

MUSÉE CANTONAL DES BEAUX-ARTS LAUSANNE Silvie Defraoui. The Tremor of Certitude



10.3 – 21.5.2023

Press kit

Musée cantonal
des Beaux-Arts
Plateforme 10

Place de la Gare 16
1003 Lausanne
Switzerland

mcba.ch



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1. Press release

In its latest show, MCBA is honoring the artist Silvie Defraoui, a major figure on the Swiss art scene, with a survey of her output over the last 30 years. Designed and installed on the museum's second floor in close collaboration with the artist, the exhibition features a first-ever panorama of her work from 1994 right up to the present. The show focuses especially on the plurality of mediums characterizing Silvie Defraoui's output and invites us, through some 40 selected works, to grapple with the impermanence of the present as one of the conditions of human experience.

In her work, Silvie Defraoui examines images that saturate our daily lives, analyzing their compositions and motifs. Cut-up and reassembled photographs; videos that are screened on the wall and floor, on sand and salt; canvas pictures and neon lights – in a range of mediums she combines symbols and graphic elements. The works on display help us to reevaluate reality and refresh our eye. Questioning the unchanging character that is bestowed on objects and images, these pieces are part of *Les Archives du futur* (The Archives of the Future), the vast open-ended artwork that she set up in 1975 with Chérif Defraoui, and to which she has been adding alone since 1994, following the death of her husband and fellow artist. Like a network of ideas, the Defraouis' sprawling art piece forms a long commentary on the concepts of image, memory and the links between space and time – past, present, and to come.

Silvie Defraoui has long been a central figure in the collection and history of MCBA. Her collaborative work with Chérif Defraoui, for example, was notably part of our 1985 exhibition series *Regard sur le présent* (A Look at the Present). The museum boasts seven works by Silvie Defraoui, moreover, the first one acquired in 1976, while ten others are signed by the two artists. Two of those have been on display since 2019 in the permanent collection, and another is part of the present exhibition.

Curators of the exhibition

Head of Exhibitions: Juri Steiner
Exhibition curators: Laurence Schmidlin, Elisabeth Jobin

Generous support for the exhibition was provided by:

ERNST GÖHNER
STIFTUNG



Kanton St.Gallen
Kulturförderung  **SWISSLOS**

FONDATION
Françoise
Champoud 

Don't miss:

Talk and screening (in French)

Thursday 11 May at 6.30pm

Silvie Defraoui invites the filmmaker Alexia Walther to talk about video art, film and the transmission of knowledge. The filmmaker will screen excerpts from a range of her films. A discussion moderated by Juri Steiner.
Free admission

In brief

Silvie Defraoui. The Tremor of Certitude
10.3 – 21.5.2023

Artist

Silvie Defraoui, born in 1935 in St. Gallen, lives and works in Vuflens-le-Château (CH) and Corbera de Llobregat (E)

Awards

2006 The Cultural Prize of the City of St. Gallen
2007 The Cultural Prize of the City of Geneva
2008 Grand Prize of the Vaudoise Foundation for Culture
2014 The BEWE Foundation Prize
2017 The Cultural Prize of the Leenaards Foundation, Lausanne

Works acquired by MCBA

The museum has seven works by Silvie Defraoui, the first of which was acquired in 1976, along with ten pieces signed by the two artists (Silvie and Chérif Defraoui). Two of these have been on view since 2019 as part of *The Collection*, the museum's permanent exhibition. Two others will be presented in the exhibition.

The Tremor of Certitude

- A display, designed with the artist, is open, extending throughout the free exhibition space of the museum's 2nd floor and enjoying excellent overhead lighting; the display encourages a dialogue with the artworks on display.
- A screening area that highlights the inventiveness of one of the pioneers of video art in French-speaking Switzerland.
- A selection of 40 pieces, chosen with the artist, sheds new light on her work while echoing today's issues and interrogations, specifically our certainties, which are constantly being undermined.
- A reflection on time and history, the roots of abstraction and motifs invites us to rethink our relationship with images.
- A journey through the variety of mediums, characterizing the originality and range of Silvie Defraoui's work.

