

# PRESS KIT

WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN AND THE MOON COMES UP JANUARY 26 – JUNE 18, 2023



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Un musée Ville de Genève





#### Open Invitation to Ugo Rondinone

Geneva, January 2023 – For its third annual Open Invitation exhibition on view from January 26 to June 19, 2023, the MAH has invited artist Ugo Rondinone to take over its building and collection to create a unique aesthetic experience. Ugo Rondinone is recognised as one of the major voices of his generation, an artist who composes searing meditations on nature and the human condition while establishing an organic formal vocabulary that fuses a variety of sculptural and painterly traditions. His art of chosen connection and affinity is now carried out at the scale of the museum. Rondinone orchestrates a dialogue that brings together more than five hundred pieces from the museum's collection and his own work.

Rondinone's when the sun goes down and the moon comes up invites us on a journey through the looking glass. Struck by the symmetry and majesty of the MAH's building, designed by architect Marc Camoletti, he saw that the location could create similarities and opposites between two recognised Swiss artists who are well represented in the museum's collection. A three-way dialogue with the work of Ferdinand Hodler (1853-1918) and Félix Vallotton (1865-1925) is forged, calling together pieces from the museum's collection (paintings, sketches, everyday objects) and Rondinone's own work. The result is a surprising narrative and artistic trajectory that plunges us into a nocturnal universe and its hidden side (hence the exhibition's title). The exhibition is a meditation on the elemental forces of the human psyche, the proximity of Eros and Thanatos, and the latent presence of Romanticism in our relationship with the world.

By integrating the MAH's space in this way, Rondinone creates a genuine ecosystem brimming with poetic accents and influenced by the presence of two of his emblematic pieces, the sun, 2017, and the moon, 2022 (both are large circular sculptures more than five metres in height). These pieces punctuate the visitor's experience and produce a mirror effect, playing on symmetry and connection. This effect is also carried out in the two wings—where Holder's warriors respond to Vallotton's nudes—and in each space through which the visitor passes. For example, Rondinone's glass horses, which carry air and water drawn from different oceans across the world, offer a surprising echo to Hodler's lakeside views, as if the silhouette of a landscape might suddenly be embodied within an animal's body and vice versa. The eye is amazed, references are blurred, and magic emerges. The themes of twins and notions of what is similar or opposite are omnipresent. The sun and the moon is a ballet of the stars that evokes the tension between the mimetic and antithetical that runs through the entire cosmos.

This movement is also temporal: when *the sun* slips away momentarily, it leaves room for exploring the hidden side of things. The allure of the nocturnal and its secrets are reconsidered and redesigned by Rondinone in his artistic and playful engagement with Eros. To this end, he has chosen to dedicate two rooms to the fictional reconstruction of Hodler and Vallotton's apartments, as he imagines them, filling them with objects from the museum's collection (porcelain, watches, small male nude statues, for example). The rooms are lined with wallpaper that he designed, inspired by drawings of male figures he unearthed in the MAH's storerooms. The aestheticisation of the ordinary in these apartments is realised in collaboration with Frédéric Jardin. While the figuration is reminiscent of the interiors that the writer and dandy Gabriele Annunzio crafted based on descriptions in Joris-Karl Huysmans'novel, *Against the Grain* (À *Rebours*), 1884.



Rondinone's intervention finally invites a deep and aestheticised exploration of our relationship with life and nature. As such, the artist chooses to work with primary materials and natural elements, enclosing different soils gathered from the world's lands in the figures of his nude dancers, for example. Elsewhere, he plays with the body, skin tone, water, and light, as is most evident in the shimmering *love invents us*, 1999, an installation of coloured filters over the museum's windows. The transformation literally tints the visual experience of visitors. It blurs the boundaries between inside and outside, turning the museum at nightfall into a projection room and a place of luminous radiance, where works of art are held within a work of art.

