



Press release

**Exhibition**

April 11–July 7, 2008

Department of Painting,  
Dutch, Flemish and German  
Schools  
Richelieu Wing, 2nd floor

# Jan Fabre at the Louvre

## The Angel of the Metamorphosis

Following upon the successes of the first three editions of *Counterpoint*, the Louvre continues to pursue its policy of openness to contemporary art and living artists by extending an invitation this spring to Jan Fabre. Within the galleries devoted to the painted works of the Flemish, Dutch and German Schools, visitors are encouraged to rediscover celebrated works by masters such as van Eyck, van der Weyden, Bosch, Metsys and Rubens through the eyes of this major artist of the contemporary scene.

This exhibition is sponsored by **SVEZ**



With additional support provided by the city of Antwerp and the Department of Culture, Ministry of the Flemish Community.



After completing his studies at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the Institute for Decorative Arts in Antwerp, Jan Fabre launched his career in the late 1970s with provocative “actions” and “private performances”. A shining star of the Flemish new wave in the 1980s, he is above all a skilled draftsman, visual artist and designer, but also stages unusually free and unrestrained performance pieces, placing the body at the heart of his approach. He has participated in prestigious international exhibitions such as Documenta in Kassel as well as the Venice, Lyon, São Paulo, Valencia and Istanbul biennales. In 2006, the city of Antwerp played host to his exhibition *Homo Faber*, presented within the ancient art galleries of its Royal Museum of Fine Arts. His theater company Troubleyn, launched in 1986, frequently appears at leading venues in Europe, including the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, the Avignon Festival, and most recently the Salzburg Festival, which saw the premiere of *Requiem for a Metamorphosis*.

**Exhibition curator:**  
Marie-Laure Bernadac, curator in charge,  
special advisor on contemporary art at the  
Louvre  
Artistic Director: Barbara de Coninck

The itinerary proposed by Jan Fabre through the museum’s collections may be perceived as a “mental drama” featuring the major elements of his own life work and those of the old masters. The artist seeks to connect his universe with the main themes running through the Louvre’s collections: death and resurrection, the vanities of human life, sacrifice, money, madness, carnival, battles, the artist’s studio. Some thirty works—ranging from drawings, sculptures, video and other installations to performance pieces captured on film—thus punctuate the itinerary imagined by the artist.

**Exhibition media partner:**



The continuity of the dialogue between Jan Fabre and the Dutch, Flemish and German old masters, a legacy ever present in the artist’s approach to his work, as well as the types of interventions placed on view, enhance the power and mystery of the works in the Louvre’s collections and endow them with new meanings.

On April 22, 2008, the artist will present a performance in the Daru Gallery entitled *Art Kept Me Out of Jail (and Out of Museums)*. An encounter with Jan Fabre, exploring the multidisciplinary nature of his work, is also scheduled to take place in the Auditorium du Louvre.

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Jan Fabre *I Let Myself Drain*  
*Homo Faber*, 2006, Royal Museum of  
 Fine Arts, Antwerp.  
 © Angelos/Attilio Maranzano  
 © adagp, 2007



Jan van Eyck, *Diptych*  
 Department of Painting, Musée du  
 Louvre



Jan Fabre, *Sanguis Sum*,  
*Homo Faber*, 2006, Royal Museum of Fine Arts,  
 Antwerp.  
 © Angelos/Attilio Maranzano  
 © adagp, 2007

### The Martyrdom of Art

The paintings by Dutch, Flemish and German old masters in the Louvre hold great fascination and are a source of both inspiration and considerable torment for Jan Fabre. *I Let Myself Drain* is the opening piece of this exhibition. The visitor, confronted with the artist's alter ego, immediately enters his universe. The artist presents himself as a martyr, defeated by the talent of his predecessors and sacrificed in the name of art.

Drawings using the artist's own blood (*My Body, My Blood, My Landscape*) mirror the brutal carnage of the *Martyrdom of Saint Denis*, the altarpiece by Henri Bellechose. In this practice, Jan Fabre rediscovers the violence and pain on view in many French and Flemish paintings, especially those arising from the Devotio Moderna movement.

### Death and Resurrection

After martyrdom comes death. A recumbent figure depicting the artist in death, *Sarcophago Conditus*, is presented at the center of room 5, opposite works by Hans Memling. For Jan Fabre, this entire room pays tribute to death and resurrection by virtue of the paintings displayed.

Next, he conceives of the corridor dedicated to the panels by Justus of Ghent as a passage between two worlds, illustrated by a series of Bic ball point pen drawings, the *Blue Hour*, on the theme of metamorphosis.