The most important retrospective of the artist

2004 -2005

Defraoui. Archives du futur 1975-2004, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, St. Gallen; Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva; Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki

2014

Silvie Defraoui. Und überdies Projektionen (Archives du futur), Kunstmuseum Solothurn, Solothurn

2023

Silvie Defraoui. The Tremor of Certitude, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, Lausanne

2. The exhibition

Destinations and Indices de variation

Destinations (1994-1995) is a piece grounded in the work of collecting words and images. Postcards representing landscapes, ornaments, or monuments offering viewers impressions of travels in Egypt are brought together in a single frame. Using collage and superimposing motifs that go back millennia, Silvie Defraoui recomposes new landscapes that are subjective and fragmentary – they are the landscapes of memory. The piece is displayed as a frieze on the wall. The frames making it up, arranged on two levels, form two horizon lines. They are arranged with a regularity that suggests ornamentation while inviting us to read them on two levels, i.e., as image on the upper line, and writing in the frames of the lower line. These texts reproduce the names of geographic localities in Egypt that exist. Yet despite that reality, they do not refer to the places depicted in the postcards positioned above them.

On the walls opposite *Destinations*, four photographs from the series *Indices de variation* ([Signs of Change], 2001-2002) make the notion of time an integral part of the image thanks to a subtle manipulation. Ripples – those of a wrinkled piece of cloth – slip into the photograph of a place or town that is in the process of being transformed, suggesting its imperceptible metamorphosis over time.

Dans le cadre des histoires...

In each iteration of this series, a monochrome image of vegetation is cut off by geometrically shaped frames, which are themselves arranged on the wall like the different elements forming an ornamental motif. The center of this image features a black-and-white photograph that conjures up a personal memory for the artist. And cut up in this way, the central image is hard to piece back together mentally. It escapes us just as the recollection of a moment is disrupted and confused by impressions, the passage of time, or a faulty memory obliterating it. *Dans le cadre des histoires...* ([Within the Frame of Stories], 1996-1999) reminds us that our perception of the world and its representation are always fragmentary and even limited by a frame – the frame imposed by the elements in a motif, our way of seeing things, a form, the memory itself. With this piece, Silvie Defraoui likewise returns to the origin of forms, which in every age and in all cultures have been inspired by plants and nature.

Poème and Echo

Because they figure among the most ancient images of humanity, ornament and motif are found at the heart of Silvie Defraoui's work. The artist has long been interested in the decorative nature of writing, the letters of which, because they are so often read, are no longer seen for what they are as well, namely, signs and symbols. In *Poème* ([Poem], 2000), letters assume once again their character as image. Here, a verse by the American-born English poet T.S. Eliot evoking the dissembling nature of shadows, can no longer be read; it is viewed. Laid out on fifteen canvas paintings and cut along a horizontal line that erases the lower third of each letter, the writing is returned to the domain of geometry and ornament.

On the same wall and positioned high up, the neon piece *Echo. Sombras electricas II* ([Echo. Electric Shadows II], 2009) adds relief to transform the look of the letters spelling the word "echo." It can only be read from one precise point of view. The letters are distorted as the reader moves

with respect to that point, stretching and modifying both the script forming the word and the word's immediate original meaning.

Faits et gestes

The series *Faits et gestes* ([Facts and Gestures], 2009-2014) contrasts two realities. On the one hand, there is the reality of current events and disastrous world news, whose images come to and at us daily and at such a rate they end up becoming banal to the point of making us numb. And on the other, there is the reality of domestic comfort, that favored place from which we take note of that news. Here the two registers are superimposed. That is, in each of the pieces a press photograph depicting a disaster of some kind, enlarged to the point of revealing the Ben-Day dots making up the image, is juxtaposed with a photograph of flowers that are like those that normally decorate a garden or the interior of a home. The reality of private space and the space of the outside world thus run into one another, illustrating the duality of our lives, torn between the facts (the *faits* of the title) of the world and the gestures (*gestes*, the second element of the title) of daily existence, between private space and the events of history.

Ombres portées...

This series is the most recent one in the show and was created during the lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic. The world at the time indeed shrank to the space of the household. From inside, we observed an outside that seemed filled with threats and uncertainties. The pieces making up *Ombres portées...* ([Cast Shadows ...], since 2020) offer viewers the chance to come back to the roots of fears and anxieties, taking the curtain as their subject matter, that interface that separates the inside from the outside, that conceals while also offering a glimpse. The series reworks the principle of layers that is dear to the artist. A partly transparent curtain features a shadow theater made up of disturbing plants and animals projected on the cloth. These are archetypes of fear that have come down to us through the centuries. The images are in fact taken from 16th-century drawings and engravings, including works by Albrecht Dürer. They illustrate ancient fears and remind us that our keenest emotions possess a history and iconography that remain steady through the ages.

Screening Room

From the 1970s on, at first with Chérif Defraoui and later on her own, Silvie Defraoui has been interested in the moving image in its capacity for *projection* – in the literal sense of the term (the projection of an image) but also figuratively (the projection of an idea, thoughts, stories, memory). The videos brought together in this room work out this idea in several ways.

