STÉPHANE BELZÈRE.
FLOATING WORLDS

STRASBOURG MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY
ART MUSEUM

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Press Relations

Museums Communication Department
Julie Barth
julie.barth@strasbourg.eu
tel. + 33 (0)3 68 98 74 78
Press kit and visuals downloadable at:
www.musees.strasbourg.eu
1. Exhibition Project

The work of the painter Stéphane Belzère, born in 1963, has been fuelled by French, Swiss and German cultural influences. In the mid 1990s, he decided to set up his easel in Paris, in the so-called "Soft Pieces" room of the National Museum of Natural History. This was the start of an ongoing pictorial event, the artist filling his canvases with specimen jars, a motif recurring to the point of obsession. It has been subjected to multiple variations, accumulated, prodigiously enlarged, traversed by the artist's gaze and even seen from within, finally becoming an immense, indecipherable landscape.

Invited to occupy a room on the first floor of the MAMCS, the painter engages in a dialogue with the collections of the Strasbourg Natural History Museum (at present closed for renovation) by partly displaying its collection of jars containing specimens of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish or invertebrates. Nearly two hundred of these jars are being presented side-by-side with his paintings and accompanied by an installation specially designed for Strasbourg - Les Mains des Anges. This is a participatory and evolutive work in which Stéphane Belzère, with the willing collusion of young visitors to the museum, will "bottle" their moulded hands.

The exhibition title is borrowed from Japanese ukiyo-e, literally “images of the floating world,” an art characterised by the introduction of everyday subjects into what remains a highly codified painting. These “Floating Worlds” oscillate between different scales and types of presentation making them at times highly realistic, at times indecipherable. In each is affirmed an original reflexion on light, colour and transparency. The jar, an ordinary container -of worlds that are not ordinary, hovers on the borderline between figuration and abstraction, between attraction and repulsion, between a scientific object and an inextinguishable source of inspiration for the painter.

In a room designed as a vast immersive interlude within the collection trail, Mondes Flottants is an exhibition of a new kind in the MAMCS' development. As a dialogue between two different types of collection, it offers to our gaze an encounter between a contemporary proposal and a scientific heritage, each complementing and shedding light on the other.

Key Facts:
- 74 paintings by Stéphane Belzère, including several non-standard formats (a spectacular polyptych over 8 metres long).
- around 200 specimens preserved in fluid, as well as dry skeletons, on loan from the Strasbourg Zoological Museum.
- Angels' Hands, a work "growing" with the help of visitors, throughout the duration of the exhibition.

Exhibition curator: Estelle Pietrzyk, Chief Heritage Curator, in charge of MAMCS; with advice from Marie-Dominique Wandhammer and Samuel Cordier, directors of Strasbourg Natural History Museum.
2. Exhibition Trail

The *Floating Worlds* exhibition is being held on the 1st floor of the MAMCS, in the third room of the permanent exhibition trail.

**PLAN**

Stéphane Belzère, *Floating Worlds*

More than 70 paintings of very diverse formats are gathered together in an area covering about 300 m². They include small works and large panoramas, oval paintings and very large vertical formats covering a period of twenty years - between the beginning of the 2000s and, in the case of *Les Mains des Anges*, the present day.

**The Soft Pieces Room – Nocturne**

The exhibition opens with a key work, a large painting showing us an impressive perspective of one of the store-rooms in the National Museum of Natural History in the rue Buffon in Paris. This is the so-called “Soft Pieces Room”, containing specimens preserved in fluid.

Stéphane Belzère has this to say about the nights he spent in this unusual space:

"In the centre of the room was a coelacanth, a fascinating fish which has changed little over the past 300 million years - what we call a "relic species". From this room there emanated a strange, eerie atmosphere, reinforced by the night-time ambience. I felt both attracted and repelled by this strange environment. artistically speaking, it was a real subject for painting, an encounter between form and formlessness. The different parts of the collection became almost abstract, impossible to distinguish clearly. There were colours in the jars I didn’t expect to find, reflections in the glass and my own reflection in the central window at the back. The painting itself has become a container of all these containers, the jars are microcosms in themselves."
The Shelves

The exhibition continues along a gallery that "invites" the visitor into a museum store-room. On one side we can see an imposing piece of furniture designed by the artist himself and accommodating "guests" one doesn't expect to meet in a modern and contemporary art museum, several hundred natural history specimens from the Strasbourg Zoological Museum collections. On the other side is a long row of 30 paintings, each of them depicting a lifesize storage module complete with jars.

