COLLECTION DE L'ART BRUT LAUSANNE

PRESS KIT

Art Brut works are produced by self-taught creators firmly entrenched outside the mainstream, harboring a rebellious spirit and impervious to collective norms and values. These include psychiatric hospital patients, prisoners, eccentrics, loners and outcasts. They are wont to work oblivious to public appreciation or judgment. Unconstrained by any need to be recognized or acclaimed, they design a world for their own purposes, a sort of private and often enigmatic theatrer. Unscathed by the influence of traditional art, they tend to avail themselves of novel means and materials, and to come up with highly unusual styles of figuration. Hence, Art Brut is a concept comprising a number of both social characteristics and distinctive aesthetic features.

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SARAH LOMBARDI, NEW DIRECTOR OF THE COLLECTION DE L'ART BRUT SINCE 2013

In 1945, Jean Dubuffet decided upon the term "Art Brut" to designate productions by authors who are self-taught people, who create outside of any institutional framework, beyond all rules and all artistic considerations. For the most part, these are solitary people, persons living on the fringes of society or committed to psychiatric hospitals. The likes of, for instance, Aloïse (1886-1964), Adolf Wölfli (1864-1930) and Heinrich Anton Müller (1865-1930) come to mind. During his first visit to Switzerland, in 1945, Jean Dubuffet traveled to various hospitals—which were at the time, by their very definition, sites of exclusion—and examined several asylum art collections. While on the very point of finding a definition of Art Brut and identifying its characteristics, he insisted that it was no "art of the insane." Rather, he stipulated, it was art produced by persons either unfamiliar with artistic circles, or tending to avoid them. Subsequently he widened his range of investigation to include notably prisons, leading to the acquisition for his collection of bread crumb sculptures by Joseph Giavarini (1877-1934), aka the Prisoner of Basel.

For all Art Brut authors, creation is born of a vital necessity in a ritual, magic, prophylactic or therapeutic vein, rendering the boundary line between art and life extremely tenuous. For some of them, the need to create arises from a revelation, a vision, an auspicious encounter or, simply, this or that occasion: one thinks of Eugenio Santoro (1920-2006), whose first drawing was inspired by the 100th anniversary of the chocolate factory where he worked. Sometimes it is triggered by a painful life event: death, exile, illness or war. In such cases, the creations are part and parcel of the body, a mate for life, until death doth part them. Such authors of Art Brut will unflaggingly produce their subversive and inventive pieces imbued with extraordinarily forceful expressivity. "There is no art without intoxication. But I mean a mad intoxication! Let reason teeter! Delirium!" Jean Dubuffet passionately exclaimed.

Inside view of the Collection de l'Art Brut
Permanent exhibition, 2013
© Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

As uncommon men—and this in opposition to the notion of the "common man" notion developed by Jean Dubuffet—Art Brut creators have no use for the posterity of their productions. It is, above all, the need to create that drives them, and it is for their own usage that they execute their pieces. Indeed, their need is all the more visceral in that they are not by nature specially inclined to take the practice up. Quite to the contrary, their solitude, poverty, marginality, illness or madness could have led to an altogether different destiny.

Jean Dubuffet took upon himself the mission of collecting and safeguarding these productions for nearly thirty years. In so doing, he was continuing a job that several discerning physicians, including Walter Morgenthaler and Hans Prinzhorn, had begun before him, as had the the Surrealists. And by taking an interest in works outside the confines of official art, he widened the boundaries of art, again as had before him Pablo Picasso, notably with African art, and Paul Klee, with children's drawings. Jean Dubuffet, however, took things a step further. He deemed the works that he unearthed from the fringes of society to be a genuine alternative to the dominant culture, which he found "suffocating." As he went along studying and collecting Art Brut pieces, not only did they arouse his enthusiasm, but they incited him to seek to make them known through publications and exhibitions. In point of fact, Jean Dubuffet hoped that through such works he would provoke the overthrow of the cultural values of the day. This comes across in his satirical text "Art Brut Preferred to Cultural Arts" of 1949. To succeed, he felt it was necessary to encourage an interest in and a taste for these works—eccentric, unspoiled and emancipated from any established norms or codes. Looking back, if such an overthrow did not occur, Jean Dubuffet nevertheless managed to raise those drawings, paintings, sculptures and embroideries to the rank of works of art, thus challenging the very notion of a work of art: "Art Brut is Art Brut, and everyone has come to understand this very well. Not all that well? Of course, that's the very reason people are curious to go see for themselves."

