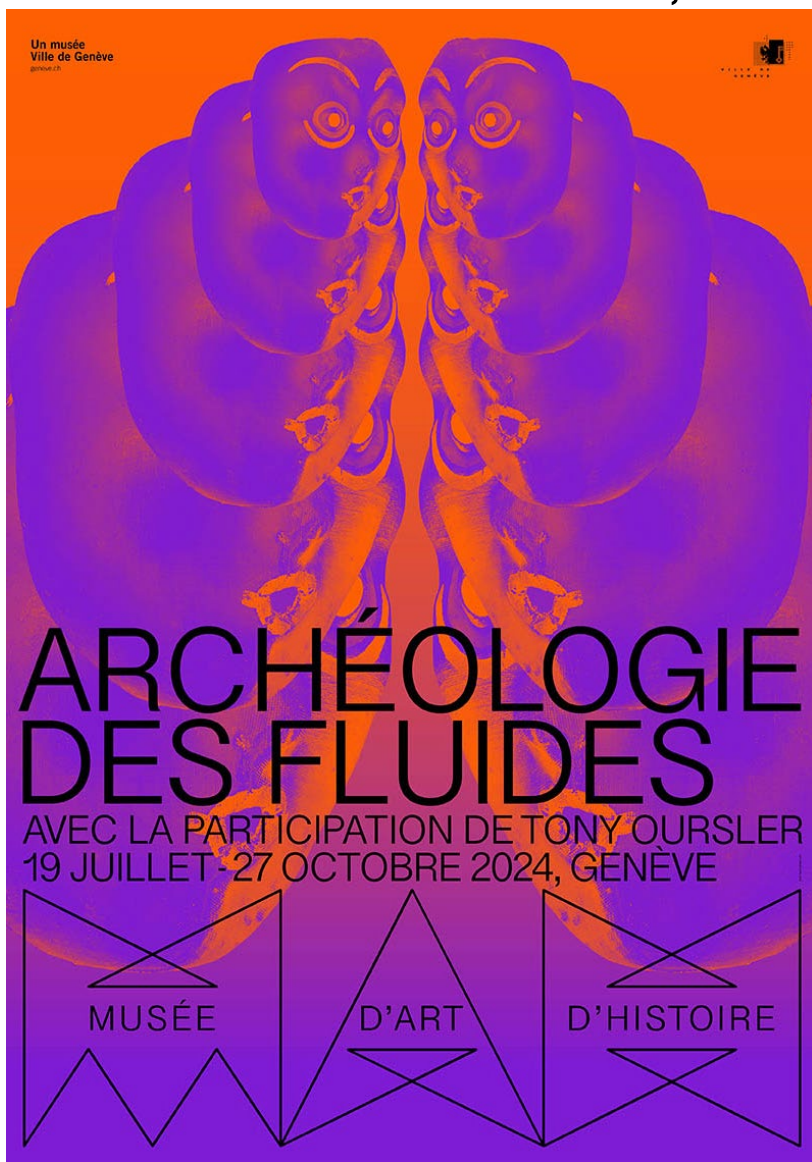


PRESS KIT

ARCHAEOLOGY OF FLUIDS

JULY 19 – OCTOBER 27, 2024



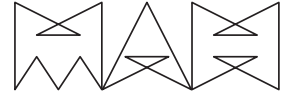
MUSÉE D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE DE GENÈVE
RUE CHARLES-GALLAND 2
CH-1206 GENÈVE

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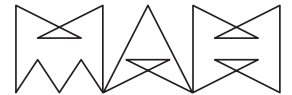




Geneva, April 2024 – For its new L exhibition, on view July 19–October 27, 2024, the Musée d’Art et d’Histoire of Geneva (MAH) has invited Pascal Rousseau to explore the relationship between objects and their power to transfix seeing. The art historian recounts a history of fascination and invites the public to rediscover the MAH’s collection in a new light. The exhibition is realised in collaboration with the artist Tony Oursler and includes work from his fascinating archives on the visual imagination of hypnotism.

What is it that fascinates us about a work of art or an ordinary object? Can we travel across the space and time that separates us from its origin, whether near or far? The metaverse and augmented reality are now shifting our perceptions, but these questions were already engaging Waldemar Deonna, the archaeologist who headed the MAH from 1922 to 1951. This exhibition is inspired by the originality of his reflections on the power of art and its capacity to capture our attention and transport us, even virtually, through eras. Auras and halos, the flux of objects and images from the past, the hypnosis of seeing, and the ecstasy of the senses—a history of fascination welcomes us to rediscover the MAH collection in a new light.