The shelf designed for the exhibition holds around 200 specimens kept in jars. As well as being objects of scientific study, some specimens preserved "in fluids" also have historical value. The oldest specimen presented was collected in 1831 in Oran and some pieces in the collection go back to German natural historians active during the second half of the 19th century.

The approximately 200 specimens presented in these glass jars offer a remarkable evocation of biodiversity among vertebrates and invertebrates. The jars presented as part of the exhibition contain Cnidarians, Batrachians, "fish" [actinopterygians], Mammals, Snakes, Lizards, Turtles, Crustaceans, Insects, Annelids and Echinoderms. All these form an intriguing "forest" of cylinders with changing reflections, green and gold, very dark blue or dark red. Each jar is identified and identifies its "occupant" using a scientifically standardized nomenclature that Stéphane Belzère has used for several of his works.

Ovis aries♂, 1929-107
Not part of the natural sciences exhibits (see below) is an installation in the centre of the shelf, Les Mains des Anges.

Opposite this "laboratory" is a long line of paintings, each showing a storage section comprising five, six, seven or more jars demurely placed on their shelves, these being simulated by grey stripes. This accumulation of paintings creates an imposing array on which the artist seems to be "practising" so as to gain an absolutely clear idea of the subject that interests him. If these paintings, figurative although representing often indistinct subjects, seem to list one by one, like an inventory, the specimens kept in storage, the result cannot be thought of as a piece-by-piece photographic survey. Belzère observes, certainly, but he composes and invents; fascinated by the shifting facets of this convergence of glass, liquid* and light with animal matter, he invents colours and textures. *(alcohol has now replaced the much more toxic formalin)

The Immersions

The two paintings entitled Immersions are being shown here to the public for the first time. Belzère offers us a new viewpoint: we are no longer observing the specimen in the jar, we are in its place. It is we who are immersed in the preservation liquid next to large indistinct shapes, scraps of mysterious creatures. In this ultramarine environment, a distorted elsewhere can be dimly perceived, "a floating world", a window and shelves faintly outlined. Continuing the reflection initiated with the Soft Pieces Room, Belzère looks at his environment through the walls of a jar where the specimens are volutes dancing in front of a room drenched in blue. Belzère himself mass tinted the canvases and stretched them on outsize frames in his studio. In fact, the canvases then had to be removed from their frames to get them out of the studio and afterwards restretched in the museum.

The Oval Pictures

The Oval Pictures are arranged so as to create a cosmological composition and they reflect the artist’s desire to go even further in the treatment of his motif. The jar is viewed from the angle of the meniscus formed by the preservation liquid, a distended ovoid shape that both reveals and reflects. In this elongated "bubble", Stéphane Belzère designs small "landscapes" that appear to be seen through a flattened glass. In these paintings the ripples of liquid and "islands" of materials, some of them painted under Plexiglas, come together and form the magnifying and distorting lens used by the artist to explore his subject.

The First Jars

Next to The Oval Pictures is a wall displaying several small formats, a series of views of the jars, in which Stéphane Belzère works on his motif in a reduced format. These works appearing relatively early in the series, interweave both the most "literal" compositions (the painting Three Brains is extremely precise in its description, with no distancing) and the most fanciful (the Inside the Jar series appears as a set of variations around a science fiction style landscape).

The Large Jars

This series of works is among the most impressive in the exhibition. Two and a half metres tall, these highly vertical paintings offer an over size plunge into the stratified world of the storage jar, the lid or bottom of which we can sometimes still sense. These Large Jars
reveal unsuspected colours and materials: far from the polar bear (*Ursus arctos*), the black bear (*Ursus americanus* 1935-194), the warthog and (but a title corresponding to the species in question is not essential) bush pig (*Potamocherus sp.* 1932-57 & *Phacocherus africanus* 1925-406) or sheep (*Ovis aries*, 1929-107), Belzère draws us into a life of folds, into a formidable organic drape. These extraordinarily magnified underwater views leave us breathless. Even though we have never been so close, there is nothing we can recognize. Forming great silent organs, this series of *Grands Bocaux* is simply beyond our grasp, in every sense of the word.

**The “Long” Pictures**

From 2012 to 2014 Stéphane Belzère produced a series of very large abstract paintings deriving from the "obsessive" subject of the jar. These paintings, made up of several panels, measure up to 8 metres in length and are identified by a title referring simply to their format: "long paintings". Belzère retains only the bottom of the jar in the shap of an immensely enlarged detail, intermingling liquid, glass and reflections of the specimen. From these interweaving layers, colours and textures emerges a kind of "horizon". Devoid of any figurative referent, these panoramic compositions subvert our ability to take in an image mentally, immersing us in a world of colours and curves. To one viewer they may evoke the cosmos, to another a landscape of water and ice reminiscent of the works of the Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler.

