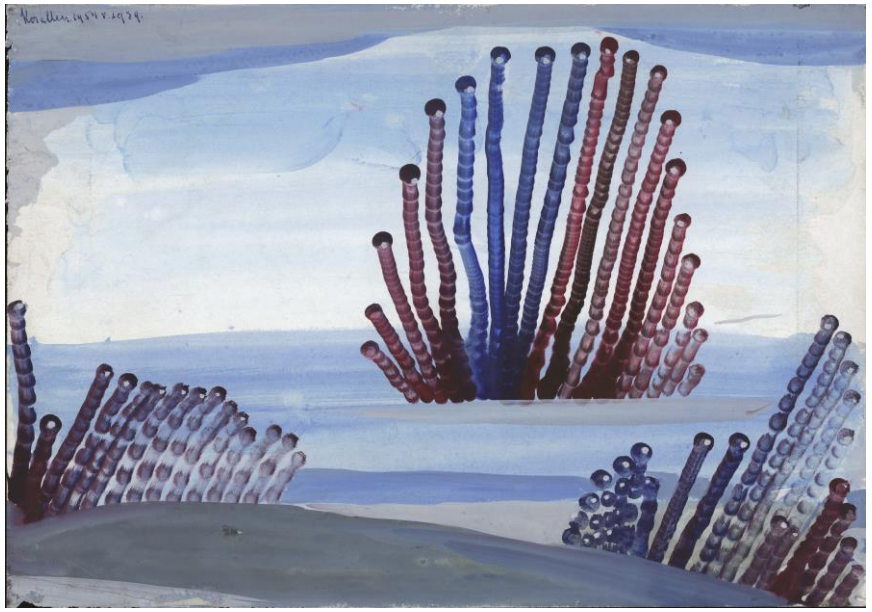
Eugen Gabritschevsky (1893-1979)

Curators (Paris): Antoine de Galbert and Noëlig Le Roux

Almost thirty years after the exhibition staged at Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, *Eugen Gabritschevsky (1893-1979)* shows over 250 works from the Russian artist's prolific output, with loans from public institutions and private collections. They include rarely exhibited drawings from a substantial gift made to the Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Georges Pompidou. This new exhibition will travel from La maison rouge in Paris to Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, then on to the American Folk Art Museum in New York. Art Brut, the term coined by painter Jean Dubuffet (who discovered Gabritschevsky's work) to describe art produced outside conventional circuits is one way to approach this vast and diverse ensemble of several thousand gouaches, drawings and watercolours on paper. Jointly curated by Antoine de Galbert and Noëlig Le Roux, *Eugen Gabritschevsky (1893-1979)* introduces visitors to this singular oeuvre from the very first drawings, produced between 1921 and 1929, shortly before Gabritschevsky was interned in 1931, to his last works of the 1970s.



Documents

The exhibition begins with a display of documents of biographical interest: scientific publications, letters from the archives at Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, and exhibition catalogues. Family photographs show the painter's mother, his sisters Elen and Irene, and his brothers Alexander, future art historian, and Georg, who would play a decisive role in bringing Eugen's work to public attention. The five siblings grew up in a well-to-do and cultured family. Until the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Gabritschevskys spent the summer months in

south-east Russia, on an estate owned by one of the grandfathers, where they enjoyed riding, swimming and hunting.

Youth

The Gabritschevsky children were educated by an army of private tutors, who taught them philosophy, foreign languages, piano, violin and classical dance. Eugen took lessons with the painter Aleksei Mikhailovich Korin, and from an early age produced drawings and paintings on paper in what his brother Georg described as an "expressionist" style. During the 1910s, Eugen showed an interest in the burgeoning Russian avant-garde, probably after seeing Ivan Morozov's renowned collection of European modern art. He also saw one of the "Knave of Diamonds" exhibitions in Moscow, which featured the work of Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, Kazimir Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky, all influenced by German expressionist art, alongside Cézanne, Gauguin and the French fauvists.

Art Brut

The term Art Brut first appeared in Jean Dubuffet's private correspondence, then in his theoretical essays as of 1945. It describes the work of self-taught artists who have no link with the art world, whether through study or the art market. Intended to contrast with the so-called "cultural" art shown in museums, Art Brut is the work of outsiders, individuals on the sidelines of society: prisoners, the mentally ill, or ordinary people such as postmen and coal-miners. Nothing could have seemed further removed from this Art Brut than the charcoal drawings that were Dubuffet's first contact with Gabritschevsky's art. They reveal a certain mastery of drawing techniques together with an educated mind. Dubuffet, who was looking for works that were "uncontaminated by artistic culture", passed up the opportunity to buy. Overlooked by collectors of Art Brut, these drawings were sourced in the United States during preparations for this exhibition, and for the most part have never been shown in public before.

