

kunstmuseum basel

Pair ings

December 16, 2024

The Im Obersteg Collection

The Im Obersteg Collection is a private collection started in 1916 that was developed in Basel and Geneva. It has been housed in the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004.

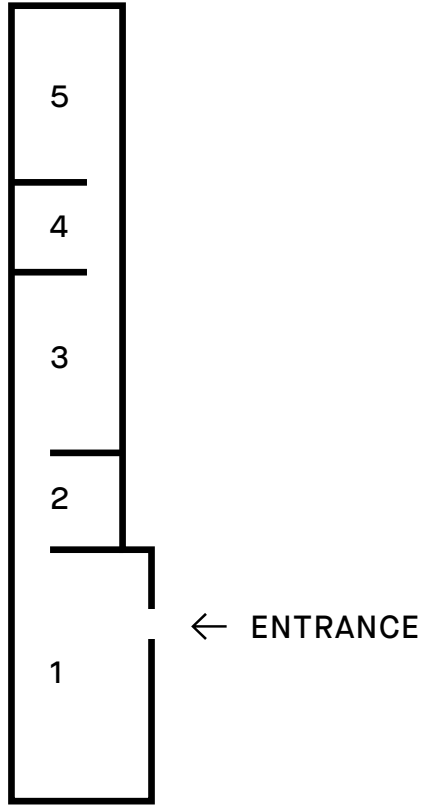
The Basel shipping contractor Karl Im Obersteg (1883–1969) and his son Jürg Im Obersteg (1914–1983), professor of forensic medicine, collected international art of the twentieth century for some seventy years. The core of the important collection, which today comprises around 220 works, can be traced back to Karl's interests. In 1916, he acquired his first painting, by Cuno Amiet. Later this was followed by important works by Marc Chagall, Alexej von Jawlensky, Pablo Picasso, Chaïm Soutine, and others.

Following a sustained preference for representational modernism from the French and Russian cultural sphere, Karl and Jürg Im Obersteg began to open up to new artistic trends after the Second World War. Color-determined abstractions, for instance by Jean-Paul Riopelle, and works by Louis Soutter, Jean Dubuffet, and Antoni Tàpies found their way into the collection.

After Karl Im Obersteg's death, Jürg continued to run his father's company and maintain the art collection. Together with his wife Doris Im Obersteg-Lerch (1931–2015), he was—like his father—surrounded by art and engaged intensively with the works. Expanding the collection, he acquired works by Lyonel Feininger, Emil Nolde, and Marianne von Werefkin, among others.

After Jürg's death, Doris Im Obersteg-Lerch established the Im Obersteg Foundation, which displayed the art collection in a villa in Oberhofen on Lake Thun during the summer months from 1995 to 2002. She then entrusted it to the Kunstmuseum Basel on permanent loan. Thus, the collection has returned to the city of its origin, where it can be accessible to a broad public and stands in dialog with a first-rate public collection.

KUNSTMUSEUM BASEL | HAUPTBAU GROUND FLOOR



Pair ings

By displaying works of art from the private Im Obersteg Collection side by side with works from the Kunstmuseum Basel's holdings, the *Pairings* exhibition establishes elective affinities that transcend generations and stylistic boundaries. What connects the juxtaposed paintings and sculptures? How do they differ? Do the paired works enrich each other through the dialogue?

The accompanying exhibition booklet brings together short texts by authors who have engaged with the works from different perspectives. Visitors can also use headphones to hear compositions performed by local young musicians. The pairings are regularly broken up and rehung to involve the exhibited works in other dialogues. The rendez-vous between the two collections develops into a slowly evolving choreography.

ROOM 1

JEAN-PAUL RIOPELLE (1923–2002)

Composition, 1951

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1451

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

WALTER BODMER (1903–1973)

Draht- und Metallplastik (Wire and Metal Sculpture), 1955

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 1978.53

Gift of Margy Bodmer, Basel 1978

Metallplastik (Metal Sculpture), 1965–1966

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 1978.54

Gift of Margy Bodmer, Basel 1978

Ilma Rakusa is an author, translator, and literary critic;
she lives in Zurich.