Moving on to the motif of the lamb, the quintessential sacrificial animal, with a reference to the *Mystical Lamb*, a Flemish treasure by Hubert and Jan van Eyck, Jan Fabre calls on the divine and the spiritual in his work *Sanguis Sum*. At the same time, the party hat worn by the lamb recalls the carnival tradition of the Low Countries and gives a more prosaic dimension to this resurrection, raising the question of the identity of the contemporary world's savior.

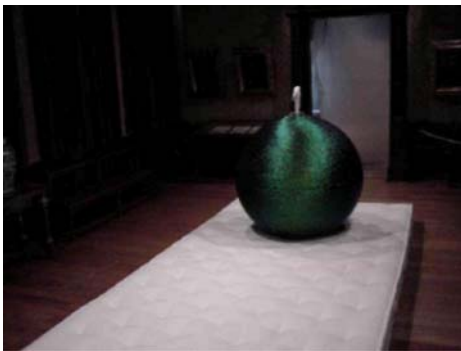
### The Warrior of Beauty

Of all the works in the galleries of German paintings, one in particular captures the attention of Jan Fabre, Hans Baldung Grien's *The Knight, the Young Girl and Death*. This painting inspired the artist to hang his three *Pantser* in the same room, works in armor made of scarab beetle shells. The artist also chooses to screen his film *Lancelot* in this same room, where the emblematic figure of the "Knight of Despair" battling a lost cause becomes a fight against an invisible enemy or against himself.

The theme of the warrior, central to the work of Jan Fabre, is found first in room 17 with the sculpture *Will He Always Have His Feet Together?* The archetype of the warrior angel shares space with canvases by Rubens. In room 19, the installation *Virgin/Warrior – Warrior/Virgin*, which originated in a performance by the artist in collaboration with Marina Abramovic, presents, through the figures of the Virgin and the Warrior, a number of variations on the themes of the cult of beauty, combat, sacrifice and forgiveness.



Portrait of Maria de' Medicis,  
Frans II Pourbus,  
Department of Painting, Musée du Louvre



Jan Fabre, *The Dung-Beetle*  
*Homo Faber*, 2006, Royal Museum of Fine  
Arts, Antwerp.  
© Angelos/Attilio Maranzano  
© adagp, 2007



Jan Fabre, *Beheaded Messengers of  
Death*  
*Homo Faber*, 2006, Royal Museum of  
Fine Arts, Antwerp.  
© Angelos/Attilio Maranzano ©  
adagp, 2007

### The Vanities of Human Life

In the following rooms, the itinerary takes up the theme of the vanities of human life, frequently represented in still lifes. The two appendages of *Umbraculum* resonate with the skeletal remains on view in the altarpiece by Joos van Cleve and the *Diptych of Jean Carrondelet*. They suggest a model of humanity and spirituality removed from the physicality of the body and freed of original wounds.

On either side of Marinus van Reymerswaele's *Tax Collectors*, Jan Fabre presents his drawings on bank notes entitled *Money Collages*. The next stop in the itinerary is an exploration of play and madness built around the *Ship of Fools* by Bosch and the *Fortune Teller* by Lucas van Leyden with the *Self-Portrait as Joker* and drawings on playing cards by Jan Fabre.

As the conclusion to this section, Jan Fabre presents two works that complement each other: his film *The Problem*, with the participation of German philosophers Peter Sloterdijk and Dietmar Kamper, and his installation *The Dung-Beetle*. The sphere made of scarab wing sheaths positioned on the mattress is of the same shape as the orb rolled along by each of the men in *The Problem* and also recalls the pearls ornamenting the queen's gown in the painting by Frans Pourbus, the iridescent reflections of the scarab jewelry, the splendor of the fabric.

### Relics and Reliquaries

With this section of the itinerary, Jan Fabre embarks on a new series, inspired by relics and reliquaries. *Vermis Dorsualis & Devil Masks*, respectively a spinal column and three gilt-covered human sacra, placed on a bed of powdered bones, are presented in a display case and allude to the preciousness of the finery worn by H el ene Fourment in the portrait by Rubens and the whiteness of her skin. Frans Snyders' still lifes recall, as do the sacra resembling death masks, that death triumphs over all and over everyone and that it is inscribed in every living thing. This series reaches its stunning conclusion with *Gravetomb*, a contemporary rendering of the last judgment.

The owls of the *Beheaded Messengers of Death* seem to be alive even though they are stuffed. In the Flemish tradition, these nocturnal birds are associated with madness as well as wisdom and they often haunt the paintings of artists such as Bosch and Bruegel.

Lastly, a new work created for the exhibition, made of wax appendages covered with glass eyes, *Votive Offerings for Insomniacs*, suggests the difficulty of falling asleep due to the seductions of the world of the senses, symbolized by the numerous landscapes and portraits hanging in room 30.



