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MEDUSA Jewellery and Taboos

19 May - 5 November 2017

Press preview: 18 May 2017, 11 am – 2 pm

Preview: 18 May 2017, 6 pm – 10 pm

The Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris presents MEDUSA, an exhibition taking a contemporary and unprecedented look at jewellery, unveiling a number of taboos.

Just like the face of Medusa in Greek mythology, a piece of jewellery attracts and troubles the person who designs it, looks at it or wears it. While it is one of the most ancient and universal forms of human expression, jewellery has an ambiguous status, mid-way between fashion and sculpture, and is rarely considered to be a work of art. Indeed, it is often perceived as too close to the body, too **feminine**, **precious**, **ornamental** or **primitive**.

But it is thanks to avant-garde artists and contemporary designers that it has been reinvented, transformed and detached from its own traditions.

In the wake of the museum's series of joint and cross-disciplinary exhibitions, such as "L'Hiver de l'Amour", "Playback" and "Decorum", MEDUSA questions the traditional art boundaries by reconsidering, with the complicity of artists, the questions of craftsmanship, decoration, fashion and pop culture.

The exhibition brings together over 400 pieces of jewellery: created by **artists** (Anni Albers, Man Ray, Meret Oppenheim, Alexander Calder, Louise Bourgeois, Lucio Fontana, Niki de Saint Phalle, Fabrice Gygi, Thomas Hirschhorn, Danny McDonald, Sylvie Auvray...), avant-garde jewellery makers and **designers** (René Lalique, Suzanne Belperron, Line Vautrin, Art Smith, Tony Duquette, Bless, Nervous System...), **contemporary jewellery makers** (Gijs Bakker, Otto Künzli, Karl Fritsch, Dorothea Prühl, Seulgi Kwon, Sophie Hanagarth...) and also **high end jewelers** (Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels, Victoire de Castellane, Buccellati...), as well as **anonymous, more ancient or non-Western** pieces (including prehistorical and medieval works, punk and rappers' jewellery as well as costume jewellery etc.).

These pieces, well-known, little-known, unique, familiar, handmade, massproduced, or computer made, mix some refined, hand-wrought, amateur and even futuristic aesthetics which are rarely associated together. They sometimes go far beyond simple jewellery and explore other means of engaging with, and putting on, jewellery.

The exhibition is organized around four themes with a specific display for each: **Identity, Value, Body and Instruments**. Each section starts from the often negative preconceptions surrounding jewellery in order to better deconstruct them, and finally reveal jewellery's underlying **subversive and performative potential**.

Fifteen works and installations **by contemporary artists** (Mike Kelley, Leonor Antunes, Jean-Marie Appriou, Atelier E.B., Liz Craft...) dot the exhibition, echoing the themes of its various sections. The works presented question related issues of decoration and ornament, and anchor our connection to jewellery within a broadened relationship to the body and the world.

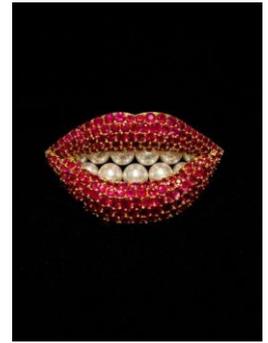
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Salvador Dalí reproduction by Henryk Kaston
Ruby Lips, 1970-80
Miami, Private Collection
Photo : Robin Hill

Director:

Fabrice Hergott

Curator:

Anne Dressen

In collaboration with Michèle Heuzé and Benjamin Lignel, scientific advisors

Practical information

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Tickets

Full-price: € 10
Concessions: € 7

Cultural offering

Information and reservations
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#expoMedusa



List of the artists and designers exhibited

Anonyme(s)	Friedrich Becker	Claus Bury
Claudio Abate	Suzanne Belperron	Pol Bury
Mathieu K. Abonnenc	Bernadette Corporation	Isabelle Busnel
Anni Albers & Alexander Reed	David Bielander	Liesbet Bussche
Marie Angeletti	Martin-Guillaume Biennais	Alexander Calder
Anjuna	Manfred Bischoff	Faust Cardinali
Marianne Anselin	Alexander Blank	Maison Cartier
Leonor Antunes	Joseph-Étienne Blerzy	Victoire de Castellane
Apple & Hermès	BLESS (Ines Kaag & Desiree Heiss)	César
Jean-Marie Appriou	Boucheron	CHANEL
John Armleder	Louise Bourgeois	CHANEL Joaillerie
Atelier E.B.	Bourne & Sheperd	Peter Chang
Tauba Auerbach	Brune Boyer	Lin Cheung
Sylvie Auvray	Frédéric Braham	Giorgio de Chirico
Solange Azagury-Partridge	Zoe Brand	Chopard
Giampaolo Babetto	Helen Britton	Tina Chow
Gijs Bakker	Caroline Broadhead	Cilice.co.uk
Baldwin Grand	Monika Brugger	William Clark
Bernard Baschet	Bucellati	Jean Cocteau
Peter Bauhuis	Christophe Burger	Maison Attilio Codognato
		Pietro Consagra

Giovanni Corvaja	Jimmie Durham	G. Gouverneur
Costanza	Atelier de F. Egermann	Phil Green
Lydia Courteille	Dominic Elvin	Carole Guinard
Morgan Courtois	Ferdinand Erhart	Fabrice Gygi
Liz Craft	Max Ernst by François Hugo	Sophie Hanagarth
Culture Chasse	Claire Falkenstein	Pierre Hardy for Hermès Bijouterie
Johanna Dahm	Simone Fattal	Keith Haring
Salvador Dalí by Henryk Kaston	FAUX/real	Hanna Hedman
Jay DeFeo	Naomi Filmer	Sheila Hicks
Marion Delarue	Finerolls	Thomas Hirschhorn
Sonia Delaunay	Leonor Fini	Histoire d'Or
Brice Dellsperger	Sharon Fitness	Evelyn Hofer
Carole Deltenre	Maison Flamand	Peter Hoogeboom
Françoise van den Bosch	Lucio Fontana	Juliana Huxtable
Jacomjin van der Donk	Maison Fontana	I&PLUS
Paul Derrez	Warwick Freeman	ID-VIE
Jean Despres	Karl Fritsch	Georg Jensen by Nanna Ditzel
Ligia Dias	François-Désiré Froment- Meurice & James Pradier & Jules Wièse	Jacques Joly
David Douard	Henri Gargat	Gilles Jonemann
David Dubois	David Gayral	Jacqueline de Jong
Henri Dubret	General Idea	Michel Journiac
Adrien Mathurin Dumelle & Samson Le Roy & Dailly	Alberto Giacometti par François Hugo	Isaac Julien
Hubert Duprat	Kiko Gianocca	Jenna Kaes
Tony Duquette	Piero Gilardi	Lauren Kalman

