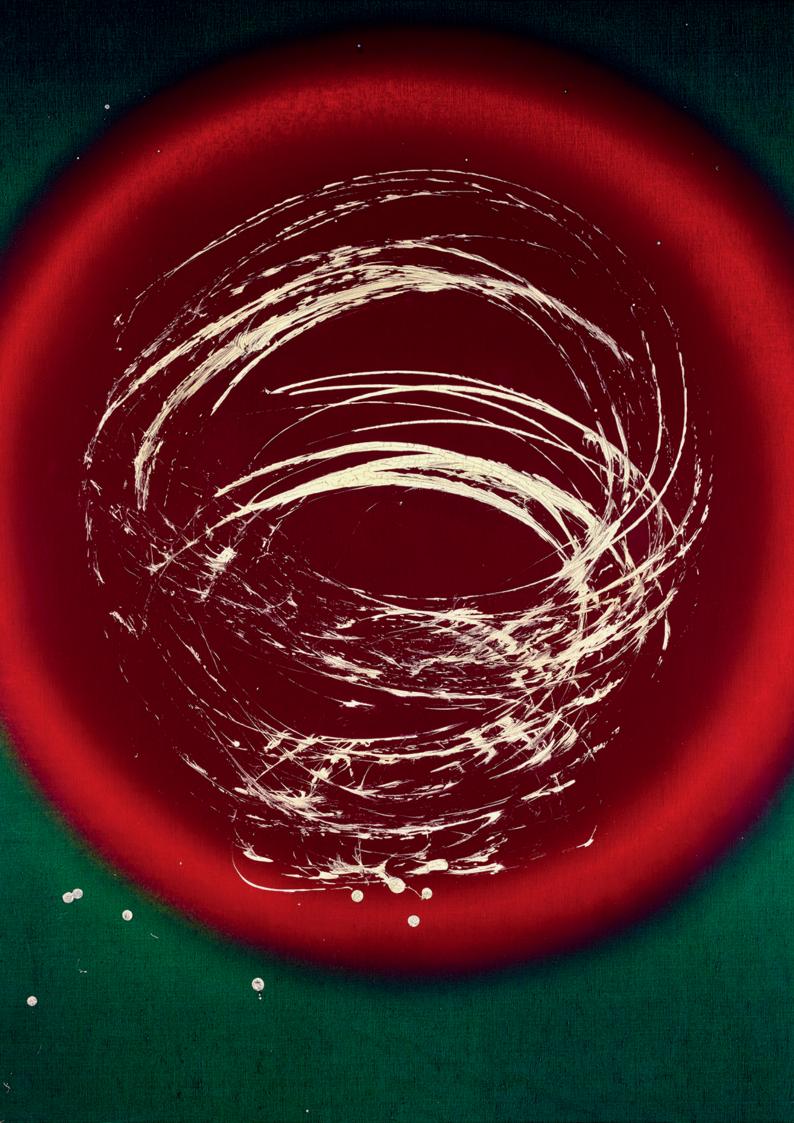
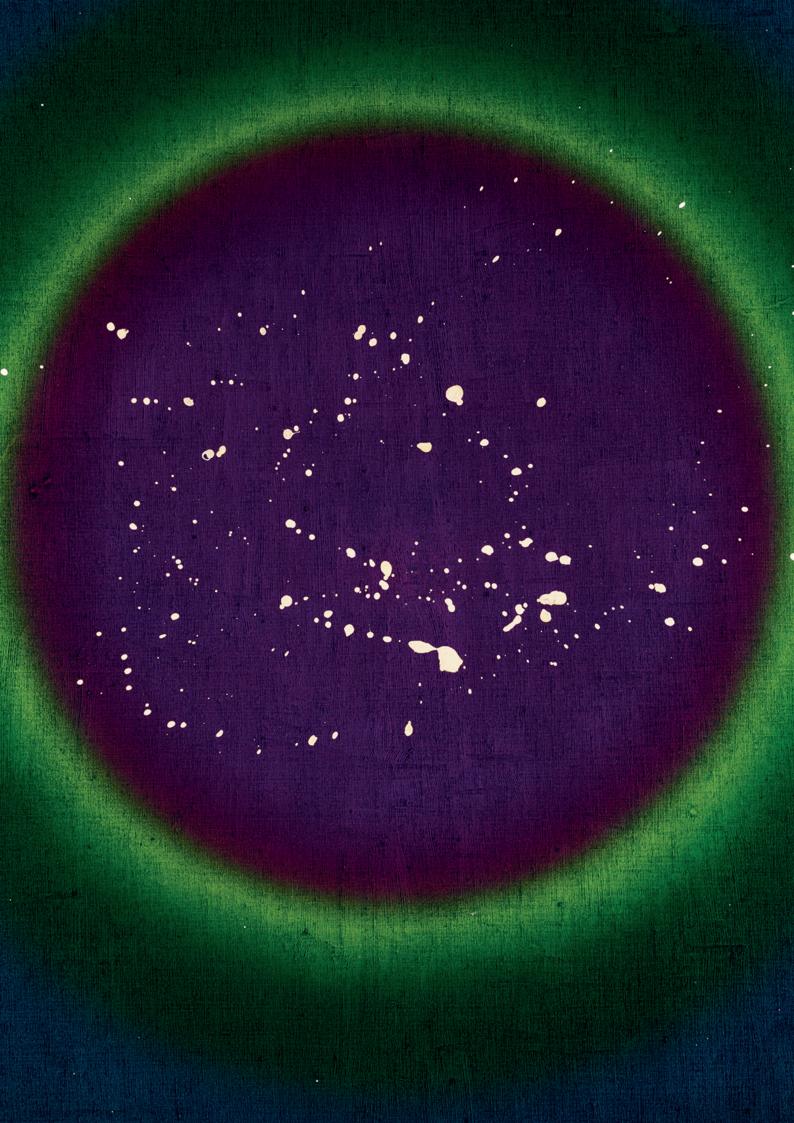
