

# MUSÉE CANTONAL DES BEAUX-ARTS LAUSANNE Otobong Nkanga. I dreamt of you in colours



3.4–23.8.2026  
Press Kit

Musée cantonal  
des Beaux-Arts  
Plateforme 10

Place de la Gare 16  
1003 Lausanne  
Switzerland

[mcba.ch](http://mcba.ch)

10 PLATEFORME  
QUARTIER  
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LAUSANNE vaud

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# 1. Press release

The Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne, in collaboration with the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, presents the first solo exhibition by the artist Otobong Nkanga in Switzerland. A major figure on the contemporary art scene, Otobong Nkanga, born in Kano, Nigeria, in 1974, and based today in Antwerp, Belgium, has been developing a body of work that draws inspiration from her history and research, focusing on the connections between ecology, memory and the circulation of resources.

Following her studies in Nigeria, France, and the Netherlands, the artist explored issues relating to mining and the use of the earth's resources, examining our complex social, political and material connections to space and the earth through a multidisciplinary practice including drawings, paintings, installations, tapestries, photographs, videos, sculptures, ceramics, performances, sound and poetry.

Drawing on her personal history and research, which reflects transhistorical and diverse influences, she creates networks and constellations between humans and landscapes while addressing the restorative capacity of natural and relational systems.

The notion of strata is central to the artist's practice, both in the materiality of her works and in her way of thinking about the relationships between bodies and lands, made of mutual exchange and transformation. Nkanga simultaneously explores the circulation of materials and goods, of people and their intertwined histories, as well as their exploitation, marked by the residues of violent colonial histories. While questioning memory, she offers the vision of a possible future.

At once a survey and a cross-section of the artist's protean oeuvre, the exhibition traces the genealogy of recurrent subjects whose visual expression is constantly evolving. It brings together emblematic installations, monumental tapestries, and a significant number of drawings, some of which go back to the earliest years of her career and are being shown for the first time. On this occasion, the artist reactivates certain works through performances in a poetics of entanglement, creating connections between forms, materials, and ideas.

The approximately 140 works on display come from both public collections (Castello di Rivoli, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Turin; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Stichting Museum Arnhem; Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle, Paris; Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden; M HKA Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp), private foundations (Beyeler Foundation, Riehen/Basel; Tia Collection, Santa Fe), private collections, and the artist's studio.

The exhibition is organised by MCBA in collaboration with Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris/Paris Musées.

### Exhibition curators

In Lausanne: Nicole Schweizer, curator of contemporary art, MCBA  
Assisted by Eleonora Del Duca, assistant curator of contemporary art,  
MCBA

In Paris: Odile Burluraux, chief curator, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris

### Dont'miss

Meet the Artist

### Performances

Thursday, 2 April at 7 pm, during the public opening

*Performance by Otobong Nkanga: Soft Offerings*

Free admission / no registration required

Saturday, 30 May at 4 pm

*Performance by Otobong Nkanga: Solid Maneuvers*

On the first floor of the exhibition

Free admission (included in museum admission)/no registration required

### Event-Talk

Thursday, 28 May at 6:30 pm

*Otobong Nkanga in conversation with Odile Burluraux*

*(Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris) and Nicole Schweizer (MCBA)*

Auditorium MCBA

Free admission

The exhibition is supported by the Fondation Philanthropique Famille Sandoz



The free access activities *La vie en couleurs* are supported by Vaudoise Insurance



## 2. The exhibition

1st Floor

Gallery 1:

The exhibition opens with works on paper created while Nkanga was still a student at the Fine Arts Department at Obafemi-Awolowo University in Ilé-Ife, Nigeria. In her first year at the University, Nkanga studied mainly painting and in particular the colour palette whose chromatic range runs throughout her work, and which would later unfold in the shimmering hues of her monumental tapestries.

It was in Paris, where she was studying at the École des Beaux-Arts, that Nkanga created what she considers to be her first complex and multi-layered work of art, *Fattening Room* (1999). In this piece she brought together for the first time her ideas on architecture, sculpture, and costume design in a performance that gave rise to a photomontage. This work thus encapsulates the central themes that the artist would continue to explore, namely the body in its connection to the earth, architecture and textiles, at the crossroads of multiple influences.