The donation of Jean Dubuffet's Collection to the City of Lausanne in 1971 has enabled an ever wider public to discover the group of works acquired over the years. Writing in a premonitory vein, Jean Dubuffet addressed a letter to the son of Henri Salingardes (1872-1974), a southern France innkeeper who fashioned little cement medallions: "these works we possess [...] are bound, still in the future and no doubt for a long time to come, to receive many visits. That's what counts." Dubuffet was right; today the Collection de l'Art Brut boasts over 60 000 works, as compared to the 5000 upon its inauguration, and it hosts an average of 40 000 visitors a year.

It might seem surprising that Dubuffet decided at the time to bequeath his collection to a public authority in the nature of a museum, in order to ensure its safekeeping and render it accessible to the public. All the more so since he considered Art Brut and its representatives as an expression of a "non-culture" at the opposite pole of museum-accredited art. The fact is, Jean Dubuffet seems to have thought of doing so from the very start. What he had in mind precisely was to modify how everyone related to art. That option was also necessary to ensure his collection's future: on the one hand, it guaranteed the collection's cohesion and unity after his death and, on the other, it shielded it permanently from the art market. For the future institution was to be public, and its collection inalienable.

Its first curator, Michel Thévoz, thought that opening the Collection de l'Art Brut would undermine the elitist and frozen institutional image that museums in general project. From 1976 to 2001, he pursued the considerations and research projects that Jean Dubuffet had launched. He also enabled the Collection de l'Art Brut to get its bearings and become a unique, internationally recognized venue. Lucienne Peiry, who succeeded him from 2001 to 2011, continued her predecessor's canvassing, welcoming a host of new creators into the collection, which, under her direction, became all the richer for it. Another facet of her directorship has been the development of programs for various publics, including, for instance, workshops for youngsters and guided tours.

Thirty-six years after the museum's opening, Art Brut—"shy and stealthy as a deer" in Dubuffet's eyes—has not replaced "customary (or polished) art..." In parallel, we are witnessing a scrambling of the categories in the face of all the interest being shown by artists stemming from accredited art: these, in ever greater numbers, are finding inspiration in the creations by the authors of Art Brut and are drawing on the aesthetics of dissident works. In such a context, the Collection de l'Art Brut represents a necessary anchor point.

As much as the creation of the Collection de l'Art Brut may have seemed paradoxical in 1976, today its existence seems indispensable to us. Sixty-seven years after its founder's first researching in the matter, it remains a refuge for otherness, a grotto in which orphan and unspoiled productions sit side by side, carrying on dialogues among themselves and forming a family despite their "only child" status. Yet again, they all remain universal in the multiplicity of the messages they convey. Thus displayed, they deeply move us as they give themselves up to posterity, having once been doomed to disappear.

Sarah Lombardi, preface ***Collection de l'Art Brut,*** *Paris, Skira Flammarion, 2012*

Inside view of the Collection de l'Art Brut
Permanent exhibition, 2013
© Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

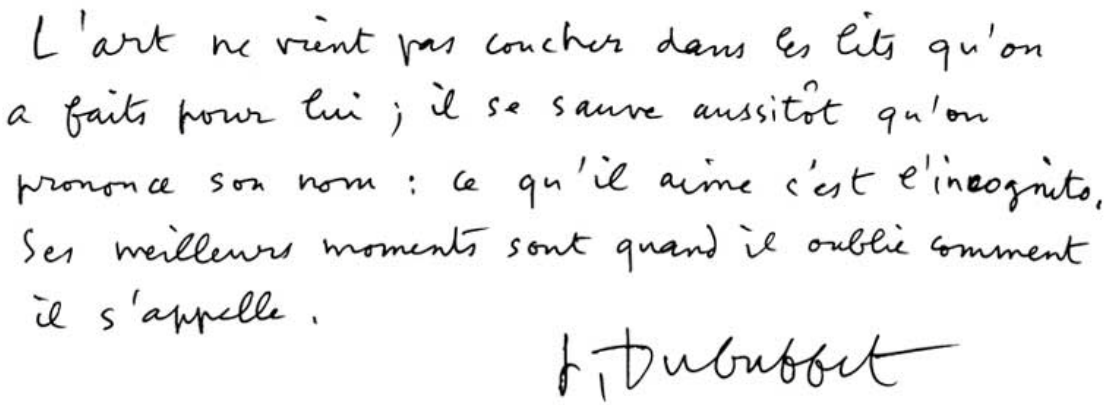
JEAN DUBUFFET AND THE COLLECTION DE L'ART BRUT