Collectors

Jean Dubuffet heard about Eugen Gabritschevsky through Anton von Braunmülh, a psychiatric doctor at the hospital where Gabritschevsky had been interned. Informed of this by von Braunmülh, Eugen's brother Georg Gabritschevsky wrote to the French artist, sending him photos of Eugen's first drawings. Letters, shown here in the display cabinet, attest to the first acquisitions for Dubuffet's collection of Art Brut, now held in Lausanne. It was through Dubuffet that Alphonse Chave, who ran a gallery in Vence in the south of France, purchased

the vast majority of Eugen's oeuvre, an estimated five thousand works, from the family. He went on to sell over six hundred to the Parisian collector and dealer Daniel Cordier. In 1972 he sold a further five of Gabritschevsky's paintings to the Surrealist artist Max Ernst. Seventy-seven works, gifted by Cordier in 1989, are part of the holdings of the Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Georges Pompidou, and are on long loan to the Musée des Abattoirs in Toulouse. Pierre Chave and the Gabritschevsky family, who live in the United States, own numerous other works by Eugen Gabritschevsky, many of which feature here.

Internment

After spending time in the United States, Eugen Gabritschevsky returned to Europe in 1927. He worked at the Institut Pasteur in Paris, then two years later moved to Munich where he took up a position at the Academy of Science. His research was widely published and he was well-respected in his field. His health, however, was deteriorating. Following a brief trip to Edinburgh, in 1931 Eugen Gabritschevsky was institutionalised at the Eglfing-Haar psychiatric hospital in Munich and would remain there until his death in 1979. This is where, during these five decades, he produced the vast majority of his work.

Fantasies

Within the solitude of the hospital walls, the Russian artist invented what he referred to as his "fantasies". They are shown throughout the exhibition and are arranged thematically, for example the landscapes presented in the main gallery. From indeterminate horizons to imaginary forests, from throngs of people to towering buildings, Eugen Gabritschevsky imagined scenes from an outside world. Many are deserted; some are inhabited by peculiar creatures, part human, part animal. The two yellow rooms are hung with a series of nocturnal scenes that make overt reference to music, literature and the theatre. Stars, planets and ghostly figures appear alongside carnivals, fireworks and concerts; stage curtains and masks lend theatricality to Gabritschevsky's imagined scenes.

Techniques

The various techniques reveal and accentuate the hybridisation and mutation that are evident in numerous pieces. Gabritschevsky worked on whatever support he could find: tracing paper, X-ray films, pages from magazines or hospital memos, covering the surface with pencil, gouache and watercolour which he applied with his hands or brushes, using different methods. Blotches of colour and folds produce forms which take on human or insect-like qualities after the artist has

pencilled or painted on hands, eyes, tiny antennae and other details. Gabritschevsky also experimented with stamping, scratching with a paintbrush handle, dabbing with cloths, and splattering paint from a toothbrush to bring to life the images in his mind's eye. Like the symbolist artist Gustave Moreau, Gabritschevsky does not outline his forms, and uses transparency to complement certain of the drawn elements. His work later became less inventive, more monochromatic; certain commentators draw a parallel between this and the therapeutic drugs that were administered to Gabritschevsky in the early 1950s.

Creatures

Eugen Gabritschevsky discovered nature as a boy, during summer vacations, and later at close quarters under a microscope. Nature's influence can be seen as from the 1930s, in works populated by amoeba, underwater vegetation, clouds and embryonic creatures. Endless streams of tiny beings are one of the possible leitmotivs of his oeuvre. In the third gallery, line drawings from the late 1930s represent female forms, which Gabritschevsky has deliberately deformed. The indeterminate physical features of his subjects in works from the 1940s introduce a caricatural aspect that accentuates the grotesqueness of certain "portraits".

Bestiary

No doubt influenced by his father, Georg N. Gabritschevsky, a bacteriologist, Eugen turned to science at an early age. He joined the school of biology at Moscow University in 1913. His fascination for embryology and microscopic techniques led him to specialise in genetics applied to the laws of heredity. He was a brilliant student who in 1925 was awarded a grant to undertake post-doctoral research at Columbia University, New York. His interest in natural science prefigures the recurrent animal theme in his work, evidenced by a raft of fantasy creatures. Birds, insects, snakes and turtles mix with dragons, larvae and griffons from the artist's imagination, portrayed side-on in for the most part frontal drawings. Insects emerge from the blots produced by folding gouache-painted paper in half, similar to the symmetrical shapes in Rorschach tests. Others are rendered with almost scientific precision. They echo the observation drawings that were part of Eugen Gabritschevsky's scientific research, prior to his internment in 1931.

