

FONDATION BEYELER

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THE LION IS HUNGRY



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10 October 2020 – 28 March 2021

INTRODUCTION

The Fondation Beyeler's new collection display offers a richly varied excursion through modern and contemporary art, aiming to whet the appetite for direct encounters with outstanding works of art. Henri Rousseau's famous jungle scene *The Hungry Lion Attacking an Antelope* is at the heart of this collection display, conceived by curator Ulf Küster. The tour leads through post-impressionist landscapes by Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cézanne. Visitors cross paths with Alberto Giacometti's legendary *Walking Man*. Louise Bourgeois's iconic giant spider lurks by the pond. Sumptuous flowers and blue bathers can be found in Henri Matisse's large cut-outs. These motifs also appear in the intensely colourful paintings of Abstract Expressionism, with new permanent loans of works by Willem de Kooning, Joan Mitchell and Clyfford Still. The mysterious pictorial worlds of Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee, both eminent Bauhaus masters and friends, meet here for the first time. And we are premiering the newly acquired sound installation *Seven Tears* by Scottish artist Susan Philipsz. The antelope in Henri Rousseau's masterpiece is not crying alone...

Cover: Henri Rousseau (1844–1910)

Le lion, ayant faim, se jette sur l'antilope, 1898/1905 (detail)

The Hungry Lion Attacking an Antelope

Oil on canvas, 200 × 301 cm

Beyeler Collection

ROOM 1

1 Wassily Kandinsky Improvisation 10, 1910

2 Paul Klee Zeichen in Gelb, 1937, 210 (U 10)

Signs in Yellow

Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) and German artist Paul Klee (1879–1940) both taught form and colour theory at the Dessau Bauhaus school. Klee remained in Dessau from 1926 to 1931, Kandinsky until the National Socialists closed the Bauhaus schools in 1933. The two artists worked together and lived with their families in a masters' house designed by Walter Gropius.

The painting *Improvisation 10* marks the transition from figurative landscape to abstraction in Wassily Kandinsky's work. His first "improvisations" date from 1909; these are no depictions of nature but rather images based on impressions of "inner nature", i.e. on the artist's own ideas, visions and imagination.

At first glance, the painting appears as a non-representational colour composition. Yet closer inspection reveals a tree or a shrub with sweeping branches on the right and a rainbow arching over a building with red cupolas at the top left. Black lines encircle the entire scene like a frame, in which the various landscape elements fall into perspective.

ROOM 1

Paul Klee's luminous colour composition, articulated by black lines, resembles a woven rug whose light ground is composed of irregular rectangle shapes. The black lines, partly growing into the picture from its edges, serve to delineate individual areas.

The year 1937 marks the beginning of a last, very intense creative period for Klee, characterised by pronounced simplification. The basic components of this new vocabulary were black bars or lines spreading freely across gleaming colour fields to various effect.

While the lines in Kandinsky's work lead an independent existence and move autonomously across the space, Klee's marks underscore the structure of his paintings' space. Ultimately, his canvases capture a construct of lines, planes and colours. He documented these considerations in his class notes: "The spatial character of the plane is imaginary."

ROOM 2

3 Henri Matisse

Nu bleu I, 1952

Blue Nude I

In his last years, French artist Henri Matisse (1869–1954) turned to the technique of paper cut-outs, which allowed him to engage in a sophisticated play with coloured shapes. He proved himself a master of the simple, precise form. In his view, cutting out pieces of paper compared to working with three-dimensional volumes: “Drawing with scissors. Cutting straight into colour reminds me of the direct carving of sculptors.”

With these “*papiers découpés*”, a simple yet highly complex combination of drawing, painting and sculpture, Matisse reached the fulfilment of his artistic vision.

The “blue nudes” are among his most famous cut-outs. *Nu bleu I*, which represents a woman seated with her legs intertwined, appears made of one piece. The work plays with the notions of figure and ground, plane and volume, while conveying physical self-absorption and calm eroticism. Ernst Beyeler purchased *Nu bleu I* in 1960 directly from Matisse’s daughter, and later enriched his collection with several other cut-outs by the artist.