The artist's relationship to home and childhood memories can be seen in the drawing series *Filtered Memories* (1999), in which she revisits significant events from her early years. As she puts it, emphasising the importance of drawing in her practice, 'From childhood, apart from playing with the soil, I was also drawing and sketching things... Drawing is that space of release where thoughts, imaginaries, conflict, anger, all kinds of emotions and feelings are put together and bundled and thrown out onto the paper. But it's also a way for throwing out sketches and plans, because only by drawing can I get close to what I wish to convey.'

The installations *Awaiting Pleasures But It Cut* (2002–2003) and *Awaiting Pleasures – The Workstation* (2003) reflect her connection with architecture and her taste for experimentation. The needle, an element found at the heart of both installations, bears a dual meaning, between care and threat, tackling the question of the body and its vulnerability. These wooden structures, like the ceramic pieces in *Pleasure Fragments* (2002), were created mainly for performances.

With the *Alterscape* (2006) series of photographs, the artist pictures herself behind a model where natural landscapes and human constructions blend. She seems to physically merge with the environment, inviting us to think about our human impact on the Earth, but also about our potential for connection with the landscapes and biodiversity that surround us.

Gallery 2:

The installation *In Pursuit of Bling* (2014) renders Nkanga's extensive research on a now-closed copper mine in Tsumeb, Namibia, and reflects on the metamorphosis of natural resources as they are transformed from raw materials into finished products. Tsumeb was part of an extractivist system in which a resource-rich site is taken over and expropriated, to be integrated in a global network of capital and infrastructure. Between the time operations began in 1875 and the closing of the mine in 1996, millions of tons of copper, zinc, lead, cadmium, silver, and germanium were extracted and sent to Germany, Belgium, and North America, leaving behind a land depleted and emptied of its resources.

Initially created for the 8<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennial after a long period of research, *In Pursuit of Bling* uses minerals (mica, malachite, copper), photographic images printed on limestone, make-up powder, and videos, all displayed on 28 tables arranged around two tapestries that reproduce the structure of a mineral atom. The whole creates a cartography of mining sites that extract shiny minerals (bling), their circulation in the global economy, and their transformation, underscoring the links between the colonial enterprise, power, and natural resources.

In the video *Remains of the Green Hill* (2015), filmed in Tsumeb, Nkanga addresses the wounded land in song, acknowledging all the resources that have been plundered from this place and the cost in human and nonhuman lives. She describes her performance as an act of healing, similar to an offering made to the land.

Facing the installation *In Pursuit of Bling*, the tapestry *The Weight of Scars* (2015) also reflects on scarred landscapes, the question of reconstruction, and the weight of colonial and extractive legacies. The circular photographs document the remains of various abandoned mine sites in Namibia, picturing cracked ground, abandoned concrete, pipelines, and fenced-off emptiness. Relying on the impact of images on our perception, the artist constructs a historical map of industrial activities, highlighting their geological and human consequences.

### Gallery 3

In this gallery, the installation *Solid Maneuvers* (2015) presents a more abstract view of the scarred lands from which resources are extracted. In keeping with the works on Tsumeb displayed in Gallery 2, it recreates a stratified topography of a hollowed out mine using the mined minerals that have been transformed and altered. As the artist points out, 'Instead of building a new monument to commemorate the absence or the act of emptying, I asked: Could the emptied space be the monument?' *Solid Maneuvers* is thus the poetic translation of the inverted and excavated topography of 'Green Hill', a name that goes back to a time when the site's mineral-rich slopes shone with a green oxidised copper. The installation contains salt, cosmetics, heavy mineral sands, and copper and serves as a poignant reminder of the ecological implications of capitalist accumulation. The dimensions of the sculptures are based on human body measurements, thus referring to the question of the body as a necessary tool in mining operations.

In performances that involve her entire body, the artist stands amid the sculpture elements and makes a series of repetitive and mechanical gestures, borrowing from the worlds of industrial work and mining. Handling raw materials while making automated gestures, counting, and reciting fragments of stories, she physically portrays the way human beings through their movements mould and shape nature and mark landscapes.

This gallery also features several series of drawings, including *Pointe-Noire*, which the artist made in 2009 during a residency at the Centre culturel français du Congo in Pointe-Noire (Republic of the Congo). These drawings evoke the environmental degradations that are due to extractive and oil drilling operations. Nkanga blends dismantled landscapes, dislocated limbs, and industrial elements connected to the local geography, mapping in this way the history of Pointe-Noire.

