

**MUSÉE D'ART  
MODERNE ET  
CONTEMPORAIN  
SAINT-ÉTIENNE  
MÉTROPOLE**

# MARCELLE CAHN

*IN SEARCH OF SPACE*

15 OCTOBER 2022 – 5 MARCH 2023

## PRESS KIT

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**Marcelle Cahn**, *Les Toits* [Roofs], 1927, oil on canvas, 46 × 55 cm. Collections MAMC+, CNAP deposit, purchase in 1959.  
Photo: C. Cauvet/MAMC+ © droits réservés

**MUSEES DE LA VILLE DE STRASBOURG**

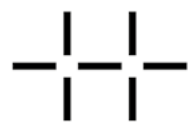
Musée  
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# MARCELLE CAHN

IN SEARCH OF SPACE / 15 OCTOBER 2022 - 5 MARCH 2023



Marcelle Cahn, *Aviatic Plane-Form*, 1930, oil on canvas, 62 x 73.5 cm, MAMC+ Saint-Étienne Métropole Collection. Gift of the artist, 1957. Photo credit: C. Cauvet/MAMC+

# INTRODUCTION

The MAMC+ presents the first major retrospective dedicated to Marcelle Cahn (1895-1981). In terms of the history of 20th century art, this artist's career began on the margins of the Expressionist and Purist tendencies and flourished in the 1950s with a lyrical yet highly rigorous free abstraction, from which emerged the remarkable achievement of the relief paintings and spatial paintings of the 1960s. From the infinitely small to the quest for an architectural space, Marcelle Cahn (who never renounced figuration, considering her "lyrical things" as a "recreation") developed a singular language of purified and sensitive abstraction, devoid of dogmatism.

Organized with the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Strasbourg (MAMCS) and in partnership with the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes, this exhibition illustrates the richness and uniqueness of Marcelle Cahn's work. It revisits the different creative contexts in which this artist developed, from German Expressionism at the beginning of the 20th century to the main currents of geometric and lyrical abstraction. This chronological display brings together more than 400 artworks, covering all the techniques used by the artist, including paintings, graphic pieces, sculptures, photographs and collages. These are on loan from cultural institutions and French and foreign private collections, to which the artist donated her studio collection and archives in 1980.

An Alsatian born in Strasbourg, where she spent most of her youth, Marcelle Cahn trained in Berlin during the Great War under Lovis Corinth and Eugen Spiro, then with Fernand Léger and Amédée Ozenfant in Paris (where she chose to spend the last thirty-five years of her life). During the interwar period Marcelle Cahn participated in large events and movements in support of abstract art. Although supported and appreciated by influential artists and critics of her time, in the last years of her life she only rarely had solo exhibitions and lived in a rather isolated state, increased by periods of withdrawal from the art world. For material and health reasons, collage was the dominant technique practiced for the last fifteen years of the career of an artist inclined to rely on the minimum of resources at her disposal. This reflects the appetite of an artist driven all her life by the freedom and poetry of gesture, as well as the play of infinite variations.

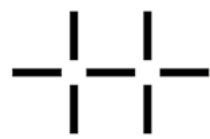
"Dear Madam, you definitely deserve to be made citizen of honour of Saint-Étienne! I am delighted to consider you a benefactor of the Museum, and, all jokes aside, I am infinitely grateful for what you do for us." It was in these terms that Maurice Allemand, curator of the musée d'Art et d'Industrie de Saint-Étienne (1947-1966) acknowledged in November 1958, amid a rich correspondence, the essential role of support provided by Marcelle Cahn to this establishment. The artist's privileged connection with the *stéphanois* museum was expressed by her role as a go-between, interceding to implore numerous artists to enhance the museum's collections. The exhibition visit is thus extended by a specific section bringing together around forty artworks from the MAMC+ collection.

General curator: Cécile Godefroy, art historian and independent curator.

Associate curators: Barbara Forest, Chief Curator of Heritage at MAMCS and Alexandre Quoi, Head of the Scientific Department at MAMC+.

This exhibition, also presented at Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Strasbourg (MAMCS) and at the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes, will vary in format at each stage depending on the site.





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Left page, top to bottom:

**Marcelle Cahn**, *Nu berlinois*  
[Berliner nude], 1916, oil on  
canvas, 133 × 58 cm. Gift from  
Denise René Gallery, MAMCS.  
Photo: Mathieu Bertola, Musées de  
la Ville de Strasbourg

**Marcelle Cahn**, *Les Trois raquettes*  
[The three rackets], 1926, oil on  
canvas, 59 × 70 cm. Cholet, Art and  
History Museum. Photo: Alexandre  
Production

Right page, top to bottom:

**Marcelle Cahn**, *Untitled (Hand)*,  
1930, drawing in black crayon,  
25 × 26,7 cm, MAMCS  
Photo: Mathieu Bertola, Musées de  
la Ville de Strasbourg

**Marcelle Cahn**, *Triptyque*,  
*Peinture-relief*, 1953, distemper  
on isorel, 74,5 × 114,5 cm, FNAC  
Collection, deposit at Lyon Museum  
of Fine Arts, purchase 1972. Photo:  
Martial Couderette - Lyon MBA

# THE EXHIBITION GUIDE

## First trajectories

Marcelle Cahn was born in Strasbourg in 1895 and raised in a family of cultivated and music-loving bankers and merchants. She spoke German, French and Alsatian. The young girl grew up in the company of her father, Anselme, a knitwear merchant who was passionate about astronomy, her mother, Alice, a pianist, her younger brother Roger and Marguerite Steinberger, the governess. The latter would become one of her favourite models in the 1930s, along with her cat Boom. Like her mother and her grandmother (who was a descendant of the composer Giacomo Meyerbeer), Marcelle Cahn played the piano and the violin. In addition to her musical education, she studied drawing and painting in Strasbourg, then in Berlin from 1915 to 1918 and finally in Paris from 1920. At the same time, Marcelle Cahn also studied literature and philosophy at the universities of Strasbourg and Zurich. Her first paintings, which featured the human figure, reflect two main tendencies: a Cézanian and Cubist vein reinforced by her time in Paris and a more Expressionist vein linked to Berlin. In the first case, the coloured volumes were geometric while, in the second, the line was precise and marked. As for the drawings, they bear the mark of the more classical and naturalistic style taught in Strasbourg.