The exhibition unfolds in two stages. The first section, in the two large Palatine Galleries, emerges from Waldemar Deonna’s research, notably, his thinking developed in a 1925 article titled “Les sciences auxiliaires de l’archéologie,” (The Auxiliary Sciences of Archaeology), in which he turns toward what outside of artistic convention and stylistic feat might explain the mystery of the power objects have on us, regardless of provenance, era, and purpose. Seeking to understand the force at work within this charm—what he poetically calls their “fluidic property”—he proposes an anthropological interpretation of art objects that is entirely innovative for its period. In Deonna’s footsteps, this exhibition also plays with the face-to-face encounter with these objects, bringing together an Egyptian sarcophagus and a wall of icons that echo the material and gleaming surfaces of golden objects. This experience brings us to the symbolism of eyes and their transfixing power. Take, for example, the empty stare of a Modigliani portrait in dialogue with its archaic sources. The ecstasy of the senses allows for more virtual travel through time via objects. The image of a hypnotised young dancer, which Deonna discovered in the book *Art et Hypnose* (Art and Hypnosis, 1907) by Genevan Emile Magnin, takes us into Ancient Greece to encounter original rhythm through the body. Archaeology is not only a science of rediscovery but also an experience of reanimation. The animated image is never far in its most immersive mode. This is the invitation that the American artist Tony Oursler, a pioneer of video sculpture, extends through his multimedia installation that amazingly condenses the entire history of the visual imagination of hypnotism.



Pascal Rousseau

The art historian and academic Pascal Rousseau, who specialises in the connection between (para)scientific imagination and artistic experiments, always adopts a cultural approach to art in his exhibitions and is sensitive to the mechanisms of fascination involved in seeing and the re-enchantment of modernity. He has curated significant exhibitions, including *Aux Origines de l'abstraction* (Musée d'Orsay, 2003), *Cosa Mentale* (Centre Pompidou, Metz, 2015) and more recently, *Hypnose* (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, 2020), the catalogue for which he received the Livre d'Art prize in 2021 and the Pierre Daix prize from the Fondation Pinault. In *Archaeology of Fluids*, he circulates through the MAH's collections, in conversation with Waldemar Deonna, to better grasp what it is, beyond usual classifications and hierarchies, that turns the objects in the exhibition into a magnetic chain, allowing the eye to flow freely back and forth through space and time, despite breaks of knowledge.

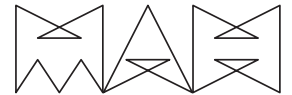
Curator Pascal Rousseau, at the invitation of Mr. Walther, director of the MAH

Sponsor Ernst Göhner Stiftung

Contact Press Office
Charlotte Henry
Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Genève
Phone +41 (0)22 418 27 04
presse.mah@geneve.ch

General information Musée d'Art et d'Histoire
2, rue Charles-Galland – 1206 Geneva
Open Tuesday-Sunday, 11 am–6 pm,
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Admission: Pay what you wish

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Geneva, July 2024 — At the dawn of the twentieth century, many studies on (para)normal psychology and altered states of conscience emerged in Geneva, diverging from the purely rational interpretations of subjectivity and artistic modernity. These questions were already being asked well before today's metaverse and augmented reality revolution by the archaeologist Waldemar Deonna, who headed the MAH from 1922 to 1951.

For its exhibition *Archaeology of Fluids*, on view from July 19 to October 27, the MAH sought to draw inspiration from the originality of his reflections on art's capacity to transport us, even virtually, through eras, via auras and halos, the magnetism of objects and the reanimation of images from the past, via the hypnosis of seeing, and the ecstasy of the senses.

The MAH has invited Pascal Rousseau to tell the story of fascination and explore the power of art and its capacity to captivate our attention. With the collaboration of American artist Tony Oursler and his amazing archives on the visual imagination of hypnosis, this exhibition sheds new light on the museum's collection. Our relationship to objects and their influence on our seeing is highlighted. What is it that fascinates us about a work of art or an ordinary object? Can we travel across the space and time that separates us from its origin, whether near or far?

