
Around the exhibition

Exhibition catalogue

328 pages, 317 reproductions, texts in French and English, 16×24 cm, 25 €. Texts by Laurent Devèze, Alexia Fabre, Frank Lamy, Emmanuelle Lequeux, Philippe Liotard, Corinne Rondeau, Claude-Hubert Tatot, Bernard Vouilloux, interview with Valérie Da Costa.

Set tours

Guided tours (free with admission) on Wednesdays at 3 pm and Saturdays and Sundays at 4 pm.

CQFD (Ce Qu’il Faut Découvrir)

Artist information kit with a selection of literary, scientific, economic and political texts exploring the work of Jean-Luc Verna in a broader context.
Available free from reception or to download from our website.

Resource centre

Artist information kit with a selection of literary, scientific, economic and political texts exploring the work of Jean-Luc Verna in a broader context.
Free admission, Tuesday to Friday from noon to 6 pm and Saturday from noon to 7 pm.
Contact: cdm.macval@macval.fr / 01 43 91 14 64

Partners

Exhibition produced with the friendly support of La Briqueterie-Centre de développement du Val-de-Marne.

The MAC VAL thanks its partners:



Friday 4 November 2016

2 pm
Tickets: 5.20 € / Concessions: 4.75 €
Information: 01 41 24 25 50
www.lesecransdocumentaires.org

“Transformer”
Screening organised by the Festival Les Écrans Documentaires at Espace Municipal Jean Vilar, Arcueil.

Sunday 6 November 2016

Noon–7 pm
Free

“Critical interludes”
Interventions, actions, talks, films and videos chosen by guests invited to give their personal, subjective, critical and poetic takes on Jean-Luc Verna and his work. With Jérôme Game, Frank Lamy, Steven Severin (to be confirmed), Claude-Hubert Tatot, Agnès Vannouvong, Jean-Luc Verna...

Noon–7 pm
Free

“The Record dealer, sous ses doigts se dissout le vernis!”
Based on an idea by Jérôme Poret Carte blanche to the experimental music label Optical Sound and launch of issue #4 of the journal OpticalSound dedicated to pioneering and critical musical practices.

Sunday 4 December 2016

Noon–7 pm
Free

“The Record dealer, sous ses doigts se dissout le vernis!”
Based on an idea by Jérôme Poret Carte Blanche to the record label Les Disques en Rotin Réunis, created by Arnaud Maguet.

4 pm
Free

“Has Been. She is dancing”
Performance by Valeria Giuga, dancer, choreographer and Laban notator, in collaboration with contemporary poet Jean-Michel Espitallier and Roméo Agid, dancer.

5 pm
Free
Temporary exhibition gallery

Solo danced by Jean-Luc Verna, from the piece *Kindertotenlieder* by Gisèle Vienne.
New work

Sunday 5 February 2017

Noon–7 pm
Free

“The Record dealer, sous ses doigts se dissout le vernis !”
Based on an idea by Jérôme Poret Carte blanche to Stephen O’Malley & The Bells Angels. In collaboration with the students on the Blitzprint programme directed by Julien Sirjacq at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts de Paris.

6 pm
Free
Temporary exhibition gallery

“I Apologize,” a show by Gisèle Vienne

Sunday 26 February 2017

4 pm
Free with museum ticket
Auditorium

Savannah Bay
by Marguerite Duras
Performance with Catherine Robbe-Grillet and Beverly Charpentier.

5 pm
Free with museum admission
Temporary exhibition gallery

Concert by I Apologize
With Xavier Boussiron, Gauthier Tassart, Julien Tiberi and Jean-Luc Verna.

Young visitors

25–28 October 2016

10 am–4 pm
Children upwards of age 8.
Enrolment possible for a day or for the whole cycle.
2 € per person per session.
Information and reservations:
reservation@macval.fr or 01 43 91 64 23

“Rencontre autour du dessin”
Fabrique d’art contemporain
Workshop designed and led by Eve Pietruschi

Saturday 19 November 2016

3 pm
Parents and children upwards of age 5, free
Information and reservations:
cdm.macval@macval.fr or 01 43 91 14 64

“Animaux bioluminescents”
Artist’s book workshop
with Marie Sochor

20–23 December 2016

10 am–4 pm
Children upwards of age 8.
Enrolment possible for a day or for the whole cycle.
2 € per person per session.
Information and reservations:
reservation@macval.fr or 01 43 91 64 23

Fabrique d’art contemporain
Workshop designed and led by Karim Ghelloussi

Jean-Luc Verna

— Vous n’êtes pas un peu beaucoup maquillé?
— Non
Rétrospective*

Curated by Frank Lamy
with the assistance of Julien Blanpied

Lighting: Patrick Riou
Sound: Gauthier Tassart

*Jean-Luc Verna
— Haven’t you overdone the make-up a wee bit?
— No
Retrospective

English

Memento mori: “remember that you will die.” Without a hint of moralism or preaching, Jean-Luc Verna fashions stories in which bodies expose themselves. With a mixture of clarity and revolt he reminds us, gently and without heroism, of our mortality, our illusions, of the vanity of our actions and our belief systems.