There Is No Such Thing as Standing Still

Movement as a primal impulse. There is no such thing as standing still. Everything is in a whirl in Jean-Paul Riopelle's *Composition*, made of sprays and dabs and streams and lines of color, a magma that forms rhythms and structures. Random or controlled by hand? The explosive intensity of the process captured here is more like a natural event. Something bursts into a thousand pieces, leaving behind splinters and shreds that come together to form what appears as order, which—on closer inspection—is itself made up of fragments and particles. And these particles move. Only here they are lashed down in a snapshot of a moment. Indeed, the picture does not really want to be a picture. The artist's intention is the act of painting, which amounts to an event without intention. It happens. Given enough paints on hand, the Action Painting develops its own dynamic. With or without a brush or palette knife. On whatever painting surface. And draws us into its vortex. We see surfaces and deep structures, networks of lines and blotches of color, we search for paths for the eye to find its way out of the labyrinth of diverse stimuli that arouse us. Our pulse quickens and suddenly we are no longer sure whether what we see is chaos or order, whether concealed behind the *Composition* is an artistic big bang.

Walter Bodmer's figures create a different kind of tension. Dance-like in their gestural character, they too are all movement, measuring out the space by demanding space. The outstretched arms of the female figure appear not only self-confident, but imperative. Here, the I makes its rounds: make way, don't you come too close to me!

There may be good reasons for this. For instance, to ward someone off. And what is going on with this strange figure threatening to plunge a spear-like spike into the belly of the beauty? She backs away a bit, alarmed by so much importunity. What happens next—we don't know. The halted movement only hints at it.

Bodmer works with wire, which suggests movement instead of volume: through staggered outlines and "limbs." The artfully bent wire produces momentum and rhythm. No coincidence—the artist was also a jazz musician. His sculptures are delicate attempts to make wire, iron, and sheet metal vibrate. And already we are swinging along, hesitantly or not.

ROOM 1

EDUARDO CHILLIDA (1924–2002)

Música callada (Musique tacite) (Silent Music) I, 1955

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 1975.11

Purchased in 1975

ANTONI TÀPIES (1923–2012)

Pintura (Painting), no. XLVII, 1957

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1551

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

Géraldine Meyer is curator of the Im Obersteg Foundation as well as of the exhibition *Pairings*.

Silent Music

A sculpture by Basque artist Eduardo Chillida encounters an abstract piece by Catalan artist Antoni Tàpies. Both works were created in the 1950s, in the shadow of the Second World War and the Franco dictatorship in Spain.

The surface of the gray wall bears traces of a deliberate attack. Gouges, the result of violent abrasions and impacts, seem to have scraped open the metallic ground; in its gesture, the painting style is tantamount to physical violence. Antoni Tàpies was inspired in Paris by representatives of the *informel* movement. Here, he associates the image, free of the representation of any object, with the oppressive reality of his Catalan homeland.

Música callada (*Musique tacite*) can be translated as “silent” or “soundless music.” Eduardo Chillida's title refers to one of the most famous Spanish poems, “Cántico Espiritual” by the mystic San Juan de la Cruz (1542–1591), who produced the “spiritual song” in a bleak prison cell. Chillida translates the silent poetry into an abstract iron sculpture. To create the work, he used parts of a multi-pronged iron tool common in agriculture in his Basque hometown of Hernani. The form of the sculpture oscillates between an expansive, intricate structure and an instrument with dangerously sharp points and edges. When the two works are placed side by side, the impression arises that the iron prongs caused the injuries in Tàpies's painting.

Both works are lyrical creations that refuse to take a clear political stance. Both seem marked inherently by the experience of violence; both manifest melancholy and vulnerability. Social and political upheavals take their toll. In remembrance of the victims of war on Spanish soil, all music is silenced.

ROOM 1

RAOUL DUFY (1877–1953)

La sirène (Siren), ca. 1925–27

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1181

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

RAOUL DUFY (1877–1953)

Trouville-Dauville, les jetees (Jetties at Trouville-Dauville), 1929

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 1960.17

Bequest of Dr. h.c. Richard Doetsch-Benziger, Basel, 1960

Marco Schneider is a member of the visitor services team at the Kunstmuseum Basel.

Dream and Awakening

The port of Trouville-Deauville awakens in me a longing for nature, fresh air, the sea, warmth, and carefree times. I gaze into the vastness of the painted seascape as if through a window. The imprecise depiction of the scene emboldens me to give free rein to my own imagination and leave everyday life behind me. As a staff member on the visitor services team at the Kunstmuseum Basel, I am familiar with many masterpieces. I look at them regularly, often for hours, and know every detail. The two paintings by Raoul Dufy, on the other hand, are rarely seen. For me, they are discoveries that invite one to daydream.