ROOM 3

4 Alberto Giacometti

L'homme qui marche II, 1960

Walking Man II

Grande femme IV, 1960

Large Standing Woman IV

In 1956, Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966) started working on a group of figures for the plaza in front of Chase Manhattan Bank in New York. Next to a large head, he planned a group of three full figures consisting of two standing women and one walking man. This selection combined all the major themes Giacometti engaged with in his late work after 1945.

L'homme qui marche II shows a man taking a step forward. The movement’s air of naturalness stands in stark contrast to the rough surface finish, the elongated limbs, the emaciated silhouette and the rigid posture. The “large woman” is shown in a state of stillness. Yet this suspension is only a fleeting moment, as standstill marks the beginning and the end of each movement.

The figures were to be positioned freely throughout the plaza in order to allow passers-by to move among them and become part of the group. In the end, Giacometti abandoned the project, as the sculptures would have lost their potency among the sixty-story skyscrapers of Chase Manhattan Plaza.

ROOM 4

5 Henri Rousseau

Le lion, ayant faim, se jette sur l'antilope, 1898/1905

The Hungry Lion Attacking an Antelope

This jungle scene by French painter Henri Rousseau (1844–1910) is characterised by the tension between botanical objectivity and mysterious fantasy. Rousseau had no first-hand knowledge of tropical forests and based his animals and plants on magazines, photographs and the dioramas of Paris' botanical gardens. His wilderness takes the guise of a well-ordered herbarium: leaf by leaf, frond by frond, blade by blade. The supposedly archaic primeval landscape is an artfully orchestrated symphony of greens, a carefully painted collage of leaves and animals. In the centre of the image, watched by the other animals, a deadly struggle is fought between a lion and an antelope.

This celebrated jungle scene provided Rousseau with his breakthrough at the 1905 *Salon d'automne* exhibition in Paris. Mocked and ridiculed before the turn of the century, he became an admired precursor of nascent modernism and eventually one of the 20th century's most popular artists.

ROOM 5

6 Louise Bourgeois

In Respite, 1992

SPIDER IV, 1996

Many works of French-American artist Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010) are influenced by events of her childhood, as she reported in numerous conversations and personal notes. As a child, she assisted her parents who owned a small workshop for tapestry and textile restoration near Paris. *In Respite* combines several elements of Bourgeois's visual vocabulary, hiding behind apparent functionality: the bobbins point to the activities of spinning and weaving the artist grew up around. They are also reminiscent of the Fates, goddesses of destiny who control the thread of life. In Bourgeois's work, the spider symbolises her mother, for whom spinning was part of daily work. The many-legged animal has a positive connotation as maternal guardian – in sharp contrast to the aversion and fear it triggers in many people.

ROOM 6

Abstract Expressionism

One of the main characteristics of abstract art is its endeavour to free painting from everything “superfluous” and lead it back to its roots, to the gesture of the painter’s hand, to colour and to pure form. Abstract Expressionism, which developed in the United States after 1945, is represented in this exhibition by Clyfford Still’s *colour field painting* and by Joan Mitchell’s and Willem de Kooning’s *action painting*. These works display gestural and spontaneous brushwork as well as a loose, rapid application of paint.

7 Joan Mitchell Untitled, 1957

In the 1950s, US-American painter Joan Mitchell (1925–1992) developed her distinctive style of rhythmical, partly divergent lines of varying type and intensity. *Untitled* illustrates her non-figurative art’s commitment to the surge and thrust of the impulse. Her dynamic and lyrical brushwork allowed Mitchell to capture on canvas her memories, emotions and impressions of inner experience and external environment. For the artist, painting was a means of poetic expression: “My painting is not an allegory or a story. It is more like a poem.”

ROOM 6

8 Willem de Kooning Untitled XXI, 1977

Beginning in 1975, in a series of canvases spanning several years, Dutch-American painter Willem de Kooning (1904–1997) produced an almost perfectly abstract and expressive form of painting. Art critic David Sylvester likened the energetic brush strokes of this period to the lashes of a whip. Yet the sinuous shapes are produced rather by the paintings’ radiant colour, which takes possession of the entire picture surface. The thick layer of lead white the artist applied to his canvas as a primer and polished to near translucency unleashes the paintings’ intense luminosity. Sylvester saw “macrocosmic landscapes” in these painterly, light-flooded compositions meant not to be penetrated according to the laws of perspective but rather explored topographically, as from a bird’s-eye view.

