

Alain Huck. Respirer une fois sur deux

13.6.2025–
7.9.2025

Exhibition Guide

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Introduction

Organized in close collaboration with Alain Huck (*1957), the exhibition offers a survey of nearly thirty years of creative output, from the early works on canvas to the most recent drawings, by way of the monumental charcoal drawings that established Huck as a major presence. The exhibition is articulated around the question of text and its relationship to the image, of language and its representation, of what can be said and what is left unspoken, of what is remembered and what makes history. Similarly, just as in the works themselves meanings emerge from the montage between text and image, from the overlaying of distinct images, and from the uncertainty of the image itself, the show is conceived in terms of associations. Here the artist creates dialogues between works from very different periods and of varying kinds. Works from major series of drawings are displayed alongside others that use a variety of supports, including tarpaulins, jute sacks, plants, and neon lights, forging a nonchronological approach to the artist's body of work to generate new meaning.

Three galleries articulate three themes that run throughout Huck's art, i.e., the question of Nature, History, and the Social Contract. Less visible, though contained in the very title of the show and circulating in and through the works, is the question of respiration, *Respirer une fois sur deux* [literally 'taking one breath out of every two']. Respiration is that breath that enables us to utter language, voice stories, transmit history, start a narrative. It is felt in the materials of works that may move in the draughts generated by bodies in motion; it is the inhaling and exhaling that are essential to wandering around the exhibition space.

1st Floor Gallery 1

Visitors are welcomed by the plea *Vite soyons heureux il le faut je le veux* [Quick let's be happy we must I want it] (2006), which is projected on monumental tarpaulins made of brightly coloured cloth. This same phrase is the title of a series of 269 drawings that form the archive of Huck's works from 1993 to 2007. To open the show with these words is to stress the importance of text to the artist whilst underscoring the unstable character of its meanings – the text is projected and therefore ephemeral. Projecting this text on pieces of cloth that are worn and frayed by the passage of time underlines as well the importance of the medium in formulating a thought or work of art. The fabric references the canvas of paintings but also the protective tarp, and what envelops the skin, be it clothing or a shelter. And when talking about projection and wall hanging, one inevitably ends up talking about theatre, that space, like the one of the exhibition venue, in which a narrative can begin.

Opposite *Vite soyons heureux il le faut je le veux* is a selection of drawings from another series entitled *Postanimal Beauty* (1992–2023). Here the artist associates an idiom of forms and words with a range of references, a mix of personal notes, snatches of poetry, and declamations. The series' title invites us to think about the connections between the human and the more-than-human (*Postanimal*), whether it's the plant or animal worlds, or worlds to come.

Nature

Sculptures made from organic materials – an agave raft, a fern bed – punctuate the space. The scarring of the agave plants making up *Éden Éden Éden* (2012) suggests the violent relationship humans have with all that is alive, far from the note of paradise sounded by the work's title. In *Addition de l'homme aux bêtes* [Adding man to the beasts] (2014), we can make out in a pile of dried ferns – that ancient plant life that preceded humans by hundreds of millions of years – the hollow of an animal imprint, a cat's in fact. It echoes the imprint of a human head in the fern pillow of *Sleeping without Eagles* (2014), whose title seems to be a response to this dream of the artist's, namely to “rest far from the violence of power”.

When visitors pass under *Vite soyons heureux il le faut je le veux*, another work is waiting for them, *Walking without Dersou* (2007), a moulded lead staff that is a paradoxical object that could potentially accompany them on their path through the show. Inspired by the life-saving stick of Dersu Uzala, the protagonist of Akira Kurosawa's 1975 film of the same name, it is both a walking stick and a sorcerer's staff, and represents for Huck the possibility of a relationship with nature that is fair. But while *Walking without Dersou* harbours the memory of a potential harmony with the natural elements, it only presents us with the poisoned reverse of that harmony.

1st Floor Gallery 2

History

This gallery features works that use fiction as a way to tell history and depict catastrophe be it the death of someone or the destruction of bodies and the living. In the drawing entitled *Chrysanthemum* (2013), a form that is both a flower and a visual suggestion of an atomic explosion looms up from the darkness left by the stick of charcoal. The image is borrowed from the Kenzaburō Ōe collection of short stories *Teach Us to Outgrow our Madness* (1969), in which the flower also works as a metaphor of a tumour that is invading the protagonist. Ōe's text sounds the immense terror of a collective catastrophe along with the shock felt by the individual.

Close by, four monumental drawings entitled *Année Zéro* [Year Zero] (2015) “look out over” the gallery. The pieces depict mask-faces that are the size of a human body. Emerging from a charred log to which the artist added two holes to indicate eyes (or the absence of sight?), they seem to arise like ghostly figures and are the only anthropomorphic shapes in a gallery tormented by the body and its disappearance. They are facing a sculpture called *Épitaphe* [Epitaph] (2008–2013), which claims to tell the story of the world in a “totally false” or “totally true” way.