## 2nd Floor

### *Unearthed:*

The second-floor space opens on four monumental tapestries displayed in a row. The medium is central to the artist's work and is part of a dual legacy for Nkanga, that of West Africa, where tapestries are a way of communicating a message or a story; and Flemish landscape tapestries, which enabled rich families to tell their story and show off their view of the world.

Nkanga creates contemporary landscapes that expand and shift these viewpoints while bringing to light what had once been concealed. With the four tapestries that make up *Unearthed* (2021), originally designed for the four floors of Kunsthhaus Bregenz, she spins a tale that begins in the great ocean depths (*Abyss*), ascends to the light of a sunny landscape (*Sunlight*), passing through shallower waters (*Midnight*) and where the sea meets the shore (*Twilight*). Here the artist connects stories of deep mining exploitation to climate change, linking visible and invisible worlds. She also evokes the triangular trade and the millions of lives lost by depicting body parts washed ashore, transformed into mineral forms containing the very substances that sustain today's technologies.

From one tapestry to the next the eye can follow a vertical orange line that begins in *Abyss* and rises up to *Midnight* and finally *Twilight*, in each case crossing a different constellation of minerals. We also notice increasing numbers of jellyfish, an indication that ocean temperatures are rising. The colour is shifting slowly towards a warmer tone, and once the line arrives at *Sunlight* it melts away into the landscape. In the latter, pockets of hardy plants used at gravesites have been inserted into the tapestry, ivy, ferns, and heather. As the artist remarks, 'It's a way of saying that within all that loss, other things survive, which have survived other catastrophes over time. That's the whole idea of the *Unearthed* series.'

### Spaces of restoration:

At the centre of the exhibition space a network of carpets is laid out on the floor, their horizontality presenting a clear contrast with the verticality of the tapestries. The carpets draw their form from the magnified structures of rocks and minerals: quartz for *Leaving trails in the distance* (2021), malachite and azurite for *Lined with shivers sprouting from the rock* (2021), and pyrargyrite for *We Come from Fire and Return to Fire* (2024). The hand-dyed wool is tufted to give the surfaces volume and texture, emphasizing their three-dimensionality.

The carpets are accompanied by sculptural elements: beech wood with carved receptacles, glass containers reminiscent of pods, and ceramic balls and hexagons linked by hand-woven ropes. Together, they reveal a vast network that reflects the intermingling of landscapes and continents. Nkanga imagines the carpet-rocks as sites of softness, spaces for restoration and respite, where the senses are heightened. Along these lines, the installation also includes olfactory elements made from organic materials such as medicinal plants and drops of essential oils. Two ceramic spheres diffuse the artist's overlapping voices, merging singing and whispering into the environment.

In recent years, Nkanga has renewed her interest in ceramics, which had been present in her work from the outset. Here, it takes the form of sculptures installed throughout the space, and clay plaques engraved with poems that create a visual rhythm on the walls.

Akin to burnt trees, the abstract stoneware columns of the *Beacon* series (2024) rise up toward the sky, their cracked and blackened aspect recalling the fragility of ecosystems. Arranged around the columns, containers hold dried seeds underscoring the vulnerability of plant life and our food systems.

*Carved to Flow:*

The question of circulation—of resources and people, across multiple geographies and through time—appears in various forms throughout the artist's work. It is seen, for example, in the tapestries of the *Unearthed* series, but also in a more abstract way in the collaborative project *Carved to Flow*, elements of which are presented here.

Begun by Nkanga in 2017 as part of documenta 14 in both Kassel, Germany, and Athens, Greece, *Carved to Flow* exists at the intersection of art and the social sphere. In Athens, Nkanga relied on the expertise of the Greek soap-maker Evi Lachana to create bars of soap, including her *08 Blackstone Soap*—a cold-production process soap comprising water, coal, lye and seven butters and oils from the Mediterranean, the Middle East, North and West Africa.