The symphony of symmetries, the exploration of the night's universe, and elemental alchemy are some of the driving forces of Rondinone's work and its transformation of seeing in this Open Invitation. The artist frames this seeing within references to Romanticism, which are present throughout the exhibition as they connect to desire, introspection, nature and the proximity of love and death. This way of seeing offers the visitor an unusual experience and turns the exhibition into something of a place of initiation. This ties into the endeavour headed by Marc-Olivier Wahler and the MAH team to reinvent and upgrade the museum. They aim to disconnect from the idea of the museum as an ivory tower and create a kind of magic space that is indeed connected to the outside but where the experience of daily life is intensified and reinvented.

First was Jakob Lena Knebl's Open Invitation (*Walk on the Water*, 2021), which shifted our sense of category through the practice of installation. Then came Jean-Hubert Martin (*Draw Your Own Conclusion*, 2022), who blew up the boundaries around the idea of the collection. Now the museum presents the notion of transformation, which is at the centre of Rondinone's work. It is a transformation of seeing, of space, of artwork, and of the relationships that we maintain with each and the museum itself. Nevertheless, it is also the transformation of the visitor's experience, which is both enchanted and questioned by an approach that is subtle and irreverent, rigorous and playful, pop and profound.

Born in Brunnen in 1964 and now living in New York, Ugo Rondinone is one of the significant figures of contemporary art. His intervention at the MAH extends his practice of creating large-scale exhibitions, whether involving his own work as an artist or serving as a curator (the third mind and  $i \triangleleft John$  Giorno at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, in 2007 and 2015).



Curator Ugo Rondinone

Set Design Ugo Rondinone with Frédéric Jardin

(for the "apartments")

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#### 1. Introduction

For this third Open Invitation exhibition launched by Marc-Olivier Wahler, the MAH welcomes Ugo Rondinone, a Swiss artist of international influence. Rondinone has been a force in the art world since the mid-1980s, regularly presenting spectacular exhibitions that continuously explore our relationship to the visible. He is a top artistic figure, represented in Switzerland by Eva Presenhuber, in Paris by Kamel Mennour, in New York by the Gladstone Gallery, in London by Sadie Coles HQ, in Berlin by Esther Schipper, and in Seoul by the Kukje Gallery. In fact, at times, Rondinone has been better known abroad than in his own county, even if the Place des Deux-Églises in Onex (Geneva) is home to one of his most impressive sculptures. Simply describing his work is challenging because his pieces communicate through their magnitude and variety. He is able to fill a landscape with colour megaliths or a slogan perched on the roof of the Paris school of fine arts or give poetic and tangible form to his internal and emotional states (for instance, his series of circular paintings titled sun started in the 1990s, which explore hundreds of chromatic combinations). In this way, his work alternates between the spectacular and the mystical, the natural and the artificial, and the grandiose and the humorous. Refusing to be trapped in an aesthetic chapel or to freeze his work in withering terminology, he is an artist of relationship and exchange. His work puts forth groups of objects or atmospheres that respond to each other, creating a world of subtle echoes. The focal point of his practice is no longer the object itself but the relationship it maintains with its immediate environment: the room, other work, and the body and mind of the viewer.

#### 2. Origin

When Marc-Olivier Wahler first encountered Rondinone's work, he was immediately struck by how it organised the space around the pieces presented. Before becoming a curator himself, the artist staged our sensations, rearranging and profoundly reorganising our perceptual field. He created the feeling of entering a different world by summoning, charming, and, at times, disorienting the viewer. In this way, a Rondinone work encounters itself on the sensory and imaginary level and deeply changes those who participate in its play.

Based on this observation, the idea emerged naturally. The artist would transform this relational talent on the scale of the MAH itself, with the museum also functioning by definition as a system of connections, but through an often very structured distribution of sensations, circumscribed by creating contexts of meanings and knowledge (texts, labels, guided routes). What happens when artistic freedom, creativity, and interpretation are introduced into the museum institution? When do the very building and its architecture come into play and become magnified in the public's view as a result of the artist's eye? How can a place and an artistic practice, which depend on objects, resonate together while proposing transformations (on the museum or artistic level)? These are the questions that Marc-Olivier Wahler has sought to explore with this new Open Invitation. Ugo Rondinone has responded in his particular way as a poet. Similar to the avant-garde cut-up, he presents significant recontextualisations, possible exhibits, and hidden connections and takes us to the wonders and vastness of aesthetic and artistic analogy.



