

A Chair and You

press kit
january 2023

A unique collection of chairs
By Thierry Barbier-Mueller
Exhibited at mudac

A A A a



Extended until
26th February

Staged by Robert Wilson
With sound and light



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CHAIR

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and

YOU

mudac

Fondation Musée
Barbier-Mueller

Partenaire principal

Julius Bär



QUARTIER
DES ARTS
LAUSANNE

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Cover :
Stefan Wewerka, *Classroom Chair*, 1971
Red lacquered wood, Edition 17/40, Gallery Mirko,
70 x 68 x 40 cm
© 2022, ProLitteris, Zurich / Photo © Patrick Goetelen
Visual : Robert Wilson / RW Work, Ltd., New York
Design : Rebecca Metzger & Pauline Piguët

Choi Byung-Hoon, *Afterimage 01-105*, 2001
Black leatherette, stainless steel, granite, unique piece,
99 x 55 x 195 cm
Thierry Barbier-Mueller collection © Patrick Goetelen

A Chair and You

28.10.2022–26.02.2023

mudac is honoured to host one of the world's largest private collections of chairs by artists, designers, and architects. This collection, initiated in the 1990s, is full of original seating designs, and its owner, Thierry Barbier-Mueller, has taken the step of exhibiting it to the public after more than 20 years of secret passion.

The presentation of this rich and diversified corpus — 211 chairs and 168 designers — was entrusted to the famous American director Robert Wilson, who imagined a set design borrowed from the repertoire of performing arts. The quality of this ensemble is unique and goes far beyond the usual typology of chairs: innovative research and formal designs, the use and assembly of experimental materials, and the interplay of scale and function characterise the bountiful collection. To unveil and pay tribute to each of them, Wilson appropriates and develops the semantic capacity of the object to tell stories without words. Immersive and spectacular, this exhibition reads like a vast opera in four acts. Light and sound amplify the dramaturgy of the narrative by confronting visitors with this iconic object.

Curators

For mudac:
Chantal Prod'Hom
Susanne Hilpert Stuber

For the Barbier-Mueller Foundation :
Thierry Barbier-Mueller
Charlotte Savolainen-Mailler

Scenographer

Robert Wilson

Associate scenographer

Annick Lavallée-Benny

Coordination

Magali Conus

Thierry Barbier-Mueller



Thierry Barbier-Mueller in front of a work by Silvia Bächli
© Pedro Neto

Born in 1960, Thierry Barbier-Mueller is the youngest of the three sons of Monique and Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller. The descendant of a formidable line of collectors, his grandfather, Josef Mueller, had already laid the foundations for a passion for the art of his time and built up an important collection of modern art by artists such as Ferdinand Hodler, Cuno Amiet, Auguste Renoir and Paul Cézanne. The Kunstmuseum Solothurn still exhibits some of the masterpieces collected by this patron of the arts and his sister Gertrud Dübi-Müller, who was Ferdinand Hodler's muse. The Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva presents the collections of art of the world's cultures constituted by Josef and enriched by Monique and Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller.

Thierry Barbier-Mueller is a graduate of the Law Faculty of the University of Geneva, a promoter and manager, a publisher, a collector of contemporary art and design and the father of five children. In 1984 he joined the Société Privée de Gérance, founded by his father in 1960, and became its Managing Director in the 1990s. He has since created the SPG Literary Prize and is also a member of the Swiss Collectors Association and the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art.

The Thierry Barbier-Mueller Collection



Views of the Thierry Barbier-Mueller Collection
© Nicolas Polli



In the 1990s, Thierry Barbier-Mueller was fascinated by the creativity, freshness and tremendous explosion of spontaneity of designers such as Ron Arad, Tom Dixon and André Dubreuil. These creators moved away from the fashionable, mercantile and overdone effects sometimes found in the visual arts, to concentrate on unique handcrafted pieces. The authenticity and uniqueness of these pieces appealed to him. He then bought his first chair, and this marked the beginning of a passion that would never leave him. His acquisitions grew spontaneously as he met and discovered new designers until they became a fully-fledged collection of more than six hundred and fifty chairs from the 1960s to the present day. The collection includes works by international designers such as Ettore Sottsass, Pol Quadens, Shiro Kuramata and Maarten Baas, as well as visual artists such as Donald Judd, Niki de Saint Phalle, Lawrence Weiner and Franz West.

