

MUSÉE CANTONAL DES BEAUX-ARTS LAUSANNE

Press release

Matières en lumière. Sculptures de Rodin à Louise Bourgeois

12.2 – 16.5.2021



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MUSÉE CANTONAL DES BEAUX-ARTS LAUSANNE

1. Press release

The exhibition *Material in Light. Sculptures from Rodin to Louise Bourgeois* offers a survey of two hundred years of creative expression, focusing on works that have maintained a connection with the figure, nature, or objects, a connection that has been endlessly reexamined. The show features some sixty works of art in dialogue, drawing on both private Swiss collections and the collection of the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts of Lausanne. By encouraging the public to see the art from a number of perspectives, the show invites viewers to discover a variety of materials and their use, the gestures that go into carving or shaping a piece of sculpture, and the play in many forms that three dimensionality makes possible. Taking shape around *Wood Fire Circle*, a major work by Richard Long measuring some nine meters in diameter, eight thematic sections deal with the questions raised by a singular form of art and the meeting of an art material and light.

Curator of the exhibition :

Camille Lévêque-Claudet, curator, MCBA Lausanne

Hours: Tuesday–Sunday: 10 am–6 pm

Thursday: 10 am–8 pm

Monday: closed

Good Friday (2.4.21), Easter Monday (5.4.21), Ascension Day (13.5.21) : open

Admission:

Adults: CHF 20.– / 15.–

Children and 18–25 years old: free

First Saturday of the month: free

This ticket includes the entry to the exhibition *Maurice Denis. Amour*.

2. The exhibition

Seizing movement

Edgar Degas and Auguste Rodin made their models adopt poses that show tension, torsion, even unbalance, and reveal the mechanics of the body in movement. Anecdotic detail is eliminated in favor of the expressiveness of the muscles and gestures. Their figures spread out beyond themselves. They integrate the surrounding space, which becomes part of the work itself.

Sculpting emotion

From Greek antiquity onwards, the expression of emotions troubled the ideal serenity of classic statuary. Romanticism and in its wake Symbolism pursued this effort to translate individual and social emotions through the “movement that shifts lines” (Baudelaire), the life and energy artists imparted to their compositions, and the sensitive treatment they gave to their surfaces. Love, hate, and despair are eternal, and sculpting sentiment has remained a constant right up to the art of today.

Classic beauty

A “conservative backlash” drove a good part of sculpture in the first three decades of the 20th century. Whether it was in reaction to the avant-garde movements and nonfigurative art, or seeking an alternative to the influence of Auguste Rodin, his expressive model and his deformed bodies with their twitching, panting flesh, the sculptors involved openly referenced classic antiquity, the search for measure and balance, and the return to symmetry and the smooth treatment of surfaces. The naked body, above all female and often idealized, was their favorite theme.

Fragmented bodies

A fragmentary work of art catches the public’s eye more. It demands viewers’ participation since they are led to imagine the missing parts. The absence of an element concentrates the effect on the rest or on what is missing, whether or not it involves a deliberate deletion. The writer Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) summarized the questions and issues involved in a fragmentary work when writing this about Auguste Rodin’s sculpture in 1902, “...the more closely one looks, the more deeply one feels that all this would be less of a whole if the individual bodies were whole. Each of these bits is of such an eminent striking unity, so possible by itself, so not at all needing completion, that one forgets they are only parts.”

Portrait matters

What is a successful portrait? One of the first criteria that springs to mind is that of the likeness with the individual depicted. However, the issues raised by a portrait are many and go beyond the mere question of similarity. To “have one’s portrait painted” long meant conforming to a type before displaying one’s own singularity. The portrait corresponded to codes and conventions. It fulfilled both an aesthetic and social function, while conveying the features of a particular physiognomy, though not excessively. Too much lucidity on the artist’s part could, for example, cause dissatisfaction from the model! With the 20th century, portraiture was no longer defined by resemblance. It became the result of the transformation, transposition, or abstraction of the model, and transmuted objective reality into a singular vision.

