

MARTHE WÉRY

**WORKS, STUDIES
AND DOCUMENTS
IN THE BPS22
COLLECTIONS**

—
VISITORS GUIDE

EXHIBIT

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25.02 > 23.07.2017

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BP MUSÉE D'ART
DE LA PROVINCE
DE HAINAUT
S²²



THE EXHIBIT

The exhibit brings together more than thirty ensembles of works by Marthe Wéry (1930-2005), extending over more than fifty years and belonging to the collections of BPS22 and the Hainaut Provincial Government. All major stages of her career are represented, along with studies and documents that shed light on her working process. The latter exhibits, from her first sketches to architecturally integrated projects, have never been shown before. In fact, they are not considered to be completed works, ready to be shown as such; that is why they are considered “studies” or “working documents”, depending on the case.

Throughout her life, Marthe Wéry attempted to explore the fundamental components of painting (pigments, stretcher, and medium), as well as to study the way in which these components interact with each other and become part of the architecture. Learning through gradual *movements* (sic), with a rare, radical nature that excludes neither sensitivity nor pleasure, she built a rigorous oeuvre that continuously renewed itself without ever becoming diluted. The exhibit perfectly demonstrates this aspect.

This retrospective is structured around the four recurring preoccupations in the artist's work: the three-dimensional materiality of the painting and its sensitivity to light (Great Hall), surface textures and the structure/format dialectic (Pierre Dupont Hall). Although divided arbitrarily among the two Museum spaces, all Marthe Wéry's works respond to these four preoccupations, reformulated each time.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born in Brussels in 1930, Marthe Wéry was a self-taught artist, visiting many museums and galleries, and going to the artistic environments of her era. She only spent one year (1952) at La Grande Chaumière, a private art school in Paris, where she worked primarily on sketches of nudes. Back in Brussels, she regularly worked at the Atelier de Woluwé-Saint-Lambert (Woluwé-Saint-Lambert Studio), started by artist Oscar Jespers (1887-1970).

In 1966, Marthe Wéry was accepted to Sir William Hayter's Atelier 17 in Paris, one of the best programs for learning engraving. At the same time, she showed her first works, geometric engravings, at the Saint-Laurent gallery in Brussels. She then taught engraving at the Institut Saint-Luc in Brussels before the engraving studio was merged with the painting studio, at her initiative. She helped train many artists. Teaching was an important part of her life.

Also in the 1960s, she illustrated a book by Belgian writer, philosopher, and feminist, Françoise Collin (1928-2012), entitled *ICI*. While the orientation taken by Marthe Wéry's art only rarely allowed her to express her political opinions, throughout her life she remained attentive to societal problems, especially feminist causes. Although she did not officially belong to any group or movement, she broadly relayed this cause, especially through her teaching, inciting many students to assume their status as woman artists.