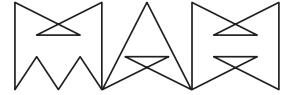
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1. Position: The Museum's Reversible Space-time

One of the MAH's qualities is its great diversity within the periods it covers and the range of human activity it brings together under one roof. This is its unique wealth, as Waldemar Deonna understood a century ago when he was director of the museum for more than thirty years. As a trained archaeologist and author of several books and hundreds of articles on art and its uses, Deonna was not as conventional as his role and scholarly mind might suggest. He had multiple approaches and combined methods and disciplines, embracing a mosaic of prehistory, palaeontology, art history and religions, the history of magic and techniques, psychoanalysis and (para)psychology. An expert in antiquity and Greek sculpture in particular, he was also interested in the art of his time. He wrote not only about the avant-garde of art but also about the possibility of recognising future attitudes in the ancient worlds he knew so well.

In 1925, he published an article in *La Revue Archéologique* titled, "Les Sciences Auxiliares de l'Archéologie (Archéologie, Art et Métapsychique)," which serves here as a thread for our journey through the MAH collections, conceived of as a trip back into the time of objects. In Deonna's writing, the museum is never frozen in a petrified history of the past; in a much more fantastical way that borders on the imagination of what was not yet called science fiction but rather "the wonders of science," he invited us to find the past that is buried in objects in the depths of the unconscious. Seeking to understand the life power behind their charm—what he poetically called their "fluidic property"—he proposed an anthropological interpretation of art objects that was relatively rare and innovative for its period. This approach opened a complete understanding of what is meant by a "museum of art and history." It is a place that, over the long term, combines a heterogeneous assortment of artefacts such as tools and masterpieces, sculptures, locks, clocks, and paintings by known and lesser-known masters.

In his writings and practice, Deonna heralded an interpretation of art that could be applied to all forms of expression beyond the distinction of era and society, all while taking into account the context of production and distribution. It was a way of travelling across space and time that shifted the conventional categories of art



history. As an example, during those same years, he proposed in vain opening the Musée d'Art de Genève to work of the medium Elise Müller, aka Hélène Smith, a self-taught artist who claimed to paint views of Mars through telepathic travel, all while inventing a Martian alphabet that allowed her to be in long-distance conversation with these extra-terrestrials. This is an entirely natural way to re-enchant the museum without augmented reality or artificial intelligence. The MAH is taking this on again in Deonna's footsteps.

2. Trajectory: A Hypnotic Odyssey

The exhibition unfolds in two stages. The first section, installed in the museum's two large Palatine Galleries, draws on the intuitions Waldemar Deonna developed in his 1915 article for *La Revue archéologique*. Turning towards the magic attributed to objects in ancient times, Deonna formed the hypothesis of their fluidic property: "Many stories give the gods and certain chosen individuals the power to release luminous emanations... This seems to be a universal belief since it can be found in ancient and modern times." For Deonna, observing the profound time of art involves finding a singular aura on the material surface of objects that physically contributes to its radiance and power of attraction.

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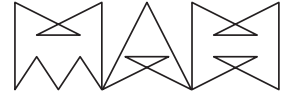
a. The lustre of icons

The exhibition invites visitors into a sanctuary that shines from everywhere. On the ground, an Egyptian sarcophagus is still radiant from its golden effect, which illustrates the invisible powers of the Other World. Gold, the only metal known at the time to not oxidise, serves here as a symbol of immortality. In the absence of the mummy, which Deonna emphasises in his article as being "impregnated with fluids" from the body it represents, the sarcophagus is a receptacle of energies that help cross the passage between life and death. Here, it points the viewer towards a full iconostasis that presents visual codes from the inside orthodox churches by bringing together a series of icons and religious paintings from the museum's collections. This wall of icons is a tradition that dates back to paleo-Christian times and indicates both union and separation through a display that connects the eye's travel to the frontiers of the visible. What's more, the gold reverberates in a play that joins the sacred and profane, Heaven and Earth.

The symmetrical arrangement of the paintings dictates a supernatural order. Saint Alypius the Stylite (1664) is atop his column, closer to the sky, bathed in gold leaf that indicates the miraculous rooting of the ecstasy. A Christ painted by Allegretto Nuzzi (*Imago Pietatis*, circa 1350–1360) points to "Jesus, during the Transfiguration, becoming as radiant as the sun." Saint George casting down the dragon (1649) defeats the dark forces of evil and reminds us that the name of the fallen angel, Lucifer, means "bearer of the light." Serving as a passageway, the iconostasis is a place of mediation and intercession and serves as a passage. Several depictions of the Virgin with Child, for example, including the one by Neri di Bicci (circa 1466–1468), transform the virtues of motherly kindness into a force of luminescence. A rare virgin as the source of life from the sixteenth century shifts the power of vibrating rays into the symbol of the revival of a new humanity.

