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Wyss Museum



Constellations

Cover:
Joan Miró (1893–1983)
Peinture (Personnages : Les frères Fratellini), 1927
Oil on canvas, 130.0 x 97.5 cm
Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, Beyeler Collection
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Photo: Robert Bayer, Bildpunkt

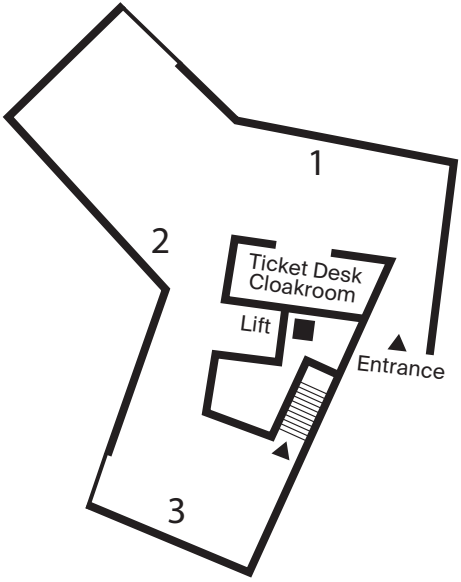
CONSTELLATIONS

Wyss Museum
26 September 2026 – 5 September 2027

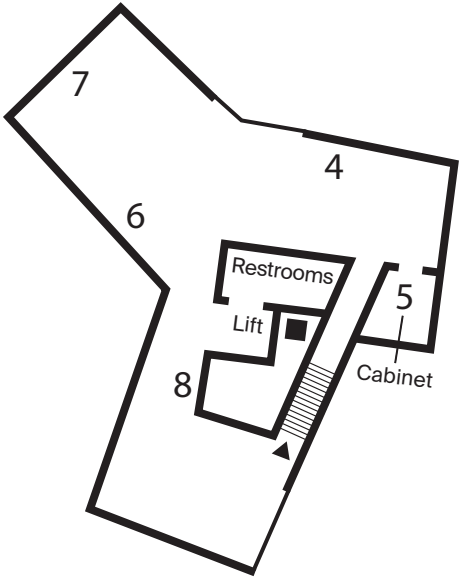
Wyss Museum

Exhibition floor plan

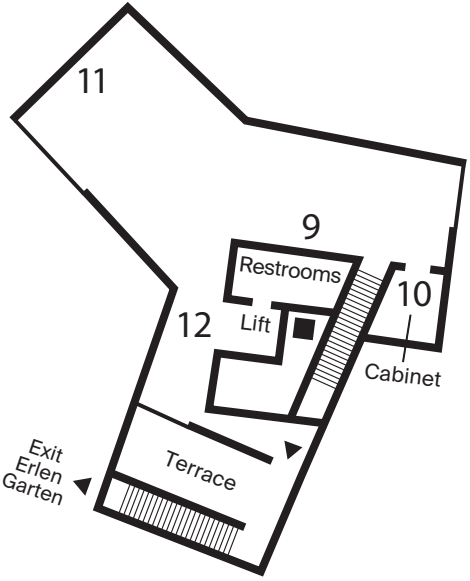
Ground floor



First floor



Second floor



Wyss Museum
Introduction

The wide-ranging exhibition “Constellations” inaugurates the Fondation Beyeler’s newly expanded ensemble, unfolding across Renzo Piano’s Beyeler Museum and Peter Zumthor’s Wyss Museum as well as the full expanse of the Beyeler Park. “Constellations” features highlights of the Beyeler Collection in dialogue with masterpieces on loan from renowned private collections, notably the Hansjörg Wyss Collection as well as the Ananda Foundation, Calder Foundation, Daros Collection, The Easton Foundation, Esther Grether Family Collection, Collection Hersaint, Collection Marx, Reuben Collection, Rudolf Staechelin Collection and further lenders, all closely associated with our institution.
In “Constellations”, artworks form new relationships with one another, with the architecture and with the landscape. Over the course of the exhibition, these constellations will partly shift with the seasons, giving rise to a rich variety of artistic experiences that invite visitors to explore the museum’s newly expanded ensemble.

The Wyss Museum shows how architecture shapes the perception of art and establishes new relationships between artworks and their surroundings. Its three floors offer different perspectives: at ground level, the exhibition is steeped in a direct connection to the earth, the park and the water. The middle floor is the most inward-looking in architectural terms. Accordingly, on this level Surrealist leanings set the tone of the exhibition, probing the depths of the human psyche. On the top floor, the space opens upward and into the distance. Here, the works' selection and display are guided by notions of lightness, expansiveness and the sky.