## Around Purism

The years 1925 and 1926 were decisive in Marcelle Cahn's career and the development of her artistic vocabulary. Through the gallery owner Léonce Rosenberg, she joined the classes of Fernand Léger and Amédée Ozenfant at the Académie Moderne. Her artistic persona asserted itself in terms of a combination of geometric rigor and poetic sensitivity. Quickly assimilating purist aesthetics, she freed herself from the interior scenes and still lifes characteristic of the movement and incorporated subtle vanishing points that hollowed out the space. Between 1925 and 1929 Marcelle Cahn

participated in many decisive exhibitions and found herself at the heart of an international artistic proliferation, alongside Léger and Ozenfant and their students, but also Jean Arp, Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg, Willy Baumeister, Wassily Kandinsky and Le Corbusier. Her rise was rapid and, in 1929, she became a member of the "Cercle et Carré" ("Circle and Square") group which was founded by Michel Seuphor and Joaquín Torres-García and advocated the rigor of geometric abstraction as opposed to the irrationality of the Surrealists. However, Marcelle Cahn was an independent and non-partisan artist and frequented both groups. She participated in the first and only exhibition of "Cercle et Carré", displaying four paintings, including *La Rame* (Oar) and *Femme à la raquette* (Woman with Racket).

## Figure-refuge

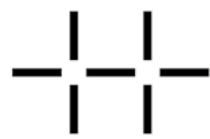
In the early 1930s, Marcelle Cahn hardly painted anymore. For more than ten years, she lived in profound solitude, between Paris and Strasbourg, without showing any hostility towards those she knew. She drew a lot, her sketches including nudes, children's heads, Marguerite, her mother, cats, apples and trees, but destroyed some of her paintings when she allowed herself to paint. This return to nature corresponded to a period of personal crisis which was not only emotional but also aesthetic and financial. In 1941, in the company of her mother, she left to join her brother Roger, a doctor for the community of the Sisters of Nevers in Toulouse where she attended seminars given by Abbé Breuil on parietal art, and those given by Father Nicolas on faith, Christianity and ecumenism.



## Recreations

Marcelle Cahn spent the years of the Occupation in Toulouse with her mother and brother. In 1946 she returned to Paris where, from 1949 onwards, she again participated in major events related to abstract art. Having moved into an apartment/studio located in the dynamic Rue Daguerre, in 1952 the artist presented a set of line drawings at the Vogelles gallery which confirmed her return to geometric abstraction. Although from then on the straight line dominated her pictorial production, it did not exclude a serpentine line which made the motifs dance, as demonstrated by *Triptych* whose essential components (black lines on a white background that give a sense of rhythm and space) responded to the ambition of geometric paintings. Many small-format, abstract or figurative Tachist drawings, to which the artist sometimes added stickers, reveal another aspect of the creation of a woman who indicated her need for "lyrical things", in other words a "certain escape from the constructed, geometric artwork which is a veritable asceticism". In short, according to the artist, it was about "recreation". Free and spontaneous "recreations" (in which the figure sometimes appeared) in dialogue with rigorously elaborated works such as *Three Triangles*, provided a necessary balance, both to the work and the artist.





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Left page:

**Marcelle Cahn**, *Untitled*, 1956, oil on wood, 100 x 73 cm. Rennes Museum of Fine Arts . Photo: MBA, Rennes, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Jean-Manuel Salingue

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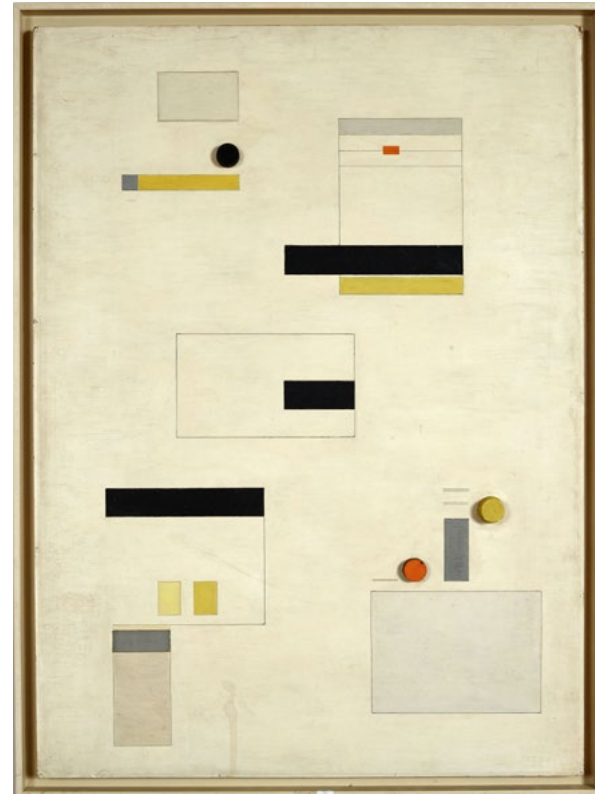
**Marcelle Cahn**, *Untitled (drawing-poem)*, 1956, heightened Indian ink, 12,2 x 13,7 cm, private collection.  
Photo: Raphaëlle Krieger

**Marcelle Cahn**, *Spatial II*, 1969, Collage of painted wood on wooden structure. Purchased with the support of the Regional Museums Acquisition Fund (State/Alsace Regional Council), 1985. Unterlinden Museum Colmar © Musée Unterlinden Colmar

# THE EXHIBITION GUIDE

## *Relief painting*

In 1953 Marcelle Cahn returned to geometric abstraction with a remarkable set of relief paintings that can be seen as a continuation of the most abstract paintings of the Purist period. In each piece, painted on wood, hardboard or plywood, the artist incised the white surface material with parallel and perpendicular black lines which describe more or less tight geometric frames and whose intersection, inside the painting, gives rise to a universe of squares and rectangles punctuated with prisms and white or coloured triangles. To give rhythm to her pieces, the artist affixed to the surface of her paintings small elements of geometric and circular



format in wood, hardboard and balsa and (in 1960) the first white and coloured spheres. These medium and large format paintings responded to the works of the international abstract tendency which, via various paths, many had adopted in the wake of Neoplasticism, considering the relief to be one of the possible ways of renewing abstraction, aiming at architecture itself.