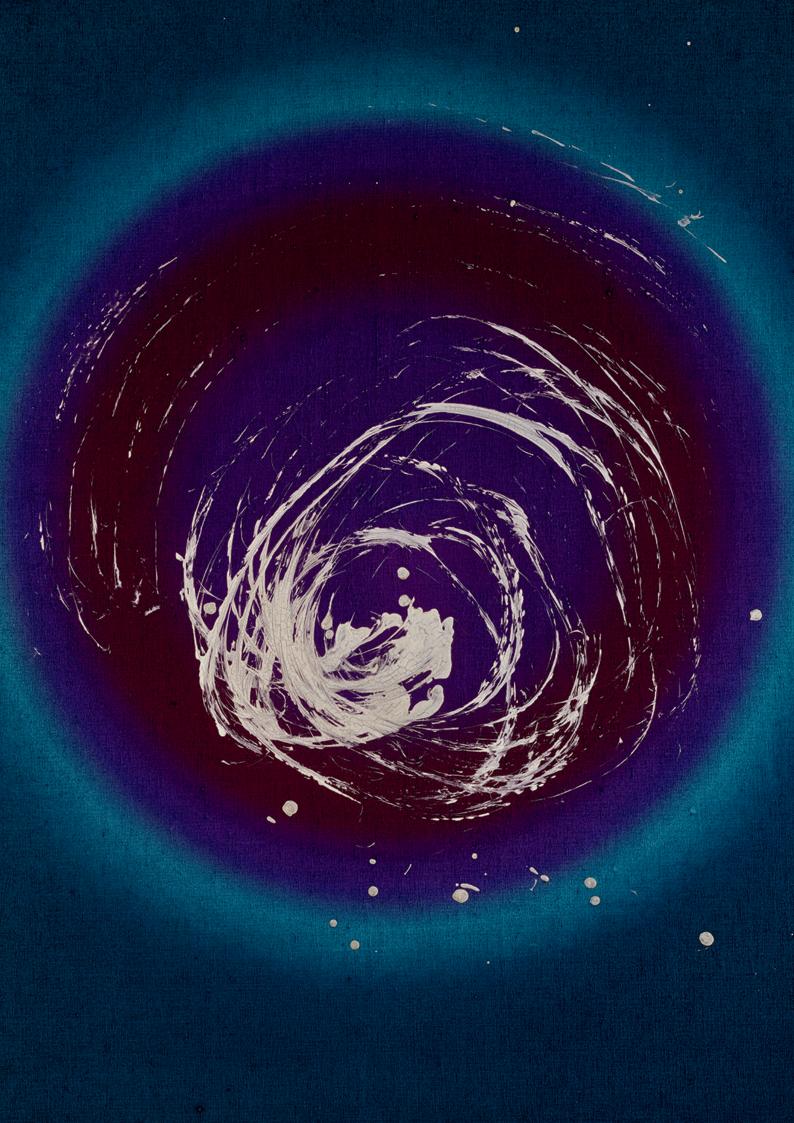
MUSÉE UNTER LINDEN

