



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

# **ROBERT MORRIS**

## ***THE PERCEIVING BODY***

**1<sup>ST</sup> JULY — 1<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER 2020**



**Robert Morris**, *Untitled (Mirrored Cubes)*, 1965/1971, mirror and wood, each cube : 91.4 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm, collection Tate, London © Adagp, Paris 2020

## A WORD WITH CURATORS

This exhibition is dedicated to the early work of the American artist Robert Morris (1931–2018), a prominent figure in the history of contemporary art. As opposed to the model of the survey, in which many examples of work are brought together to demonstrate variety or range, *Robert Morris. The Perceiving Body* is organised as a constellation of seven discrete rooms, each containing a single installation or a group of related objects.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Morris produced what are now considered to be canonical works of Minimal and Postminimal art. The works were primarily concerned with acts of making and beholding. They were made by Morris (and, later, by others) from materials and means drawn largely from the construction industry. In form, these objects eschew the compositional conventions of modernist abstraction, being based instead on principles of repetition, permutation, and chance. In scale, they observe a direct, 1:1 relation between the sculptural object and the body of the artist or observer – the 'perceiving body.' This emphasis on an encounter – between the subject and object – has its roots in advanced art circles of performance and dance with which Robert Morris has worked closely. Placed directly on the floor, the objects are non-monumental yet big enough to fully engage the space of the room: they confront, obstruct, or intervene.

The exhibition includes celebrated examples of the artist's work, such as *Untitled (3Ls)* (1965/1970) and *Untitled (Mirrored Cubes)* (1965/1971), and various early 'large-form' constructions in plywood, fiberglass, and steel mesh that hold, transmit, or reflect light. Also shown are process-based works using soft felt, and a related work, *Untitled (Scatter Piece)* (1968–1969/2009), a complex installation partly devised according to chance operations derived from John Cage. A film on the theme of the mirror, where the artist works with his own body, is also included. Finally, *Untitled (Portland Mirrors)* (1977) is a large installation with mirrors – an expansive illusion of multiple spaces that both summons and defeats the principle of one-point perspective.

The works produced by Morris in the 1970s saw the emergence of new factors and themes, such as disorientation, blindness, and illusion. According to the artist's writings, these elements reflect an emphasis on intensive interiority, a search for the self. Much later, Morris suggested that his early work possessed undisclosed, even allegorical, references to his childhood – to indelible memories of encounters with looming objects and hidden rooms. In this way, the work was said to engage space as affective or symbolic form.

Coproduced with the Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, this exhibition is of a special importance. Conceived by the American independent curator Jeffrey Weiss in close collaboration with Robert Morris himself before his death in December 2018, it is the very first exhibition looking back on his historic production ever since. Bringing an opportunity to gather a group of major works rarely seen in France from international collections. Elected as an 'Exhibition of national interest', it received exceptional financial support from the French State, and was possible thanks to the Terra Foundation for American Art support.

Having this exhibition in Saint-Étienne prolongs Robert Morris' special relationship with the MAMC+. The museum devoted an exhibition to Morris in 1974 and has ever since constituted a consistent and abundant body of Minimal and Postminimal works, forming one of the richest collections in France.