#### 3. Concept

The tasks of the Open Invitation exhibitions organised by the MAH intend to rediscover the MAH's collection from new angles, create connections between eras, artists and customs, and crystallise new and unusual aesthetic experiences. With Ugo Rondinone, the concept takes on new dimensions because the artist has included his own work, some pieces created especially for this occasion. A new polysemy unfolds as a result and known works (or lesser known) are discovered by the visitor's freshened and captivated eye.

Ugo Rondinone first envisioned this exhibition as a true voyage, reconsidering how visitors circulate through the MAH in an original way. A visitor can choose to go right, towards the galleries dedicated to the work of Hodler, or to the left, to enter into the world of Félix Vallotton, where the rest of the trajectory is guided by the artist via the contours of a veritable poetic and narrative ecosystem through the rooms. This route then unfolds and resonates on several levels around a genuinely new conception of Romanticism, considered key to understanding our relationship to the world. Romanticism fascinates Rondinone because of the role it grants to our irrational side, on the flip side of our conscious life: the world of the night, of dreams, fantasy and imagination are validated and expressed, and the artist decisively takes hold of them to uniquely recontextualise both the work and life of his two predecessors. When the sun sets, the moon sheds new light on what we thought we knew.

This journey into the night becomes an occasion for Rondinone to reinvent the inner life and private worlds of the two painters. In two installations realised in collaboration with the architect Frédéric Jardin, they use techniques of altered photographs by staging powerfully suggestive objects from the MAH and from the revelation of desires that the artist interprets subjectively. From this point, Rondinone transforms Hodler and Vallotton into *fin-de-siècle* dandies, secret and refined, whose relationship to the other, in body and in love, is suddenly understood through the prism of surprise. Going from pieces that reinvent their lives to the life embodied by the pieces, the visitor is also led to appreciate the echoes that unite and oppose Vallotton's sunsets and Hodler's views of Lake Geneva and Lake Thun.

These two visions of landscape painting take us back to Romanticism and its perspective on nature. Nature is also magnified in Rondinone's own work: with the presence of water and air from the different oceans of the world filling his glass horses, he creates the perfect counterpoint to Hodler's "planetary" landscapes, evoking like him, but differently, the presence of the infinite at the heart of the finite, and the union of the cosmic and aesthetic. The same dialectic is created between the figures of Rondinone's nude dancers, who are made of wax and soils from different surfaces of the world, and Vallotton's sunsets, where nature is felt everywhere and the raw and elemental are embodied in forms, whether terrestrial or human. The pieces Rondinone selected from his personal collections are also entirely related to natural elements: the sun, moon, earth, sea, and light (which enliven the clocks with solar dials and chromatic magic) compose a ballet of forms and textures, a symphony of elements.

Romanticism also allows Rondinone to amplify his reflections on seeing and vision. As one of its principal components, the contemplation of nature is fundamental in the Romantic experience. In this way, the artist does not hesitate to also recall the movement's influence on introspection and the exploration of the self. Playing with the horizon of the visible, inverting windows into mirrors, and multiplying reflections, Rondinone turns the visitor's attention to their own inner life. "My work concerns seeing, turning it to the outside, to nature, or the inside, opening a space of

introspection," he has stated on the subject, reminding us to what extent our feeling of identity also depends on what surrounds us and on visual experiences that form us and transform us from the inside.