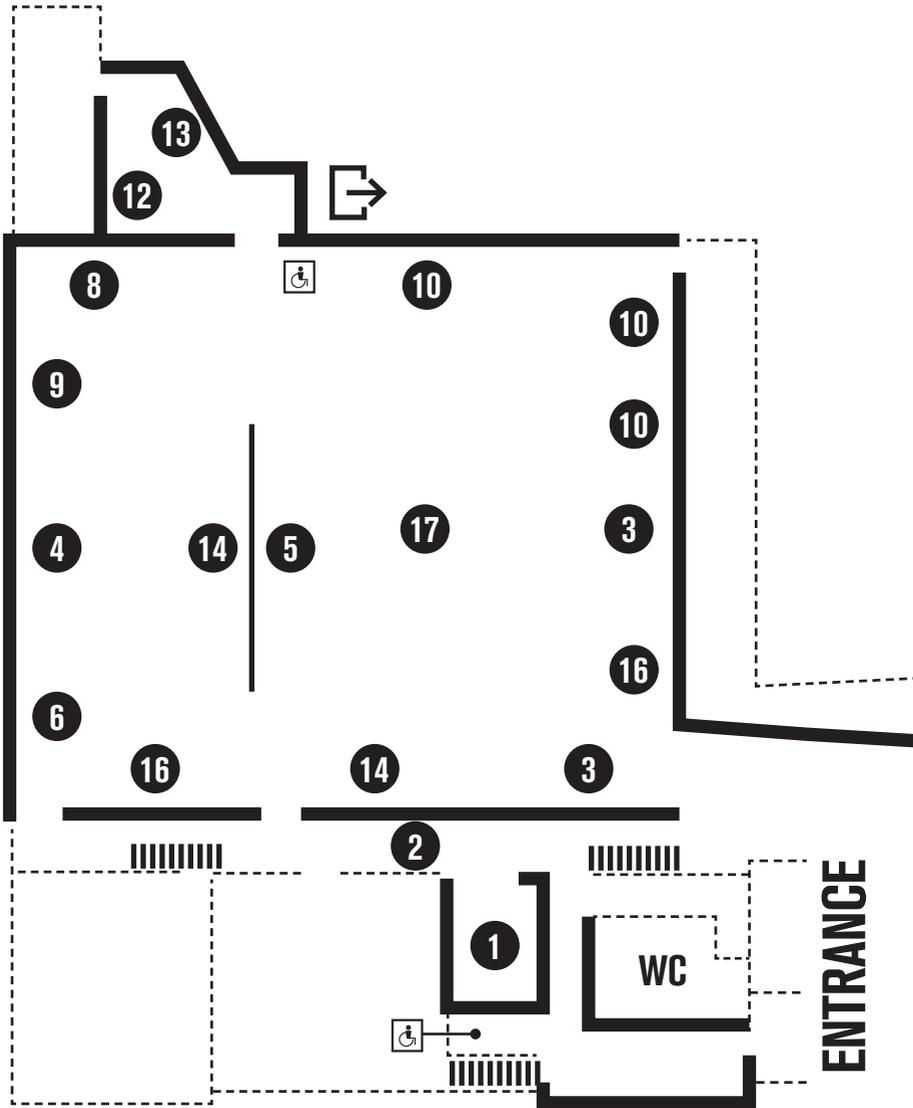
In the 1970s, Marthe Wéry achieved international recognition. She was invited to the famous exhibit, *La Peinture fondamentale* (Fundamental Painting) at the Stedelijk Museum, in Amsterdam, which brought together artists working on the material components of painting (medium, stretcher, frame, pigments). In 1977, she participated in *Documenta 6* (Kassel, DE), the largest international contemporary art event.

During the 1980s, she was appointed to represent Belgium at the Venice Biennale and the Sao Paolo Biennale. Also during this period, she was selected, with Jean-Paul Emonds-Alt, to create stained glass windows for the Nivelles collegiate church; a project that would last more than ten years.

She participated in many exhibits during the 1990s. In 2001, the Belgian Presidency of the European Union opened with a major exhibit by Marthe Wéry at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. In 2003, she was selected, along with Jan Fabre and Dirk Braeckman, to create a series of paintings to decorate a hall in the Palais Royal in Brussels. Her last major solo exhibit was organised by BPS22, at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Tournai, as part of *Lille 2004, European Capital of Culture*. She died unexpectedly in February 2005.

