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“Nature Culture”

Collection display

13 June to 21 September 2021



The Fondation Beyeler’s next collection display references Olafur Eliasson’s exhibition *Life*, currently on display at the museum, and explores the relationship between nature and culture in art. Landscapes, still lifes and portraits uncover a dense web of relationships with the environment. The exhibition brings together 170 works from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, including masterpieces and major groups of works by Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, Ferdinand Hodler, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Alberto Giacometti, Louise Bourgeois, Mark Rothko, Sigmar Polke, Roni Horn, Peter Doig, Philippe Parreno, Tacita Dean and Wolfgang Tillmans, as well as rarely displayed works and recent acquisitions. From 13 June to 21 September 2021, “Nature Culture” will be on view at the Fondation Beyeler in Riehen near Basel, spreading across twelve rooms of Renzo Piano’s iconic building as well as the surrounding park.

This collection display, the most comprehensive in a long time, is the only one the Fondation Beyeler will stage this year. It offers a rare opportunity to re(discover) a significant part of the museum’s celebrated collection. Using a vast range of media – painting, sculpture, photography, drawing and multimedia installations – the modern and contemporary works on display chart the rich and layered complexity of the relationship between nature and culture. Curated by Sam Keller, Director of the Fondation Beyeler, the exhibition eschews chronology in favour of inviting viewers to discover and establish thematic, formal and poetic links between the collection’s various art works.

In the foyer, Maurizio Cattelan’s horse jumps head first through the museum wall. In the first room, 90 pictures spanning three centuries are hung closely together from floor to ceiling. These unusual adjacencies uncover surprising connections between the works. The hanging starts with Max Ernst’s *Swampangel* (1940), which shows his partner, artist Leonora Carrington, sitting sphinx-like in a surrealist, flooded and overgrown landscape. Elective affinities arise between a beach scene by Paul Gauguin, bathers by Paul Cézanne, the rescue of a drowning woman by Pablo Picasso, and a man walking through a jungle waterfall by Peter Doig. Flanking Henri Rousseau’s famous jungle scene, in which a hungry lion devours a weeping antelope, Paul Klee’s *Diana*, goddess of the hunt, meets his witches of the wood. The head of Marlene Dumas’ swan hangs lifelessly.

Transience and transcendence are the themes of the next room, in which one passes through a green glass bead curtain by Felix Gonzalez-Torres to access Constantin Brancusi's bird in flight and Barnett Newman's queen of the night. A chain of lights beckons toward a meditative «Rothko chapel». The largest room is given over to an immersion in Claude Monet's water lilies paintings. Light is reflected in Roni Horn's glass sculptures and gives heightened vibrancy to the colours of Olafur Eliasson's glass reliefs. Outside, Thomas Schütte's hare spouts into the pond. A «weather library» adds a literary dimension to Tacita Dean's cloud panorama and Philippe Parreno's frozen Christmas tree.

Philippe Parreno's *With a Rhythmic Instinction to be Able to Travel Beyond Existing Forces of Life* (2018), recently acquired by the Fondation Beyeler, is displayed for the first time. The time-based installation is composed of hundreds of black and white drawings of a firefly that flicker across a large LED screen. In a room devoted to Henri Matisse's cut-outs, visitors can create their own plant compositions. Alberto Giacometti's bronze figure of a man strides along a walkway in the rain without ever reaching the larger-than-life female figures. Photographs by Ernst Scheidegger document the artist's work process in his Paris studio. Around the corner, Louise Bourgeois' spider mother lurks among a web of spiral shapes. A heron in a pond opens the next room with fascinating paintings by Sigmar Polke selected from the Daros Collection, which works in close cooperation with the Fondation Beyeler.

The exhibition's final highlight is Wolfgang Tillmans' presentation, for which the artist created a unique hanging of selected photographic works from the Fondation Beyeler's collection. In a new work, the naked artist crawls on a beach on all fours. Other images show the artist's friend asleep with stones on his face, flowers wilting as beautifully as they bloom, windows opening out onto a garden with magnificent trees, colours merging to form a pond, trails of light coalescing into one flow, or the starry sky glittering above a solitary island. Just for a moment, in mysterious harmony, one feels connected to it all.

“Natureculture” is a term coined by philosopher and author Donna J. Haraway, referring to the immediate and inseparable connection between culture and nature. An approach that Olafur Eliasson also explores, especially in his installation *Life*.

List of artists

Harold Ancart	Paul Gauguin	Barnett Newman
Lucas Arruda	Alberto Giacometti	Philippe Parreno
Francis Bacon	Vincent Van Gogh	Pablo Picasso
Georg Baselitz	Felix Gonzalez-Torres	Camille Pissarro
Arnold Böcklin	Ferdinand Hodler	Sigmar Polke
Pierre Bonnard	Edward Hopper	Jackson Pollock
Louise Bourgeois	Roni Horn	Neo Rauch
Constantin Brancusi	Wassily Kandinsky	Gerhard Richter
Maurizio Cattelan	Ellsworth Kelly	Mark Rothko
Marc Chagall	Anselm Kiefer	Henri Rousseau
Paul Cezanne	Paul Klee	Wilhelm Sasnal
Tacita Dean	Roy Lichtenstein	Ernst Scheidegger
Peter Doig	Fernand Leger	Clyfford Still
Jean Dubuffet	Henri Matisse	Wolfgang Tillmans
Peter Doig	Joan Miró	Andy Warhol
Marlene Dumas	Piet Mondrian	Barnett Newman
Olafur Eliasson	Claude Monet	
Max Ernst	Sarah Morris	

Illustration: Max Ernst, *Swampangel*, 1940, oil on canvas; 65.2 x 81 cm, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, gift of Ulla and Richard Dreyfus-Best; © 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich; Photo: Robert Bayer

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Fondation Beyeler opening hours: 10am to 6pm daily, Wednesday 10am to 8pm