Consisting of about two-thirds unique pieces, prototypes or works from small, limited editions, the collection reflects this interest in atypical objects, outside the usual niches of industrial design. Barbier-Mueller is above all fascinated in the object itself, its uniqueness and plasticity, the humour it evokes or its materiality.

Far from the idea of putting together a scientific and exhaustive corpus on the contemporary history of the chair, Barbier-Mueller is interested in everything that emerges as unique and new in this field. Contrary to his collection of contemporary art initiated in the early 1980s, the common thread of his collection is above all the chair, while the identity of the creator takes a back seat.

This collection brings together the work of internationally renowned designers, as well as young, little-known designers of all nationalities. These unusual objects illustrate conceptual and experimental production in terms of form and materials, on the art and sculpture spectrum.

Until now, this collection has remained rather confidential, mainly visible to a few people close to him, artists, researchers or museum curators. Barbier-Mueller has built up his collection in a personal and intimate way, unattracted by the pomp and circumstance of the current art world. It is partly to honour these artists and to allow these objects to be appreciated by all, that he has decided to exhibit them at mudac.

The exhibition *A Chair and You* offers a glimpse of this collection of original objects that represent a history of contemporary design.

A catalogue documenting the entire chair collection is available in the museum bookshop:

The Spirit of the Chair. The Chair Collection of Thierry Barbier-Mueller, October 2022, Lars Mueller Publishers GmbH, 384 pages, 927 illustrations, 22x30cm, CHF 65.



Portraits of Thierry Barbier-Mueller
© Olivier Vogelsang



Scenography by Robert Wilson

To underline the sculptural character of the elements of the Thierry Barbier-Mueller collection, the great American director and artist Robert Wilson was entrusted with the scenography. This exceptional scenography plunges the public into immersive worlds where the chairs are treated as the protagonists of a performing arts show. Sound, light and sets provide a unique way to discover the iconic design object that is the chair and its many variations.

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Waco, Texas, Wilson is among the world's foremost theatre and visual artists. His works for the stage unconventionally integrate a wide variety of artistic media, including dance, movement, lighting, sculpture, music and text. His images are aesthetically striking and emotionally charged, and his productions have earned the acclaim of audiences and critics worldwide.

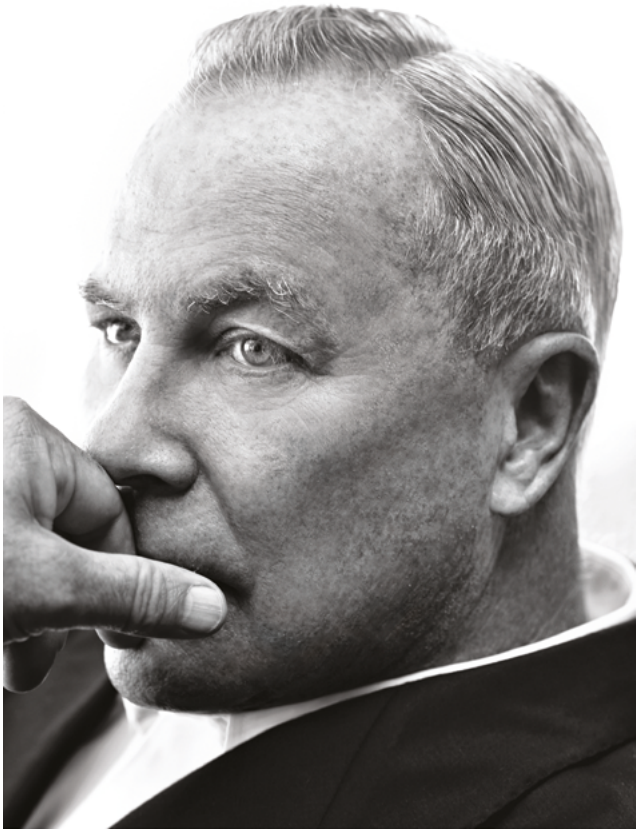
After being educated at the University of Texas and Brooklyn's Pratt Institute, Wilson founded the New York-based performance collective The Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds in the mid-1960s, and developed his first signature works, including *Deafman Glance* (1970) and *A Letter for Queen Victoria* (1974-1975). With Philip Glass he wrote the seminal opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976).