"Art does not come lie down in beds made for it; runs away as soon as it hears its name pronounced. What it likes is to be incognito. Its best moments are those when it forgets what it is called." Jean Dubuffet

In 1945, the French painter Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985) began assembling a collection of works he termed "Art Brut"—a concept of his own invention and definition at the time. He saw this fringe creation as "an artistic operation that is thoroughly pure, raw, entirely reinvented in all its phases by its creator, based solely on the latter's own impulses." He launched the publication of the Art Brut fascicles series in 1964, writing up the initial topics himself; the series continues to be published to this day. In 1971, he donated his collection to the City of Lausanne: 5,000 works, 133 creators. The Collection de l'Art Brut has been open to the public since 1976.
Continuing in the line of Jean Dubuffet and, in the meantime, having become a an international reference in its realm, the Collection de l'Art Brut contributes in no small measure to the renown of the City of Lausanne and the Canton of Vaud, in Switzerland and abroad.

As Switzerland's first Art Brut collection, the museum has forged close ties with related institutions devoted to this sort of marginalized forms of expression and, in the process, has allowed the development of a network inviting exchange, emulation and collaboration. Since its creation, the Collection de l'Art Brut has never stopped its intense activity on behalf of Art Brut's recognition: to date, it has mounted some 100 exhibitions, published 56 catalogues or monographs, and produced seven short films.
Often enough, visitors may recognize Lausanne as the seat of the Collection de l'Art Brut, but the museum's own ambitions extend far beyond a specific cultural and geographic context, embracing all five continents. Unflaggingly, moreover, the institution continues to search worldwide for overlooked creators and singular bodies of works. Such works—from China to India, from across Africa and from many other countries as well—never fail to call back into question the paradigms of this uncontrived creation and, in this manner, to confirm Jean Dubuffet's initial intuition.

Jean Dubuffet, Michel Thévoz, Slavko Kopac at the opening of the Collection de l'Art Brut in 1976
© Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne



Jean Dubuffet's definition of Art Brut

By this [Art Brut] we mean pieces of work executed by people untouched by artistic culture, in which therefore mimicry, contrary to what happens in intellectuals, plays little or no part, so that their authors 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. Here we are witnessing an artistic operation that is completely pure, raw, reinvented in all its phases by its author, based solely on his own impulses. Art, therefore, in which is manifested the sole function of invention, and not those, constantly seen in cultural art, of the chameleon and the monkey.

extracted from Jean Dubuffet ***L'art brut préféré aux arts culturels,*** *Galerie René Drouin, Paris, 1949*

SELECTION OF AUTHORS FROM THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

Aloïse (1886-1964), Switzerland

Aloïse Corbaz was born in Lausanne, Switzerland. With a high school diploma in hand, she worked as a dressmaker but dreamt of becoming an opera singer. Later, she occupied a post as a governess in Potsdam at the court of Wilhelm II. She fell in love with the Emperor, experiencing a passion that was entirely imaginary. The declaration of war forced her to come back in Switzerland. She then began demonstrating exalted religious feelings of such intensity that she was committed to the asylum at Cery-sur-Lausanne in 1918 and, later, to the La Rosière hospital in Gimel-sur-Morges.

Until 1936 she worked in secret, using graphite and ink. She would also use the juice from petals, crushed leaves and toothpaste. She used wrapping paper sewn with thread or, alternatively, envelopes, bits of cardboard or the backs of calendars as supports for her work. Aloïse was the author of a personal cosmogony inhabited by princely figures and historical heroines. Pairs of lovers, together with themes drawn from the theater and opera that were her passions, predominate in her work

Gaston Duf (1920-1966), France

Born in the mining region of the Pas-de-Calais (France), Gaston Duf came from a family of ten children. At the age of 14, he was apprenticed to a baker but was dismissed for incompetence. He subsequently worked at the mine, but his precarious health forced him to take frequent leaves of absence. Eventually he no longer even attempted to work, taking refuge in alcohol before being committed to a psychiatric hospital in Lille, at age of 20.

