

Beyeler Collection/ Cooperations

ROOM GUIDE
FONDATION **BEYELER**



BEYELER COLLECTION / COOPERATIONS

October 18, 2017 – January 1, 2018

CAUTION: Please do not touch the works of art!



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Whenever this symbol appears on the exhibit labels, it means you will find the work of art discussed in detail under the corresponding number in this guide.

INTRODUCTION

The third and final exhibition of our collection, marking the 20th anniversary of the Fondation Beyeler, dares to take a look into the future. It celebrates the museum's cooperation with private collections, as well as with artists and their estates. *Cooperations* shows, by example, how our collection can be supplemented and augmented by potential donations or long-term loans. Of the more than 170 works of art and historical objects on view, dating from the 16th to the 21st century, about half come from distinguished partners who are closely allied with the Fondation Beyeler. The temporary joining of superb and rarely exhibited works with famous pieces from the Beyeler Collection enables the public to imagine an ideal museum, a *musée imaginaire*.

The exhibition begins with a *Wunderkammer* or *Kunstkammer*, which is evocative of the origins of the contemporary museum. The following rooms recall the salons of the intellectual elite frequented by Degas, Matisse and Picasso, as well as the historical and experimental presentations of the Surrealists led by André Breton. They provide examples of how modern art was originally exhibited. In the second half of the 20th century, rooms painted in a neutral white advanced to become the standard that still dominates museums today. Here, in a variation on this "white cube," artists of Abstract Expressionism, Zero and Pop Art enter into a dialogue with one another. In addition, rooms are devoted to artists Louise Bourgeois, Gerhard Richter, and Peter Doig. The beginning and end of the exhibition are formed by works by Maurizio Cattelan and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, while the midpoint is marked by Marina Abramovic—all artists, who have established new ways of presenting art.

The exhibition was curated by Sam Keller and Ulf Küster, Fondation Beyeler.

Scenography, graphic design and exhibition architecture were provided by Martina Nievergelt, Thorsten Romanus, and Dieter Thiel.

ROOM 1

1 • *Narwhal Tusk*

Cooperations sheds light on the Beyeler Collection as a flexible entity, subject to continual change. This third hanging of the collection in the Fondation Beyeler's 20th anniversary year accordingly explores various presentation possibilities. The hanging of the paintings and placement of the sculptures are oriented to historical precedents: The first exhibition room is arranged as a sort of *Wunderkammer*: a chamber of wonders in which ritual objects from Africa, Oceania, and Europe are juxtaposed with works by Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons. This room recalls the curiosity cabinets of princely courts or bourgeois Renaissance and Baroque houses, the immediate predecessors of modern-day museums. The narwhal tusk is an exceptional exhibit, with a spiralled projection over two meters long. It was believed in the Middle Ages and thereafter to be the horn of the legendary unicorn—making it a much sought-after collector's item.

2 • Andy Warhol***Skull*, 1976/77**

Warhol created his series of *Skulls* in response to the near-fatal shooting he suffered in 1968, which became a turning point in his art and life. These pictures, amounting to *memento mori* images, followed his 1960s series titled *Disasters*, in which the subject of death had already been memorably treated. The photograph of the skull was made by Warhol's friend and assistant, Ronnie Cutrone, who recalled that it was "like doing a portrait of everybody in the world." The skull calls to mind the transitory nature of human life and the negation of personality—even that of a celebrity—who might well find a place in the collective consciousness only through their art.

3 • Paul Cézanne***Pichet et assiette de poires*, 1890–1893*****Pichet de grès*, 1893/94**

This room brings together two still lifes by Paul Cézanne that strikingly show how everyday objects challenged him over and over again.

From the Beyeler Collection, *Pichet de grès* depicts a pitcher playfully teased by the folds of a tablecloth with a dark blue pattern. This leads the eye from the fruit into the background, where two pictures stand on the floor and lean against the wall. In front of one picture lie two apples: one red and yellow and the other green. Cézanne has shot them into the background like billiard balls. In contrast, the objects in the loaned work, *Pichet et assiette de poires*, are brought into the extreme foreground, pushed together and connected. The white cloth with its wonderful folds rises above the fruit like snow-covered mountains. The pears on the plate and the apple are rendered in full three dimensions: heavy and bursting with juice, and gigantic in comparison with the pitcher. While the stoneware pitcher is cut off by the upper edge and threatens to topple off the table in the Fondation Beyeler work, it is counterbalanced by the four pieces of fruit in the painting on loan.