Alexandre Keller	Suska Mackert	Catherine Noll
Mike Kelley	Madestones by Diamaz International	Ted Noten
Jeff Koons & Stella McCartney	Tobias Madison	Meret Oppenheim
Jannis Kounellis	Serge Manzon	Nam June Paik
Manon van Kouswijk	Maison Marchak	Jean Painlevé
Sam Kramer	Maison Margiela	Christodoulos Panayiotou
Otto Künzli	Christophe Marguier	Seth Papac
Seulgi Kwon	Bruno Martinazzi	Noon Passama
Emmanuel Lacoste	Nick Mauss	Margaret De Patta
Boutique Lafargue	Danny McDonald	Bruno Pélassy
Auli Laitinen	Aude Medori	Mai-Thu Perret
Claude Lalanne	Bjarne Melgaard & Bjørg	Gaetano Pesce
René Lalique	Nanna Melland	Galatée Pestre
Michele Lamy	Mellerio dits Meller	Ruudt Peters
Agnes Larsson	Mended Veil	Pablo Picasso
Stanley Lechtzin	Bruce Metcalf	Annelies Planteijdt
Emmy van Leersum	Jhana Millers	Dorothea Prühl
Florence Lehmann	Monster Cable Products Inc.	Purityringsonline.com
Patricia Lemaire	GianCarlo Montebello	Paco Rabanne
Benjamin Lignel	Gustave Moreau	Wendy Ramshaw
Perle Lo Casale	Gert Mosettig	Sari Räthel
Look-O-Look	Ugo Mulas	Man Ray
Paul Louis	Nervous System	Carissa Rodriguez
Louis Vuitton Malletier	Louise Nevelson	Clément Rodzielski
Ingrid Luche	Manfred Nisslmüller	Henri Rondel

Ugo Rondinone	Suzanne Syz	Laurence Verdier
Dieter Roth	Alina Szapocznikow	Fulco di Verdura
Gerd Rothmann	Dorothea Tanning par François Hugo	Jean-Luc Verna
Kris Ruhs	Raymond Templier by Jean Trotain	Betony Vernon
Agathe Saint Girons		Versace Fine Jewellery
Niki de Saint Phalle	The Kase	Tone Vigeland
Gérard Sandoz	T H E U N S E E N	Visual Aids Artists' Caucus & Franck Moore
Maison Schiaparelli	Sam Tho Duong	Lisa Walker
Marjorie Schick	Lauren Tickle	David Watkins
Bernhard Schobinger	Elie Top	Vivienne Westwood
Service des matériels de la Garde républicaine	Torun	Björn Weckström
Verena Sieber-Fuchs	Maison Tournaire	Hannes Wettstein
Peter Skubic	Toye, Kenning & Spencer	Bill Whitten
Art Smith	Maud Traon	Haegue Yang
SOS Racisme	Michael Travis	Amy Yao
Jesús-Rafael Soto	Elsa Triolet	Yazbuckey
Gisbert Stach	Elene Usdin	Annamaria Zanella
Josef Strau	Van Cleef & Arpels	Christoph Zellweger
Sturtevant	Sophia Vari	Noa Zilberman
Swarovski	Line Vautrin	Heimo Zobernig
Janna Syvänoja	Jean Vendome	Lukas Zpira
	Bernar Venet	

Exhibition layout

Like the face of Medusa in Greek mythology, jewellery attracts and disturbs those who design, wear or gaze upon it. Despite being one of the oldest and most universal forms of artistic expression, at the intersections of ornament and sculpture, its connotations as too feminine, too precious, too ornamental or too primitive often impede its recognition as an art form.

'Medusa' is designed to capture the taboos surrounding jewellery through four underlying themes: identity, value, the body and ritual. Each section takes as its point of departure the—often negative—preconceptions that hover around jewellery, to better deconstruct them and reveal in the end its underlying subversive and performative power.

The exhibition pays homage to the anonymous craftsmen, goldsmiths and paruriers who have been inventing jewellery for millennia. Special attention is devoted to avant-garde artists and contemporary designers, who challenge the conventions of the medium and, by constantly reinventing it, push its boundaries ever further.

The exhibition comprises over four hundred pieces of jewellery, and brings together practices that are usually not associated : objects by artists, designers, contemporary jewellers and high-end jewellery brands cohabit with anonymous, ethnic and costume jewellery.

The pieces on display are presented in dialogue with twenty works and installations by contemporary artists whose probing reflections on decoration and ornament transcend our accustomed hierarchies.

1. Identities and subversion

A piece of jewellery calls into play a maker, a wearer and a viewer: it conveys different meanings depending on who wears it, where, and in what historical period. Previously a highly-codified expression of identity that revealed a society's main roles and their transformations over time, jewellery was reimagined in the 20th century as a vehicle for 'free' self-expression.

Nonetheless, jewellery in the West is to this day characterized first and foremost as 'overtly feminine.' Associated with women's bodies from childhood, it is supposed to discretely accentuate beauty and sensuality, exemplifying a form of pointless frivolity.

Its feminization, however, remains quite recent: up until the Industrial Revolution, jewellery, like clothing, was an essential attribute of masculine power. A trophy of sorts, it served to make manifest—via its massivity or rarity—a superior station, whether inherited or earned. Today, by comparison, only a few, specifically designated and mostly functional items of male jewellery are tolerated.

Challenging a modern polarisation between the sexes premised on clothing and behaviour, jewellery has become a crucial mode of expression for communities that flout conventions, in particular through appropriation, accumulation and excess.

1.1 Assignment

Jewellery is what identifies the body as 'feminine' (or effeminate). It accompanies its development, marks the 'stages' of its growth, and codifies the types of bodily interaction it may tolerate.

Jewellery, as a prefiguration of 'sexual deflowering', a poisoned gift or a foil, often links (or rather binds) a woman to the giver, assigning the body to a role in which seduction is central.