Verdier— The song of the Stars

01.10.22 - 27.03.23









Fabienne Verdier – The song of the Stars

01.10.22 - 27.03.23



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 $\textit{Fabienne Verdier in her studio}, \textit{Chambly, photography: Laura Stevens} \\ @ \textit{Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022}$

1 Introduction



 $\textit{Fabienne Verdier in her studio}, \textit{Chambly}, \textit{photography: Laura Stevens} \\ @ \textit{Fabienne Verdier}, \textit{ADAGP}, \textit{Paris}, 2022 \\$

In autumn 2022, the Musée Unterlinden is devoting a major monographic exhibition to Fabienne Verdier responding to the museum's collections and architecture.

Fabienne Verdier was born in Paris in 1962 and studied at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Toulouse. Since then, engagement with systems of thought deriving from different cultures and eras has constituted a recurrent theme in her work, whilst her creative process has been enriched by hybridisation of knowledge, manifesting itself through various technical inventions.

In Colmar, Fabienne Verdier invites visitors to take a new perspective on certain works from the Musée Unterlinden's collections, in particular by highlighting the importance of the vibrations of light and the energy that emanates from them.

In the imposing contemporary nave, designed by the architects Herzog & de Meuron to host temporary exhibitions, the artist presents an original monumental installation linked to the Resurrection panel of the Isenheim Altarpiece, offering a new iconographic representation inspired by the colour spectrum and the aura of light painted by Grünewald. The installation suggests an approach to the subject of death in which it is no longer represented as something finite, but as the trace of an energy that is transmitted to the living.

The title of the exhibition, "The Song of the Stars", is a poetic reference to the link between humanity and the cosmos, the vital energy between dissolution and expansion, because, as Hubert Reeves put it, "we are all stardust".

1.1 A word from the curator of the exhibition

The public wonder what motivates artists' choices when planning an exhibition. Of course, in the first instance, the subject must be in line with the museum's strategic plan, make sense with regard to the institution and have a link to the collections, the geographic environment or current events.

In the specific case of Fabienne Verdier, there were multiple areas of common ground with the Musée Unterlinden. The use of glazes was a technique employed by the prestigious Old Masters represented in the museum's collections. The painted trace of the artist's movements and gestures on the smooth background follows in the tradition of the 20th-century exponents of gestural abstraction, who are well represented at the Musée Unterlinden.

In addition, there is an analogy in terms of form:
Fabienne Verdier's works are frequently composed
of several panels, establishing a connection to the
numerous polyptychs in the museum's collections of
historic, modern and contemporary art. Finally, Fabienne
Verdier has a history of dialogue with the great masters
of painting, whether in China or in Europe, making her
a natural fit in a museum that is keen to build bridges
between its collections of historic and modern art.

Fabienne Verdier came to the Musée Unterlinden on 28 March 2019 to form a first impression of the exhibition spaces and the works. Some avenues for exploration linked to the collections emerged, and it quickly seemed appropriate that the project should refer to a form of afterlife, to cosmogony, cosmology, the night, the stars and light, taking into account Verdier's art and the Isenheim Altarpiece, and more broadly, all the works in the museum touching on the heavenly bodies, light, rhythm, the sacred and the quest for spirituality.

Very soon, it was agreed that for the Colmar project, Fabienne Verdier's works would describe the world with line and colour and the flow of the painter's medium, like the paintings of the great masters in the museum. In the same way, the exhibition would offer visitors a tour comprising works by Fabienne Verdier that would enable them to rediscover the collections, in counterpoint to or in dialogue with the museum's artworks and in harmony with the architecture, leading up to the exhibition gallery in the museum's new wing (the Ackerhof). But when the pandemic struck in 2020, the plans for an installation in the exhibition gallery took a new direction. In this context, it was Grünewald's panel depicting the resurrection of Christ, rising up like a ball of fire in the starry night, that emerged as the path to follow.

