



Magalí Herrera at one of her exhibitions, after 1972, venue unknown Archives de la Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

Sneak preview guided tour for the press

Thursday 7 March 2024, 11am By Pascale Jeanneret, curator

At the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne Booking : sophie.guyot@lausanne.ch

Adress

Collection de l'Art Brut Avenue des Bergières 11 CH – 1004 Lausanne www.artbrut.ch

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MAGALÍ HERRERA - A SPARK OF LIGHT IN THIS WORLD 8 MARCH - 1 SEPTEMBER, 2024

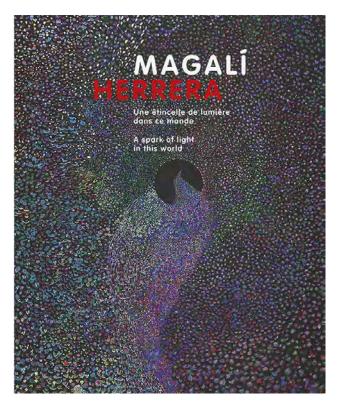
The Collection de l'Art Brut is holding a retrospective of the works of Magalí Herrera (1914–1992). The exhibition will feature every piece by the Uruguayan artist held in our collection, spanning the full length of her career. A selection of items from her personal archives will also go on display, including an intense series of letters between Herrera and Jean Dubuffet, the first of which was written in 1967. The French artist immediately added her drawings to the collection of the Compagnie de l'Art Brut in Paris. Herrera threw herself fervently into the epistolary relationship, which lasted until 1974. She later entrusted her husband with the task of donating both her entire body of drawings and her private archives to the Collection de l'Art Brut upon her death. She is the only Uruguayan artist to feature in our collection.

Herrera was born in Rivera, Uruguay. She came from a family of notables and taught herself dancing, acting and photography. She also organised poetry evenings. She wrote poems herself, as well as science-fiction stories, some of which have not been published. In around 1952, she started painting sporadically. By the early 1960s, she had devoted herself exclusively to this means of expression, painting night and day in a sort of trance. In 1967 and 1968, Herrera spent time in Paris. There, she discovered Art Brut and began exchanging letters with Dubuffet. This correspondence helped her find meaning in her pictorial works.

When making her art, Herrera gave herself over completely to her imagination, creating pieces that reflected a kind of internal cosmogony. Each of her paintings used the same media: black or white India ink on white, black or coloured paper. She worked slowly and persistently, using high-precision Chinese calligraphy brushes to produce works of exceptional artistry – compositions consisting of dots and lines that, together, represent utopias. This exhibition is a unique opportunity to reconsider Herrera's distinctive body of work through the lens of the letters she exchanged with Dubuffet.

Curated by Pascale Jeanneret, curator at the Collection de l'Art Brut

PUBLICATIONS



Magalí Herrera, A Spark of Light in this World, texts by Pascale Jeanneret, Céline Delavaux, Laure Cheynel and Sarah Lombardi, Lausanne/Milan, Collection de l'Art Brut/5 Continents Editions, 2024, 192 pages, more than 200 color plates, bilingual French/English edition



Magalí Herrera, « une étincelle de lumière dans ce monde »

Magali Herrera, 'A Spark of Light in This World'

dia la Disciscion dei IAR Brut i teste autant de l'évidence qui de l'improbable. Audicate de solaties, april la four en consistent de propriet de present par la l'igual de l'improbable de solaties et de postit hand qui figurent de unes métaphoriques. Famme cultivée, elle sivet avois adomnée à de nonthreusse autres pratiques articliques, avent de principer le dessira, qui monopolieren toute son attention. De 1967 à 1974, alors que tren ne pouvait le présegue, elle entretette inte converspondiere antidue et artefente avec. Jean Dubuffel, clética à leur diseigne, elle character de la referent de la sec composition graphiques. L'obligation de son travait à l'inférit fibre, il si que le differil Dubuffel, cle l'années de la si au seria de l'indébit l'autres de l'indébit cavair qui attemper de busile se précide de se production. Cette exposition interrage ces créations à la laminée des lettres que Maggil Hermes charges avec l'entretion à la laminée des lettres que Maggil Hermes charges avec l'entretion de l'Artichica de la seria que Maggil Hermes charges avec l'étroissime de l'Artichica de la seria.

