

Press Release

Denis Monfleur. People of Stone



L'Homme sauvage (*The Wild Man*) detail, 2019, lave de Chambois
Tête monumentale III (*Monumental Head III*), 2010, granite, place Vendôme Paris (2022) © ADAGP, Paris, 2023, Denis Monfleur, photo: S. Briolant.

4 May 2023 – 7 January 2024

Museum Gallery forecourt, gardens and main courtyard of the Town Hall

As part of the BAD+ Art Fair (May 4-7)

2 June 2023 – 7 January 2024

Galerie et musée des Beaux-Arts

Denis Monfleur. People of Stone is the first major solo exhibition on the artist in a French Museum. Featuring over 100 works by Monfleur (born in 1962 in Périgueux), it above all aims to show his most recent and emblematic works, through a range of different formats and materials. Around one hundred pieces have been selected to echo the museum's permanent collections, through thematic or formal resonance, from which eight large-scale works will be presented outside, in the Gallery forecourt, in the gardens and the main courtyard of the Town Hall.

Juxtaposing powerful and monumental sculptures, made in quarries and weighing several tons, with smaller, more intimate and domestic pieces, the artist is one of the few sculptors of his generation to uphold the ancestral tradition of direct carving and to tackle the hardest stones. His work belongs to a secular tradition of sculpture, from Romanesque art to Louise Bourgeois, via Michelangelo, Brancusi, Dubuffet and Chillida.



Sardanapale, 2020, albatre, 42 x 83 x 27 cm.

A battle between man and matter

Denis Monfleur, a self-taught artist who has been working since the mid-eighties, shares his time between his studios in Fontenay-sous-Bois (Val-de-Marne) and in his native Périgord. Alongside his early career working for José Subira-Puig, Dietrich-Mohr and Marcel van Thienen, he gradually began to develop his personal approach. With the exception of a piece made in clay during his youth and recently cast in bronze (*Portrait de Kafka*, 1983), all the exhibited pieces span the period from 2010 to 2023, a time when the artist joined the Claude Bernard gallery in Paris. This was a pivotal step in Monfleur's career which saw him expand his visual vocabulary through the use of new techniques and materials such as lava, basalt, basalt columns and diorite. He also explored the multiple possibilities of polychrome, with a particular focus on patinas, and is developing an entirely new technique for enamelling volcanic lava stone.

“There can be no remorse”

Tirelessly experimenting and never retreating from a challenge, he freely explores contrasts of textures and weight – lightness/density, power/fragility, smooth/rough, balance/instability. Often scarified, his works bear scars like stigmata, whether rough-hewn or chiselled, left by his tools, which includes angle grinders, burins, tungsten drills and diamond disc blades.

“My sculptures are marked by life, they are not supermodels.”



Galerie des rois et des reines (Gallery of Kings and Queens), 2019, pouzzolane de Chambois émaillée et lave du Mont-Dore, 160 x 50 x 24 cm.

A universal view of the human figure

The exhibition *People of Stone* reveals the artist's interest in the human figure, which runs the gamut of art history, from figuration to abstraction, accessing a universal and timeless dimension. His work is far from fashions and trends as well it eludes conventional aesthetic categorisation. Some of his works (*Christ, Anges [Angels], Prophètes [Prophets], Vanités [Vanitates]*) are imbued with a spiritual resonance.



Moine bouddhiste, 2018, lave de Chambois émaillée, 87 x 40 x 40 cm.
Moïse d'albâtre, 2019, albatre, 41 x 30 x 40 cm.



“Bringing stone to life”

Monfleur plays with different scales, shifting in turn between small and medium-sized formats, through serial and narrative devices (*Anges [Angels]*, *Fleurs [Flowers]*, *Vanités, Stylites, Christ, Ménines [Meninas]*, *Individus [Individuals]*, *Le Bal des Mexicaines [Dance of the Mexican Women]*, *Les Assis [Those who sit]*, *Rois et Reines [Kings and Queens]*, *Heaumes [Great Helms]*, etc.) to the monumental, as embodied by his powerful totemic monoliths with archaic qualities (*Torses [Torsoes]*, *Grandes Têtes [Large Heads]*, *Marguerite de Navarre [Margaret of Navarre]*, etc.).

A history of art and sculpture

The titles of his works are deliberately evocative, conjuring up ancient history, mythology, humour and the history of art, particularly through tributes to iconic artists such as Delacroix, Rodin, Dubuffet and Picasso.

He is the artist behind some major commissions for the public space, including *La Famille (The Family)*, a monumental group on the slopes of Vesuvius, *Le Porteur de vide (The Bearer of Emptiness)* in front of the Municipal Library of Santo Tirso in Portugal (2015), *L'Apporteur de l'Espoir (The Bringer of Hope)* in homage to the International Brigades who went to defend the Republic during the Spanish Civil War, on the forecourt of the Gare d'Austerlitz (2016) or, more recently, the temporary installation on Place Vendôme (2022). Since 2011, Monfleur has been represented by the Claude Bernard gallery, which has held several solo and group exhibitions featuring his work in France and abroad. His work, which has gained recognition in the spheres of art history and criticism, has often been the subject of publications by the art historian Eric Darragon.

Works to be touched

All the works on display in the museum Gallery can be explored through touch. One of Monfleur's sculptures, *Dubuffet* (2019), in wood and bronze, is included in the exhibition *Please Do Touch! Art and Matter*, which plays on visitors' perceptions of materials and their different senses.

In 2023, let sculpture reawaken your senses!

The MusBA is dedicating its new 2023 exhibitions – *Please Do Touch! Art and Matter* and *Denis Monfleur. People of Stone* – to sculpture, with an original approach to the works that seeks to sharpen visitors' senses and deliberately shake up their traditional points of reference! Both exhibitions focus on the human figure, the common thread on the visitor route, designed specifically for the occasion, between the Gallery, the museum and its outdoor spaces.

From Greek Antiquity to the modern era with the monumental monoliths of guest artist Denis Monfleur, via the 19th century with Carpeaux's *Laughing Girl* from the collections in Bordeaux, the museum invites you to enjoy a multisensory experience spanning all eras. *Learning to touch as we learn to look*: in the digital and virtual era, these two exhibitions bring our encounter with the artwork back to the heart of the museum experience.

For a few years now, the museum has been committed to showcasing sculpture – a medium now often overlooked – by combining it with its collections of paintings. In 2016, sculptures from France’s most prestigious public collections (Musée du Louvre, Musée d’Orsay, etc.) were brought into dialogue with the paintings on display in the exhibition *Modern Bacchanalia! Nudity, drunkenness and dance in French art of the 19th century*; two years later, in 2018, four sculptures were transferred by the Louvre to augment the new sculpture display in the Lacour wing.

Practical Information

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Closed on public holidays except 14 July and

15 August.

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Caption:

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