Bruits de surface ([Surface Noises], 1995) focuses on breaches and break-ups, when images are lost, forgotten, or substituted for others. Photographs are projected on glasses that little by little are filled with milk, making them gradually appear. The images are borrowed from the artist's personal albums. These memories are swept away by a hand, thus breaking the glasses, which are immediately replaced by others.

Résonnances et courants d'air ([Resonances and Drafts], 2009) likewise resurrects stories of the past. The camera explores an empty house, although it is inhabited by the memory and fabulations of the people who have lived there. It stops on the threshold of the rooms, where each time

the artist's voice tells a new story inspired by Scheherazade's tales in the *Thousand and One Nights* – a vast narrative that strives to be endless and in which each story calls for the next.

Aphrodite Ping Pong (2005) touches on, though back to front as it were, the fascination that images of destruction stir within us. In ten sequences, geometrical objects drop onto plates one after the other and brake them. The moment of impact is never revealed. On the contrary, the artist uses the potential of video, screened here in reverse, to show only images of reconstruction. The shards of each plate seem to implode and reassemble in slow motion.

Screening on the floor

Silvie Defraoui has often varied the surfaces on which she projects her images, exploring the possibilities of video installation. In this gallery, she transforms the space by screening videos on the floor. These moving images are animated by constant movement that is endlessly renewed. Rose petals are stirred by a gust of wind (*Vor deiner Tür* [Before Your Door], 2000-2001). Other projections in the shape of circles reveal words and images which in turn summon stories without ever offering a conclusion. At the center of *Tide* (1994), for instance, images play out in a crystal ball. A sentence in English forms a circle around them like an omen, "The thing you secretly dread the most always happens." Excerpted from the diary of the Italian poet Cesare Pavese, this verse reflects the worry and expectation of the worst which haunt us still. Finally, *Tell This Story* (2004) is an invitation to stories and fiction. Projected in a circle on crumpled paper, incomplete sentences announce the premises of unfinished stories. Their conclusion are left to viewers' imaginations.

3. Publication



Laurence Schmidlin (ed.), *Silvie Defraoui. Le tremblement des certitudes*, with an essay by Laurence Schmidlin and a preface by Juri Steiner
Co-published by Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne and Scheidegger & Spiess, Zürich, 2023 (Fr./Eng./Ger.), 120 p., 76 ill.
CHF 35.– in bookstores / CHF 30.– at the MCBA Book- and Gift Shop during the show's run
→ shop.mcba@plateforme10.ch

4. Biography

Silvie Defraoui
Lives and works in Vufflens-le-Château (CH) and Corbera de Llobregat (E)

1935

Birth in St. Gallen

1935-1952

Silvie Defraoui grows up in St. Gallen and Graubünden.

1952-1957

School of Fine Arts of Algiers in painting, then School of Decorative Arts of Geneva in ceramics (diploma in 1957)

1960-1970

Silvie & Chérif (Geneva, 1932-Vufflens-le-Château, 1994) Defraoui, who met in Geneva during their studies, live mainly in Corbera de Llobregat in Spain.

1971

First solo exhibition, for him at the Galerie Gaëtan in Geneva and for her at the Kunstmuseum in St. Gallen

1974

Chérif Defraoui begins his teaching at the Ecole supérieure d'art visuel de Geneva, joined the following year by Silvie. Their workshops become the "Mixed Media" section. From 1994 to 1998, Silvie Defraoui continues alone to direct this section which closes its doors after her departure.

1975

Silvie & Chérif Defraoui decide to sign their works in common and create a "construction" which they call Archives of the future. Since 1994, year of Chérif's death, Silvie Defraoui continues alone her contribution to this structure.

1999-2007

Silvie Defraoui is a member of the Federal Fine Arts Commission.

Awards

2006

Cultural Award of the City of St. Gallen

2007

Cultural Award of the City of Geneva

2008

Grand Prize of the Fondation vaudoise pour la culture

2014

Awards of the Fondation BEWE

2017

Cultural Award of the Fondation Leenaards

Solo exhibition since 1975

Silvie & Chérif Defraoui

1975

C. & S. Defraoui, Galerie Gaëtan, Geneva

1976

Jardins exotiques, Galerie Gaëtan, Geneva

Estuaire, Galerie Arte Arena, Dübendorf

Lieux de mémoire, Centre d'Art Contemporain (Cité universitaire), Geneva

1977

Perquisición : el tango, Galería « G », Barcelone

Archétypes et artifices, Galería Cadaqués, Cadaqués

1978

C. & S. Defraoui, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva

La route des Indes, Galeria Quadrum, Lisbon

1979

Cartographie des contrées à venir, Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis / Centro de Arte Contemporânea, Porto