que Magail Herrera échange avec le thécrisen de l'Art Brut. Au début des anniées 1960, une nouvellé despe se profilé dans l'histoire de l'Art Brut. Depuis 1951, les œuvres réunies par Jean Dubuffet sont convervées aux Elist-Unis, dans la telé dence du peinte Alforso Osonio. Seules quelques personne amies de l'artible y ont alors accès. Cette étape nord-américain The common of Magail Hermin's work in the Collection of Whit filts are much to excepted as it is injusticated with a construction of Whit filts are much to excepted as it is injusticated instead in one scalarly, with a horror of crossle, Hermin worked historic for the gold of el-school and the common of the common of the composed of dels are taken laters. A collevated common of the control of the control of the control of the control of country of the control of the control of country of the control of the control of country of the control of the control of the control of country of country

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Magall Hemera participant à un tournoi d'échecs international. Montevideo, 1° – 2 auril 1954, Archives de la Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

Magnifyteres laung perjer er International hess transmert Momentien, 1-1 April 1954, Anciens de la Collector de l'Am Brid Lincomer

EXCERPTS FROM THE PUBLICATION

MAGALÍ HERRERA, A SPARK OF LIGHT IN THIS WORLD

Preface – A Woman Under the Influence, by Sarah Lombardi, director, Collection de l'Art Brut

[...]

A self-taught artist, Herrera identified the careful observation of a ray of sunlight and its reflections as the catalyst of her artistic practice.5 Carried out in tandem with her many writing projects and journalism, her production was quickly appreciated in artistic circles in Montevideo during the 1950s, where she received support and encouragement to continue her work, as she later would too from Jean Dubuffet. Her first solo exhibition was held in the Uruguayan capital in 1966, which was followed by others in the country and abroad.

While living temporarily in Paris in 1967, she discovered Art Brut during a visit to the exhibition of that name held at the musée des Arts décoratifs, where seven hundred works from the collections built up by Dubuffet were shown. There, she experienced a visual shock and a powerful affinity with these marginal artists, in particular with the work of the mediumistic creator Augustin Lesage. By extension, she immediately felt a close bond with Jean Dubuffet, her guide in the discovery of these works, which fascinated and affected her strongly. She would later declare her great admiration for him and dedicate several of her works to him.

At first sight, Magalí Herrera seems far removed from the criteria applied by Dubuffet to define the artists of Art Brut. After all, she came from a prominent family with important social connections, and she received support in her artistic practice. However, she felt at variance with her environment and those around her, and produced her creations in a way completely free of all artistic contingencies, putting herself in a trance-like state and allowing herself to be carried to the energies she captured so that she could feverishly draw and paint by day and night. Her production, which to her was undoubtedly a form of therapeutic work, can therefore be described as 'under the influence', owing to the contribution made by the invisible world she seemed to want to grasp.

It was through her graphic works – which sometimes suggest dead cities and galactic landscapes, in series with such evocative titles as *Après la bombe atomique* (After the Atomic Bomb) or *Cosmica* – that Magalí Herrera expressed profound malaise. It seems that in Art Brut she found a community of 'orphans' to whom she felt very close, as though she shared a rapport with them. She was also driven by a great thirst for freedom that was not without a dark and tragic side, and which led her to take her life in 1992.

[...]

The presence of Magalí Herrera's work in the Collection de l'Art Brut is as much to be expected as it is improbable. Self-taught and solitary, with a horror of crowds, Herrera worked herself to the point of exhaustion creating metaphorical universes composed of dots and short lines. A cultivated woman, she also pursued a number of other artistic practices before focusing on drawing, to which she gave all her attention. From 1967 to 1974, with nothing to presage it, she entered into a diligent and heartfelt correspondence with Jean Dubuffet. As a result of their exchange, she found meaning in her graphic work as a whole. The acceptance of her work in Art Brut, as it was called by Dubuffet, made the Uruguayan artist one of the few representatives of South America to become a member of the Lausanne-based institution. The organisation thus owns a body of work that is unique in the world, comprising 104 works from all periods of her career. This exhibition considers these creations in the light of Magalí Herrera's correspondence with the theoretician of Art Brut.