**Angels’ Hands**

Specially produced for the exhibition, this work will still be in progress at its opening, reaching fruition only after several more months. *Les Mains des Anges* is seen as a growing set of small-format jars, each with a coloured glass plate and the cast of a hand. The plates recall Stéphane Belzère's foray into the field of glass - he designed the stained glass windows in Rodez Cathedral and worked very closely with master glassmakers from the Atelier Duchemin. The idea for this work came from objects in an artistic family environment - both of Belzère's parents, Jürg Kreienbühl (1932-2007) and Suzanne Lopata (born 1932) were painters - and the presence in their home of collections of various kinds. The Kreienbühl family kept a set of religious sculptures readily described by Belzère as "saint-sulpiceries" (religious kitsch). Several items, notably the hands, have become broken over time but all have been carefully preserved. These hands of angels, saints and other figures from religious history were to become the starting point for Stéphane Belzère's work in moulding.

**Interpretation Facilities: an Innovative Solution**

Several “sound points” (without headphones or prior download) accompany the visitor along the trail and offer audio and/or visual commentary (including transcripts). The visitor is told by several different voices - including that of Belzère himself - how the work came into being, thus offering a privileged moment of contemplation. Unlike the traditional audioguide, this interpretation device using voiceover and scrolling text is a new approach specially designed for the exhibition.
3. About Stéphane Belzère

Stéphane Belzère lives and works in Paris and Bâle.

**Biography**

1963 - Stéphane Belzère born at Argenteuil in the Paris suburbs. His mother Suzanne Lopata and his father Jürg Kreienbühl were both painters.

1968 - After five years spent with his grandparents in Basel, returns to the Paris suburbs (Cormeilles-en-Parisis).

1985-1989 - Studies at the National School of Fine Arts in Paris.

1986-1987 - Military service in Berlin, where he takes up residence and where he returns regularly until 2013.


2003-2007 - Production of stained glass windows for Rodez Cathedral.

2009 - One-year residency at the Christoph-Merian-Stiftung in Basel.

2011 - Awarded the Édouard and Maurice Sandoz Foundation Prize (FEMS), Pully.

2016 - Commission under the French Ministry of Culture’s “1% art market endowment programme” for work at the Léon Blum secondary school in Villefranche-de-Lauragais.


**Personal exhibitions**

2018 : Szenographie einer Familie, Psychiatrie Museum, Berne

2015 : Pensées colorées, Hommage au peintre Jürg Kreienbühl, Galerie Franz Mäder, Bâle

2013 : Nachtspiegelungen-Reflets nocturnes, LageEgal, Raum für aktuelle Kunst, Berlin

Stéphane Belzère / Prix FEMS 2011, Musée d’art de Pully

Œuvres sur papier, Centre d’art, Cesson-Sévigné

2012 : Gouaches et Pochoirs, Moments Arts, Chez Christian Aubert, Paris

2011 : Vagues, tourbillon et autres turbulences, Galerie Nicolas Silin, Paris

2010 : Überblick, Galerie Mäder, Bâle

Radboud University Medical Center, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen

2009 : Portraits de famille etc..., Galerie RX, Paris

Solo show, Salon du dessin contemporain, Paris

2008 : Reflets nocturnes, Chapelle Saint-Jacques, Centre d’art, Saint Gaudens

Peintures etc..., Musée Denys-Puech, Rodez
2007 : Peintures en bocal/bocal de peinture, Palais Rumine, Musée de zoologie, Lausanne
L’Invitation au bocal, Frédérique Lucien-Stéphane Belzère, galerie municipale, Vitry

2006 : Peintures d’après nature, La Lune en parachute, Espace d’art contemporain, Épinal

2005 : Vitrail chimique et peintures récentes, 2005 Galerie RX, Paris

2003 : Galerie RX, Paris
Conserves peintes-Eingemachtes, Café au lit, Paris
Le fruit de la rencontre-Histoires de bocal, Musée Raymond Lafage, Lisle-sur-Tarn

