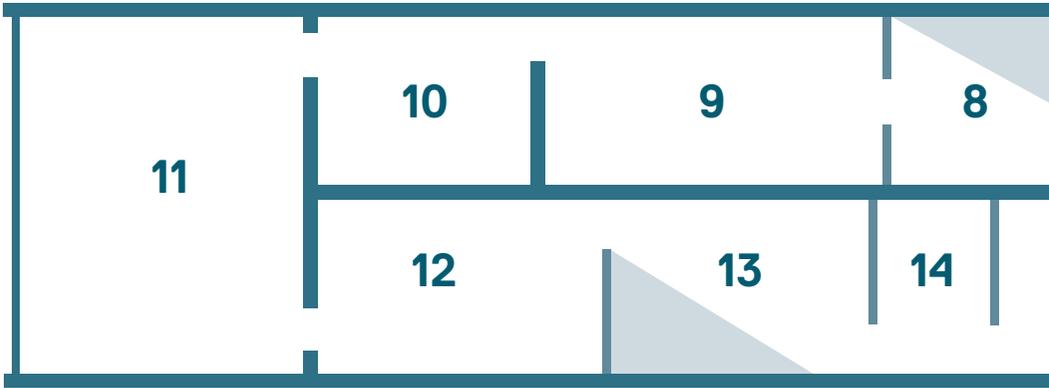


CONSTRUCTED WORLDS

A CHOICE OF SCULPTURES
FROM THE CENTRE POMPIDOU

22.11.19 → 23.08.21

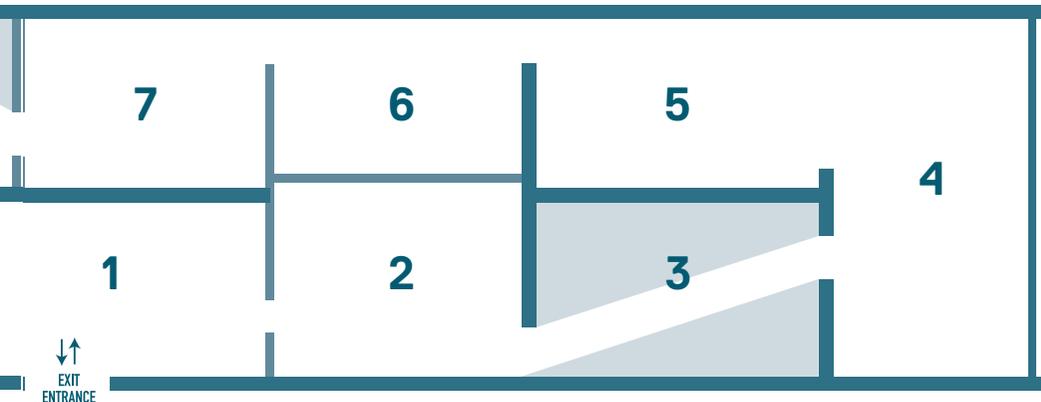
GALERIE 1



As early as the beginning of the 20th century, a large part of modern sculpture marked a radical shift away from tradition, by following the route of abstraction. Paradoxically this was a way of analysing the world in a more objective and universal manner: rather than modelling the surface of things, certain artists like the cubists wanted to reveal their essential structure. They divided up the objects they studied into lines, volumes and planes.

In their wake, sculptors and diverse avant-gardists baptised their works “constructions” or “structures”, opting for a radical abstraction, where straight lines and right angles predominated. If industrial architecture encouraged these tendencies known as “constructivist”, occasionally willing to produce functional objects, sculpture also looked to redefine what is unique to it: the relationship to gesture, to materials and above all to space, clearly structured, even modular and dynamic, involving the spectator.

Modernist artists wanted a transparency and a balance for their sculptures that they wanted to see transposed into human structures. The most important pieces which are assembled here from the Centre Pompidou call into question the spawning of this utopian abstraction, followed by the analysis of it and finally, its contemporary deconstruction.



1 - FALKE PISANO, UNBOXING

2 - ARCHAIC FORMS

3 - VERTICAL/HORIZONTAL

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Facilitators, identifiable by their badge, are on-hand to answer your questions about the exhibition.