## *Cosmic objects*

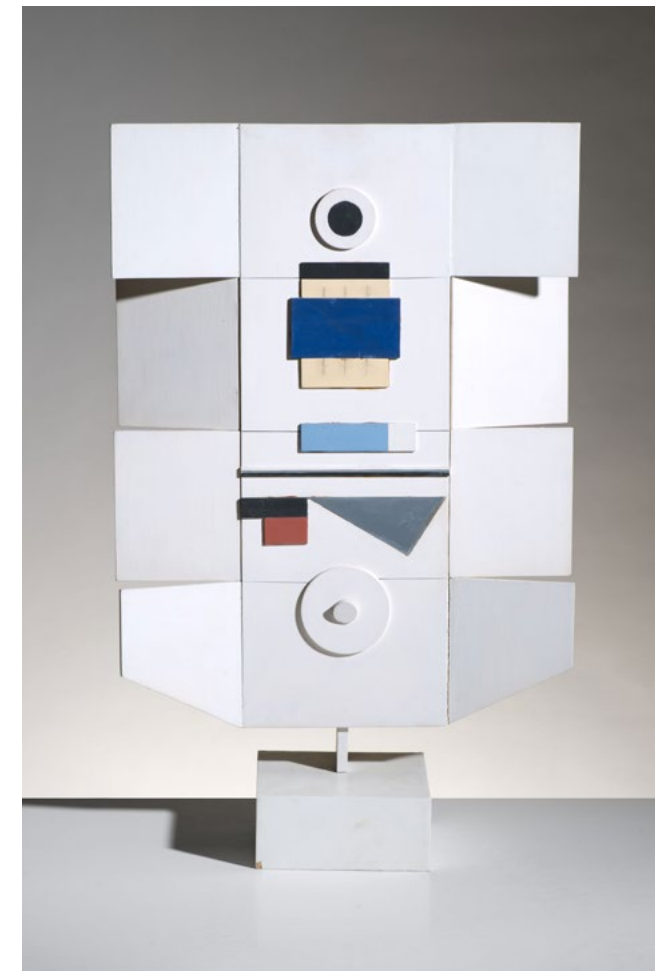
For Marcelle Cahn, who sought to escape from bourgeois interiors and to counter the idea of decoration, “Spatial are spatial equivalences from fixed and mobile panels which should participate in the structure of our universe”. In 1961, Marcelle Cahn designed her first *Spatial* with the encouragement of Swiss artist Gottfried Honegger. Originating from the cutting and assembling of small medicine packets, the *Spatial*s were executed in painted wood by a practitioner and are for the most part apprehended frontally through an arrangement of elementary forms cadenced by the relief, the coloured pellets and cut angles that modulate the light. Along with the relief paintings and photocollages, the *Spatial*s evoked space imagery (space stations, aerospace rockets and satellites in orbit) nourished by the rivalry between the United States and the USSR in the astronautical field which had begun in the 1950s, and constituted probably one of the most sensational results of the quest for space that Marcelle Cahn had been engaged in since the mid-1920s.

## *Music and poetry*

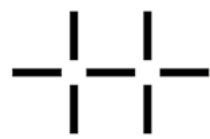
Music and painting are closely linked in the imagination of artists, particularly in the synesthetic debates that heralded the birth of colourist abstraction. The musical theme is present in Marcelle Cahn's work, as can be seen in *Éventail et guitar* (Fan and Guitar) of 1926, but also through the titles that allude to jazz syncopation and other tempos. The many variations that the artist created from screenprints, invitation cards and photographs, making identical motifs dance in a constantly renewed way, testify to a musical sensitivity that recalls the family of musicians that the artist, who studied violin and piano in her youth, came from. Close to composers as well as poets,



the woman who declared she “develops initial, simple forms, like a musician develops a theme in a fugue” without “excluding poetry” was the author of about twenty short poetry texts as well the drawing-poems she composed from 1956 onwards.







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Left page:

**Marcelle Cahn**, *Untitled*, around 1972-1975, collage on postcard, 15 × 10 cm. Private collection. Photo: François Doury

Right page, top to bottom:

**Aurelie Nemours**, *Abstract composition*, 1958, pastel on paper, 55,5 × 46 cm. MAMC+ Collections, gift of the artist in 1959. Photo: Yves Bresson / MAMC+ © ADAGP, Paris 2022

**Léon Tutundjian**, *Untitled*, 1925-1926, collage of drawing paper, wrapping paper and an engraving taken from a school textbook, pasted on paper and Indian ink, 46,5 × 33 cm. MAMC+ Collections, gift of the artist in 1964. Photo: Yves Bresson / MAMC+ © ADAGP, Paris 2022

# THE EXHIBITION GUIDE

## *Collage in play*

The collages that Marcelle Cahn produced from 1952 onwards and which, from the mid-1960s, constituted the bulk of her production, oscillate between strict geometry and lyrical fantasy. On the one hand, there is the rigor of constructed thought and, on the other, spontaneity and deconstructive fun. In 1969 she had to leave her Rue Daguerre apartment/studio for the retirement home for artists run by the Galignani Foundation in Neuilly. There, Marcelle Cahn restricted her practice to materials that remained easily accessible to her: coloured paper, stickers, transparencies and other items of stationery, medical materials, embossed cardboard, wool and various fabrics, envelopes, razor blades, metro tickets, more or less unexpected packaging and discarded materials. These were enhanced with pencil, oil pastels or white paint, reused and metamorphosed into mostly abstract compositions that sometimes nevertheless evoked reality. The poetry and humour with which Cahn transformed the most modest everyday objects and scraps transports us into a constantly renewed, sensitive and vibrant world.