b. The gleam of objects

In his inventory of radiant bodies, Deonna went beyond saints, martyrs, and sacred divinities; his anthropologist's curiosity also turned toward the earthly and material surface of objects ("But don't inanimate objects also emit rays?"). To the right, facing Tony Oursler's flashing lightbulb that turns light into an orphic language to be

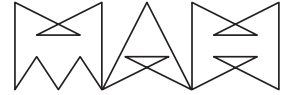


deciphered (*Talking Light*, 1996), a picture rail brings together in staggered rows a series of gleaming objects from the Department of Decorative Arts, the Department of Clocks and Watches, and the storerooms of sculptures. A wall clock shaped like a lyre (late eighteenth century) is alongside a perfume burner (circa 1800) and a two-branch candelabra (possibly a medieval copy). The spherical form of a globe (*Globuspokal*, late sixteenth century) echoes a clock-rack, its sun timepiece indicating a pathway that's more heavenly than earthly. Certain bronze pieces present gilding when applied with mercury, making them more resistant to time's polish. This sometimes came at the cost of a factory being filled with toxic fumes. The later chemical electroplating process did not produce a more sustainable shine. That the shine has lasted covertly signals the more vital stakes of survival.

c. The symbolism of eyes

It is in this resistance to the passage of time that the magnetic power of looking comes into play, a gaze that embraces this external gleam of objects. Deonna knew the subject well and devoted his very final book to the symbolism of the eye, a treatise of more than 320 pages. Completed shortly before his death in 1958 and published in 1965, this book compiles the work of several decades of research and is skilfully organised with a profusion of notes that reveal encyclopaedic knowledge. Deonna shows how the eye's symbolism filled the imaginations in the most distant times as well as the most contemporary folklore, oscillating between good and evil, protection and corruption, and life and death. The sources tumble together, answering one another. Nothing is left out, from Homer to the Old Testament, from medieval hagiography to theosophic literature, from pre-Columbian texts to modern poetry.

The other side of the installation reveals this imagination of magnetic looking. Passing through the doors of the iconostasis, the viewer discovers objects in a mostly random order, spread out as if in the museum storerooms—masks, helmets, and funeral steles. There are solids and voids. The voids are the eyes' cavities; the solids are the disorganised pile of trophies. Because with accumulation, also comes the reduction of what is essential, something that Deonna detected in these hieratic figures from the Greeks and Egyptians, as well as from Iberians and Chaldeans. The person is simplified to a head, and then from the head to the eye. It is a shared way of recentring the power-filling representation of the eye, all while emphasising the symbolic similarity between the eye and light.



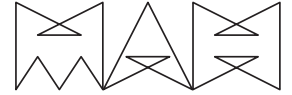
d. Disorder in time

The visitor roams into a forest of busts whose eyes converge toward a portrait painted by Amedeo Modigliani (*Crossed Hands*, 1917), a masterpiece of the museum. Known for rendering oblong, amazingly deep eyes, Modigliani drew inspiration from many sources, most archaic and, at times, some more modern. This combination is also found in some dozen sculptures installed on bases, which bring together references and remnants. The head of a hero in Carrara marble (first century) is alongside a portrait of an eastern ruler in the classic Cyprus style; a bust in polished black basalt from the Ptolemaic period is next to an Apollo. Circulation is global in the same way that we understand the universal migration of images today. In their alignment, which blurs cultural registers, a cast bronze sculpture from the early Roman Empire lends a more serious air to a carnival mask with wide-open eyes (1950s), highlighting both similarities and differences, despite the pupils, which belong to all eras and converge on the modern and unifying silence of Modigliani's portrait. The eye aperture becomes the common denominator of the supernatural magnetism of the looking.

e. Clairvoyance and the unconscious

An intermediary room brings together publications, manuscripts, and books by Waldemar Deonna, focusing on two angles: 1) the connection between antique art and modern forms—what's ancient in the new but also what's new in the ancient, and 2) the (para)psychological sources of artistic creation. Deonna was not a conventional scholar, having submitted to the rational lessons of modernity.