Wilson's artistic collaborations include many writers and musicians such as Heiner Müller, Tom Waits, Susan Sontag, Laurie Anderson, William Burroughs, Lou Reed, Jessye Norman and Anna Calvi. He has also left his imprint on masterworks such as Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, Brecht/Weill's *Threepenny Opera*, Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Goethe's *Faust*, Homer's *Odyssey*, Jean de la Fontaine's *Fables*, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Verdi's *La Traviata* and Sophocles' *Oedipus*.

Wilson's drawings, paintings and sculptures have been presented around the world in hundreds of solo and group exhibitions, and his works are held in private collections and museums throughout the world.

Wilson has been honoured with numerous awards for excellence, including a Pulitzer Prize nomination, two Premio Ubu awards, the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale, and an Olivier Award. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, as well as the German Academy of the Arts, and holds eight Honorary Doctorate degrees. France pronounced him Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters (2003) and Officer of the Legion of Honour (2014); Germany awarded him the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit (2014).

Wilson is the founder and Artistic Director of The Watermill Centre, a laboratory for the Arts in Water Mill, New York.



Portrait of Robert Wilson
© Yiorgos Kaplanidis

« [Robert Wilson is] a towering figure in the world of experimental theater and an explorer in the uses of time and space on stage ».

— The New York Times

SCENOGRAPHY BY ROBERT WILSON IN A MUSEUM CONTEXT

In 2018, he curated and designed a large retrospective on Max Ernst, called *The Hat Makes the Man*, at the Max Ernst Museum near Cologne, Germany. In 2013 Wilson was “Artiste invite” at the Louvre Museum in Paris. In this capacity he curated and designed the exhibitions *Living Rooms* and *Lady Gaga Video Portraits*. Many of his video portraits have been shown all over the world in over 70 solo and group exhibitions since 2005, notably at PS1 New York, Hamburger Kunsthalle, ZKM, Onassis Cultural Centre and Villa Panza. In 2004 he created the exhibition *Images of the Body. The Museum Interpreted by Robert Wilson* for the Barbier-Mueller Museum in Barcelona. For the Vitra Design Museum, he designed a retrospective on designer Isamu Noguchi in 2001, which then toured internationally, including to the Noguchi Garden Museum in New York. His installation *14 Stations* was shown in 2000-2001 in Oberammergau, Germany, and at MASS MoCA.

Previous exhibition designs and website of the artist : robertwilson.com

ROBERT WILSON QUOTES

Painting with light

“When we first met the team, the first thing we talked about was light. It reminded me of what Louis Kahn used to say when I was at architecture school: students must start with light.

(...) Light isn't something you do after you've designed an exhibition; it's an integral part of the project. Hence, we started with the lighting. In the theatre, people often laughed at me when the first thing I did was light a production. Light is structural, light is architectural, it's the element that helps us hear and see.”

“I was very impressed by my meeting with Luchino Visconti in 1974. I watched him work for two hours as he painted with light. I knew from then on that one can paint with light onstage, and that's what I've been doing since. I wanted to be a painter when I was younger, but I wasn't very good. What I could do on stage, I couldn't do on canvas.”

