

## PRESS KIT

OBSERVATOIRES

CARTE BLANCHE TO JOHN M ARMLEDER

JANUARY 29 – OCTOBER 25 2026

OPENING NIGHT FEBRUARY 5TH FROM 6 PM



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

MAHMAH.CH  
MAH@GENEVE.CH  
@MAHGENEVE

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## For its sixth Open Invitation, the MAH invites artist John M Armleder

Geneva, January 2026 – The Musée d'art et d'histoire (MAH), under the direction of Marc-Olivier Wahler, continues to pursue its goal of creating dialogue between cultural heritage and contemporary art. Since 2021, its Open Invitations have offered artists an opportunity to engage with and propose new interpretations of the museum's collection. Through this approach, the museum affirms its commitment to making its collection living and accessible. In 2026, for its sixth Open Invitation, the museum has invited John M Armleder, the internationally known Genevan artist, to design an exhibition in the MAH.

His exhibition *Observatoires* offers a thematic journey where each room explores a different world, including animals, abstract painting, musical instruments, and light fixtures. In this approach, the monumental architecture of the MAH meets the expansiveness of its collection, and John M Armleder has created an experience that is both surprising and coherent, where each object finds its place naturally in an ongoing dialogue between the ordinary and the aesthetic.

Born in Geneva in 1948, John M Armleder is a major Swiss artist whose five-decade career has reflected many movements in contemporary art. As a co-founder of the Ecart Group, his work is marked by the influence of Fluxus and John Cage, injecting humour and conceptual challenges and drawing from various movements such as Dada and Abstract Expressionism, while still approaching every exhibition as an unpredictable artwork in and of itself.

With over 500 of his works held in the museum's collection (from his famous *Furniture Sculptures*—large geometric paintings—to other graphic works), Armleder appears to be the ideal curator to pursue this unique dialogue between cultural heritage and contemporary art.

Featuring temporary structures and intriguing combinations, the exhibition invites visitors to stroll and discover. Everyone is free to compose their own pathway of ideas and associations. This experience reflects the MAH's determination to bring its historic collection into contact with contemporary approaches and to invite visitors to rediscover the museum in a new way.

### 1. A fresh dialogue between the artist and the collection

Armleder's curatorial project offers a fresh journey through the MAH's collection. Its principle is simple: to reveal the breadth of the museum's holdings through themes chosen by the artist, creating a new interpretation and a new approach.

Hence, the collection is experienced in a brand-new architectural arrangement with temporary structures inspired by the artist's drawings held by the MAH. This architectural approach transforms the museum into a network of "rooms within rooms," where each thematic sequence opens with



a work by the artist, creating a constant dialogue between the architecture, the collection, and the contemporary viewer.

## 2. A stroll through themes and concepts

The exhibition is experienced as an unstructured stroll where ordinary objects are presented alongside aesthetic objects. Visitors are greeted by a mirror ball in the entrance hall. The first room is the abstract painting room, bringing together works by artists such as Olivier Mosset and Christian Floquet, which are displayed on a semicircular wall designed especially for the occasion.

In the flower room, compositions of artificial flowers planted in Armleder's tyres enter into dialogue with a selection of still lifes from the museum's collection, including works by Jan van Os, Marie Laurencin, and Jan Brueghel the Elder.

A room devoted to music (a passion of Armleder's) brings together instruments from the MAH's collection and contemporary works, including a mirror-piano by Christian Marclay and two *Furniture Sculptures* made of electric guitars. Whether through the influence of the random music of John Cage or the recurring use of instruments in his art, Armleder has often evoked the world of music. The exterior walls of this space are painted monochrome.

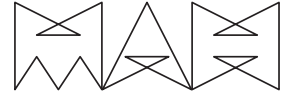
Next, there is a section devoted to multiples—editions and graphic works—including artists such as Sol LeWitt, Joseph Beuys, Robert Smithson, Salvador Dalí, and Sylvie Fleury, offering a panorama of art publishing practices.