Thanks to the kind contributions of the Bibliothèque de Genève, viewers can see original, rarely shown drawings by Hélène Smith. These are a reminder of the interest Deonna took in the inspiration this self-taught artist drew from her experiences as a medium. The matter is Genevan. Elise Müller, known as Hélène Smith, became known through the publication of psychologist Théodore Flournoy's *Des Indes à planète Mars* (1900) and claimed to be in communication with spirits and extraterrestrial worlds. Jacques Lacan would later call her “the mind-blowing clairvoyant with the wonderful name.” She wrote alphabets, drew figures and presented views of the planet Mars in *Paysage Ultra-Martien* (Ultra-Martian Landscap), 1900–1901). They created a sensation. After the Martian series, her work is much less known but was again carefully studied, this time by Waldemar Deonna in a book titled *De la planète Mars en Terre Sainte* (1932), in which he focuses not only on the unconscious inspirations of the artist-medium but on the creative process of her work, now inspired by Christianity. These imaginary journeys through space and time gave Deonna an example to follow when travelling into the distant past of art where the archaeologist, so taken by Ancient Greece, claimed it was possible to relive the memory of a buried past via the aesthetic experience of the museum. And this was well before virtual reality, and augmented reality realised the great dream of ubiquity through technological tools: to be both here and there at the same time, in the present and past simultaneously.



f. Journey through hypnosis

Here again, the work of the unconscious provides precious support. At the end of his 1925 article on the “auxiliary sciences of archaeology,” Deonna brings the reader’s attention to a treatise by Emile Magnin (*Art et Hypnose*, 1907, with a preface by the same Théodore Flournoy), which takes us into the rhythm of a dance of origins via images. In this book, illustrated with more than two hundred photographs by the Swiss Fred Boissonnas (this exhibition presents for the very first time a group of original prints thanks to the kind gift of an important private Genevan collection), Magnin analyses the feats of Magdeleine G. (Guipet), a young woman who under hypnosis, became a virtuoso dancer whose body responded to the slightest hint of music, which she immediately interpreted in a repertoire of skilled expression.

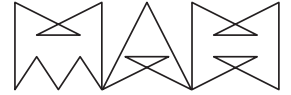
Made sublime by Boissonnas’ lens, Magdeleine becomes a Terpsichore muse and represents the classic movements of Greece. For example, she asked whether setting the dances painted on Greek vases in motion through chronophotography would not be enough to rekindle the rhythm of origins. Inspired by Maurice Emmanuel’s theses (*Essai sur l’Orchestique grecque*, 1895), Deonna dedicated a long article to this hypothesis of reanimation through image, which Magnin also had in mind when he hoped to restore Greek dance through hypnosis. Having become a muse for European theatre, as did the hypnotised dancer Lina de Ferkel a few years earlier, Magdeleine also inspired the symbolist painters, notably the artist Ferdinand Hodler, who, around 1910, executed a series of women in ecstasy. Several examples, *Femme en extase* (Woman in Ecstasy, 1911) and *Regard dans l’infini* (Looking into Infinity, 1913–1915) are held in the MAH collections. In *Chant lointain* (Distant Chant, 1911), Hodler adopts Magdeleine’s ecstatic pose, her arms raised. His Genevan disciple, the painter Albert Schmidt, created a copy, *Femme en bleue* (Woman in Blue, 1919), simulating the fresco technique as if it meant making an antique-like version in the manner of a relic bearing time’s shine. The museum’s second Palatine room, which itself is neo-Greek in style, becomes the ideal stage for this amazing journey between Ancient Greece and classic Geneva, where objects and eras intermix to better reactualise the past in the museum’s décor through the mind’s travel, as launched by hypnotic trance.

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3. TONY OURSLER

The great spectacle of hypnotism

The second part of the exhibition turns back to this hypothesis of the historical connection between art and hypnosis in a more spectacular way. American artist Tony Oursler has converted this thread of hypnosis into an animated visual history. A pioneer in video sculpture, Oursler presents a vast multimedia installation that condenses the history of the hypnotic imagination from Mesmer to the present day. The ghost of Mesmer, who invented “animal magnetism,” is alongside an iPhone screen, which has become the fetishised instrument of collective enchantment. A tree, animated by a mouth calling to the viewer, is reminiscent of “artificial somnambulism.” At its side, a phrenology head is a reminder of how much research on brain location has overlapped with the protocols of scientific hypnotism. On the ceiling, the agitated movements of Dr. Charcot’s hysterical patients (circa 1880) draw their pulsating energy from the depths of the unconscious, projected onto the walls of a blackened room converted into a phantasmagorical theatre. Entertainment culture is not far. Hypnosis very quickly went from the laboratory of psychiatric convulsions to the stages of the café-concert and cabarets and even to early movies. Tony Oursler, at once a juggler of moving images and an archivist of