Robert Wilson, collector

“I am myself a collector. I started when I was very young. I collected flint stones. I think it comes from a compulsion or something. (...) I was about eleven years old when I received my first chair. It was a trigger to collect chairs. (...) I wasn't so interested in sitting on a chair, but I liked looking at them, and a chair for me was like a sculpture. (...) In 1968 I started to create my first chair, which is now featured in Thierry Barbier-Mueller's collection.”

A Chair and You, a sound experience

“I work with all elements at the same time. From the beginning, I think about light. I also think about the soundscape. What do I hear? What's the sound like in the first room, how is it in the second, how is it in the third? What's the last thing that I hear? On Broadway, you always have to 'start strong and end big.' In theatre, the last thing you hear or see is the most important. Sometimes, if you do something at the very end that seems right, the audience might forgive you for what you've been doing all evening!”

Scenography

“Regarding the selection of objects for *A Chair and You*, I'm especially interested in how the chairs are placed. (...) Each group helps me see the other, simply because of the way they are organised. This is what is exciting about designing an exhibition. (...) I often work with counterpoint, which allows you to look at one thing against another.”

AN OPERA IN FOUR ACTS

PRESENTATION OF THE SPACES

Robert Wilson and his collaborators met in Watermill, off Long Island, USA, to lay the foundations for an exhibition project they entitled *A Chair and You*, based on plans for mudac's new halls. To bring to life a meticulous selection of 211 chairs, the museum's stage was divided into four spaces.



Alessandro Mendini, *Pavonia*, 1993
Lacquered wood, fabric, Edition 6/12, Design Gallery, Milan,
92 x 102 x 79 cm
Thierry Barbier-Mueller collection © Patrick Goetelen

BRIGHT SPACE

Islands made up of a dense network of the most colourful and eclectic chairs in the collection give visitors the illusion of getting lost in a dense forest. Bright colours, surprising materials, and curves predominate in a space bathed in light. The chairs have been intuitively grouped by family and grouped around themes such as animality, duality, sculptural aspect, pop, humour, or engineering.



Robin Bara, *Geoflux 101*, 2007
Wood, Unknown edition, No. 8, 73 x 50 x 88 cm
Thierry Barbier-Mueller collection © Patrick Goetelen

MEDIUM SPACE

Calm, minimalism and geometry characterise the Medium Space. Straight, clean lines divide this monochrome landscape. The layout of the room, a series of tulles splitting the translucent set, is inspired by the architecture of Mies van der Rohe's German pavilion. The open, soothing space is in dialogue with chairs that have strong architectural features. The soft, diffuse light contrasts with a metallic sound environment.



Luigi Colani, *Poly-COR*, 1968
 Glass fiber reinforced polyester, Edition de 10,
 Cor Sitzkomfort, Germany, 78 x 55 x 64 cm
 Thierry Barbier-Mueller collection © Patrick Goetelen

DARK SPACE

Through a lowered, backlit door, dazzled visitors enter a dark and hushed room. As if floating in the darkness, the chairs are revealed in turn by changing lights that give the seats a star-like aura. As if in a planetarium, our gaze is guided by the projectors to observe the most significant chairs in the collection.



Philipp Aduatz, *Melting Chair*, 2011
 Glass fiber with silver coating, Edition de 12 + 3 E.A.,
 81 x 93 x 99 cm
 Thierry Barbier-Mueller collection © Patrick Goetelen

KALEIDOSCOPE SPACE

The last space remains closed—a cube lined with mirrors serves as a showcase for the objects. Circular openings in the facades reveal the sculptural and metallic qualities of the chairs, which literally melt into this reflective environment. The changing light intensifies the kaleidoscopic effect.

