The precious power of stones
30 January - 15 May 2016

Curator: Rébecca François

Minerals inspire collective curiosity and a sense of wonder. As children and as adults, we've all embarked on treasure hunts to collect stones, selecting the most intriguing specimens to arrange in our own private collections of little gems. The appeal minerals hold ranges from the simple curiosity of casual collectors to aesthetic meditation, from spiritual or magical belief to scientific experimentation.

Minerals have been used since Prehistory in creating paints, and were gradually collected, preserved, arranged and catalogued in private collections, cabinets of curiosities and mineralogical galleries. They were even painted and turned into portrait subjects in themselves, as seen in Leroy De Barde's sumptuous 19th century paintings of display cases and mineralogical specimens. Featuring in the poetic works of the surrealists followed by the experiments and installations of the Arte Povera, Land Art and Supports-Surfaces movements, in the hands of artists, these "involuntary masterpieces of the universe" (Roger Caillois) became works of art.

Today, artists use rough stones as up-cycled ready-made pieces, collecting them, arranging them or depicting them, while others carry out experiments on them, transform them and manufacture copies. While the history of how these minerals have been used, depicted or presented still remains to be written, contemporary artists' taste for minerals is palpable.

Designed as a fully immersive experience, the "Precious Power of Stones" exhibition intertwines several facets that reflect the various different unique resonances and vibrations that artists have lent these minerals. We open with an invitation to embark on a spiritual journey through time and space relativity, kicking off with the imaginary worlds and symbolism triggered by occult phenomena and the great mysteries of nature. Next comes the time of collecting and depicting, in which the visitor is transported into a kind of mineralogical cabinet scattered with copies and vanities. This off-beat 'lithotherapy' can be summarised as follows:

"I contemplate at my leisure and manipulate as I see fit a captive, miniaturised plot, almost like a reduced model of the immensity of the universe." Roger Caillois

Stones are precious archives of the earth. In holding and reading them, Man gains access to the infinity of time, engaging in a journey through space and time and the concrete state of being in our world and the universe at large. While stones may appear to be frozen in time, their strata are illustrations of their ever-shifting nature, thus forming a kind of living autobiography of our planet. Through these stones, some artists attempt to connect Man, the Earth and the Universe in a unique physical and metaphysical experience, while others plunge the audience into a relativity and impermanence that makes us rethink our perception of the world.
Laurent Grasso (1972, Mulhouse)

Studies into the past
Oil on wood, 114 x 94 cm
Collection of the artist

This painting opens the exhibition, creating a kind of brief gap between time and space relativity. This faux Renaissance painting depicts the phenomenon of levitation. Using this anachronistic detail, the scene shifts to an unsettlingly strange atmosphere. This ambiguity is enhanced by the painting's lack of date. The boundaries between reality and fiction, science and belief, the visible and the invisible, the present and the future, are blurred. Studies into the Past inhabits a paradoxical word, a future temporality (as it depicts a phenomenon that has never yet been proven to exist) written in the past tense (through its many historical references).

Éric Michel (1962, Aix-en-Provence)

Fluorescences, 2015
Fluorescent pigments on canvas, black light, fluorite from Nice's Natural History Museum, varying measurements

Courtesy of the artist

Generously loaned by Nice's Natural History Museum, monochromes and fluorite specimens reveal their secrets under the effects of black light from within a screen box, a kind of ultra-sensory sounding board. The natural elements communicate in a secret form of alchemy, with the painting serving as a paragon of human activity. Veritable blocks of light, minerals and monochromes operate as gateways to be passed through in order to gaze upon the depths of the immaterial. In doing so, the installation is an "open window" looking out into the world. The fluorescence creates a radiant, enveloping landscape where everything seems connected, and where no words are required. Everything is simultaneously spiritual and rational.

Marina Abramović (1946, Belgrade)

Shoes for departure, 1991
Amethyst
2 pieces, 26 x 50 x 20 cm 10 kg each
Enrico Navarra Collection - Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives

Instructions for the Public: enter the shoes with bare feet - Eyes closed – Motionless – Depart. Time: Limitless

In the 1990s, Marina Abramović perfected interactive devices that drew on the power of amethyst, a stone renowned for its spiritual, soothing and protective qualities. The Shoes for Departure sculpture is made of two amethyst monoliths carved into a pair of clogs. Fragile and precious, this sculpted stone is evocative of the ruins of archaeology to come. A plate explains how to use the piece. Visualising themselves wearing these celestial, protective slippers, visitors are invited on a static journey into the heart of the precious power of stones.