The picture opposite, *La sirène*, raises questions: The title reveals that it may be a mermaid (siren), but she looks human-like. The artist seems to have transported a scene from Greek mythology into the present. I once read that sirens are known to lure passing sailors with their beguiling song and then kill them. In the background of the picture, I see two ships approaching the beautiful woman. I am filled with unease and suddenly realize that, as the viewer, I am standing closest to the dangerous siren.

The Norman harbor view enticed me into dreaming. The siren in the second work wakes me up again and warns me to take care not to overlook impending dangers. Ordinary life goes on.

ROOM 1

ROBERT GENIN (1884–1943)

Balinesin (Balinese Girl) II, ca. 1926

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1208

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

THEO MEIER (called Meier aus Bali) (1908–1982)

Kopf einer Balinesin (Head of a Balinese Woman), 1938

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 1978.116

Legat Dr. August Meyer, Basel 1977

I See Her as if She Were Glass

They say it is the highest honor to be plucked from one's youth this way—to be singled out, molded, made more special; indeed, to put one's stamp on time itself. I was all of five, and yet they—my father, the *raja*, the *pedanda*¹ had seen all they needed to see: how agile I was, and how oblivious to the magic I could conjure within the span of my little hands. Being men, they had no use for that thing called ego, other than their own, and I had none to offer.

Tenderly they sent me off to meet my destiny, and through the rooms and corridors of the temple I grew in my eyes, my feet, my fingers what I missed in my childhood—my mother, my siblings, my home—and as I held them there I learned a new language. With a mere flick of my wrist I am able to summon the most dastardly of demons and glue them to their seats. Command the *gamelan*² to make music out of the beat beneath my feet. Occasionally someone in the audience might yell how pretty I am even with my headdress askew, and I would just burn him down with my gaze.

Lately however, I have come to covet the sight of a girl who comes to our temple to help us welcome guests. She's no dancer, but I am felled by her proud unfettered womanliness. I see her as if she were glass. The poise with which she holds her head, so different from mine. The coral hair a besotted painter might fan into a flame, the downcast gaze that apologizes for nothing, not even for wearing those hideous studs that make her ears look like mangoes.

I am envious of the stillness of her movements, of her being, as if a gift from the gods bestowed only to the unchosen. Is there is a hint of sorrow in her eyes—has she perhaps love to give but nowhere to go? I might only have dreamed it. What is greatness if you are not allowed the grace of your own making.

There are many kinds of desire, and I wonder if there is between my eternal motion and her ethereal worldliness a place where we can meet in full, where the men are not.

¹ In Indonesia, a *raja* is a ruler, prince or king. *Pedanda* is the name for a Balinese Hindu priest.

² In Indonesia, *gamelan* refers to a musical ensemble, usually with traditional musical instruments.

ROOM 1

PAUL CEZANNE (1839–1906)

Baigneur assis au bord de l'eau

(Bather sitting near the water), ca. 1876

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1071

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

MIREILLE GROS (*1954)

Bulgarisches Bild (RHODOPA)

(Bulgarian Picture [RHODOPA]), 1995

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 2020.4

Gift of Dr. Dieter Koepplin, Basel 2019

The text was produced on the basis of a conversation between **Géraldine Meyer**, curator of the exhibition, and the Basel artist **Mireille Gros**.

On the Nature of Painting: Finding a Balance

This painting by Paul Cezanne shows a seated human figure leaning against a tree trunk in the greenery. The artist did not intend to make a precise depiction of the human body. The figure's gender, age, and identity remain vague. The brushwork structures the entire picture and integrates the body into its surroundings. Everything is given the same treatment. The naked body seems to absorb the color of the ground and the foliage. The subject of the painting and the rough painting style emphasize the connection between man and nature.

Mireille Gros sees a parallel between Cezanne's work and her own. Her painting is inspired by a landscape in Bulgaria. While walking in the Rhodopes, she observed nature and its colors intensely in order to later incorporate these impressions into her painting. The result is an imaginary representation based on an actual experience of nature.

The artist perceives that there is a balance between cool and warm tones in untouched nature. Gros strives to achieve this balance in her art as well. She notes that Cezanne's paintings also possess this harmony, while the presentation of nature in contemporary photographs and landscapes is often "overheated." This is often caused by the use of photo filters that produce too many warm tones. Moreover, the colors of nature can be altered due to over-fertilization.

Both works harken back to an ultimately harmonious relationship between people and nature. They show that nature is a source of inspiration and that we are all part of it. In our modern world, shaped by the climate crisis, this harmony and ecological balance are at risk. The question thus arises, how can we ensure that future artists can also continue to use nature as a source of inspiration?