As an enhancer of sensuality, however, it must respect a certain etiquette or risks becoming a symbol of immorality. Ornaments, like cosmetics, partake of beauty as technique: the issue of 'fakery' is bound up with that of honesty, and speaks to a body's relationship with the natural.

1.2 Domination

The preconception of jewellery as being 'too feminine' has an obvious corollary: a man should be without—or above—jewellery. This is, however, a modern construct. Jewellery was long an instrument of power that conferred visible recognition. It magnified the body of the king and that of his court, until the new industrial and merchant class abandoned finery in the 19th century. Yet the 'dominant' adornment is not the purview of men only, and can be seen among femmes fatales and women of power.

Today, in the West, the jewellery considered 'suitable' for men is preferably functional and technical (sometimes excessively so), a bias that sustains a distinction between the active, determined man and the frivolous, vain woman.

A man's jewellery may also be a token of gratitude that identifies the power of a group, a corporate affiliation rather than an assignation.

1.3. Disobedience

Jewellery's relationship to identity is not limited to assignation or domination. It may also channel specific communities' insubordination and refusal of social conventions or the masculine/feminine dichotomy.

Often, it is the wearer who appropriates the object, detaching it from both its normative social codes and circumstantial quality. In becoming an everyday accoutrement among dandies, hippies, punks, bikers, goths, rappers and so on, jewellery is, paradoxically, 'spectacularised'. This often goes hand in hand with various forms of excess, transgressive accumulation or détournement that reinvent as well as echo earlier practices.

2. Values and Counter-Values

The official history of jewellery is the story of an elite. The notion of value is inherent to jewellery, bound up with the materials it is made of. For this reason, jewellery is often perceived as 'too precious,' and its aesthetic—allegedly timeless—value is used to underwrite a fluctuating market prices and cannot be separated from theatrical performances of power. But such pieces make up only a small percentage of all jewellery. Indeed, this very exclusivity has provoked a flurry of dissidence.

Costume jewellery, and more recently contemporary jewellery (aka 'author jewellery' and, formerly, 'studio jewellery') resolutely uphold alternative values, sometimes deliberately contesting the criteria that underlie the economy of traditional jewellery. They purposefully employ affordable or poor materials, and adopt the utopian philosophy of serial, accessible production, even in the case of unique pieces.

Other values also come into play. Jewellery can be inspired by current events or relay convictions, political or otherwise. Often, the sentimental value of an item takes precedence over any direct relation to the market value of its materials. 'Contemporary' jewellery is also grounded in an iconoclastic desire to rebel against a system of values and aesthetics perceived as reactionary and restrictive. Its unlimited repertoire is based on deconstruction, and ranges from the blithely humoristic to the highly conceptual, as the case may be.

2.1 Established values

From 'coin' jewellery to 'wearable inheritance,' jewellery is often a matter of money. Several of the qualities specific to fine jewellery—preciousness, rarity, durability, technical virtuosity—are associated with verification and authentication procedures (hallmarks, certificates, criteria governing purity, colour,

weight, brilliance and so on). Validation also takes place publicly, through high society and official celebrations that arouse envy. As a luxury item, jewellery is constantly identified with its materiality, or even materialism. At the same time, however, techniques evolve—stones, including coloured ones, may today be synthetic—while production may take on a moral cast, as for instance support for ethically-sourced gold.

2.2 Counter-values

During the 20th century, fashion jewellery's imitation of precious materials (in the form of costume, or 'rhinestone' accessories, produced by certain paruriers), served as a foundational and liberating gesture that was subsequently to benefit the more openly critical contemporary jewellery makers.

Contemporary jewellers started questioning jewellery's conventional values, and the institutions involved in their validation: they turned their backs on the logic of hallmarking—to embrace that of art making, fraying a path to the museum.

This dissidence expressed itself in numerous ways including an iconoclastic approach to the precious (via the serial, the humble, the trinket or even the fake) and the adoption of an entire repertoire of defiant gestures, from scavenging (upcycling) and ephemeral pieces, to the deconstruction of the artisan-author figure through 'Do it Yourself' or collective creations.

2.3 Other values

The binary opposition between established values and counter-values is a good tool to understand contemporary practices. However, it does not cover a host of other values with which jewellery has been invested since the beginning. As, for instance, its role as a privileged proxy for sentimental bonds. Also, contrary to preconceptions regarding its timelessness, jewellery often serves as a mirror of the world: its subjects, forms and materials follow revolutions in technology and society, inviting dialogue through mechanisms such as humour, or sometimes bluntly political statements. Lastly, the emergence of contemporary jewellery corresponds to with the advent of 'conceptual' jewellery designs that can deconstruct its fundements and question the very principle of wearability.

3. Bodies and Sculptures

The decorative quality of jewellery, which lies between sculpture and ornament, is both a blessing and a curse. Indeed, jewellery's relationship to the body is considered the most deeply problematic, limiting its scale and defining its range. Being the art of little things, it is seen as a 'little' art. It becomes a wearable 'mini-sculpture', a sort of subcategory, namely the art of objects appended to, on, or in the body.

As such, jewellery is immediately appropriated by the sphere of the intimate. It is precisely this subordinate relationship to the body that certain jewellers and artists seek to accentuate or contradict.

Unquestionably, there is a relationship between jewellery and sculpture. In many cases, jewellery can dispense with the body; however, it is necessary to distinguish the instrumentalized autonomy of jewellery associated with power—like a crown on display, which stands in for the king in his absence—from the wilful emancipation of contemporary jewellery. Sometimes literally unwearable, room-sized rather than body-shaped, contemporary jewellery may be imagined outside of, or beyond, the body. Many pieces, in fact, break away (temporarily or durably) from the human body to instead shoulder their way into the museum.

On the contrary, some jewellery maintain a co-dependent relationship with the body: it is activated even as it enlivens the wearer. It can also profoundly modify the body, or be permanently inserted, thereby shedding its official role as a sole accessory.

3.1 Corporeal

Jewellery is often seen as a derivative product, as wearable sculpture, and therefore sub-sculpture, reduced and miniaturized a posteriori based on a work that is in every sense of the term 'greater.' Rather than as art sized to the body, it is viewed as a shrunken—and thereby compromised—version of the work of art. A minor art form, which many artists practice only as a hobby.

Jewellery is judged a merely ornamental object, and the body the whole of its horizon: jewellery exists—by definition—through and for the body.