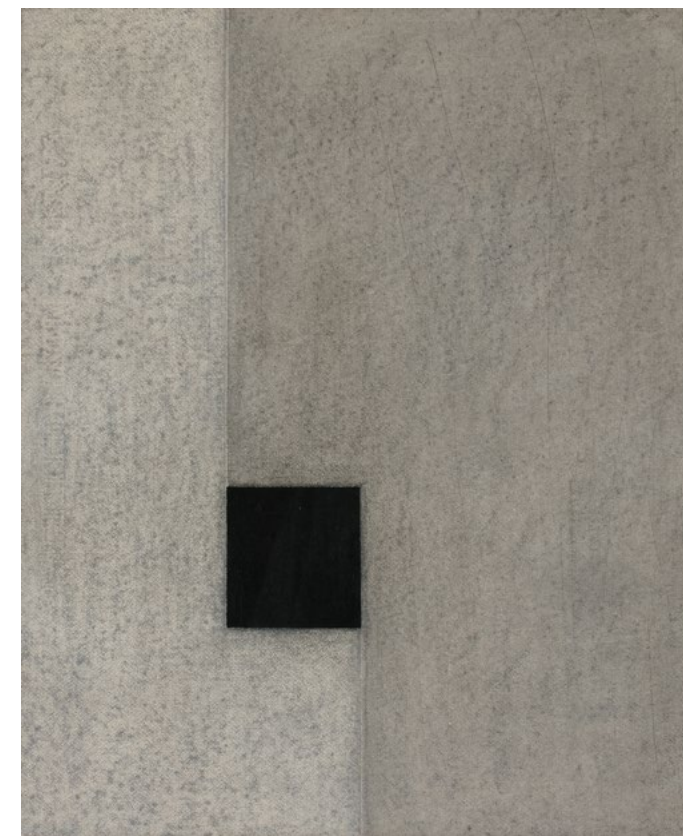
Collage on postcards seems to have been as much an occupation as a game for the artist who deployed all her sense of space when using postcards of the city of Paris whose poetic and mischievous transformation she liked to address to those dear to her.

For the Dijon stage of the Marcelle Cahn exhibition in 1973, Serge Lemoine commissioned the artist to create a set of collages based on postcards of the city. Using stickers of various colours and formats, the artist humorously and poetically presented the most emblematic monuments of the Burgundian city, whether medieval or of more recent construction (like the large Lake Kir urban planning project built on the outskirts and lined with multi-storey towers).

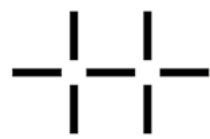


## *An ambassador of the Musée de Saint-Étienne*

“Dear Madam, you definitely deserve to be made citizen of honour of Saint-Étienne! I am delighted to consider you a benefactor of the Museum, and, all jokes aside, I am infinitely grateful for what you do for us.” It was in these terms that Maurice Allemand, curator of the musée d'Art et d'Industrie de Saint-Étienne (1947-1966) acknowledged in November 1958, amid a rich correspondence, the essential role of support provided by Marcelle Cahn to this establishment. The artist's privileged connection with the *stéphanois* museum was notably expressed by her role as a go-between, interceding to implore numerous artists to enhance the museum's collections. From Aurelie Nemours to Carmelo Arden Quin, from Nicolas Schöffer to Léon Tutundjian, to André Bloc and Alicia Penalba, the list is long concerning donations of artworks that the musée de Saint-Étienne received through the intermediary of Marcelle Cahn. This broad network of artists that she solicited, in solidarity with Maurice Allemand, relativises the image of solitude and distance that is often how she is portrayed. The exhibition visit is thus extended by a specific section bringing together around forty artworks from the MAMC+ collection.







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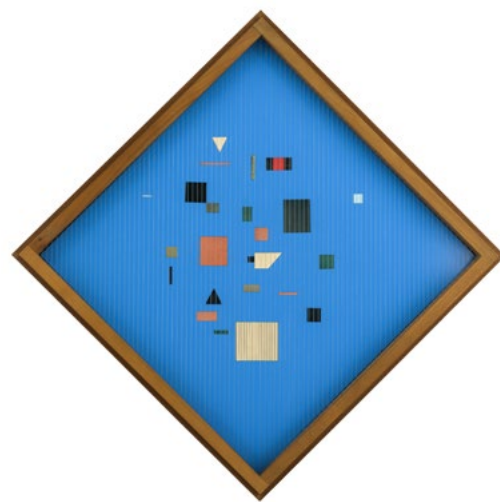
**Amédée Ozenfant**, *Purist still life*, 1921, oil on canvas. MAMC+ Collections, purchase with the support of Regional Acquisition Fund for Museums, co-financed by the State and the Rhône-Alpes Region and the Casino Corporate Foundation, 1999

**Carmelo Arden Quin**, *Geometric composition*, 1958, plastic, lacquered wood and nylon thread. MAMC+ Collections, gift of the artist in 1959

# THE EXHIBITION GUIDE

In the 1918 book *Après le cubisme*, then from 1920 onwards in the journal *L'Esprit nouveau* directed by Le Corbusier, **Amédée Ozenfant** defined the characteristics of an artistic form marked by idealism – known as purism – responding to a society turned upside-down by World War One. While continuing to carry the familial and social torch of the “builders” inherited from cubism, Ozenfant developed a rational vision of forms and colours. The plastic values of geometry, mathematics, and numbers now took precedence in this “aware art”: an art aware of its own means, corresponding to the economy of pictorial work. Ozenfant worked on still life – purism’s central theme – in a serial manner, staging objects whose usage became timeless, arranged according to a vertical and horizontal equilibrium, through transparencies and translations of planes, and variations on colour, form, or line (often Ingresque or musical).

With *Nature morte puriste*, the identification of objects tends to be eclipsed, within a geometric constellation created through the use of flat zones of colour and through the shared outlines of the composition. This work from 1921 attests to a new approach to figurative abstraction in which the pictorial space highlights planes, through the formal precision of surfaces and contours.



From as early as 1936, he showed his first polygonal forms at the Casa de España and fought against Spanish fascism, before moving to Buenos Aires where he frequented painters, writers, and poets. It was with the artists Gyula Košice and Rhod Rothfuss that he created the MADi movement in 1946, which he brought with him to Paris two years later.

The principle of geometric design repeated in the composition, thus generating the theme of the canvas, pervaded his paintings as well as his series of collages and cut-outs. It was through the intermediary of Marcelle Cahn that Carmelo Arden Quin donated this *Composition géométrique* to the musée de Saint-Étienne in 1958. The work was presented in 1964 as part of the exhibition *Cinquante ans de 'collages'* devised by its curator, Maurice Allemand.



From his teenage years onwards, **Carmelo Arden Quin** studied history and painting with writer and painter Emilio Sans. In 1935, he met abstract painter Joaquín Torres García in Montevideo, whose conferences proved to have a decisive influence, helping him to discover the concerns and methods of the avant-gardes. He established his artistic vocabulary by trying his hand at compositions using circles, squares, and triangles, which took into account the respect of the law of proportions and the unity of chromatic tone, contributing to the overall balance of the artwork.

A pioneer of geometric concrete art in Switzerland, **Sophie Taeuber-Arp** is a multitalented artist who learned the decorative arts, embroidery techniques, lacework and weaving, as well as woodturning, architectural practices, and dance.

