

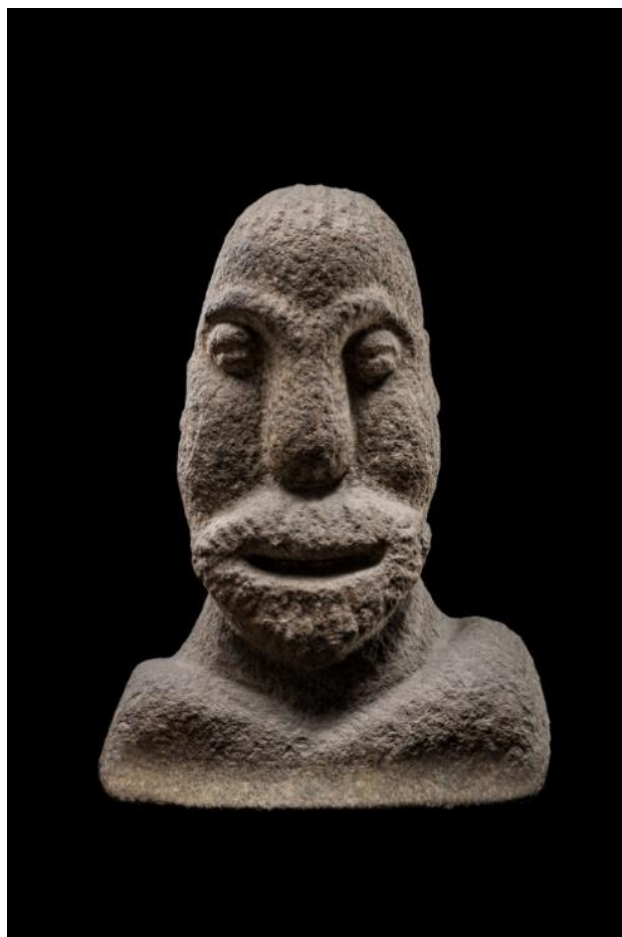


MUSÉE BARBIER-MUELLER
GENÈVE

**The Barbus Müller
Their Enigmatic Sculptor Finally Unmasked!**

Exhibition, until November 1st, 2020

The upcoming exhibition at the Musée Barbier-Mueller is devoted to stone statues called "Barbus Müller"; to their origins, which long remained mysterious, and to their connections to Art Brut (Outsider Art). Incomplete or nonexistent information, far-fetched attributions, and diverging viewpoints created the legend.



Antoine Rabany (1844–1919)? Barbu Müller sculpture. France, Auvergne, Chambon-sur-Lac? Late nineteenth–early twentieth century. Volcanic rock (trachyte). 39.5 x 29 x 17 cm. Formerly Josef Müller collection, acquired in 1939 from Mme Vignier, Paris. Inv. 104-6. Musée Barbier-Mueller, photo Luis Lourenço.

These sculptures appeared on the market at a Paris antique shop in about 1939. The dealer Charles Ratton pointed them out to Josef Müller, who purchased a lot of seven works. Ratton himself acquired three. The novelist Henri-Pierre Roché also owned three of them. Over the years, other pieces emerged, and about forty can now be identified.

Because of World War II, Müller departed France to return to Switzerland and left these statues behind in Paris, where he had lived since the 1920s. Müller entrusted them to the pedestal maker Inagaki in 1945. Charles Ratton invited the painter and sculptor Jean Dubuffet to visit the pedestal maker, so that he could see these objects and have photographs taken of them. At the time, Dubuffet christened them the "Barbus Müller". He devoted a brief publication to them, which also contained the founding text of his concept of Art Brut, and in 1947 held an exhibition dedicated to them in the Foyer de l'Art Brut in Paris. He purchased three Barbus Müller two years after that exhibition. The Barbus Müller have a style so original that Dubuffet immediately classified them as spontaneous works produced by self-taught and little-known artists, without any detectable artistic influences, works he undertook to collect from that time forward. He called that type of work *art brut*, "outsider art" (literally, "raw art"). It is assumed that the name "Barbus Müller" was inspired by the beard sported by a few of the pieces and by the name of Josef Müller, who acquired the largest number of them. Some of these sculptures are carved in granite, others in volcanic stone. A mineralogical analysis of one of the pieces determined that it is from Auvergne and not Vendée, as Müller believed.