ROOM 7

9 Vincent van Gogh

Champ de blé aux bleuets, 1890

Wheatfield with Cornflowers

With renewed hope of improving health, in May 1890 Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) travelled to Auvers-sur-Oise, northwest of Paris. There he produced paintings in which, in the artist's own words, he expressed his "extreme loneliness".

In *Champ de blé aux bleuets*, the vigorous brushwork makes the windswept wheat field which leads into the picture's depth "spill over": in the centre, a few protruding yellow wheat stalks plunge into the blue hills, echoing the blue cornflowers in the field.

Beginning in mid-June 1890, van Gogh produced thirteen paintings in elongated landscape format (double-square format). Examinations of the canvas structure have shown that the artist cut all double-square canvases from the same roll of fabric. The canvases of the Rudolf Staechelin Collection's *Le jardin de Daubigny* (Daubigny's Garden) and the Beyeler Collection's *Champ aux meules de blé* (Field with Stacks of Grain) are thus once more united in this exhibition.

ROOM 8

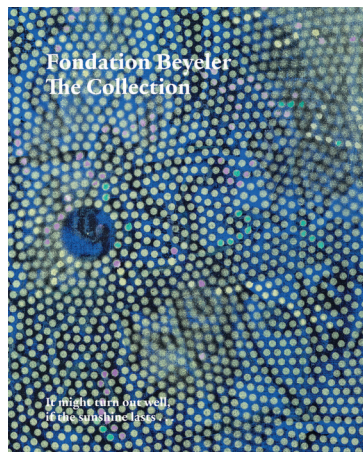
10 Susan Philipsz

Seven Tears, 2016

Scottish artist Susan Philipsz (*1965) places the interplay of sound and architecture at the heart of her work. In her installations, the sounds' rhythm and distribution in space are experienced as a form of immaterial sculpture.

Seven Tears is based on the lute song "Flow My Tears" by composer John Dowland (1563–1626), originally created as an instrumental version with the title "Lachrimae" and taking as its theme seven types of falling tears: 'old tears', 'old tears renewed', 'sighing tears', 'sad tears', 'forced tears', 'a lover's tears', 'true tears'. For her composition, Philipsz sampled a single tone from each of Dowland's "Lachrimae" and recreated it using the simple technique of glass music, filling glasses with water and running her wet fingertips along their rims. Each record player plays one of these sounds. Visitors move through space among the different sounds, their movements reminiscent of a slow processional dance from Dowland's Elizabethan times.

COLLECTION CATALOGUE



Fondation Beyeler. The Collection

With works and texts by the artists

Edited by Theodora Vischer for the Fondation Beyeler,
Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2017, 284 pages, 183 ill., CHF 68.–

Further publications on the Beyeler Collection are available
from our Art Shop: shop.fondationbeyeler.ch

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INFORMATION

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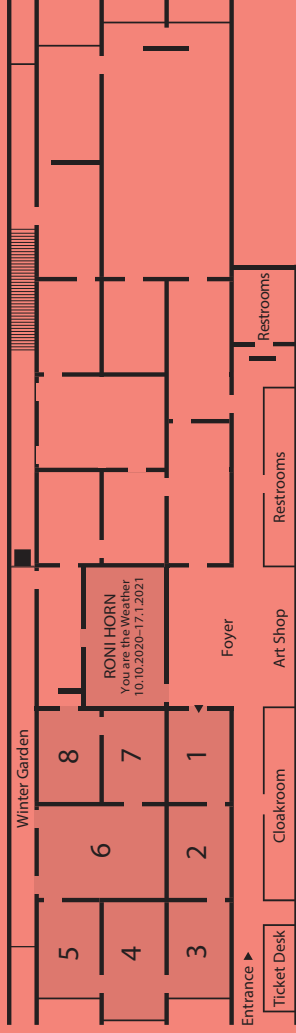
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Caution: please do not touch the artworks!