In 1915, she met painter and poet Jean Arp, with whom she produced collaborative artworks. With him, she engaged in the dada movement and mingled with the surrealists in Paris. In 1928, a commission for the interior decoration of L'Aubette in Strasbourg, with Theo Van Doesburg and Jean Arp, marked a turning point for the artist, who would subsequently develop many reliefs and paintings along these lines. She joined the groups Cercle et Carré and Abstraction Création, then edited the magazine *Plastique* from 1937 to 1938 in collaboration with César Domela and Jean Arp.

Dissociating her artistic research from Arp's so as to better hone her originality, Sophie Taeuber-Arp drew orthogonal constructions in colour pencil and combined purely geometric form as a rhythm-setter – acquired from cubism – with pure colour, as the melody line, based on the principle of vertical and horizontal intersections in weaving.

It was during the acquisition of Jean Arp's work *En songe* in 1957 that Arp made the donation of these screen-print reproductions, thus guaranteeing Sophie Taeuber-Arp's presence at the Musée de Saint-Étienne.



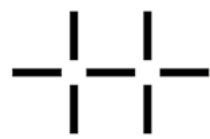
**Sophie Taeuber-Arp**, *Composition in a circle*, 1938, silkscreen in colour on paper. MAMC+ Collections, gift of Jean Arp in 1957.



**Véra Pagava**, *Enchanted city*, 1961, oil on canvas. MAMC+ Collections, gift of the artist in 1962

From the start of her career in the 1930s in Paris, although her work was figurative, painter **Véra Pagava** proved to have a strong inclination for the principles of abstraction. Within a post-cubist vein, the minimalist schematism of her early works, supported by a dark and restrained palette, already expressed her desire to make a beeline for the essential. Whether it concerned her portraits, still lifes, or religious scenes, she seemed less interested in the narrative potential of subjects than in the way in which motifs, zones of specific and almost plain colour were arranged on the surface of the canvas. It was with great freedom that she later pursued this work in many directions, notably trying her hand at optical interplays, relative to the multiplication of the motif and confusion between planes. With her series on cities, including the work *Ville enchantée*, she experimented with imbrications of coloured rectangles, geometric shapes with curved and irregular contours. This very free treatment of geometry brought fluidity and an organic composition to these raw elements, more closely aligning it with the work of Sophie Taeuber-Arp.





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*Marcelle Cahn*, by Shirley Goldfarb and Gregori Mazurowski, around 1955, silver print, 17,3 × 12,6 cm. MAMCS Archives, Marcelle Cahn Fund. Photo: Mathieu Bertola, Musées de la Ville de Strasbourg

# BIOGRAPHY



1895

Birth on 1<sup>st</sup> March in Strasbourg of Marcelle Delphine Cahn, eldest child of an Alsatian Jewish family. Her father, Anselme Cahn, was a knitwear merchant and her mother, Alice Sophie Blum, was a musician descended from a family of Strasbourg bankers.

1906-1913

Drawing lessons with the renowned Strasbourg artists Émile Schneider, Joseph Sattler and Georges Ritleng.

1914

Enrolled at the School of Decorative Arts in Strasbourg, Marcelle Cahn studies philosophy at the University of Strasbourg at the same time. The painter Simon Lévy, future founder of the May group, introduces her to the paintings of Cézanne and Van Gogh.

1915

Marcelle Cahn lives in Berlin with her mother and her brother Roger until 1918. She attends classes given by Eugen Spiro and at Lovis Corinth's studio, and attends exhibitions at Der Sturm gallery.

1920

Period of comings and goings between Paris and Strasbourg until 1925. In Paris, she enrolls at the Ranson Academy where the teachers include Édouard Vuillard, Maurice Denis and Félix Vallotton, she is subsequently taught by Othon Friesz at the Académie Moderne.

1925

In Paris again (until 1930). At the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, she draws the nude from life. Meets Léonce Rosenberg, director of the gallery and review named *L'Effort moderne*, thanks to whom she meets and attends courses given by Fernand Léger and Amédée Ozenfant at the Académie Moderne. First abstract paintings and participation in Victor Poznanski's exhibition "Art Today" in Paris which brings together the main currents of the international avant-garde of the time. Ruined following bad financial investments, Marcelle Cahn faces her first material difficulties.

1926

Joins the Society of Independent Artists, and participates in its first Salons. Participation with other Léger students in an exhibition at the Contemporary Art Gallery, then in the Société anonyme exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in New York following her meeting with Marcel Duchamp.

1930

Invited to join the "Cercle et Carré" group founded in 1929 by Michel Seuphor and Joaquín Torres García, Marcelle Cahn participates in the group's one and only exhibition at Galerie 23, which features 85 abstract and constructivist artists. She returns to live in Strasbourg.

1932

Marcelle Cahn returns with her mother to Paris which, due to the economic crisis and the rise of Nazism in Germany, hosts many foreign artists. She stays there until 1935.

1939

On 15 April, 1939, she leaves Strasbourg where the buildings belonging to Alice Cahn's family are subsequently occupied by the Nazis (in 1940), then bombed. With her mother, she joins her brother in Toulouse where the two women remain until the end of the war. Marcelle Cahn is deeply affected by the death of her mother on 28 December 1945.

1946

Back in Paris she resumes working and emerges from her artistic isolation. She then gets back in touch with her friends, including Natalia Goncharova, Seuphor and Arp.

1949

First participation in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles (in which she takes an active part until 1967). This exhibition marks her return to the art scene.

1951

Moves into an apartment/studio at 63 Rue Daguerre, in a district frequented by many artists, where she remains for nearly twenty years.

1952

First solo exhibition at the Vogelles gallery featuring a series of line drawings. A pivotal year in her work, she returns to the practice of collage. First eye problems.

1953

First relief paintings.

1955

Joins the "Space" group, founded by André Bloc and Félix Del Marle, and participates in the group's exhibition in Saint-Cloud.

1956

Lyrical drawings and composition of short poems. She joins the "Structures" group which contributes to the promotion of abstract art in the region.

1958

Meets the Hungarian poet and art publisher Imre Pan.

1959

First retrospective of the artist at the Simone Heller gallery, organized through the art critic Waldemar-George. The French State and the Museums of the City of Strasbourg buy artworks by her.

1961

A founding member of the "Measure" group, Marcelle Cahn participates in their one and only exhibition in France at the Rennes Museum of Fine Arts. First Spatial.

