

PRESS KIT

DRAW YOUR OWN CONCLUSION

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Carte blanche to Jean-Hubert Martin

Geneva, september 2021 – For its second big open invitation exhibition, on view throughout the entire first semester of 2022, the Museum of Art and History (MAH) has invited Jean-Hubert Martin to cast a fresh eye on its collection. This eminent expert has taken on the role of curator with the ease afforded to him by his experience organizing ambitious exhibitions that have influenced the world of art for more than four decades. With *Draw Your Own Conclusion (Pas besoin d'un dessin)*, Martin draws us into an excursion through the heart of the MAH's archives and invites us to take in our shared treasures that constitute the fascinating diversity of the MAH collection.

With a selection of some 550 works in every genre, including a handful of loans from several Genevan institutions, *Draw Your Own Conclusion* reconsiders part of the MAH's permanent collection while taking advantage of the historical building and the vast range of its spaces. Unfolding through the ground floor and the MAH galleries, the exhibition offers a trajectory divided into some twenty sequences that draw from all the collection's artistic and historical fields. Each of these sequences is based on a suite of analogies and correspondences regarding content and form and create a narrative arc - from the cross to the globe; from the swindle to decapitation; from the breast to maternity, for example.

This recasting of the installation implies an abolition of hierarchies, an awakening of seeing and a vision for the museum of the future. *Draw Your Own Conclusion* in fact extends an invitation to return to the primary relationship between the artwork and the viewer, one in which sensitivity plays an essential role. This exhibition grows out of an observation: the knowledge accumulated since the beginning of art history has slowly but surely caused the essence of art to disappear from view. Museographic resources, which reflect knowledge and establish an order and a precise hierarchy between eras, styles and techniques, have contributed to this distancing. Consequently, the emotion that objects are able to provoke only emerges in a person who takes the time to look at them.

For this reason, as the title indicates, *Draw Your Own Conclusion* rests on the involvement of the public, which the exhibition trusts to make its own judgements. Visitors are invited to concede to their capacity to observe, to find their own references, to listen to what they feel. In following the flow of the visit (which is not imposed), viewers will best discern the passage from one piece to the next and the curator's motivation to make the choices he did – based on play, humor, similarity or, on the contrary, contrast, for example. This active participation ultimately means that each person will come to his or her own sensations and emotions. The museum will then be revealed in new light and will become the stage of the viewer's interpretations and desires.

As an art historian, the former director of museums in Paris, Berne and Dusseldorf, and the curator of ambitious exhibitions that have marked their time – for example *Magiciens de la terre* (1989), *Une image peut en cacher une autre* (2006) and *Carambolages* (2016) – Jean-Hubert Martin has wide experience exploring a collection and pairing objects with seemingly nothing in common from an historical and geographical point of view. *Draw Your Own Conclusion* will allow visitors to step back and (re)discover certain masterpieces from the Museum alongside singular pieces that have escaped conventional classification.



Curator	Jean-Hubert Martin, art historian
Catalogue	The catalogue of <i>Pas besoin d'un dessin</i> , published by the Museum of Art and History, will be available in the first trimester 2022
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Information	Museum of Art and History (MAH) 2, rue Charles-Galland – 1206 Genève Open Tuesday to Sunday, from 11am to 6 pm, Thursdays, from 12pm to 9pm Admission free Website: mahmah.ch Tickets: billetterie.mahmah.ch Blog: mahmah.ch/blog Online collection: mahmah.ch/collection Facebook: facebook.com/mahgeneve Twitter: @mahgeneve



1. Introduction

For this second XL exhibition, director Marc-Olivier Wahler has extended an open invitation to Jean-Hubert Martin, the renowned curator who has influenced the world of art for more than four decades, to cast his unique eye on the collection. Like the artist Jakob Lena Knebl, his predecessor in this endeavor, this eminent museum expert spent a year and a half immersed in the museum's storerooms and was enriched by the knowledge of inhouse specialists. From a first selection of more than a thousand objects, only five hundred pieces were chosen to take part in the exhibition's trajectory. A full conservation and restoration campaign complemented this work to ensure that each object was in good structural and esthetic condition – some have never been exhibited before. The assistant curator Mattijs Visser, Mr. Martin's longtime collaborator, strove to create a design that highlights the existing structure of the permanent collection. Instead of new wall installations, works will be presented on easels, old display cases and furniture from the collection storerooms.