4 • Vincent van Gogh***Champ de blé aux bleuets*, 1890**

On May 20, 1890, Vincent van Gogh went northwest of Paris, to Auvers-sur-Oise with revived hope in his improving health. After first devoting himself to motifs in the vicinity of the idyllic town, he soon turned to the spacious fields of grain on a plateau above it. This resulted in paintings that reflected, as the artist said, his “boundless loneliness.” The Fondation Beyeler owns two works from this final phase of van Gogh’s career.

Champ de blé aux bleuets is marked by ecstatic brushwork that seems to bring the windswept wheat field to the point of virtually “running over.” In the centre, a few yellow tips of wheat detach themselves, become immersed in the blue of the hills, and seemingly reply to the blue of the cornflowers dotting the field.

5 • Edgar Degas

Le petit déjeuner après le bain (Le bain),

c. 1895–98

Trois danseuses (jupes bleues, corsages rouges),

c. 1903

The treasures in the Beyeler Collection include these two pastels from Degas's late work. The sophistication and daringness of their compositions are fascinating. As far as drawing is concerned, Degas was truly an "Old Master," whereas his coloration shows him to have been an experimental vanguard artist. Degas stood a bit on the sidelines among the Impressionists because rather than working outdoors, directly from the motif, he preferred the studio. Ballet and boudoir were his themes. Degas was interested in the complex sequences of dancers' movements and the intimate, everyday gestures of women at their toilette.

In his pastel *Le petit déjeuner après le bain (Le bain)*, Degas depicted a female figure from the back just as she was climbing out of the bathtub. He captured a fleeting moment in time, lending the image a solid structure that ensured it would not be quickly lost, but remain present to this very day.

ROOM 3

Ernst Beyeler devoted important exhibitions to Surrealism in his Basel gallery, and collected high-quality pieces by artists associated with this movement, including Joan Miró, Alberto Giacometti, Max Ernst, Alexander Calder, Jean Arp, and Pablo Picasso. The selection of works in this room is complemented by outstanding loans. This leads to a fascinating dialogue with the Beyeler Collection, in which Surrealist artists play a key role. The presentation of paintings and sculptures is adapted from arrangements seen in historical exhibitions of Surrealism, especially André Breton's "Mur Breton", a confrontation of European with non-European art.

6 • René Magritte

Le brise-lumière, 1927

A complex interplay between representations of reality and reality itself is characteristic of Magritte's art. In *Le brise-lumière*, an indeterminate space with wooden floorboards is occupied by two irregular shapes placed one behind the other, which recall the frames of eyeglasses. The left-hand shape reveals a view of the back wall, while on the right—as in a window—we see a cloud-dotted summer sky. An interior and exterior are simultaneously suggested, subtly leading our habitual expectations astray.

7 • Max Ernst

L'ange du foyer, 1937

“*Fireside Angel* is a picture I painted after the defeat of the Republicans in Spain. This is naturally an ironic title for a kind of monster that destroys and devastates everything that comes into its path. This was the impression I had at the time of what was going on in the world, and I was right.”
(Max Ernst in 1967)

The Spanish Civil War had broken out in 1936. Like many artists of the Paris avant-garde, Ernst was a firm opponent of the Spanish General Franco, who was supported by the Nazis in Germany. Thus the artist's wild beast can be seen as embodying the devastation fascism brought first to Spain, then to Europe as a whole. An alternative reading was suggested by Ernst himself in 1938, when he spontaneously decided on another title, *The Triumph of Surrealism*. This turned the work into an emblematic image of Surrealism and its revolutionary claims.