Jan Fabre *Still Life with Artist*  
*Homo Faber*, 2006, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp.  
 © Angelos/Attilio Maranzano  
 © adagp, 2007

On April 11: France Culture at the Louvre  
 for programs about Jan Fabre

#### Visitor information

##### Place

The works are presented in the galleries of the Department of Paintings, Dutch, Flemish and German Schools, Richelieu Wing

##### Hours

Open daily except Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and until 10:00 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays.

##### Admission fees

Access to the exhibition is included in the purchase of an admission to the museum's permanent collections: €9; €6 after 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Free admission for all visitors the first Sunday of each month, and for youths under 26 on Fridays after 6 p.m. on Fridays. Free admission at all times for youths under 18.

##### Further information

+33 (0)1 40 20 53 17  
[www.louvre.fr](http://www.louvre.fr)

## The Artist's Role

Ushered in by the elephant tusk of *Avant-Grade*, the purpose of this next stage in the itinerary is to sketch the life and role of the artist. *Still Life with Artist*, showing a peacock emerging from a coffin, places emphasis on this creature's vanity and the inescapable reality of death, which will catch it in full flight. This work is paired with the small painted portraits by Gérard Dou, especially the *Self-Portrait* presented in room 35. The *Working Table/Bed*, which takes up residence beneath the *Arcadian Landscape* of Johannes Glauber harmonizes with its color scheme, making it both the dreamed landscape of the artist at rest and his source of inspiration. All of these works are interconnected by the series of drawings *Sperm of the Parakeet*, where appearance (birth and creation) and disappearance (death and sleep) are symbolized by semen.

In room 39, *Only Acts of Poetic Terrorism* closes the exploration of the role of the artist, calling attention to the latter's poetic activist mission.

The itinerary ends with a monumental work produced especially for the museum paying tribute to the renowned cycle of Marie de' Medici portraits painted by Rubens.



Gérard Dou, *Self-Portrait*  
 Department of Paintings,  
 Musée du Louvre

## Related events and publications

Publication: Catalogue of the exhibition *Jan Fabre at the Louvre*  
Co-published by Musée du Louvre Éditions and Gallimard.

### Face to Face

Auditorium du Louvre

Free admission subject to seating availability.

**Friday, April 25 from 6:30 p.m.**

**At 6:30 p.m. *Les Guerriers de la Beauté***

A film by Pierre Coulibeuf.

France, 2002, 71 min, 35 mm., color

With Els Deceukelier, William Forsythe, Edmond Fabre, Jan Fabre, Emio Greco, Lisbeth Gruwez

Screening followed by a discussion with Pierre Coulibeuf

### At 8:00 p.m. Dance and Theater from Jan Fabre

Discussion between Jan Fabre, Jean-Marc Adolphe, Director of Movement publication, and

Vincent Baudriller, co-director of Avignon festival

Free admission subject to seating availability.

### Performance by Jan Fabre

Daru Gallery and Cour Napoleon

*This performance is made possible thanks to the support of Louis Vuitton*

**Tuesday, April 22 from 7:30 pm to 11:30 p.m.**

***Art Kept Me Out of Jail (and Out of Museums)***

Jan Fabre conceives of his artistic practice as an organic continuum, a place of dialogue between the visual arts, the stage and the languages of the body. In honor of his exhibition at the Louvre, the artist presents a performance piece created especially for the museum. He has chosen the Daru Gallery as the venue, dominated by the well-known *Winged Victory of Samothrace* at one end. The effigies of Roman dignitaries, sculpted sarcophagi and other antiquities of the Borghèse collection, placed within their historical context in this gallery, are recast as players in a poetic quest. Encompassing the themes of death, disguise and metamorphosis, Jan Fabre invites visitors to share, over the course of a single evening, in a meditation on the relationship between living artists and the museum. The performance is to be retransmitted in the open-air setting of the Cour Napoleon, while the public will be allowed to step into the gallery from time to time during the performance.

### Conference and screenings in the Auditorium du Louvre

Free admission subject to seating availability.

**Saturday, April 26 from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.**

**Jan Fabre: Drawing, Sculpture, Installation**

#### Films of performances

With Jan Fabre, Lorenzo Benedetti et Jan Hoet, Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, Game C, Bergame, Marta Herford, Paul Huvenne, musée des Beaux-Arts d'Anvers, Roselee Goldberg, Performa, New York, Nicola Setari, philosophe et critique d'art, Eckhard Schneider, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Philippe Van Cauteren, SMAK, Gand et Marie-Laure Bernadac  
Musée du Louvre.

A selection of films of performances by Jan Fabre, ranging from the short subjects produced in the 1970s to the artist's most recent projects, will be screened and discussed.

#### Press relations:

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