By transforming the galleries on the museum's ground floor and first floor this exhibition, which will surpass others at the MAH in breadth and ambition, also points to what the museum might look like after its expansion and renovation.

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2. Background

Draw your own conclusion draws its title from an expression that figuratively indicates the superfluity of an explanation. This exhibition springs from curator Jean-Hubert Martin's observation that knowledge accumulated from more than a century and a half, all while advancing art history, has ultimately masked and obliterated the essential vitality of museums: the emotion to which the pieces and objects are able to give rise.

A sense favored by artists, who cultivate visual thinking, and by collectors, the boldest of whom follow their passions, emotion (not to say the esthetic shock) has been erased from the field of art history, which has claimed a rigorously scientific approach. Other criteria have supplanted it like authenticity, the hierarchy of disciplines and also the factual information feeding a strict chronology; these are all obstacles in front of the public and need to be crossed in order to reach the stage of delight. In other words, the pleasure of observing a piece is now reserved for those who have knowledge.

Inspired by the artists he has encountered during his career, at the MAH Jean-Hubert Martin proposes to remove these obstacles and consider art as universal, a wonderful repertoire with which to freely play. Specifically, the curator wishes to reconnect with analogical thinking, which dominated during the Renaissance before being overshadowed by Cartesian thinking. If one considers every object one sees as contemporary, the preeminence of chronology fades. Released from their impermeable context and categories, works are ultimately distinguished by their palpable qualities. The mind is then free to wander and walk its own path.

But in the absence of so-called scientific support, how is the eye awakened and how is concentrated observation incited? Firstly, by abandoning the order that presides over the scholarly presentation of pieces, which has become so common that it is no longer questioned. And secondly, by introducing disorder so as to awaken senses, as artists have always done. *Draw your own conclusion* renounces both conventional taxonomy and decorative installations that bring together that which is similar, and instead proposes an arrangement of the unexpected at the MAH.



Instead of language, the curator wants seeing to be the sense that generates knowledge. Images take on the role of words. Do we not have the expression in English “a picture is worth a thousand words?”

3. Exhibition concept

Draw your own conclusion stands apart from more classical exhibitions by taking as its theme (or non-theme) art from an encyclopedic point of view, both on the geographic and historical level.

This project, far from renouncing knowledge, aims to return to the fundamentals. MAH’s visitors are invited to take in the museum with the same mindset as they would a concert or movie: with the intention of finding pleasure by postponing judgement. With one’s reflection uninfluenced by visitor guides, the mind is free to draw its own conclusions.

This decompartmentalized presentation rests on the gamble of putting visitors in front of pieces from different fields, eras and origins, and doing so while relinquishing any notion of classification and chronological, technical and stylistic categories. What remains is the anthropological aspect of the works; their human dimension is put forward, both the humanity of the artist and of the viewers who perceive them through the prism of their experience.

The juxtaposed artifacts do not resemble each other strictly speaking; they’ve been selected because they are at once similar and different in the emotions, memories and sensations they may provoke, so as to construct evolutive sequences that lead from one theme to another. Unfolding within the MAH’s permanent and temporary spaces, both on the ground floor and first floor, the exhibition’s trajectory is organized as a succession of installations, its form resembling the stylistic device of the French nursery rhyme *Trois petits chats (... chapeau de paille, paillason...)*.

Each section has a title that clearly suggests this progression, this passage from one state to another (“From love to hate,” “From the swindle to decapitation,” “From the breast to maternity,” for example). Through sequences of analogies, at times unexpected or scabrous, the public is able to discover the infinite breadth of the creations and representations that constitute material culture. Whether formal or semantic, the relationship between an object and its neighbors is simple and visual, and can be understood by all, without reference to history or mythology. Many little known and rarely exhibited works, or singular pieces that indeed do not fit into traditional categories, stand alongside the collection’s masterpieces. All are invited to decipher and interpret these associations of ideas using the understanding of one’s own knowledge.