8 • Balthus***Passage du Commerce Saint-André*, 1952–1954**

The characteristic figurative style of Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski de Rola) fully unfolded from the 1930s onwards. In *Passage du Commerce-Saint-André*, the artist transforms an actual Parisian street into a twilight zone of his own devising that seems far removed from any temporal dimension. The apparent standstill in time is contrasted to the figures representing various phases in life. As if on a theatre stage, the figures are isolated like ghostly marionettes performing their own roles. The young girl with a mask-like face in the foreground has a strangely aged appearance.

9 • Morris Louis***Gamma Tau*, 1960**

This room brings together two artists whose approaches to composition and paint application could hardly be more different. Morris Louis executed his paintings by slowly pouring pigments thinned with turpentine on large, unprimed canvases. In this way, he emphasized the empty space, neutrality and non-painted nature of the surrounding surface. Willem de Kooning, by contrast, filled the image space with gestural brushwork to the point of bursting. Though Louis influenced the way the paint spread across the canvas and thus composed it, he left its drying process up to chance. The way paint was absorbed into the weave lent a special character to his colors, whereas in the paintings of Willem de Kooning or Jackson Pollock, the distribution of paint directly reflected the rhythm of their working movements. In Louis's case, the chemical and physical properties involved in painting took on a greater weight than the artist's personal touch.

10 • Willem de Kooning*Untitled XXXI, 1977*

Although he was born and educated in Europe, Willem de Kooning became one of the major artists of American modernism. His paintings are legendary, and are now appreciated just as much as Jackson Pollock's. This may be explained by the radicalism and untamed force of his works. For de Kooning, there seems to have been no difference between abstraction and figuration. Painting according to the demands of modernism implied abstracting from reality and, especially in his case, giving expression to one's personality through gesture and paint application. As viewers, we must decide whether what we see is wildly agitated landscape, physical figures, or simply luminous brushstrokes laden with color and charged with energy.

11 • Sam Francis***Round the World*, 1958/59**

This room assembles works by American artists of Abstract Expressionism, which emerged in response to developments in European art after the Second World War. Sam Francis's *Round the World* presents a view recalling that from the window of a high-flying airplane as the countryside passes schematically below. The painting may in fact have been inspired by the artist's departure on a round-the-world trip in 1957. The topography seen from a bird's-eye view is evoked using thinned paints that had begun to run and then congealed into puddles of color on the white-primed canvas. Francis himself was a pilot in the U.S. Air Force who survived a terrible crash in 1944, which prompted his turn to painting. His enthusiasm for European art led him to Paris from 1950 to 1957. Francis was especially fascinated by Monet, Matisse, Cézanne and Bonnard, as well as by Japanese art.

12 • Clyfford Still***PH-131*, 1951**

In his large-format painting *PH-131*, Clyfford Still uses separate color fields to emphasize the composition's flatness, yet also creates a sense of depth, as if we were gazing from a cliff into a rocky canyon. His works take up the aesthetic of the sublime as found in 19th century landscape painting, especially that of the Hudson River School in America. Though he always resisted associative interpretations of his compositions, we might plausibly see rugged countryside like that of the American West, or human figures in relation to their surroundings. In Still's eyes, space and figure "entered a total psychic unity" in his paintings that liberated him "of both their limitations."

13 • Barnett Newman*Uriel*, 1955

Barnett Newman's Color Field Painting is among the most radical varieties of Abstract Expressionism. Color gradations, contrasts, sharp focus, and weighting of chromatic fields were the basic, but always variable, elements of composition. In *Uriel*, a broad, light-blue field on the left and a dark brown field on the right take Newman's trademark Zip Paintings to new heights. Here, the transition from one area to the next is marked by two narrow bands, or "zips," consisting of both colors. Yet the formal stringency of the composition is mitigated by the suggestiveness of the title, *Uriel*, the name of the archangel of light in Judeo-Christian tradition.

14 • Louise Bourgeois

The Hours of the Day, 2006

Les Fleurs, 2009

Avenza, 1968–1969

In this room devoted to the American artist Louise Bourgeois, her two important multipartite works on paper, *The Hours of the Day* and *Les Fleurs*, are on display. In both she employs the color red (in watercolor and gouache), which she viewed as the color of oppositions and aggression. Following an almost ten-year retirement from the art world, Bourgeois created a series of sculptures in plaster, plastic, bronze, and latex in the early 1960s. The latter is the material used in *Avenza*, whose organic forms are reminiscent of a landscape or an archaic human figure of indeterminate sex. Bourgeois's art was nourished by her private life and childhood memories, as she frequently pointed out in interviews.