ROOM 2

LOUIS SOUTTER (1871–1942)

Volagie (Hovering), 1937–42

Vierges du pharaon (The Pharaoh's Virgins), 1937–42

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1542; Inv. Im 1541

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

BRUCE NAUMAN (*1941)

All Thumbs, 1996

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 1996.24

Purchased in 1996

Music

MATTHIAS SCHMITT (*1958)

Ghanaia for Marimba Solo

Musician

Percussionist **Lucas Hettinger** attends the Gymnasium Leonhard in Basel and for the last two years has concurrently participated in the talent development class at the Basel Music Academy.

ROOM 2

OTTO PLATTNER (1886–1951)

Der Tod zur Stenotypistin (Death of the Stenographer), 1920

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1421.09

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

HANS BALDUNG, called Grien (1484/85–1545)

Death and the Woman, ca. 1520–25

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. 19

From the Museum Faesch 1823

HANS BALDUNG, called Grien (1484/85–1545)

Death and the Maiden, 1517

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. 18

From the Museum Faesch 1823

Music

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)

String quartet no. 14 in D minor, D 810

Death and the Maiden

Second movement: Andante con moto

Musicians

Quartetto Eos: Elia Chiesa (violin) and **Giacomo Del Papa** (violin), **Alessandro Acqui** (viola), and **Silvia Ancarani** (cello) formed the quartet at the Conservatorio S. Cecilia di Roma in 2016.

The group has won several international competitions and received awards.

After study residencies in Rome, Basel, and Lucerne, the members are now studying as a quartet at the University of Music and Theatre, Munich.

Julia Rüegger is an author and poet as well as a moderator
and cultural journalist in Basel.

ROOM 3

Who is “Grenouille,” Suzanne?

I

She steps into the tub with a great big step, as if she has to cross a threshold. The tub is big enough that the water makes a sloshing sound when she sinks her body into it. Big enough to make small waves when she paddles with her feet or slaps the water with her hand. Even big enough to soon envelop her completely; her torso, her legs, her arms, her head, so that in the end all of her thoughts circle down the drain.

(The washerwoman’s hands afterwards, those watery, whitish wrinkles, do they remind you, Suzanne, of your mother, who was a washerwoman?)

II

And from what body of water does this stone bather emerge? From the Rhine or the river Wiese? From Lake Maggiore? More likely from the pool of a bathing establishment, perhaps at the Margrethen pool in Basel, which opened in 1903?

She holds her arms protectively around her chest and stomach to shield herself from prying eyes or a cool breeze. Tackles the transition back to land without haste. As if she were still submerged under water, she hears the children’s laughter from afar, the chatter of the other women, the call of the swallows, her own pulse. Feels for the first time in weeks quite clearly that she too is alive, not just the athletic dancers on the diving platforms, who plunge into the pool swift as an arrow.

The drops of water trickle down her calves. How differently her heart is beating now, how pleasantly cool her circulation runs. So still that she is almost dizzy.

III

But the frog, Suzanne: what is this title all about? Is "La Grenouille" the nickname of the bather, the term of endearment of the one for the other? Frog because of the spread thighs, because of the jumping power and the hibernation?

You painted with as much defiance as the defiance that it takes to live, you said once.

And painted as many nudes as you wanted, of women as well as men, without a care for the prevailing taboos.

IV

One of the bathers stands entranced under a swimming cap.
The other wears nothing but her knotted hair.

SUZANNE VALADON (1865–1938)

La grenouille (Frog), 1910

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1591

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

CARL BURCKHARDT (1878–1923)

Bather, 1917

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. P 40

Purchased through the Birmann-Fonds in 1917

ROOM 3

PABLO PICASSO (1881–1973)

Femme dans la loge (Woman in the Loge)

(*verso: Buveuse d'absinthe* [The Absinthe Drinker]), 1901

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1411

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR (1841–1919)

Femme dans un jardin (*La femme à la mouette*)

(*Woman in a Garden* [Woman with a Seagull Hat]), 1868

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 1988.22

Acquired with a special loan from the Basel government and numerous private contributions in 1988

Marius Glaser is a retired fine arts teacher
at the Olten Cantonal School.

Brushstrokes that Caress, Whip, and Cover

In 1868, Auguste Renoir painted a picture of his twenty-year-old lover. Lise Tréhot is seated elegantly in an armchair, wearing a dark, blue-violet Parisian promenade dress and resting her left hand on a small table. In her right, she holds a light-colored glove. The red coral and gold earrings and the blue-grey seagull hat are striking. Renoir has depicted these fashionable details with precision, and they stand out particularly well against the dark foliage in the background, which is rendered in an animated painterly style.