To make his selection, Jean-Hubert Martin countered customary exhibition development processes. Instead of springing off of one subject or artist, the curator reviewed several thousand pieces in the museum’s galleries and storerooms and also in its databases. From these hours of observation emerged themes specific to the history of the MAH collection, which is unlike any other. Certain works became departure points, like Jacques-Laurent Agasse’s *The Personified Fountain*, which is the basis for the sequence “From the birth of Venus to the waterfall.”



4. Jean-Hubert Martin

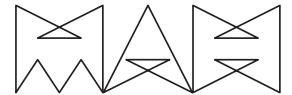
An essential figure on the international museum scene for four decades, Mr. Martin started his career at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris before playing an active role in founding the Centre Pompidou. The curator of numerous monographic exhibitions (Man Ray, Francis Picabia, Kazimir Malevich, Salvador Dalí, among others) and historical exhibitions (Paris-Berlin, Paris-Moscow) as well as of the French pavilion at the Biennale of Sydney, he became head of the Berne Kunsthalle in 1982. He later directed several institutions – the Musée National d'Art Moderne-Centre Pompidou and the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie in Paris, the Museum Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf – and was the art director of the Château d'Oiron, of the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea and of the Lyon and Moscow biennials.

As a curator who began at the Louvre Museum and therefore comes from the most classical bastion, he has for several decades extensively considered established museological concepts and practices, a common thread of the major exhibitions he has curated (*Magiciens de la terre* (1989), *Art et publicité* (1990), *Altäre* (2002), *Africa Remix* (2004), *Une image peut en caché une autre* (2009), *Théâtre du monde* (2013), *Carambolages* (2016). *Draw your own conclusion* at the MAH belongs to this lineage of exhibitions that speak to the general public all while implicitly questioning the historical ways of collecting, categorizing, presenting, interpreting and even promoting works of art.

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5. A few words from the curator

“This exhibition is an attempt to move the cursor now that museums have been taken over by art historians. At the turn of the nineteenth century across France, fine art museums were founded and rehoused royal collections. Many stood alongside art schools because they were places where academy models for students were stored. At the helm of these museums could be found either scholars from wealthy backgrounds who were financially comfortably enough to work for the beauty of the gesture, or artists. The director of the school was very often the director of the museum and vice versa. Presenting art chronologically was never a concept behind their installations. They operated in terms of creative ideas, according to dominant color, for example, or the relationships of form. Analogy propelled the process. In the second half of the twentieth century, art history developed, in Switzerland (especially in Basel) and in Germany along with the *Kunstwissenschaft*, and its scholars took hold of museums. That was the beginning of the sacrosanct system that is the chronological presentation, and the more art history progressed, the more museums became specialized and structured by department – fine arts, applied arts, sculpture, graphic arts and the like. Subdivisions were created, museums for textiles, decorative arts, musical instruments, etc. Today, most exhibitions follow this standard and are connected to a movement, a school, a monograph or the like. These systematic divisions have moreover completely prohibited any comparison of two objects from different cultures, especially when their association cannot be proved historically. What has emerged are exhibitions of knowledge (which I am not against!), in which the public is most often invited to read an entire wall of information at the entrance, without which what follows will not be understood. I am not against people who want to learn, but it seems that we have gone too far. The museum is a place where we are constantly intermixing, with paradoxes and difficulties, sensitivity and knowledge. Yet I believe we need to move the cursor toward sensitivity.”



6. Exhibition trajectory

a. Main Entrance Microcosm

A large display case presents a selection of small objects arranged into some dozen sections: this is a concentrated version of the exhibition trajectory. At a glance, visitors can discover a summation of what awaits them.

b. First Palatine Room From the cross to the globe

These two, very simple geometric forms play an important role in our civilization: the cross alone summarizes all of Christianity while the circle represents a certain idea of wholeness, completion, even of the world in several cultures well before Galileo. This sequence brings both together, like the famous *Vitruvian Man* or the globe topped by a cross held in the hand of the Lord.

c. Small Palatine Rooms

I Keeping count

A little bit of fun likely to make visitors wonder, this sequence offers a series of pieces that, depending on the number of figures represented, keep count from one to twenty-one and lead to the painting *Détail 2356423-2373709* from the series *Un à l'infini (One to Infinity)* launched in 1965 by Roman Opalka.