Nicolas Darrot

Règne Analogue

Like a shaman, Nicolas Darrot develops the means and understanding to intercede between different realms. He has multiple filiations, as a visual artist, an engineer, a Mr Fix-It, and a stage director. His lineage is that of the fabulists who use animals to define Man; he is of kinetic extraction for the attention he pays to movement in art; he has the scientific bent of a man who builds his own automata and mechanised sculptures. He studied painting yet his curiosity was piqued by new technologies, prompting him to learn the rudiments of electronics, adapt circuit diagrams gleaned online, and hang around film sets where he could pick the brains of SFX technicians, intent on constructing his own animated systems. Look closely, and you'll see traces of the entomologist, the puppet master, the mythologist and the robot-builder. La maison rouge is well-acquainted with Nicolas Darrot's multiple talents. In 2006 he took over the Foundation's patio with an installation of fifteen mechanical crows that burst into a cacophony of cawing whenever a ball-balloon rolled by. His work has been in the private collection of Antoine de Galbert for almost twenty years. Nicolas Darrot returns to La maison rouge this summer for an exhibition that is less retrospective and more exploratory; through it,

he relates a parallel history of the world that is governed by almost-human and non-human beings: the animals, machines and fabulous creatures with which we form emotional and social ties; an Analogue Realm where atoms bond differently to engender alternative life forms and reshape our approach to the natural sciences. The exhibition invites visitors to lean in, prick up their ears, and be alert to the chattering of hybrid creatures; to become immersed by the cosmogonic tales that delve as far as it is possible to go into the innermost nature of living beings; to laugh and tremble as their own humanity is pulled apart, and enter into a game of images, signs and emotions.

It opens with the *Dronecasts* series. Part toy, part weapon, these warrior-insects bring to mind Belgian artist Panamarenko's flying machines; they also refer back to experiments carried out to control the nervous system of butterflies and beetles. They make a good lead-in to that aspect of Nicolas Darrot's work that is the disconcerting passage between the wonder a living creature inspires and the temptation to take it apart and see what it's made of. *Alpha Leader*, the military chief who rules by tyranny, takes this logic to its most extreme point; a living being reduced to a prosthetic body. In the centre of the room, *Vega* is part of the animal-constellations series. A dog's head shot through with arrows is borne away to the banks not of the River Styx but of a faraway kingdom. A heavenly realm, perhaps, as Vega is also a star in the constellation Lyra. Heraclitus cites the tension in a bow and a lyre, two of Apollo's attributes, for their capacity to reconcile opposites, stating that it is the vibration of the string, whether tensed or plucked, which holds things together. This cosmic duality, which implies opposites are one in a superior harmony that is unique to divine or poetic creation, fits with the idea of impermanence: the frost that covers the animal's skull endlessly melts and reforms.

A peculiar ballet is playing out in the adjacent space, to the sound of a composition by Quentin Sirjacq. Two imposing, ghostly figures, made from parachute canvas, rustle and flutter above the ground. They exploit gravity to produce an impression of weightlessness. A third figure, in a camouflage of coloured threads, recalls the costumed dancers of Burkina Faso who preside at ritual ceremonies; this is *L'Intrus*, the intruder, the unwanted presence. *Ariel*, the name Darrot has given this group of figures, is also the name of Prospero's spirit helper in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and the title of a poem by Sylvia Plath, who merged poetic creation with mystical ecstasy. Darrot dedicates a second piece, *La Rosée Suicidaire* ("the suicidal dew") to

her: these two bronze feet, borne aloft by tiny beings, lift the veil on the mystery of levitation to instead leave us with another mystery, that of its invisible servants. On the wall, Darrot interprets Saint Eustache's vision of a stag with a crucifix between its antlers, which prompted his conversion to Christianity. Between floors, visitors are required to invert their senses: to smell a space, to hear a material. The haze that envelops *Misty Lamb* unexpectedly suggests the softness of a woolly fleece and the comfort of its warmth. Darrot succeeds in using a climate, an atmosphere, to intimate a sentiment while questioning how our senses function and the meaning of attraction, the dynamic force in relations between living beings. Like Lucretius in *De Natura Rerum*, he draws a parallel between gravitational force and the sentiment of love that lifts the individual out of himself. In *Misty Lamb*, we can see the Van Eyck brothers' altarpiece, the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*; is not religious devotion a form of unconditional love? The fountain of honey - or is that youth - illustrates the artist's fascination with pheromones whose action binds moving bodies, as in a swarm, and offers a glimpse of the invisible networks that connect individuals within a colony. From starfish to jellyfish, the artist recognises a living creature's disposition to develop its own strategies for existence, to find others like it, to join together, and to perpetuate itself no matter what form nature has given it. Throughout this time, *Or Logic Wall* flies back and forth to disperse the haze of moisture around *Misty Lamb*. The thermal blanket that constitutes the work sends out a precious and welcome glimmer of light, as if to connect heaven and earth. Discontinuity and convergence, over and over.