After a space dedicated to transparency, where glass globes are placed on a rectangular stand, there is a series of salons displaying furniture, with historical pieces alongside contemporary appropriations.

Visitors then discover the animal rooms (208 and 214), which have been transformed into a reflection of the natural history museum with loans of taxidermic specimens: an iguana, a chamois, a stork, and other pieces dialogue with works from the collection depicting fauna, particularly paintings by Jacques-Laurent Agasse.

To explore light, an installation of Armleder's neons is in conversation with a selection of historic light fixtures from the MAH's storehouse. In the oval room, a semicircular structure features portraits and self-portraits by Ferdinand Hodler, Cuno Amiet, Elisabeth de Stoutz, Giovanni Giacometti, Henriette Rath, and others, introducing visitors to this intimate space. Facing them is a self-portrait by Armleder, with pairs of his shoes placed on photographic portraits of the artist and arranged in a circle around a gas lamp.

The artist also addresses the themes of the void and of damaged objects: the armour room is transformed to evoke absence, a nod to the artist's pacifism. Reflective film has been applied to the glass cases, blurring the view of the pieces. Metallic silver fabric is draped over the walls, and a series of frames from the collection are intentionally left empty. Finally, an elevated space, accessible from a scaffolding erected for the occasion, presents images and documents related to the museum's architectural



history—particularly the two watchtowers that were once present—offering a historical and spatial interpretation of the site.

The visit continues with a space devoted to ink stamps, with pieces by Fabrice Gygi, Lawrence Weiner, Muriel Olesen, and Ben Vauthier, as well as artists' books, including important pieces by Ed Ruscha, Yoko Ono, Marcel Duchamp, Tristan Tzara, Sonia Delaunay, and Andy Warhol. The room of remnants features installations of debris from the exhibition's installation, a sculpture broken into three pieces, and archaeological fragments from the museum's collection.

3. An evolving exhibition

Some sections of the exhibition are designed with a temporary and evolving component. The works on paper, the editions, and the artists' books will rotate every three months. These periodic replacements help preserve the artworks while also offering the public the opportunity to discover new aspects of the collection over time.

4. The visitor's active role


In addition to reinterpreting the collection, this Open Invitation gives visitors a truly active role in the experience. This participatory approach is part of the curatorial concept "Toward a museum of possibilities," which the MAH is implementing this year. Our goal is to make the museum a living surface that is open and unpredictable, where each person contributes to creating meaning.

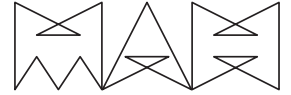
By breaking with the traditional contemplative approach, *Observatoires* invites visitors to explore freely. Here, the curator is someone who makes connections between the works, suggesting thematic affinities rather than chronological classifications. In this way, the visitor's viewpoint becomes the true catalyst of the exhibition, creating new connections between cultural heritage and contemporary art with every step.

5. Opening on Thursday, February 5, at 6 pm

The MAH invites you to a festive evening at the *Observatoires* exhibition curated by John M Armleder. On February 5, with the artist present, the museum will transform into a space for encounters and experiences. With rapidly sketched portraits, a DJ set, artistic activities, and conversations around the collection, the opening will offer a stimulating immersion in the artist's world and a chance to explore the exhibition, before or after drinks in the museum restaurant.



<b>Curator</b>	John M Armleder
<b>Sponsors</b>	CBH Compagnie Bancaire Helvétique Fondation Leenaards Fondation Ernst Göhner Fondation Migore
<b>Contact</b>	Press Office Charlotte Henry Musée d'art et d'histoire, Genève Phone +41 (0)22 418 27 04 charlotte.henry@geneve.ch
<b>General information</b>	Musée d'art et d'histoire 2, rue Charles-Galland – 1206 Genève Open Tuesday – Sunday, 11 am – 6 pm, Thursday 12 pm – 9 pm Admission: Pay what you wish  Website: mahmah.ch Ticketing: billetterie.mahmah.ch  @mahgeneve



To whom it may concern:

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Thank you very much.

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Rue Charles-Galland 2

CH-1206 Genève