In contrast, Pablo Picasso's *Femme dans la loge* has a wild and expressive effect. Picasso himself was twenty years old when he created the portrait of the seated lady with bright red-painted lips and a lavish hat. Her severely drawn face appears mask-like and withdrawn. Picasso has only roughly sketched the surroundings with energetic, even violent brushstrokes in blue, yellow, and a few shades of red. The face is clearly recognizable, while in other places the work appears almost abstract, like a painterly experiment.

The *Buveuse d'absinthe* on the reverse side of Picasso's painting forms a stark contrast to this wild application of paint. The colors are muted and applied more flatly; the composition appears calmer. The woman's gaze seems to be directed inwards, her crossed arms signaling distance. This melancholy picture depicts the portrait of an absinthe drinker, an unknown woman on the margins of society in Paris during the Belle Époque.

Thanks to their different coloration and application of paint, the three portraits of Parisian women also convey different content in a temporal context. To my mind, the juxtaposition makes it clear that the design and painting style of a work of art can convey meaning as powerfully as its motif.

ROOM 3

NIKLAUS STOECKLIN (1896–1982)

Sarg-Schreinerei (Coffin-Maker's Shop), 1919

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1631

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER (ca. 1497/98–1543)

Two Skulls in a Window Alcove, ca. 1520

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. 299

Amerbach-Kabinett 1662

Music

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)

Dichterliebe op. 48, song cycle based

on poems by Heinrich Heine

no. 16 *Die alten bösen Lieder*

Musicians

Duo Gygli-Domański: The two musicians have been performing as a duo since 2019.

Felix Gygli (baritone) is the winner of the 2023 Kathleen Ferrier Award and a member of the International Opera Studio at the Zurich Opera House. **Tomasz Domański** is a pianist with a focus on lieder accompaniment and correpetition.

Under the Window Cross

The skulls: We're lying here in the window. As if on display. People are frightened when they see us. Their own mortality horrifies them. "What you are, we were. What we are, you will become!"

The coffin: I also feel them shuddering when the people walk past me. The smaller I am, the more terrified they are. Nothing gets to them so much as a child's coffin. But after all, one is old enough to die at any age.

The skulls: We were painted in the sixteenth century. A century of upheaval. Martin Luther sharpens his pen and shakes the world with his words. Magellan sails around it. The Ottoman Empire rises to become a world power. They all reach for the world and have to let it go again.

The coffin: As for me, I was painted in 1919. What sort of time was that? A World War fought with modern means left millions dead. Nothing is as it was. Centers of power shift. The world is changing breathlessly. Technological progress and genocide reveal mankind in all its contradictions.

The skulls: The more they suppress it, the more mercilessly it returns, death. Look at us, who put us here, in this window, so everyone can see us? And do they also see the cross above us? What do they see when they see the cross?

The coffin: They see the symbol of the "Christian West," reduced to a window cross. They see the cross in the newspaper: someone has died. They also look with horror upon the long history of death in Europe, at the misuse of the cross as a military promise of victory: "Under this sign you shall conquer!"

The skulls: And they forget again. The brain we harbor is too weak to retain the memory. That is why we are hollow. Hollow are their assurances. "Never again!" they say, and carve it in stone. But stone is patient and memory only lasts for three generations at most. Then everything starts all over again.

Coffin and skull: "What a wretched human I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal coil?"

ROOM 3

MAURICE DE VLAMINCK (1876–1958)

Côte de mer (Seashore with Rough Waters), ca. 1932

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1602

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

FRANZISKA SCHIRATZKI (*1960)

Strong Water I-III 2013 (Platte), 2022 (Abzug)

Kunstmuseum Basel, Department of Prints and Drawings,

Inv. 2022.123

Purchased with funds from the Foundation for Graphic Art
in Switzerland in 2022

Strong Water

Here are two takes on the elemental power of water. One as the sea. With seeming ease and a quick, impasto application of paint, the post-impressionist Maurice de Vlaminck captures the play of light and shadow on the *Côte de mer*, making the properties of the water almost physically palpable: it roars, the wind whips the waves in all directions, carries the seagulls' low flight. The surf sprays its salty drops in our faces, sticks together the sandy strands of our hair. Where the clouds clear on the horizon, the sun breaks out piercingly in an almost malicious way. Far out in the distance, a sailboat sways lonesomely. Pure drama—a metaphor for the grandeur of nature and the loneliness of man.

