PRESS KIT
ORDER DOESN’T MATTER
JULY 21 – OCTOBER 29, 2023

L’ORDRE N’A PAS D’IMPORTANCE
21 JUILLET - 29 OCTOBRE 2023, GENÈVE
**Order Doesn’t Matter**, from July 21 through October 29, 2023

Geneva, July 2023 – On July 21, the Musée d'art et d'histoire (MAH) will open **Order Doesn’t Matter**, the third L exhibition presented in its Palatine galleries. The exhibit is the result of a collaboration among the museum’s curatorial teams and considers the MAH's varied approaches to presenting its collections since it was established.

At a moment when the MAH is engaged in active reflection of its future, **Order Doesn’t Matter** invites the public to engage in an in-depth review of the museological choices of the past, interrogate those of the present, and imagine those of the future. All of the museum’s curatorial departments (Fine Arts, Works on Paper, Applied Arts, Clockmaking and Jewellery, Archaeology, Coins and Medals) have combined forces to examine the successive historical approaches to presentation in the current museum as well as in the institutions that preceded it—the Bibliothèque de Genève’s cabinet of curiosities, the Musée Rath, and the Musée Fol. Within the Palatine galleries, images from various points in time trace the evolution of these approaches, offering a nuanced interpretation of our cultural heritage.

Every exhibition, whether public or private, unfolds from a point of view and a frame of reference. Curators make selections among collections, exhibitions, and didactic or aesthetic objectives. **Order Doesn’t Matter** encourages visitors to consider how the viewer's gaze is influenced by aspects of the presentation, such as the staging, pedestals, signs, and informational elements. Is the work integrated into a distinctive display or shown in vitrines so neutral that they merge into the background décor?

Viewers will experience an evolving, immersive aesthetic encounter as they move through several distinct spaces. The sculpture park evokes its 1910 counterpart; the cabinets of curiosities recall the vitrines designed by the museum’s architect Marc Camoletti; a gallery features densely mounted artworks typical of the nineteenth century. This time travel journey allows us to experience, for example, the trophies of L’Escalade as they were originally presented over a century ago.

The informational materials are another part of this panorama. They range from brief handwritten labels to QR codes leading to galleries filled with works on the MAH website and labels that demonstrate the institution’s accumulated knowledge. A visitors’ booklet is inspired by the nineteenth-century catalogues of the Musée Rath. In fact, all visitor guides are a reflection of an era.

This summer, every visitor will discern whether order matters when accessing cultural heritage, as presented and preserved in the multifaceted MAH.
Curatorial: Musée d’art et d’histoire de Genève

Lenders: Bibliothèque de Genève
Fonds municipal d’art contemporain de la Ville de Genève
Hôpitaux universitaires de Genève
Musée Ariana, Genève
Musée d’histoire naturelle de Genève

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2 Rue Charles-Galland—1206 Geneva
Open Tuesday–Sunday, 11:00 am–6:00 pm
Thursday 12:00 pm–9:00 pm
Admission is free

Website: mahmah.ch
Ticketing: billetterie.mahmah.ch
Blog: mahmah.ch/blog
Online collection: mahmah.ch/collection
Facebook: facebook.com/mahgeneve
Twitter: @mahgeneve

Opens July 20, 2023, 6:00 pm
1. Introduction

This exhibition springs from today’s reflection on the MAH of tomorrow. It brings together all of the institution’s fields of expertise in a programme inspired by the museum’s missions of education, promotion, preservation, and the transmission of cultural heritage.

The matter of order, raised in the exhibition’s title, touches on dual themes. The first is the visitor's choice of trajectory, which may be non-chronological and even random. The second is how works are displayed: They are organised with a didactic or aesthetic objective or unorganised to confuse the eye, pique curiosity, or evoke various emotions. The exhibition’s title is also a wink at the neon installation *L’Ordre n’a pas d’importance* by Ann Veronica Janssens that has loomed over Geneva’s public space at Plainpalais (FMAC) since 2012.

2. Concept

Visitors are invited to circulate at will through the museum’s Palatine galleries. The unifying theme is the history of public exhibitions in Geneva according to their modes of presentation, selected from significant moments in time. The visit may be self-guided or accompanied; an object may be displayed in isolation or contextualised; the offerings may be sparse or cluttered, shown against white or dark-toned walls, in standard or specialised display cases, from a private cabinet of curiosities or a public museum, and may range from monographic subjects to major group shows. This exhibition illuminates the many missions of the MAH—in turn or simultaneously didactic, artistic, and historical—and casts light on its vocation as a conservatory, a refuge for contemplation, and a recreational space.

When the museum first opened in 1910, it had the pedagogical role of classifying art and history. It employed typologies to organise the world for its audience. It evaluated the donations that constituted the nucleus of the current collection and shaped the institution’s encyclopaedic character. These gifts formed distinct ensembles and were displayed in clearly identified spaces, such as the Duval, Fol, L. Ormond, and A. Piot rooms. Today, arranged by provenance, these artefacts demonstrate how history, as recounted by objects, may take precedence over the importance of a donor.

