



Miraflores de la Sierra, Juarez, México. © Sully Gabot/Copyright Agency/2023, Pro. Liffers, Zurich. Photo: Vincent Gier Dufourier

BENEATH THE REFLECTIONS OF THE WORLD



FONDATION OPALE

15.06 — 16.11.25

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BENEATH THE REFLECTIONS OF THE WORLD

From 15 June to 16 November 2025, Fondation Opale presents *Beneath the Reflections of the World*, a landmark exhibition bringing together two visionary painters: Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori (c.1924–2015), a celebrated Kaiadilt artist from Bentinck Island, Australia, and Forrest Clemenger Bess (1911–1977), a reclusive American painter and mystic from Bay City, Texas. Though separated by time, place, and culture, both artists forged singular, symbolic visual languages rooted in solitude, memory, and metaphysical experience.

This is the first time these two artists have been shown together—marking not only a world-first pairing but also the first instance of Forrest Bess being exhibited in direct dialogue with an Aboriginal artist. The exhibition exemplifies Fondation Opale's mission to connect contemporary Aboriginal art with broader currents in global art, and to stage meaningful encounters that reflect on the human condition. Through its programme of exhibitions, commissions and cultural exchange, the Fondation seeks to deepen institutional recognition of Aboriginal art within a European context.

Curated by Samuel Gross, Head of Exhibitions at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva, and featuring around fifty works, the exhibition unfolds as a poetic encounter between two self-taught artists who transposed inner visions into painted form. While Gabori worked in expansive, gestural abstractions, Bess painted in small, symbol-laden formats—yet both sought to map psychic terrain rather than physical geography.

Sally Gabori began painting in 2005, at the age of 81, following the displacement of her Kaiadilt community in the mid-20th century. Over the final decade of her life, she produced more than 2,000 works—vivid, large-scale abstractions that reimagine ancestral Country through light, tide, and emotion. Though her work defies conventional classification within Aboriginal art, it has gained increasing international recognition, including a major retrospective at the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain (2022) and inclusion in the central exhibition of the Venice Biennale the same year.

Across the Pacific, Forrest Bess developed a complex personal cosmology that he channelled into cryptic paintings—rooted in dream symbolism, alchemy, and Jungian archetypes. Despite exhibiting with the influential Betty Parsons Gallery in the 1950s and 60s, Bess remained largely unknown until a posthumous retrospective at the Whitney Museum in 1981.

Though the two artists are presented in clearly delineated spaces—accented by distinct wall colours and rhythms—*Beneath the Reflections of the World* creates moments of resonance between their practices. The scenography invites viewers to consider contrasts in scale and format: Gabori's sweeping linen canvases, imbued with place and memory, meet Bess's small-format oils that evoke vision, isolation and encoded desire. The works do not intermingle, but rather reflect toward each other, inviting contemplation of two radically singular approaches to the invisible.

Curator: Samuel Gross

THE EXHIBITION

BY GEORGES PETITJEAN

Sally Gabori and Forrest Bess have very distinct backgrounds and grew up in radically different cultural and geographical environments. Yet, in their art some remarkable parallels, and differences, occur. Both artists are largely self-taught and developed their own visual language. Through their paintings they gave expression to their cosmology of the mind and body in relation to the landscape

FORREST BESS

Forrest Bess (1911–1977) spent most of his career in relative isolation in a fishing camp right on the water on the Gulf of Mexico coast and accessible only by boat. By day he pursued his livelihood activities, which consisted of fishing, crabbing and selling bait. By night and during the off-season, he read, wrote, and painted prolifically. His mostly small-scale paintings are based on intense hallucinations and visions that he experienced throughout his life.

He began to incorporate the biomorphic shapes and abstracted landscapes of his visions into his paintings in the mid-1940s and developed an abstract vocabulary that was cryptic even to him.

After studying the writings of psychologist Carl Jung, Bess came to believe that the symbols that appeared in his visions were clues to ancient and universal truths. As he became more immersed in the exploration of symbolism, he also became increasingly preoccupied with the idea of uniting the male and female within himself.



Forrest Bess (1911–1977) | *Sans titre (No.30) / Untitled (No.30)* | Huile sur toile | Oil on canvas | © The artist | Private collection, courtesy Fondation Opale | Photo: Fondation Opale

SALLY GABORI

Considered one of the greatest contemporary Australian artists of the past two decades, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori (c. 1924–2015) began painting in 2005 and rapidly achieved national and international renown as an artist. In the brief span of a few intensely creative years leading up to her passing in 2015, she produced a distinctive and vividly colourful body of work, seemingly disconnected from other aesthetic movements — including those within contemporary Aboriginal art.