It is the most personal of belongings an object whose value is individualized and private. This intimacy rubs off on it (both as sweat and as affect) and bars it from the status of artwork.

3.2 Autonomous

Much jewellery can stand on its own, dispensing with the body. Government or military office, for instance, comes with very visible attributes of power. Like a royal insignia exhibited in public, jewellery entertains a metonymic relationship with the power it stands for.

Some jewellery is obviously unconcerned with the body. Designed to be self-standing, installed or anchored in space, contemporary jewellery colonizes the White Cube of the museum with highly sculptural statements. Other pieces are intentionally unwearable: too big, too heavy, too dangerous or, on the contrary, too fragile. While continuing to implicitly reference the body, they refuse to 'play by its rules'.

3.3 Co-dependent

Instead of relinquishing its ties to the flesh, jewellery has, in some cases, sought to reinforce these, celebrating a performative, symbiotic, mechanical and co-dependent relationship with the body. For instance, kinetic jewellery adopts the body as a partner rather than a pedestal.

As a fragment or cast, jewellery may also be imagined as emanating from a body—its double, or its redundant imprint. In taking the body as its subject, jewellery asserts itself as more than 'decor'. Other jewellery is 'incorporated': it pierces through, settles in, reshapes and maps the body, becoming the transplanted or prosthetic agent of a voluntary transformation of the self.

4. Rites et Functions

Jewellery has never been exclusively ornamental or aesthetic. Its many social, economic, and—equally important—magic and ritual functions often coexist side by side. Rational thought is eager to dismiss these more esoteric, obscure and thus 'primitive' uses. To do so, however, is to forget that in the West, jewellery continues to be linked with every milestone of our ritualized lives.

Contrasting with such 'magical aspects,' there is also more obviously 'functional' jewellery, anchored in the notion of measurable efficiency. Utilitarian jewellery is by no means incidental: these are the portable versions of a wide range of instruments for domestic and personal care or pleasure.

Yet, amidst these very real objects, certain pieces of jewellery remain persistently imaginary: they exist only because we dream them up: they commemorate some 'once upon a time' and 'might have been' as well as possible fantasies of the future.

Today, jewellery plays a role in the mutations and constant monitoring of our connected bodies. As a 'technological' accessory, jewellery forges a new relationship as an active, almost embedded partner, 'augmenting' body and becoming a sign of its programmed obsolescence.

4.1 Ritual

Jewellery is often a fetish object, useful to ward off the evil eye: from amulets, talismans and charms to crosses, rosaries and various healing or protective gris-gris. It is impossible to consider jewellery independently from the magical beliefs it carries and attracts. Pre-rational or traditional, we think of it as an object with roots in a faraway and hazy past. Yet, subjecting Western culture to an ethnographic lens reveals how many public and private rituals jewellery is still implicated in: instances of superstition that we fail to see as such because of how familiar and deeply ingrained they are. These objects materialise the important stages of life and seal various relationships among members of society: religious and secular, societal and familial.

4.2 Utilitarian

Utilitarian jewellery sounds like an oxymoron. Jewellery's association with vanity, rather than with the realm of the mind or the tool, obscures its ancestral function as a practical object, one ever more imaginatively explored with each passing century. By adapting standard objects (rattle, mirror) to existing forms (ring, bracelet), this type of jewellery is also the purview of objects used directly for the body (smelling salts, toothpicks, brass knuckles) or its clothing (fibula, belt-buckle).

The line dividing the necessary from the superfluous turns out to be a permeable frontier between the practical and the agreeable, between need and desire. Within the category of instrumental jewellery, erotic accessories occupy a shifting space that spans pleasure, healing and pain.

4.3 Speculative

What we term 'speculative jewellery' expands the notion of jewellery as evidence—revealing of identity, certainly, but also of certain values. Objects may draw on ancient myths or history, engage with 'hyper-connectivity,' to better dissolve within futurist projections. But however conceptual, none of these speculative schemes advocates 'dematerialisation.' Recently, jewellery has come to adorn the gadgets we treat as extensions of our bodies—mobiles, headphones and the like—imbuing these smart objects with a very human desire for 'beautification.' Other pieces give shape to cyborg fantasies taking the body as a worksite, and the human—and nature—as their project.

As always, jewellery helps to solidify—or invent from scratch—potential fictions of identities: I adorn myself, therefore myself becomes.

Catalogue extracts

Fabrice Hergott, Director of the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Foreword

Deep within the gaze, there is a kind of anxiety. Starting as simple observation, it transforms into a speculative gaze. In the past, we knew what was art and what was not. Books and museums presented a simple and linear history of art. There was a hierarchy of works. But as we lost those hierarchies, our eyes have opened to many other things.

Not so long ago, it was easy to consider jewellery the way Ernst Jünger saw entomologists or admirers of Byzantine art: "Amateurs of marginal genres who do not fully adapt to the system [in which] the strange prevails over the memorable and disturbs the logical sequence of events."

Today, the artistic landscape no longer seems concerned with logic. It could be mistaken for a generous and enterprising nature, integrating more and more elements on which it feeds and that it nourishes faster than we can possibly come to understand the ins and outs.

How is it that jewellery is being shown in a museum of modern and contemporary art? Why are these objects, long considered futile, now entering a space, ARC, which for exactly fifty years—2017 is its anniversary—has been obstinately faithful to the principle of being a space of animation, research and confrontation?

What we come to see at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and particularly in the ARC spaces, are not only objets d'art, but the way art is transformed and how our perception of it is changing.

Already in 1961 Roland Barthes explained how gemstones became jewellery: "There has been a widespread liberation of jewellery: its definition is widening, it is now an object that is free, if one can say this, from prejudice: multiform, multi-substance, to be used in an infinite variety of ways, it is now no longer subservient to the law of the highest price nor to that of being used in only one way, such as for a party or sacred occasion: jewellery has become democratic." It did not, however, enter the field of interest for artists as a result. Only recently have certain artists wondered about that democratization and how an object and a work of art in particular could encounter the public. Following a significant renewal of interest in Pop Art came the question of everyday objects, traditionally considered as decorative. It is true that by abolishing the pedestal and the frame, the art of the 1960s and 1970s was able to enter everyday life and integrate most of our personal spaces. As it has become more popular, contemporary art has lost its doctrinaire character, showing that it needed freedom of style and form. Recognizing art in objects previously scorned recalls once again the extent to which the boundaries of art are psychological.

