



View of the exhibition

art brut
abcd / bruno decharme collection

curators: Bruno Decharme and Antoine de Galbert

For over ten years, each autumn La maison rouge has shown a private collection, thereby revealing to its visitors different worlds of art enthusiasts.

The twelfth exhibition in this series highlights Bruno Decharme's collection of art brut. For more than three decades, this French filmmaker has assembled one of the finest collections of art brut in the world, comprising more than 3,500 works by "established" artists such as Aloïse Corbaz, Adolf Wölfli, Scottie Wilson and Madge Gill, as well as more recent works originating from all four corners of the globe.

In 1999 he set up abcd (art brut connaissance et diffusion), a non-profit organisation based in Montreuil, on the eastern edge of Paris, as a mean to share his collection with the public and promote a wider reflection on art brut. For Decharme, this exhibition at La maison rouge is an extension of this wish to bring art brut to public attention. For La maison rouge, which shows mainly contemporary art, it also has a particular significance as the venue's founder, Antoine de Galbert, has always promoted a breaking down of boundaries by mixing artworks irrespective of the misleading and reductive notion of category. Visitors to La maison rouge have thus had several opportunities in the past to enjoy outstanding examples of art brut : *Arnulf Rainer and his collection of art brut* in 2005, Henry Darger in 2006, Augustin Lesage (shown alongside Elmar Trenkwalder) in 2008, and Louis Soutter in 2012.

The present exhibition is first and foremost the presentation of a private collection, and as such reflects the personal history, preferences, interests and encounters of a collector, and his vision of art. For this reason, Bruno Decharme himself, with Antoine de Galbert, has defined the theme for each group of works and their order. He also wrote the texts that guide the visitor through each of the twelve sections in what is intended as a poetic journey, from "original chaos" to certain artists' intent to "save the world".

Glossary

As a complement to the labels, this guide provides a glossary of terms intended to shed light on the concept of art brut, its history, and the questions it raises. Artists' biographies can be consulted on the terminals at various points in the exhibition, or on your smartphone (www.mrparis.org/biographies).

Terms followed by an asterisk* are referred to in this glossary.

abcd

abcd (art brut connaissance & diffusion), a registered not-for-profit association, was set up to "make art brut in all its forms known to a broad public both in France and abroad, by organizing events and exhibitions relating to its main subject, by publishing by way of books and other media, and by producing films." *abcd* was founded in 1999 at the initiative of Bruno Decharme, as part of an overall project whereby this filmmaker and collector is opening up his collection of art brut to the public. A research group has gradually taken shape around him, bringing the diverse perspectives of writers, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, art historians, philosophers and committed art lovers. Their discussions and ideas generate publications, exhibitions, investigations and films. Bruno Decharme himself has made numerous film portraits of artists, some of them brought together in the feature-length *Rouge Ciel, un essai sur l'art brut*, produced in 2009, which also features men and women involved in various ways in the world of art brut. Since 2011, *abcd* has enriched its activities through a partnership with the Collège International de Philosophie, where it has created a seminar led by Barbara Safarova, running for a period of six years. By drawing on explorers and researchers from all kinds of backgrounds and disciplines, *abcd* is working to broaden its approach to art brut. It also plays an international role, through its Prague-based annexe—*abcd Prague*, founded 2003—and through the exhibitions it organises abroad. In 2004 *abcd* opened a space and exhibition venue in Montreuil, with a programme exploring art brut themes but also hosting curators working in other creative fields.

Anonymity

Many works of art brut, older ones in particular, are anonymous as, at the time of production, neither their authors nor those around them (whether their social, family or medical circle) considered this output from an artistic perspective. For this reason, none of these works bear the creator's name or signature, a key element of identification for "professional" art and its value system. The anonymous nature of these works also reflects the means by which they have reached us. The link between author and work has often been irretrievably lost, as works were discovered by chance, saved from destruction and conserved thanks to the unhoped-for interest and curiosity of certain individuals. Some works can nonetheless be attributed to a single, albeit anonymous author thanks to

recognisable stylistic traits (materials, techniques, iconography). The "Barbus Müller" sculptures are one example.