Bestiary

Sculptors enjoy recreating in bronze, stone, and other materials the poses, morphologies and behaviors of animals, whether domestic or wild. The depiction of animals also serves to reveal the moods, desires, and anxieties of artists. It always exposes a little something of human beings.

Recycled material, reappropriated object

In the field of sculpture, the interwar years witnessed the use of new materials (cardboard, iron, aluminum) or materials that were the result of technological developments (industrial paints, plastics). Attitudes changed. Assembling recycled elements came to replace modeling forms in a raw material. Occasionally, artists have delegated to craftspeople and engineers the actual production of their works. Objects, which have flooded into daily life, have also found a place in the artworld. In the still-vital heritage of the ready-made (everyday manufactured objects that are declared works of art simply through the artist’s consideration) of Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), or through an extension of the Surrealist object, artists question the object in ways that are by turn playful, ironic, symbolic, or banally quotidian by reappropriating its meanings and subjecting it to a range of manipulations.

Creating with nature

Nature lies at the root of many sculptors’ concerns. They find inspiration in plant matter and through their creative gesture are able to reformulate it in the realm of art. Some of them allow themselves to be carried away by nature’s imagery, while others, deeply stamped by ecological issues, question its fragility and human beings’ impact on it.

3. Press images

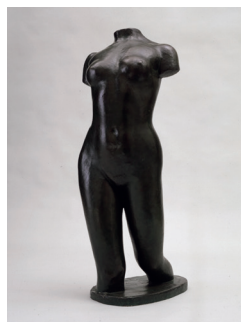
The images of the exhibition are available here www.mcba.ch/presse

The images are duty free for the duration of the exhibition. Any reproduction of them must mention the following: author(s), title of the work of art, date, name of the museum, name of the photographer and the copyright.

Other indications (dimensions, techniques, etc.) are welcome but not obligatory. Once the document is published, we would be grateful if a copy was sent to the museum's press department: Service de presse, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne.



1. Bruce Nauman, *Untitled (Hand Pair), No. H*, 1996
White bronze, on a pedestal designed by the artist
38 x 16 x 10 cm
Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne.
Acquisition, 1996
© 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo © Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne



3. Aristide Maillol, *Torse de l'Île-de-France (Torso of Île-de-France)*, 1922
Bronze
109.5 x 41 x 50 cm
Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts of Lausanne. Bequest of
Henri-Auguste Widmer, 1936
Photo © Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne



2. Auguste Rodin, *Le Baiser (The Kiss)*, 1886
Bronze
71.5 x 45 x 48 cm
Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne.
Bequest of Henri-Auguste Widmer, 1936
Photo © Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne



4. Louise Bourgeois, *Cell IX*, 1999
Metal, marble and mirrors
213.4 x 254 x 132.1 cm
The D.Daskalopoulos Collection
© The Easton Foundation / 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich
Photo © A. Burke

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5. Germaine Richier, *Le Griffu (Clawed)*, 1952
Bronze
89 x 94 x 70 cm
Private collection
Photo © Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne
© 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich



6. Claudia Comte, *The Can* (detail), 2018
Marble
37 x 25.5 x 20 cm
The Silard Isaak Collection
© Claudia Comte
Photo © Roman März



7. Exhibition view / *Matières en lumière*.
Sculptures de Rodin à Louise Bourgeois
Photo © Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne



8. Exhibition view / *Matières en lumière*.
Sculptures de Rodin à Louise Bourgeois
Photo © Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne



9. Exhibition view / *Matières en lumière*.
Sculptures de Rodin à Louise Bourgeois
Photo © Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne

5. Comments on 6 presented works



Bruce Nauman, *Untitled (Hand Pair), No. H*, 1996
White bronze, on a pedestal designed by the artist,
38 x 16 x 10 cm.
Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne.
Acquisition, 1996
Photo © Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne
©2021, ProLitteris Zurich

Nauman has employed his body as both the subject and the material of his work since the mid-1960s. He made castings of his face and sometimes his feet, “When you’re trying to find something out, it’s much easier to do, using yourself,” he confessed in a 2003 interview. In the 1996 sculpture series called *Hand Pair*, it is his hands, tools that are absolutely central to making art, that he celebrates. Cast in bronze, they look both strong and delicate, thanks to the contrast of their musculature and their surface, which displays folds and wrinkles testifying to thirty years of work. The version *No. H*, displayed here, shows the hands detached from the body and in a complex pose that is imbued with tension, with the palms facing one another and the fingers flexed, ready to stretch out from their tips.