This path linked into the initial ideas relating to the stars – the return to the source that forms the basis for creation. Fabienne Verdier's challenge was then to express this in painting by analogy with the stars that, as they die, take on the appearance of vividly multicoloured rings of gas, in the process composing cosmic artworks of a rare brilliance. By analogy also with the magical, fleeting spectacle of a rainbow, after she witnessed a perfectly circular apparition in her garden in Hédouville in spring 2020, which she compared to the aura of colour surrounding Grünewald's resurrected Christ.

The entire installation now takes the form of a total artwork intended to make a physical and emotional impression on the viewers and to investigate the notion of transcendence.

"Fabienne Verdier has managed to sublimate the transition to the afterlife."

Respecting everyone's individual melody, she creates an overall harmony leading into the development of the Vortex, the final elevation of souls into the infinite darkness

Frédérique Goerig-Hergott, Senior curator, Curator of the exhibition



© Grünewald, *Isenheim Altarpiece, The Resurrection* (detail), 1512-1516, Le Réverbère / Mulhouse, Musée Unterlinden. Colmar

1.2 Artist's statement of intent

The energy of Life

In the exhibition room at the end of the museum, I imagined, with Frédérique Goerig-Hergott, chief curator and curator of the exhibition, an installation that would be on the scale of this contemporary nave. Built by the architects Herzog & de Meuron, this space is a place of contemplation, silence and life in the heart of the city of Colmar.

The museum's collections

I spent long days in the museum's collections admiring Cranach's paintings, Schongauer's engravings and polyptychs, the gilded landscapes of the Rhenish masters, the polychromed sculptures, the first decorative capitals in Vosges sandstone, Hans Holbein's Portrait of a Woman, the ceremonial shield, the Guernica tapestry, Jean Dubuffet's 'texturologies', the works of Nicolas de Staël, Maria Helena Vieira da Silva and Judit Reigl, as well as Georg Baselitz's prints, to name but a few.

I also spent a great deal of time in front of the panels of the Isenheim Altarpiece. Through our 21st- century eyes, we see the polyptych as a cinematographic creation, a work capturing the image in motion. It seems that the painter imagined ten sequence shots, almost like what we would now refer to as a series, consisting of a "season" of ten episodes. In each panel, Grünewald constructed his narratives with multiple viewpoints, "framing" solutions or "camera movements", perspectives that appear contradictory and yet lend the scenes a vitality and mystery that are entirely cinematographic.

Each of these works speaks to us of the artist's endeavour to grasp the energy of life. In their own way, on canvas, on wood or in stone, they each captured the dynamism of living beings and the forces of nature surrounding them, whichever era they lived in. The perception and translation of vibrations of light constituted a central part of their research and their creations.

At the end of my journey and the public's itinerary through the museum in the Ackerhof exhibition gallery, I thought it would be interesting to present a sort of meditation/roving exploration of the notion of the visual persistence of the colours, forms and emotions perceived in front of the museum's works.



Ackerhof, © Peter Mikolas, Musée Unterlinden

Light, a source of energy



© Grünewald, *Isenheim Altarpiece, The Resurrection,* 1512-1516, photography: Le Réverbère / Mulhouse, Musée Unterlinden, Colmar

My experience visiting the museum and this search for the energy of life quickly focused on the panel of the Isenheim Altarpiece depicting the Transfiguration/Resurrection/Ascension. In this wood panel standing nearly 3 metres tall, Grünewald took optical phenomena to their extremes to invent new perceptions of space, volume and light.

In a sort of transmutation of space, the painter takes us into a place in which geometry has almost been taken out of the equation. Thanks to the ascending vortex of the shroud, the skewed bodies of the fallen soldiers who have been thrown to the ground, Christ's burning face slowly dissolving and the rings of an ethereal sphere expanding outwards into the starry sky, our retinas are confronted with apparently contradictory movements and durations. We are further disconcerted by the painter's organisation of a depth of field that extends from the blades of grass, the bark and the tree stump to the faces of the rock, from the armour and the floating drapery to the clouds, and from the levitating body to cosmic space.

Grünewald's painting is a meditation on light that prefigures the discovery of colour composition. His intuition had already led him to represent light through a spectrum of colours. He painted rings of light in hues that mutate without precise boundaries, rebound and envelop the elements of his composition from infra-red to ultraviolet, up to the midnight blue of the starry sky.