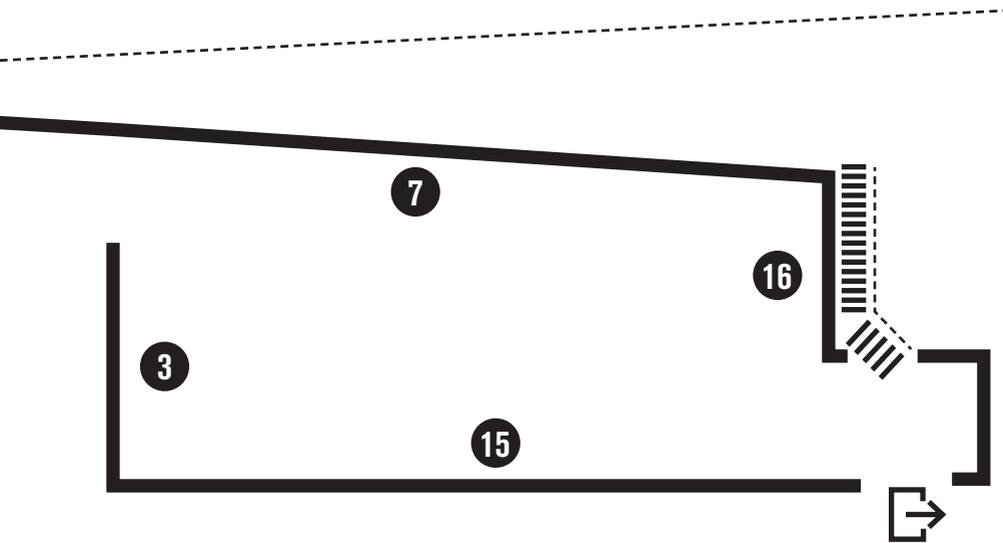
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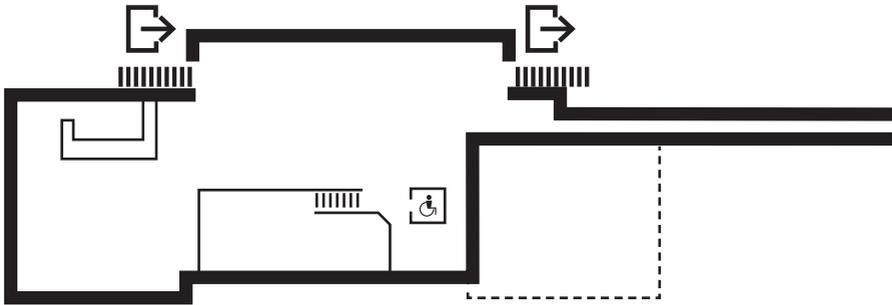
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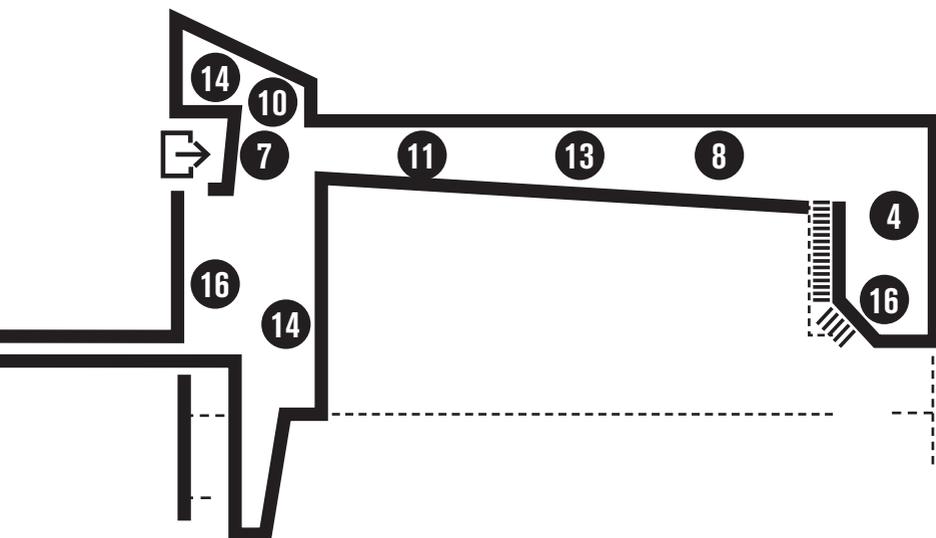
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Web application for smartphones available.
Browse <http://guide.bps22.be>
and explore the exhibition.
Free access to WIFI in the museum.



① FIRST SKETCHES: SKETCH BOOKS, NUDES, TREES, AND “BATTLES”

Marthe Wéry's first attempts at sketches date back to 1952. They are contained in small sketch books, shown for the first time as part of this exhibit. They are sketches of urban scenes (park, street corner, ports, etc.) sketched rapidly in which one can detect a desire to efficiently render the space to be represented in a few general lines. Then, she created landscapes on larger pages. Despite a few watercolour highlights, lines were already the major structural element of her compositions; the same is true in her rare still lifes.

This aspect becomes even more prominent in the series of nudes, dominated more by the dynamic of the lines than by an outline of hatching. She clarified her approach in discussing later work: *"It was not an evolution toward abstraction, but actually toward a fundamental represented by the line and the dynamic according to which it is ordered"*.

The series of trees expresses a preoccupation with texture. The composition is dominated by a desire to render the knotty roughness of the bark and their reaction to light, through skilful material effects.