Performances secrètes, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva

1981

Indices de variation, Raum für aktuelle Schweizer Kunst, Luzern

Instruments de divination, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva

1982

Les formes du récit, Tartar Gallery, Edinburgh

C. & S. Defraoui, Galerie Med a Mothi, Montpellier

1983

Conversa dalt d'un rai / Conversation on a raft, Metrònom, Barcelona

Conversations sur un radeau, Galerie Grita Insam, Vienna

1984

Elementare Begegnungen, Galerie Corinne Hummel, Basel

1985

Regard sur le présent. Silvie et Chérif Defraoui, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, Lausanne

S. & C. Defraoui, Galerie Marika Malacorda, Geneva

1986

Autour de Barcelone, Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona

La querelle des images, Centre Régional d'Art Contemporain Midi-Pyrénées, Toulouse

« Figures » 1981-1985, Centre d'Arts Plastiques, Villefranche-sur-Saône

1987

Bilderstreit: Morgen- und Abendland, Kunsthalle St. Gallen, St. Gallen

C. & S. Defraoui, Metrònom, Barcelona

Orient / Occident, La Criée, halle d'art contemporain, Rennes

1988

Orient / Occident, Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris

C. & S. Defraoui, Galerie Arlogos, Nantes

C. & S. Defraoui, Galerie Rosenberg, Zurich

1989

Orient / Occident, Musée Rath, Geneva / Museum van Hedendaagse

Kunst, Anvers / Centre de Création Contemporaine Olivier Debré, Tours

/ Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz

1990

S. & C. Defraoui, Galerie Grita Insam, Vienna

Tragelaph : Silvie & Chérif Defraoui, Vleeshal Center for Contemporary Art, Middelburg

S. & C. Defraoui, Galerie Rosenberg, Zurich

Silvie et Chérif Defraoui, Villa Arson, Nice

S. & C. Defraoui, Galerie Albert Baronian, Brussels

S. & C. Defraoui, Galerie Insam-Gleichner, Chicago

1991

S. & C. Defraoui, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne / Stadtgalerie, Saarbrücken

Übergang, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, St. Gallen

1992

Gezeiten, Galerie Grita Insam, Vienna

1993

Les origines de la description, Le Magasin, Centre national d'art contemporain, Grenoble

Silvie Defraoui

1996

Bruits de surface, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva

Dans le cadre des histoires, Galerie Brigitte March, Stuttgart

Destinations, Galerie Grita Insam, Vienna

1997

Slow Motion, Galerie Art & Public, Geneva

1998

S. & C. Defraoui, Galerie Elisabeth Kaufmann, Basel

1999

Pflanzenbilder (avec Karl Blossfeldt), Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg

2000

nacht und tag und nacht – night and day and night, Helmhaus, Zurich

2001

C. & S. Defraoui, Galleria Seno, Milan

2002

Zeichen der Veränderung, Galerie Elisabeth Kaufmann, Zurich

2004

Defraoui. Archives du futur 1975-2004, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, St. Gallen

2005

Defraoui. Archives du futur 1975-2004, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva / Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki

2006

Aphrodite Ping-Pong, Galerie Elisabeth Kaufmann, Zurich

2008

S. & C. Defraoui, Galerie Brigitte March, Stuttgart

2009

Sombras electricas, Centre culturel suisse, Paris

2011

Das Bild im Boden, Galerie Susanna Kulli, Zurich

2012

Silvie Defraoui. Les formes du récit II / The Forms of Narrative II, Galerie Susanna Kulli, Zurich

2013

S. & C. Defraoui. ROOMS (Lieux de mémoire VI) 1976-2003, Galerie Susanna Kulli, Zurich

2014

Silvie Defraoui. Und überdies Projektionen (Archives du futur), Kunstmuseum Solothurn, Solothurn

2017

Silvie & Chérif Defraoui, Galerie Susanna Kulli, Zurich

2023

Silvie Defraoui. The Tremor of Certitude, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, Lausanne

5. Press images

To download → mcba.ch/presse

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Views of the exhibition available on 9 March, 12am

→ mcba.ch/presse



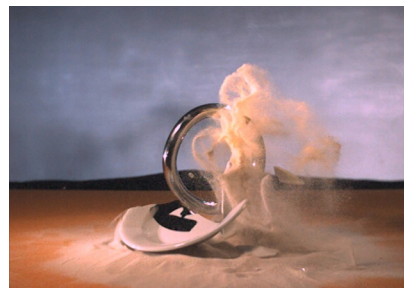
1.
Portrait of the artist
Photo: MCBA, Jonas Hänggi