Isabelle Giovacchini (1982, Nice)

Aurore 541, 2015
Positive prints of desert rose photograms, 30 x 24 cm each

Collection of the artist

HOW ONE OUGHT TO TURN TO STONE.
— Slowly, slowly to become hard like a precious stone — and at last to lie there, silent and a joy to eternity.
Friedrich Nietzsche, Daybreak. Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality, 1881, aphorism 541

These strange and mysterious shapes are the result of a photographic experiment created
using photograms* of desert roses, the positive prints of which were reworked in order to capture the different facets and shadows cast by this evaporite mineral. Hovering between apparition and disappearance, the flipped photograms of these crystallised rocks mirror Nietzsche's aphorism concerning petrification and death. This strange fossilisation is evoked not only through the photographic process but through the nature of this rock itself, made from evaporated infiltrated water. The shapes that emerge on the surface of the paper are reminiscent of the inflamed tangles that occur at 451°F (temperature at which paper catches fire and burns in Ray Bradbury's dystopian novel Fahrenheit 451, 1953).

*Photogram: Images of objects placed on light-sensitive film and exposed to light.

Chair Event (mineral sample and hammer), "Footnote for volume I of The Book of the Tumbler on Fire" series, 1968

Chair painted white, mineral, hammer and associated text 81.5 x 39 x 43 cm
Reconstruction of the 1986 piece with the artist's approval for the "George Brecht" exhibition, MAC Lyon, 9 October - 25 November 1986. The original piece belongs to the Hansjörg Mayer Collection, Stuttgart.
Donated in 1986 – Collection Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon

In "Chair Events", George Brecht calls on active participation from the audience in their approach to his random and poetic combinations of chairs and everyday objects. In Chair with mineral specimen and equipment, pieces of quartz and a hammer are placed on a white chair, creating a palpable sense of tension that transforms a seemingly innocuous scene into a continuously renewed and therefore unique event that speaks directly to the audience's imagination.

Bettina Samson (1978, Paris)

"Comment, par hasard, Henri Becquerel découvrit la radioactivité", 2009
Series of five photographs on Baryta paper, 80 x 100 cm each
Frac Ile-de-France

These black and white photographs are prints created from uraninite radiation (natural uranium oxide), with no other additional source of light. The artist recreates the conditions that led to the French physician's accidental discovery of radioactivity in 1896, when he was researching fluorescence in uranium salts. These photographic prints reveal the invisible, and in doing so, they evoke occult and supernatural phenomena. The mineral becomes a meteorite with magnetic powers, lifting itself away from the black backdrop scattered with light dust, in a symbol of the incommensurability of the universe.

Isabelle Giovacchini (1982, Nice)

Lames de fonds, 2015-2016
HD video projection on loop made from thin slivers of mineralogical samples taken from Nice's Museum of Natural History, 10'02".

Collection of the artist

In Lames de fonds, the artist photographs fine slivers of rock taken from Nice's Natural History Museum from behind a microscope. Collated in video form, these petrographic images taken for research purposes reveal the rocks' mineralogical constitutions and a slice of their history. They are displayed as a successive string of worlds to be explored, interlinking the past and the future.

Laurent Grasso (1972, Mulhouse)

Psychokinesis, 2008
HD video and animation, 12'30"
Collection of the artist - Courtesy of the Sean Kelly Gallery, New York and the Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong

Psychokinesis transports visitors into time and space relativity by plunging them into the heart of a surrealist René Magritte painting equipped with movement and sound. In a scorched desert landscape, a magnificent, colossal monolith towers overhead against a crystal-clear sky backdrop. Little by little, as if inhabited by supernatural powers, the rock floats off the ground with a heavy slowness. Time dilates. The deafening, serious and profound soundtrack heightens this sense of latency. Magritte's Atlantis levitates in the blue of the sky, rotating on itself, and then with the same extreme tension, drops back down into the landscape. The title of this piece refers to the power of thought and imagination.
Emmanuel Régent (1974, Nice)

Pierre (7 février), 2008
Natural stone with silver metallisation
27 x 13 x 16 cm
Collection of the artist - Courtesy of the Caroline Smulders Gallery, Paris and Analix Forever, Geneva

Left on the floor, almost forgotten, a single stone narrates an unexpected trajectory that connects the ordinary to a poetic, ambivalent appearance. The stone has been gleaned by the artist on the trip he daily borrows between his studio and his home, in a surveying process. Metallised with silver, the stone instils a sense of unsettling weirdness. A far cry from alchemical sublimation, this archaeological vestige from the future seems contaminated in some way. An unrelenting truth reigns supreme.