**Jeffrey Weiss**  
Guest Curator

**Alexandre Quoi**  
Associate Curator  
Chief Curator, MAMC+

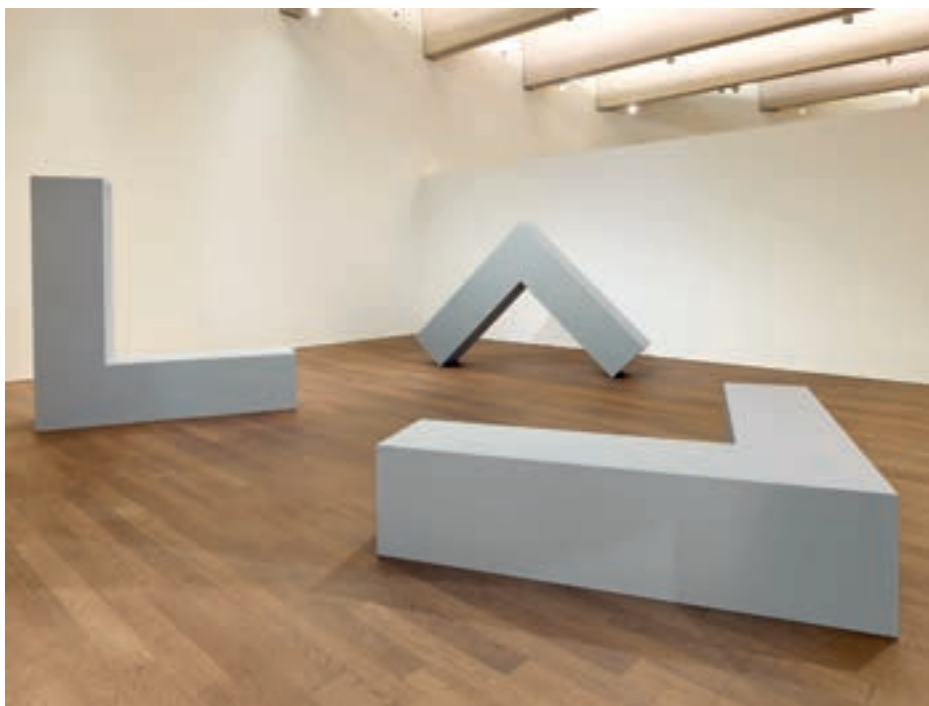


**Robert Morris, *Untitled (Felt Piece)*, 1974, felt and wood, 190 x 970 cm, collection MAMC+**  
Visual: Y. Bresson/MAMC+ © Adagp, Paris 2020

## UNTITLED (3Ls), 1965/1970

*Untitled (3Ls)* is a single work comprising three identical L-shaped forms constructed of gray painted plywood. Together they represent a concise exercise in two principles: "modular repetition" or the repetition of a single form; and "permutation", expressed by the variation in the three positions the L form is made to adopt. These positions also have anthropomorphic connotations, implying sitting, standing, and reclining. Yet Morris' work dispenses with the sculptural image – be it figurative or abstract – in favor of neutral objects that are intended to solicit a direct encounter based on placement, size, and scale.

Indeed, Morris produced works during the early 1960s (since destroyed) that take the form of "cabinets" designed to contain the body in those three postures. Yet the artist's work means to dispense with the sculptural image – be it figurative or abstract – in favor of neutral objects that solicit a direct encounter based on placement and size or scale. Conceived in 1965 for an exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York, *Untitled (3Ls)* was first shown with only two components – the artist ran out of time to make the third. A completed version, with all three elements, was finally made some years later.



**Robert Morris, *Untitled (3Ls)*, 1965, plywood, 243.8 x 243.8 x 61 cm,**  
collection Christian and Franziska Hausmaninger  
Exhibition view *Robert Morris. The Perceiving Body* at Mudam Luxembourg, 08.02.2020 –  
01.06.2020. Visual: Rémi Villaggi | Mudam Luxembourg © Adagp, Paris 2020

## FELTS

Morris produced several dozen works in felt during the 1960s and 1970s. The examples in this room were made according to a methodical process by which large rectangular sheets of thick industrial felt were precisely cut and/or folded. Suspended from the wall, they arrange themselves in geometric configurations that bear a legible relation to the shape of the sheet. Morris valued felt as a material partly because, being soft, it responds to gravity – a principle he referred to as "anti form".

Morris' work shares this property with the work of other artists of the period, but he pursued it in an unusually systematic way, producing a sequence of variants on a handful of simple types. He observed that work of this kind was said to bring form and process together in a single act, revealing a "phenomenology of making." This appeal to gravity and process, involving principles of space, permutation, weight and balance, and bodily scale, have far-reaching implications. As Morris wrote at the time, with reference to work of this kind, "process is existence".



**Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1969, felt, 255 x 453 cm, private collection**  
Exhibition view *Robert Morris. The Perceiving Body* at Mudam Luxembourg, 08.02.2020 –  
01.06.2020. Visual: Rémi Villaggi | Mudam Luxembourg © Adagp, Paris 2020



**Robert Morris,**  
*Untitled (Ring with Light)*, 1965–1966, fiberglass and fluorescent light, two parts each of 60 x 48 cm, overall diameter 246 cm, collection Estate of Robert Morris Courtesy Castelli Gallery, New York;  
*Untitled (Fiberglass Frame)*, 1968, translucent fiberglass and resin, 183.8 x 224.5 x 45.7 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York;  
*Untitled (Quarter-Round Mesh)*, 1967–1968, steel and steel mesh, 274.3 x 274.3 x 78.7 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York;  
*Untitled (Pine Portal with Mirrors)*, 1961–1978, statified pine and mirrors, 213.4 x 121.9 x 27.9 cm, collection Estate of Robert Morris Courtesy Castelli Gallery, New York

Exhibition view *Robert Morris. The Perceiving Body* at Mudam Luxembourg, 08.02.2020 – 01.06.2020. Visual: Rémi Villaggi | Mudam Luxembourg © Adagp, Paris 2020

## « LARGE-FORM » OBJECTS

Morris referred to his best-known works of the 1960s as “large-form” objects. By contrast with the conventional figurative or abstract sculpture which rests on platform or bases and solicits close scrutiny, Morris’ objects sit directly on the floor and engage visitors in the “actual” space of the room. Fabricated of plywood, fiberglass, or steel mesh, they are blocky in form and deliberately devoid of compositional interest. The objects in this room were selected in part for their shared capacity to transmit, reflect, or hold light, a secondary element that is recurrent in this period of work.

While Morris made many early works of this kind himself (applying basic carpentry techniques he learned from experience framing houses as a young man), he eventually came to leave their fabrication to assistants and shops. In certain respects, the objects were propositional: built for exhibitions then often dismantled or discarded, to be made again if needed. In this sense, the artist explained: “Of many of these larger works, it can be said that there were no ‘originals’, just inexact reproductions.” Remade over time, the works often vary in date of fabrication, although they were all conceived and first produced during the early period.

## UNTITLED (SCATTER PIECE), 1968–1969/2009

The word *scatter* is a reference to the uneven distribution of objects across the floor of the room. *Untitled (Scatter Piece)* is composed of 200 elements, half-made from six kinds of metal and half from industrial felt. The elements were formed in one of three basic configurations (flat, bent once, bent twice) that were assigned to each element through the use of so-called “chance operations” borrowed from composer John Cage.

The work possesses no fixed configuration. Instead, the disposition of the elements of *Untitled (Scatter Piece)* is intended to change each time it is shown and these elements should never be distributed the same way twice. Once an installation is determined, it is fixed. The elements are not meant to be handled by visitors. When it was first installed, in 1969,

Morris devised simple – if arbitrary – rules (for example, elements made of the same material were not permitted to touch). At the MAMC+, the configuration is both inspired by this last principle and by other possible rules the artist enunciated: fragments can be arranged on the floor, leaned against the wall or even stacked; the whole generates a certain density.

Its basic principles, including the application of chance and a loose play of figure and ground, support a new kind of sculpture: the low, lateral spread of materials, a form that bypasses the history of sculpture as a single, coherent object in favour of the disintegrated distribution of a group of component parts.



**Robert Morris,** *Untitled (Scatter Piece)*, 1968–1969/2009, pressed wool felt, steel, galvanized steel, copper-plated steel, lead, aluminium, brass, variable dimensions, collection Art Institute of Chicago © Adagp, Paris 2020



## UNTITLED (MIRRORED CUBES), 1965/1971

This work was first shown at the Green Gallery in New York in 1965, shortly after the artist's exhibition of large plywood objects the previous year. In form, it clearly relates to Morris' other works. Nonetheless, the mirrored surfaces introduce an element of illusion. The cubes reflect the room, the observer, and even each other. In this way, multiplication and fragmentation compromise our perceptual grasp of – and, by extension, our physical relation to – the work as a whole.