1998 : Alles ist Wurst-Tout est saucissee, association Fantome.V., Berlin

1997 : Tout est saucissee-Alles ist Wurst, galerie Art & Patrimoine, Paris

**Group exhibitions (selection)**

2020 : Pop-Up Artistes, Fondation Fernet-Branca, Saint-Louis
Vitraux d’artistes, de Notre-Dame de Paris à l’Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud

2018 : Vitrail contemporain, Couvent de la Tourette, Eveux
Jürg Kreienbühl, Suzanne Lopata, Stéphane Belzère, Kunsthau Interlaken
Matière Céleste, Pierre Soulages, Daniel Coulet, Stéphane Belzère, Atelier Blanc, Villefranche de Rouergue

2015 : Tandem17, exposition avec le sculpteur Guy Reid, Galerie Croix-Baragnon, Toulouse
Le Vitrail contemporain, Cité de l’architecture et du patrimoine, Paris

2014 : Frisch gemalt, Museum Bruder Klaus Sachseln

2013 : Biennale d’Issy les Moulineaux

2012 : Memento mori, L’H du Siège, Valenciennes, commissariat Karim Gahddab

2011 : Veilleurs de nuit, centre d’art de Tanlay
20 ans, La Lune en parachute, Espace d’art contemporain, Épinal

2010 : CARNE, le 104, Paris
Artistes dans la ville, Musée des beaux-arts, Saint-Lô

**Bibliography (selection)**

- Stéphane Belzère, Tableaux longs, Prix FEMS 2011, Fondation Édouard et Maurice Sandoz, Lausanne, 2013
- Stéphane Belzère, Peintures etc... Catalogue d’exposition, Éditions du Rouergue, 2007
- L’invitation au bocal, Frédérique Lucien, Stéphane Belzère, Galerie municipale, Vitry-sur-Seine, 2007
- Lumières contemporaines : Vitraux du XXIème siècle et architecture sacrée, Centre international du vitrail, Chartes, éditions Gaud, 2005
- Histoires de bocal, Rodez, Éditions du Rouergue/Actes sud, 2003
4. Exhibition Catalogue

Title: Stéphane Belzère, Mondes Flottants
ISBN: 9782351251973
Planned publication date: the catalogue will contain views of the exhibition and is due for publication in June 2022
Intended sale price: 25 € TTC

En inventant une continuité entre l’organicité de la chair et la facture picturale au point de les rendre indissociables, Belzère exhibe le pouvoir de la peinture elle-même, sa puissance expressive, il invente une peinture qui puisse embrasser le spectre allant de l’absurdité à l’horreur et le transfigurer : « La chair devient couleurs et lumières, le bocal réserve inépuisable de formes. » Par leur caractère immersif, les Grands Bocaux – 250 cm x 200 cm pour les plus grands – radicalisent cette orientation en faisant œuvre de science-fiction, ce genre qui imagine « le monde sans nous ». La salle des pièces molles – nocturnes, ouvre sur le sublime qui chez Kant renvoie « à ce qu’une subjectivité peut avoir de ses propres limites et de son propre anéantissement possible ».

Extrait de « Stéphane Belzère, la peinture à l’épreuve du temps », par Marguerite Pilven
5. Educational and Cultural Events

À DEUX VOIX
Samedi 4 décembre 2021 à 14h30
Tarif : entrée du musée
Durée : 45 mn
Rencontre avec Stéphane Belzère, artiste et Estelle Pietrzyk, conservatrice en chef du MAMCS.

CONFÉRENCES
Conserver dans l'alcool : une technique archaïque ?
Dimanche 30 janvier 2022 à 14h30
Durée : 45 mn
Tarif : entrée du musée
Pourquoi choisit-on l'alcool pour conserver les spécimens ? Quels spécimens et quels types de collections sont conservés ainsi ? Quelques réponses sur une pratique ancienne mais une technique toujours utile aujourd'hui, par David Carita, adjoint au conservateur du Musée Zoologique.

Les collections en alcool : regard scientifique, regard artistique
Dimanche 27 février 2022 à 14h30
Durée : 45 mn
Tarif : entrée du musée
Les spécimens conservés en fluides sont rarement les vedettes des musées d'histoire naturelle. Elles sont pourtant très précieuses pour le chercheur et fascinent aussi les artistes. Regards croisés sur des collections particulières par Samuel Cordier, conservateur du Musée Zoologique et Estelle Pietrzyk, conservatrice en chef du MAMCS.

