

Jean Fontaine

En fer sur terre

ARIANA MUSEUM, GENEVA | FROM SEPTEMBER 27, 2013 TO FEBRUARY 16 FÉVRIER 2014

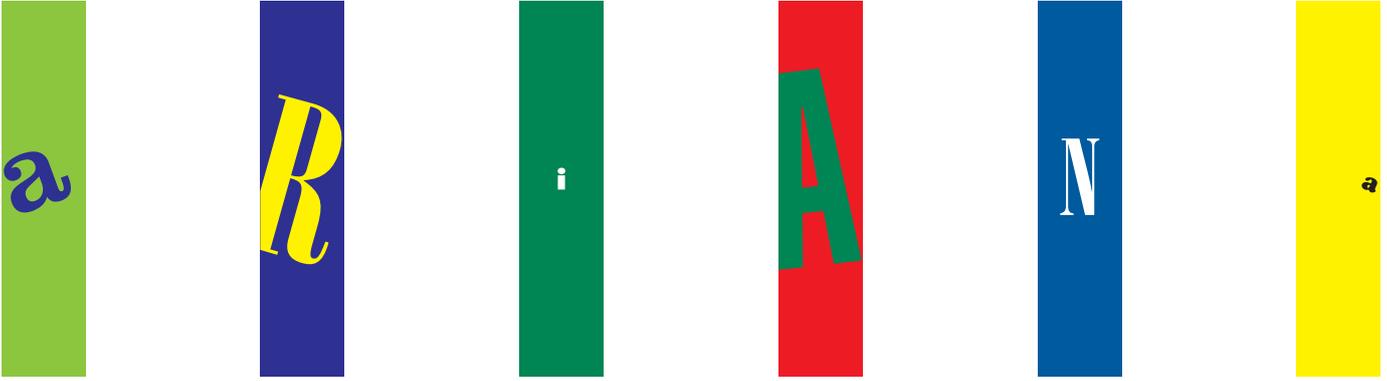
PRESS RELEASE

Geneva, September 2013 – **The month of September will combine several ceramic-related events and the Ariana Museum cannot but welcome the tribute being paid to this medium, possessing as it does a broad span of its history from the Middle Ages to the present day and which it endeavours to promote. The Parcours céramique carougeois (Carouge Ceramics Tour), which runs from 28 September to 6 October 2013, is the ideal context for exhibiting the works of two contemporary artists: Akio Takamori (until 31 October in the Great Hall of the museum) and Jean Fontaine, in the space dedicated to contemporary creation.**

The latter exhibition can be experienced through touch, a sense rarely solicited in museums. With the assistance of visually-impaired cultural interpreters, it will also be possible to explore the highly sensual oeuvre of Jean Fontaine blindfolded. Partnership with the ABA (Association pour le Bien des Aveugles et malvoyants) and the UCBA (Union centrale suisse pour le bien des aveugles), respectively the Geneva and Swiss associations for the visually-impaired, has enabled the development of a rich programme of visits. A perfect opportunity for meeting and sharing, values dear to the artist.

The unbridled world of the ceramist Jean Fontaine (France, 1952) is populated by humanoid hybrids, combinations of the human, the animal and the machine. Yet Jean Fontaine's imagination remains well-anchored in reality. A hermetic carapace veils the softness of a female body that the bolts and other pistons endeavour to dehumanize. In a humorous way, Jean Fontaine destabilizes the viewer, who is attracted by the reassuring hyperrealism of his sculptures and at the same time disturbed by his strange, provocative, even subversive juxtapositions. After assembling the different moulded elements, he covers his stoneware sculptures with saturated metallic oxides, giving them the appearance of cast iron or bronze in order to disorientate once again. He freely adds exogenous materials (wood, industrial porcelain or glass) to his sculptures, to which he then gives titles with hidden puns. Another way of not taking oneself too seriously!

For further information about Jean Fontaine and his working techniques, an information file for visitors is included with the press file.



Jean Fontaine – En fer sur terre

A slightly provocative interview

[ACS] Jean Fontaine, is it because of your name (and is it actually your real name?) that you enjoy telling stories?

[JF] I'm a confirmed Republican and by no means of noble birth! Yes, Jean Fontaine's my real name and I'd also like to point out that it comes above that of Jean de La Fontaine on Google. Perhaps the connection I can draw between the two of us lies in the moral (if we dare use the word!) of our stories.

How did you get into clay and what is the reason for your continued attachment to this medium, despite the fact that you blur the lines between "earth and iron"?