Art institutions (art brut in)

Relatively little-known at mid-century, art brut emerged from clandestinity from the 1960s, probably influenced by the spirit of social protest sweeping through Europe at the time. In 1967, Jean Dubuffet held a major art brut exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. A decade later, in 1978, another show, titled *Les Singuliers de l'art*, took place at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris at the initiative of Alain Bourbonnais and Michel Ragon. Curated by Suzanne Pagé, the *Singuliers* show included many works related to art brut as well as installations and projects for garden designs by *habitants paysagistes* (individuals who use landscapes and gardens as artistic expression).

An architect and sculptor, Alain Bourbonnais paid a visit to Jean Dubuffet in the early 1970s and decided to open the Atelier Jacob gallery in Paris that would specialise in "art hors-les-normes", a form of "non-compliant art". In 1983 the collections were moved to Dicy, where they were opened to the public as the Musée de la Fabuloserie.

In response to the transfer of Jean Dubuffet's* collection to Lausanne in 1972, Madeleine Lommel, Claire Teller and Michel Nedjar decided to establish an art brut collection in France. From 1984 to 1996, works collected by L'Aracine, a non-profit organisation, went on display at Château Guérin in Neuilly-sur-Marne. In 1999, a large donation of 3,500 works was made to the Musée d'Art Moderne Lille Métropole, not without raising many questions as to whether this type of art belongs in a cultural institution.

There are now many venues dedicated to the public display of art brut or related works, such as abcd in Montreuil, La Halle Saint-Pierre in Paris, and art) & (marges musée in Brussels.

Collectors

At the turn of the twentieth century, a handful of mental health professionals began to show an interest in their patients' drawings and writings. Psychiatrists seeking new ways to understand mental illness through artistic production guided their research in this direction, and showed themselves to be enlightened collectors at the same time : Auguste Marie and Benjamin Pailhas in France, Walter Morgenthaler in Switzerland, Hans Prinzhorn in Germany, Osório Cesar and Nise da Silveira in Brazil, Honorio Delgado in Peru, Pavel Ivanovitch Karpov in Russia. In 1945, Jean Dubuffet visited institutions in Switzerland and France in search of an "immediate art, art without practice." Some of what he found would later join the Collection de l'Art Brut which he had begun to assemble. The closing decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of several major private collections of art brut – the collection of Bruno Decharme is one; others are the collections of Philippe Eternod and Jean-David Mermoud, Sam Farber, James Brett, Gérard Damman, and Charlotte Zander, to name but some. Certain of these collections also feature naïve art and other forms of Outsider Art.

Contemporary art / art brut

This is an era of breaking down walls: whereas historically art brut came into being in the 1940s, through opposition to a so-called "cultural" art (Jean Dubuffet*), a number of

exhibitions have attempted to confront art brut with works that are integrated within the world of contemporary art. In 1972, curator Harald Szeemann's selection for Documenta 5 in Kassel included a large number of works by Adolf Wölfli. More recently, *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico*, the name given to the 55th Venice Biennale (2013), curated by Massimiliano Gioni, showed art brut and contemporary art side by side, providing proof of the multiple intentions at work today. Curators' as yet timid interest in art brut echoes artists' more longstanding interest. First Breton and the surrealists, and later Jean Tinguely, Annette Messager, Christian Boltanski, Cindy Sherman, Elmar Trenkwalder and Arnulf Rainer, among others, have been enthusiastic proponents of art brut, and acknowledged its influence on their work.

Two earlier exhibitions at La maison rouge initiated similar juxtapositions. In 2005, works by Arnulf Rainer were shown alongside others from his collection of art brut; in 2008 paintings by Augustin Lesage and ceramics by Elmar Trenkwalder were presented together.

Cultural art / art brut

The term "art brut" first appeared in 1945 in a letter which Jean Dubuffet* addressed to the Swiss painter René Auberjonois. Until his death in 1985, Dubuffet continued to elaborate on this notion of Art Brut, in his writings and by assembling a collection that is now conserved in Lausanne. He was behind one of the first and most important exhibitions of art brut, held in 1949 at Galerie René Drouin and titled *L'art brut préféré aux arts culturels*. The preface to its catalogue, written by Dubuffet, has become one of the most famous essays on art brut. In it, the painter develops ideas which oppose the intellectual, creator of a stagnant art, and the "imbecile"; purported intelligence and "vision"; denigrates one in favour of the other. In these few pages, Dubuffet pursues his own subversive intent, begun several years earlier through his own works. Yet contradictions rise to the surface: the dream of an acultural art brut is a utopian one; any art, brut or otherwise, is by definition cultural. Dubuffet, aware of this aporia, increasingly viewed art brut as a "hub of ideas" which the works in question should more or less converge towards.