Some years later, his doctor noticed that he was hiding drawings in the lining of his clothes—drawings done in lead pencil in the margins of newspapers, and depicting monstrous creatures. The doctor provided the patient with crayons and tubes of gouache, as well as sheets of paper, and Gaston Duf began producing compositions in larger formats. Recurrent subjects are a clown-like figure and a protean beast that he called a rhinoceros. Furthermore, he spelled this word differently every time he drew this animal.

Madge Gill (1882-1961), UK

Madge Gill was born in the suburbs of London, England. She was brought up by her mother and an aunt, and subsequently placed in an orphanage before going to Canada, where she was employed as a maid on a farm. She returned to London at the age of 19, and worked as a nurse in a hospital in the city. Around 1903, she was initiated into spiritualism and astrology by her aunt. Four years later, Madge Gill got married: she would bear three sons, one of whom was stillborn. Her second child succumbed to the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918, whereupon Madge Gill fell gravely ill and lost the use of her left eye.

A year after this tragic death, she started to draw, write and embroider, creating a dress of great finesse. Guided by a spirit that she called "Myrninerest" —possibly "my inner rest"— she worked at night, standing by the light of an oil lamp. Cardboard or calico served as supports to her India ink or ballpoint drawings of obsessively repeated female faces wearing a hat and set within imaginary architectural settings.

Auguste Forestier (1887-1958), France

Born into a farming family in the Lozère region of France, Auguste Forestier was forever fascinated by trains. On several occasions, he ran away from home via this means of transport. One day in 1914, he caused a train to derail by piling pebbles on the rails. As a result of this incident he was committed, at the age of 27, to a psychiatric hospital, where he remained until his death.
Within the establishment he undertook several maintenance jobs. During his free time he drew with crayons, made medals which he sported proudly and sculpted butcher’s bones snitched from the institution’s kitchens.

Later on, he fitted out a small workshop in one of the hospital corridors. Here, using a cobbler's leather knife, he carved human figures, animals and anthropomorphic figures out of pieces of salvaged wood. Forestier decked out his statuettes with bits of fabric or leather, medals, string and sundry scraps salvaged from the rubbish.

Augustin Lesage (1876-1954), France

Augustin Lesage was born in Saint-Pierre-les-Auchel, in the Pas-de-Calais region of France. Coming from a family of miners, he in turn took up this trade. At the age of 35, while working down at the mine, he heard a voice predicting he would be a painter someday. Some months later, he heard messages that seemed to confirm this vocation.

From then on, he began doing drawings "dictated" by the dead, notably his younger sister, who had died at the age of three. Augustin Lesage subsequently took up painting, creating an initial canvas of nine square meters that took him from 1912 to 1913 to complete. He interrupted his pictorial activities the following year, only to resume them in 1916. Finally, seven years later, he abandoned his job as a miner, in order to devote himself exclusively to art until his death.
His œuvre presents imaginary architectural constructions made up of minute motifs; these are finely worked with a small brush and give pride of place to the principle of symmetry.

Heinrich Anton Müller (1865-1930), France

Heinrich Anton Müller was born in Versailles (France). He married a Swiss girl and settled in her country, in Corsier-sur-Vevey (canton of Vaud). He became a winegrower and, with the ingenuity of a true handyman, invented a "machine for pruning vines prior to grafting." Unfortunately, he forgot to pay the annual patent tax to the Federal Copyright Office where the invention was registered, enabling others to exploit his discovery. Thereupon he fell into depression. His behavior worsened and, at the age of 37, he was committed to the psychiatric clinic of Münsingen, near Bern, where he would remain for the rest of his days. Here, in 1914, he began creating artistic pieces, first in the form of assemblages and, three years later, in the form of drawings.

Heinrich Anton Müller was skilled at creating impressive mechanical devices out of branches, rags and wire—lubricating the parts with his own excrements—and large variously-dimensioned cogs that drive each other. Today, only a few photos remain to attest to the extraordinary inventions that he himself ended up destroying.