A drawing teacher at my secondary school, passionate about the fire arts, inspired my taste for ceramics. It was the sensuality and neutrality of this age-old, primitive material that appealed to me. I love putting my hands into clay. You don't have to

battle with it; you can give it any character you want. I started out as a potter, making turned vessels, until I realised that I was seeking a different form of expression. So, through moulding, I started creating a new world of ceramic sculpture. I'm not really under the spell of fire; I know what happens in the kiln. Ever since I dismantled my wood kiln and began using only gas, firing has become just a technical phase in my work.

I don't like barriers; I play with materials and incorporate, if necessary, wooden or glass components, with some pieces being produced in bronze. I'm currently experimenting with the metallisation of ceramic pieces. I'm still true to clay, the possibilities of which are ideally suited to my work, but I'm open to developments of any kind.

Your favourite technique is moulding, in which you're a past master. What lies behind this need to copy the real world? Is it from a lack of imagination?

I'm definitely not a moulding virtuoso! My moulds are fairly approximate and I don't seek perfection, which for me would compromise any spontaneity. I always start with the drawing phase, which sparks my imagination. Moulding makes it possible to capture an existing form without interpreting it, rather like the difference between photography and drawing. My imagination is deeply rooted in reality; I aim to stay as close as possible to what is real. It's the juxtaposition of ordinary, everyday elements that makes a piece surprising and gives it its richness.

The female body is used in your sculptures on an equal footing with industrial parts or the shells of animals. Do you see woman as an object?

I look at the human body as a whole; I find very few human bodies to mould in reality. The technique of moulding requires you to remain motionless, to control your body, which seems to be a more difficult and uncomfortable experience for a male. And I do like the female body, with its simple, legible volumes that are eminently sculptural. The human body needs demystifying; it's first and foremost mechanical. I don't chase after beauty. I avoid moulding faces as the result is often macabre.

Do you create works that provoke laughter or tears? Where do you position yourself as a 21st century artist?

I don't want to take myself too seriously or make grand speeches. I like spontaneity and still work directly with my hands. Humour makes you less frightening; you're less likely to be rejected, but that doesn't stop me taking a critical look at human beings and their impact on the future of the planet. This ephemeral civilisation, in which our power is increased by machines, worries me. I'm interested in time and sustainability: the time to make, the time to look. My work evolves slowly; I only create a few new sculptures each year. I like spending time on a piece. I re-use existing moulds and combine them with other elements. I play with words to find titles for my works, which sometimes change over the course of time. The words are part of the game; they contribute to the interaction with the viewer.

What filiation do you claim for yourself?

I explore the theme of monsters, which is on the whole a very moral theme (another influence of Jean de La Fontaine?). In this way, I feel close to the world of Hieronymus Bosch. For me, it's important not to block perception but to allow other people's imagination to develop. I also want to bring sculpture down from its pedestal and to make the artwork accessible to all.

By giving visitors the chance to caress your sculptures, you take us into the realm of sensuality. What does touch represent for you?

Touch is the sense overlooked in our society, or limited solely to the area of sexuality. Everything is ruled by sight and the intellect and our movements are carefully measured and controlled. By bringing touch into the museum, I'm expressing my desire to step outside the framework, to go beyond the limits. In my line of work, I put my hands into clay every day, I breathe in its smell and I love that. Clay is very sensual!

You freely exhibit outside the usual ceramic circles, especially in natural history museums. By coming to the Ariana are you not stepping back into the mould, which is rather ironic for you?

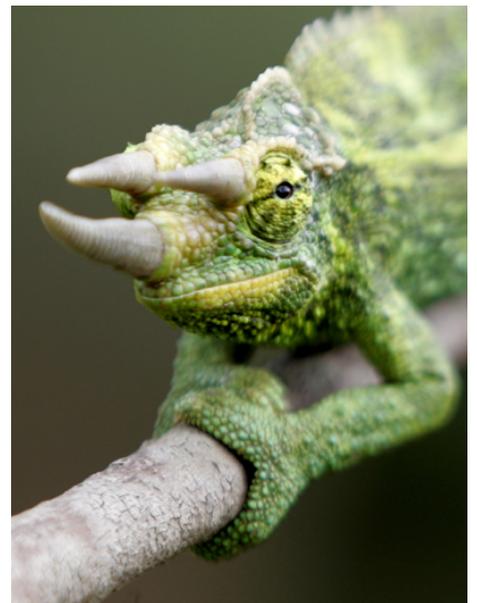
I have indeed exhibited in science and natural history museums, but also in places devoted to ceramics. I'm open to anything; I try to break down barriers and above all to avoid any constraints.