This exhibition is the first retrospective of his work, from 1991 to 2016. The protean practice of Jean-Luc Verna (born 1966, in Nice) is considered here in its full extent, embracing drawing, photography, sculpture, music, dance, performance and cinema. Some 300 pieces are on display, but the point is not so much to present isolated artworks as to offer a true experience of art, Jean-Luc Verna’s experience of art, which is viscerally rooted in his personal life.

Drawing is the backbone of his practice. It traces a line that runs throughout his work/life like a line, a path whose starting point and destination is the body.

The tattoos that have gradually enveloped his body are a garment, a “stage costume for confronting life.” They afford a possible space of mastery and control. They metamorphose the body into a palimpsest, like

those ancestral parchments that medieval scribes obliterated by overwriting a second text. A resistance to the world by obliteration, covering; the disguising and staging of the self: the work of Jean-Luc Verna is a mirror that challenges us to find its blind spot. A veritable working tool, his body is constrained, modified, modelled, augmented, forced, made-up, constantly disguised by himself and for others. A body and all its moods. In the year of his birth, 1966, Michel Foucault gave his famous lecture titled “The Utopian Body” (7 December 1966), about mirrors, masks, tattoos, make-up and self-hatred. Verna’s body is not just utopian, it is plastic, always in motion, confronting passing time. It is punk, queer, transgressive.

Displayed on the entrance wall that gently leads visitors towards the galleries, the lyrics of songs that are important to the artist and photographs for which Verna has posed and given the image of his body begin to indicate the extent of the artistic field in which he is constructing his life.

“Music constitutes the breath that swells (this) body”¹. It is omnipresent in the life and work of Jean-Luc Verna. The singer Siouxsie Sioux (leader of the post-punk

group Siouxsie and the Banshees) is at the centre of his musical pantheon. “She has that trans-historical character that I like in drawing and in literature. She is at once the Pythia, the magician, Circe, the vamp, etc.”². But this circle is also inhabited by The Cramps, Blondie, The Bauhaus, Barbara, Nico, Iggy Pop, Diamanda Galas, etc.

The specially created soundtrack to the exhibition was conceived in collaboration with Gauthier Tassart (a member of the band I Apologize started by Verna with Julien Tiberi). It creates an atmosphere, a cladding, a colour full of disturbing laughter. The black-and-white of the design, the white central stage, the stage curtain created by Verna in homage to Bruno Pelassy (a draughtsman, sculptor and couturier who died at the age of 36 from AIDS) and the lighting specially designed by Patrick Riou, who lights the performances of Gisèle Vienne, heighten the sense of uncanniness. The

exhibition space is a theatre in which the artist’s baroque energy is paradoxically endowed with a rigorous, symmetrical order.

A line of drawings, like a lifeline, runs across all the walls in the room. On it are displayed, for

the first time, his “raw” drawings – originals on old, used paper, exhibiting the artist’s apparently “natural” gesture. There is a kind of shamelessness here that long prevented Verna from showing them ‘naked’ to the public.

“I envy artists who have the crazy presumption to show a raw drawing while saying, ‘Look how well I’ve done!’ I am incapable of that kind of vanity. [...] Tracing a drawing takes away the vivacity of the line and makes it the image of a drawing. That also makes it, as I am myself personally, an object of great ambiguity that may be a total borrowing or a gesture that is shameful for the fundamentalists of drawing. That gesture is like me”³.

The original drawing is indeed systematically transferred and photocopied, then transferred using trichloethylene onto different supports, and finally heightened with pencil, with make-up, kohl or foundation. It is deposited, as if being registered in memory. It is the interpretation of its own model, with the make-up reinforcing this will to hide, to produce an illusion. It is a reflection of Verna’s idea of life, a cruel joke, a laugh in the form of a grimace that distances things and overplays the ugliness

and darkness of this world. By an association of ideas, Verna summons up mythological figures, fauns and satyrs from Antique paganism, figures of saints or fallen angels from Christian iconography, and finally, figures taken from contemporary images – singers, the Paramount logo... Drawn from memory, these chimerical bodies are assembled and combined, grafted and fragmented to the point of losing definition.