The display decisions made at specific points in time may define narratives and influence emotions. They act upon the viewer’s perception of the object and its significance, whether in a private setting (a cabinet of curiosities) or a public area. When the museum replicated private spaces (historic rooms) in 1910, it endorsed the idea of placing objects in a temporal context. Public spaces, on the other hand, tended to emphasise the scale of the area available for staging artworks.

What is the impact of a sculpture gallery where works are simply set in place on the ground instead of mounted on a wall or a pedestal? Compare the atmosphere of the cabinet of curiosities in the Bibliothèque de Genève with the organisation imposed by the vitrines designed by Marc Camoletti (1857-1940), the architect of this important museum that opened in 1910. Consider the Musée Rath’s approach to hanging paintings in the nineteenth century.

What kind of information is available to the public, and how is the accumulated knowledge concerning an object conveyed? How is the viewer's eye influenced by a pedestal or by the descriptive information posted inside and outside the display cases?
Order Doesn’t Matter encourages visitors to immerse themselves in the museological choices of the past, interrogate today’s issues, and imagine the challenges of the future. Ultimately, it presents a question: Does order matter?

3. Exhibition Trajectory

a. Sculpture Gallery
The hall behind the left façade of the museum entrance was initially used to exhibit modern sculpture; subsequently, following the bequest of Étienne Duval in 1914, it was devoted to classical sculpture. Following the general practice of nineteenth-century European museums, Marc Camoletti, the architect of the Musée d’art et d’histoire, used laterally directed natural light to accentuate the sculptural reliefs.

These works came from private interiors and public spaces, and they were sometimes detached from larger sculptural groups. The design of the pedestal was an integral aspect of the display. Its height, shape, and compositional materials were themselves elements that influenced the viewer’s perception of the artwork. This is the case for a contemporary trophy composed of twelve suits of armour that recalls both the Ancien Arsenal, the place of its original display, and its transfer to the gallery of Arms and Armour.

Preparatory models, often reduced-scale plaster maquettes, give an overview of the successive stages of an artwork’s creation. These models were included in the museum’s historical inventory records, and they were preserved along with the finished work itself. These statues cannot speak for themselves, but can their presentations tell us their histories?

b. Cabinets of curiosities
A new kind of collection appeared during the Renaissance, the predecessor of the modern museum. The word “cabinet” initially referred to a chest of drawers for storing objects and later came to refer to the entire room or dedicated display area. Exhibited
privately by cultivated art lovers, it presented an array of marvels in a small, densely packed space.

In 1559, rare objects collected by Genevan cognoscenti were housed in the Bibliothèque de l’Académie, which opened its cabinet of curiosities to the public in 1702. The original items included a stone Florentine table and a small hourglass with decorative cast iron mounts. An astronomical clock with automatons came next, followed by a nautilus cup and a mummy’s hand, the first Egyptian artefact to reach Genevan collections in 1749.

This exhibition presents an evocation of cabinets of curiosities, rather than a literal reproduction, in two adjacent spaces where the contents are distinct from their containers. Concentration, dilution, and the nature of immersion are all issues open to reflection in the MAH’s 2023 interpretation of cabinets of curiosities.

Travel chest. ca. 1620
Pine, blackened wood and engraved bone veneer, brass, decorative paper,
57 x 76 x 29 cm (22 ½ x 30 x 11 ½ in)
Gift of Don Walther Fol, 1871, inv. MF 4021
© Musée d’art et d’histoire de Genève, photo: Bettina Jacot-Descombes

A comprehensive museum project
When the MAH opened in 1910, it was furnished with display cases designed by Marc Camoletti. The received wisdom of the time differed significantly from the current tenets of museology and underestimated the technical requirements for conserving works of art.

Historical collections of archaeology and applied arts were displayed by typologies as exhaustively as possible. Tiny shards were exhibited alongside intact vases in the library, with the motherlode of information located in the heart of the museum. First and foremost, the goal was to present a maximum number of objects as pleasingly as possible, displayed in each case in a representative series of previously established categories. There was no reluctance to include pieces that today would be considered mere study materials, such as fragments of Greek ceramics. Extensive travel was rare at the time, and the public had never before viewed such objects as the treasures on display in this grand new museum.

Like the early museum guides, the written labels in the showcases were brief and to the point. The titles in the case were generic, and labels referring to each group of objects were tersely worded, usually without the classifications that would become standard practice in the decades that followed.
d. Art display in the 19th century

By the end of the eighteenth century, there were three distinct approaches to the presentation of artworks.

The first presented the evolution of art history, hanging works by school, chronology, or artist.

The second seized upon the concept of the masterpiece and the contemplation thereof. The painting was isolated and decontextualised, sufficient unto itself.