* "The vision that the eye records is always poor and uncertain. The imagination enriches and adds to this vision with the treasures of memory, of knowledge, and with everything that experience, culture and history contributes, not to mention everything the imagination invents or dreams, as it sees fit." (Roger Caillois)

The supposed power of stones is sometimes diverted, as illustrated by inexplicable phenomena and phantasmagoria that combine magic, reality, fiction, belief and myth. Stones therefore become ritual objects that convey Man's quest to understand and master the great mysteries of nature.

Valentin Souquet (1978, Rouen)

Amethyst Island, 2011
Wood, resin, mirror, carafe, amethyst
75 x 95 x 40 cm
Collection of the artist

Amethyst Island is displayed in suspension like a console or altar. At the frontier between decorative element and ritual object, this sculpture depicts a black island that is evocative of the ruins and caverns of Romantic paintings. In this volcanic and dream-like landscape, an absinthe carafe is placed on an amethyst, a powerful stone renowned for its protective effects against intoxication and drunkenness, and against the psychoactive properties of this mythical and cursed liqueur. On the other side of the mirror, beneath the melancholic island, crystals made from raw wood, uncontaminated by the black platform, flourish. The philosopher's stone evokes the Wormwood star which, in the Apocalypse Of Saint John, crashes to Earth, polluting streams and rivers, where "many people died from the waters that had become bitter".

Evariste Richer (1969, Montpellier)

Masque à faire tomber la neige #1, 2010
Calcite 37 x 31 cm
Amarante/Hellier du Verneuil Collection - Courtesy of the artist and Meessen De Clercq, Brussels

This sculpture lends a piece of natural calcite the ritual function of a mask. The white stone is roughly textured and dotted with impurities, reminiscent of snow, and pierced with two small holes. Presented in a display case like an ethnographic object, this anthropomorphic mask is transformed into a sacred object that conveys Man's desire to understand and master natural phenomena.

Paul Armand Gette (1927, Lyon)

Offrande à Aphrodite (L'Apothéose des fraises ou Les Menstrues de la déesse), 2009
Aphrodite à l'Ailante, inkjet PVC, 260 x 200 cm
Quenast dacite, 32 x 40 x 21 cm
Three glasses in crystal and bronze, 11 x 18 cm
Strawberries, rose petals and strawberry coulis

Collection of the artist - Courtesy of the Jean Brolly gallery, Paris

In a series of fully demystified metaphors and mythologies, Paul Armand Gette weaves nudes and female genitals in with natural elements (stones, flowers, fruits and water). Offrande à Aphrodite (L'Apothéose des fraises ou Les
Menstrues de la déesse) invokes the divine aspect of love and sexuality. In front of a large-scale print on tarpaulin of a mould of Aphrodite of Cnidus*, a paradigm of the eroticism of the naked female form, and assisted by young women**, the artist engages in a celebration that involves crushing red berries and flowers arranged in crystal glasses on to Quenastvieille dacite aged 200 to 300 million years old. The running liquid evokes the loss of virginity and menstruation as well as pagan sacrifices and rituals. This celebration can be interpreted as both an ode to womanhood and freedom. This pairing of the cryptic powers of the stone and sexuality is an irrevocable reference to the origins of Man and the world.

* The Aphrodite of Cnidus was the first depiction of a nude female form in Greek sculpture. It is said that the sculptor Praxiteles used his mistress as a model, the famous courtesan Phryne, getting out of a bath taken in honour of Demeter. Praxiteles is thought to have made two sculptures, one clothed and the other nude, with the right hand covering the genitals and a robe held in the left hand. This sculpture was sold to the citizens of Cnidus and was hugely popular. A number of anecdotes, moulds and interpretations stemmed from its erotic power. Paul Armand Gette's photograph was taken in 1999, based on a mould housed in the Villa Médicis named Aphroditte Ailanthus, after the leaf chosen to hide her genitals.

** Anna Balkin, Morgane Lepechoux and Elisabeth Verrat, students at Nice's art school.

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Damián Ortega (1967, Mexico)

Cinco anillos, 2011

Metallic frame and suspended objects: fragments of coloured glass, alloy (Zamak), metallic cable, sandpaper and red tezontle (volcanic rock used in construction in Mexico) 254 x 240 x 240 cm

Self Collection, London - Courtesy of the artist and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City

In his Cinco anillos [5 rings] piece, Damián Ortega assembles fragments of coloured glass, alloy (Zamak), metallic cable, sandpaper and tezontle (red volcanic rock used in construction in Mexico) in a suspended cosmic sphere. Simultaneously poor and precious, delicate and unchanging, these samples transform into an expanding world in which everything is separate and yet connected, too. The dynamics between the colours and the emptiness, the suspension of the elements and the cut and stratigraphic composition create optical illusions that rely on the audience's movement. The visual trick played here refers back to the magnetosphere and the rings of Uranus. This sort of dream-catcher or Shamanic object made from little bits of suspended nothingness reinfests wondertainment, magic and fantasy into the banality of everyday life.