Defining art brut

Can we characterise art brut? "Asphyxiation of meaning" Jean Dubuffet* might have retorted. To define art brut without considerably narrowing its scope is indeed difficult, if not impossible. Through its very conception as a critical tool, art brut provides the foundation for a theory of art that was, for Dubuffet, an object of constant reflection starting in the 1940s.

In addition to producing texts, such as prefaces to catalogues and letters, that gradually shed light on his own intellectual positioning, the artist fine-tuned his conception of art brut through works acquired on trips within Europe to research this art. They now form the core of La Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne (see "Art institutions"). They are all creations by individuals, generally self-taught, from outside conventional artistic circuits, "in which mimesis [...] plays little or no part" (Dubuffet, 1949).

The artist focused on three categories: "art of the insane", spiritualist art* and various forms of popular art by self-taught* artists. A number of adjustments were required in order to arrive at this characterisation. Artists such as Louis Soutter and Gaston Chaissac had to be withdrawn from La Collection de l'Art Brut on the grounds that they were too close to cultural circles.

New terms such as Outsider Art, and its French counterparts art hors-les-normes and art singulier, were found for the often heterogeneous works that did not strictly speaking "belong" in La Collection de l'Art Brut, but were produced on the margins of conventional art channels.

Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) and art brut

Jean Dubuffet was born in 1901 in Le Havre to a family of wine merchants. In 1918, after passing his baccalaureate, he made his way to the capital to devote himself to painting. Between 1918 and 1923, he frequented some of the most important artists of the period, among them Suzanne Valadon, Max Jacob and Fernand Léger, as well as André Masson's studio.

From 1924 to the early 1930s, he completely stopped painting, travelled to Argentina and Holland, and started a wholesale wine business in the Bercy district of Paris.

Dubuffet resumed his painting in 1942 and continued for the rest of his life. In 1943 he met Jean Paulhan, editor of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. With Paulhan and Le Corbusier, he undertook his first trips to Switzerland in search of what he would later call art brut. In 1947 he opened an exhibition space known as Le Foyer de l'Art Brut in the basement of Galerie René Drouin in Paris. In the autumn of 1948, it was moved to a house loaned by publisher Gaston Gallimard; this was the beginning of La Compagnie de l'Art Brut. The latter broke up in 1951 and its collections dispatched to the home of the painter Alfonso Ossorio in the United States.

Early in the 1960s, Dubuffet decided to bring his collections back to France and purchased a building on rue de Sèvres in Paris, now the offices of the Fondation Dubuffet. This marked the revival of La Compagnie de l'Art Brut, which became a study centre open to visitors by appointment. Dubuffet envisaged making a donation of his art brut collection; meeting with reluctance on the part of French institutions, he gave his entire collection to the City of Lausanne in 1972. La Collection de l'Art Brut opened four years later at the Château de Beaulieu. Michel Thévoz was the first curator, serving until 2001.

Ethics

Often, the individuals who produce art brut are not intentionally creating art, and are possibly unaware that they are doing so. Their aim is not to make a career in "the art world." Yet one corollary of the recent burst of interest in art brut has been the development of an increasingly flourishing market with its attendant galleries, art fairs and auctions. However, unlike "professional" artists, the creators of art brut pieces don't sell their work to make a living. While they might appreciate interest in their creations, they are not necessarily seeking recognition from "legitimising entities" such as curators, critics, art historians or the market.

This results in a paradoxical situation with, on the one hand, creators producing works without caring what they might be worth and, on the other, a market that attributes commercial value to these pieces. All of the intermediaries involved (families, guardians, studio directors and gallery owners) have an important moral obligation to see that the creators' best interests are served, that their works are exhibited and circulated in a manner respectful to them, and that they benefit, in one way or another, from the profits generated by the sale of their works.