Auguste Rodin, *Le Baiser (The Kiss)*, 1886
Bronze, 71.5 x 45 x 48 cm.
Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne.
Bequest of Henri-Auguste Widmer, 1936
Photo © Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne

In 1880, France commissioned Rodin to create a decorative door based on Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. The first designs and sculptural drafts included the tenderly entwined couple formed by Paolo Malatesta and his sister-in-law Francesca da Rimini, whose love affair and death are famously told by Dante in Canto V of *Inferno*. But the sculptor deemed this depiction of happiness and sensuality as contradicting the dreadful theme of his project and abandoned it. The same year, Rodin decided to exhibit *Paolo and Francesca* as a stand-alone work of art. The absence of elements lending context, picturesque detail, or individualizing traits for the lovers led the public to dub the work *The Kiss*, a title that translates the timeless universal character of the moment that the artist transcribes in the material. The success of this piece is due to the classic dynamic triangular composition, the musculature inspired by the figures carved by Michelangelo (1475-1564), the luminous polish of the bodies, and the sensitive rendering of the group’s gestures.



Aristide Maillol, *Torse de l'Île-de-France*
(*Torso of Île-de-France*), 1922
Bronze, 109.5 x 41 x 50 cm.
Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts of Lausanne. Bequest of
Henri-Auguste Widmer, 1936
Photo © Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne

Unlike Auguste Rodin's followers, Maillol banished the drive to translate emotions from his art. For him beauty lay in the harmony and balance of gestures devoid of passion. He favored simple geometrical volumes, a unique point of view, and a smooth shiny material. *Torso of Île-de-France* recalls the mutilated statues that make up the legacy of ancient Greece and Rome, but this sculpture also displays the working process that was peculiar to the artist. It was his habit to begin indeed with the trunk, to which he would add the arms and legs, and finally the head. For Maillol, certain secondary parts could even be eliminated while the unity of the piece resided in the balance of the volumes and the indications of movement. Here it is the full well-endowed forms of the female body that are emphasized by a torso that is shaped to point them up



Louise Bourgeois, *Cell IX*, 1999
Metal, marble and mirrors, 213.4 x 254 x 132.1 cm.
The D.Daskalopoulos Collection
Photo © A. Burke
© The Easton Foundation / 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich

Bourgeois's *Cells* are enclosures – occasionally cages – from which the public is in general physically excluded, although invited to enter visually. They are built from recycled materials combined with found objects and/or sculptures by the artist. These installations are peopled with fragments of memories from Bourgeois's private life, notably the fears that haunted her from childhood. The *Cells* also go beyond these autobiographical foundations to materialize emotions and traces of the human condition. In *Cell IX*, a pair of hands with their palms turned skyward meet a hand of a second individual. Three mirrors pivot outwards to offer us several fragmented views of the cell's interior. The mirrors' presence directly involves us in the work's narrative and creates a strange emotional interaction in which we become the third protagonist.



Germaine Richier, *Le Griffu (Clawed)*, 1952
Bronze, 89 x 94 x 70 cm.
Private collection
Photo © Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne
©2021, ProLitteris, Zurich

After the atrocities of World War II and the use of the atomic bomb, humanist values were collapsing. Richier was among those artists who found it impossible to continue in the traditional representation of the figure. Rather than turn to abstraction, she chose to rethink figuration. Her experimentation led her to relaunch her exploration of the human body and question its identity anew. To combine in the same sculpted form man, woman and animal formed a new approach to figuration in her art. An eagle's claw placed by the right elbow is the source of this sculpture's title. Richier drew her inspiration here from the Tarasque, a mythical beast of Provençal legend. The creature seems to be on the alert and ready to spring. Its movement, though still held in check, is already imprinted in the surrounding space with the metal rods structuring the void.