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Damián Ortega (1967, Mexico)

Sol, 2015

Card, Kraft paper, Indian paper, newspaper, bamboo, Polyurethane foam, acid-free PVA glue 83 x 86 cm (closed)

Collection of the artist - Courtesy of the artist and Kurimanzutto, Mexico City

In this evocation of the concept of a microcosm and macrocosm, Sol [Sun] serves as a refocussed version created in a simple sphere made from card, Kraft paper, Indian paper, newspaper, bamboo, Polyurethane foam and glue, laid out on the floor with a quarter cut away and opened like a fruit, revealing what is habitually concealed.

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Aurélien Mauplot (1983, Vincennes)

Sculptures découvertes sur l'île de Moana fa 'a' aro, 2015

Trees, basalt, screws, photographs, minerals, varying measurements

Collection of the artist

Aurélien Mauplot leads visitors into the tale of an isolated forest deep in the Pacific, where basalt rock is encrusted inside splintered tree trunks. Documentation from a variety of different fields, eras and lands (map, photography, writings and vegetable, mineral and animal specimens) describe a Tahitian practice that aims to heal trees and reconcile volcanoes with the Earth. Making up the oceanic crust, basalt is a magmatic rock used for its protective, fluidifying and soothing properties and benefits. This tale...
draws inspiration from personal and collective imagination fuelled by myths and legends as well as great discoveries and the mysteries of nature. This enchanted or cursed forest radiates a kind of magic as it questions Man's capacity to believe and experience wonderment.

"If I endure their witchery, it is no doubt because they draw on some other ascendant to take effect on me. For months before I took on the challenge of describing them, I was fascinated by them. Ever since I have known of their existence, I have been unable to resist the call of acquiring more. My apartment is full of them."
Roger Caillois

Dream stones, ruin marbles, septarians, jaspers, agates, sandstones and dendrites are renowned for their abilities to connect the inert with the organic, and through "stabilised miracles" (Roger Caillois), giving birth to representations of the world, mountains, forests and landscapes, and even human or animal silhouettes. These acheiropoietas (meaning not made by Man, but by the miracles of nature) rival the finest artistic creations. They are feats of mimesis, simulacrum, appearance. While some sought dream stones, like the 19th century Chinese painter K'iao Chan who put his name to one of his natural paintings as one might produce a piece of ready-made jewellery, others looked for and collected little rocks and stones for their intriguing beauty, such as Jean Dupuy, Ève Pietruschi or Marine Class. Others still, like Michel Blazy, Emmanuel Régent or Alicja Kwade, played on the theme and created their very own stones. Cabinets of curiosities are stages on which Man's memory of the world are played out, a space where the categories separating the natural and the artificial, the organic and the inorganic, are choreographed into aesthetic arrangements. These compositions describe our relationship to the world - relations that are ever-shifting, and are put to the test through the artistic creativity of Jean-Philippe Roubaud, Hubert Duprat or Marion Catusse.

Jean Dupuy (1925, Moulins)

"Polype-loupe", 1999-2013
Magnifying glasses and stones on painted wood, watercolours and graphite, varying measurements
Collection of the artist - Courtesy of the Loevenbruck gallery, Paris

Jean Dupuy collects the weirdest and most wonderful stones. When placed under a biconvex lens, these 'freaks of nature' take on a life all of their own. Slow and prolonged observation of the stones triggers the imagination. A self-proclaimed 'lazy artist', Jean Dupuy retaliates to the fixed nature of stone with the lightness of mental effervescence. In an ode to the "queen of faculties"* that is the human imagination, the artist applies Baudelaire's "moral of the toy** to these flayed pebbles, in which children are introduced to artistic beauty through their ability to experience wonderment and inventiveness. This piece demonstrates the artist's beloved 'DIY' aesthetic.