1962-1964

Three solo exhibitions are devoted to her in galleries in Paris and Milan. Worsening of her problems related to sight, requiring several operations and hospitalizations over the following years. The artist stops painting.

1966

Beginning of her collaboration with the Denise René gallery.

1969

Moves to the Galignani Foundation in Neuilly, a retirement home for artists where she resides until her death.

1972

Major retrospective of her work organized by the CNAC at the Museum of Art and Industry in Saint-Étienne. This travelling exhibition then tours France until 1974, showing in fifteen cities, including Dijon and Strasbourg.

1973

Made a Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters.

1975

Retrospective at the Denise René gallery.

1976

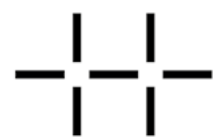
Installation of two public sculptures for the middle schools Le Parc in Dijon and Paul Fort in Is-sur-Tille as part of the 1% funding scheme for artistic projects in new buildings.

1980

Donation of her artworks and personal archives to the Strasbourg Museum of Modern Art.

1981

Death of Marcelle Cahn on 20 September in Neuilly-sur-Seine.



**MUSÉE D'ART  
MODERNE ET  
CONTEMPORAIN  
SAINT-ÉTIENNE  
MÉTROPOLE**

**PRESS KIT**

**Marcelle Cahn**, *Untitled*, 1972-1973,  
colour serigraph printed on Arches  
paper, 65 × 38,5 cm.  
MAMC+ Collections, gift of the  
artist in 1973. Photo: Yves Bresson  
/ MAMC+



## LENDERS

### FRANCE

Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris  
Musée national d'art Moderne - Centre  
Pompidou, Paris  
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Cambrai  
Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Cholet  
Musée Unterlinden, Colmar  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon  
Musée de Peinture et de Sculpture de  
Grenoble  
Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille  
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon  
Musée des Ursulines, Mâcon  
Espace de l'Art concret, Mouans-Sartoux  
Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes  
Musée de l'Abbaye de Sainte-Croix,  
Sables d'Olonne  
Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain de  
Strasbourg  
Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Romainville  
Galerie Lahumière, Paris  
Archives municipales et métropolitaines de  
Saint-Étienne

Private collections, Paris  
Private collection, Lyon  
Private collection, Colmar  
Private collections, Strasbourg  
Private collection, Saint-Étienne

### ALLEMAGNE

Private collection, Aachen

### BELGIQUE

Fondation Wallonie-Bruxelles, Liège  
Private collection, Brussels

### MONACO

Private collection, Monaco

### PORTUGAL

Museo Coleção Berardo, Lisbon

### SUISSE

Kunstmuseum, Bâle  
Marguerite Arp Foundation, Locarno  
Private collection, Vevey

## ACCOMPANYING THE EXHIBITION

### CONFERENCE

"Around Marcelle Cahn (1895-1981): a historiography of abstraction".  
Monday 7 November 2022 at 6.30 pm

In this lecture, Cécile Godefroy will return to the context that preceded the re-reading and re-evaluation of this great figure of abstract art, Marcelle Cahn.

Cécile Godefroy is art historian, doctor of the University of Paris IV-Sorbonne and member of the International Association of Art Critics. She has taught at French and American universities in Paris. She is a specialist in the historical avant-garde and in transdisciplinary issues in art. She was co-curator of the exhibitions *Sonia Delaunay. The colors of abstraction* (Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris; Tate modern, London, 2014-15) and *Picasso. Sculptures*, Musée national Picasso-Paris; BOZAR, Brussels, 2016-17; and curator of the exhibitions *Picasso's musics*, Musée de la Musique - Philharmonie-Paris, 2020; *Picasso ibero*, Centro Botín, Santander, 2021. Author of numerous books and essays on Picasso's work, she has just joined the Musée National Picasso-Paris to direct the future Centre d'Études Picasso which will open in autumn 2023. She is the general curator of the exhibition *Marcelle Cahn. In search of space* for the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Strasbourg, the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Saint-Étienne and at the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes.

## CATALOGUE

*Marcelle Cahn. En quête d'espace*

Publication director: Cécile Godefroy.

Associate director: Alexandre Quoi and Barbara Forest.

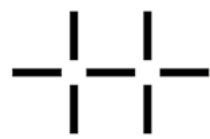
336 pages, 360 illustrations

Retail price: 44€ TTC

The catalogue includes an English version of all the essays, at the end of the book.







MUSÉE D'ART  
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# EXTRACT FROM THE CATALOGUE

## Interview by Alexandre Quoi with Bernard Ceysson

**Alexandre Quoi:** “Dear Madam, there is no doubt that you deserve to be made an honorary citizen of Saint-Etienne! I am satisfied to consider you a benefactor of the Museum; however, jesting apart, I am infinitely grateful for what you do for us.” It was in these terms that in November 1958 and in a very rich correspondence Maurice Allemand, curator of the Musée d'Art et d'Industrie de Saint-Étienne (1947–1966), hailed the essential support Marcelle Cahn had provided for the museum.

**Bernard Ceysson:** I can only agree with Maurice Allemand's words that you nicely recall in your question. And therefore repeat with him and with you that in appreciation of her “intercession” in favour of the enrichment of the collections Marcelle Cahn should have been made an “honorary citizen of Saint-Etienne.” But, in 1958 and well after – let's say until the election of Michel Durafour to the town hall of Saint-Etienne – while the elected representatives of Saint-Etienne left Maurice Allemand totally free in the management of the Musée d'Art et d'Industrie's affairs and in enriching its collections, they were careful not to allocate him the sums needed to undertake a real acquisitions policy. His appointment in Paris to the Inspectorate of Artistic Creation facilitated the doubling of this acquisition budget, which Michel Durafour was able to raise to seventy-five thousand francs! Having succeeded him in September 1967, I benefited from this from 1968 onwards. We are thus, Aurélie Voltz, you and I, as well as Jacques Beauffet and Lóránd Hegyi, indebted to the unfailing support given by Marcelle Cahn to the obstinate and audacious activism of Maurice Allemand.