Lastly, a final series of sketches inspired by the *Battle of San Romano* by Renaissance painter Paolo Uccello (1397-1475) seems more finished. They are characterised by the tension established between the intense texture of the solid colours and the spatial rhythm developed by the lines.

② ENGRAVING, A CONSTANT IN HER OEUVRE

At her first individual exhibit, at the Saint-Laurent Gallery in Brussels, Marthe Wéry showed a set of engravings. They were geometric compositions, inspired by Russian *Constructivism* and the *De Stijl* movement. The flat surfaces make it possible to see the fabrication process; the tightly bunched parallel lines structure the composition and appear to be a possibility of constructing a dynamic and vibrant surface. Although she returned to painting at the end of the 1960s, Marthe Wéry would never abandon engraving and would periodically return to it, creating several masterful series in the 1980s for exhibits in Montreal and The Hague. Shortly before her death, she started a new series that would only be printed after she passed away.

3 GEOMETRIC PERIOD

At the end of the 1960s, Marthe Wéry returned to painting after several years spent working on engraving. Taking inspiration from the geometric compositions of her engravings, she created twenty paintings on canvas and wood panels. The series is characterised by a balanced composition, as well as by the asserted materiality of the medium, strengthened by the choice of thick studs on the back that set the painting away from the wall. The painting is confirmed as autonomous painting, doing away with the need to picture, symbolise, or express (feelings, emotions, etc.). The chromatic range is reduced to black, white, and grey, with a few dark coloured highlights at times. Additionally, the artist sometimes used coloured spray paint to obtain finely mottled blocks of colour that delicately mirror the light, keeping the surface in constant vibration; as she had done with some engravings. On the advice of her German gallery manager, Paul Maenz, she decided to hide her production prior to the geometric period and consider that her oeuvre started with that point.

4 LINE PERIOD

During a trip to the USA, Marthe Wéry discovered American Minimalism, as well as, and especially Unism, which Polish Wladyslaw Strzeminski (1893-1952) theorised during the inter-war period. He considered the painting as a whole made of equal parts. This involved no longer privileging any one element of the painting through the composition, but considering it as an overall unit to be treated as a whole. *“What characterised my evolution,”* she would explain later, *“is the progressive decomposition of the form. One could not say an explosion of the form, because that would make us think of a wild explosion. It is much more a deconstruction in order to restore a more fundamental structure.”* This more fundamental structure was the line, considered not as a movement, but as a series of very tightly bunched points. She entirely covered her paintings with parallel lines traced with a rule, the form thus merging with the format; even more so in the series that she now privileged (diptych, triptych, or polyptych). The large ensemble of 14 paintings shown in the exhibit is a veritable environment that encompasses the viewer in a dynamic vibration, strengthened by the convex bodies that “detach” the canvas from the wall, thus recalling their materiality. The smaller formats condense the vibration.

5 LINED PAPER

At the end of the 1970s, Marthe Wéry abandoned canvas for artisanal sheets of white paper. Their vague shapes with blurred edges accentuate the dynamic dialectic established between structure and format; their knobbly textures catch the light. She also ensured that each component appeared separately: the medium is visible, the ink can be seen, and the format of the medium is clearly marked. "*All the elements*," she clarified, "*that constitute the work must appear for what they are: the visual effect is directly linked to their ensemble and to the dynamic aspect of the relationships they establish among each other. In a way, the elements must remain sufficiently distinct and clear. In other words, each material must... appear for what it is. But on the other hand, the elements must establish a structuring relationship among each other.*" This intention is clearly shown in the ensemble that she planned to show at *Documenta 6*, in Kassel, in 1977, but which in the end was not shown there. The exhibit here is the first complete showing of the 12 sheets.

6 "WRITINGS"

At the beginning of the 1980s, Marthe Wéry created several works on paper by copying excerpts of texts. Several authors have noted the analogy that exists between the movement of a horizontal line and that of writing. Two exceptional studies (two pages of journal paper covered with ink lines) recently rediscovered in the artist's studio clearly show the passage between the two series. The texts allow the artist to bring new content to her work while emphasising the materiality of the medium through the texture of the paper and folds. The work shown here is a manuscript reproduction of an excerpt of a book by writer and modern art collector, Gertrude Stein, entitled *Composition et explication* (Composition and Explanation). It is one of the rare testimonials to the feminist positions held by Marthe Wéry, as well as a text in which she perceives convergences between her work as a painter and Stein's literary approach; notably the principle of repetition and the search for a "*continuous present*" (sic).

7 COVERED PAINTINGS

At the end of the 1970s, Marthe Wéry continued her explorations of the paper medium, both from the point of view of its texture and its three-dimensional materiality, by covering sheets with various layers of black colour. Thus, the sheets can be shown in piles, the sheets one on top of the other, or aligned on the floor separately, or even hung on a wall. The various layers of colour can be seen through transparency and reveal the artist's working process. In the ensemble shown at the La Cloche warehouse in Tournai in 1979, and shown again for the first time here, the white and black sheets are placed one after another on the wall and on the floor, reacting differently to the light and emphasising the articulation of the horizontal and vertical planes in space. She also conducted studies of embossed, coloured paper, of which only a few fragments remain.

8 VENICE

Invited to represent Belgium at the Venice Biennale in 1982, Marthe Wéry marked the grand return of colour in her oeuvre. Especially inspired by the paintings of Vittore Carpaccio (1465-1525), she used large series of rectangular canvases on stretchers, covered with a succession of layers of translucent red colour. Starting from green-grey or blue backgrounds, she achieved intense, transparent, or sparkling reds, that vibrate in the Venetian light. The walls of the great hall of the Belgian pavilion were covered with long canvases; their angle highlighted their three-dimensional materiality while accentuating their exposure to the light. This major installation is now part of the collections at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. On that occasion, she introduced the concept of an "open series" in her work: she painted many canvases of the same size, to be combined in various ways, depending upon the conditions of the exhibit. The two ensembles shown in this exhibit are part of this series extended the following year.

9 MONTREAL

Marthe Wéry returned to the principle of open series, started in Venice, for her exhibit in Montreal in 1984. This time, she composed ensembles of deep navy blue, inspired by the Montreal winter. The canvases of various sizes are so many "touches" of colour, arranged against the white wall. This time, the tension between form and format moves to the scale of the wall. The architecture of the exhibit site takes on an increasingly assertive role in the final design. Gilles Godmer noted in the catalogue for the Montreal exhibit: "*Literally invading the space through proliferation, as the line did in the past on the surface, creating and imposing its rhythm, the ensemble of the place in which the painting is integrated, and with which it composes, also becomes the painting.*"

10 FORT AAN DER DRECHT AND THE QUESTION OF THE FRAME

Invited to show in a former military fort in the Netherlands, Fort aan der Drecht, Marthe Wéry used photocopies of a photograph of the fort to study the relationships between colour and architecture. This study led to a radical series of panels and canvases framed in bevelled MDF. The panel format is enclosed by a frame, some sides of which are left open. The depth of the blue is contradicted by the roughness of the panel. The tension between blue coloured block and the raw medium was amplified even further a few years later in a radical series, shown for the first time in 1991 at the City of Paris Museum of Modern Art, at the exhibit *L'Art en Belgique. Un point de vue* (Art in Belgium: A point of view). A neutral grey-coloured panel rests on one of the 7 raw wood panels. With this historic series, Marthe Wéry achieved a rare point in her questioning of the painting medium and its limits.

11 UTRECHT

Extending the *Montreal series* (see above), the *Utrecht series* uses a much warmer chromatic range. These are monochromes in muted colours, affixed onto thick panels that are nearly square, one half of which is painted. The relationships among the elements of the polyptychs transform the white wall into a "sensory surface" to use the expression from the museum's spatial theoretician, Bryan O'Doherty. The diptych shown, made of a panel in warm grey and dense red, directs light changes toward two central points.

12 ARCHITECTURE

Born into a family of entrepreneurs, Marthe Wéry was always drawn to questions related to construction. Starting at the end of the 1950s, she was invited by architect Georges Volckrick (1919-1987) to create stained glass for several private homes, as well as for the Assumptionist Convent in Leuven. The stained-glass windows she created have concrete veins, and their composition is very similar to the sketches she was doing at that time (especially the series on trees). The light passing through the subject is a problem that she addressed often. Therefore, it is not surprising that she committed to create new stained glass windows for the Nivelles collegiate church. It was a trying project, undermined by personal conflicts. In the end, she would only take on the stained-glass windows in the transept, all in subtle shades of diffuse luminosity of which we have found the samples; along with those from the surprising Sainte-Barbe Chapel, dominated by colourful red opal glass stained-glass windows.

Various projects integrated into architecture would hold her attention. Charles Vandenhove invited her to create wainscoting for the Liege University Hospital building. She also worked on integrated projects for the Albert subway station in Brussels, and for the College of Law in Louvain-la-Neuve; but these would never be completed. In Louvain-la-Neuve, she wanted to create enamel plaques with pointillist frames that held her attention for several years and for which she conducted many tests, which can be seen in the exhibit.

At the end of her life, she reflected on a project integrated into the Le Manège theatre, in Mons, by architect Pierre Hebbelinck. Stopped at the outline stage, this project was never completed.

13 ARCHITECTURE IN HER OEUVRE

Marthe Wéry's interest in architecture never waned. Following a trip to Chicago with her daughter Françoise Debuyst, who was an architect herself, she had a passion for building facades. She took many photos, tried various processes (photos on diasec, photocopies, collages, folds, serigraphs on coloured panels, etc.) to attempt to "make," she noted, "*colour work with the type of architectural structure represented in the photo and for it to contribute an additional excitation of the luminosity.*"

However, her many studies were never truly finished, and except for the large photo shown in this exhibit, none of the other works can be considered finished. Still given the many documents and studies she left, architecture remained an ongoing preoccupation in her life, which, as revealed by her husband Christian Debuyst, allowed her to develop other aspects of her work.

14 PAINTINGS IN RELIEF

After the return of colour in the beginning of the 1980s, Marthe Wéry produced a series of minimalist grey paintings, traversed by flat, horizontal or vertical lines, establishing the passage of various planes. These paintings "in relief" move away from the planar to structure space with a precise rhythm that changes the perception of colour. The paintings seem to be constructed of bands of darker or lighter colour, depending upon their orientation. A true sculptural rhythm seems to modulate the planes of the painting and, by extension, the architecture hosting it. In the same series, shown at the Claire Burrus gallery in Paris, in 1993, she produced an especially radical piece, made of two painted wood panels superposed one on top of the other, with a slight offset. A gesture that is both profaning, reducing the painting to its fundamental basic component (a painted "object"), and testimonial to the artist's unwavering faith in her ability to shake things up. She would create other paintings in relief, in different colours.

15 **CALAIS**

Invited to show at the Channel in Calais, in 1995, Marthe Wéry continued her questioning of the way in which her work was part of the architecture. She thus designed a vast installation of MDF panels, covered with a very cool sky blue, which can be reconfigured in relation to the exhibit space. Thus, for the first showing, she chose to place the panels side by side on the floor, resting against the wall and set on strips of wood. A few years later, at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Tournai, she chose to arrange them laterally across an entire wall. The structure/format tension thus plays out on the scale of the building through the relationships that the paintings establish with each other and with the architecture.

The ensemble is what we now call “variable media”, which is to say a sort of sculptural score (in the musical sense of the word) that must be reinterpreted at each show. Marthe Wéry always refused to “fix” the presentation of her works in restrictive protocols; she preferred to keep (or leave) the freedom to “replay” them, each time in relation to the architectural context. Like any musical performance, the presentation is subject to appreciation separate from the work.

16 **NEW “WAYS” OF PAINTING**

At the beginning of the 1990s, Marthe Wéry returned “to the inside” of the painting; which is to say she created autonomous paintings that are not necessarily parts of series. The tension between structure and format is replayed on the textured surface of the painting, first wood panels, sometimes PVC, and then aluminium. She developed new ways of painting: colour was poured onto the paintings, set in basins, and directed by tilting the panel and/or with a fan, which also accelerated the drying. An incredible play of textures and chromatic shades forms on the surface, as well as roughness reacting to lighting, focusing attention inside the limits of the painting.

One of these series, entitled *Pontormo* in homage to Renaissance painter Jacopo Carucci da Pontormo (1494-1557), of which 7 panels were hung in the Palais Royal, is characterised by the displacement of attention to the edges of the painting. A white background appears under the layers of scraped paint, giving the impression that the light no longer falls on the painting but comes from behind it; as in the various stained-glass windows she created over the course of her career.

17 *TOUR & TAXIS*

For an exhibit at the Tour & Taxis site in Brussels in 2001, Marthe Wéry renewed what she had done previously with a large three-dimensional installation. This time, large aluminium plates were cut and placed “folded” on little tables. The coloured sides show and react differently to the light. The subtle coloured material work on the surfaces offers a great richness of various textures, magnified here by daily changes in the natural light that enters through the glass roof of the Great Hall at BPS22.

EXHIBIT

25.02 > 23.07.2017

MARTHE WÉRY. WORKS, STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS IN THE BPS22 COLLECTIONS

Curator: Pierre-Olivier **Rollin**

AROUND THE EXHIBIT

COCKTAIL CONFERENCES - CYCLE #1

11 am > 12:30 pm

SAT. 11.03 : *LA PEINTURE DÉCOMPOSÉE* (PAINTING DECONSTRUCTED)

with Pierre-Olivier **Rollin**, director of BPS22

SAT. 06.05 : *LE VITRAIL CONTEMPORAIN À LA LUMIÈRE DE L'ŒUVRE DE MARTHE WÉRY* (THE CONTEMPORARY STAINED-GLASS WINDOW IN LIGHT OF MARTHE WÉRY'S ŒUVRE)

with Dorothee **Duvivier**, curator at BPS22.

PHILOSOPHY TEAS - CYCLE #2

SUN. 26.02 + 26.03 + 23.04 - 2:30 pm

With Maud **Hagelstein**, Philosopher of Art and Researcher at ULG.

WORKSHOPS FOR CHILDREN

9:30 am > 4:30 pm

03 > 07.04.2017 : *PRINTING*, WORKSHOP ON COLOURS AND PRINTING

for children ages 8 - 12

03 > 07.07.2017 : *ACTION!*, A WORKSHOP ON PRODUCING AN ANIMATED SHORT

for children ages 8 and up

BPS22 FOR CHILDREN

13 > 14.05.2017 - 11:00 am > 7:00 pm

Tour, workshops, and entertaining installation as part of the *Pépites, l'Art et les Tout-petits festival* (Little Gems, Art and the Very Young)

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

RAPHAËL ZARKA RIDING MODERN ART

02.09.2017 > 07.01.2018

The French plastic artist transforms the Museum's great hall into a novel skate park. Skaters will free ride on the modular sculptures inspired by the geometric volumes of German mathematician Arthur Schoenflies. Raphaël Zarka also shows his audience a selection of black and white photographs of skaters evolving on modern sculptures.

The multifaceted artist (sculpture, painting, drawing, video, photography) is also an author renowned for his historical researches around the skateboard, his preferred method of transportation.

OUTDOORS

ARTVIEW#5. BPS22 – ART OBJET

25.06.17 > 03.09.17

@ ADAM > PLACE DE BELGIQUE – 1020 BRUXELLES

Within the framework of the 5th edition of Artview, the ADAM is hosting the BPS22. From the 1980s, artists began to be interested in the boundaries between the work of art and the everyday object. They questioned the paradoxical nature of industrial design creations, being intrigued by the dual functionality of these items. They then took to creating works that were situated "on the borderline between design and the plastic arts". Following in the wake of Duchamp's Ready-Made movement, then the Pop Art trend, this exhibition brings together around ten works (by Michel François, Wim Delvoe, Méret Oppenheim, Gilbert & George, Maarten Baas and Marcel Mariën) from the collection of pieces that span the frontier between design and the plastic arts that is held by the Province of Hainaut.

SUPER DÉMOCRATIE. LE SÉNAT DES CHOSES

01.10.2017 – 31.10.2017

@ PARLEMENT FÉDÉRAL > RUE DE LA LOI, 8 – 1000 BRUXELLES

Exhibit of the BPS22 and the M HKA collections at the Belgian Senate.

Museum open from Tuesday through Sunday, 11:00 am > 7:00 pm
Closed Mondays, and 24.12, 25.12, 31.12, 01.01 and from 24.07 through 01.09.2017.

RATES:

€6 / seniors: €4 / students and job-seekers: €3 / ages 12 and under: free
Groups of 10 or more: €4 / Guides: €50 or €60 (Weekends) per group of 15 people.
Free for schools and associations (tour+workshop), reservation required.

WEB APPLICATION available on <http://guide.bps22.be>

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DE LA PROVINCE
DE HAINAUT

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