Michel Blazy (1966, Monaco)

"Pierres qui sèchent", 2015
Wallpaper paste, food colouring, varying measurements
Collection of the artist

Michel Blazy creates his own agates and septarians using wallpaper paste drenched in water and food colouring. These 'drying stones' evolve over time, mirroring the effects of crystallisation and reminding visitors that seemingly inert stones remain in a constant state of change, recording the pulsations of our planet like a seismograph. Through these low-tech experiments and effects, Michel Blazy links the lifeless to the living and affords us a glimpse into the future.

Alicja Kwade (1979, Katowice)

412 leere liter bis zum

Anfang, 2008
555 kg of empty labelled champagne bottles, ground 70 x 110 cm
Collection of the artist - Courtesy of the König gallery, Berlin
A spectacular pile of scintillating green and grey particles forms a mysterious mineral landscape using champagne bottles ground down to a powder. The effect is a dazzling, shimmery creation that contrasts with the trivial nature of the materials used while nevertheless evoking glamour and luxury. This pile of broken champagne bottles symbolises the vacuity of human existence and shattered dreams.

Jean-Philippe Roubaud
(1973, Cannes)

"Souvenir du monde flottant, autoportrait", 2015
120 x 180 cm

"Souvenir du monde flottant, bézoard", 2015
120 x 90 cm

"Souvenir du monde flottant, opus magnum", 2015
29 x 29 cm (x4)

"Souvenir du monde flottant, cristal 2", 2015
120 x 90 cm

"Souvenir du monde flottant, cristal 1", 2015
120 x 90 cm

Graphite on Canson paper
Collection of the artist

This series was created using graphite, a native element mineral present in the earth's crust or in meteorites, and used as paint since the prehistoric era. As if taken directly from an imaginary cabinet of curiosities, these drawings of mineralogical display cases are packed full of iconographic and symbolic detail. Crystals* and bezoars* abound, evoking the cabinet of curiosities' narrative value as well as the relativity of human awareness. The title of this series (ukiyo-e) refers to Japanese prints used to describe the impermanence and relativity of everything. In a world of appearances in which all is but smoke and mirrors, the dark and metallic value of the graphite stirs melancholic feeling. This series is therefore a contemporary take on the concept of memento mori, serving as a reminder of the ephemeral, fragile and transient nature of the human condition.

*Initially considered curiosities, crystals helped define atomic composition thanks to studies carried out on their structure.
** These foreign bodies found in the stomachs of some mammals were considered curiosities and were highly prized for their alchemical and healing properties until the mid-18th century.

Marion Catusse (1991, Paris)

Sans titre, "Les Quartz" series, 2014
Quartz, nasal wall, ink and glue
4.5 x 9 x 4.5 cm
Collection of the artist

Sans titre, "Les Micas" series, 2014
Mica, ink and glue
2.5 x 16 x 5.5 cm
Collection of the artist

Marion Catusse embellishes quartz and mica with a blue element which, when combined with glue and ink, mimics human stem cells, thus blurring the boundaries between naturalist categories. The splendour of a dash of gold deposited on the quartz transforms the stone into something resembling an animal's skull, and the work of art into a spectacular vanity.

Guillaume Gouerou
(1987)

MW 6400, "Metatron Project" series, 2013-2016
Oven, 120 x 120 x 120 cm
Control panel, 160 x 70 x 70 cm
Co-production Villa Arson, Nice
Collection of the artist

Fulgurites, "Metatron Project" series, 2013-2016
Carved stones, varying measurements
With the support of jeweller Lola Miche, La Station, Nice and, 40mcube, Rennes
Collection of the artist

Guillaume Gouerou is fascinated by mineralogy and exact and inexact sciences. "Metatron Project" refers to a divine power, positioning this experience within a semi-alchemical or demiurgical quest. A complex geometric shape, a metal rhombicuboctahedron, provides the armour within which a MW 6400 oven built by the artist to melt minerals and reshape new ones is contained. Using stones sourced here and there, the artist forges his own stones which he calls Fulgurites, evaporite rocks born from a meeting of lightening and desert soil rich in silicon, highlighting the artist's ability to create using fire. Reworked into classical faceted form by a jeweller, the artist's works of art take on the appearance of precious stones.
Evariste Richer (1969, Montpellier)

"Les Micachromes", 2012
Series of 11 ilfochromes
162 x 120 cm each
Collection of the artist - Courtesy of UntilThen, Paris

Micachrome #3, 2012
Private collection, Paris

Micachrome #5, 2012
Collection MAC VAL, Musée d’art contemporain du Val-de-Marne

Evariste Richer captures the shiny, friable texture of mica via the photographic process of ilfochrome*. Sheets of mica are placed one at a time in the photographic magnifier before being directly revealed on ilfochrome paper. These fossilised "Micachromes" whisk visitors away on a journey through the strata of time.