View of the exhibition (Hans-Jörg Georgi)

Films

Midway through the exhibition, there is a projection room where visitors can watch films by Bruno Decharme about several of the artists represented. Decharme considers film-making as the other important facet of his interest in art brut, and one that is equally as important as collecting. He has made a number of documentaries on the subject. *Rouge Ciel*, from which these filmed portraits are taken, is the first full-length film about art brut.

Hans-Jörg Georgi

An entire room is given over to the work of Hans-Jörg Georgi, a German artist who has been drawing and making model airplanes for decades. Limited in his mobility, having contracted polio in his childhood, Georgi immediately chose a material - recycled cardboard boxes - that is easy to handle and readily available. He builds scale models of airplanes from small pieces of cardboard that he cuts and assembles with glue. He had already made several thousand before joining the Atelier Goldstein* group of artists in 2001. Georgi's early creations were copies of actual planes. In the past few years, however, his imagination has given rise to floating cities, conceived to carry humans into space when our planet is no longer inhabitable. Six aircraft from this fleet are from Bruno Decharme's collection. The others have been loaned by the artist and Atelier Goldstein.

Materials

An art brut work is an accurate reflection of the environment in which it was produced: the materials are generally taken from the creator's immediate surroundings. Usually, the

artist recovers materials and tinkers with them using techniques of his or her own invention.

One of the most striking aspects of art brut is its anthropological dimension. Often, the materiality of these works cannot be dissociated from the life story of their authors. Self-taught*, they feel free to use any sort of material in their art, which explains its formal inventiveness and extreme freedom.

Some of the glued, painted or drawn elements (Giovanni Galli, Pietro Ghizzardi, Aloïse) show that these artists are permeable to other forms of contemporary production, including picture magazines, advertisements and images of the fashion world. This begs the question whether these are truly "anti-cultural" works as Dubuffet wanted them to be (see cultural art / art brut).

Mediums and spirits

The practitioners of spiritualist art belonged to a current that began in 1848 and reached its apogee in the early decades of the twentieth century in Europe and the United States. The first examples of this broad popular movement, embraced by entire generations of artists, were etchings by Victor Hugo, titled *Albums spirites*. These artists - the best-known being Victorien Sardou, Hélène Smith, Augustin Lesage, Fleury-Joseph Crépin, Jeanne Tripier and Madge Gill - created at the behest of otherworldly voices, allowing their hand to be guided by a force that was, they felt, out of their control. Consequently, spiritualist art is sometimes signed with the name of the spirit, as the person executing the work views him or herself merely as a "messenger."

Photographie brute

Is "photographie brute" a contradiction in terms? In the writings of Jean Dubuffet, art brut is characterised by inventive iconography and the implementation of materials* using original techniques. How, then, can one conceive of a work of art brut whose production would not only be delegated to a mechanism, albeit a photographic one, but would also involve, in part, the recording of the image of an object or person? This would come in contradiction to the anti-mimetic nature of the art brut works which Dubuffet collected.

Even so, in the past few years several artists who use photographic processes have been admitted to the ranks of art brut creators. Highly idiosyncratic, these works are characterised by an obsessive repetition of the same theme: urban panoramas (Albert Moser), self-portraits in the guise of a hunter (Alexandre Lobanov), Marie in various poses (Eugene von Bruenchenhein), or women's bodies caught at unexpected moments (Miroslav Tichý).

Secrète army

Artist-in-residence in 2011 at La "S" Grand Atelier*, Moolinex considered the building's previous life as a military barracks, deep within the Ardennes forest in Belgium. During the Second World War, the region was the theatre of resistance, including by the mysterious "Secret Army" to which a monument was erected. Moolinex and other artists, both with and without disabilities, undertook to reinvent the military logbooks, regimental flags, weapons, ceremonial uniforms, official portraits and legendary derring-do of this imaginary Secret Army. Their work is presented in the restaurant at La maison rouge.

Self-taught

With a few rare exceptions, the creators featured in this exhibition are self-taught. This means they had no formal artistic training and "draw everything (subjects, choice of materials employed, means of transposition, rhythms, ways of writing, etc.) from their own depths and not from clichés of classical art or art that is fashionable." (Dubuffet, 1949). This is, then, a very personal, original, inventive art. Which does not make them dabbling amateurs. They immerse themselves entirely in their creations, devoting a great deal of time and energy to their work.