1 - FALKE PISANO, UNBOXING

Creation produced for the exhibition “Constructed Worlds”

Discourses, diagrams or structures: since the middle of the first decade of the century, Falke Pisano has created systems likely to examine the vocabulary of modernist sculpture. Because of its abstraction, it can indeed seem to be an inscrutable enigma, a purely formal game, indifferent to the course of things. Modernist sculpture is, however, always the fruit of a personal or collective project. It appears in the form of tangible materials, it exists in a context; we have an emotional experience from it, we argue about it; it transforms us.

Suggesting light propaganda structures, constructivist podiums and stands from the 1920s, Falke Pisano's boxes create a pedagogical apparatus to be unfolded. Set up in the space, they are made up of tables and thematic panels on which can be read fictional conversations, between different major figures of the exhibition.

Unboxing, “unpacking”, contextualises and reveals the exchanges between artists, which, far from being trivial, have often had a determining impact on forms of modernism.

2 - ARCHAIC FORMS

At the beginning of the 20th century, masks, totems, talismans from African, Oceanian, Indigenous American tribes fascinate Westerners by their expressive force and their ritual functions. The primitive avant-gardists find in their geometrical simplicity and their raw materiality the path to abstraction. But even more than geographical boundaries, archaism emerges from the depths of time, a survivor of immemorial origins, from prehistory or from antiquity. Caves, Megalithic alignments or burial mounds, archaeological sites give to some post-war artists a taste for monumental scales and collective building sites as well as their cosmic dimensions. Concerned about the integrity of the materials, they privilege the technique of carving directly, working by hand with blocks of wood or stone. Their idols and monuments synthesise multiple influences: Paleolithic, Neolithic, Cycladic, Celtic, Gothic...

3 - VERTICAL/HORIZONTAL

That which is vertical follows the direction of the thread of the plumb line, pointing under the effect of weight towards the centre of terrestrial gravity. Verticality also symbolises humanity standing up straight, leaving the ground, stretched out towards desires of elevation, like a growing tree. The column materialises this balance, solid and stable in its role of an architectural support. There is therefore between the tree, the column and man, strong symbolic ties, which culminate in the image of the axis of the world (*axis mundi*) which connects the terrestrial to the celestial.

Constantin Brâncuși produced the abstract synthesis of it in *The Endless Column*, proposed in a variety of forms over forty years. This laid down important milestones for modern sculpture, like the abandon of the pedestal, and the repetition of geometrical modules, essential for American minimal art of the 1960s. Fascinated by *The Endless Column*, the minimalist Carl Andre nevertheless decided to bring this heroic uprightness back down to earth – Brâncuși dreamt of a column that would be higher than a skyscraper –, preferring instead a stretched out horizontality, which would simply become part of the exhibition space.

4 - DRAWING IN SPACE

Both an exceptional goldsmith and blacksmith, Julio González predicted at the beginning of the 1930s the emergence in modern sculpture of a “new Iron Age”. In 1928 he assisted Pablo Picasso in the creation of the models of welded wire for a project for a monument in memory of Guillaume Apollinaire. Highly graphic, these slender structures suggest the poet’s calligrammes. González therefore defines the limits of a linear sculpture, enabling both writing and “drawing in space”, by grasping “the essential expression” by a line, a transparency and a void. Sometimes worked on a single plane, like *Sculpture in two dimensions* by Berto Lardera, these works play between flatness and volume, the shadow they project recalling their openwork materiality. Stretched like the strings of an instrument, radiating like beams of light, with industrial means, their lines take on an architectural dimension, particularly evident in the second part of the 20th century.

5 - ARCHITECTURE

Sculpture and architecture are traditionally defined as two distinct disciplines – one decorative, the other utilitarian – brought together within the context of complementarity, and sometimes in competition. Numerous avant-gardists have however striven for their consolidation during the first half of the 20th century. Suprematism and constructivism in Russia, De Stijl and neo-plasticism in the Netherlands, Bauhaus firstly in Germany, and then in the United States, Cercle et Carré and Abstraction-Création in Paris or Concrete art in Switzerland, were all looking to conquer a three-dimensional space. Their abstract orthogonal geometrical structures made up only of straight lines and right angles, floating planes in primary colours, suggest the models of modernist architecture, which had become much more flexible since the development of reinforced concrete, the steel framework and the glass shell.