This turning of seeing towards intimacy finally allows the artist to propose an in-depth exploration of human psychology. Rondinone exhibits and embodies powerful archetypes that inform our vision of the world; love, death, light, and shadow are then established as the fundamental coordinates of our approach to reality. The room that brings together Hodler's sketches on the agony of Valentine Godé-Darel, his mistress, therefore deeply echoes Vallotton's series titled *Intimacies*, with each examining reality in its own way and bringing to the forefront the archetypal powers that are Eros and Thanatos, desire and death, in a ballet of references and resonances that continuously call to the visitor's attention and imagination. Rondinone tends to describe his work as a "lexicon composed around archetypes." He, therefore, draws from the most fundamental elements of our relationship with the world and converts these themes into forms and deeply significant materials. Our relationship to time is, therefore, a thread through his work. This is seen in the series of his clocks, colourful but without hands, which are reminiscent of solar dials from antiquity. He immerses us into a reflection of our own limits and our subjective relationships to duration, for example. In the face of these objects, we are seized by a disturbing feeling of strangeness in recognising known forms now suddenly less recognisable, more enigmatic, and visually fascinating.

Finally, the MAH (the building) itself undergoes a true transformation. With *love invents us*, 1999, a large-scale installation that relies on the placement of coloured filters on all the museum windows, Rondinone creates a genuine screen of light for the collected works. Each gallery becomes differently tinted, and each filter embodies a psychological atmosphere or a particular narrative. In an even more influential way, when the sun goes down, which is the title of the exhibition, the museum begins to shine outward, becoming itself a visible work of art in the Genevan night. Here again, the inside and outside of the building seem to merge; the front and back reflect one another and are flipped, embodying a new magical symmetry.

To end, Ugo Rondinone reminds us that a museum is always more than a simple place: it is an adventure, a discovery, an experience that offers many surprises and calls upon the visitor's curiosity. With *when the sun goes down and the moon comes up*, he offers us a new prism through which to see the museum.

#### 4. Exhibition Trajectory

### a. Rhythmic Space. Opening

Purposely placed in the entrance hall, *the sun*, 2017, one of Rondinone's emblematic pieces, is a key to the exhibition. This sculpture is a five-metre circle made of bronze branches that acts as a symbolic gateway, a threshold that the viewer's eye traverses, coming out the other end transformed. *The sun* also presents the image of a circular trajectory through the museum galleries, which can be travelled in either direction. Finally, it is an illustration of synergetic functioning, in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, a symbol in itself of the relational exhibition the artist presents.

To note: the other museum entrances will be closed, and the visit route will necessarily begin at this highly symbolic reception area. Visitors will nevertheless be invited to make a choice and go to the right (into the world of Hodler) or to the left (towards Vallotton's), freely testing out for the first time here the principle of symmetry, which is at the root of the exhibition.



#### b. Rhythmic Space. Ten Pillars

In this gallery, Rondinone has us enter into his personal reinterpretation of the work of Ferdinand Hodler, a major figure in Swiss modernity whose art is marked by the themes of life's fragility. Visitors are welcomed by a bouquet of martial figures and large paintings of Swiss warriors. These paintings are installed on pedestals, thereby transformed into sculptures, filling the space, not walls. A new perception of depth is created. On the back of each pedestal, several of Hodler's sketches and preparatory drawings allow Rondinone to show the backside of the work, the pathways and detours of creation, all leading to the solidification and realisation of the inspiration on canvas. Finally, *love invents us* tints the space red, hinting at the warrior's intensity and the violence of the emotions he embodies.

# c. Rhythmic Space. Pathways (in collaboration with Frédéric Jardin)

These spaces offer an imaginary recreation of Hodler's apartment, based on the model of a dandy's interior, very inspired by the world of the character Jean des Esseintes, as he appears in Jori-Karl Huysmans' novel Against the grain, 1884. Every artwork and object in these rooms is from the MAH's collection. The figurative pieces are all male silhouettes, suggesting another facet of the artist's desire, here fantasised and played out by Rondinone himself. There is also a watercolour by Albert Trachsel, drawings by Auguste Baud-Bovy, porcelain pieces, fans, watches, and other objects that are transformed into a graphic and visual lexicon, perhaps representing the inner life of the artist. The will to aestheticise the world is transmitted here into daily life—it is a place that seems less a real room than an "interior space," where the artist's relationship to the body, to time, and to the formation of tastes and emotions is at play. This dimension is accentuated by the fact that Rondinone himself designed the wallpaper of these rooms, demonstrating that this is a subjective and imaginary projection. The artist captured his inspirations and dressed up the rooms with Victorian tapestry motifs as well as with male silhouettes and bodies from the museum's collection. Three unconscious aesthetics overlap in a ballet of references, including Hodler, the museum and Rondinone himself. love invents us, 1999, lends a green atmosphere to the space.