At the start of the 1960s, the history of Art Brut entered a new chapter. Since 1951, the works Jean Dubuffet collected had been kept in the home of the painter Alfonso Ossorio in the United States, where only a few of the artist's friends had access to them. During this North American period of the collection's existence, the works were only presented to the public on one occasion, at the Cordier & Warren Gallery in New York, at the same time that an exhibition dedicated to Jean Dubuffet was being held at the Museum of Modern Art. Once the two events had closed, Dubuffet, disappointed to see his collection stagnate in Alfonso Ossorio's home, decided to send it back to France in 1962 and threw himself once again into the Art Brut adventure. He bought a townhouse in Paris in which he installed his collections, which at that time numbered 1,200 works by nearly one hundred artists. To these were added another hundred or so works collected in conjunction with the gallerist Alphonse Chave in 1959, during Dubuffet's stay in Vence. The new exhibition space was open by appointment to anyone who showed sincere interest in his project and to his circle of friends. Having been dissolved in 1951, the Compagnie de l'Art Brut was recreated in 1962 with a new membership that included Raymond Queneau, Slavko Kopač, and Asger Jorn. In 1964, Dubuffet initiated publication of the booklets L'Art Brut, dedicated to Art Brut works and their artists.

This new burst of energy resulted in a major exhibition at the musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris. Jean Dubuffet and the museum's director, François Mathey, were friends who held each other in mutual esteem. [...] [Mathey] persuaded Dubuffet to organise a large exhibition of his collections. The inaugural presentation, 'L'Art Brut', was held at the musée des Arts décoratifs from 7 April to 5 June 1967 and brought together seven hundred works selected exclusively from the collection of the Compagnie de l'Art Brut. While it attracted twenty thousand visitors, the exhibition was given a mixed reception, arousing opposition and stimulating spirited debate in the press. [...]

Magalí Herrera, who had been in Paris for several weeks, found her visit to the exhibition in April 1967 profoundly moving. Shaken by the works shown, her discovery of Art Brut left her wanting to know more. She found a way to get around the language barrier – she hadn't yet had time to learn French – so that she could further her knowledge. She deciphered to the best of her ability the exhibition catalogue she had just bought and decided to write to Jean Dubuffet to tell him about her own work.

[...]

Magalí Herrera and Jean Dubuffet, «The Whole Wild Feeling of an Authentic Latin American Woman», by Céline Delavaux

[...]

'I study at the Alliance Française, and with my microscopic knowledge of your language and a dictionary I read the entire catalogue.'

Herrera had no inkling that her ignorance of French would be an attraction for the recipient of her letters. The difficulty posed to her by this foreign language continued throughout their correspondence: in September 1970, Herrera asked Dubuffet to send her 'a good French-Spanish dictionary' in Montevideo and, when she received it, exclaimed: 'I am radiant with the dictionary you sent me.' On 5 June 1972, she wrote to him again: 'I have not given up hope of learning your language very well so I can torture you for a whole year without letting you sleep, speaking to you incessantly in your diabolical tongue.' But she also reproached him for the delays in his replies, and in a sort of wrathful graffiti: 'How fortunate that you are unable to read my language!' In addition to his objective of exploding the definition of art, one of the fundamental goals of Art Brut, Dubuffet, in writing, also urged the reform of literature, which involved a critique of the uses of the French language; one aspect of this poetic programme was a knowledge of foreign languages. In his Biographie au pas de course, written in 1985, a few months before he took his own life, Dubuffet recounts how, as a young student recently arrived from his native Normandy, he became caught up in the 'Russian fashion' that had swept through the capital and threw himself into learning the language. [...]

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[...]

Herrera's letters to Dubuffet make her as much a part of Art Brut as the inclusion of her paintings in the collections of the Compagnie de l'Art Brut. She had of course read Dubuffet, starting with the catalogue of the 1967 exhibition, where she discovered the biographies of the so-called *brut* artists. It is likely she tried to match the Art Brut criteria, all the more so as she was amazed to identify herself with it. In her first letter, she described herself as a 'simple amateur', as 'a case of parapsychology'. She also read *Asphyxiante Culture*, which she summed up in an apposite phrase: she said that Dubuffet took the liberty of 'taking madam official culture by her hair and shaking her mercilessly before the whole world!' Once back in South America, she read the Compagnie de l'Art Brut fascicules that Dubuffet sent her and informed him that she had learned 'to differentiate between Art Brute and L'art faux et commercielle'. She loved Scottie Wilson's generosity and declared in 1971: 'If I continue here, in this terror and with my sensitivity, I will end my days like Simone Marye.' Dubuffet must have been flattered by this close attention to the effort he had expended on Art Brut, so despised, disparaged, and misunderstood. [...]