6 - MONUMENT

Whereas during the 19th century monuments glorified and commemorated the history of a nation by an heroic representation and enduring installations, modern artists developed an abstraction and a dynamism more appropriate for portraying ideals pointing towards the future: technical progress, but also democracy and pacifism. *The Monument to the Third International*, modelled by Vladimir Tatlin in 1919 after the October Revolution, is exemplary in terms of scale and utopian vision. Its double steel spire should have gone higher than the Eiffel Tower and housed a sphere, a cube, a pyramid and a glass cylinder supposed to accommodate various administrations. Never built, this mythical project founded the political orientation of constructivism as implied in public spaces and made claim to having cosmic dimensions. The very same which would be directly later taken over, in the 1960s, by artists making the site and the landscape a contribution to monuments devoted to the elements or to geological forces.

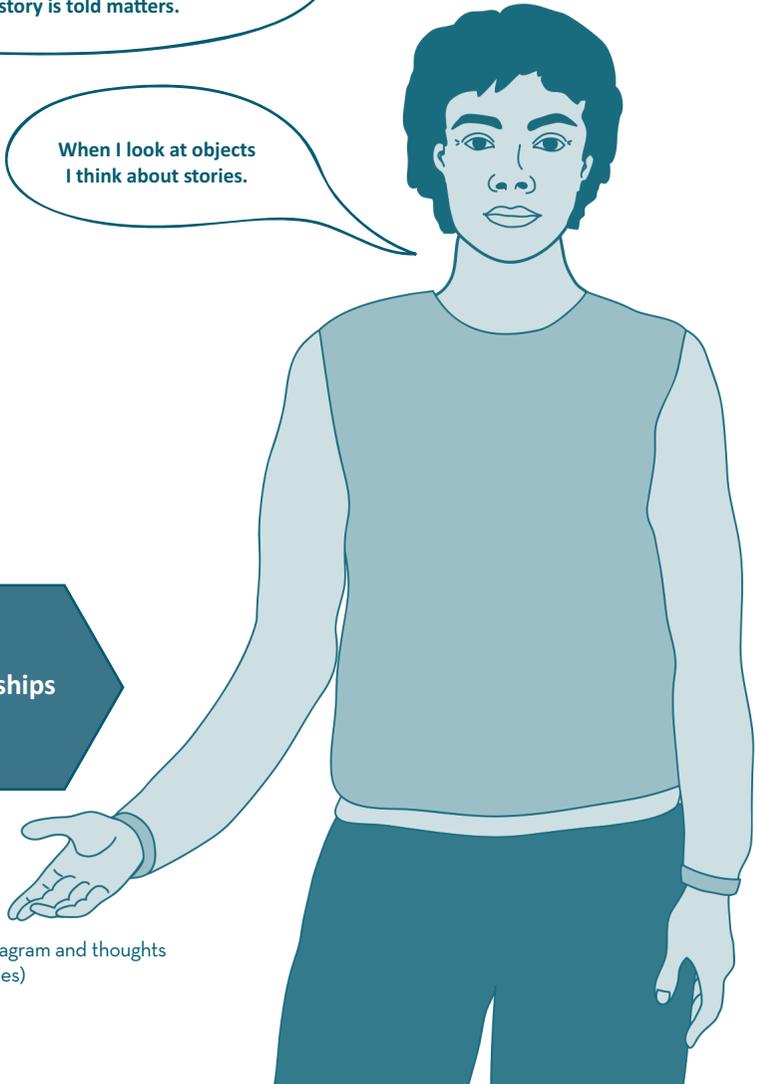
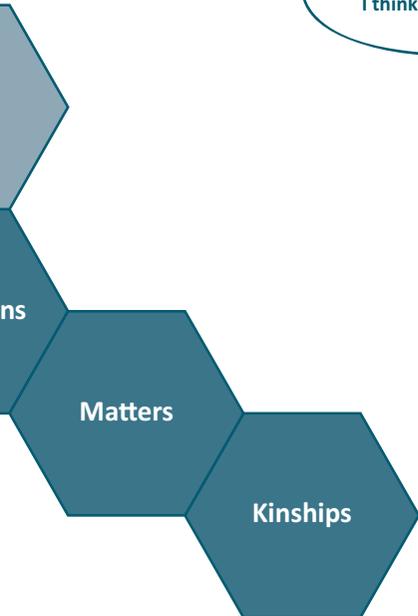


