

Charles
Blanc-Gatti

The Colours
of sound

25.9.2026–
17.1.2027

Exhibition
Leaflet

MUSÉE CANTONAL
DES BEAUX-ARTS
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Espace Focus

The Lausanne native Charles Blanc-Gatti (1890–1966) was drawn to music and the visual arts from a very young age. He was also born with “colour and geometric synaesthesia”. That is, sounds in his mind were inextricably linked to colours and shapes. Hearing one he would instantly see the others. An amateur violinist and painter, he had no formal academic training.

The exhibition *Les couleurs du son* (The Colours of sound) focuses on four key moments in the artist’s career.

In 1931, while living in Paris, Blanc-Gatti put together an exhibition that featured some 50 abstract artworks. These were pictorial transpositions of visions that had been triggered in his mind as he listened to classical music compositions. In 1932 he cofounded the Association des artistes musicalistes (Association of Musicalist Artists) with Henry Valensi, Gustave Bourgogne, and Vito Stracquadaini, three painters who shared his belief in the supremacy of music over all the other arts.

Blanc-Gatti later became interested in new techniques of lighting design for the stage. He created dynamic lighting in which coloured lighting effects were projected and synchronised with sound. He also experimented with fluorescent paint.

L’Orchestre – 2^e version is a painting that synthesises his concept of the chromophonic spectacle; it provides a key to reading the vibratory correspondences Blanc-Gatti saw between sounds and colours. Back in Switzerland in late 1936, the artist continued his experiments in the field of film and produced a 1939 experimental animated film called *Chromophonie*.

Multiple factors probably triggered Blanc-Gatti’s visions. Dazzling light – whether natural or spiritual – generates ecstatic moments that he would depict in his landscapes of the Lake Geneva region and the Alps of the Valais, as well as in his religious painting.

Biography

- 1890: birth in Lausanne of Charles Blanc, Protestant and son of Jules, an office worker, and Anna Rapin, dressmaker.
- 1907: graduates from the Industrial School of Lausanne, where he took art classes with Raphaël Lugeon. Hired as a technical draughtsman by a civil engineering firm.
- 1911: brief stay in Paris at a branch office of a Lausanne engineering firm.
- 1912: marries Giustina Gatti; he eventually joins her surname to his.
- 1914–1916: frequently travels between Lausanne and Paris.
- 1924: settles in Paris and takes over a branch of Benjamin Bonaz's company, for which he designs models for women's fashion accessories.
- 1931: puts together for the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery his first solo show: *Blanc-Gatti. Le peintre des sons*.
- 1932: cofounds the Association of Musicalist Artists with the painters Henry Valensi, Gustave Bourgogne, and Vito Stracquadini.
- 1934: patents the "chromophonic Orchestra", a stage device for projecting lighting effects in sync with music. Publishes *Des Sons et des Couleurs* (On Sounds and colours). Puts together in Lausanne the exhibition *Blanc-Gatti, le peintre des sons*.
- 1935: at the 3rd Salon de la Lumière, exhibits a fluorescent triptych along with a dynamic lighting design promoting electric cookers.
- 1936: at Établissements Clémançon, presents dynamic lighting designs for several shows (*Jazz, Le Meurtrier*). The Popular Front's rise to power in France and the period's economic crisis lead the artist to return to Switzerland for good at year's end; settles in Territet, where he puts together an exhibition, *Cloches et clochers romands*.
- 1938: advocates for the creation of a Swiss animated film industry. Takes over the management of Montreux-Colorfilm, a studio producing animation for advertising.
- 1939: release of his experimental animated film, *Chromophonie*.
- 1940: foundation of the "Corporation Romande des Arts" with the artist serving as president.
- 1944: puts together in his home the exhibition *Ciels et Cimes. Cinquante toiles nouvelles*.
- 1946: opens at his address in Lausanne what will prove to be a short-lived academy called Art et esthétique.
- 1947: settles in Verbier (Valais).
- 1952: settles in Riex (Vaud).
- 1953: partial paralysis forces him to give up painting but he continues his activities promoting musicalism.
- 1966: dies in Riex at the age of 76.

Exhibition curator:
Catherine Lepdor, chief curator, MCBA,
with the assistance of Camille de Alencastro,
research associate, MCBA

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Available at the MCBA Book- and Giftshop
→ shop.mcba@plateforme10.ch

Events:
Guided tours with the exhibition curator (in French)
Thursday, 12 November 2026 and 14 January 2027
at 6:30 pm

Guided tour with the exhibition curator for the
Ami·e·s du MCBA (in French)
Tuesday, 17 November 2026 at 12:30 pm

Reservations are required for all events:
→ mcba.ch/agenda

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