modern times, collects iconographic accounts of this movement between academic and popular cultures. Often reduced to a circus act that manipulates individuals and the public, hypnosis has stormed back onto the medical field and become part of the debate on new therapies. This “new hypnosis” in part explains the renewed interest today’s artists have taken in creatively exploring the state between wakefulness and sleep that redistributes the conditions of space and time and gives greater control to the creative imagination. The fabulous archives Oursler has brought together stage this dynamic movement between the time belonging to images and objects and their power to fascinate us.

4. Pascal Rousseau

Pascal Rousseau, the art historian and academic specialising in the connection between the (para)scientific imagination and artistic experimentation, adopts an art-cultural approach to his exhibitions and turns towards the mechanisms of fascination involved in seeing and the re-enchantment of modernity. He has curated significant exhibitions, including *Aux Origines de l'abstraction* (Musée d'Orsay, 2003), *Cosa Mentale* (Centre Pompidou, Metz, 2015) and more recently, *Hypnose* (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, 2020), the catalogue for which he received the Livre d'Art prize in 2021 and the Pierre Daix prize from the Fondation Pinault. In *Archaeology of Fluids*, he circulates through the MAH's collections, in conversation with Waldemar Deonna, to better grasp what it is, beyond usual classifications, that turns the various objects in the exhibition into a magnetic chain, allowing the eye to experience the unknown and flow freely back and forth through space and time.



To whom it may concern:

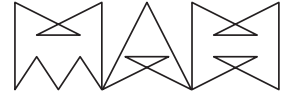
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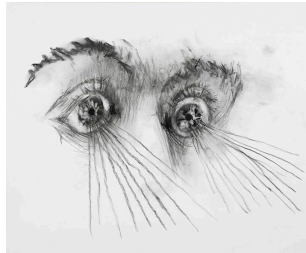
Thank you very much.

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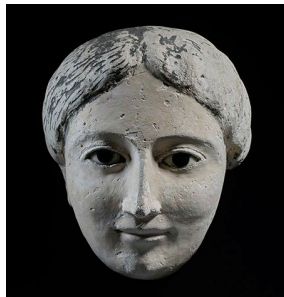
Carnival and Costume Ball Mask
Ca. 1950, Solothurn

Painted papier mâché, painted oilcloth
20 x 15 x 10 cm
Gift, 1998; inv. AA 1998-0557/d
© Musée d'Art et d'Histoire of Geneva,
photo: F. Bevilacqua



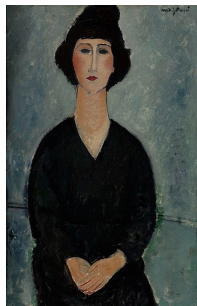
Tony Oursler (1957)
Magnetic Eyes, 2020

Pencil on paper
© Courtesy of the artist



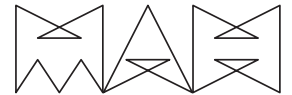
Funerary Mask of a Young Woman
Ptolemaic Kingdom, Roman Empire

Stucco, black paint, pâte-de-verre
22 x 17.5 x 20.5 cm
Purchase, 1927; inv. 12484
© Musée d'Art et d'Histoire of Geneva,
photo: B. Jacot-Descombes



Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920)
Crossed Hands, 1917

Oil on canvas; 92 x 60 cm
On permanent loan from the Fondation Jean-Louis
Prevost, 1988
Inv. 1988-35
© Musée d'Art et d'Histoire of Geneva,
photo: F. Bevilacqua



Ferdinand Hodler (1853–1918)
Faraway Chant, 1911

Oil on canvas
178 x 136 cm
On permanent loan, 2003; inv. BA 2005-30
© Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Genève,
photo: B. Jacot-Descombes



Fred Boissonnas (1858–1946)
Dance Under Hypnosis, 1903

Aristotype
15 x 11 cm
© Collection Lightmotif – Blatt



Emmanuel Tzanès (1610–1690)
Saint Alpius the Stylite, 1664

Egg tempera on wood, gold leaf background
41 x 28,5 cm
Gift of Brigitte Mavromichalis, 1983; inv. 1984-84
© Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Genève,
photo: O. Held



Tony Oursler (1957)
State Non_State, 2020

Installation
© Courtesy of the artist