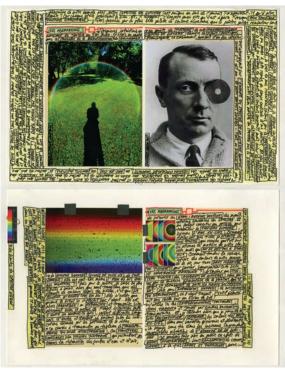
"Painters have always been faced with this impossibility of capturing the essence of light. They work with pigments that by their nature cover up, whereas the colours of the light spectrum that surround us on all sides are simultaneously immaterial, ephemeral, elusive, transparent and constantly transforming."

Fabienne Verdier

Late one afternoon, when I was watering the garden after a day in the studio working on the project for the Musée Unterlinden, I was struck by the way the sunlight behind me shone through the water droplets and created an iridescent arc of colours around me, enabling me to perceive moving reality through an entirely different prism. The question was how to capture the vibration of forms and light with their kinetic energies on the canvas.

Following this experience, I wanted to investigate the notion of visual persistence further. To study how our eyes and then our brains perceive and memorise the moving reality of our surroundings. To explore the possible links between light and matter.

For the installation in the Ackerhof gallery, I imagined extending Grünewald's intuition, and I wanted to try to paint with the colours of the rainbow. The light spectrum is Planet Earth's signature within the universe. It constitutes the DNA of our mental images.



Studio notebook, 2021, Mixed media on paper, 30 x 46 cm, artist's collection, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022

Death and life of a star

In his altarpiece, Grünewald presents us with a meditation on life and death, and I set out to investigate what a contemporary painter would paint when faced with the same subject in modern times. Freed from religious dogmas, of course, but suggesting images that could form contemporary icons in a sense, to console us for our losses. This line of thought became a necessity in the recent context of the pandemic.

"I imagined that human death could perhaps be compared to the death of a star."

I envisaged each painting in the installation as the portrait of a star or an individual, in their final moments of life, transforming in a phase of sublimation, passing from the liquid state (given that we are 70% made up of water) to the gaseous state, composed of particles that would disperse into the atmosphere.

When painting this series of "Rainbow Paintings" using cyan, magenta and yellow pigments – a series of spheres or auras formed by haloes of light, their wavelengths superimposed with no precise boundaries – I tried to create movements, circular vibratory accidents within the light spectrum with gaseous white energies, swirling forces that emerge, travel and disappear into space.



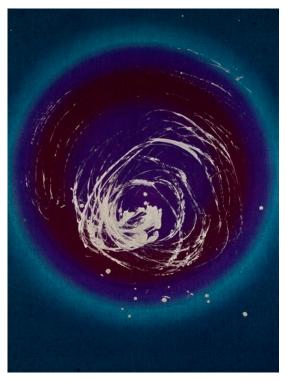
Fabienne Verdier in her studio, Chambly, photography: Laura Stevens © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022

Science and satellite observation technologies now mean that we can see the Earth from space and in parallel contemplate the cosmos with an entirely new level of clarity. I thought that in order to talk to our contemporaries about death, we could, perhaps, benefit from the sort of change of scale and perspective that science offers us when it explains the phenomena of the life and death of the stars. When the energy source of a star runs out, the star dies, creating gaseous debris that in turn creates new stars.

In a certain sense, throughout their existence, each individual leaves a unique imprint of energies that then gradually dissolve in order to transform or recombine in the form of atoms with the immensity of space...

"Colour is the place where our brain and the universe meet."

Paul Cézanne



Aakash, 2021, Telugu (Andhra Pradesh), India, celestial vault, firmament, void, atmosphere , 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Dieleman ©Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Fabienne Verdier in her studio, Chambly, photography: Laura Stevens © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022

2 An exhibition specifically designed for the Musée Unterlinden

2.1 A tour through the museum's permanent collections

The visit is designed as an itinerary that begins in the permanent collections, where Fabienne Verdier's paintings are set alongside the museum's historic and modern artworks. Thanks to the correspondences of forms, rhythms, colours, compositions or subjects, visitors are encouraged to think about the way they approach a work and take a new perspective on the panels painted by Martin Schongauer and Lucas Cranach, the Ruckers harpsicord and the paintings of Jean-Jacques Henner, de Serge Poliakoff, Jean Dubuffet or Agnès Thurnauer.