### d. Rhythmic Space. Open Sky

Rondinone's glass horses from 2020, *the horizons*, respond here to eleven of Hodler's paintings depicting Lake Geneva and Lake Thun. Here, again, a web of echoes and contrasts dominates the visitor's perception. These animal silhouettes are embodied here in a material rendered and created artificially as a craft. The glass, therefore, represents another alchemy: the conversion of a natural world through the magic of the painter's eye into pigments on canvas. Beyond this dialectic that brings together the artificial and the natural, another strong symbolic dimension emerges: each of the glass horses is also a container of water drawn from the different oceans of the earth. In this, the vastness is invited into form and the boundless into the bounded. Finally, the surface of the water in Rondinone's horses replicates the demarcation of the sky and ocean, a play of contrasts between water and air, also found in Hodler's chromatism. From pigment to mineral, from canvas to sculpture, from lakeside to seaside, there is a fascinating play of coming and going that enchants the eye and which *love invents us*, 1999, tints yellow.



### e. Rhythmic Space. Closed Sky

This space includes seventeen drawings that Hodler devoted to the agony of Valentine Godé-Darel, his mistress and muse. These extremely disturbing and moving representations aim to seize death the moment it strikes while tracing the progression of her sickness in space and through time. The visitor will view this work as Rondinone intended in a staging designed by himself. A special display presentation realised for this occasion arranges the pieces through the gallery's space.

### f. Rhythmic Space. Three Steps

These three rooms all present a dialogue between Ugo Rondinone's *landscape sculptures* from 2023, which recompose and rearrange a landscape from surprising angles, and the small *diary paintings*, 2005-2012. Again, a conversation is launched between nature and primordial elements in these pieces. The materiality of the paintings resonates with Rondinone's transformation of soil in his mysterious geometric landscapes.

#### g. Rhythmic Space. Before an Invisible Hand Opens the Door

These two spaces present an artistic staging on the theme of temporality. Visitors find a relief by Auguste de Niederhäusern, better known as Rodo, and engravings depicting Adam and Eve, as well as a selection of the museum's clocks, some standing, some on the wall, and others placed on the same grey supports used as pedestals. They are structurally placed in a position like other works of art. What is sensed is redistributed as a result: the aesthetic and material properties of everyday objects become more visible and prominent. They are contemplated on the same level as works of art. The orange filter of *love invents us*, 1999, is complemented by an installation that amplifies the sounds of the clock hands and mechanisms. The visitor joins a quasi-synaesthetic experience of time.

#### h. Rhythmic Space. Oblique Shadow

With the moon, 2022, the silver sculpture that is the pendant to the sun, a new symbolic passage is presented to the viewer. It is the point in the exhibition that begins (or ends, depending on the direction of the path chosen) where Vallotton's work is reframed. This spectacular piece, evoking the cosmic scale, is surrounded by high-contrast engravings by the Lausanne native. In his renowned series Intimacies, Vallotton explores the relationships of couples and plays with the themes of betrayal, secret, and closeness with the other. These black-and-white images are an invitation to explore the reverse side of the visible: they hint at what is hidden behind appearances. Behind closed doors, these subjects then function as a surprising counterpoint to the moon. The play of scale perfectly expresses Rondinone's fascination with duality and the art of contrasts.

#### i. Rhythmic Space. On the Edge

Seven representations of still lifes and landscapes by Vallotton welcome the visitor. They echo Hodler's landscapes arranged symmetrically in the museum's other wing but also reintroduce the theme of time passing and the emotion of landscapes, a fundamental motif of Romanticism. Selected sculptures in a sensitive installation respond to these pictorial figurations. Rondinone's seven nude dancers are made from wax mixed with different soils collected from across the world. Each of these bodies is also a landscape, a configuration of earth and material, informed both by the artist's practice and the nature of the body. Microcosms and macrocosms respond to each other, the curves of limbs recall those of landscape, and the dialectic between



the natural and artificial throughout Rondinone's work is again resoundingly illustrated in this room. Black filters darken the display cases containing the museum's armour. The latter is presented in quasi ghost-like fashion, like a muted echo of Hodler's warriors in the first Palatine room. Finally, *love invents us*, 1999, and lends a purple halo to it all.