*an ancient positive-to-positive photographic development technique

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Ève Pietruschi (1982, Nice)

"Récoltes", 2015
Collection of drawings, cotton paper tracings, varying measurements
Collection of the artist

In her work on memory of elusive or forgotten space and time, throughout her travels Ève Pietruschi collects unusual and ordinary stones which she reworks through photographic transfer techniques. These drawings of gleaned stones and rocks outline a dual movement, that of evanescent memory and of projection into the potential future. Brought together in a collection, these "Récoltes" ['Harvests'] are both sketches and ruins that hint at the vestiges of things to come.

Lucy, 2004-2006
Compressed black charcoal and adhesive
14 x 14 x 18 cm
Collection of the artist - Courtesy of the König gallery, Berlin

Lucy is a black diamond made from compressed charcoal and adhesive. Placed under a cloche, the sculpture is as stunning as the most highly sought after diamonds. As with the fossil named Lucy*, which revolutionised our knowledge of the origins of humankind, this black crystal operates like an illusion.

* First relatively intact fossil dating back around 3 million years, discovered in Ethiopia in 1974 and initially considered to be the species responsible for the origins of humanity before being categorised in the bipedal hominid family.

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Hubert Duprat (1957, Nérac)

Sans titre, 2008
Pile comprised of polished magnetite
80 x 280 x 280 cm
Acquired from the artist in 2009 – Collection Centre National des Arts Plastiques - On loan at the Frac Languedoc-Roussillon since 07/12/2009
Courtesy of the artist and Art : Concept, Paris

A pile of several tonnes of magnetite is spread across the floor like a minimalist conceptual sculpture. Naturally magnetic and cabochoon-like in appearance, these stones take their name from the Greek mountain Magnetos, and cut a strange figure oscillating between the mineral and the organic. From a heap of glistening jewels to a concentration of necrophagous flies, this sculpture leans in to the visitor, whispering in their ear a precious warning: "Remember that you will die".

Marine Class (1983, Chambray-Les-Tours)

Pierres de rêve, 2013
Painted wood, enamelled ceramic, marbled paper, leather, stones, coloured crayon on paper, brass, 40 x 34 x 35 cm
Drawing of a mountain, 24 x 30 cm
Collection of the artist

Marine Class turns a toolbox into a mineral box. This is where she keeps her collection of stones and rocks, most of which were collected on the Greek island of Tinos. In a mimesis that plays on the ambiguity between presentation and representation, reality and illusion, this miniature, mobile and practical compilation can be read as a contemporary interpretation of dream stone collections. The entire world seems to be contained within this box. Arranged inside it, the specimens are enclosed within mouldings that follow their every curve. Removed, they are presented on pedestals made by the artist against a backdrop reminiscent of the trompe l’œil of coloured marble. This microcosm then takes life, with anthropomorphic forms or natural décors emerging on these little stones, combining to create a world of their own that can be contained in a handkerchief. As a counterpoint, a drawing of a mountain evokes a quote from Roger Caillois on the powers of the imagination: "All
Emmanuel Régent (1974, Nice)


Pieces of shipwrecks, varying measurements
Sandra Hegedüs Mulliez Collection - Courtesy of the artist and Caroline Smulders, Paris and Analix Forever, Geneva

Emmanuel Régent collects pieces of boat hulls of all sizes as others would precious stones. These underwater archaeological ruins are collected by the artist during free diving and exploration in the harbor of. Suspended against the wall, the "Mes Naufrages" series constitutes a floating horizon. As with 'landscape stones', these scattered fragments operate like pieces of a painting - the Mediterranean's accidental masterpieces.

Didier Mahieu (1961, Jemappes)

Oversoul Undersoul, 2015

Mixed media, meteorite dust, varying measurements
Collection of the artist
Acknowledgements: Corentin Mahieu, Maud Barral, Isabelle Pellegrini, Francis Siméoni, Antonio Brusadelli, Jonathan Puit, Éric Haubrue at the Université de Gembloux (ULG) and Gilbert Perlein

In a mountain landscape drawn with graphite, one rock seems to stand out on its way to landing inside the exhibition space. The scope and attention paid to the drawing are reminiscent of Romantic paintings as well as 19th century photography, in which the viewer is taken on a journey through space and time. This drawing raises an unanswered question, too - where might this extraordinary rock made from meteorite dust have come from? Split in two, within the sculpture is a man in the foetal position covered with a survival blanket. Could he be a fossilised time traveller from a previous future? A nomad? A refugee? Everything is hypothetical here in this reminder of the fragile condition of mankind and the world. Observing the scene from behind the mist of dirty, old glass, the viewer/explorer is plunged into a world beyond time. Echoing Henry David Thoreau's Walden or Life in the Woods (1854)*, Oversoul Undersoul invites the viewer into a melancholic reflection on the world via nature observation.