Erected, transgressed, invalidated… the notion of boundary particularly informs Nicolas Darrot's work: Man's need to distinguish himself from the state of nature yet always to return to it. Aristotle made the distinction between three souls, vegetative, animal and rational; a theory disputed centuries later by René Descartes, for whom the spiritual nature of Man fundamentally sets him apart from the animal's corporeal state. Descartes considers animals to be machines; the sociologist and philosopher Edgar Morin prefers to distinguish between "living machines" – stars, humans, animals – and man-made, artificial bodies. As for the Greek and Latin atomists, they conceived of the universe as being composed of physical matter which constantly interlocks and separates in an infinite void. Of course, Nicolas Darrot comes down on neither one side nor another, but he does put these demarcations to the test. The story of Amala and Kamala, the two wolf-children who were captured in Bengal, in 1906, by the Reverend Singh, leads him to embrace the idea that human

status is something that must be learned: whereas Amala never uttered a word, opening her mouth only for food, Kamala mastered the rudiments of language. These are fragile acquisitions, as Darrot shows in the pictograms, each representing a word, that flick on and off. *Dronecasts* showed us how Nicolas Darrot envisages the advent of cybernetics in its most coercive form; that which undermines the integrity of the living state in order to dominate and control. Mechanical eyes scrutinise the surrounding space, suggestive as much of breakthroughs in biometric identification as George Orwell's Big Brother or an animal on the alert. Sometimes, though, the machine can show a glimmer of humanness; not so much in its efforts to mimic living beings, but when it misfires. Like Jean Tinguely, Nicolas Darrot is more interested in observing what happens when things don't go to plan, the uninvited flops and fiascos. Nothing captures his attention more than the hitches and glitches that lend coldly calculating algorithms a touching vulnerability. The *Injonctions* series takes this direction: zoomorphic instructors giving life lessons to students – an artificial larynx, a metallic worm, a travel bag – who are clearly lacking motivation. The noisy gesticulations of the former are confronted with the apathy of the latter, doomed to failure by their very form. While the comic value of these sketches doesn't escape visitors, their descent into absurdity illustrates the violence behind our obsession with performance that alienates more than it liberates. Note that these tiny tyrants are themselves manipulated by strings. Nearby, *Fuzzy Logic*'s representatives reek of irony. They take a pot shot at rational thinking and open new paths to knowledge. Like the proponents of fuzzy logic, who could see the dead-end nature of binary thinking, they create intermediate terrains that leave room for uncertainty, multiple inscriptions and nuance. A shaman enters a state of trance, a rider stripped to his bare bones bursts into song, a parrot finally penetrates the logic that put it behind bars, after removing then reconnecting to its brain. The artist reaches into animism, madness, even incoherency and emerges with the invisible link between things, shaking up the very principle of plausibility. Adam himself questions his ability to make the right distinctions: "Hey kid, what kind of animal are you? I can’t guess."

In the last part of the exhibition, Nicolas Darrot considers living matter on vastly different scales. He thinks small, very small, with *Curiosae*, scenes acted out by performing insects in the manner of a nineteenth-century flea circus, or *Grande Ourse* which contains a funeral or possibly a cannibalistic rite. He thinks big, very big, with *Faune*, a poetic installation that considers the limits of our cognitive capacity. When NASA takes a photo with 1.5 billion pixels, it's hailed as a