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori and her family lived a traditional lifestyle on Bentinck Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, relying almost entirely upon their island's natural resources. Her name Mirdidingkingathi refers to Sally's Dolphin spirit totem. Weaving natural fibres into baskets and fishing belonged to the daily activities of the women on the island. As a young woman, she was responsible for the maintenance of *Ngurruwarr*. These traditional rock-walled fish traps have been in use for millennia on the island and abound at particular places along its coast. As the tide drops schools of fish become entrapped inside the walls of these stone fish traps.

In 1948, after the contamination of sweet water points, following the devastating passage of a cyclone, she and the 62 other remaining Kaiadilt speakers had to leave their home country of Bentinck Island for the more northerly Presbyterian mission of Mornington Island. The establishment in the 1990s of a new arts and crafts centre on the island spurred a school of colourful painting. Sally Gabori was already an octogenarian when she began to paint with modern materials in 2005 for the Mornington Island art centre.

As a result of the forced removal of the Kaiadilt from Bentinck Island, the language and knowledge of this country almost completely disappeared. As one of the last kayardilt tongue speakers, Gabori had to develop in her painting practice a new pictorial language that allowed her to render family stories and knowledge of her ancestral country in her own personal manner. Using powerful fields of colour on large canvases, with an energetic and spontaneous gesture, thus transposing her attachment to her homeland, she fostered a highly personal style in which colour and colourful abstractions are just as important as content. While her seemingly abstract expressionist pictures are not immediately recognisable as conventional Aboriginal art, Gabori continues the informed representation of Country. Her unique style constituted a true visual revolution for the region.



Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori (1924–2015)
| *Makarrki*, 2009 | Synthetic polymer paint on linen | © Sally Gabori/Copyright Agency/2025, ProLitteris, Zurich |
Photo: Vincent Girier Dufournier

Gabori's paintings are not depictions of Country as such, but rather the colours and the light emanating from the sea when she is at those places. This reflects Paul Cezanne's assertion "*Je vois, par taches.*" (Paul Cezanne) A raw force emanates from her use of colour. The rendition of movement in a still medium through the application of energetic brushstrokes, places her in a category similar to artists such as Emily Kam Kngwararray.

The first painting she produced is *My Country* (2005). Since this first painting Gabori created a major body of work, comprising some 2,000 works. An immediate power of painting is tangible on her canvases, as well as her natural talent as a colourist. Her work is characterised by gestural physicality and dense primary colour fields.

Five key subjects are to be identified in Gabori's oeuvre. These correspond to significant sites. Most of Gabori's works represent places on Bentinck Island of deep personal significance to the artist: Dibirdibi (her husband's country), Thundi (her father's country), Makarrki (her brother's country), Mirdidingki (her own Country) and Nyinyilki (the first outstation). Dibirdibi is the area that is most represented throughout her oeuvre.

Every painting evokes particular sites on Bentinck Island that are dear to her or/ and that she associates with a member of her family. In her oeuvre Sally Gabori reconnects with sites and family genealogy. Topography of places and family genealogy often fall together. While painting Thundi she also evokes Thundiyrngathi Bijarrp, her father. While painting Dibirdibi, she paints also her much-loved husband Kabarrjngathi Bulthuku Pat Gabori.

Sally Gabori herself asserts about her paintings "*This is my country, this is my sea, this is who I am.*" This idea of self portraiture is also very much present in Forrest Bess's oeuvre.



Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori (1924-2015) *Dibirdibi Country*, 2009 | Synthetic polymer paint on linen | © Sally Gabori/Copyright Agency/2025, ProLitteris, Zurich | Photo: Vincent Girier Dufournier



Forrest Bess (1911-1977) | *Untitled (The Void No. II)*, 1952 | Oil on cardboard | © Kunst Museum Winterthur, Ankauf mit Mitteln der Jubiläumsstiftung Kunstverein Winterthur, 2014 | Photocredit: SIK-ISEA, Zürich, Philipp Hitz

It is interesting to compare Bess' more thought, austere brush strokes in the black and white fields in *Untitled (Meeting White Forms on Black)* (c.1950) or in *Untitled (The Void II)* (1951) with the bold and intuitive brush strokes in the pictures of Gabori. The geometry in the paintings is different too. Lines and dotting in *Untitled (The Void II)* are rendered detailed versus the free, organic painting of Gabori. The allusion to the void, even if it concerns a mystic void, in the title of Bess' picture contrasts sharply with the plentiful and lush country that Gabori represents. The unity with the country and the artist is natural and full here, while Bess is on an inner quest to reach unity.