He also enjoyed making drawings, first on the hospital walls and subsequently on pieces of cardboard or sheets of Kraft paper that he stitched together. Using mainly lead pencil and white chalk, he depicted an imaginary bestiary. Writing, too, was important to him, leading him to draw up unusual texts in fancy handwriting set down on both sides of his graphic compositions, so that their content underscores the overall mysterious nature of his production.

Laure Pigeon (1882-1965), France

Laure Pigeon was born in Paris, France. Her mother, a professional laundress, died when Laure was five, leaving the little girl in the hands of her paternal grandmother, in Brittany. The girl received a strict education. At the age of 29, against the wishes of her family, she married a dental surgeon. After 22 years of married life she separated from her husband – whose infidelity she had discovered – and went to live in a boarding house. There she met a woman who initiated her into spiritualism. Fifteen years later she moved into an apartment in the Paris region where she practised spiritualism on her own.

Laure Pigeon did her first drawings, which she hid from sight and to which she attributed a mediumistic character, as of 1935. Laure Pigeon drew abstract figures within a system of complex, tenuous webs, in blue or black ink. The drawings also contain messages and prophecies, the writing of which – under the effect of a trance – is uncertain, hesitant, even illegible. Her works were discovered in her home after her death.

Guillaume Pujolle (1893-1971), France

Guillaume Pujolle (1893-1971) was born in Saint-Gaudens, France. As a teenager he worked in the workshop of his father, a cabinetmaker, before enrolling in the army. He went on to marry but proved subject to violent fits of rage due to his jealousy. After a murder attempt on his wife he was hospitalized a first time, only to be institutionalized permanently at the age of thirty-three. He is thought to have begun drawing at the hospital as of 1935; his physician Dr. Gaston Ferdière encouraged him in this vein and began collecting his works.

Guillaume Pujolle's œuvre comprises figurative drawings composed of curling flame shapes, curves and straight lines all struggling to make room for themselves. He drew them on sheets of paper strewn across the floor, randomly inserting sinuous or rectilinear lines accomplished with the help of a compass and an angle bracket. Figuration alternates with abstraction.
At first, Pujolle used various pharmaceutical products pilfered from the hospital lab—iodine, methylene blue and Merchurochrome, which he applied as washes. Subsequently he resorted to inks, colored pencils and gouache paints. He made his own work tools, like the paintbrushes he prepared out of locks of his own hair, with a roll of paper as a handle.

Pujolle stopped drawing most probably as of 1947; instead, he produced items of carpentry, and made himself rings and various talismanic objects.

Emile Ratier (1894-1984), France

Emile Ratier was born into a farming family established in Soturac, in the region of western France. A farmer, the young man left the farm to go to the Front in 1914. Returning from war to the family farm, he became a timber merchant, and then a clog-seller. From 1960 onwards, Emile Ratier underwent a period of depression, with his eyesight dimming progressively until he became totally blind.

From the time his vision weakened he started to work with wood, more particularly elm, with which he made mobile sculptures animated by cranks and other resonant mechanisms. The noises, the grating and grinding, allowed him to verify the finish of the object as well as its mobility. His works essentially represent carts, merry-go-rounds and animals, but also the Eiffel Tower, as well as all sorts of strange vehicles.
Emile Ratier's workshop was situated in a barn at the back of his farmhouse. He used to get there by means of an ingenious system of iron wires, suspended high up, along which he would slide his hand.

Jeanne Tripier (1869-1944), France

Jeanne Tripier was born in Paris, France. The daughter of a wine merchant, she spent her childhood in the country, then settled in the Montmartre district of Paris, where she was employed as a saleswoman in a department store. At the age of 58 she became fascinated by spiritualistic doctrines and divination. Her new activities monopolised her to the extent that she gradually stopped going to work. In 1934 she was admitted to a psychiatric hospital in the Paris region.

Jeanne Tripier wrote texts and did drawings, embroidery and crochet work. She considered all her creations to be mediumistic revelations. In her writings she frequently inserted small compositions executed in black, purple or blue ink to which she occasionally added hair dye, nail varnish, sugar or medicines. She would also mix a number of colours together, obtaining cloths of subtle hues that she used for clairvoyance tables.