ATELIERS
Ateliers collaboratifs pour les 6-12 ans
Dimanche 5 décembre 2021 (en présence de l'artiste), mercredi 9 février et 13 avril 2022
De 14h30 à 17h en continu
Tarif : entrée du musée
« Ma main moulée »

Ateliers pour les 6-11 ans
Samedi 12 mars de 14h30 à 16h30
« Immersion bleue »
Atelier de peinture

EXPLORING FURTHER
Exhibition - « Bestia — Animals in the Würth collection »
07.11.2021 – 07.09.2022
Würth France Museum, Erstein
The exhibition offers an innovative dialogue between works of art from the Würth Collection and specimens from the Strasbourg Zoological Museum, a meeting between an art collection and a scientific collection, between a private collection and a public institution. It is committed to celebrating not only beauty but also animal strangeness. It presents paintings by contemporary artists including Max Ernst, Georg Baselitz and Barry Flanagan in dialogues with taxidermised animals. These take place along a trail arranged around the four elements: air, earth, water and fire.
In partnership with Strasbourg Zoological Museum
6. Strasbourg Zoological Museum

The Strasbourg Zoological Museum is currently under renovation. Closed to the public in the autumn of 2019, it will reopen in 2024 with new facilities and museography. This ambitious operation, codirected by the University and Strasbourg City Council, is being partially funded under the current “Operation Campus” project.

Strasbourg's Zoological Museum occupies a special place among French museums, its collections being largely focused on animal biodiversity - also by the fact that since 1893 it has occupied part of the former Imperial University in the “Neustadt” district, built during the German period and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The museum has its origins in the large natural history cabinet set up by Jean Hermann (1738-1800), a professor of botany, philosophy and medicine in Strasbourg. Acquired by the city council in 1804, this collection has since grown considerably through the work of successive French and German directors and curators. Today, the collections of the Zoological Museum - numbering 1,200,000 specimens - are representative of both global and regional biodiversity, in particular in the fields of ornithology (18,000 birds) and entomology (800,000 insects).

Museum under Renovation

The museum closed its doors on September 23, 2019 and it plans to reopen them in 2024. After moving all of its collections to the Strasbourg Museums' Study and Conservation Centre in the Union Sociale building, the Zoological Museum has now been in full site “works mode” since October 4, 2021. Works will last for 26 months. The project aims to bring the museum building into regulatory compliance (fire safety and accessibility), to renovate it in particular from an energy point of view, to have store-rooms in line with current standards for the conservation of the collections and to offer visitors renovated museum spaces with new museography. Visitors will find a friendly museum with a new "biodiversity atrium" and larger exhibition spaces. The displays will focus in particular on the history of the collections and the systematics, on ecosystems (such as the Upper Rhine) and will be linked to current societal themes.

Following relocation of the collections, renovation work was started in October 2021. The next few months are therefore being devoted to work on the collections, restoration of the specimens to be presented in the future museum, to the design and production of multimedia, as well as to writing new texts. The next steps will be devoted to setting up the exhibitions and defining a cultural programme for the museum's different audiences.
7. Visitor Information

Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporain (MAMCS)
1 place Hans-Jean Arp, Strasbourg
tel. +33 (0)3 68 98 50 00
Opening hours: every day - except Monday – from 10 am to 6 pm
Closed on 1 January, Good Friday, 1 May, 1 and 11 November and 25 December.

Group Visits
Special times are reserved for group visits, organized by the Service Éducatif des Musées or accompanied by guides from the Strasbourg Tourist Office.
Advance telephone booking is essential for all group visits of more than 10 persons:
to book, telephone 03 68 98 51 54, Monday to Friday 8.30 am – 12.30 pm (school holidays: 9 am - 12 noon).

MAMCS admission rates: 7, 50 € (reductions: 3,50 €)

Admission free:
- visitors under age 18
- Carte Culture card holders
- Atout Voir card holders
- Museums Pass Musées card holders
- Éduc’Pass card holders
- disabled visitors
- art history, archaeology and architecture students
- employment seekers
- recipients of social assistance
- badge-holding employees of Strasbourg Eurometropolis

Free admission for all visitors: 1st Sunday in the month.

1 day pass:
16 €, reduced rate: 8 € (access to all Strasbourg museums and temporary exhibitions)
3 day pass:
20 €, reduced rate 12 € (access to all Strasbourg museums and temporary exhibitions)

Museums Pass Musées:
1 year, 320 museums: more info at www.museumspass.com

With the implementation of sanitary measures to ensure your safety and that of our team, we are able to offer you a friendly, quality welcome. More info on reception and visiting conditions:
musees.strasbourg.eu
musee:at musees.strasbourg.eu