In Kaiadilt country the body was traditionally marked with ceremonial scarifications that in time transformed to cicatrised motifs. Scarification, and self-scarification, is also a fundamental interest of Forrest Bess. Bess' primary concerns are the body, nature, androgyny and hermaphroditism, and the union of opposites.

Paradoxically, also for Sally Gabori nature, the land and the body are one. Ultimately, both oeuvres are intensely autobiographical.



Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori (1924-2015) *Nyinyilki*, 2010 | Synthetic polymer paint on linen © Sally Gabori/
Copyright Agency/2025, ProLitteris, Zurich | Photo:Vincent Girier Dufournier

BIOGRAPHY

SAMUEL GROSS

Samuel Gross, born in 1976, is Head of Exhibitions at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva, where he is involved in discussions about the future of the museum and the format of its programming. Previously, he was curator at the Istituto Svizzero in Rome (2016-2020); he worked at the Speerstra Foundation, Apples, as director (2012-2014), at the Evergreene Gallery, Geneva, as artistic director (2007-2012), and at MAMCO, Geneva, as assistant (2004-2007). He obtained his master's degree in art history from the University of Geneva in 2001.

FONDATION OPALE



Photo:
Olivier Maire

VISION AND PURPOSE

Established in 2018, Fondation Opale is the sole contemporary art center dedicated to the promotion of Australian Aboriginal art in Europe. It strives to facilitate dialogue between peoples and cultures through art. The foundation is based on Bérengère Primat Collection which includes over 1,900 works by nearly 440 artists, making it one of the world's largest collections of contemporary Aboriginal art in private ownership. Fondation Opale is a non-profit organisation with strictly cultural and artistic objectives

Located in the heart of the Alpine panorama of Lens/Crans-Montana (Valais, Switzerland) at an altitude of 1140 meters, Fondation Opale offers visitors the opportunity to discover temporary exhibitions of international scope on two floors of almost 1000 m². These exhibitions highlight universal themes and values carried by contemporary Aboriginal art and build bridges with modern and contemporary artworks from around the world.

Focusing mainly on visual arts (painting, sculpture, photography, installations, etc.), the foundation is also open to other disciplines such as the performing arts, music and literature in the form of special events. Every exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue and a public program that includes workshops for all publics, residencies, conferences and artist talks, as well as academic research projects. In addition to its weekly activities (public guided tours and yoga classes), the foundation organises three to four events a month. Its boutique-bookshop, a member of the Indigenous Art Code, offers a wide range of objects created by Australia's Aboriginal communities.

Fondation Opale works closely with local and regional communities in order to improve cultural and tourist offers in the region of Lens/Crans-Montana, and thus actively contributes to its development. Its educational program promotes inclusive access to culture through state-of-the art, constantly updated museum pedagogy.

CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL ART

Australian Aboriginal art and culture is the oldest continuous art tradition on the planet. In the last century it has also emerged as one of the world's most important contemporary art movements. Whether on bark, canvas or in new media, Aboriginal artists have used art to express the power and beauty of their culture, across cultures: to show their enduring connection to, and

responsibility for, ancestral lands and the continuity of their identities and beliefs. In our increasingly global world, this ability to speak across borders without forsaking any of its distinctive identity makes Australian Indigenous art some of the most innovative contemporary art being produced anywhere today.

NEW SPACES

After five years, Fondation Opale expanded with a new wing adjacent to the original building. Designed by the Sion-based architecture firm EFAR, the extension includes a 124-seat auditorium with a foyer, a library, an artwork storage area, a seminar room, and a green terrace. The building's striking façade features a work by Manyjilyjarra

artist Jackie Kurltjunyintja Giles Tjapaltjarri, selected for its sacred symbolism and evocation of a guardian figure. This artwork is reproduced on anodized aluminum panels. The art center's entrance has also been relocated to the new wing, now opening toward the village of Lens.

AUDITORIUM

A versatile, comfortable space equipped with cutting-edge audiovisual technology, designed for hosting conferences, concerts, screenings, and various artistic performances in optimal conditions. The room features an acoustically designed wave-shaped wooden ceiling and active accordion walls made of raw concrete, enhancing its sound properties.