Thanks to the proceeds from the soap sales, the artist has set up two initiatives. One is an art space in Athens called Akwa Ibom co-founded with Maya Tounta. The other is a foundation, an organic farm in Nigeria whose products are sold at a low price and where local residents can come for water. As the artist notes, 'It's a reflection on how to generate an economy, but not an economy of greed. An economy of sustaining and maintaining, an economy that helps to regenerate things.' In 2025 two new bars of soap *08 Salt Rock* and *08 Red Bond* were launched by Nkanga, She worked closely with the Austin soap-maker Emlyn Roesler who sourced the raw materials in North Texas in the United States.

On the second-floor, the show opens and ends with *Soft Offerings* (2022), a piece meant to be activated by a pair of bearers distributing offerings and flowers or chanting, a way to pay homage to all forms of nonhuman life—stone, wind, ants, birds, water, plants—inviting us to imagine the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world.

The artist's quotations come from the following publications:

- 'Otobong Nkanga in conversation with Odile Burluroux and Nicole Schweizer', *Otobong Nkanga. I dreamt of you in colours*, Paris, éditions Paris Musées, 2025, p. 29–48.
- 'Intricate Connections. Otobong Nkanga, Clare Molloy & Fabian Schöneich', *Otobong Nkanga. Luster and Lucre*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2017, p. 165–187.

### 3. Publication



Odile Burleraux and Nicole Schweizer (eds),  
*Otobong Nkanga. I dreamt of you in colours*,  
with contributions by Noam Gramlich, Sandrine Honliasso,  
and Maya Tounta, and a conversation between Otobong Nkanga, Odile  
Burleraux, and Nicole Schweizer.

Paris, Éditions Paris Musées, 2025 (Fr./Eng.)

CHF 38.–

Available at the MCBA Book- and Giftshop

→ [shop.mcba@plateforme10.ch](mailto:shop.mcba@plateforme10.ch)

Published with the generous support of the Fonds Alice Pauli

## 4. Biography

Born in Kano, Nigeria in 1974, and now living in Antwerp, Belgium, and Uyo, Nigeria, Otobong Nkanga trained at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ilé-Ife, Nigeria, the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam.

Her work has been featured in many solo exhibitions, including: Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2025); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2024); Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno–Centro Julio Gonzalez, Valencia, Spain (2023); Frist Art Museum, Nashville, United States (2023); Museum Sint-Janshospitaal, Bruges, Belgium (2022); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2021–2022); Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli, Turin, Italy (2021–2022); Villa Arson, Nice, France (2021); Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Hovikodden, Norway (2020–2021); Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin (2020); Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, United Kingdom (2020–2021); Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, Cape Town (2019); Tate St Ives, United Kingdom (2019); Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2018); Tate Modern, London (2017); Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany (2015); Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, Netherlands (2015); Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, Germany (2015); Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (2015); Kadist, Paris (2015).

The group exhibitions in which she has participated include the biennials in Venice (2026 and 2019), São Paulo (2025), Lyon (2024), and Sharjah (2019), as well as documenta 14 (Athens and Kassel, 2017).

Otobong Nkanga received the Jury's Special Mention Award at the 58th Venice Biennale (2019). She is the recipient of the Finkenwerder Art Prize (2026), the Zeitz MOCAA Honorary Award for Artistic Excellence (2025), the Nasher Prize for Sculpture (2025), the Golden Afro Artistic Award (2024), an Honorary Doctorate of the University of Antwerp (2024), the Peter-Weiss-Preis, Bochum (2019), the Sharjah Biennale Prize (2019), the Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award (2019), the Ultima Flemish Cultural Prize for the Visual Arts (2018), the Belgian Art Prize (2017) and the Yanghyun Prize (2015).

## 5. Press images

To download → [mcba.ch/presse](https://mcba.ch/presse)

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Views of the exhibition available on 2nd April 2026, 12.00 pm  
→ [mcba.ch/presse](https://mcba.ch/presse)

Captions for the exhibition views:

View of the exhibition *Otobong Nkanga. I dreamt of you in colours*

Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne

Photo: Etienne Malapert, Karim Kal, MCBA, Lausanne



Portrait of Otobong Nkanga  
Photo: Wim van Dongen



Otobong Nkanga  
*Social Consequences V: The Harvest*, 2022  
Acrylic and stickers on paper, 42 × 29,7 cm  
Collection Wim Waumans  
© Otobong Nkanga  
Photo: Courtesy of the artist