Wyss Museum
Ground floor

1

Entering the Wyss Museum, we are welcomed by a gleaming silver figure: a man is squatting on the floor, seemingly lacing up his shoes. As we step closer, however, it becomes apparent that he is not only completely naked, but also barefoot. This sculpture by Charles Ray (*1953) is inspired by classical antiquity. At the same time, it plays with our perception and brings the visible and the non-visible into a state of tension. The polished stainless steel figure is a self-portrait of the artist. Ray used photographs and 3D scans of his own body – combining traditional sculpture with contemporary technology. Like many of the US-American artist's works, *Shoe Tie* hovers between the depiction of an idealised figure and that of an everyday, mundane situation. At the very entrance to the museum, the sculpture thus invites us to look more closely and to rediscover what may seem familiar.

Wyss Museum
Ground floor

2

The works shown on the ground floor of the Wyss Museum are connected by their immediate proximity to nature, to the earth and to the water. The ten blue-violet glass sculptures by Roni Horn (*1955) seem filled to the brim with water. They are positioned in the room in such a way that, depending on the incidence of light, their surfaces appear either transparent or reflecting. Despite their size and their sheer material presence, the massive glass bodies look almost weightless.
Alongside *Ostgut Freischwimmer*, *left*, a large-format photograph by Wolfgang Tillmans (*1968), Horn's sculptures invite us to pause and contemplate the beauty and transience of nature.
Close to monumental in scale, bordering on abstraction, the painting *Le bassin aux nymphéas* by Claude Monet (1840–1926) operates as a historical point of reference for its contemporary neighbours. This quiet, yet thrilling dialogue can be experienced in a similar form in the Beyeler Museum.

Wyss Museum
Ground floor

3

At the back of the ground floor, we come face to face with a large-format work by Otobong Nkanga (*1974). Aquatic plants, corals and shells glow against the intense dark blue of a vivid underwater landscape. This idyllic view is disturbed by strange objects, reminiscent of machine parts, which are collecting on the seabed. *Unearthed – Abyss* is the first of four monumental tapestries that make up the multipart work *Unearthed*. They remind us of all forms of life's reliance on water and of the threat posed to this resource by humankind.
The two early paintings *Genetic Moment* and *Genesis – The Break* by Barnett Newman (1905–1970) approach the theme of origin and beginnings from a spiritual perspective. The work of French artist Pierre Huyghe (*1962) also deals with fundamental questions of emergence and existence. For his sculpture *Mind's Eye (FL)*, human brain activity was read out electronically and transposed into three-dimensional form. Here, creativity no longer rests solely with the artist, but takes place in interaction between human and machine.

Wyss Museum
First floor

4

On this floor, the museum's architecture appears more inward-looking. In keeping with this spatial experience, the works selected for display offer insights into the practice of artists who, more than depicting external sensory inputs, give expression to inner worlds using vivid symbolism.
In the Surrealist works of Max Ernst (1891–1976), transitions and transformations play an important role. He favoured processes of chance as a starting point for his paintings, such as decalcomania (pressing paint between two surfaces) or frottage (rubbings of textured surfaces). These initial traces would then be meticulously fleshed out in paint to form landscape features and figures – the latter always ambiguous hybrid creatures, often angel and monster all at once. The sculpture *Spider IV* by Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010) owes its surreal effect to the animal's enormous enlargement. A source of fear for many people, within the artist's vocabulary the spider is also a symbol of maternal care and nurture.

Wyss Museum
First floor – Cabinet

5

Like his celebrated mobiles, these small works by Alexander Calder (1898–1976) play with the balance of their elements under the pull of gravity. Painted in different colours, the shapes are simultaneously connected and held at a distance from one another by metal wires. New perspectives emerge depending on one's position in the room. The title *Constellations* is suggestive of patterns of stars in the night sky. Unlike Calder's other, oftentimes kinetic works, the works in this series, produced in 1943, are not made of metal. As metal was difficult to source in the United States due to wartime rationing, the artist used wood, including ebony from an existing work, *Crowd* (1929). The carved small objects are reminiscent of bottles, bowling pins and bones, in keeping with his organic vocabulary of forms.

Wyss Museum
First floor

6

The dreamlike, enigmatic visual worlds of René Magritte (1898–1967) are considered seminal works of Surrealism. *Les idées claires* features the crashing waves of the sea, over which a boulder hovers, suspended mid-air. In its fleetingness, a single, fluffy white cloud underscores the absurd nature of the image. Magritte's visual pun relies on both a disruption of physical logic and the work's paradoxical title: the sky is often viewed as a symbol of clarity, yet "clear ideas" are hard to come by in this image. The constellation of cloud-stone-water crystallises a key motif in Magritte's painting – some of its elements can be found in other works displayed nearby. Stone as a material is one of the central and most consistent themes in the Belgian artist's late work. It is closely connected to the notion of petrifaction, as seen in *L'idole*. In *Le confort de l'esprit* and *Le temps jadis*, it appears alongside the element of fire.