* A travel journal and reflection of nature and society written by Thoreau during a retreat to a cabin built on the edge of Walden Pond.

Through their spontaneous beauty, stones seem to contain both our original past and our future, perpetual movement and the transient, science and the great mysteries of nature. Whether spiritual, symbolic or mimetic, these stones illustrate the relativity and impermanence of all things and the world itself. They cast doubt over the principle of reality and realism, and call into question our methods of understanding, perceiving and believing. As living memories of the planet and universe, they invite us to reflect on the past, present and future.

Living in an atmosphere of stagnation, these artists chose to leave behind the criticism and disillusionment of the failings of a modern utopia. In an age of dematerialisation and nanny states, relativity and wonderment are returned to the spotlight. In a temporality one might qualify as the "future anterior", so inextricably intertwined are the temporalities in question, the artists reassess the power of the imagination. They distil a concept in which dreaming and projection into the future are still possible. Because thanks to the power of imagination, "every stone is a mountain of power" (Roger Caillois), every man and woman a grain of sand, a resistant force.
Amethyst: Owes its colour, which can range from light to dark purple, to manganese and iron impurities. It is mainly found in Siberia and Brazil, and in the Massif Central in France. It takes its name from the Greek amethystos, and protects from drunkenness thanks to its colour which is reminiscent of wine cut with water.

Silver: This metal has been highly prized since Antiquity, and can be found in sheet, sliver, nugget or filament form. Silver crystals are rare and are cubic or octahedron-shaped. The best silver comes from Norway, Mexico or South America.

Basalt: Igneous rock with a dark, black, microlithic structure characterised by the presence of large feldspar crystals, etc. Volcanoes on the islands of Hawaii and Réunion emit basaltic lava. Dating back to tertiary era lava flows, basalt is abundant in the Massif Central in France.

Bezoar: A concretion that forms in the digestive system of humans and other mammals, this "bile stone" was a source of beliefs and superstitions for centuries. It was considered to possess thousands of medical and supernatural powers. A legendary stone that still sparks the imagination today!

Calcite: Chemical limestone. Crystallisation and deposition in calcite form occur following dissolution by infiltrating waters and a long journey down the walls of caves.

Coal: Rock derived from vegetal matter. Black and compact, some parts of it are dull, soft and leave traces on fingers, while others are shiny and harder. Coal is made from decomposing vegetal matter and wood debris sheltered from the air and transformed by bacteria.

Crystal: A homogeneous solid mass in which the atoms are structured in space, defining what is known as the unit cell. The word 'crystal' comes from the Greek kryos, meaning 'glacial cold'. It was long believed that rock crystal (a variety of quartz) was ice that was so hard it never melted.

Diamond: The hardest natural material (maximum hardness of 10 according to the Mohs scale). This 'simple' carbon, considered the most noble of precious stones, has long caught the eye of many...

Fluorite: Mineral formed of cubic aggregates of various different colours (green, purple, sometimes yellow). The mineral form of calcium fluoride with traces of organic compounds. It is characterised by phenomena such as fluorescence and thermoluminescence.

Fulgurite: This stone is quite literally born of a bolt of lightning. Electric and thermal shock (bolt of lightning of several thousand degrees) results in quartz fusing in the sand. A kind of boiling process then occurs which, after cooling, results in a natural, impure and non-transparent glass.

Graphite: Extremely pure carbon. This is the softest form of carbon, while diamonds, another form of highly pure carbon, is the hardest form.

Magnetite: An excellent oxide of iron. Characterised by a metallic black to blackish brown shade that varies from shiny to dull. It is magnetic and makes for a good electrical conductor. Deposits are found within igneous or metamorphic rock.

Marble: Marble (from the Greek marmoros, meaning 'shiny') comes from limestone that has been subjected to metamorphic pressure. A number of different varieties exist, which owe their beauty to their range of colours and veins - the latter caused by organic impurities.

Minerals: The word 'mineral' is used in opposition to 'vegetable', 'animal' and 'fungal' (relating to mushrooms). Two types of minerals exist: amorphous minerals (from the Greek a, meaning 'without', and morphe, meaning 'shape'), the constitutive atoms of which are not structured in a homogeneous network, and crystalline minerals, in which the atoms are arranged in a regular and repetitive pattern in space.