Each work chosen reflects a key period in the artist's career. In parallel with the evolution of her pictorial writing, we also see the evolution of the tools she uses to create her works as the visit unfolds.

From easel painting to horizontal painting, to the use of ever-larger hanging brushes that she ultimately combined with a set of handlebars, the artist's technique is constantly changing.



Clairvoyance, 2006, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 151 x 137 cm, private collection, photography: Inès Dieleman © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022

The cloister

Amongst the works presented in the cloister, three paintings from 2011 provide the means to explore the artist's objective of capturing the energies of the living world through her pursuit of minimal pictorial writing.



Sedes Sapientiae II, 2011, After The Madonna with Canon van der Paele by Jan van Eyck (1436), held in the Groeningemuseum, Bruges, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 180 x 120cm, private collection, photography: Inès Dieleman © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP. Paris. 2022

"Sedes sapientiae V, 2016, along with the circular paintings, constitutes one of the most condensed pictorial compositions in Fabienne Verdier's oeuvre. It is a work of pure expression, the moment of immediate spontaneity. (...) A single brushstroke, an abstract sign full of power and intensity."

Florian Steininger, Extract from the exhibition catalogue text.

The Petite Maison

An architectural signature and visual landmark for visitors outside on the Musée Unterlinden's public square, the Petite Maison is an exhibition space within the underground gallery. The presentation of Fabienne Verdier's works in this emblematic space was designed as a sustained interval, with a set of 6 polyptychs entitled White Energies, dating from 2018. These paintings are the precursors of the latest works painted in 2022, in which the artist painted flows of "white energies" on the canvas.

The Underground Gallery

The visit continues in the main part of the Musée Unterlinden's underground gallery linking the old building to the contemporary extension. Works on display here include a set of pages from notebooks made between 2019 and 2022 that introduce the idea for the Rainbows installation.

Ackerhof - Level 1

On the first floor of the Ackerhof wing, the tour continues through the collections of modern art, which have been rehung and accompanied by a selection of Fabienne Verdier's works. So the artist's canvases are presented amongst the abstract works by the likes of Serge Poliakoff, Jean Dubuffet or Agnès Thurnauer.



Fluid Night, 2018, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 252 x 183 cm, private collection, photography: Inès Dieleman © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



The Dormition, 2012, ink, pigment and varnish on canvas, private collection, 185 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Dieleman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Jean-Jacques Henner, The Levite of Ephraim and His Dead Wife, c. 1895, oil on canvas, 31.5 \times 53.5 cm, Musée Unterlinden, Colmar

2.2 A monumental and immersive installation entitled "Rainbows"

Ackerhof - Level 2

In the Ackerhof, the imposing temporary exhibition gallery created by the architects Herzog & de Meuron, the artist and the curator imagined a large-scale installation entitled "Rainbows", with the aim of transforming the space into a place of contemplation and silence.

Over a period of more than two years, Fabienne Verdier has created a monumental group of seventysix paintings relating to the museum's artworks and more specifically to Grünewald's Resurrection panel. The artist was particularly struck by the image of Christ transfigured and surging upwards in a halo of light, radiating outwards into the starry night.

Based on Grünewald's panel and rejecting the traditional imagery historically found in Western art (danses macabres, skeletons and the Last Judgement), the artist presents a new iconography inspired by contemporary observations of the aura of light produced when a star dies. Conceived as individual entities, the different paintings presented on the side walls each have a forename linked to the sky, the stars or light as their title.

Fabienne Verdier's collaboration with the lexicographer Bérangère Baucher made her aware that on the five continents and in almost all cultures, parents sometimes choose names for their children that "sing" of humanity's relationship to the cosmos. A group of international linguists brought together for the project catalogued and collected these given names that "look to the skies".

Written on the back of each painting is the name the artist chose for it, in the original language, transcribed and in translation. An information panel will enable visitors to identify "the individuals" who make up this constellation of stars resonating beneath the room's vaulted ceiling.

For the artist, these circles of light or "Rainbow Paintings" are portraits linked to those who were taken from us by Covid-19, which prevented their friends and family from being with them and later performing their funeral rites. Conceived as contemporary icons, they aim to soothe or console those who have suffered the consequences of the coronavirus personally or amongst those close to them.