*From Aurelie Nemours to Carmelo Arden Quin, and from Nicolas Schöffer to Léon Tutundjian, via André Bloc, Alicia Penalba and Marta Pan, the list of donations of works that the museum of Saint-Etienne received through Marcelle Cahn is a long one. Does this wide network of artists that she solicited in conjunction with Maurice Allemand not relativise the image we often have of her as being marked by solitude and remoteness?*

For sure she participated in, let's say, the “life” of the art world of the post-war years, but she was rather at one remove from the agitations of a topical scene seeking to be “avant-gardist.” The names you mention – and which should be recalled – circumscribe her, if I may say so, to a part of Parisian artistic life still animated by abstractions grouped, since the 1930s, around Cercle et Carré and Abstraction-Création, and then after the war around the periodical *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, created in 1949 by André Bloc, who was later a founder of the Espace group. Michel Seuphor, of course, was an active member. A constructivist genealogy is thus evident, well away from the informal and lyrical surrealist poetics. If one browses through the collections of the museum, one finds Béohty, Vasarely, Schöffer, Leppien, Gorin, Tutundjian, Seuphor, etc. Maurice Allemand was much more attracted to geometric abstractions than to those called gestural, lyrical, informal, etc. And more by Dada, perhaps, than by surrealism if I recall some of our conversations correctly. But it is true – and Jacques Beauffet and I have exaggerated, let's say, the rituals – that it was not appropriate to get bogged down in habits. And, in the extraordinary “Cinquante ans de collages” exhibition in 1964, he remarkably did not omit any of the “collagist” and “assembler” experiments. The influence of Michel Seuphor and, even more so, that of Marcelle Cahn have greatly contributed to shaping the spirit of the museum's collection. Like Seuphor, she had good relations with Larionov and Goncharova. With regard to some apparently overlooked artists, considering the sums he had at his disposal, Maurice Allemand was unable, absolutely unable, to acquire their works. Paradoxically, therefore, we can take the measure of Marcelle Cahn's “intercessions.” They made it possible, credible, to create an identity for the museum, that of a museum outside Paris dedicated to the defence and illustration of modern art and to the construction of a solid base favourable to the development of a singular, identifiable and unique collection. These “intercessions” demonstrate that Marcelle Cahn was not a loner and that she had a real network of relations and friendships. But current events did not give her the consideration, the place she deserved, already, in the implicit hierarchies postulated by the various chapels of the “art world” and its clerics.

*In what precise circumstances did you meet Marcelle Cahn? Was it on the occasion of the travelling retrospective exhibition that you curated with Daniel Abadie for the CNAC, the first stage of which was held in Saint-Étienne in 1972? What memories do you have of this project and how was it received at the time?*

It is very difficult for me to tell you the precise circumstances. Daniel Abadie was preparing a retrospective exhibition of Marcelle Cahn's work for the CNAC and he worked and worked to convince me to present it in Saint-Étienne and to write a text for the catalogue. So I gladly accompanied Daniel to Marcelle Cahn's house because I have always liked the two paintings in the museum's collection and the very constructivist assemblage of 1961. *Avion – Forme aviatique* is, in my opinion, a masterpiece. (...) I remember Marcelle Cahn's impeccable, modest and rather spartan flat and her great kindness. (...) The inhabitants of Saint-Etienne who visited this exhibition appreciated it. I didn't get much criticism for it. The previous year they had been out in full force about Rancillac and Peter Saul. (...) The fact remains that this exhibition by Marcelle Cahn now takes on a different meaning, thanks to Strasbourg and Saint-Étienne. Seen from today, it appears premonitory. Marcelle Cahn, “She” too, made abstraction.

*In your introductory text to the 1972 catalogue, you mentioned the activity of a painter who was “half stuck.” How do you explain the relative oblivion of Marcelle Cahn's work and the fact that her career effectively remains marginal?*

I think I made it clear in what I said before. Demonstrating a rare modesty, she deliberately remained in the background. She is in the centre, in the foreground, next to Jean Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp, in a famous “souvenir” photograph of Circle and Square, not far from Mondrian and Kandinsky. Strongly present, as if she wanted to belong. It is up to you and the curators of this exhibition to make her known and recognised. As for the expression you attribute to me, I don't remember it, because I have never reread this preface of which I am the troubled author – but I shall do so. It was inspired, I think, by the stickers and I used them rather than more wisely sticking to “forgotten.”

*How would you describe Marcelle Cahn's contribution and particular approach to abstract painting from 1925 onwards?*

(...) Without indulging in hierarchical comparisons, I think she should be situated between Sonia Delaunay and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. Perhaps we should dare to compare her “small works” to the much more spectacular large formats, based on what she did with her toolbox of stickers and envelopes. We would then be surprised by the gentle irony, in a deliciously minor mode, of a minimalism as modest as she herself was.

*Marcelle Cahn was represented by seven collages in the Cinquante ans de collages exhibition at the Musée de Saint-Étienne in 1964. How would you describe her collages*

I don't know. I don't remember them. I saw this exhibition two or three times. But in 1964, I was much more interested in Stefano da

Zevio or the Maestro del Bambino Vispo – I'm putting on airs here – than in many contemporary artists. I'm only just in jest. (...) But the assiduous visitor of the museum that I had been since 1953, often stopped that year, as always since 1957, in front of *Avion – Forme aviatique*. It was, of course, in that fabulous, overwhelming exhibition, “Art abstrait. Les premières générations” (“Abstract Art. The first generations”). Imagine such an exhibition in 1957! In 1957! In Saint-Etienne! My life was irrevocably and happily changed. Ask Claude Mollard and Jacques Beauffet who also visited the exhibition what it meant to them.

*Would you like to say a word about the postcards of Paris that Marcelle Cahn used to send you from her retirement home in Neuilly, in which she decorated the Eiffel Tower with stickers?* These are somewhat “mail art” collages with a touch of humour. Do what I was unable to do: don't archive them and put them in the inventory of the collections.

*Today you are generously donating a work by Marcelle Cahn, Atmosphère bleue (1966), to the MAMC+. This small painting, which was included in the 1972 exhibition, is one of a series of replicas of earlier works that were executed by an assistant at a time when the artist was partially blind. You spoke to me of a “quasi-conceptual” approach to this work. Could you elaborate on this idea?*

It's very difficult to explain briefly. The painting was not, I believe, necessarily painted by her, but by an “assistant” from a collage. An interesting renunciation of any expressiveness. Just a painting showing its mechanics. A bit “it's made of”? A bit “it's made like this”? “It features and it doesn't feature”? What you see is only what you see! Yes? No? And that's how it is with Frank Stella, a painting by whom entered the museum in 1972. I don't see the connection. But there is a connection . . .