Jewellery has never been the subject of an exhibition from this perspective, for want of having been taken sufficiently seriously. The relationship to the work of art has become more open in the early twenty-first century, more intuitive than it was during the preceding decades, and perhaps paradoxically, more physical too. At a time when virtual reality has become so important, to wear an object on oneself, against one's body, and to associate it with one's gestures and with every moment of life, can be felt as compensation, a rebalancing in favour of the real body of the spectator.

Jewels nonetheless remains objects that participate in a social, political, or religious code. They make it possible to identify people by noticing a part of the identity they wish to display. It can begin with a wedding ring, a watch, a decoration (this vestige of the ribbons of the Ancien Régime). In every case, it is a question of presenting an acceptable image of oneself, an image that is in harmony with the person who wears the jewel or jewels. They are the sign of belonging to a group, even if it is, for example, the exclusive and paradoxical one of dandyism.

The precious materials that jewellery previously contained have given way to common materials, transforming them into singular objects. They have freed themselves from convention to become indicators of meaning. Their function is to draw the gaze, to retain attention, and to adorn the person who wears them. The relationship between subject and object distinguishes the person. By wearing a singular object, a person becomes singular. The power of the jewel is to make that distinction disappear by placing the subject out of their time and out of time. It is thus an extension of the body that denies the body's temporality. The radiant intangibility of a diamond on the finger of its owner is

nothing other than the negation of ageing. And any adornment or jewel, even if it highlights the vanity of life by displaying a skull, a Medusa head, or a carcass, exalts the life of the person who wears it.

The result is a compulsive relationship that this exhibition undoubtedly recounts. Rarely have so many objects been shown at the Musée d'Art Moderne in so little space, and rarely has such an extended period been covered. By opening the jewellery box, the museum is opening a Pandora's box from which burst forth codes and rules of behaviour, symbols and rituals. This fascination for timelessness emerges as the real subject of the exhibition. Jewels are objects of emancipation from time. And in their relationship to the body, they underline by incision the fundamental nudity of the human being.

The body is thereby augmented. It is more seductive, and by the magical effect of beauty, protected. A beautiful ring draws the eye, and confers upon the person wearing it a unique power. Each ring wearer is quite simply a lord. A new world then opens, which is that of adornment and its codes. That is surely why jewellery has become an important subject: it speaks of position within society and of the experience of the person wearing it.

Medusa, Jewellery and Taboos presents an assessment of that evolution. An evolution, let us recall, that is only perceptible for the Musée d'Art Moderne thanks to the interest artists have devoted to it. That is the reason this exhibition could not have taken place without the presence of works by artists who through their visual thinking, are concerned with jewellery and its relationship to the body and the world. Having become a real and metaphorical object of that need to connect with experience, jewellery has become more than an intermediary object. It is now part of the gaze from which it can no longer be dissociated.

Credit for the idea and the realization of this exhibition belongs to Anne Dressen. Medusa is part of the perfect series of exhibits she has initiated and organized at the Musée d'Art Moderne, including Playback in 2007, which addressed the relationship between music videos and video art, and Decorum in 2013, investigated the connections between tapestry and contemporary art. Her sharp sense of "marginal genres", which has taken up a central position in the artistic landscape, is in part connected to her close and often complicit relationships with the artists.

As in all of her previous projects, she has surrounded herself with partners of quality: Michèle Heuzé and Benjamin Lignel, whose contributions have proved essential and complementary. Without forgetting Olivia Gaultier and her unceasing commitment, as well as the teams at Paris Musées and the Musée d'Art Moderne, who contributed enormously to bringing this ambitious and unprecedented project to life.

Benjamin Lignel, « Beings »

[...] From defence of the Tudor-Stuart monarchy's lavish lifestyle to Marinetti's manifesto *Against Female Luxury*, the history of jewellery in the Christian West is one of the shaping of a prejudice. Jewellery is excess, artifice, snare. It signals vice (in her case) and weakness (in his). Fuelled by the quarrel about luxury, this startling dichotomy has developed out of an ongoing – and most often virulent – debate about the relationship between having and being. A "being" of which jewellery and clothing are alternately the means and the identifying marks.

In Europe the rise of an industrious merchant class in the seventeenth century would gradually make sartorial sobriety the tool of moral reform: male splendour became "effeminate" and the man of taste no longer cared to clutter his dark wool or calico jacket with gold trim or pearl buttons. This feminising of jewellery went hand in hand with modern polarisation between the sexes and was a continuing feature of the repertoire of twentieth-century forms of sartorial rebellion.

This brief essay proposes one history of this divide and offers a reading of the systematic Western perception of jewellery as something excessively feminine.

Supposedly feminine

In the twentieth century, the historian Patrizia Ciambelli explains, jewellery was a woman's concern, where femininity is cultivated by a circle of women and later "shaped" by certain male figures. Things begin with the placing of the first ring in the earlobe – somewhere between the ages of two and fifteen in France, Spain, Italy – by an "old woman" or a female relative or friend. Later come the engagement ring, the wedding ring and maybe a gift for a new baby. The piece of jewellery exists as a reminder of these key moments, as a way of

"giving concrete expression to the floral metaphor of her maturation."

The many personal accounts gathered by Ciambelli seem to come from another time, like bearers of a woman-jewellery binary which in retrospect looks dated, self-confirming and complacent. And yet in the West the early twenty-first century continues to see jewellery as a means and, therefore an attribute, of femininity. The phases of growth towards femininity are less rigidly codified now, but the idea of moving rung by rung up the jewellery ladder endures as a conceptual buttress for individual life-narratives whose high points it designates. The jewels are part and parcel of the shaping of the girl whose body does not yet belong to her. Jewellery, though, is also a tool for coercion; more specifically the ring is "a circular instrument placed upon the noses of hogs and fingers of women to restrain them and bring them into subjection."

A more pugnacious analysis even goes so far as to suggest that jewellery publicly codifies the exchanges tolerated by the body, in a sexual semiotics underpinned by a rationale of reproduction of the species which keeps women and power separate. Caught up in a succession of rites of passage, then in a condescending economy of reciprocal husband-wife duties, the deserving female body sees its labour rewarded via an object (rather than a salary) that signals its adhesion to a femininity supervised from above. Jewellery assigns the body to a role and the qualities implicit therein. The repetition of certain gestures – from generation to generation, but also morning after morning – underscores "the cultural orthopedics that construct everyday femininity."