15 • Marina Abramovic***Chair for Human Use (III)*, 2015**

Marina Abramovic is one of the most important performance artists in the world. She became known in the 1970s with performances involving the human body as both subject and medium: treating it in various and extreme ways. The objects in her two-part series, *Transitory Objects for Human Use*, differ from these works to the extent that they are intended for either human use or for non-physical, spiritual use (“non-human” use). *Chair for Human Use (III)*, part of this series, encourages the viewer to abandon their passive role by sitting on the chair. The chair’s back is fitted with large quartz crystals, which the artist believes have an influence on the human body and mind. Direct contact with the work aims to trigger physical and mental experiences as the viewer becomes part of the work itself. “The function of the artist,” Abramovic says, “is to present the work and deliver it to the public, so the public can bring it to completion.”

16 • Yves Klein***Anthropométrie sans titre (ANT 106)*, 1960**

Thanks to a film, the emergence of Yves Klein's painting *Anthropométrie sans titre (ANT 106)* is well documented. On March 9, 1960, the French artist invited 100 people to a gallery in Paris and assumed the role of master of ceremonies, conductor and choreographer. A small orchestra performed his *Symphonie monoton - silence*, which consists of a single note played for 20 minutes and followed by 20 minutes of silence. Shortly after the music began, three women appeared, painted their nude bodies in blue, and pressed themselves against a white canvas. The imprints suggested prehistoric wall paintings or human silhouettes. Klein established distance between himself and the work by touching neither the models nor the paint and canvas. This anticipated the approach of early performance art in the 1960s and 70s. The empty spaces of the canvas were suffused by immediate physical presence—the work serving as a sign, imprint, or trace of a highly charged moment.

17 • Lucio Fontana***Concetto spaziale, Natura*, 1959/60**

From the 1950s onwards, Lucio Fontana entitled his slit or perforated canvases *Concetto spaziale*, “Spatial Concept” or “Conception of Space.” In these works he set out to overcome the flatness of the painting by introducing a spatial dimension. His sculptures of the early 1960s, including *Concetto spaziale, Natura*, in the Beyeler Collection, also evince this powerful gesture of opening out and incursion into the material.

In Fontana’s eyes, art should react to a human experience of reality. The reality of the 20th century included the exploration of the universe with its infinite scope, and its staggering distances in space and time. According to Fontana, attempts to explore, understand, or even conquer space caused human beings sheer physical discomfort. This insecurity in face of the precipitous developments and insights of the era, Fontana believed, could be made visible in art. His *Concetto spaziale, Natura*, accordingly embodies a tense interplay between completeness and incompleteness, and the known with the still hidden.

18 • Roy Lichtenstein***Yellow Brushstroke II*, 1965**

Yellow Brushstroke II shows a brushstroke enlarged to monumental proportions: luminous and applied with such rapidity that we can virtually watch it dripping over the lower edge of the canvas. This work by Roy Lichtenstein is suffused with pathos and irony. It is both a celebration and mockery of the inspired brushstroke and pure painting, especially as practiced by the Abstract Expressionists. The American Pop artist has raised a monument to the free, spontaneous brushstroke in the guise of a carefully planned and painstakingly executed work from which all spontaneity has been removed. *Cooperations* provides an opportunity to trace the diverse history of brushwork in art, from Impressionism (Monet, van Gogh, Cézanne) through Abstract Expressionism (de Kooning, Cy Twombly, Still, Francis), all the way down to Lichtenstein's frozen *Yellow Brushstroke II*.