*What do you expect today from the present retrospective exhibition, which should make up for a lack of knowledge of Marcelle Cahn's work? What do you perceive as the topicality of her art?*

I simply have to say, dear Alexandre, to you and to Aurélie, that I am a little moved by the attention paid to Marcelle Cahn by Saint-Étienne and Strasbourg – which has a very fine collection of works by this great artist, as it should be. It was necessary to do her justice and to act as historians. You have done so! Because by paying the tribute due to Marcelle Cahn, tribute is also paid to Maurice Allemand.

# PARTNERS

## MUSÉES DE LA VILLE DE STRASBOURG

In 1998, the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Strasbourg (MAMCS) opened its doors to the public. Designed by the architectural studios AFA, Adrien Fainsilber et Associés, its building is organised around a vast nave that serves the temporary exhibition spaces and the permanent display as well as the Auditorium, the bookshop-boutique, the Museum Library and the Art-Café.

In 2018, to celebrate its twentieth anniversary, the MAMCS has completely renewed the display of its permanent collections. New principles define this presentation entitled "Joyeuses frictions". Modern art and contemporary art meet and dialogue on the two levels of the museum to show the permanence of certain aesthetic and thematic concerns and to translate the porosity between artistic disciplines. Through twelve sections, "Joyeuses frictions" thus meets three main objectives: to give an account of the singularity of the collection, to exhibit rarely seen monumental works and to show what the form can reveal about its context of creation but also of distribution and perception in a broadened conception of the History of Art. The exhibition is built around the most important artists in the collection: Gustave Doré, Claude Monet, Paul Signac, Hans Arp, Wassily Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso, Alain Séchas and Bertrand Lavier, and through them, the question of the sacred, the links between painting and photography, the touch, the avant-garde, abstraction, formlessness and language. "Joyeuses frictions" integrates spaces for mediation and creative practices into its itinerary, such as the Studio, dedicated to artistic practices for individual visitors and groups, and the Salles Parenthèses, which offers an offbeat, digital or poetic, sonic or visual view of the works. Finally, an experimental and creative trail, "ExpériMAMCS! Art through experience", offers new encounters with the works and another point of view on the museum, its history, its actors and its current events.

The collection, which comprises some 18,000 works covering a period from 1870 to the present day, is clearly geographically oriented towards Europe. The modern collection starts with Impressionism and goes up to the pioneers of abstraction, without forgetting the decorative arts, and highlights three major artists born in Strasbourg: Gustave Doré (1832-, 1883), Hans Jean Arp (1886-1966), and Marcelle Cahn (1895-1981). The contemporary collection, for its part, highlights art from the 1960s to the present day and presents a group of German paintings unique in France centred around the works of Baselitz, Penck, Lüpertz, Immendorf.

MAMCS keeps a close watch on young artists and reserves a special place in its annual programme of exhibitions, as well as in its acquisition policy, for artists of the new generation. With three to four exhibitions a year, it is identified as a dynamic player within French and European institutions.

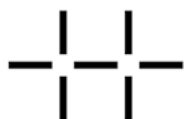
- Nearly 3 million visitors since the opening
- 150,000 visitors per year on average
- 3 exhibitions per year
- 150 exhibitions since the opening in 1998

The Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes offers visitors a panorama of the history of art from Antiquity to the present day. Its collection is structured around three strong axes: an 18th century cabinet of curiosities, enriched over time by various ambitions to build a museum-world; a fund of older paintings (Veronese, Rubens, Chardin, Gustave Caillebotte, Odilon Redon), which is particularly rich in terms of 17th century French art (Georges de La tour, Charles Le Brun, Noël Coypel, Philippe de Champaigne); a collection of modern and contemporary art, formed in the middle of the 20th century (Picasso, Gris, Tanguy, Laloy, Soulages, Asse, Morellet, Nemours, Molnar). Its temporary exhibitions seek to enhance these three axes which offer the possibility of juxtaposing older art, contemporary art and collection items from various sources. This programme is part of the cultural policy of the Rennes metropolis which, with a second-generation Frac (Regional Contemporary Art Collection), two art centres and multiple associative and private initiatives, emphasizes openness to the various forms that make up the contemporary art scene.

The Musée des beaux-arts is a cultural facility of the City of Rennes, which receives support from the Ministry of Culture – Drac Bretagne, the Regional Council of Brittany and the District Council of Ille-et-Vilaine.  
Open Tuesday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Access to the permanent collection is free of charge but there is an entry charge for temporary exhibitions.  
Regular collaboration with most of the city's festivals.  
Various possibilities for guided tours and workshops.





**MUSÉE D'ART  
MODERNE ET  
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SAINT-ÉTIENNE  
MÉTROPOLE**

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# PRESENTATION OF THE MUSEUM



## A Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art

The collection includes nearly 20,000 works ranging from the acquisitions of modern and contemporary art made since the beginning of the 1980s, to important donations and long-term loans.

Not only does the collection comprise significant artworks spanning from Surrealism to Neo-Expressionism, from Pop Art to New Realism, from Minimalism to the most contemporary movements, but the Museum also preserves major photographic holdings and a rare reference collection in the field of design, with productions by Charles and Ray Eames, Le Corbusier, Jean Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand...

The Museum demonstrates a real desire to open up to the world and, every year, several temporary exhibitions are organized with renowned artists such as Roman Opalka, George Baselitz, Richard Nonas, Laura Lamiel, Tania Mouraud, Jannis Kounellis, Giovanni Anselmo, Valérie Jouve, Pierre Buraglio, Robert Morris, Thomas Ruff...

## A Museum Rooted in the Region

The Museum currently welcomes more than 65,000 visitors every year. It fosters a variety of publics; individuals account for 71%, 29% for groups. The exhibition and mediation programme attracts a significant number of young audiences (in 2019, 38 % of the visitors were under 25 years old). In 2019, 67% of the visitors were inhabitants of the Loire Department, 33 % coming from other French regions and 2% from abroad.

## An Internationally Renowned Institution

The Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Saint-Étienne Métropole is approached throughout the year with loan request or for shared exhibition projects, in the context of major national and international events. Around 300 artworks are thus on loan to prestigious institutions throughout the world (recently The Phillips Collection in Washington D.C., Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, Lublin Museum in Poland...). The MAMC+ is also a member of the French-American network FRAME since 2019.