A story is actually much like a sculpture.
Does it express fragility or does it emphasise power?
Does it hold or shatter the space around it?
Does it look for balance?
What knowledge does it rely on?

I think about the stories that the objects tell,
and about the objects that the stories create in return.
I question whether objects can tell stories, but I never doubt
that stories create objects and that the intention
with which a story is told matters.

Does it consolidate what has already
been preserved? Or does it try to intervene
in the reproduction of the same?
2019

When I look at objects
I think about stories.



7 - FREE FORM

Without forming a specific current, and whilst belonging to different groups, the promoters of free form became liberated of all functionalistic constraints during the 1950s in order to inspire themselves with organic forms and mathematical formulae. Geometry, and notably topology which is the study of the relationship of positions, is for example for Max Bill, “the primary element of any work of visual art”. In 1934, whilst searching for an endless movement, he intuitively rediscovered the Möbius strip by folding on itself a strip of paper, to which he added a half-twist. This is the starting point of his series *Endless Ribbon* produced from 1935 to 1953, in hard stones, perfectly mechanically polished. The straight line no longer had the monopoly of architectonic rigour; the curve, infinite and open forms become part of the reflections about unknown spaces and more complex geometries, that art helped to imagine.

8 - MOVEMENT, EQUILIBRIUM

At the beginning of the 20th century, numerous avant-gardists looked to transcribe into their sculptures the dynamics which were acting upon industry, science and technology. Galvanised by “the beauty of speed”, the futurists became enthusiastic about the aggressive movement of machines. The constructivists preferred to evoke the speed of light as being the most absolute manifestation of movement. However, far from these mechanical or cosmic debates, the first veritable kinetic work (in movement) is presented firstly as a playful makeshift production: a bicycle wheel fixed onto a stool, actionable by whoever wishes to contemplate the infinite rotation of the cycle. The “ready-made” bicycle wheel by Marcel Duchamp opens in 1913 the era of unproductive gears, authorising the spontaneous balance of Calder’s mobiles or Bruno Munari’s *Useless Machines*. These objects celebrate impermanence, the random and the transformation peculiar to life, whilst stimulating the perception and interaction of the spectator, himself always moving.

9 - STRUCTURES

In architecture the “structure” designates the elements which make up the framework of the building, leaving to one side any covering. More widely, a structure is an arrangement of the parts of a whole, an organisation, a system. In 1966, the collective exhibition “Primary Structures” assembled in New York diverse three-dimensional objects constituted of geometrical modules, arranged according to the principles of seriality and of permutation. Steel girders, aluminium polyhedrons, Formica monoliths, glass cubes or lines of bricks, these minimalist works close to industrial design seemed to come out of the factory. Of simple logic and totally neutral, they were described by the American artist Donald Judd as “specific objects”, their specificity being the power to be grasped at the first glance and to not refer to anything other than themselves. But this claimed literality sometimes masked hidden references, interiority, mystery, critical, erotic or humorous tension.

10 - PROCESS

At the end of the 1960s certain artists rejected the affection for the pure forms of minimalist sculpture, of which the solid matters, made to last, seemed to come from an outdated idealism. The representatives of the Anti-form on the contrary preferred a supple and movable materiality, the properties of which were not definitively set, but engaged in a process till ongoing, made up of impermanence and of hazard. Rubber, string, rope, canvas, felt, sand, plaster, wax, etc.: as many unstable materials likely to be transformed. For the American sculptor Robert Morris, it was a question of finding the right balance between the tool, the manner of doing and the nature of the material, all “to go beyond the personalism of the hand to the more direct revelation of matter itself”. In his essay *Anti Form* (1968), he made Jackson Pollock a precursor: at the end of the 1940s, the painter had let paint freely run off his paintbrush which was suspended above a canvas placed on the floor, exploring the fluidity specific to its medium.