wonder of technology, but is this fabulous image anything but a chimera, a terrifying freefall? By projecting this image pixel by pixel by means of an intermittent light signal, Nicolas Darrot attempts to reproduce the immensity and distance of the galaxy. And yet we are seeing just one fragment of the cosmos. The brain's failure to grasp such colossal dimensions requires a detached, poetic response, and so the faun, in its hybrid state, reminds us there is no stopping the representations of the mind. *Petite Ourse*, meanwhile, tells of the in-between state that is inherent to all production: the bronze is connected to a refrigeration system which transforms the surrounding humidity into frosty fur, like breath on a window pane. More bronzes explore alternative ways of living and understanding – *Tropiques* puts Aristotle's geocentric model inside a voodoo ritual; *Albedo* measures the reflective power of a surface and applies it to astronomy or climatology – while *Les Parfums* performs an incessant circular motion, tracing the shadows of molecules that appear then vanish in its wake: round and round, like the march of life. To enter the world of Nicolas Darrot is to allow oneself to be led through a succession of poetic states which reflect the ambivalent nature of the world, down to its most disturbing realities. It is to take a step back to observe hidden concordances and fertile associations of meaning. It is to accept that analogy – a cognitive process which André Breton held in great esteem – can cast a different light on the everyday. Making the world a more poetic place is no easy task: it takes stringency, a dash of imagination, a dose of clairvoyance to sublimate beings and things, and even more so to endow them with movement and speech. On leaving the exhibition, we may feel torn between confusion and delight, but is it not true to say that by the power of mechanised repetition, Kafkaesque metamorphoses and dizzying images, Nicolas Darrot's sensitive rhetoric has won us over?

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Nicolas Darrot is represented by Galerie Eva Hober, Paris.

Boris Chouvellon

Modern Express

It’s not really work / It’s just the power to charm /

I’m still standing in the wind / But I never wave bye bye /

But I try, I try.

David Bowie – *Modern Love* (1983)

Once a year, les amis de la maison rouge produces a work specifically for the foundation's patio. Boris Chouvellon has always been captivated by what goes on behind the scenes, or what he calls "the no man's land aesthetic". He sets out in search of its motifs, materials and objects by exploring the fringes of urban space and *third landscapes* (in the sense of Third Estate, not third world). An area which expresses neither power nor submission to power[1]. The artist scrutinises and analyses what goes on behind the window-dressing; what lives (survives) beneath the sheen of society. He extracts elements and articulates forms and materials from these third landscapes, using ordinary objects and references to brutalist, modern architecture. Thus we come face to face with an ersatz upturned swimming pool, the bare bones of a fairground ride, busted slides, platforms no-one

[1] Gilles Clément, *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage*. Paris: Sens & Tonka, 2014, p. 13

can climb on, empty strollers, and boats too heavy to float. The works, the future ruins of this society of the spectacle, raise issues of disillusion, survival and total disenchantment. For the patio at La maison rouge, Boris Chouvellon has installed a mobile, *Modern Express*, on a giant scale. Artists from Alexander Calder to Xavier Veilhan, from Joana Vasconcelos to Bruce Nauman have given the mobile different formal, conceptual and critical expressions, as both subject and motif. Hung above a child's bed, it is the door to dreams while its hypnotic, circular motion lulls them to sleep. It both stimulates and soothes. *Modern Express* explores a dichotomous world which includes the mobile and its implications, but also its physicality. Built from metal chains and concrete, it stands over eight metres high. The backbone of the mobile is the beam, from which several chains are hung. Attached to these chains are the shovels from mechanical diggers which Boris Chouvellon sources from a second-hand dealer, selecting them for their shape and size. Their rusty metal bears the marks of a life spent digging and carrying earth. A laborious existence which the artist exacerbates by partly melting, crushing, piercing, striking and otherwise mistreating them. These shovels sway in the air, above a reconstructed landscape of marble chips on which other, new ones are arranged. They are smaller in size and made from different materials: glass, bronze, gold leaf and concrete. The shiny white gravel contrasts with the melancholy that radiates from the concrete and **rusty metal**. Carrying on his research into the aesthetic of ruin and abandon, Chouvellon has developed a landscape of reverse relations, between the precious and the non-precious, body and machine, presence and absence, work and rest, candour and clairvoyance[2]. Boris Chouvellon's work takes a lucid and disenchanted view of contemporary society. Mindful of a society cast-off by the political classes, and of the ravages inflicted on our everyday lives by the neoliberal system, he grasps hold of the things he sees or finds to forge a way out. His works are anti-spectacular and heavy with **disillusion**; they appeal to a collective conscience in order to defuse a shared sense of **alienation** and **helplessness**. The choice of motifs, the contrasting scales and the use of industrial materials are all part of a strategy that is driven by the poetic force of an objective and indignant mind.

Boris Chouvellon is represented by Galerie Virginie Louvet, Paris.

[2] *Modern Express* refers to the Panama-registered cargo ship that ran aground in the Bay of Biscay in January 2016. An impressive operation was mounted to rescue the ship, which was transporting 3,600 tonnes of wood between Gabon and Le Havre.

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