Wyss Museum
First floor

7

Akin to a diorama, this large painting by the French artist Balthus (1908–2001) presents a view of a street scene in Paris. The faithfully detailed architectural setting contains many figures. They seem strangely stiff and doll-like, as though merely symbolically enacting certain gestures.
The contemporary sculptures of Robert Gober (*1954) echo the painting's surreal atmosphere. An anonymous male leg jutting out of the wall right next to it is eerily life-like and deeply disruptive. In the sculpture *Burnt House*, the uncanny, which remains hidden beneath a layer of paint in Balthus' work, has broken loose and engulfed the dollhouse in the form of a fire.

Wyss Museum
First floor

8

Floating stones, a ladder reaching all the way to the sky, on which a cloud is pinned with thumbtacks – this early landscape *Paysage (Paysage au coq)* introduces us to the distinctly playful Surrealism of Joan Miró (1893–1983). His works challenge the laws of nature, delicate lines intersect to form shapes in space, and areas left unfilled blur the distinction between foreground and background. Miró orchestrates a fragile interplay of different elements, whose balance could be disrupted by the slightest breeze.
In this regard, his work is closely related to that of his friend Alexander Calder (1898–1976). Their juxtaposition in this room allows us to identify various other formal similarities between Calder's delicate, mobile sculptures and Miró's paintings.

Wyss Museum
Second floor

9

On the museum's top floor, we encounter constellations of works that, each in their own way, appear to be breaking free of the constraints of gravity.
The painting *Untitled no. 5 (Night)* by Barnett Newman (1905–1970) opens a narrow glimpse into the depth of night. In his later work *Queen of the Night II*, a band of colour, the so-called "zip", cuts across the canvas while at the same time uniting the two areas into a boundless field of nocturnal blue.
In the centre of the room stands the sculpture *L'oiseau* by Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957). The marble bird is the manifestation of the artist's more than 30-year-long quest for the ideal embodiment of flight, which began with his move to Paris in 1911. The sculpture's dynamic effect of upward ascent is further heightened by the shape of its multi-part plinth, which forms a constituent element of the work.

Wyss Museum
Second floor – Cabinet

10

In this cabinet, the expansive mobile *Snow Flurry* by Alexander Calder (1898–1976) is given a striking stage. A large number of white metal disks are balanced on filigree wire rods, set in motion by the slightest breeze. Playing with air, light, shadow and gravity, the mobile conveys the feeling of standing under dancing snowflakes. The title refers to the snowfalls Calder experienced in wintertime at his home in Roxbury, Connecticut in the United States. With *Snow Flurry*, he succeeded in translating this fleeting natural phenomenon into an abstract, poetic visual language.

Wyss Museum
Second floor

11

The intricate, calligraphic lines in this seminal painting by Brice Marden (1938–2023) convey an airiness that directly echoes the open expanse of the second floor gallery. Looking more closely, we can make out the shapes of dancing bodies rising upward and against the picture ground. The title *The Muses* alludes to the nine muses of Greek mythology – divine sources of inspiration and artistic creation. References to antiquity are also found in the works of Cy Twombly (1928–2011). *Arcadia (Roma)* refers to the Greek region of Arcadia in the Peloponnese, which poets and painters have long celebrated as a pastoral utopia. The US-American artist lived and worked in Rome from 1957. The works of his early years in Italy blend mythological allusions, fragmentary writing and an increasingly gestural visual language.

Wyss Museum
Second floor

12

The views from the top floor lend the room a sense of expansive airiness, which finds an echo in the abstract, contemplative paintings of Agnes Martin (1912–2004). Only up close do the drawn lines become visible, whose precision forms a subtle contrast to the bands of diluted, softly shaded hues. The paintings are evocative of the vast skies of the desert landscape of New Mexico in the United States, where Martin lived and worked. Yet she was less interested in depicting nature than in the emotional world unleashed by the contemplation of wide expanses and light.
At first, Ferdinand Hodler's *Stockhornkette mit Thunersee im Winter* appears to operate as a counterpoint. However, neither was Hodler (1853–1918) interested in purely representing nature. His rhythmical, pared down compositions directly fed into the emerging abstraction of the early 20th century. His cool mountainscape further echoes the expansive views of the Jura Mountains and the Southern Black Forest the museum building offers from this floor.

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Information

Exhibition

The exhibition “Constellations” is curated by
Sam Keller, Director of the Fondation Beyeler,
and Theodora Vischer, Chief Curator of the
Fondation Beyeler.
Curatorial assistance: Amelie Baader,
Associate Curator Collection

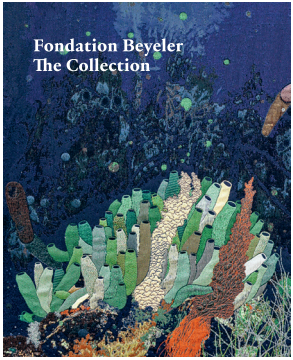
Exhibition guide

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Information

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Upcoming exhibition

Beyeler Museum
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