The motif of water also appears repeatedly in art history. In Christian times, religiously charged, as the Flood and baptism; in the Renaissance, as a basic element of life; later variously as a metaphor for the relationship between man and nature, almost always as a reflection of social status. Water is fundamental—for life on earth, for all biological processes, for culture, economy, climate. And for art? Like most cultural techniques, it too can hardly do without water.

Water is presented in a completely different way by Franziska Schiratzki in her *Strong Water* series. In the three round aquatints, the liquid element of the etching process itself becomes the protagonist: in subtle tonal gradations, the acid, the medieval *aqua fortis*, makes the spectrum of liquid's motion visible—splashing, dripping, flowing, sloshing, meandering, eroding, displacing, and infiltrating. The traces show the possibilities of the experimental printing technique and, in the sophisticated combination with the round printing plate, also make reference to our vision and our need to fill structures and patterns with meaning: Are we perhaps looking through a microscope? Through a telescope? Are these molecules? Water crystals? Or planetary spheres? Surfaces of celestial bodies, bubbling masses of rock, continents, oceans, primordial seas: *Strong Water* in any case.

ROOM 4

PABLO PICASSO (1881–1973)

La guenon et son petit (Baboon and her Young), 1951

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1414

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

ÉDITIONS PAUL-MARTIAL, PARIS (1926–1986)

Front View of a Citroen Automobile, ca. 1928/29

Kunstmuseum Basel, Department of Prints and Drawings,

Inv. 2012.102

Gift of Ruth and Peter Herzog, Basel 2012

David Schaub is eight years old and goes
to school in Binningen.

Monkey Mama or the Face Made of Cars

How would you describe this work by Pablo Picasso?

“I see a monkey mama with a big, smooth backside, holding a small baby in her arms.”

Strictly speaking, it is a baboon. In females, during their fertile period, they get a menstrual swelling. That means that their hairless buttocks bulge outwards. That is why the artist made the female monkey’s bottom so large and smooth.

“The monkey also has a long snout and big, sticking-out ears. If I look closely, I can see that the head is made of two toy cars and that the mother monkey’s eyes are the people sitting in the car on top.”

Exactly, and the monkey’s ears are actually the handles of a clay pot. The round body and shoulders are fragments of a vase, and the tail is a car’s metal spring. So here Picasso brings together several objects to mimic a female baboon.

Do you see any similarities with the photograph?

“In both works of art, there are cars. But the one in the photograph has a different shape. It’s less round and looks old-fashioned. With a little imagination, I can also see a face in the photo: the car lights could be big eyes. The shape of the car reminds me of a long snout—like a crocodile seen from the front.”

Do you also sometimes see faces where there aren’t any in everyday life?

“Yes, when I see cars on the road, I sometimes ask myself how they look. Whether they are looking friendly or fierce or whether they are squinting one eye. Here, the baboon’s face seems friendly, but the car in the picture looks rather sad.”

Artists are sometimes inspired by imaginary faces that appear in everyday things. You can try this too: Look at objects or clouds and try to find a face or a creature in them. Then draw the shape you have seen and then you will have invented your own picture.

ROOM 4

JEAN DUBUFFET (1901–1985)

Effigie rocher fruiteux (Effigy of a Fruitbearing Rock), 1958

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1171

Deposited with the Kunstmuseum Basel in 2004

JEAN DUBUFFET (1901–1985)

Le crapadeur (The toad), 1959

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 1964.11

Gift of Werner Schenk, 1964

Maira van Dam is twelve years old and attends
the first secondary school in Binningen.

Stony Beings

When I see the artworks next to each other, I think of people. People, like works of art, are different, no two are alike and yet they all have things in common. Two works of art, created by the same artist, with different materials—one seems happier, friendlier than the other, is rounder and looks more homey, perhaps it lives in a big family. The other work is bonier, sadder or more wistful, older and lonelier. But you can't overlook the similarities either. Both have something stony, craggy, both are missing something if you follow their gaze; they are not angular, and both are unique.

If I wanted to meet them, I would look for them in stony valleys and caves. Maybe there would be more of them too? But they could also live in other places, because they are not really made of stone. One guy is made of paint on canvas, the other of papier-mâché. But who says these creatures are male anyway? Perhaps there is no way of knowing because they are extinct? Is that why they look so distressed?