Events and Activities

OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION

Thursday 27 October 2022 from 18:00

GUIDED TOURS

Sunday 13 & 20 November, 4, 11 & 18 December 2022, 15 & 22 January 2023 from 14:30 to 15:30

GUIDED TOUR WITH SUSANNE HILPERT STUBER, JOINT CURATOR OF THE EXHIBITION

Sunday 6 November 2022 & 5 February 2023 from 14:30 to 15:30

GUIDED TOUR WITH THIERRY BARBIER-MUELLER, THE COLLECTOR

Thursday 19 January 2023 at 18:30

The tour will be followed by an aperitif.

FAMILY TOURS

Sunday 30 October, 27 November 2022 & 29 January 2023 from 14:00 to 15:00

This tour is specially adapted for children aged 6 and over and offers a playful stroll through the exhibition.

CREATIVE WORKSHOPS WITH ANNE-MARIE LENDI

Wednesday 30 November 2022 & 25 January 2023 from 15:00 to 16:00

Try to imagine a chair adapted to the animal of your choice... An offbeat approach to understanding the ergonomics, function, and poetry of this object. Drawing and collage, from 6 years old.

CREATIVE FAMILY WORKSHOP WITH ANNE-MARIE LENDI

Sunday 6 November 2022 from 14:30 to 16:30

Let's create an iconic object together! Build your own miniature chair from a set of imposed materials. From 6 years old.

ORIGINAL TOURS – THE VISITOR'S WORKSHOP BY COMPAGNIE GÉNÉRALE DU THÉÂTRE

Thursday 17 November & 1 December 2022 at 19:00

What if we regained our self-confidence in front of a work whose meaning we do not understand? How can we enter a museum today without apprehension and with complete legitimacy? Two members of mudac's scientific outreach programme and street educators Gian Franco Bizzini and Ludovic Pelet seek to answer these questions.

IN VIVO PERFORMANCE BY ANNE ROCHAT – *BLUMER*

Thursday 8 December 2022 at 18:30

Twelve years later, let's rediscover Anne Rochat's very first performance. The artist stages and "tames" the famous Laleggera chair by the architect Ricardo Blumer with her mouth.

PERFORMANCE BY VIKTOR ČERNICKÝ – *PLI*

Thursday 2 February 2023 at 18:30

As a prologue to the Printemps de Sévelin festival, mudac and Théâtre de Sévelin will showcase *PLI*, an unpredictable and humorous performance. Viktor Černický manipulates 22 conference chairs, from pyramids to cascades, in search of a system that can contain physical and philosophical ideals.

THE SPIRIT OF THE CHAIR

Thierry Barbier-Mueller's collection of chairs

Alongside the exhibition at mudac, this very rich publication has been published by Lars Müller Publishers.

EDUCATIONAL FILE

mudac offers an educational file, the result of close collaboration with the University of Teacher Education (HEP), in the form of a "classroom museum." The originality of this document is that it is relatively independent of the temporary exhibition and allows teachers to continue the experience in class when they feel like it. This file is an easy tool to help students to appropriate the Museum as an institution and design as a discipline.

→ **Tour of the exhibition for teachers on Wednesday 16 November at 12:30 and presentation by HEP of the educational file.**

* This programme is subject to change. To stay informed in real time of the activities related to the exhibition, visit our website mudac.ch.

Registration at visites.mudac@plateforme10.ch

The mudac workshops are accessible to people with disabilities.

Partners

Main partner

Julius Bär

Fondation Musée
Barbier-Mueller



Practical Information

Exhibition dates

→ From Wednesday 28 october 2022 to sunday 26 February 2023

Opening hours

- Monday : 10am-6pm
- Tuesday : closed (MCBA open)
- Wednesday : 10am-6pm
- Thursday : 10am-8pm
- Friday : 10am-6pm
- Saturday : 10am-6pm
- Sunday : 10am-6pm

Every first Saturday of the month, admission to all exhibitions is free for everyone.

Media contact

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HD Visuals

mudac.ch/presse

**Please don't hesitate to contact us
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