Paris, 20 June 1968

Dear friend Magalí Herrera, You feel a desire to be, you write, a spark of light in this world, and that is exactly what you are. You write marvellous letters. It's just that you exaggerate disproportionately my rank among artists, which is in fact not at all what you generously attribute to me, and which, moreover, I do not aspire to, feeling it more salutary – both for myself and for everyone else – to abolish once and for all this baseless and perfectly unhealthy notion of rank. I believe, furthermore, that the moment has come when this notion will finally be abolished. You are more than a spark of light, as you are a large dancing and burning flame. You are Ardour. Consider our home of Art Brut your own; come and visit us often. I would like to meet you; I hope the occasion will soon arise. I would like to ask you to become a member of our association. Please accept my warmest sympathy and admiration.

Jean Dubuffet

Paris, 24 June 1968

My dear and great friend Jean Dubuffet: I received your delicious letter with great emotion. It seems that your imagination has decided to leave me breathless. First of all I want to tell you something: that you are recognised as the leading painter in France, that is the 'vox populi' and not my own 'artistic creation'. All I'm doing is repeating what everybody's saying. And secondly, while all people who work in any profession deserve the greatest respect, I find, like you, that painting doesn't make the painter any different from all the other mortals. But what enraptures me and moves me beyond tears is generosity, tenderness, kindness, attributes that are lacking in people's generosity. I have suffered greatly, very much, and that's why when I find someone with pure feelings I feel the humblest of women before this magnificent thing. Today, when all we see around us is selfishness and a long series of faults, this atmosphere revolts me and meanness stifles me, it's too remote from what I can tolerate now that I've cleared the hurdles of many predicaments. Is it not clear, my dear benefactor, that I do not bow down before the most famous painter in France, but that I do so before the feelings that this painter possesses? You say I'm a flame, I don't know. Everyone sees us differently to what we really are. In any case, it pleases me that you see me like that. I thank you for your kindness in telling me to consider your house of Art Brut as my own. As far as our meeting is concerned, I have to say that I am a wild beast with no social sense, and, to my misfortune, shy, ugly and old, and I have lost the gaiety of my brazen and vital youth -On the other hand, if I may write to you, I will tell you many things that would have been lost if I had met you.

Please don't judge me badly, but when I meet important people I feel something is stifling me painfully deep inside. And there are so few people who really interest me that, with them, I want to travel to the most remote jungles and leave a small sign of my existence with them. The others, who don't move me at all, are completely indifferent to me, and it is of no importance to me whether they know me or not. I would also like to thank you for the Art Brut volumes and for the honour, which overwhelms me but fills me with joy, of being a member of the Compagnie de l'Art Brut – You are without doubt my guardian angel who fills my long days in Paris with pleasant surprises. I never thought of or expected all the lovely things you give me. In fact, it wasn't in vain that I travelled the long, long sorrowful road to find your soul mate. Please accept once again the certainty of friendship from she who cannot repay your continual kindnesses.