From an historical perspective, notions of self-taught and spontaneity have often been used concomitantly to refer to works whose characteristics cannot be grasped by critical discourse. By promoting the artist to demiurge, the numerous interpretations which have sprung up around art brut over the past fifty-plus years have, in many instances, revived fantastical projections and accompanied certain primitivist views which seek to present art brut works as the potential witness to an original art, just as Oceanic art, African art and children's drawings once were.

Studios

Whereas most "classic" art brut was created within the walls of psychiatric hospitals, the past two decades have witnessed the emergence of a new type of studio. They exist independently of care institutes and are as far removed from "art therapy" as it is possible to be. They have no occupational therapy purpose. On the contrary, they define themselves as autonomous creative zones where art supplies are made available to selected creators, assisted by professional artists. Their role is also to rethink social bonds and imagine a suitable daily environment for self-taught* artists, many of whom are mentally handicapped. The Haus der Künstler at Gugging in Austria, set up by the psychiatrist Leo Navratil in 1981, was among the first. Others have followed, each demanding creative freedom for disabled artists: Atelier Goldstein in Germany (Julius Bockelt, Hans-Jörg Georgi), La "S" Grand Atelier in Belgium (Eric Derkenne, Joseph Lambert), and La Tinaia in Italy (Giovanni Galli, Marco Raugei). Programmes to exhibit works produced in these studios, through dedicated galleries, have also been put in place, notably at the Creative Growth Art Center in California where proceeds from the sale of works are redistributed to the entire studio. Consequently, more and more of these artists are featured in exhibitions and collections of art brut.



View of the exhibition

La Chambre des Fantômes Isabelle Roy

La Chambre des Fantômes is the second leg of *La Chambre*, an ambitious, four-part project led by Isabelle Roy. The first "chamber", *La Matrice*, was presented at the Singer-Polignac Museum, in the grounds of Sainte-Anne hospital in Paris, in January 2013 and will be shown again, at the same location, in February 2015. The third and fourth chambers will be *La Chambre des Rêves* and *La Chambre de l'Intime*.

Swiss artist Isabelle Roy was awarded a one-year residency grant in 2000 from the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, where she now lives. Her work combines video with installation. Isabelle Roy gives form to an intimate world with exceptionally striking visual and formal qualities. It appears to the spectator as a vision, a dream, a passageway to an extraordinary otherworld of which the artist is the principal protagonist. She has spent the past several years working exclusively on these *Chambres*, a mammoth project which calls on multimedia, sculpture and performance, together with craft-based techniques such as taxidermy, sewing and marquetry.

The spectator enters an immaculate, mirror-encrusted world: not physically but through peepholes in this "box of secrets". We are unwitting voyeurs, forced to step closer and press our eye against one of the ten decorated openings. Each offers a different

viewpoint, allowing us to discover from a new perspective what goes on inside this mysterious room.

When viewing *La Chambre des Fantômes*, one cannot help but think of the similar device used by Marcel Duchamp in his last ever installation *Etant donnés...* (1946-1966), which is seen through two holes in a door. Peering through the peepholes of Isabelle Roy's installation reveals a woman, her back turned, seated in a baptismal font, an image suggestive of Man Ray's photograph *Le Violon d'Ingres* (1924). The female figure is made from plaster casts of Isabelle Roy's bust and head; moving images are projected onto the back and hair. For the eight minutes of this video, this pristine cocoon with its infinite details no longer envelops but unnerves. It is no longer sensual but menacing.

"*La Chambre des Fantômes* gives form to the mystery of desire, its fragility, its death, and the quest for its perpetual rebirth. The skin serves to express mounting sensations which ultimately break through the integrity of the material body, thus revealing its attempts to disintegrate and become one with the immensity of the universe. The fantasy in question conveys this profound desire for an elsewhere, dictated by the body." Isabelle Roy

Centre Hospitalier de Sainte-Anne and Centre d'Etude de l'Expression support this long-term project by providing space for its implementation. The Canton of Jura in Switzerland is the main financial sponsor of *La Chambre*. Production of the project is managed by two non-profit organisations: "La Fabrique des Univers" in France and "Ici et Là" in Switzerland.