Jean Fontaine, transplant surgeon

Jean Fontaine is often called a *transplant surgeon*. But how does he make his astonishing sculptures?

Every new piece of work is first visualised, thought out and drawn in order to consolidate and refine the ideas, distribute the volumes and determine the position of the internal supports necessary to prevent the object from collapsing when dried and fired.

Once the concept has been established, the artist works with different moulds created using the technique of impression. Some are made up of sections of the female body, while others incorporate parts of animals or mechanical elements like engines, pulleys, cylinders, screws or nuts. The artist particularly likes the impression method as it faithfully reproduces every wrinkle, fold, skin texture, marks of suffering or signs of aging. Impressions can conceal nothing from us.

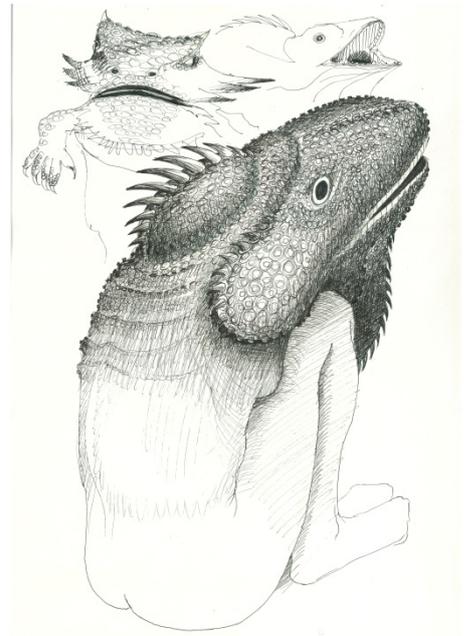


Next comes the delicate step of moulding the stoneware in the plaster moulds, then the assembly, generally before firing, of the different sections of the piece with slip (liquid clay). Any parts in danger of breaking or collapsing are attached after firing with epoxy glue.

The artist keeps all the moulds and re-uses some of them as his inspiration dictates, combining them to produce new creations.

Jean Fontaine works mainly with stoneware extracted from the quarries in La Puisaye in central France. The particular feature of this stoneware is that it is grogged (that is, pieces of previously fired and ground stoneware are incorporated into the clay), which reduces shrinkage and increases the solidity of the piece. He uses porcelain for certain parts of these strange beings, for teeth, nuts and bolts, for example, and for the wings of certain fantastic creatures.

The pieces are fired in a gas kiln in two stages, first at 980°C and then at 1280°C. The gas kiln allows firing in oxidation, reduction or neutral atmospheres (rich in oxygen, rich in carbon monoxide or in-between the two), in order to play with the colour of the oxides until a dark colour is obtained. These atmospheric changes are impossible to achieve in an electric kiln and difficult to control in a wood kiln.



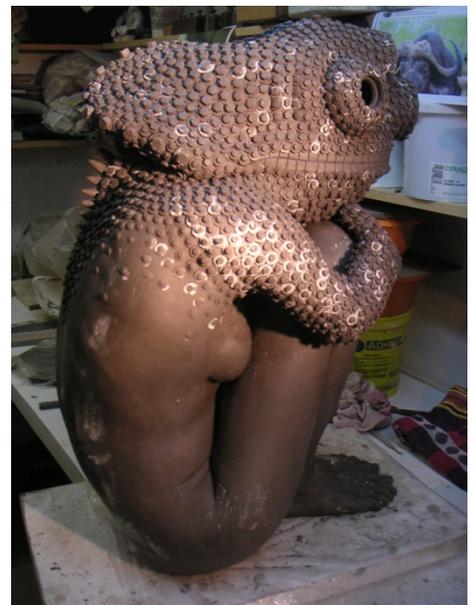
The stoneware becomes vitrified during the firing, acquires its solidity and comes to sound like metal.

Between the two firings, Jean Fontaine applies pure metallic oxides. Copper, manganese and iron oxides are the ones the artist most often employs. He achieves colours ranging from metallic grey to bronze to reddish brown, giving his works the appearance of rusted metal.

Through his assemblages, the artist brings forth the extraordinary and strange from the well-known and ordinary. Jean Fontaine sometimes makes use of other exogenous materials such as feathers, wood or glass for eyes, which are added to the pieces after firing. Our surgeon of materials plays with forms as well as with the words in the titles of his works, always with a touch of humour, logic or cynicism.

This exceptional artist manages to make us doubt what we see, what we touch.