De facto, jewellery is part of a "technique" of beauty which carries out transformative operations on the body: trickery, camouflage, manipulation. Intersecting with the moral issue of honesty and the body's relationship with its supposed nature, the trickery issue ultimately tightens up the cultural association between finery and vice (as men would have it) and between ornament and imposed objectification (for women).

The challenge – met by gender-sensitive artists – thus becomes to endow this female body with a visibility that is not ipso facto a capitulation to the male gaze. It consists in thwarting modes of transmission and giving in which the wearer often plays a passive part: instead of merely receiving, a woman should create her own regalia. Either in an auto-ironic mode, or, as sex-positive ecofeminist Annie Sprinkle advocates, by adopting as her own Baudelaire's apology for artifice: seduction techniques in the interests of empowerment rather than of voluntary servitude. This is a way of reframing the body's everyday technical acts in terms of "gender production", and their inclusion into artistic practices as a critique of the system. [...]

Michèle Heuzé, « Assets »

Value seems inherent to jewellery, to its constituent materials and to its fixed definition as “small precious objects”. The difference between other objects and jewellery, therefore, is that the former are things of value while the latter is value. That reality affects its use and its image, through attraction or through rejection. “All that is rare is expensive” affirms the well-known sophism. Yet uniqueness does not lead to costliness unless other values are involved: transfers of personal, religious, political, sentimental, and now artistic truths. Assets respond to Beings and complicate the language of jewellery, whose dictionary definition has become too narrow. [...]

“Gold makes you blind”

Preciousness, and the myths that surround it, seem to be the products of immutable mechanisms, rarely questioned by the media. Yet fashion, more free, like some opposition movements, rejects models codified by secular conformism and offers other sophistications. The twentieth century exploded in social, political and artistic fireworks and brought to jewellery its greatest transformation.

Beginnings

Mediocrity drives innovation: the ugliness or creative weakness of nineteenth-century English industrial objects led a handful of artists to respond with more economical—but inventive—jewellery. Arts & Crafts jewellery was handmade in silver, embellished with semi-precious gemstones, mother-of-pearl or enamel. The added value was in the treatment. The intentions were commendable, but served an intellectual elite and a utopia. However the idea spread to northern Europe. Silver was a rejoinder for innovative jewellery. Best known in France are pioneers Georg Jensen (Denmark) and Torun (Sweden). Art Nouveau is often seen as innovative because it mixed together different categories of materials (glass and diamonds), but it had none of that spirit of breaking with traditional preciousness. The exhibition *Modern Handmade Jewelry* in New York in 1946, put forward the spirit of the Bauhaus, with Margaret De Patta and Anni Albers. As early as 1941 Albers presented necklaces made out of ordinary items (paperclips, bobby pins) found on the shelves of hardware shops. For her even lowly materials could become “beautiful and even precious”. Alexander Calder astounded with his ingenious settings, with string or wire, and his tesseræ of broken dishes.

Fashion accelerated the trend. Chanel was already mixing real and fake, and designers let their finery makers express themselves. Elsa Schiaparelli had fun with artists, working in partnership with Salvador Dalí, Meret Oppenheim, Elsa Triolet and Jean Schlumberger. Paco Rabanne invented his metal plate dress and the Baschet Brothers created sculpture-garments like giant jewels for the fashion show in William Klein’s film *Who Are You, Polly Magoo?* (1966). In the 1960s Roland Barthes noted the widespread liberation of jewellery; its definition is widening, it is now an object that is free, if one can say this, from prejudices; multiform, multisubstance, to be used in an infinite variety of ways, it is now no longer subservient to the law of the highest price nor to that of being used only one way, such as for a party or sacred occasion: jewellery has become democratic.

Having become more playful, jewels trumpet their extravagances; even high jewellery is entertaining. In this audacity, the fluorescent colours of the street, forbidden themes—drugs, sex—blossom; Victoire de Castellane scandalizes. The fear of ridicule disappears, irony through diversion is a recurring tool, “Nothing is Forever” is engraved on a diamond.

Ruptures

For more than fifty years certain groups have positioned themselves in opposition to the jewellery establishment directly attacking the codes of preciousness; avant-garde jewellery, later called contemporary jewellery, was born of that iconoclasm. Materials whose mere presence dictated the value of an object without any other form of judgement were banished. *Gold Makes You Blind* and if you have to wear it, why not do so directly, with an ingot pinned on as a brooch (O. Kunzli). The diamond offered up in an adjustable spanner has fallen off its pedestal. Recovery of scraps answers to the rarity of materials, rust to shine, the sharp shard to polish. The ephemeral—falsely fragile with paper, and quail eggs as bezels (G. Jonemann)—responds to the durable. Gold is cut into shavings and a pearl of mercury thumbs its nose at it (Henri Gargat). With derision, the cut-out letters on a

Jhana Millers brooch read “This brooch cost me my credit card”, and directly mocks the sacrifice one is (or is not) prepared to make, and David Bielander perfectly imitates cardboard with the gold one is paying for all the same. No more settings: stones are perforated with a nail or glued together. In Holland the sacrosanct savoir faire is seen as a hindrance to exploring forms. Taking the mystery out of the craft, Ted Noten makes jewellery from chewing gum chewed by other people. Jewellery making becomes participatory. These questionings are little understood, often seen as bricolage and not as radical positions that contribute to a more global analysis set in place by contemporary jewellery. In this dialogue with the history of forms, it makes archetypes intelligible, deconstructs them to question the foundations of the value of a piece that is neither beautiful, nor rich, nor simple. [...]

Anne Dressen, « Bodies »

Hovering between adornment and sculpture, the decorative aspect of jewellery—as bodily ornamentation—always prevails. Or rather, therein lies the rub. Its relationship to the body is even what seems the most problematic. Treated as a “sub category”, or at most as a “mini sculpture”, jewellery accounts for one of the main taboos in art. As opposed to the size of a work of art and its purported autonomy, the scale of jewellery is dictated by its wearability—a submissive relationship to the body which is therefore exactly what some jewellers and artists seek to challenge.

The aura of jewellery is tainted by its corporal and intimate character, in the almost sexual sense of the word. More commonly associated with fashion than art, jewellery is considered an accessory, ranking low in the hierarchy of value. Since the Middle Ages it has belonged to the so-called minor arts. Would jewellery therefore be unable to convey meaning? Disturbing the hypocritical criteria of artistic morality, its power of diversion renders it, to the contrary, a paramount and enthralling object.