Magalí

- 1914 in Tranqueras, a village on the banks of the Río Tacuarembó, in a rural zone of the Rivera Department, on the northern section of Uruguay's border with Brazil. She is born into a family of notables that includes known figures in the country's cultural and political worlds, including the poet Julio Herrera y Reissig (1875–1910) and the journalist and president of the republic Julio Herrera y Obes (1841–1912). She is born during the prosperous period of José Batlle y Ordóñez's presidency, during which there is a rise in the population's standard of living. Her father, Francisco Herrera, is a landowner, and her mother, Dolores Escarón, a housewife. She has one brother, with whom she will have no relationship as an adult.
- 1930_ Youth during the military dictatorship in Uruguay in the 1930s.
- 1950_ Mercedes Eleuteria Herrera changes her first name, becoming Magalí Herrera. She takes up a career as a cultural journalist during the period of the country's return to democracy and prosperity in the early 1950s. In addition to her work as a press and radio journalist during the 1950s and '60s, Herrera pursues numerous other activities, including acting in radio plays. Her eclectic interests diversify further as a result of her studies: she teaches herself macrobiotic cooking, at that time rare in Uruguay, and is an avid chess player.
- 1956_ On 27 December 1956, Herrera marries Rubén Núñez, a journalist and a specialist in Chinese art, who will become the director of the Study Centre for Far Eastern Cultures in Buenos Aires during the 1990s.
- 1964_ Although the art critic Esther Barrios has written that Magalí Herrera began painting seascapes in 1952, most testimonies by her contemporaries claim that she began creating in her fifties, between 1964 and 1965.
- 1966_3-15 October 1966: The first exhibition of Herrera's work is held at the Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes (Christian Youth Association) in Montevideo. Professor Daniel Vidart is in attendance at the opening.
- 1967_ At the insistence of her husband and close relations, Herrera agrees against her will to go to Paris to further her knowledge of art. She is enrolled as a student at the Alliance Française from 10 April to 31 July 1967, where she studies French. In spring 1967, in the company of Espósito, she visits the musée des Arts décoratifs to see an exhibition of Jean Dubuffet's 'Art Brut' collection (7 April–5 June). The show shocks Herrera, who immediately identifies with the works, in particular a canvas by Augustin Lesage.
- On 1 July, Herrera writes a letter to Dubuffet, in which she proposes that she meet him at the exhibition of his work at the Galerie Jeanne Bucher so that she can show him the works she has produced in Paris, as well as photographs of those that remain in Uruguay. This letter marks the start of a correspondence that will last until July 1974, despite the pair never meeting.
- On 17 July, Dubuffet buys two of her works, Grimace pour le Vietnam and Mi mundo interior
- 1973_ A coup d'état on 27 June by Uruguay's president, Juan María Bordaberry, dissolves the chambers of representatives and installs a dictatorial military regime that will remain in place until 1984. Repression of political opposition in the name of the struggle against 'international communism' serves as a pretext for the surveillance and the general censorship of cultural associations and institutions, provoking a mass exodus of artists. Even though Herrera does not speak directly about the situation in her *pays convulsif* (convulsive country), her letters from 1971 onward make reference to the insecurity and economic crisis that has plunged her into a state of precarity and prompted her to propose to Dubuffet that she give him all her works in exchange for a studio where she can work in or around Paris. When she receives no reply, and is unable to send a series of large works to France, in the spring of that year Herrera sends eight drawings on fine

paper, symmetrical anthropomorphic coloured compositions that differ from her galaxies and graphic works in India ink. The package does not reach Paris until August, due to the general strike in Uruguay following the coup d'état.

1974_ Herrera writes to Dubuffet in January to tell him he cancollect two of her works that have been held since 1972 at the Atelier Jacob belonging to Alain Bourbonnais. He does so in July. This will be the last exchange between Dubuffet and Herrera.

1975_ Herrera's works are selected to represent Uruguay at thell Bienal de Dibujo Latinoamericano (2nd Latin-American Biennial of Drawing), held at the Modern Art Museum in Maldonado in 1977. The political situation in Uruguay has led to the cancellation of events in the art world in Montevideo and to the exile of many artists to neighbouring countries.

1976_ The donation of Dubuffet's Art Brut collection to the City of Lausanne, as announced in 1971, is followed by a long process of transformation and reorganisation of the chateau of Beaulieu, where the five thousand works are to be held and exhibited. The Collection de l'Art Brut opens to the public on 26 February.

1977_ Herrera writes to Michel Thévoz, the new director of the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, about the donation of her works.

1980_ In August, the Alianza Francesa in Montevideo presents 'Art Brut', a retrospective exhibition of ninety of Herrera's works.

1992_ Suffering from physical and psychological frailty, Herrera is temporarily taken to a geriatric home, a stay she describes as a 'nightmare'. Once back in Barra de Carrasco, she discovers that her home has been burgled in her absence.

Herrera ends her life on 30 September.

1994_ In fulfilment of Herrera's frequently expressed desire, Rubén Núñez donates sixty-four works and the artist's archive to the Collection de l'Art Brut. The works are transferred in June with the help of the Swiss Embassy in Montevideo.

1996_ The Collection de l'Art Brut presents the first monographic exhibition of Herrera's work in Europe, from 25 January to 2 June.

2024_ A new monographic exhibition of Herrera's work is held at the Collection de l'Art Brut, from 8 March to 1 September.