The uncertainty surrounding the truthfulness of a story or narrative is literally depicted in the series of graphite drawings called *Darkness of Heart* (2017–2018) in which a story plays out in reverse. Here the meaning of the words and phrases

comes apart and the image springs up in its place. On eleven sheets of paper, the artist has written out in reverse order the whole of Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899), starting with the last word–“darkness”–and ending with the first. The grey tone of the handwriting allows the artist to depict in reserve (the untouched white surface of the sheet of paper) the Congo River. The artist goes upriver by proceeding against the normal flow of this ambiguous book, a story about colonial violence and simultaneously a heightened symptom of that violence, the violence of the Western view of the African Continent as a surface for projecting one's own state of mind.

It is with the piece called *Le Delta* (2004–2005) that Huck explored for the first time the idea of producing the negative of a drawing within a text, the fusion of two works from the series *Vite soyons heureux il le faut je le veux*, one being a text of his, and the other a wash drawing depicting an aerial view of a delta. In this large landscape where the white of the reserve is just as present to the eye as the grey of the words, daily thoughts filled with doubt build up like the sediments borne along by the river.

1st Floor Gallery 3

Social contract

The last gallery highlights the central concerns that have run through the artist's career — the connection with nature, history and power, the collective — along with their paradoxes, but also the multiplicity of visual expressions of those concerns which Huck has produced over the years.

As the title of this charcoal drawing puts it quite simply, *Certains dessins certains faits* [Certain Drawings Certain Facts] (2006), there is the question of what it is possible to speak of in a lifetime's output and what exactly it has all been about. It is both sizing up the work accomplished and accepting all that couldn't be said or depicted. This nightscape, this whirlwind of dark pigment which Huck has used masterfully for over ten years, is returned here to its powdery state. Charcoal, which swallows up the image here, elsewhere reveals it through a transparency, like a fog that is lifting. It brings out a view, however slight, on the desolation of history and people's fates. For example, the monumental drawing *M Marzabotto* (2008) superimposes scraps of texts over a featureless neutral landscape. The title refers to the Etruscan ruins of Marzabotto, which has been the scene of violence repeatedly throughout its history, including the 1944 massacre of the town's inhabitants by Nazi troops.

Two installations are displayed back to back at the centre of the gallery, overlapping and referencing each other. The video piece *Breath on Hemerocallis* (2014) is screened on the drawing series *Vivre à vendre* [Live to Sell] (2017–2020), like a

reduplication of the shadow theatre that makes up the video. Behind that installation stands a sculpture that was produced in homage to the Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau called *Du contrat social* [On the Social Contract] (2011–2013). The words written out in neon are trapped, as the artist himself puts it, “inside an interconnected grid network, far from the idealisms of the 18th century.” Here Huck is alluding to the conflict between nature and society that proved so dear to Rousseau. If nature embodies the natural order of things, three hundred years later, the *Social Contract* has not been respected.

The exhibition opened, as we have seen, with the projection of the words *Vite soyons heureux il le faut je le veux*. It closes with the intimacy of the drawings from the series of that name, enlarged, transposed, and transformed by the artist's graphite pencil, as well as a video called *Le langage* (2005). In it, a voice runs through more than one hundred animal species, evoking all these languages whose meaning escapes us for our lack of knowing how to resonate with the infinite modulations of the more-than-human world. Unlike the despairing realization contained in the title of the drawing *Exit Lingua* (2017), which is hanging just next to this and in counterpoint to the breath that is being held in *Respirer une fois sur deux*, the whisper of *Le langage* points to, if not the promise, then at least the attempt to maintain, despite everything, the connection with the rustle of the living.

Publication

Publication:
Alain Huck. Postanimal Beauty,
co-ed. Musée cantonal
des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne
and art&fiction publications,
Lausanne, 2025, 148 p.

Insert:
*Alain Huck. Respirer une fois
sur deux*, with contributions
by Sophie Ballmer, Christian
Cuénoud, Célia Houdart,
Robert Ireland, Julie Lang,
David Lemaire, Alessandro
Mercuri, Federico Nicolao,

Guillaume Pilet, Christophe Rey,
Carina Roth, Laurence
Schmidlin, Nicole Schweizer,
Katia Schwerzmann, Jacques
Sprunger, and Stéphane Zaech,
co-ed. Musée cantonal
des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne
and art&fiction publications,
Lausanne, 2025, 44 p.