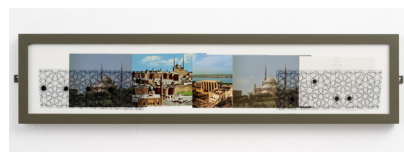
2.
Silvie Defraoui (*1935, St. Gallen)
Incendie Hertford - Faits et gestes, 2013
Fine Art Ultrachrome on Hahnemühle
305 g/m² paper, 160 × 258 cm
Courtesy of the artist
© Silvie Defraoui



3.
Silvie Defraoui (*1935, St. Gallen)
Lune noire, 2014
Vertical screening of color video on a circle of salt on the floor
Courtesy of the artist
© Silvie Defraoui
Photo: Georg Resteiner



4.
Silvie Defraoui (*1935, St. Gallen)
Video still from *Aphrodite Ping-Pong I*, 2005
Color video, with sound, 10' 23"
MCBA, Acquisition by the Cantonal Commission on Cultural Activities, 2007
© Silvie Defraoui



5.
Silvie Defraoui (*1935, St. Gallen)
Destinations, 1994-1995
Assemblages of postcards and printed decorative motifs, metal frame, 17.5 × 78 cm, and texts handwritten in pencil on tracing paper, metal frame, 17.5 × 78 cm
Courtesy of the artist
© Silvie Defraoui



6.
Silvie Defraoui (*1935, St. Gallen)
Dans le cadre des histoires... d'une année exceptionnelle, 1996
2 parts: black-and-white photograph, Ilfochrome, wood frame; altogether: 86 × 150 cm
Courtesy of the artist
© Silvie Defraoui

Views of the exhibition





Captions to be reproduced:
 View of the exhibition *Silvie Defraoui. The Tremor of Certitude*
 at the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, 2023
 Photo: MCBA, Jonas Hänggi

6. Public engagement– Public outreach services

Reservations required for all events
→ mcba.ch/agenda

Guided tours (in French)

Sunday 12 and 26 March, 9 and 23 April at 11am
Thursday 16 March, 20 April, and 4 May 2023 at 6:30pm:
Visit of the exhibitions *Silvie Defraoui* and *Jardin d'Hiver #2*

Final guided tour with the exhibition curator (in French)

Sunday 21 May at 3pm
With Elisabeth Jobin

Guided tour (in English)

Sunday, 7 May at 2pm
Visit of the exhibitions *Silvie Defraoui* and *Jardin d'Hiver #2*

Guided tours for Les Ami·e·s du Musée

Tuesday 21 March at 12:30pm
Thursday 4 May at 6pm
With Juri Steiner

Talk and screening

Thursday 11 May at 6.30pm
Silvie Defraoui invites the filmmaker Alexia Walther to talk about video art, film and the transmission of knowledge. The filmmaker will screen excerpts from a range of her films.
A discussion moderated by Juri Steiner.
Free admission

Adult workshop (in French)

Saturday, 13 May, 2 –5pm
Producing realities, deciphering the world
Through the practice of assembling objects and collage, multiply the points of view to read the world around us. The workshop is punctuated by moments of exchange and individual and collective productions.
By Roxane Bovet, curator, author and publisher
CHF 50.– + entrance ticket

Kids activity booklet (in French)

Free, available at the reception desk

Program for schools and private tours
→ mcba.ch

7. Informations and contact

Florence Dizdari
Press coordinator
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T +41 79 232 40 06

All our press releases and press kits are available under:
→ mcba.ch/presse/

Press conference: 9 March at 10.30 am
Presentation of the exhibition by the curators in the presence of the artist
Upon registration: → presse.mcba@plateforme10.ch



Public Opening: 9 March at 6pm

Hours:
Tuesday – Sunday 10 am – 6 pm
Thursday 10 am – 8 pm
Monday closed
Good Friday (7.4) 10 am – 6 pm
Easter Monday (10.4) 10 am – 6 pm
Ascension Day (18.5) 10am – 6 pm

Admission and Online Tickets:
→ mcba.ch/billetterie
First Saturday of the month: free

Access:
SBB Lausanne train station, 3 minutes on foot
Bus: 1, 3, 20, 21, 60, Gare stop
Bus: 6, Cecil stop
Metro: m2, Gare stop
Car: Montbenon parking, Reduced fee

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 @mcbalausanne
 @mcba.lausanne

8. 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
Art et Vie

Fondation
Anita et Werner Damm-Etienne



Abakanowicz Arts and
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Le Brassus



Madame
Alice Pauli

Association rétrospective
Pierrette Gonseth-Favre

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