There are, nonetheless, several types of jewellery. A distinction must be made between jewellery “signed” by artists (most visual artists obviously not being jewellery professionals), and the production of contemporary jewellery designers (formerly called studio jewellery), fine jewellers, anonymous creators of costume jewellery, not to mention “ethnic” jewellery. Among these there are relationships of influence and reciprocal critiques that are more or less explicit. The developments of artist’s jewellery and so-called “contemporary” jewellery follow somewhat reverse trajectories: after inventing the modernist white cube, contemporary art then ventured outward into the realm of the everyday, before body art tackled the body head on. For its part avant-garde jewellery first challenged established codes by redefining and challenging its relationship to the body; once liberated, it entered the museum. With jewellery every wearer, but also maker, can push his or her own limits.

Scaled to the body

A summary definition might characterize jewellery as “a small object worn on the body, which shows it off.” But still one must wonder how.

Ornamental

Jewellery is a surface, if not superficial, ornament. But like an artwork which is dependent on the context in which it is exhibited, the same piece of jewellery is different according to the body wearing it, whether a child or an adult; female, male or queer; young or old; beautiful or ugly; rich or poor; or according to skin tone. A piece of jewellery has no inherent or intrinsic meaning; it all depends on the way (conventional or subversive) it is worn. The jewellery wearer is at once an exhibitionist and a voyeur. We cannot necessarily see all of the jewellery he or she is wearing but we are aware of the effect it has on others. If too flashy, except in society’s upper echelons, it is considered uncouth and outrageous; the onomatopoeic term “bling” also somehow mimics the social chatter it provokes.

In other cultures, where the body is less clothed, jewellery may be more prominent and is sometimes associated with tattoos or scarifications. Symmetry is more common in so-called ethnic jewellery. Different types of jewellery serve to distinguish between ethnic groups and social castes. In the West the fashion for ethnic jewellery emerged in the 1920s, followed by American studio jewellery in the 1940s, then with contemporary jewellery and hippy jewellery: each instance embodying a form of resistance to conservative, patriarchal Western values. The decorative ceases to be merely self-

referential or in the service of the aristocracy and begins to explore other types of experiences and realities by advocating a “multi-cultural, non-sexist, non-classist, non-racist, non-hierarchical” art.

Derivative

Parallel to the emergence of American studio jewellery, artist’s jewellery originated under the influence of the goldsmith François Hugo, who in the 1950s made a significant number of pieces, first for André Derain, then Pablo Picasso, Max Ernst and Alberto Giacometti. Since the 1960s Milan-based GianCarlo Montebello has issued many editions of artist’s jewellery under the name GEM: Man Ray, Lucio Fontana, Niki de Saint Phalle, etc. Since the 1980s and apart from a few exceptions, artist’s jewellery is often inspired by an existing sculpture, a reversal of the usual creative process from smaller scale (maquette) to larger (artwork). Championed during the Middle Ages, most notably illuminated manuscripts—since modernism, the art of the miniature has often been perceived negatively as an affected and uselessly time-consuming artisanal craft. The result of an a posteriori miniaturization, artist’s jewellery is considered a fraught derivative product. Sub-sculpture or tacky ersatz for art purists, it is also denigrated by contemporary jewellers who reproach artists—who often delegate their work to specialists—for their dilettante colonization of a field over which they have no mastery. In another way however, its status as reproduction calls into question the notion of originality. When it is a multiple, a piece of artist’s jewellery adheres to the modernist ideal of more democratic distribution, a kind of jewellery and art “ready-to-wear”. Yet, this does not prevent it from becoming a commercial object of desire for a growing market.

Sometimes, but not always, an artist manages to renew his or her style without giving it up completely. The pieces of jewellery signed by Alexander Calder for instance, are all unique and handmade, and inspired by African jewellery. At first he created them for his family and friends, namely his wife, just as Jimmie Durham does today.

Intimate

Jewellery often materializes the personal ties which may also contribute to its disrepute. Personalized, created for a particular person, it is also a means by which an individual can identify (by naming) themselves. Besides being intimate since it is worn on the body, jewellery can literally be corporal—made of hair (see the nineteenth-century vogue for sentimental or mourning jewellery), or from baby teeth. Contemporary jewellers perpetuate these practices by subverting them, sometimes pushing the envelope as far as abjection and playing on the reaction of disgust caused by the presence of a foreign body on our own bodies. Often constituting its sole “horizon” (its point of departure and its limit), the body (with its sweat and affect) hinders jewellery’s ascent to the status of art. [...]

Anne Dressen, Michèle Heuzé et Benjamin Lignel, « Instruments »

Jewellery is never simply ornamental. It serves many, often overlapping, functions—social, economic, aesthetic—as well as others that are equally important: magical and ritual. Commonly viewed in the West as esoteric, obscure, or primitive, jewellery is in fact a crucial accessory to all the important stages of our existence. In contrast to its “magical dimension,” jewellery originated as a useful, functional, rational object. Utilitarian jewellery is not a mere footnote: rooted in the real, the objective efficiency of the ornamental instrument sometimes even provides its rationale. Today, jewellery evolves with our ever-changing bodies, an active participant in our controlled, interconnected lives.

Rituals and Magic

Jewellery as a mount for magic

As a magical object, jewellery belongs to a long tradition. Its protective and preventive qualities are conveyed through symbolic representations and linked to its materials.

Ever since the ornaments made of seashells and teeth in prehistoric times, Egyptian, Celtic, Viking, African and Amerindian cultures have fashioned objects—in the form of amulets to be worn on the body—capable of attracting good fortune or conjuring a spell by appealing to magical, divine powers. Various called gris-gris, talisman or fetish according to the culture, they can also comprise the protective sculptures guarding palaces, temples and tombs, symbols placed on houses—such as the North African hand hamsa or the hot pepper garlands on facades in southern Italy—or even “charms” hanging from the rearview mirrors of cars.

Pleas for fertility are frequent and assume different, more or less stylized, forms: a plethora of phallic or triangular motifs - representing the female sex – to ensure filial lineage. Other blessings invoked relate to practical activities—different representations being associated with hunting or fishing people. Bracelets from pilgrimages or devotional bracelets (Hindu, Catholic, etc.) are supposed to protect the faithful after returning home. And more prosaically, the wearer waits for a votive and “charged” bracelet to break for his wish to be granted. [...]