CHF 48.–
Available at the MCBA Book-
and Giftshop
→ shop.mcba@plateforme10.ch

Events

Reservations required
for all events
→ mcba.ch/agenda

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

Guided tours
Thursday, 3 July at 6:30pm
with Alain Huck
and Nicole Schweizer

Every Sunday at 11am
Thursday, 14 August
at 6:30pm
Tour of the exhibitions
Alain Huck and *Jardin
d'Hiver #3*

Guided tour with the curators
of the exhibitions
Sunday, 7 September at 3pm
Alain Huck
with Nicole Schweizer
and *Jardin d'Hiver #3*
with Elise Lammer

Guided tours for les Ami·e·s
du MCBA
Tuesday, 24 June at 12:30pm
Thursday, 21 August at 6pm
with Nicole Schweizer

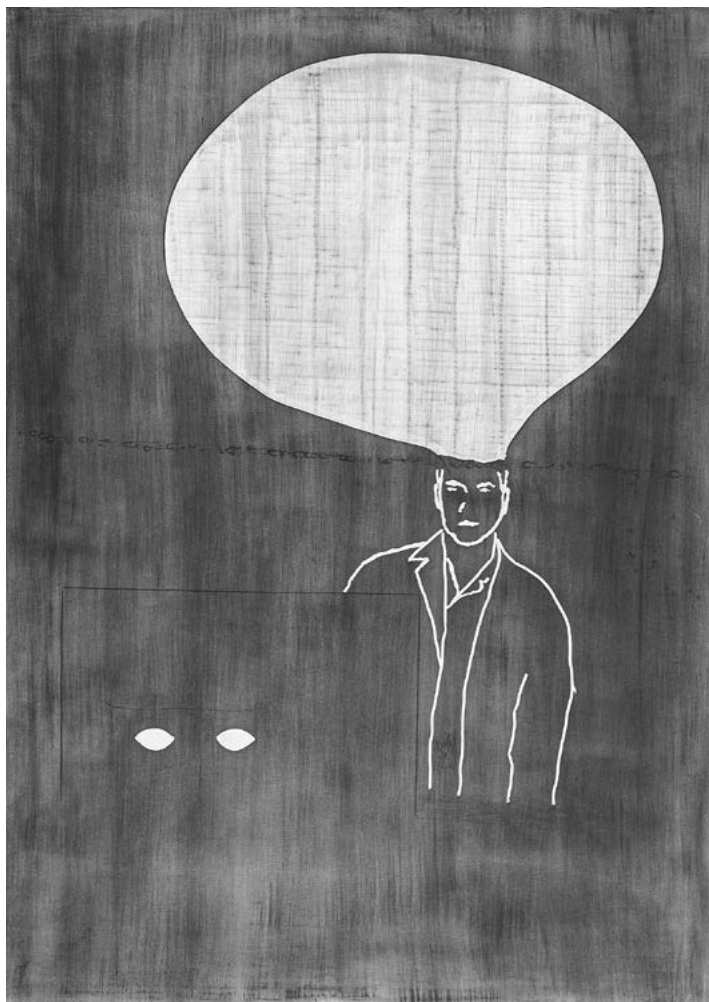
Guided tour (in English)
Sunday, 31 August at 2pm
Tour of the exhibitions *Alain
Huck* and *Jardin d'Hiver #3*

Workshop for adults
Saturday, 30. August,
2 to 5pm
The visual artist and art
teacher Noémie Doge uses
drawing to deconstruct
images and stories, exploring
perception through her poetic
approach. For an afternoon at
MCBA, she will be presenting
her work and introducing
participants to the different
media she practices.
CHF 50.–

Open-access activities
Superposition games

Kids activity booklet (in French)
Free, available at the
reception desk

Program for schools and
private tours
→ mcba.ch



Alain Huck, *Culpa*, 2017
Graphite on paper, 215 x 151 cm
Artist's collection
© Alain Huck
Photo: David Gagnebin-de Bons



Information

Hours:
Tuesday–Sunday 10am–6pm
Thursday 10am–8pm
Monday closed

MCBA is open:
National Day (1.8.25)

Admission and Online Tickets:
→ mcba.ch/billetterie
First Saturday of the month:
free

Access:
SBB Lausanne train station,
3 minutes on foot
Bus: 1, 3, 20, 21, 60,
Gare stop
Bus: 6, Cecil stop
Metro: m2, Gare stop
Car: Montbenon parking,
Reduced fee

Staying connected:
Behind the scenes, a look
at the collection, etc.
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 @mcba.lausanne

Newsletter:
Events, Museum life,
editorial, etc.
→ mcba.ch/newsletter

Association des Amis·e·s
du MCBA:
Special tours and visiting
hours, classes and trips, etc.
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Musée cantonal
des Beaux-Arts
PLATEFORME 10
Place de la Gare 16
1003 Lausanne
Switzerland

T +41 21 318 44 00
mcba@plateforme10.ch
www.mcba.ch

Other shows on view this
summer at MCBA:

Jardin d'Hiver #3. DECORAMA
13.6 – 7.9.2025

Espace Projet
Sophie Thun. Wet Rooms
14.3 – 10.8.2025
Free entrance

Espace Focus
Alice Pauli and Prints
14.2 – 31.8.2025
Free entrance

The Collection
Free entrance

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