LIBRARY

A dedicated resource center for contemporary Aboriginal art, the library offers a wealth of books and videos on Aboriginal art and culture for researchers and the public. At its core is a room housing archives, including those of artist, activist, and curator Bernhard Lüthi, with 5,300 documents, 5,000 slides, 150 works on paper, and 1,200 books. The library's ceiling is adorned with a piece by Yolŋu artist Naminapu Maymuru-White, depicting the Milky Way.

STORAGE AREA

A specialized facility designed to conserve and restore some of the works from the Bérengère Primat Collection, as well as works loaned for exhibitions. The space is divided into two rooms: one for canvases, and the other for barks and wooden objects, all of which require specific temperature and humidity conditions for their preservation.

PAST EXHIBITIONS

15. 12. 24 → 20. 04. 25

NOTHING TOO BEAUTIFUL FOR THE GODS

Fondation Opale gave carte blanche to French curator Jean-Hubert Martin, who, through some 60 works, offers an insight into the rich and extravagant diversity of spiritual and artistic practices.



Exhibition NOTHING TOO BEAUTIFUL FOR THE GODS | Photo: Dimitri Brooks

16.06.24 → 10.11.24

ARTIST ACTIVIST ARCHIVIST: BERNHARD LÜTHI INVITES

This exhibition highlights the career of Bernhard Lüthi, an artist and curator from Bern, who has been a staunch advocate for the recognition of Australian Aboriginal art in Europe.

17.12.23 → 14.04.24
HIGH FIVE!

The foundation has challenged 26 figures from the Swiss cultural scene to choose a work of contemporary Australian Indigenous art from Fondation Opale's collections, by suggesting a "mirror work" that they own, that they have created or that the Foundation could borrow.



Exhibition INTERSTELLAR | Photo: Yorick Chassigneux

18.06.23 → 12.11.23
INTERSTELLAR

Curated together with artgenève, INTERSTELLAR invites us to explore the unknown and to stretch the limits of our imagination. Bringing together some sixty works by contemporary Aboriginal and international artists, this exhibition offers a new perspective on our relationship with the galaxy and leads us to question the meaning of our place in the universe.

10.12.22 → 16.04.23
DREAMING IN THE DREAM
OF OTHERS

An exhibition juxtaposing the works by French artist Yves Klein with those of twelve Aboriginal artists, opening a sensitive, poetic path to this primordial brotherhood of awareness. Artist Ulay's Aboriginal Afterimages photography series completed the exhibition in the foundation's Special Focus space.

12.06.22 → 06.11.22
FUGITIVE PRESENT

An exhibition combining two very different types of artworks: contemporary photographs from Australian urban centers and unique traditional ground paintings made from *wamulu* (a yellow flower from Australia's Central Desert). Additionally, two Special Focus shows enriched the program: PAPUNYA 1971, which explored the origins of contemporary Aboriginal art, and a showcase dedicated to Swiss-Guinean artist Namsa Leuba.

13.06.21 → 17.04.22
BREATH OF LIFE

An exhibition dedicated to the *yidaki* (didgeridoo), an emblematic instrument of Aboriginal Australia, and to the artistic diversity of the Yolngu people from whom it originates. Additionally, two Special Focus shows enriched the program: one on Czech-born French artist Vladimír Škoda, the other on artist Lena Herzog's immersive project LAST WHISPERS: PRELUDE.

14.06.20 → 25.04.21
RESONANCES

A dialogue between contemporary Aboriginal art and international contemporary art, with over 90 works of some 50 artists from the two sisters Bérengère and Garance Primat's collections. Additionally, two Special Focus shows enriched the program: one on the series *Broken Dreams* by Australian Indigenous photographer Michael Cook, the other on the Italian architecture agency Superstudio.



Nganampa mantangka minyma tjutaku Tjukurpa ngaranyi alatjitu / Women's Law alive in our Country, 2018, acrylic on canvas. Photo: Olivier Maire

09.06.19 → 29.03.20
BEFORE TIME BEGAN

An exhibition offering insights into the evolution of contemporary Aboriginal art from 1971 to the present day, with over 80 major works including paintings, sculptures and installations. Additionally, three Special Focus shows enriched the program: one on the photographic series *Painting on Country* by Australian Indigenous artist Robert Fielding, the second one on the projects of a group of Master students in Cinema from Lausanne (ECAL) and Geneva (HEAD). The last one on the series *Self-portrait* by Pintupi artist Walala Japaljarri

OFFSITE

CURRENT PROJECTS

Tate – London, England

From July 10, 2025 to January 11, 2026, Tate is dedicating a major retrospective to the Anmatyerr artist Emily Kam Ngwararray. In addition to the loan of eight works from the Bérengère Primat Collection, the exhibition will travel to Lens from June to November 2026.