I would like to ask them how they are doing and what they need. Of course, I would be unsettled if I actually met them, but actually I don't think they would do anyone any harm. But you can't really know that. People know nothing about many things. You don't have to know everything to do something special though. Art knows no boundaries, anything is possible. It doesn't just show what you already know. Artists can create something new, mysterious, and unknown. And that is exactly the case with these two works.

ROOM 5

ARISTIDE MAILLOL (1861–1944)

Nude, no date

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1332

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

HANS ARP (1886–1966)

Torse préadamite (Pre-Adamic Torso), 1938

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 1966.14

Gift of Marguerite Arp-Hagenbach in honor
of Hans Arp 1966

What Is a Woman?

Stripped bare. Here on the paper, just as she had been in the studio where Aristide Maillol first sketched her. Over and over, he interprets her, as he calls it. Sitting, squatting, standing in profile, or with her back turned—Maillol wrests “the woman” from the lightness of the paper with strong shadowed contours. The point, each time, is to capture a version that—like this one—stands both for itself and for all others. Men are simpler to interpret, Maillol claims about his life-long artistic interest in women. Circling round the torso, he always draws the woman in a similar way: like a hilly surface with no hint of bones, where the center is formed by the breasts, navel, and pubic mound. The limbs help Maillol round out his interpretation, but the woman isn’t able to gesticulate. When it comes to the proportions (including, as he emphasizes, the short legs), Maillol remains faithful to the prototype of his wife—one of his first nude models: a woman, his woman.

Hans Arp has no interest in making determinations and needs no model. He speculates: What (theologically) is a (female) body before there was Adam (and Eve)? It is multiple. That is the answer found in his *Torse préadamite* (Pre-Adamic Torso) of 1938, as well as in the woodcut *Multiple Femme* (Multiple Women) from 1956. How many forms does the pink limestone shape contain? It could assume many other positions: ones in which this being, living entirely through the sense of touch, might perhaps appear less human. Are these things that seem like legs actually antennae, or are they both, or neither-nor? Who decides here what is up or down? Arp does at least generate concreteness by dissolving boundaries (and above all, oppositions) and capturing a moment of movement and growth. He calls it *giving form, like plants*. The form here, according to Arp, has given birth to itself. It is a manifold hybrid that escapes being tied down: plant woman, insect woman, mother goddess, or all of them at once.

“Who knows what a woman is?” the philosopher Annemarie Mol asked in 1985. She discusses the various answers offered by anatomy and endocrinology, and their very real consequences. What do artworks tell us when we pose the same question to them? Brought into dialogue, Aristide Maillol and Hans Arp invite some initial formal reflections.

ROOM 5

SUZANNE VALADON (1865–1938)

Panier d'œufs de cane (Basket with Duck Eggs), 1931

Im Obersteg Foundation, Inv. Im 1592

Permanent loan to the Kunstmuseum Basel since 2004

HANS ARP (1886–1966)

Le coquetier ivre, (The Drunken Egg-Cup) 1926

Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. G 1968.34,

gift of Marguerite Arp-Hagenbach, 1968

Anja Morawietz works as a lecturer at the Pädagogischen Hochschule Zürich in the didactics of art and design department.

The Egg: Where Did It Come From, Where Does It Go?

A basket of eggs sits on the floor of a light-flooded room. A stained wall and dark floor tiles form the backdrop. We can almost sense the smell of the stables in our nostrils. The surroundings are painted with rough brushstrokes in various shades of beige and brown. The bluish and green accents on the shell and the size of the eggs indicate they are duck eggs. The ordinary everyday rural scene almost makes us forget that the painter of this picture, Suzanne Valadon, was one of the first women who managed to make a name for herself on the Parisian art scene at the beginning of the twentieth century. With her unconventional representations of the female and male nude, she challenged her fellow painters' understanding of gender roles.

In this same era of social and artistic awakening, Hans Arp produced his painting *Le coquetier ivre*. He used an idiosyncratic type of linear representation, sewing a cord onto a white painted canvas with neat stitches. The “drunken eggcup” with an egg, in which a duckling appears to be quacking, is distorted. With its angular twist to the right, it gives the impression of tipping over or even floating away. In this artwork, Hans Arp combines the simplest creative means with surreal poetry. Arp's art repeatedly meandered between Dadaism, Surrealism, and abstraction, often bringing the unexpected together under one roof.

ROOM 5

Music

MARC CROFTS (*1989)

YARDANI TORRES MAIANI (*1988)

FALSETAS

Cantilations et Verdiales de Comares

(Cantilations and Verdiales by Comares)

The piece *Cantilations et Verdiales de Comares* was composed especially for the group of works by Marc Chagall.