11 - THE IMPRINT OF THE PLACE

Rachel Whiteread produced her first sculpture in 1988 by pouring plaster into the interior of a cabinet tilted horizontally and then broken up to free the solidified cast inside. This technique of hollow casting necessitates destroying the mould in order to take out the negative imprint, which at first served as a means of revealing to her the cavities of domestic objects: the convex container of a hot water bottle or the soft volume of an old mattress. The artist then cast the empty interior of a living room, the whole of a house destined to be demolished. The large piece presented here was cast at the headquarters of the BBC in London, built in 1932. Invited to explore the memory of the place on the occasion of redevelopment work, Whiteread chose to capture the very enigmatic “room 101”, which had become legendary after George Orwell, who had himself worked at the BBC from 1941 to 1943, had used the name to baptise the torture room in his novel entitled *1984*. In 2003, the artist turned into an impenetrable bunker this space which had become a technical room, petrifying from the inside all the walls’irregularities, in an almost archaeological approach: “to mummify the air in the room”.

12 - INSTABILITY

From the hyperrealist moulding to the video performance and the neon, Bruce Nauman has contributed since the middle of the 1960s to a widened practice of sculpture. Fascinated by mechanisms of control, this artist has called into question the way in which space conditions our behaviour, modelling architectural installations meant to create feelings of disorientation, confinement or instability. As early as 1969, narrow dead-end corridors imposed on visitors the experience of a physical and mental stalemate. From 1977 to 1981, several projects of tunnels in the shape of rings, lacking an access and a destination, proposed the absurd project of “going around in circles”. Symbol of the infinite and of repetition, this circularity is here doubled up by the title *Smoke Rings* suggesting the vertical elevation of horizontal forms as much as the transient breath of idle smokers. Created in several segments of plaster - the material of the first draft in sculpture -, simply placed on the floor on wooden blocks, in a precarious equilibrium, these two fragile circles are the models of imaginary monuments.

13 - THE SKIN OF THINGS

If constructivist sculptors have defended transparent structures, with their works similar to frameworks or skeletal structures stripped bare, on the contrary, others have practiced the art of dissimulation and opacity. Envelope, wrap up, bundle up, pocket, box . . . certain artists affiliated to Dada and to surrealism cover up mysterious contents. In 1920, Man Ray swathed in a blanket an object that he did not wish to reveal (*The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*). Was it to protect or to hide the object? To create curiosity or frustration? Produced by artists of different generations, the works in this room cover and preserve domestic objects, sanctified in spite of their banality. Heidi Bucher's imprints removed from her ancestors' home have the appearance of shrouds. The sheets of precious metals that Edith Dekyndt applies to woolen blankets make them into abstract icons. Finally, the *Grande Chrysocale* - an alloy of copper, tin and zinc - woven by Guillaume Leblon in the proportions of a sarcophagus encloses everyday objects kept secret.

14 - DECONSTRUCTING

Since the beginning of 2000, Monika Sosnowska has been exploring the architectural relics of the communist era, notably in Warsaw, where she lives and witnesses the rapid changes in the urban tissue of the city and its chaotic growth on the ruins of social modernism. Guided by functionalist principles as much as a social ideal, some of these buildings from the 1960s have grown old prematurely, because of an excessive standardisation, of inhuman scales or substandard construction. Fascinated by these defeats, the artist conceived "psychoactive spaces": traps which are both physical and logical (a succession of neverending doors, impracticable stairways...). *Rubble* is presented as an enigma: why does the debris on the floor - apparently due to the collapse of the ceiling - have the charm of precious crystals? Inspired by the brutal vision of a fractured window as much as by the trompe-l'œil of a baroque vault, from which painted figures seem to drop, the artist suggests that a hidden order can emerge from the fall, from the accidental and from the destruction.

VISITOR INFORMATION

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Monday, Wednesday, Thursday,
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