**Robert Morris**, *Untitled (Mirrored Cubes)*, 1965/1971, mirror and wood, each cube: 91.4 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm, collection Tate, London © Adagp, Paris 2020

Beginning with *Untitled (Pine Portal with Mirrors)* (1961/1978) and culminating with the mirror-based installations of the late 1970s, the mirror occupied an important place in the artist's early practice: with respect to spatial orientation, it served to establish an ongoing opposition between what we see and what we know.



**Robert Morris**, *Mirror*, 1969, film 16 mm, length 8 min. 31 s., collection Estate of Robert Morris  
Courtesy Castelli Gallery, New York © Adagp, Paris 2019

## MIRROR, 1969

In this short film of 1969, Morris uses the mirror as a source of perceptual ambiguity in relation to space and motion. In a sequence of performance-like moves, the artist holds the mirror before his body as he circles through a snow-filled landscape. At first, the mirror reflects the landscape, acting as a mobile frame within the frame of the camera eye. Then, with distance, the mirror ceases to display the setting, becoming solely an instrument of reflected light.

Writing in 1979, Morris referred to the illusion of the mirror as a "fraudulent" space, which, he explains, he gradually came to accept as a necessary element in his work. The mirror complicates the relation of seeing to the body of the observer. Yet the artist also came to value the complex mythology of the mirror, its function across history as a practical and symbolic device of deceit, blindness, vanity, violence, and the uncanny.

## UNTITLED (PORTLAND MIRRORS), 1977

The mirror may, at first, seem alien to the so-called literalism of Morris' work of this period – its apparent disavowal of image or allusion. Yet Morris had been using mirrors since 1961, suggesting that one implication of his work had long been the relation of what we see to what we know.

In *Untitled (Portland Mirrors)*, one of several expansive installations of this kind conceived during the mid-late 1970s, four large mirrors are arranged to create – through reflection – fictive (or, as Morris said, fraudulent, even uncanny) spaces within the room. Laid out on the floor, long

timbers, which establish a diagrammatic relation among the mirrors, resemble the orthogonal lines in images drawn according to the rules of one-point perspective lines that trace the path of our gaze into infinite space. Together, the mirrors and timbers serve to articulate space on two registers: the real and the imagined.

In this way, *Untitled (Portland Mirrors)* introduces an element of disorientation, destabilizing the act of perceiving or "beholding" with which the artist's practice had been chiefly concerned.



**Robert Morris, *Untitled (Portland Mirrors)*, 1977**, Douglas fir wood of variable length, 4 units, 30.5 cm section (each), mirrors, 182.8 x 243.8 cm, collection Estate Robert Morris, Courtesy Castelli Gallery, New York  
Exhibition view *Robert Morris. The Perceiving Body* at Mudam Luxembourg, 08.02.2020 – 06.01.2020.  
Visual: Rémi Villaggi | Mudam Luxembourg © Adagp, Paris 2020



**Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1968–1969**, aluminium, 91 x 426 x 426 cm, collection MAMC+, purchased with the help of the Fonds Régional d'Acquisition pour les Musées, cofunded by the French State and the Rhône-Alpes Region, 1993 © ADAGP, 2020

*Portrait of Robert Morris*, 1996.  
Visual: Yves Bresson / MAMC+

## ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Robert Morris (1931, Kansas City, Missouri – 2018, Kingston, New York) was a major figure in the history of minimal, post-minimal and conceptual art. He was also a distinguished critic who made a significant contribution to the theoretical discourse on art after 1960. In 1963, his first exhibition at the Green Gallery in New York heralded the emergence of minimalism, a movement that was brought to the public's attention during the *Primary Structures* group show at the Jewish Museum in New York (1966). Morris' works were shown alongside sculptures by Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt, among others.

## CURATOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Jeffrey Weiss is an independent curator and critic. He previously worked as chief curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York (2010–2018), director of the Dia Art Foundation in New York (2007–2008), and curator and head of the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (2000–2007). He is currently Adjunct Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, a position he holds since 2008.