II From the birth of Venus to the waterfall

Variation on the theme of the birth of Venus, made famous by Sandro Botticelli, from Jacques-Laurent Agasse's *Fontaine personnifiée (Personified Fountain)* to François Diday's *Cascade de Giessbach (Giessbach's Waterfall)* and also including Japanese prints.

d. Second Palatine Room From the flag to the blanket

Demonstration of the omnipresence, throughout history, of geometric motifs, which are wrongly considered to be a modern invention related to twentieth century abstract painting. Swiss infantry flags encounter American quilts, a Joseph Hoffman rug and also a costume by Matisse.

e. Zakos Room From love to hate

Along with the Virgin and child, the theme of love is among the most depicted subjects in western painting since the Renaissance, as is echoed by the MAH collection. From first meeting to consummation, passing through the different phases of seduction, all the stages of love are recounted here, but so are extramarital and nonconsensual unions, which engender hate and the vengeance of women, for example in the very violent *Orpheus Dismembered by the Maenads*.



f. **Byzantine Room**

I **From the bacchanale to the bistro**

From Antiquity to our present day, western culture has been filled with harvest celebrations and the cheer induced by intoxication. The nineteenth century and its many scenes in bistros, open air dance halls and other restaurants synonymous with modern life follow the sundry gambling dens depicted in seventeenth century Dutch painting.

II **From glory to commonplace**

In opposition to the Italian school devoted to Beauty and the glorification of saints and martyrs and the idealization of the human figure, a movement grew in Holland starting in 1620, stemming from village festivities of the previous century, which portray the most commonplace aspects of life: grimaces, the food of poor people, hovels and ruined fences, gambling dens and brothels, all the way to scatology. Once again it is contemporary creativity that reveals this artistic proclivity neglected by art history.

g. **Stained Glass Room**
From the breast to maternity

Built around the image of the Virgin nursing, this sequence presents the breast's other dimensions: erotic in the eighteenth century, life-saving in the story of Roman Charity in which a woman rescues her imprisoned father from starvation by offering him her breast, and sacred in the lactation of Saint Bernard.

h. **Jean-Jacques Rigaud Room**
From hair to the beard

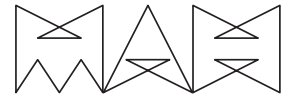
Through metonymy, hair can represent an entire person and thereby become an object of fetishism by means of a lock enclosed in a pendant or even several locks braided to become a piece of jewelry. The beard can be a distinctive sign of belonging, of social class, or it can mark the time before a decisive event. Between the gods of Antiquity and Ferdinand Hodler's entourage, the MAH's collection even includes a painting of a bearded woman.

i. **State Council Room and Drawing Room of the Castle of Cartigny**
Rich and poor

By means of an original intervention in the current presentation in these two historical rooms, this sequence plays on the opposition between representations of poverty and wealth, supported by historical objects like chests and tokens that buy food.

j. **Decorative Arts Room**
From ambiguity to the enigma

A nod to the exhibition *Une image peut en cache une autre*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin (Galeries Nationales de Grand Palais, Paris, 2009), this sequence calls particularly on the public's ability to observe. The pieces brought together are characterized by the multiplicity of readings, whether through the double image, trompe-l'oeil or anamorphosis.



k. Ceremonial Room of the Castle of Zizers
From the eye to seeing

A slight pause in the exhibition, this sequence stages pieces that look at each other through different spaces and times and that would have never encountered each other before now at the MAH.

l. Armoury Room
From the swindle to decapitation

Significant in size, according to Jean-Hubert Martin, this sequence reveals a tropism in the Museum's collection, starting with more or less honest gaming, petty thefts, accounts of violence and imprisonment all the way to scenes of execution, which do not always result from the justice system. Weapons, handcuffs and fetters accompany a guillotine dating from 1799.

m. Pradier Room
The senses

Sight, hearing and touch are evoked by very remarkable paintings, the two other senses being even harder to represent. Markus Raetz tracks the relationships between the senses. Is not all art a metaphor?

n. Castle of Zizers Cabinet Rooms

I The Lilliputians and the giants

As its name indicates, this sequence brings together works filled with figures that have dominated western culture, not only because of their size but also because of their exploits.