Our perception is constantly questioned. Are these ceramics? Metal? Leather? They are well and truly ceramics! Jean Fontaine disorientates us once again when he produces a piece in bronze and places it next to its clay twin.



Making the museum accessible to all

Since 2009, the Ariana Museum has aimed to make its permanent collections and temporary exhibitions accessible to a wider public (children, senior citizens, adults, people with disabilities, migrants, ...). This led to the first sign language visits with our hearing-impaired guide, Noha El Sadawy.



In 2013, the Ariana Museum is targeting the visually-impaired in particular through the exhibition devoted to the French artist, Jean Fontaine “Jean Fontaine – En fer sur terre”. For once in an exhibition, visitors will be invited to touch the artworks, to caress them and appreciate their curves and textures. A rather unusual practice for a museum.



Through this tactile approach, the artist is enabling all visitors to discover his work. But what can you feel with your fingertips or with the palm of your hand? Jean Fontaine wishes to share with us the magic of touch in his chosen profession and the sensuality of being in contact with clay. Visits can therefore begin with a blindfolded, hands-on exploration. This will give people the chance to imagine the object first, then to see it and consider the relation between our imagination and our visual perception.



During this touch-related experience, visually-impaired museum educators will share their feelings, impressions and emotions with you. They will then ask you to remove the blindfold. What additional or different information did you gain from seeing the artwork? Can you differentiate between porcelain, stoneware or metal by touch? It will then be your turn to share your experience with the interpreters.

For organisational reasons, prior registration is required to participate in these “shared” visits. The reception staff, museum attendants, guides and volunteers have all followed an appropriate, advance training programme and will be closely associated with this project. We also hope to create a climate of friendliness between visitors so that the museum becomes a place of sharing, of trust and of dialogue.

The museum is working in collaboration with the *Association pour le bien des aveugles* (ABA), the Geneva association for the visually-impaired, to set up this project, in order to ensure optimum satisfaction of these visitors’ needs. The signage as well as the gallery information sheets will be in large-print and braille to increase the accessibility of the museum and the exhibition contents.

And as for the future? Cultural interpretation activities for the visually-impaired will continue at the Ariana Museum, focussing on the architecture of the building and ceramic techniques. Listen out for our suggestions.

Jean Fontaine – biographical outline

Born in Macon in 1952. Childhood spent in the countryside in Solutré.

Lives and works in Davayé, near Solutré in the Mâcon region.

1991-1995 First sculpture exhibitions, notably at the Galerie Humus and the Librairie Filambule in Lausanne

1978-1990 Set up his ceramic studio in Davayé.

Construction of a gas kiln and then a wood kiln, production of utilitarian ceramics, research into stoneware enamels, sculptural work in parallel.

1975-1977 Auxilliary art teacher

1970-1975 Joint studies at the École des Beaux-arts in Mâcon and at the Sorbonne in Paris (degree in Visual Arts)



Exhibitions (selection)

2013 Station8 Gallery in Zuzwil (Bern, CH)

2012 Musée de Pont-de-Vaux (F), Musée du Luxembourg, Paris (F), Galerie Espace contemporain, Beaune (F)

2011 Musée de la faïence, Sarreguemines (F)

2010 Galerie 2016 Brussels (B), Galerie Humus / Filambule, Lausanne (CH)

2009 Fondation Bullukian, Lyon (F), Station8 Gallery in Zuzwil (Bern, CH), Naturhistorisches Museum, Bern (CH)

2008 Galerie Bigot, Charnay-les-Mâcon (F)

2007 Kunsthal KadE, Amersfoort (NL) Keramiekcentrum Tiendschuur, Tegelen (NL), Musée d'ethnographie, Neuchâtel (CH)

- 2006 Orangerie, Parc de la Tête d'Or, Lyon (F)
- 2005 Galerie des Emibois (CH), Keramaikos Gallery, Arnhem (NL)
- 2004 Galerie Schlassgoart, Esch-sur-Alzette (L), Parc Phoenix, Nice (F)
- 2003 School of Art, Arrecife, Lanzarote (E), La Antigua, Fuerteventura (E)
- 2002 Museo Elder de la Ciencia y la Tecnología, Las Palmas (E), Museo de la Ciencia y el Cosmos, La Laguna, Tenerife (E)
- 2001 Technoseum, Mannheim (D), Museu de la Ciència, Barcelona (E)
- 2000 Musée de la faïence, Sarreguemines (F), Musée de l'utopie, Yverdon (CH), Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester (GB)
- 1999 Arsenal, Metz (F), Natural History Museums of Grenoble, Nimes and Marseille (F)
- 1998 Musée de Zoologie, Nantes (F), Statens Naturhistoriske Museum, Copenhagen (DK)
- 1997 Zoological Museums of Strasbourg (F), Lille (F) and Luxembourg (L)
- 1996 Natural History Museums of Lausanne, Neuchâtel and Sion (CH)