Morris also contributed to the development of land art and process art, performance and avant-garde film. His works have been the subject of major solo exhibitions at the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (2011), at the Abteiberg Museum in Mönchengladbach (2009), at the Tate Modern in London (2009), at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2008), at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne (2002) and at the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon (2000).

He has conceived major exhibitions on On Kawara, Mark Rothko, Pablo Picasso, Jasper Johns and Robert Morris. A regular contributor to *Artforum*, he has published several books, including *Robert Morris: Object Sculpture, 1960–1965* (2014). He lives and works in New York.

## CONFERENCES

### CONFERENCE WITH THE FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM

Monday, 28 September at 7 pm.

"Robert Morris, the exhibition experience".  
By Alexandre Quoi, associate curator of the exhibition and Chief curator at MAMC+.  
*Only in French.*

### SYMPOSIUM ROBERT MORRIS

Thursday, 15 October from 2 to 6 pm.

With Jeffrey Weiss, art critic and independent curator, guest curator of the exhibition; Pauline Chevalier, art historian, Associate Professor at the Université Bourgogne – Franche-Comté and advisor at the INHA; Aurélien Mole, artist, curator and exhibition photographer, co-founder of the *Postdocument* magazine.

## PARTNERSHIPS

### THIS IS MY HERITAGE!

In July 2020, the MAMC+ and the Fédération d'Éducation populaire les FRANCAS de la Loire once again team up, as part of the operation "This is my heritage!", led by the French Ministry of Culture.

Raising awareness of heritage among young people from priority areas, both urban and rural, is the main goal of this project, inciting them to take part in it.

This year, actions will take place outside the museum for a crossed-educational program around Robert Morris' works, in collaboration with the choreographer Alexia Dury.

*Information and registration with the social centres operating the action.*

### WORKSHOPS ON ROBERT MORRIS

From September to November 2020, the MAMC+ holds, with the support of the A.R.T.S. Project, a series of workshops with students of the Master Arts, Plastic Arts degree, from the Université Jean Monnet. This collaboration will provide an opportunity to develop an educational programme of activities on and around *Robert Morris. The Perceiving Body*, going through history of art, exhibition curating, installation and activation of works, exhibition view, and education.

## EVENTS

### EUROPEAN HERITAGE DAYS

Saturday, 19 and Sunday 20 September from 10 am to 6 pm.

On a individual or a guided tour, among friends or family, this new edition of the European Heritage Days will be an opportunity to discover or rediscover the exhibition *Robert Morris. The Perceiving Body*. A specific youth programme will assist the discovery of the exhibition and the museum collections.

A "Behind the scenes" visit opens the hidden side of the museum to visitors: the installation of an exhibition, the management of collections but also its lesser-known professions. The Jean Laude library and the workshop will also be open to the public.  
*Only in French.*

### "SAINT-ÉTIENNE WELCOMES ITS STUDENTS" NIGHT

Monday, 5 October from 6.30 pm to midnight  
The museum will be part of the 2020 edition of "Saint-Étienne welcomes its students". During this festive evening, the exhibition will be open with tours and workshops.

### DANCE — SHAPESHIFTING BY LINDA HAYFORD

Sunday, 11 October from 2.30 to 4 pm.

American artist Robert Morris had a strong interest in dance. In the sixties, along with his wife Simone Forti, he contributed to the creation of the post-modern dance collective known as Judson Dance Theater.

At the heart of the exhibition, in the illusionist installation *Portland Mirrors*, the MAMC+ invites dancer and choreographer Linda Hayford, to present *Shapeshifting*, a bold yet introspective performance. *Shapeshifting* questions physical metamorphoses, motivated by emotions. Based on a hip-hop aesthetic, Linda Hayford has perfected a surprising, organic set of movements in which various influences are combined.

*For all. Length: 20 minutes.*



Linda Hayford, *Shapeshifting*, 2016, Visual: Patrick Lombaert

## TOURS

### Guided tours in English

In July and August, everyday at 4 pm, only on request.