II Winter

As the period when nature is dormant in the northern hemisphere, winter is synonymous with taking refuge around the home's tiled hearth, both literally and figuratively.

III The human condition

Human nature and the meaning of life are at the heart of this small installation where are gathered together Auguste Rodin's *Penseur* (Thinker), Ferdinand Hodler's philosophical worker – both so similar in pose – and also the *Chants de Maldoror* (The Songs of Maldoror) illustrated by Salvador Dalí.

IV Still life

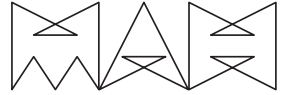
In one of the Castle of Zizers small rooms, this wide view on several still lifes puts forth the universality of staging victuals.

V Morphologies

Approaching the collection on a strictly formal level, this presentation brings together some fifty vessels of all kinds (bottles, vases, pitchers, cups, urns, amphora, and the like) and exhibits them in a way that reveals their silhouettes and also their universality, diversity and evolution (developed by Gaël Bonzon, research assistant, MAH).

VI Colour range

This presentation closes the exhibition with originality by organizing by color more than 150 objects from every horizon, thereby creating a panoramic palette thirty meters in length. Covering three thousand years of history, this installation contains some fifty allusions and expressions ready for discovery (developed by Anne Baezner, research assistant, MAH).

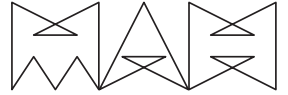


7. Markus Raetz

As an homage to the Swiss artist who died in 2020, curator Jean-Hubert Martin wished to include Markus Raetz's work in the exhibition. He is particularly well represented in the museum's collection thanks to generous donations made by the artist, notably his first engravings (*Reiter* (Rider), 1960), a nude executed in three-color process with his compatriot Balthasar Burkardt (1944-2010), not to forget his famous cast-iron sculpture in homage to Josef Beuys (*Métamorphose I* (Metamorphosis I), 1991).

8. Catalogue

The catalogue for *Draw your own conclusion*, published by the Museum of Art and History, will be released in the first trimester of 2022 both in French and English. It includes essays by Jean-Hubert Martin and the American art critic Maura Reilly, an interview with the curator conducted by MAH director Marc-Olivier Wahler as well as exhibition views of the galleries.



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After publication, we would be grateful if you could send a copy of said publication to the press office of the Museum of Art and History.

Thank you very much.

Musée d'art et d'histoire
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Rue Charles-Galland 2
CH-1206 Geneva



Vase
Nagda II

Yellow-gray ceramic, decoration painted in red ochre colour; H. 11.1, D. 15.8 cm
Purchase, 1898, inv. D 1176
© MAH, photo: Arlotti

and

Alexandre Parisot
Lyre guitar, first half 19th century

Maple, fir, cedar, ebony fillets, mother of pearl, ivory, bone, brass
H. 9, l. 60, p. 33.2 cm
Gift, 1908, inv. 009361
© MAH, photo: B. Jacot-Descombes

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Auguste Rodin (1840-1917)
The Thinker, element from the Gates of Hell,
1880 (original model) ; 1896 (cast iron)

Bronze; H. 72, l. 34, p. 53 cm
Inv. 1896-0011
© MAH, photo: F. Bevilacqua

and

Ferdinand Hodler (1853-1918)
The Philosophical Worker, 1884

Oil on canvas; 72.2 x 51.6 cm
Purchase, 1939, inv. 1939-0021
© MAH, photo: B. Jacot-Descombes



Italian School, Lombardy
The Rape of Helen, between 1630 and 1640

Oil on canvas; 134.5 x 164 cm
Bequest, 1932, inv. 1932-0007
© MAH, photo: Y. Siza

and

Félix Vallotton (1865-1925)
Orpheus Dismembered by the Maenads,
1914

Oil on canvas; 250 x 200 cm
Purchase, 2001, inv. BA 2001-0026
© MAH

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Oil Lamp
3rd century BC – 2nd century BC;
4th century BC

Terracotta; H. 4.6, L. 8.3, l. 6.8 cm
Gift, 1905, inv. 002786
© MAH, photo: Chaman ateliers, Hauterive



Jean-Hubert Martin, exhibition's curator
Marc-Olivier Wahler, director of MAH

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