Jewellery as a rite of passage

If we examine Western cultures from an ethnographic perspective, we realize that jewellery is the support for rituals so rooted in our habits and customs that we tend not to consider them superstitious. They come to materialize moments and seal religious and secular, social and familial relationships between members of society.

From birth to death, all stages of life are in effect celebrated with a piece of jewellery—the first being the pink or blue natal bracelet, a kind of first birth certificate that the newborn, according to its sex, is given to wear in the maternity ward; then, ear piercing for little girls, which was believed to have beneficial therapeutic effects: to prevent eye conditions but also to “foresee” namely so the blood of the first menstrual period and their future deflowering.

The discovery of the jewellery box, the moment when a little girl tries on her mother’s or grandmother’s jewellery, constitutes an initiatory rite of passage.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the baptismal pendant and bracelet are replaced by the personalized pendant and the communion chain bracelet, or prayer beads, rosary, etc.

An adolescent’s choice of piercing can be seen as a crucial transitional moment toward adulthood: the challenge of affirming one’s own identity.

In more traditional communities, the engagement ring will then be placed on the right hand, as a token of love prefiguring the wedding band. Many contemporary jewelers have also focused their attention on the wedding ring, the most common piece of jewellery whose form and usage they have reinterpreted. [...]

From tool to pleasure: interfaces

Jewellery and utility seem to be antithetical. Not defined by practical function, jewellery is tied foremost to pleasure, existing in a realm of superficiality from which the tool is absent. This improbable encounter leads to a division between the necessary and the superfluous, the porous border between need and desire.

The invention of utilitarian jewellery is ancient. From the fourth millennium BC, the growth of trade brought about the appearance of the seal, soon to be worn on the body. At first, the practical object was adapted to existing jewellery typologies. Two models were created: one on a long bead and the other on a ring. Originating in Sumerian Mesopotamia, the cylindrical seal or engraved bead, rolled onto wet clay tablets, was strung on a cord worn around the neck or pinned to clothing. In ancient Egypt, the ring adopted the form of the owner’s cartouche, which embodied him. On papyrus, the seal was also pressed into clay, a precursor to lead and then wax. By sealing jars, baskets, and documents, it served the necessary purpose of guaranteeing the personal link to an object, its provenance, the integrity of its contents. The genesis of the jewellery-tool responded to the need both

to validate and protect by securing the “self” and to communicate by delivering a message. The birth of utilitarian jewellery was a serious affair. [...]

These latter pieces elicit ambiguous reactions. They suggest the idea of a human-jewellery partnership that affords jewellery some degree of independence, seemingly unlike the semiotic couple wearer-jewellery, which has been at issue until now. They also point to the relatively new idea of the body as an ongoing worksite— of which the image of the blank canvas where one can draw a tattoo or a piercing offers a very inadequate picture. Space of fabrication, evolving “thing,” emitter/receiver of pleasure, pain, information, platform for identity: these interpretations of the body, and the related notion of corporal supplement do not resolve the “jewellery question.” They add to the protean interpretations of an object around which MEDUSA: Jewellery and Taboos refrains from setting boundaries. Instead, this exhibition convokes both works and their uses in order to elucidate jewellery, and takes the stance of showcasing creativity through the lens of our preconceptions.

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Information and booking
Tel. 01 53 67 40 80 / 40 83
Visit us at www.mam.paris.fr "Events and Workshops"

EVENTS

- **Museum Night**

Free admission to temporary exhibitions
Carte Blanche for LA PLACE Hip Hop Cultural Center of Paris
Free guided tours led by the scientific team of MEDUSA
Saturday 20 May from 6pm to midnight

- **Writing workshop with Laurence Verdier, author of stories and jewellery**

Saturday 17 June 10am-1pm, Thursday 6 July 7-10pm
For adults; advance booking required via email at eppm-mam.actionculturelle@paris.fr

- **Open air cinema: Howard Hawks Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1953)**

Thursday 29 June starting at 10pm

- **Happening Theta Frequency Session 1 by Betony Vernon in the exhibition**

Thursday 28 September at 8pm

- **Symposium about MEDUSA in the Matisse Room (as space permits)**

Thursday 12 October, 10am-6pm
Visit us at www.mam.paris.fr - "Events"

- **ASQ Factory performance by Yuka Oyama in the Matisse Room**

Saturday 14 October 2-5pm

- **Let's talk about art!**

Thursday 19 October from 6-10pm

A group of students from the jewellery school AFEDAP welcomes you within the exhibition, to discuss, debate and trade impressions or questions about the works and artists on display

ACTIVITIES

CHILDREN

- **Workshops for ages 4-10**

By reservation, book online or by telephone at 01 53 67 41 10

- **“Happy gris-gris” and “A head for jewellery.”**

Fun tours followed by workshops for ages 4-6 years

- **“Jewellery & Talismans” “Medusa’s Headdress”**

Workshops for ages 7-10 years

- **“Medusa’s jewellery”**

By reservation, book online or by telephone at 01 53 67 41 10.

- **Visit for babies 0 to 8 months old “Little Medusa”**

- **Guided tours, accommodations for the visually impaired and lip reading tours**

Available with the museum’s guides, or unaccompanied tours subject to booking

ADULTS

- **Guided tours**

No advance booking required

From 27 May: Tuesdays at 12.30pm, Saturdays and Sundays at 4pm

- **Contemplation**

By reservation, book online, or by telephone at 01 53 67 41 10

Practical information

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RER : Pont de l'Alma (line C)
Bus : 32/42/63/72/80/92
Station Vélib' : 3 av. Montaigne or 2 rue Marceau
Station Autolib' : 24 av. d'Iéna, 33 av. Pierre 1^{er} de Serbie or 1 av. Marceau

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 6pm (ticket desk closes at 5.15pm)
Late opening on Thursdays until 10pm only for special exhibitions (ticket desk closes at 9.15pm)
Closed on Mondays and during bank holidays

Admission

Combined ticket MEDUSA / Karel Appel

Full price €15
Concessions €11

Combined ticket MEDUSA / Derain, Balthus, Giacometti

Full price €15
Concessions €11

Ticket desk

No-queue tickets available on www.mam.paris.fr

Upcoming exhibitions

Derain, Balthus, Giacometti (2 june - 29 october 2017)

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