MoMa – New York, USA

For the exhibition **WOVEN HISTORIES TEXTILES AND MODERN ABSTRACTION** which just opened at MoMA in New York, Fondation Opale loaned the work **BURIAL BASKET**, by Australian artist and weaver Yvonne Koolmatrie, member of Ngarrindjeri people.

PAST PROJECTS

Ocean Space – Venice, Italy

From September 25 to September 30, 2024, Ocean Space hosted the collaborative work *Emarr Totol / Emarr the Turtle* (2017) as part of a collaboration Fondation Opale × TBA21-Academy during the Venice Biennale.



Emarr Totol / Emarr the Turtle (2017) | Photo : Lynnette Griffiths

MUDEC | Museo delle Culture – Milano, Italy

For the exhibition **RAINBOW**, presenting the rainbow as a natural, cultural, spiritual and human phenomenon at the MUDEC – Museo delle Culture, Fondation Opale loaned the work *Rainbow Serpent* (1995) by John Mawurndjul. The exhibition ran from February to July 2023.

Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain – Paris, France Triennale Milano – Milano, Italy

Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain dedicated an exhibition to artist Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori, from July to November 2022. This exhibition was then presented at the Triennale Milano, from February to May 2023. Fondation Opale loaned two works: *Nyinyilki*, 2010, and *Dibirdibi Country* (2010), from the Collection Bérengère Primat.

Musée Yves Saint Laurent – Marrakech, Morocco

From July 21st, 2023, to January 28th, 2024, the Musée Yves Saint Laurent in Marrakech presented the exhibition **SERPENT**, commissioned by Bérengère Primat and Georges Petitjean. The exhibition is based on works from the Collection Bérengère Primat, in which the snake plays a key role.

Palais de Tokyo – Paris, France

Fondation Opale partnered with Palais de Tokyo for the collective exhibition entitled **RECLAIM THE EARTH**, presented from April 15th to September 4th, 2022. This exhibition was dedicated to a selection of international Indigenous artists who work differently with so-called “natural” matter



Photo: Olivier Maire

Royal Museums of Art and History – Brussels, Belgium

The first exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal art presented at Fondation Opale from June 2019 to March 2020, *BEFORE TIME BEGAN*, has been shown in the Royal Museums of Art and History of Belgium from October 22th, 2021 until May 29th, 2022.

***Centre Pompidou – Paris, France
Guggenheim Museum – Bilbao, Spain***

Fondation Opale loaned a monumental collective work to the Centre Pompidou in Paris in May 2021 for the exhibition *WOMEN IN ABSTRACTION / ELLES FONT L'ABSTRACTION*, which was held from May 19th to August 23th, 2021. It was then shown at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao from October 22nd, 2021 to February 27th, 2022.

Muséum du Havre – Le Havre, France

In May 2021, Fondation Opale loaned four works in *Ghost Net* to the Muséum du Havre in Normandy for the exhibition *AUSTRALIA LE HAVRE – L'INTIMITÉ D'UN LIEN*, from June 5th to November 7th, 2021.

Biennale of Sydney – Sydney, Australia

Fondation Opale has worked closely with the 22nd edition of the Biennale of Sydney, *NIRIN*, from March 14th to November 15th, 2020. Fondation Opale supported several artistic projects and loaned a selection of Swiss curator Bernhard Lüthi's archive. The 22nd Biennale was the first edition under the direction of an Aboriginal artist: Brook Andrew.

Menil Collection – Houston (Texas), USA

For its first exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal art, the Menil Collection chose to display over 100 works from Australia's most isolated communities, all on loan from Fondation Opale. Named "best exhibition of the year" by the Houston Chronicle, *MAPA WIYA* took place from September 12th, 2019 to January 26th, 2020.