Portrait of Magalí Herrera, photographer unknown, undated, Archives de la Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

MEDIA VISUALS

All images : Atelier de numérisation – Ville de Lausanne (AN) Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne



Un tema solitario en la musica de las esferas, 1968, white India ink and gouache on black paper, 50×65 cm



untitled, 1967 India ink and gouache on paper, 32,5 \times 25 cm



untitled, between 1952 and 1992 ink on paper, 65 × 45,5 cm



 $\textit{Recurrencia eterna},\,1980,\,\text{white India ink}$ and gouache on black paper, 66,5 \times 48 cm



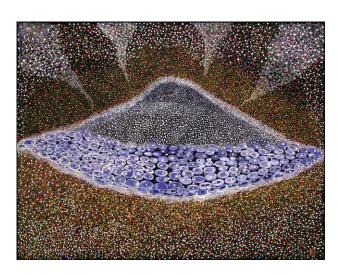
Masa planetaria, 1982 gouache on black paper, $65 \times 50 \text{ cm}$



untitled, 1991 gouache on black paper, 65×50 cm



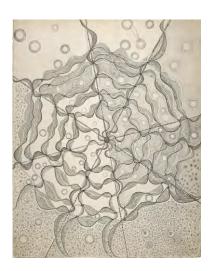
Un instante en el cumulo de la edades, between 1970 and 1988, encre de Chine white India ink and gouache on black paper, 65×50 cm



En la vastitud del espacio, 1988 white India ink and gouache on black paper, $50 \times 65 \text{ cm}$



 N° 1 Émanation du livre de Jean Dubuffet, 1968, white India ink on red paper, $65.5 \times 50 \text{ cm}$



De los trillones de los planetas, solo conocemos la minuscula tierra, between 1969 and 1987 India ink on paper, 64 × 50,5 cm



 N° 2 Émanation du livre de Jean Dubuffet, 1968 white India ink on black paper, 65,5 \times 50 cm

EXHIBITION EVENTS

Sneak preview guided tour Thursday 7 March 2024, 11am

for the press At the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

Bookings: sophie.guyot@lausanne.ch

Public opening Thursday 7 March 2024, 6:30pm

Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

Free guided tours Visite by Sophie Clément, (60 min)

Saturday 23 March 2024, 2:30pm Visite by Pascale Jeanneret, curator Saturday 25 May 2024, 2:30pm

These visits are organised at the same time as with the workshops

Visite by Pascale Jeanneret, curator Saturday 31 August 2024, 2:30pm

Free guided tours for teachers Tuesday 19 March 2024, 6pm (60 min)

Workshops for kids Saturday 23 March 2024, 2pm Length: 1h45

(aged 6-12) Saturday 25 May 2024, 2pm admission: 10.- per child

Every first Saturday of the month The guides of the Collection del Art Brut invite you to a meeting with

a work at 2:30pm and 3:30pm (20 min).

Free admission and tour.

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Advance booking required for School groups can also book for Thursdays at 9:30am groups of six and more

School, preschool and extracurricular groups

- Tertiary students
- Adults

Guided tours Tuesday - Sunday, 11am - 6pm

Advance booking required School groups can also book for Thursdays at 9:30am

- School groups age 6+
- Tertiary students
- Adults

Languages: French, German, English, Italian

Contact and ticketing for all tours www.artbrut.ch > tickets or 021/315 25 70 subject to availability and workshops

USEFUL INFORMATION

Press material download visuals and the press kit: www.artbrut.ch, menu: press

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Opening hours Tuesday-Sunday: 11am - 6pm

including public holidays, Easter Monday and Whit Monday

Admission free the first Saturday of each month

Entrance fee Fr. 12.-

Concessions: Fr. 6.– Groups of 6: Fr. 6.–

Jobseekers and under-16s: free

No entrance fee the first Saturday of every month

Access Bus

From St-François: Line 2, get off at Beaulieu-Jomini.

From the CFF station: Lines 3 and 21, get off at Beaulieu-Jomini.

On foot: 25 min. from the station, 10 min. from Place

de la Riponne.

By car: autoroute, exit Lausanne-Blécherette, follow Palais de

Beaulieu. Parking lot Beaulieu.

Reduced mobility:

The Collection de l'Art Brut has an elevator

All the temporary exhibitions are accessible for people with reduced

mobility

THE COLLECTION DE L'ART BRUT THANKS FOR THEIR SUPPORT:



