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Jean Dubuffet: Brutal Beauty

Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK

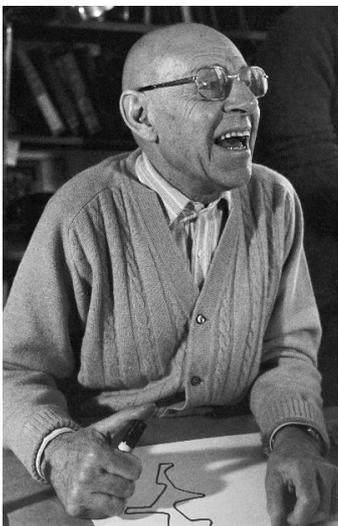
17 May – 22 August 2021

Media View details to follow

#JeanDubuffet #BrutalBeauty @barbicancentre

The exhibition is sponsored by Sotheby's with additional support from Waddington Custot and Bauwerk

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Left : Jean Dubuffet in Paris, France, 1972. Photograph by Francis Chaverou © Archives Fondation Dubuffet, Paris / © Francis Chaverou
Right : Jean Dubuffet, *The Extravagant One (L'Extravagante)* July 1954, Private Collection © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2020

'Art should always make you laugh a little and fear a little. Anything but bore'.

Jean Dubuffet: Brutal Beauty is the first major UK exhibition of the work of French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985) in over 50 years. One of the most provocative voices in postwar modern art, Dubuffet rebelled against conventional ideas of beauty, hoping to capture the poetry of everyday life in a gritty, more authentic way. Drawn from international public and private collections, *Brutal Beauty* brings together more than 150 works: from early portraits, lithographs and fantastical statues to enamel paintings, butterfly assemblages and giant colourful canvases. It opens at Barbican Art Gallery on 17 May 2021.

Spanning four decades in the studio, *Brutal Beauty* highlights Dubuffet's endless experimentation with tools and materials, as he blended paint with shards of glass, coal dust, pebbles, slithers of string and gravel. Shown alongside his work are two dedicated rooms from Dubuffet's collection of Art Brut, acquired throughout his life – shedding light on artists such as **Aloïse Corbaz**, **Fleury-Joseph Crépin**, **Gaston Duf.**, and **Laure Pigeon**, who profoundly inspired his approach to the making and understanding of art.

Jane Alison, Head of Visual Arts, Barbican, said *'I could not be more thrilled that we're staging Jean Dubuffet: Brutal Beauty at the Barbican where his sculpture, painting, collage and drawing will feel perfectly at home. Dubuffet marvelled at the fabric of everyday life - an alchemist experimenting with dust and dirt, conjuring visual gold. So many artists, from David Hockney to Eva Hesse, Robert Smithson and Jean-Michel Basquiat have been influenced by his playful spirit and experimental drive. I have no doubt that this exhibition, the first show of his work in the UK for over 50 years, will be an utter joy and a revelation'.*

Born in Le Havre, Dubuffet moved to Paris when he was 17 to study at the prestigious Académie Julian. He left after six months, realising that he could create his own syllabus of favourite subjects, which included philosophy, literature and ethnography. He worked for his father's own wine business and then established his own. It was only at the age of 41, in the midst of the German Occupation of Paris, that he decided to devote himself whole-heartedly to being an artist.

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Living and working in the heart of liberated Paris, surrounded by the devastation of the Second World War, Dubuffet had taken to mixing his paint with found materials – layering his canvases into powerfully visceral objects, turning the ordinary into the extraordinary. From the outset, Dubuffet was drawn to other untrained artists, graffitiists, tattooists, spiritualists, people who were incarcerated and individuals in psychiatric care, whose creativity felt so much more inspiring to him than anything on display in the city's museums. He invented the concept of 'Art Brut' (literally meaning 'raw' art) and from 1945 was passionate about its research and recognition. This exhibition presents work by 18 artists from Dubuffet's collection, many rarely seen, including one of Madge Gill's monumental calico drawings, a wooden sculpture carved by Auguste Forestier and the colourful drawings of Scottie Wilson.

Significant works by Dubuffet in the exhibition include the *Little Statues of Precarious Life*, 1954–59, figures made out of natural sponge, wood charcoal, grapevine and lava stone; and the *Texturologies* from the late 1950s, inspired by the rich natural surroundings of Vence, Southern France, which pivot between our micro and macro worlds, their delicate speckles having a spellbinding effect. While *Paris Circus*, 1961, is a series of works drawn from the frenzy of street life bursting with consumerism and featuring a somersault of dense imagery.

Emerging from doodles the ever-playful Dubuffet made while on the telephone in 1962, *L'Hourloupe* developed into a new cycle of work, created over a decade and encompassing paintings, sculptures, architectural environments and performances. Meandering lines create fluid forms of molten red, white and blue. The series culminated in a theatrical performance of *Coucou Bazar* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1973. This 'living painting' was performed in a one-hour spectacle with sixty artworks animated by performers, motors and remote control. These theatrical props are now too fragile for the performance to be re-staged as Dubuffet originally envisioned, but are presented here as a powerful display within the context of *Hourloupe*.

In his later works, *Theatres of Memory*, Dubuffet returned to assemblage, layering fragments of paintings into enormous collages, such as *Vicissitudes*. More than 3.5 metres wide, Dubuffet in his winter years at 75 completed the work with 'a good deal of gymnastic exercise on a ladder'.

List of Artists from Dubuffet's Collection in the exhibition:

Maurice Baskine (1901 – 1968); Gaston Chaissac (1910 – 1964) Aloïse Corbaz, known as Aloïse (1886 – 1964); Fleury-Joseph Crépin (1875 – 1948); Gaston Dufour, known as Gaston Duf (1920 – 1966); Auguste Forestier (1887 – 1958); Madge Gill (1882 – 1961); Pierre Giraud (1925 – Unknown); Joaquim Vicens Gironella (1911 – 1997); Miguel Hernandez (1893 – 1957); Jan Krížek (1919 – 1985); Sylvain Lecocq (1900 – 1950) Augustin Lesage (1876 – 1954); Laure Pigeon (1882 – 1965); Henri Saltingardes (1872 – 1947); Émile Ratier (1894 – 1984); Adolf Wölfli (1864 – 1930); and Scottie Wilson, born Louis Freeman (1888 – 1972)

The Barbican believes in creating space for people and ideas to connect through its international arts programme, community events and learning activity. To keep its programme accessible to everyone, and to keep investing in the artists it works with, the Barbican needs to raise more than 60% of its income through ticket sales, commercial activities and fundraising every year. Donations can be made here: barbican.org.uk/join-support/support-us/for-individuals/make-a-donation

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Press images available online from the Barbican Newsroom

A link to the image sheets can be found in the 'Downloads' box on the top right-hand side of the page from: <http://www.barbican.org.uk/JeanDubuffetNews>

Important note on Press Tickets

BOOK PRESS TICKETS 48hrs in ADVANCE

To ensure the safe flow of visitors through the Barbican, **all press tickets will need to be booked 48 hours in advance** by contacting a member of the Barbican's Communications team.

You can only enter with a pre-booked ticket and so please do get in touch prior to your visit.

The Barbican reserves the right not to allow entry without a pre-booked ticket

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Barbican Art Gallery, Silk Street, London, EC2Y, barbican.org.uk

Opening Hours 10am – 7pm; Bank Holidays: 12 – 7pm

Tickets on sale to Members on 2 December; on general sale 4 December

Important Notes

Large bags, rucksacks, long umbrellas and luggage are not permitted in the gallery.

All bags are subject to search. Food and drink are not permitted.

The Art Gallery will be operating at reduced capacity, with timed entry slots to ensure a safe flow of visitors through the space, and tickets will need to be booked online at barbican.org.uk in advance of a visit. Safety measures in place when the Barbican reopens will include social distancing, limited visitor capacity, one-way routes through the building, sanitisation points and regular cleaning. Access to all venues will be via the main entrance on Silk Street with lifts available for those who need them.

Exhibition

Jean Dubuffet: Brutal Beauty is at Barbican Art Gallery from 17 May to 22 August 2021. The exhibition design is by acclaimed architects **Witherford Watson Mann** with graphic design by **the Bon Ton**. The exhibition is sponsored by **Sotheby's** with additional support from **Waddington Custot** and **Bauwerk**.

Events

A dynamic programme of talks and events accompanies the exhibition. Check the website for full listings: www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery

Book

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated book published by **Prestel** and designed by **the Bon Ton**. An introductory text is written by the curator, **Eleanor Nairne**, alongside rich and insightful thematic essays by **Kent Mitchell Minturn**, **Rachel E. Perry**, **Sarah Wilson**, **Sarah Lombardi**, **Sophie Berrebi** and **Camille Houzé**

Price: £39.99 (Special exhibition price, £35), hardback, ISBN: 978-3-7913-5979-3

Press Contact for the book: Kate Burvill, kateburvill@gmail.com M: 07947 754717

Barbican Art Gallery Shop

A selection of exhibition merchandise will be available from the Gallery Shop including tote bag, prints, postcard and exhibition book and poster. www.barbican.org.uk/shop

Barbican Art Gallery and The Curve

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

We invest in the artists of today and tomorrow; The Curve is one of the few galleries in London devoted to the commissioning of new work. Through our activities we aim to inspire more people to discover and love the arts. Entrance to The Curve is free. Through Young Barbican we offer £5 tickets to 14-25 year olds for our paid exhibitions and free admittance for under 14s.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. We develop engaging online content for audiences and offer special tours for schools. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

About the Barbican

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](#) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over 1.1 million people attend events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 300 [staff](#) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas One, Two and Three, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery The Curve, foyers and public spaces, a library, Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](#), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](#) and [Britten Sinfonia](#), Associate Producer [Serious](#), and Artistic Partner [Create](#). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](#) and [Michael Clark Company](#). The [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) are the Barbican's International Orchestral Partner, the [Australian Chamber Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court and [Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble.

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