*Adult only. Length 1h15.*

*Starting from 2 people.*

### Guided tours in French

In July and August, all weekdays at 2.30 pm, Saturday and Sunday at 2.30 and 4 pm.

In September and October, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday at 2.30 pm.

*Adult only. Length: 1h15.*

### Tours in French Sign Language

Saturday, 3 October at 10.30 am.

Conceived for the deaf and hard of hearing public, this tour is open to all audiences.

*Length 1h15. Only in French.*

### Sensory tours

Beginning in September, the MAMC+ proposes sensory tours offering another approach of the exhibition.

*Only in French.*

### Mirror tours

Saturdays, 5 September & 3 October at 4 pm.

Playing on reflections, the mirror was of importance for the artist Robert Morris.

Handing a mirror, experience new points of view or the effects of multiplying the image.

*For all. Only in French.*

### Moving body tours

Saturdays, 12 September and 10 October at 4 pm.

This tour gives a chance to apprehend works

through a body approach, relating Robert Morris' works with the concern on movement, space and matter. The visit is both led by educational officer and a choreographer.

*For all. Only in French.*

### Tactile tours

Saturdays, 26 September and 24 October at 4 pm.

Samples of materials that can be touched, tested, identified and classified are part of this tactile tour, inviting you to perceive the physical aspects and the sensitive nature of the artist's sculptures. Conceived for the visually impaired, this tour is open to all audiences.

*For All. Only in French.*

### Family tours

In July, on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 10.30 to 12 am.

In August, on Sundays from 10.30 to 12 am.

During Fall holidays, on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 4 pm.

These tours offer an intergenerational approach to the exhibition, with alternating sensory tours on Wednesdays and a more traditional discovery on Saturdays and Sundays.

*Starting 6 years-old. Only in French.*

### Children tours

Sundays, 6 September and 4 October at 2.30 and 4 pm (1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month).

This tour invites children to stare at, discuss on, think over and ask questions about works.

*Starting 6 years-old. Only in French.*

## WORKSHOPS

### Family workshops

In August, Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 to 12.30 am.

A new educational project for the summer!

Squares, cubes, felts, mirrors, angles, curves, gravity and density: so many materials, notions and forms to explore as a family during these artistic practice workshops.

*Starting 4 years-old. Only in French.*

### Workshop-tours

Saturdays, 19 September and 17 October at 4 pm.

Manipulating materials and objects, learning to stare at works: an experience to discover the exhibition and become creative!

*From 7 to 10 years-old. Only in French.*

### Children workshops

2 days workshop on October 22-23 2020.

2 days workshop on October 29-30 2020.

During fall holidays, the museum offers workshops for the young public, where exhibitions and collections can be compared. Shapes and materials will be at the heart of children's experimentation.

*From 7 to 10 years-old. Only in French.*

## ONLINE EDUCATION

The museum is also online, with posts on our website blog and our social networks.

Challenges and workshops are proposed by the educational team, exclusive videos and pictures relates what's behind the scenes.

## GROUP VISITS

### Small groups

Exploratory tours are offered throughout the exhibition.

Bookings must be done at the public reception and development department.

*Gauge depends of sanitary conditions.*

*Available in English.*

### School groups

Tours are scheduled in September and October.

Information and bookings must be done at the public reception and development department.

*From all level from preschool to high school.*

*Available in English.*

### Private tours

If you would like to visit the exhibition at other times than those offered, the museum will organise your visit during the day or in the evening.

*Bookings must be done at the public reception and development department.*

*Available in English.*

## AND ALSO...

The exhibition is free on the first Sunday of each month, from 10 am to 6 pm.

Pricing conditions for our activities on our website or at the audience department.



# MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE ET CONTEMPORAIN DE SAINT-ÉTIENNE MÉTROPOLE

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Open every day from 10 am to 6 pm.  
Except on Tuesdays.

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## TICKETING

[www.mamc.saint-etienne.fr](http://www.mamc.saint-etienne.fr)

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Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean

  
**MINISTÈRE  
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*Liberté  
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This exhibition is recognized as  
being of  
'National interest' by the  
French Ministry of Culture

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