Adolf Wölfli (1864-1930), Switzerland

Adolf Wölfli was born in the canton of Bern, Switzerland. At the age of seven he was abandoned by his father. The boy remained alone with his mother for two years, before being placed in peasant families where he worked as a goatherd and farmhand. Later he became a woodcutter, then a labourer. A few years afterwards Wölfli was arrested for indecent exposure and imprisoned for two years. On his release, he committed the offence again and in 1899 was admitted to the hospital in Waldau, near Bern, where he stayed until his death.

Adolf Wölfli started to draw, write and compose music at the age of 35. His output was colossal. It included 25,000 pages strewn with graphic compositions done with crayons, but also collages, literary creations and musical scores. In his drawings, figures whose eyes are surrounded by a mask are combined with musical notes, snippets of text and brightly coloured shapes. The ornamental elements have both a decorative and a rhythmic function.

Carlo (1916-1974), Italy

Carlo Zinelli was born near Verona, Italy. He was only two years old when his mother died. Seven years later his father, a carpenter by trade, sent him to work on a farm. Carlo later became a butcher's apprentice at the municipal abattoirs in Verona. During the Second World War he enlisted in an alpine chasseurs platoon. It was then that the first signs of psychological trouble became evident. At the age of 31, he was admitted to the San Giacomo hospital in Verona. Ten years later he started to scratch graffiti on the walls of the establishment. Faced with a need for self-expression on Carlo's part, the hospital board permitted him to attend the painting and sculpture workshop created in 1957.

Carlo went on to produce almost 3,000 works. His graphic language is characterized by an accumulation of certain motifs and by changes of angle and scale. He painted animals and people in profile using gouache on both sides of sheets of paper, and embellished his compositions with inscriptions.

THE CHÂTEAU DE BEAULIEU

The Collection de l'Art Brut is housed in the Château de Beaulieu, an 18th-century patrician residence belonging to the City of Lausanne. Its 48-meter long façade is composed of three building units, making it 18th-century Lausanne's most generously dimensioned building.

While residents of the Château for two generations, the Mingards also rented out other apartments - the roster of tenants includes such famous names as Jacques Necker (minister of finance under Louis XV) and his wife Suzanne (born Curchod), and their daughter Germaine (the future Madame de Stael); the Duke de Belluno, Marshal under Napoleon; the historian Jules Michelet; and more still.

It was from among nine sites that the Château de Beaulieu was chosen to house the Collection de l'Art Brut donated by Jean Dubuffet to the City of Lausanne in 1971. Its transformation (1974) was entrusted to the architects Bernard Vouga and Jean de Martini. One wing was renovated and expanded in 1983. Offices were set up on the first floor of the middle house and, the overall exhibition space was increased with white-walled rooms to the south (1985), the opening of a room in the garret (2002), and the addition of a small vestibule (2005).

Outside view of the Château de Beaulieu
© Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

WHAT PEOPLE HAVE SAID…

Yolande Moreau
"In Lausanne, you have one of the most magic venues in the world, the Collection de l'Art Brut." *24Heures, 10.12.2013*

Isabelle Huppert
" I'm crazy about the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne. It's where I get to see Aloïse Corbaz, an artist who fascinates me because she created a world beyond everything." *Le Temps, 4.06.2011*

Christian Lacroix
" Art Brut has always fascinated me. I remember an embroidered dress that one of the solitary artists kept hidden under her bed. That impressed me more than anything you can see at the Louvre." *Le Temps, 12.07.2008*

Thom York (Radiohead)
" I was looking forward to coming here at last. And it's all even more than I expected. It really is the best museum I've ever seen. Thank you." *Visitors' Book, 15.08.2006*

David Bowie
" Switzerland also made me discover Art Brut. That has had a major impact on my life, on my creation. I remember bringing along Brian Eno to the museum in Lausanne, and spending hours there admiring the works, reflecting on the creative process and the boundaries artists are willing to cross in their quest..." *L'Hebdo, 06.06.2002*

Inside view of the Collection de l'Art Brut
Permanent exhibition, 2013
© Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne

CHRONOLOGY (more on www.artbrut.ch)