Publications

Jean Fontaine, *Zoofolie*, Galerie Humus, Lausanne, 1995 (French version [out of print], English version)

Jean Fontaine, *Mécanofolie*, Galerie Humus, Lausanne, 1999 (French and English versions)

Jean Fontaine, *Humanofolie*, Galerie Humus, Lausanne, 2011 (French and English versions)

Dossier prepared by Anne-Claire Schumacher and Hélène de Ryckel

September 2013



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ARIANA MUSEUM, GENEVA | 27 SEPTEMBER 2013 TO 16 FEBRUARY 2014

MUSEUM EVENTS

Guided tours

Sunday 29 September at 15.00

Sundays 6 October, 3 November, 1st December 2013 and 12 January, 2 February and 16 February 2014 (in the presence of the artist) at 11.00

No reservation required, entrance fee payable

Except on every first Sunday of the month

Thematic tours

"Les animaux fantastiques à travers le décor céramique"

(Imaginary beasts seen through ceramic decoration)

Sundays 13 October 2013 and 2 February 2014 at 15.00

Tours for the visually-impaired

Tuesday 15 October, Sunday 8 December 2013, Saturday 18 January and Thursday 6 February 2014 at 14.30, registration required

Tour with commentary for the visually-impaired

Wednesday 13 November 2013 at 14.30, registration required

Sign language tours

Sunday 6 October 2013 at 14.00,

Saturday 9 November, Sundays 8 December 2013 and 19 January 2014 at 11.00 and 2 February 2014 at 14.00

Registration required with the FSS (*Fédération suisse des sourds* / Swiss Federation for the Hearing-impaired)

Tour with commentary

"Grotesques, hybrides et autres monstres" (Grotesque creatures, hybrids and other monsters)

Sunday 3 November 2013 at 15.00

“Shared” tours

Blindfolded visits with visually-impaired cultural interpreters

Sundays 20 October, 10 November, 1st December 2013, 19 January, 9 February 2014 at 14.30, 15.15 and 16.30

Registration required

Schools

Guided tours of the collections of the Ariana Museum and of the temporary exhibition are free for classes from the Canton of Geneva. For schools outside the canton, the admission fee is 50.- CHF. Registration required at least 15 days before the selected date.

Groups

Commentated visits of the permanent collections and the temporary exhibitions.

Number of places limited to 25 participants per visit. 150.- CHF per group (75.- CHF for institutions serving the community, subsidised by the City of Geneva).

Registration required at least 15 days before the chosen date.

Reservations and registration

Visitor Services

Monday to Friday

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F + 41 22 418 54 51

adp-ariana@ville-ge.ch



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PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Ariana Museum

Swiss Museum of Ceramics and Glass
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F +41(0)22 418 54 51
www.ville-geneve.ch/ariana
Open 10.00 to 18.00

Closed Mondays

Entrance fee (CHF 5.-/CHF 3.-), free admission for under 18s and on every first Sunday of the month

Inauguration Thursday 26 September at 18.30, in the presence of the artist

Organisation of the exposition:

Isabelle Naef Galuba: Director of the Ariana Museum

Exhibition Curators:

Anne-Claire Schumacher, Curator - anne-claire.schumacher@ville-ge.ch
Hélène de Ryckel, Head of Cultural Interpretation – marie-helene.de-ryckel@ville-ge.ch

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MUSÉE ARIANA, GENÈVE | DU 27 SEPTEMBRE 2013 AU 16 FÉVRIER 2014

VISUELS POUR LA PRESSE

01 *Truffe de buffle*, 2008

Jean Fontaine (France, 1952)

Grès, oxydes métalliques
L 96 cm cm

Propriété de l'artiste
Photo : Bertrand Mussotte



02 *Oh, l'ange mécanique*, 2007

Jean Fontaine (France, 1952)

Grès, oxydes métalliques 56 x 32 x 32 cm

Collections Musée Ariana
Photo : Nathalie Sabato



03 Elle est caméléon, 1998

Jean Fontaine (France, 1952)

Grès, oxydes métalliques
65 x 35 x 50 cm

Collection particulière
Photo : Bertrand Mussotte



NOTE AUX JOURNALISTES

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