Claudia Comte, *The Can (detail)*, 2018
Marble, 37 x 25.5 x 20 cm.
The Silard Isaak Collection
Photo © Roman März

In an alcove that looks like a reliquary, hacked out of the trunk of a Norway spruce darkened by fire, rests a can carved in marble. Bent by the pressure of a hand that apparently crushed it before tossing it away, the can has nevertheless been placed there with care, as if it were a piece displayed in a showcase of a museum from some future time. In this sculpture, one from a series of pieces, the artist materializes a paradox in which the artistic heritage of the art material (the nobility of marble and its durability) contrasts with the limited timeframe of the aluminum packaging, which is meant to become rubbish once the product is consumed. And yet an aluminum can takes several hundred years to break down; we might consider it – like so much else in our rubbish – a fossil in the making. Playing with a trompe-l'oeil effect through the use of polished marble, the artist explores the memory of materials and their ability to evoke the passage of time.

5. Public engagement – Public outreach service

Events in conjunction with exhibition (concert, lecture): see the announcements on our internet pages → www.mcba.ch

Guided tour (in French) with
Camille Lévêque-Claudet,
curator of the exhibition
Thursday 4 March, 1 April
and 6 May, at 6 : 30 pm,
Sunday 16 May at 3 pm

Guided tour for the Amis
du Musée with Camille Lévêque-Claudet,
curator of the exhibition
Thursday 18 March at 6 pm,
Thursday 25 March at 12 : 30 pm

Guided tour (in French)
Last Thursday of the month at 6 : 30 pm,
First Sunday of the month at 11 am

Adults workshop

“Tressage métallique, avec Olivier Estoppey et
Lara Estoppey”

Saturday 24 April from 2 pm to 5 pm

Meet the artists and discover
through practice an original
creative process.

CHF 70.– / 50.–

Kids Workshop

“Création en 3 dimensions”

Tuesday 13, Thursday 15, Friday

16 April, 10 am to 4 pm

Observe then experience different techniques
for creating objects in 3 dimensions,
such as modeling, casting, and assemblage
9 to 15 years old, CHF 20.–

Family tour

“Sculptures en jeu!”

Sunday 14 March and 9 May, 3 pm to 4 : 30 pm

A fun group exploration of the exhibition
7 years old and up, adult admission fee

Reservations (limited number of participants) →
mcba.ch/agenda

Programme for schools and private tours →
mcba.ch

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6. Book and Giftshop – Le Nabi Café-Restaurant

Book- and Giftshop

In the MCBA Book- and Giftshop you can find books on all of the shows currently on view, and a selection of publications on artists in the collection, the history of art and techniques and mediums, books for children, along with a range of items (notebooks, jewelry, scarves, pencils, etc.).



Hours:

Hours: Tues., Fri., Sat., Sun.: 10 am – 6 pm

Thurs.: 10 am – 8 pm / Mon. closed

Good Friday (2.4.21), Easter Monday (5.4.21),

Ascension Day (13.5.21) : open

Contact and order:

shop.mcba@vd.ch

Café-Restaurant Le Nabi

Before or after your visit, Le Nabi invites you to take a break. The menu, reflecting the open, welcoming spirit of our museum, is both family oriented and refined. Drinks are all artisanal and the menu emphasizes local products that change with the seasons.



Hours:

Tues., Fri., Sat., Sun.: 10 am – 6 pm

Thurs.: 10 am – 8 pm / Mon. closed

Good Friday (2.4.21), Easter Monday (5.4.21),

Ascension Day (13.5.21) : open

Reservations :

T. +41 21 311 02 90 / info@lenabi.ch

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7. MCBA partners and sponsors

The MCBA building was inaugurated on 5 April 2019. The museum's new premises were built by the canton of Vaud with the generous support of the City of Lausanne and the following private partnerships:

Fondation
Les Mûrons

Fondation
Gandur pour l'Art



Nestlé



Abakanowicz art
and culture charitable
foundation

Loterie Romande



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