1945 Jean Dubuffet undertakes a first exploratory trip to Switzerland; he soon makes connections among many artists, writers and psychiatrists there. The works he discovers form the core of a collection that has never stopped growing.
1947 The Foyer de l'Art Brut comes into being in the basement of the Galerie Drouin in Paris, where the works are nevertheless shown in a spirit of utmost privacy.
1948 Together with notably André Breton and Jean Paulhan, Dubuffet founds the Compagnie de l'Art Brut, setting it up in a Parisian villa lent to them by the publisher Gaston Gallimard. Artists and intellectuals, including Jean Cocteau, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Henri Michaux, Francis Ponge, Tristan Tzara and Joan Mirò, show their interest.
1951 Subsequent to the Compagnie's dissolution, the painter Alfonso Ossorio agrees to house the collection in his residence in East Hampton, near New York, where it remains for the next ten years.
1962 The works are repatriated to Paris and set up in a centrally located townhouse, with the painter Slavko Kopac acting as its curator and archivist. As reconstituted, the Compagnie de l'Art Brut serves as a study center, where only the sincerely interested are welcomed. The collection develops extensively, thanks to various research projects and donations.
1964 Publication of the first of the L'Art Brut fascicles, devoted to the collection's main creators.
1967 The City of Paris Museum of Decorative Arts presents a show entitled "L'Art Brut" featuring 700 works by 75 creators, all from the collection.
1971 Dubuffet donates the entire Art Brut collection, some 5000 pieces, to the City of Lausanne. The Act of Donation is officially ratified a year later.
1976 Inauguration of the Collection de l'Art Brut at the Château de Beaulieu in Lausanne, with Michel Thévoz as its first curator. The institution's historical credentials encourage the spread of its renown internationally. Contacts and activities in Europe and the United States multiply.
1985 Death of Jean Dubuffet.
2001 – 2011 Lucienne Peiry serves as director until 2011. The Collection de l'Art Brut continues to carry out research and to present Art Brut creators, notably from abroad.
2013 Sarah Lombardi is appointed as director of the institution. Her priority is to showcase the museum collections to their best advantage through Art Brut biennials: every two years now, these are to display works stemming exclusively from the Collection de l'Art Brut. Ms. Lombardi also presents the work of new Art Brut creators belonging to the Neuve Invention collection.

FROM OUTSIDER TO MAINSTREAM

Art brut joins the market frenzy – *an interview with Sarah Lombardi by Michèle Laird (swissinfo.ch, 17.01.2014)*

The sudden popularity of art brut has triggered a frenzy that is spilling into the contemporary art market. As demand rises, experts and collectors debate on whether art brut, produced by individuals immune to reward, has any reason to survive.

“First of all, art brut is not an art movement, with a beginning and an end,” explains Sarah Lombardi, who heads the Collection de l’Art Brut, the first of its kind and the largest in the world. The Lausanne museum was founded in 1976 on the basis of the collection of French painter Jean Dubuffet, who coined the term art brut to define “an artistic operation that is completely pure, raw, reinvented in all its phases by its author, based solely on its own impulses”.

“What is new is that art brut is no longer confined to the shadows of the art world,” said Lombardi, admitting with a smile that Jean Dubuffet had not foreseen the current trend. Numerous prestigious venues, including the 2013 Venice Biennale, have recently organised events around art brut. But the novelty is a new focus that highlights not the eccentricity, but the creativity of art brut, also known as outsider or raw art. The frontiers with mainstream art are being dissolved.
“Dubuffet believed that art brut would overturn traditional museums, acting like a counter-power, but, in fact, the opposite has occurred: art brut is being swallowed up by the art world, including by the contemporary art market,” Lombardi said. She mentioned the outsider art fairs that now take place alongside large commercial fairs, like FIAC in Paris and the London and New York editions of Frieze. In Zurich, the newly opened Musée Visionnaire, the offshoot of a former commercial gallery, aims to show art brut within the context of related art forms such as urban and street art.

The paradox, Lombardi pointed out, is that art brut artists, whom she prefers to refer to as ‘authors’, never work for recognition or money and cannot therefore respond to market expectations. Whole bodies of work are often only discovered after the artists die, she added. It’s the role of experts to repeat these truths, she said. “That is our motor.” The Biennale recently launched by Lombardi (see gallery) is precisely a reminder of the role of the Lausanne collection, as well as a way of revealing the extraordinary wealth of a collection that already contains 60,000 pieces, up from the 5,000 originally donated by Dubuffet. Of course, the museum cannot work outside the art market, Lombardi acknowledged, “but we prefer to get there ahead of it when we can”. Asked why the sudden recognition, Lombardi answered: “Art brut has a spiritual dimension that contemporary art often lacks.”