19 • Roy Lichtenstein***Beach Scene with Starfish*, 1995**

Two years before his death, Lichtenstein created this huge painting depicting four sunbathing beauties playing with a ball on the beach. Apart from this obvious scene, other features are worth noting, including some aspects that allude to earlier art. For instance, sunbathers, a ball with stars, bathing cabanas and rocks are found in Picasso's surrealist beach scenes, especially those of 1931, to which Lichtenstein here pays homage on a king-size format. But the work is also self-referential, with the waving hair of the two outermost figures recalling Lichtenstein's own *Brushstroke* composition. In addition, a subtle play of Benday dots and stripes emphasizes the graphic stylization of the image.

20 • Andy Warhol***Joseph Beuys*, 1980**

Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys probably first met in 1979 at the Denise René Hans Meyer Gallery in Düsseldorf. The photograph of Beuys that Warhol used for a series of silk-screen prints was also taken on this date. The portrait of the German artist is a negative, aligning it with Warhol's *Reversals* series. Thanks to a partial application of diamond dust, the image takes on a special tangibility, underscoring the purely material character of a work of art as a luxury object. On the other hand, the costly, shimmering glitter suggests immateriality and ephemerality. The dust, a Vanitas motif in material form, alludes not least to the fleetingness of possession and life, the void underlying the glamorous existence of a star.

21 • Gerhard Richter***Vierwaldstätter See*, 1969**

Gerhard Richter depicted the motif of Lake Lucerne four times in 1969, basing his paintings on photographs. In the misty atmosphere of these landscapes, the elements of water and air merge. The mountains rise dark grey and black, and there are no boats to interrupt the mirror-smooth surface of the lake. The painting captures things that are intangible: the banks of fog clinging to the mountains, or the clouds passing across the sky. The viewer takes a very high vantage point, virtually presiding over the landscape. This is a sublime representation of nature, with a detachment reminiscent of the Romantic tradition, aimed at eliciting our subjective reaction.

22 • Gerhard Richter***Wolke*, 1976**

When compared with *Vierwaldstätter See*, this composition represents a more unusual approach to landscape painting. In *Wolke*, Richter focuses on a motif that generally forms only one element in a landscape. Here, the clouds emerge from a deep blue sky to become a landscape in their own right. The interplay of light and shadow is rendered with a veritably photographic realism that supplants the Romantic approach to such subject matter. The perspective in the image is elusive, with the viewer's eye being directed to no defined vanishing point. Our position and distance from the subject Likewise, our position remain unclear.

23 • Peter Doig***Cricket Painting (Paragrand)*, 2006–12**

Cricket Painting (Paragrand) features three diagonally arranged figures playing cricket on a beach. This sport, a legacy of the British Empire and still popular throughout the Commonwealth, is depicted here by Peter Doig, himself a sometime-resident of the island of Trinidad. His observation is transformed into a seemingly timeless image. The starkly reduced forms representing water, sand and vegetation suffuse the tropical landscape of the canvas. A strongly contrasting juxtaposition of brilliant colors, from the light blue of the Caribbean Sea through the bright orange of the beach to the intense green of the foliage, induces a sense of tropical heat. The stagnant, misty atmosphere is contrasted with the impenetrable black of the background. The abstraction of the scene is underscored by the indeterminate illumination. Though the arrangement of indefinable shapes lends the image a spatial structure and helps the eye orient itself, it provides no clear information on the place and time of the evoked event.

24 • Felix Gonzalez-Torres

“Untitled” (Beginning), 1994

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was among the most influential artists of his generation. Employing a broad range of media, from drawing, photography and sculpture to public billboards, his works combined political statement, emotional effect, and a clear interest in formal issues. His point of departure was often objects from daily life, such as clocks, mirrors, light bulbs, candies, or glass bead curtains. Juxtaposition with works of classical modernism makes the radical nature of Gonzalez-Torres’s art especially obvious. The green curtains hanging at the entrance and exit of the exhibition not only bring our eyes, but also our entire body, into play. The sensuous experience of pushing the curtain aside and crossing the threshold, recalling an apartment, bar or restaurant, is banal yet charged with meaning in this context. The first exhibition held after the artist’s death in 1996 consisted of this single work alone.

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- BEYELER COLLECTION / COOPERATIONS (18.10.2017–1.1.2018)
- PAUL KLEE: THE ABSTRACT DIMENSION (1.10.2017–21.1.2018)