In 2017 Bruno Montpied (a writer, painter, filmmaker, researcher, and emissary of Art Brut and spontaneous arts) conducted an investigation. Based on glass-plate photographs showing a forest of sculptures in front of a house, he precisely located the garden (apparently a vegetable garden) and identified the baptistry of the Chambon-sur-Lac cemetery, listed as a historical monument in Auvergne in 1862 and also called, more precisely, a sepulchral chapel.

The sculptures reproduced in these photos, three of them in particular, bear an astounding resemblance to the Barbus Müller. Montpied went on to do photo enlargements of two of these pieces, which appear to be identical to some of those reproduced in Dubuffet's famous booklet of 1947 (reissued by the Musée Barbier-Mueller in 1979, and reissued a second time on the occasion of this exhibition).

These works appear in the garden among others in the same style.

The artist turns out to be a farmer named Antoine Rabany, known as "the Zouave". In the current state of the research, it has not been proven that the entire corpus known as Barbus Müller can be attributed to Rabany, but Bruno Montpied was able to identify a few of them. The investigation continues.

In its upcoming exhibition, the Musée Barbier-Mueller will bring together the eleven Barbus Müller from its collection (including seven acquired by Josef Müller in 1939, before World War II), two Barbus Müller held in the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, and five Barbus Müller from private collections.

Various provenances were attributed to these Barbus Müller, Oceania and Africa, for example. It is therefore interesting to place the Barbus Müller side by side with works from faraway cultures, selected from the museum's collections. The museum thereby

encourages an interplay of formal and material affinities as a means of assessing resemblances and differences.

Finally, the Musée Barbier-Mueller will exhibit a selection of works by Jean Dubuffet, an admirer of the Barbus Müller from the very start, fascinated on an aesthetic level by these archaic-looking objects and also by the fact that they were anonymous.

A Partnership with the



Within the framework of a partnership between the Musée Barbier-Mueller and the Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève reflecting the connection between their respective temporary exhibitions, a Barbu Müller from the Barbier-Mueller collection will take up residence at the exhibition "Jean Dubuffet, a Barbarian in Europe" from September 8, 2020 to February 28, 2021, after being exhibited at the Musée Barbier-Mueller. From September 8, 2020 to February 28, 2021, the ticket for admission to the Musée Barbier-Mueller will allow free entry to the MEG exhibition.

More information at www.meg-geneve.ch

Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue that includes:

- an article by Baptiste Brun, lecturer in contemporary art history at the Université Rennes 2 and exhibition curator, who offers a reflection on categorization in the arts;
- an article by Sarah Lombardi, director of the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, who speaks of Jean Dubuffet's encounter with the Barbus Müller;
- an article by Bruno Montpied that relates the research that allowed him to identify the creator of several Barbus Müller;
- a catalogue of photographic plates with reproductions of the Barbus Müller, works by Jean Dubuffet, and pieces from the collections of the Musée Barbier-Mueller displayed at the exhibition, accompanied by catalogue entries.



Antoine Rabany (1844–1919)? Barbu Müller sculpture. France, Auvergne, Chambon-sur-Lac? Late nineteenth–early twentieth century. Volcanic rock (trachyte). 42 x 23 x 20.5 cm. Formerly Josef Müller collection, acquired in 1939 from Mme Vignier, Paris. Inv. 104-6. Musée Barbier-Mueller, photo Luis Lourenço.

USEFUL INFORMATION

The Barbus Müller

Their Enigmatic Sculptor Finally Unmasked!

Musée Barbier-Mueller

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Until November 1, 2020

- The Musée Barbier-Mueller is open 365 days a year, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Admission: adults, 8 francs; students, seniors, the disabled, the unemployed, and groups, 5 francs; children under twelve and schools admitted FREE.
- Public guided tours on Sundays and private guided tours on request, workshops for children (visit our website for more information: www.barbier-mueller.ch)
- The exhibition catalogue *The Barbus Müller, Their Enigmatic Sculptor Finally Unmasked* (French version only) is for sale at bookstores, online, and in the museum shop, for 32 Swiss francs.
- All books published or co-published by the museum are on sale at the entrance to the exhibition halls.
- The Association of Friends of the Museum provides many benefits. For information, contact jcmappus@barbier-mueller.ch, +41 22 312 02 72.

For all requests for high resolution images, contact ajnardin@barbier-mueller.ch or +41 22 312 02 73