Whereas art brut museums dotted throughout many countries tend to remain outside the art mainstream, galleries are doing everything they can to get in. They need to sell, after all. For the past 25 years, Cologne gallery owner Susanne Zander has been a tireless discoverer of art brut, which she believes should be appreciated alongside contemporary art. She likes to borrow the term “conceptual outsiders” from New York Times critic Roberta Smith to describe the conceptual mono-manias of artists who work obsessively in single mediums, creating a complete world of their own with their art.

Zander suggested in a phone interview that outsider art is gaining ground in response to the virtualisation of the world. “In a digital era, people are searching for roots, for authenticity,” she said, adding that she spends more than half her time searching for new conceptual outsiders. “You can show me 1,000 works, and I’ll immediately be able to single out the important ones,” she said. “The stranger the work, the greater the possibility for me to step inside and see the world from the perspective of the artist, even if only for a few moments,” Zander said. Judging by the artists she shows, Zander has a penchant that goes beyond the common definition of art brut, although an intense solitude is perhaps the thread between the individuals who used artistic expression to escape into the worlds they created. She mentioned Horst Ademeit’s “secret universe”, which is revealed through the obsessive documenting of his surroundings, or the Polaroids of TV stars by the mysteriously identified Type 42 (Anonymous), whose work has just been acquired by the Elysée museum. Photography, she ventured, is appealing to outsiders “because it makes things look real”. In Zander’s view, there hasn’t been a significant shift in the art market; her collectors are still the same as before. She notes, however, “that the public is much more interested”. Outsider art should not be treated differently, she insists: “It doesn’t belong on dark walls.”

“Jean Dubuffet was brilliant, but deceptive and something of a Fascist,” announces maverick James Brett, a UK film producer by trade. Brett has turned his passion for outsider art (a term he avoids) into an adventure that now dominates his life. The Museum for Everything was created in 2009 on the premise of Brett’s interest for “the untrained, unintentional, undiscovered and unclassifiable artists of modern times”. His nomadic museum, comprising works drawn essentially from his own collection, has been shown successively in London, Turin, Paris, Moscow and Venice to popular acclaim, drawing an entirely new audience to the art he defends, albeit with a larger focus than dictated by Dubuffet. Brett is convinced that the conspicuous consumption of modern and contemporary art during economic recessions has helped buoy his venture. “People need to reconnect with creativity,” he said. Asked how he went about finding new artists, Brett pointed out that he tended to find them in non-egalitarian societies, surprisingly naming the US as one of his sources. The term “folk art” tends to be used in the US, which to Brett sounds apologetic. Brett considers that 10% of the artists are good, 5% are great and only 1% are amazing. “It’s my job to create a truthfulness by presenting only the amazing art,” he said.

In the wake of art brut's notoriety, Lombardi pointed out that the term was often used abusively, when, for instance, Paris City Hall exhibited works produced in disabled workshops in November 2013 under the title Art Brut: absolument excentrique, a trend that is common in art therapy classes.
There is a common misconception, including among numerous galleries and merchants, that any art produced by marginal individuals falls into this category, but according to Lombardi this is very far from the truth. Only when a body of work reflects a strong and complex system of representation – one that is powerfully unique – can it be considered art brut, the museum director insisted, and even then, there must be talent.

She then added pointedly that there is no more talent or creativity among marginal individuals than there is in any population at large. "The phenomenon is very rare," she said. The emotional impact of a work of art, the way it makes the onlooker vibrate, remains in her eyes the ultimate criteria. "One does not become an art brut expert overnight," Lombardi cautions.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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Accessibility **By bus** From St-François : bus 2, the Beaulieu-Jomini stop.
From the train station: buses 3 and 21, at the Beaulieu-Jomini stop.
On foot: 25 min. from the train station; 10 min. from the Place de la Riponne
By car: Highway, Lausanne-Blécherette exit, follow Palais de Beaulieu. Parking de Beaulieu car park.
Reduced mobility: The exhibition is partially accessible to people with reduced mobility.