Paramour has been a recurring motif in Jean-Luc Verna’s work ever since his studies at Villa Arson (Nice). The famous logo of the Paramount studio in Hollywood is diluted and transformed using the same transfer technique as for the drawings. It is repeated in endless variations. The mountain is metamorphosed, in turns, into a person, a volcano, a horned animal, a space symbolising the seasons of love.

“This work is close to what I do with songs. It allows me to interpret and reinterpret. From one song to another, it’s the same song, the same text, the same music, but a little bit different every time”⁴.

This process of reinterpretation is also at work in his photographs.

Begun in 2000, they effect a synthesis of art history and rock history. From two historic images, Verna creates a singular new image. The photographs have double captions: “*Michelangelo, Night, marble, 1566 / *Traditional pogo (since 1976)” (2000), or again: “*Unidentified artist, Diadumenos, 150 AD. / *Siouxsie Sioux (The Creatures) saying to the front row: ‘There’s a lady here who wants to drink some water,’ London, 1998” (2011).

These photographs recall a genre, with a double, aristocratic and popular destiny. In front of the public, then in front of a still or film camera, actors strike a pose in order to reproduce a famous genre scene, history painting or allegory. These devices create a troubling effect, due to the singularity of the bodies and the fiction of which it is the medium, and to the make-up and accessories, which turn the body into a fetish. In his images, Verna is naked but reality and contingency are still there and cannot be neutralised⁵.

His main artistic collaborations, with Gisèle Vienne and Brice Dellsperger in particular, explore in different ways the figure of the performer, be it the dancer or actor. Since 1995, Brice Dellsperger has

been making a series of videos under the generic title of “Body Double” which are remakes of films or famous scenes from the history of cinema. Disguise and the reversal of genders are the keystones of this exercise in rereading cinema. Like the actor in Kabuki (traditional Japanese epic theatre), Verna plays on the multiplicity of faces and bodies that are made up, pastiched and kaleidoscoped. In *Body Double X* (2000), a remake of *That Most Important Thing: Love* by Andrzej Zulawski (1975), and *Body Double 22* (2010), a rereading of *Eyes Wide Shut* by Stanley Kubrick (1999), he plays all the roles, both male and female. His collaboration with the choreographer Gisèle Vienne is driven by a shared desire to trouble the criteria of gender, an interest in tableaux vivants, masks, puppets, the darkness of the human soul, fantasy and violence as embodied in posed or de-realized, stylised and retouched bodies. In 2004 he danced and played in *I Apologize*, a show by Gisèle Vienne to which he brought his own artistic material (a scene from a film by Brice Dellsperger, poses from the history of art and rock ‘n’ roll excerpted from his photographs).

Concession is a funerary monument for the artist himself. Made

specially for the exhibition, it symbolises a world that is collapsing, the ageing and wear of images. It is a deposition, an ultimate staging of the death of the clown or his ability to revive. “It is the time of reckoning, of wondering what it has been possible to laugh at, what you cannot laugh at, what it will still be possible to laugh at in order to find a reason, perhaps, for continuing along this path of art”⁶.

Stéphanie Airaud
Head of public programmes

MAC

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VAL

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Opening hours

Tuesday to Friday, 10 am–6 pm. Saturday, Sunday and public holidays, noon to 7 pm. Last admissions 30 minutes before closing. Closed on 25 December and 1 January.

¹ “Make up to break up,” interview with Jean-Luc Verna by Valérie Caradec and Pierre Belouïin, *Optical Sound*, 4, October 2016.

² Jean-Luc Verna quoted by Julie Crenn in “Jean-Luc Verna- Étoile insoumise,” *Laura*, 12, October 2011.

³ “SOUS LE MAQUILLAGE : RENCONTRE AVEC JEAN-LUC VERNA.” Interview by Julie Crenn, *Inferno*, December 2012.

⁴ “SOUS LE MAQUILLAGE : RENCONTRE AVEC JEAN-LUC VERNA,” loc. cit.

⁵ Cf. Bernard Vuilloux, “Le tableau vivant, entre genre et dispositif,” *Figures de l’art*, 22, Entre code et corps, October 2012, Pau - Publications de l’Université de Pau - 2012, pp.91-103.

⁶ “Make up to break up,” loc. cit.