The third approach was introduced in 1826 with the inauguration of the Musée Rath, the predecessor of the Musée d'art et d'histoire. It was the first Swiss museum designed to display both painting and sculpture. Works were densely hung with intermingled genres, schools, and periods, accentuating their distinctive characteristics. Copies, such as *The School of Athens* by Raphaël, hung alongside original works, allowing artists to hone their skills and enhance their visual understandings based on the direct study of old masters. Miniature portraits on enamel or ivory, so typical of Geneva's artistic output, were first displayed in the Rath in 1846 and were presented in a manner very similar to private collections.
To whom it may concern,

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Thank you very much.

Musée d’art et d’histoire
Press Office
Rue Charles-Galland 2
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The Étienne Duval Gallery, room 201, between 1934 and 1940
Negative on glass plate
Inv. Bât. 122
© Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève,

Modern sculpture, room 201, 1910
Negative on glass plate
Inv. Bât. 41
© Musée d’art et d’histoire de Genève,
photo: attributed to William Aubert

Auguste Rodin (1840-1917)
Auguste Griffoul, founder
Crouching Woman, 1895 (model), 1896 (cast)
Bronze, 78 x 117 x 125 cm (30 ¾ x 46 x 49 ¼ in)
Gift of the artist, 1896, inv. 1896-10
© Musée d’art et d’histoire de Genève, photo: Peter Schälchli

Arms and armoury gallery, room 204, between 1913 and 1915
Negative on glass plate, inv. Bât. 112
© Musée d’art et d’histoire de Genève, photo: attributed to William Aubert
Jean-Jacques Dériaz (1814-1890)
*Geneva, college: entry hall of the public library, 1873*

Watercolour, 300 x 680 mm (11 ¾ x 26 ¾ in)
Commissioned by the institution, 1872, inv. 202
© Bibliothèque de Genève

Nautilus Cup
Frank Christian (Ausbourg, ?-1704)

Nautilus shell, vermeil, polychrome silver,
31 x 22.5 cm (12 ¼ x 8 ¾ in)
Gift of Anne-Catherine Trembley to the Bibliothèque publique de Genève, 1730, inv. G 937
© Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, photo: Bettina Jacot-Descombes

Travel Chest, ca. 1620

Pine, blackened wood and engraved bone veneer,
brass, 57 x 76 x 29 cm (22 ½ x 30 x 11 ½ in)
Gift of Walther Fol, 1871, inv. MF 4021
© Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, photo: Bettina Jacot-Descombes

Walther Fol collections of antique vases, room 215, between 1910 and 1922

Negative on a glass plate, inv. Bât. 26
© Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, photo: attributed to William Aubert
Bell-shaped crater
Pothos painter, between 440 and 430 BCE

Red figured pottery, 30.8 x 35.3 cm (12 ¼ x 14 in)
Bequest of Gustave Revilliod, 1890, inv. 14983
© Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, photo: Flora Bevilacqua

Prehistoric antiquities, room 218, 1952

Negative, inv. Bât. 65
© Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, photo: Jean Arlaud

Gold coin
Kingdom of Macedonia, Philip III, Argead Dynasty, in the name of Alexander the Great
Susa, between 336 and 323 BCE

Gold, 8.38g
Purchase, 1976, inv. CdN 032583 bis/021
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Muriel Olesen (1948-2020)
Mystères and Boules de Gomme no. 15: Fish, 1975-1979

Candy gels pinned on paper and expanded polystyrene in a cardboard box
290 x 410 x 55 mm (11 ½ x 16 ¼ x 2 ¼ in)
Gift of Jean-Rémy Olesen, 2022, inv. E 2022-346-14
© Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, photo: Flora Bevilacqua
Numismatic Gallery
Permanent exhibition, first half of the twentieth century
Negative on glass plate, inv. Bât. 29
© Musée d’art et d’histoire de Genève,

Alphée de Regny (1799-1881)
Musée Rath in Geneva with a bust of General Rath, 1849
Graphite pencil, watercolour, and gouache highlights on paper, 222 x 334 mm (8 ¾ x 13 ¼ in)
Purchase, 1980, inv. 1980-271
© Musée d’art et d’histoire de Genève, photo: Yves Siza

Jean I Petitot, dit Petitot l’Ancien (1607-1691), painter on enamel
Charles Jacot (1906-1994), goldsmith
Catherine Howard, Lady Aubigny (?-1650), in the year of her marriage (1638), 1643
Enamel painted on gold and gold repoussé frame
Purchase, 1979, inv. AD 3708
© Musée d’art et d’histoire de Genève, photo: Maurice Aeschimann

Jeanne-Françoise-Eugénie André-Viollier (1844-1928)
Interior of the Musée Rath, 1865
Oil on canvas, 46 x 65 cm (18 x 25 ½ in)
Gift of Tony André, 1928, inv. 1949-16
© Musée d’art et d’histoire de Genève, photo: Bettina Jacot-Descombes
Lacombe & Arlaud, active between 1894 and 1915

Geneva, Palais Eynard: vitrine displaying objects and portraits of the Eynard family, 1903

Photograph, 16.9 x 22.8 cm (6 ¾ x 9 in)
Historical collections, inv. 748
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