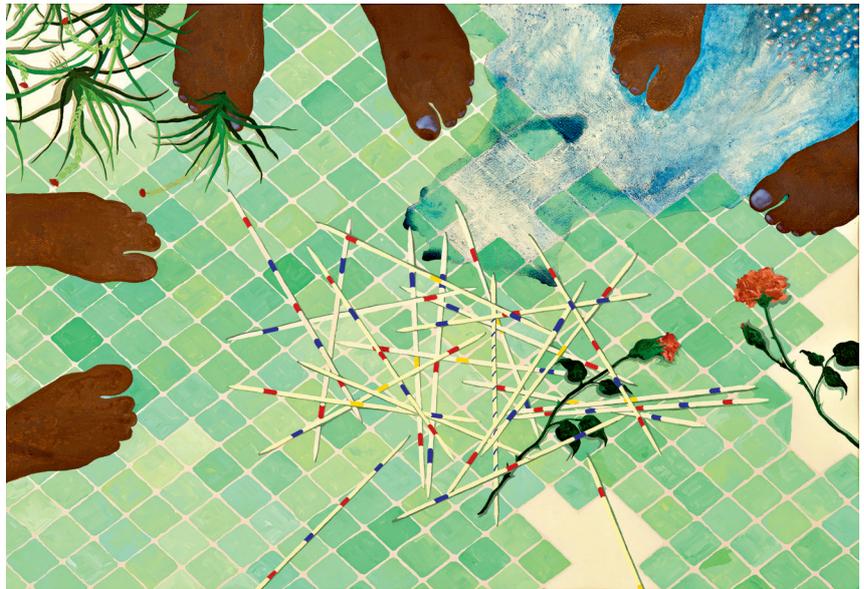
Otobong Nkanga  
*Leaving trails in the distance*, 2021  
 Wool carpet, cotton hand-knotted ropes,  
 weeping beech wood sculptures, handblown  
 glass sculptures, clay sculptures, metal,  
 sound, organic materials and various oils  
 Overall dimensions determined  
 by the space  
 Collection of the artist  
 © Otobong Nkanga  
 Photo: Objets pointus



Otobong Nkanga  
*Spots of Amnesia*, 2006  
 Acrylic and lacquer on paper, 42 x 29,7 cm  
 Collection Wim van Dongen  
 © Otobong Nkanga  
 Photo: Courtesy of the artist



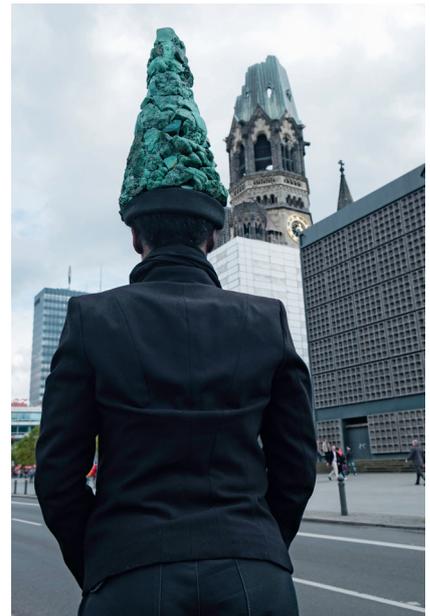
Otobong Nkanga  
*Perfect Measures with Blood Stain*, 2002  
 Watercolor, pastel, acrylic, and ink on paper,  
 32 x 24 cm  
 Collection Wim van Dongen  
 © Otobong Nkanga  
 Photo: © Grégory Copitet



Otobong Nkanga  
*Just waiting for us to play*, 2006  
 Acrylic, gouache, nail polish, and perforations  
 on paper, 92 x 120 cm  
 Collection C. Mallard  
 © Otobong Nkanga  
 Photo: © Grégory Copitet



Otobong Nkanga  
*Pointe-Noire Fragments - Black Home*, 2009  
 Acrylic on paper, 42 x 29,7 cm  
 Private collection  
 © Otobong Nkanga  
 Photo: © Grégory Copitet



Otobong Nkanga  
*Reflections of the Raw Green Crown*, 2014  
 Single-channel HD video, color, sound, 2'52''  
 © Otobong Nkanga  
 Photo: Michael Mann

## 6. Events

Reservation required for all events → [mcba.ch/agenda](https://mcba.ch/agenda)