#### j. Rhythmic Space. The Cypress Trees

These spaces offer an imaginary recreation of Vallotton's apartment, based on the model of the dandy's interior, very inspired by the world of the character Jean des Esseintes, as he appears in Jori-Karl Huysmans' novel Against the Grain, 1884. All the objects and pieces in these rooms are from the MAH's collection. Each figurative piece is a male silhouette, suggesting another facet of the artist's desire, here fantasised by Rondinone. There are also paintings by Alexandre Perrier, drawings by Adolphe Appia, a sculpture by Simone Tallichet, engravings by Arnold Bocklin, archæological pieces, antique furniture and objects and even precious fabrics that are transformed into a graphic and visual lexicon perhaps representing the inner life of the artist. The will to aestheticise the world is here transmitted into daily life, to a place that seems less to embody a real room than an "interior space" where the relationship of the artists to the body, time, and the formation of tastes and emotions is at play. This dimension is accentuated by the fact that Rondinone himself designed the wallpaper of these rooms, demonstrating that this is a subjective and imaginary projection. To dress up these rooms, the artist drew inspiration from Victorian tapestry motifs but also from male silhouettes and bodies from the museum's collection. Three unconscious aesthetics overlap in a ballet of references: Vallotton, the museum, and Rondinone himself, who has orchestrated the whole. love invents us lends a pink atmosphere to the space.

#### k. Rhythmic Space. The Waterfall

Echoing the first Palatine room on the other side of the hall are seven of Vallotton's nudes presented vertically on the same kind of pedestal with drawings installed behind. Here the fragility of the human body responds to the theme of war presented on the other side of the hall. Rondinone creates tension between diametrically opposing forces, drawing in viewers and having them confront extremely powerful and archetypal representations. The blue filter of *love invents us*, 1999, offers a light that accentuates the vulnerability of flesh exposed to looking and nevertheless confiscated from touch, a phenomenon that is at the root of an entire dialectic of desire in painting.



#### 5. The Artist

Rondinone has not overlooked any creative path in his œuvre. Whether the artist is working on drawing, video, sculpture, installation or even slogans, he aims to multiply the possibilities of expression. Strengthened by his long relationship with John Giorno, he is aligned with sound poetry and the innovations of the American avant-garde and has been able to capture a sort of heterogeneous magic that comes from being surprised and the unexpected. At times monumental, as in *seven magic mountains*, 2016 (in a desert of Nevada), his work can fill landscapes and expansive views and also provide intimate encounters. His pieces characteristically recompose the space around them and around the viewer, whether making the horizon appear in a horse, time in a circle of colours or seeing through darkened "windows" that inverse the elements of the visible. Rondinone's practice, in this way, endeavours to continuously de-automate our perception of the world, blurs overly defined categories through which we grasp reality, and gives rise to the mystical and magical every day, often with spare means.

The perceptive wealth of Rondinone's oeuvre, the multiple layers of its character and visual form, resonates with the variety of the MAH's collection; its sensorial dimension, which is deeply kinæsthetic (that is, it involves all the dimensions of the body) finds a field of exploration here that is unique and entirely bewildering. Drawing from his vast experience organising and manifesting influential exhibitions (the third mind and i ♥ John Giorno at the Palais de Tokyo, in Paris, in 2007 and 2015)), and large-scale artistic interventions, the artist here finds the ideal context for realising his inventor's instinct, his sensual and unhabitual imagination. He asks us to do nothing less than reconsider the world and art history together through the prism of new colours.

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# Rhythmic Space. Opening

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# Rhythmic Space. Ten Pillars

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# Rhythmic Space. The Cypress Trees

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# Rhythmic Space. The Waterfall

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