by car around the United States with her sister Beatrice, and took classes in filmmaking in San Francisco. She eventually settled in New York in 1976, where she joined the underground arts and culture scene in the Lower East Side. Over the next few years she would hold a number of odd jobs, working by turns as a laborer in a clothing factory, an assistant electrician, and a waitress in a bar.
- 1978** She joined the artists' collective Collaborative Project, Inc. (CoLab), whose ranks notably included Jane Dickson (\*1952), Jenny Holzer (\*1950), Rebecca Howland (\*1951), Alan W. Moore (\*1951), and Tom Otherness (\*1952). The group organized numerous actions and exhibitions on the fringes of the commercial gallery system. Smith also took engraving classes at the Lower East Side Printshop and produced her first monotypes.
- 1979** She began copying out plates from Henry Gray's book, *Anatomy: Descriptive and Surgical* (1858), popularly known as *Gray's Anatomy*.
- 1980** Her first silkscreen, *Corrosive*, printed on a T-shirt, was exhibited as part of the group show *The Time Square Show*, mounted by CoLab in New York.
- 1982** She attended Documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany, where she exhibited plaster and wood objects as well as scarves and printed textiles in a show called *Fashion Moda Store*, after the name of an independent art space in the South Bronx neighborhood of New York.
- 1983** Her first solo show, *Life Wants to Live*, was held at The Kitchen in New York. Part of the exhibition was dreamed up in collaboration with her friend the artist David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992), whom she had met the year before.
- 1984** In New York, Smith continued to explore printmaking and learned to do line engraving, notably etching. The same year the AIDS virus was identified. The consequences of the pandemic would leave deep scars on Smith's work and personal life. She would lose many close friends and her sister Beatrice to the disease.



1985	Smith met the artist Nancy Spero (1926-2009) and took part with her in a show devoted to the perception of male sexuality at Arts City, New York. With Beatrice, she trained as an ambulance technician, for three months in Brooklyn, another way for her to gain a better understanding of human anatomy.	1997	Her output shows her fascination with heavenly bodies, the cosmos, geology, and natural history. She also began working with the fine arts publisher and print studio Harlan & Weaver, New York. The following year the historian of American art Helaine Posner (*1953) published the first monograph devoted to the artist.
1989	First solo show in a major art institution, the Dallas Art Museum. The well-known fine arts publisher and print studio Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE) in Bay Shore in the State of New York, invited Smith to work with them. The invitation marks the start of a long history of collaborating with the studio.	2002	Smith took part in a performance by Francis Alÿs (*1959), <i>The Modern Procession</i> , which marked the temporary relocation of the Museum of Modern Art of New York from Manhattan to Queens. She headed a parade as an icon of modern art, seated on a sedan chair. She began teaching printmaking at Columbia University.
1990	Smith's first solo show in Europe was held at the Centre d'art contemporain in Geneva. The exhibition traveled to the Institute of Contemporary Art in Amsterdam as well. She also produced her first standing sculptures of the human body.	2012	Fascinated by the <i>Apocalypse Tapestry</i> of Angers, which she had first laid eyes on in 1976, Smith began working in textile in monumental formats.
1994	The artist joined Pace Gallery, which has represented her to the present, along with several other galleries.	2017	She exhibited at the 57th Venice Biennale, paving the way for a number of retrospective exhibitions of her work in Europe (including in Munich, Vienna, Oxford, Paris, and Lausanne) in the following years.
1996	Smith broadened her iconography to include nature and animals, thanks in particular to a residency at the Print Department of the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, where she studied the collection of stuffed animals. The Musée des Beaux-Arts of Montreal devoted a retrospective to her work, her first such show in a museum. The artist left Manhattan's Lower East Side and settled in a house in the East Village.	2019	Smith relocated to a converted train depot in the Hudson Valley (New York State). She currently divides her time between this home and studio and her house in Manhattan.