Photo: Sébastien Crettaz

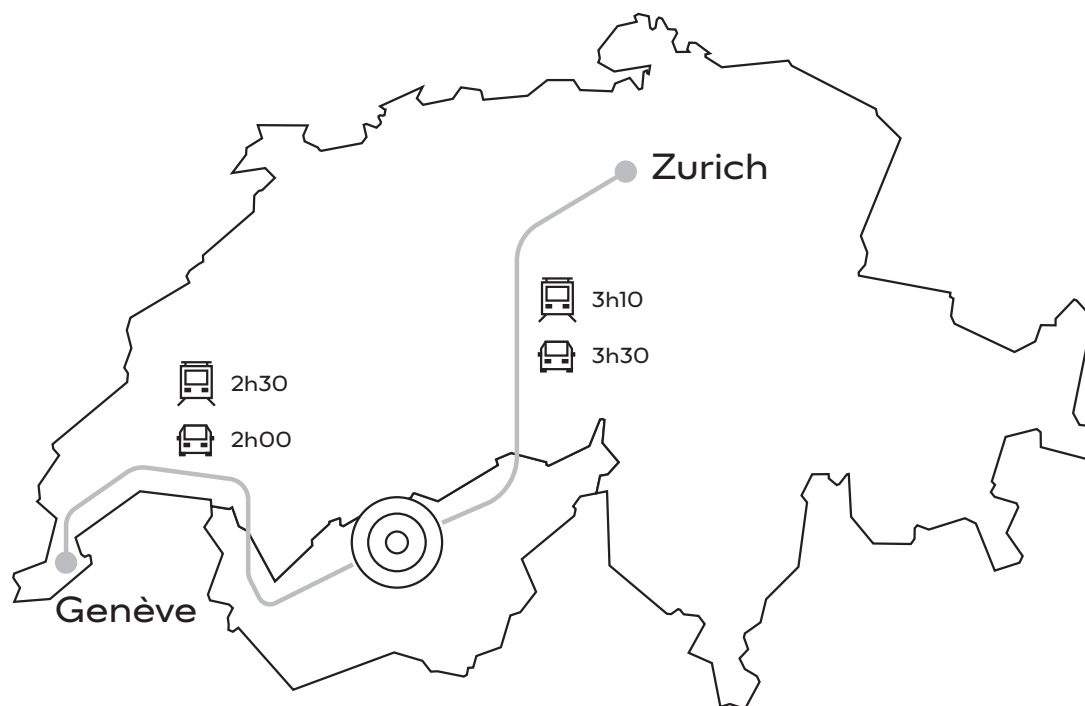
RESTAURANT L'OPALE

Located in the Art Center and overlooking Lac du Louché, Restaurant L'Opale serves simple, inventive cuisine paired with a thoughtfully curated selection of regional wines.

The menu features homemade dishes, crafted using ingredients sourced from local markets and producers, with a focus on sustainability. The cuisine evolves with the seasons, bringing fresh, new flavors to each visit. In fine weather, the sunny terrace offers breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding alpine landscape.



USEFUL INFORMATION



CONTACT INFORMATION

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OPENING HOURS

Art center and shop

Wednesday – Sunday: 10 am – 6 pm

Restaurant L'Opale

Tuesday and Sunday, from 9:30 am to 6 pm

Wednesday to Saturday, from 9:30 am to 9 pm

BENEATH THE REFLECTIONS OF THE WORLD

June 15 – November 16, 2025

Wednesday – Sunday: 10 am – 6 pm

Restaurant L'Opale

Tuesday and Sunday, from 9:30 am to 6 pm

Wednesday to Saturday, from 9:30 am to 9 pm

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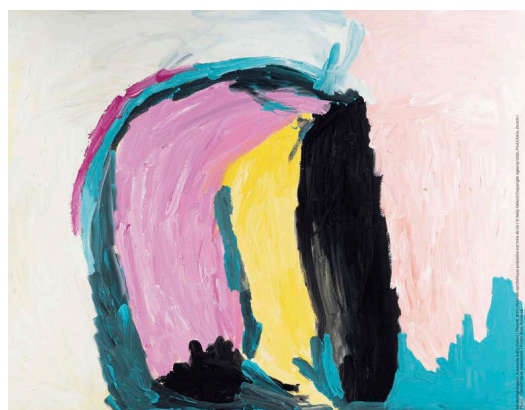
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SOUS
LES REFLETS
DU MONDE

15.06 —
16.11.25

MIRDIDINGGATHI JUWARANDA SALLY GABORI
FORREST BESS



FONDATION OPALE

LENS / CRANS-MONTANA
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