Please note: all tours and events are in French unless otherwise specified

### Guided tours

Thursday, 23 April, 7 May, 2 July, and 20 August at 6:30 pm  
Every Sunday at 11 am (except 5 April and 23 August)

### Guided tours with the curator

Thursday, 18 June at 6:30 pm Sunday, 23 August at 3 pm

### Guided tour (in English)

Sunday, 28 June at 2 pm

### Guided tours for the Amie-s du MCBA

Thursday, 21 April at 12:30 pm Thursday, 13 August at 6 pm

### Guided tours for teachers

Wednesday, 22 April at 12:30 pm Thursday, 23 April at 5:30 pm

### Guided tours for social work professionals

Thursday, 23 April at 10 am

### Regards croisés

Saturday, 6 June from 2 to 6 pm

*La terre en héritage: regards croisés entre histoires coloniales et pratiques artistiques contemporaines*

Guided tour of *Colonialisme. Une Suisse impliquée* at the Château de Prangins – Swiss National Museum, transfer by bus to visit *Otobong Nkanga. I dreamt of you in colours* at MCBA.

Guided tours hosted by the curators, followed by a cocktail  
CHF 35.–

### Performances

Thursday, 2 April at 7 pm, during the public opening

*Performance by Otobong Nkanga: Soft Offerings*

Free admission/no registration required

Saturday, 30 May at 4 pm

*Performance by Otobong Nkanga: Solid Maneuvers*

On the first floor of the exhibition

Free admission (included in museum admission)/no registration required

### Events-Talks

Thursday, 30 April at 6:30 pm

*Représenter l'extractivisme, un essai de dialogue entre art et anthropologie*

By Matthieu Bolay, anthropologist and associate professor at HES-SO Geneva

Auditorium MCBA

Free admission

Thursday, 28 May at 6:30 pm

*Otobong Nkanga in conversation with Odile Burlaux (Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris) and Nicole Schweizer (MCBA)*

Auditorium MCBA

Free admission

Workshops for adults

Saturday, 23 May from 2 to 5 pm

*Making an irrigation jar*

Making a clay object as an ecological and political gesture, with the artist Annabelle Voisin

CHF 50.-

Saturday, 13 June from 2 to 5 pm

*Cold process soap making*

Learn the secrets of how Aleppo soap is made, with Hadi Aljundi, chemist

CHF 50.-

Workshops 0 to 100 years old

Friday 10, Saturday 11, and Sunday 12 April from 2 to 6 pm, nonstop

*Living landscape*

Collective creation of an imaginary clay landscape on the Plateforme 10 plaza.

Come with your family, friends, or alone, and spend 15 minutes or 3 hours.

Part of PâKOMUZé

Free admission/No registration required

Workshops for kids

Tuesday 11, Thursday 13, and Friday 14 August from 1:30 to 5 pm

*Salut, ça bulle ?*

Make your own soap without chemicals!

Part of Passeport vacances

Registration required → [apvrl.ch](http://apvrl.ch)

Free-access activity

*La vie en couleurs*

Kids activity booklet

Free, available at the reception desk

Programme for schools and private museum tours → [mcba.ch](http://mcba.ch)

## 7. Information and contact

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All our press releases and press kits are available under:  
→ [mcba.ch/presse](https://mcba.ch/presse)

### Press conference

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> April at 10.30 am

Presentation of the exhibition by the curator in the presence of the artist

Registration required: → [presse.mcba@plateforme10.ch](mailto:presse.mcba@plateforme10.ch)

### Public opening in the presence of the artist

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2026 at 6.30 pm

### Hours:

Tuesday–Sunday 10am–6pm

Thursday 10am–8pm

Monday: closed

MCBA is open: Holy Friday (3.4.26), Easter Monday (6.4.26), Ascension Thursday (14.5.26), Swiss National Day (1.8.26)

### Admission and Online Tickets:

→ [mcba.ch/billetterie](https://mcba.ch/billetterie)

Up to 25 years old: free

First Saturday of the month: free

### Access:

SBB Lausanne train station, 3 minutes on foot

Bus: 85, 3, 20, 21, 60, Gare stop

Bus: 6, Cecil stop

Metro: m2, Gare stop

Car: Montbenon parking, Reduced fee

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