Musicians

The violinist and composer **Marc Crofts** grew up in Switzerland and received his musical training there. As a composer, he focuses on jazz, Balkan music, and flamenco. Known for his versatile improvisations, he is equally at home interpreting complex scores.

Yardani Torres Maiani was born in Andalusia and studied music in France and Switzerland. He composes music rooted in flamenco and is a compelling virtuoso performer.

FALSETAS, a duo formed by Marc Crofts and Yardani Torres Maiani, explores innovative ways to integrate the violin into the soundscape of flamenco.

How the Chagalls Came to the Kunstmuseum Basel

The Russian-French Jewish painter Marc Chagall is considered one of the most important artistic figures of the twentieth century. There are various reasons why his work is so well represented in the Kunstmuseum Basel. Chagall had his first retrospective show in 1933 here in Basel. It was here, too, that his painting *Die Prise (Rabbiner)* (The Pinch of Snuff [Rabbi]) once again became part of a public collection after being defamed as “degenerate art” in Nazi Germany, confiscated from the Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, and sold at the much-discussed auction at Theodor Fischer in Lucerne in 1939. His daughter Ida Chagall also lived in Basel with her husband Franz Meyer, who was director of the Kunstmuseum from 1962 to 1980.

Provenance research investigates the origins of these works, the history of their ownership, and the fates of their prior owners. How and under what circumstances did Chagall's paintings, sculptures, and works on paper end up in the Kunstmuseum?

Purchase

The painting *Ma fiancée aux gants noir* (My Fiancée with Black Gloves) is a portrait of Chagall's fiancée Bella Chagall. Originally owned by the Hanover gallerist Herbert von Garvens, it came into the possession of the banker Baron Eduard von der Heydt in the 1920s via the art dealers Alfred Flechtheim (Berlin) and Christoph Bernoulli (Basel). Von der Heydt kept it from 1930 to 1950 and it was used to decorate his villa on Monte Verità in Ascona. Twice during this period, the painting was temporarily stored in the depository of the Kunstmuseum. When it was finally put up for sale in 1950, Georg Schmidt, Franz Meyer's predecessor as director, was delighted to have this second chance—for it turned out that the art dealer Bernoulli, who sold the painting to the Baron, had also offered it to the Kunstmuseum before. At that time, however, the offer was not well received, and the painting was considered too expensive. In February 1950, the purchase was made possible with the financial support of a Basel patron.

Tessa Rosebrock heads the Provenance Research Department
at the Kunstmuseum Basel.

Permanent Loan / Deposit

The so-called Jewish portraits from 1914–15 are an important series in Chagall's oeuvre. They depict seated, self-confident beggars, the models for which the painter found in his Russian homeland of Vitebsk. There are a total of four such representations in different colors. The paintings *Jew in Black and White* and *Jew in Red* were once part of the Kagan-Chabchay Collection (Moscow and Paris). In 1936, they were purchased by the Basel shipping contractor Karl Im Obersteg, who was a great admirer of Chagall. Through an exchange of another Chagall painting, *The Wedding*, the *Jew in Green* came into his possession as well, so that today, the Im Obersteg Foundation in fact owns three of the four Jewish portraits. Since 2004, the Im Obersteg collection has been on display at the Kunstmuseum. In terms of ownership, the works remain the private property of the Foundation. They grace the spaces of Basel's public art collection as a permanent loan.

Gift

In 2023, Chagall's granddaughter, Meret Meyer, bequeathed fourteen works on paper and an oil painting on cardboard by her grandfather to the Kunstmuseum. Almost all these works had remained in the family. Only the painting *La prière dans la nuit* (Prayer at night) had been acquired by her on the Swiss art market in 2008. This is the first time these works have been presented publicly in a museum. They were selected deliberately to complement the portrait of Bella Chagall already in the Kunstmuseum's collection.

Gifts are one of the particularly joyful events for a museum—sometimes they come as a surprise, sometimes museums are given a chance to articulate wishes. But they always express a special connection between the artist in question and/or the donors and the institution that holds the cultural assets.

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The Swiss Foundation for Young Musicians (FYM) was founded in Basel in 2012. The foundation supports young musicians on their path onto the concert stage and into professional life, either during or immediately after concluding their studies. The foundation's headquarters, Spalenvorstadt 25, Basel, are regularly host to concerts with young musicians. foryoungmusicians.ch

Selection of the musical contributions and the musicians for the exhibition:
Isabel Heusser, artistic and administrative director of the FYM.

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