Meteorite: Earth is continuously bombarded with fragments of rock from out of space. In most cases, little fragments break off and dissipate in the atmosphere. The resulting tail of light is called a meteor or shooting star. The largest among them reach Earth, causing significant sound and light phenomena.

Mica: Metamorphic and igneous rock characterised by large hexagonal sheets. Mica is reflective and can be easily split with a nail or pocket knife. There are two varieties: white, which contains aluminium and potassium, and black, which contains iron and magnesium.

Uraninite: Made from uranium dioxide, it is the primary uranium mineral. Formerly known as pitchblende, Marie Curie used this mineral to discover polonium and radium.
Gold: A native element that is best-known in nugget form, but is most commonly found as gold dust. Gold crystals are fairly rare, it usually presents in cube, octahedron and dodecahedron form. It is a good heat conductor. It is also responsible for a great number of misfortunes in this world.

Quartz: Mineral made of silicon. This incredibly hard mineral can scratch glass and steel. It exists in a number of varieties such as milky, smoky, purple or amethyst.

Volcanic rock: This rock is created through the solidification of magma, the thick, high-temperature elements found beneath the Earth’s crust. Magma can rise to the surface suddenly as a volcanic eruption that takes on a number of different forms: eruption, effusion, explosion, etc. As it is deposited the magma loses its gas and becomes lava.

Desert rose: Gypsum featuring grains of quartz in which the intertwined crystals are reminiscent of a rose’s petals.

What’s the difference between a mineral, rock and stone? According to dictionaries, rock is a mineral mass and vice versa. The word ‘mineral’ has a more general meaning used to refer to the structure of the Earth’s crust. In geology, it also refers to crystalline substances in which the atoms are regularly structured. A rock might be included in this whole and then categorised based on a number of properties. A stone would then be a fragmented part of a rock (?). It’s difficult to settle on rock-solid definitions!

A window for the Museum

As part of the exhibition, the Natural History Museum of Nice invests windows of plastic arts workshop, located Place Yves Klein, with a selection of 30 mineral specimens from its collections and chosen for their aesthetic appeal, their diversity and their origin.

Notes

Musée d’Art Moderne et d’Art Contemporain
Place Yves Klein - 06364 Nice Cedex 4
Open from 10am to 6pm except Mondays (and 27 March and 1 May) +33(0)4 97 13 42 01
www.mamac-nice.org

Musées de Nice pass free for Nice Côte d’Azur Metropolis residents upon presentation of proof of identity and residence from the last 3 months. The pass grants free admission to all municipal museums and galleries and is valid for a 3-year period.

Single ticket - €10: Access to the MAMAC, the Théâtre de la Photographie et de l’Image, the Espace Ferrero, and the Galeries de la Marine et des Ponchettes for 48 hours.

7-day ticket - €20: Access to all museums and galleries for 7 days.

Free admission: see conditions on the museum’s website

Guided tour every Wednesday at 3pm, booking required
Single rate: €6
Group rate (15-20 people): €82

Guided tour for school groups: free upon request, booking required

Kids’ workshop: For kids aged 6 to 11:
5-day workshops during the school holidays, mornings from 10:30am to 12:30pm.
Price: €8 for a 2-hour session, €40 for the full week
Further information available on the museum’s website

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Musées de Nice
The mineralogist's workshop

Use your imagination to colour in and interpret this fine sliver of rock.

Complete these English expressions

*To have a heart of*
*Get blood from a*
*Between a ______ and a hard place*
*To be carved in*
*A __________'s throw away*
*To be as solid as a*

gold
diamond
crystal
marble
stone
rock

Work your way through the exhibition and draw a fluorite, a diamond, a piece of magnetite in cabochon form and a crystal. Next, circle those considered to be precious stones.

Post-exhibition activities

Collect your own stones made from paper, plastic, foil, soap, buttons, pebbles... Let your imagination run wild!
Keep your treasures in a box.

At home...

Make your very own surprise stones for your friends.

Mix together:
- a cup of flour,
- a cup of used and dried coffee grounds,
- ½ cup of salt and sand.

Add around a ¾ cup of warm water and mix to form a dough.

Divide the dough into 4 balls. Use your finger to make a hole in the middle. Place a marble in the hole, then cover it up.

Place your stones on a baking tray and put in the oven at 170°C for 35 to 40 minutes.

Once baked and cooled, you can give these surprise stones to your loved ones: all they have to do is break through the shell to discover the gems within.