# Special events

Reservation required (seating limited) → [mcba.ch/agenda](http://mcba.ch/agenda)

## Lecture

Thursday 22 October, 6:30 pm

*Art et médecine: perception du corps à travers les âges*

By Dr. Gerald d'Andiran, doctor and exhibition curator

Free admission

## Performance

From Thursday 12 to Sunday 15

November, during opening hours:

10 am-12:30 pm and 2 pm-5:30 pm, every half hour

*MINUS 9 crossing the sound barrier of the here / hear / ear*

K&A (Karla Isidorou & Alexandra Bellon)

Length: 14' | 18 years and older | CHF 12.–

Performance limited to one adult at a time

## Adult workshop

Saturday 21 November, 2 pm-5 pm

*Modelage corps/animal*

With Lucie Kohler, artist

CHF 70.– / CHF 50.– (reduced admission)

## Kids workshop

Saturday 7 November, 5 December,

2 January, 2 pm-4 pm

*Danse avec les œuvres*

With Natacha Garcin, dancer, and

Dragos Tara, musician, together with

the AVDC – association vaudoise de danse contemporaine

7-11 years old | CHF 15.–

## Final guided tour

Sunday 10 January, 3 pm

With Laurence Schmidlin, the exhibition curator

## Family tours

Sunday 1 November, 3 pm-4:30 pm

*Au fil des contes*

Tour of the exhibition and stories with which to tame the animals peopling Kiki Smith's tapestries.

With Celine Cerny, author and storyteller

Sunday 6 December, 3 pm-4:30 pm

*Dans tous les sens*

What connects us with the world?

Exploration of our senses in front of Kiki Smith's works

Sunday 3 January, 3 pm-4:30 pm

*Dedans/dehors*

Listen to your heartbeat and what else is going on inside you... Discover the human body while touring the show.

7 and older | Free for children.

Adult Admission ticket only

## Further information

→ [mcba.ch](http://mcba.ch)

## Regular events

### Guided tour (in French)

Thursdays at 6:30 pm, Sundays at 11 am

### Guided tour (in English)

First Sunday of every month at 11 am

### Noon tour

First Thursday of every month at 12:30 pm



Kiki Smith. *Hearing You with My Eyes*  
9.10.2020 – 10.1.2021

Exhibition curator: Laurence Schmidlin,  
curator of contemporary art

Texts for the exhibition guide and the labels:  
Elisabeth Jobin and Laurence Schmidlin

Translation: John O'Toole

## Catalogue

Laurence Schmidlin (ed.),  
*Kiki Smith. Hearing You with My Eyes*,  
with essays by Amelia Jones, Lisa Le Feuvre,  
and Laurence Schmidlin, 192 p., 126 ill., Fr./Eng.,  
jointly pub. Scheidegger & Spiess, Zurich, 2020.  
Price: CHF 39.– (at MCBA only: CHF 35.– during  
the show)

## Even more

### Book- and Giftshop

Hours: Tues., Wedn., Fri., Sat., Sun.: 10 am-6 pm  
Thurs.: 10 am-8 pm / Mon. closed

### Le Nabi Café-restaurant

Hours: Tues., Wedn., Fri., Sat., Sun.: 10 am-6 pm  
Thurs.: 10 am-8 pm / Mon. closed

# Fall exhibition programme at MCBA

## Espace Projet

Jorge Macchi. *The Submerged Cathedral*  
11.9 – 22.11.2020  
Free admission

Anne Rochat. *In Corpore*

Manor Vaud Culture Prize 2020  
11.12.2020 – 14.2.2021  
Free admission

## Espace Focus

Giovanni Giacometti. *Watercolors*  
16.10.2020 – 17.1.2021  
Free admission

## The Collection

### Permanent presentation

Free admission

The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue  
were made possible with the generous support



Main partners-MCBA construction:



AUDEMARS PIGUET  
*Le Brassus*



Musée cantonal  
des Beaux-Arts  
PLATEFORME 10  
Place de la Gare 16  
1003 Lausanne

T +41 21 316 34 45  
info.beaux-arts@vd.ch  
www.mcba.ch  
@mcbalausanne  
@mcba.lausanne