This desire to create a universal artwork with which visitors can identify is not without its similarities to Grünewald, whose famous altarpiece was intended for the sick in the care of the Antonite monastery of Isenheim in the 16th century.

"The circle is an image of perfection and the infinite. (...) For the Tibetans and African tribes, Medieval philosophers or Zen masters, the circle is the central figure: nurturing void, initial plenitude, birthplace of everything that is."

Charles Juliet, Entretien avec Fabienne Verdier, Paris, Albin Michel, 2007, p. 46



Fabienne Verdier, still from the film The Song of the Stars (52'), Ned Burgess, Martin Baizeau

At the end of the contemporary nave, visitors will be faced with a vast painting, Vortex, which represents the culmination and synthesis of the reverberating waves of the light paintings on the side walls. Between darkness and light, the expanding flow of white energy contrasts with the painting's midnight blue background. As in Grünewald's work, it evokes the connection between earth and the skies, the movement of ascension and the dissolution of matter.

"The whole installation takes the form of a total artwork creating an immersive experience for the public."

Fabienne Verdier



Great Vortex of Unterlinden (detail), 2021, acrylic and mixed media, 551 x 272 cm, Private collection, photography: Inès Dieleman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



3 Catalogue

The exhibition catalogue, edited by Frédérique Goerig-Hergott, curator of the exhibition, looks at Fabienne Verdier's distinctive approach in the context of her project in Colmar begun in January 2019. The contributions from the different authors serve to elucidate the premise of the exhibition and the specific approach underpinning the artist's work.

The publication is illustrated with all of Fabienne Verdier's works on display at the Musée Unterlinden, as well as Laura Stevens' photographs taken in the artist's studio between 2021 and 2022.

Authors: Bérangère Baucher, Jean Frémon, Frédérique Goerig-Hergott, Florian Steininger, Trin Xuan Thuan

5 Continents Éditions, Milan Format 230 x 280mm, 192 pages Price: €30

SOMMAIRE

Preface Thierry Cahn

Forward Pantxika De Paepe

Fabienne Verdier: Starsong Frédérique Goerig-Hergott

Fabienne Verdier: Modern and Contemporary Constellations Florian Steininger

The Other Studio Jean Frémon

Works in the museum's permanent collections

The Kingdom of Light: The Life and Death of Stars Trinh Xuan Thuan

"What's in a name?" Bérengère Baucher

Works in the exhibition hall Rainbows

Studio notebooks

Biography

Select bibliography

4 Resources

4.1 Biography of the artist

Fabienne Verdier

(Paris, 1962)

After studying at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Toulouse, Fabienne Verdier trained in China between 1983 and 1992, alongside great masters at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in Chongqing, becoming the first foreigner to receive a post-graduate diploma in art from this prestigious university. She then spent several years immersing herself in the work of abstract expressionist painters to create a series of paintings for the Hubert Looser Foundation in Zurich.

Between 2009 and 2013 she turned her attention to the work of the Flemish Primitives for an exhibition with the Groeningemuseum in Bruges. In 2013, she worked with Jean Nouvel on the design for Beijing's future museum of art, the National Art Museum of China (NAMOC). In 2014, she installed a studio at the Juilliard School (New York), which was the first time it had agreed to host a research laboratory investigating pictorial and sound waves. Between 2015 and 2017, she worked with Alain Rey on the fiftieth-anniversary edition of the Petit Robert dictionary, producing 22 paintings celebrating the creative energy of language. In 2019, she was the subject of a major retrospective at the Musée Granet in Aix-en-Provence.

Fabienne Verdier's work has been exhibited in numerous countries and is held in several public collections, including the National Museum of Modern Art-Centre Pompidou and the Musée Cernuschi in Paris, the Kunsthaus in Zurich, the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich and the National Museum in Oslo. She is also represented at the Musée Barbier-Mueller in Geneva and the Pinault Collection.



Fabienne Verdier in her studio, Chambly, photography: Laura Stevens ©Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022

In the autumn, another exhibition pays tribute to Fabienne Verdier in Germany

«In the Eye of the Cosmos» - 3 September 2022 to 26 February 2023 - Saarlandmuseum - Moderne Galerie, Saarbrücken

This is the artist's first solo exhibition in Germany and the first museum presentation of his graphic work. The exhibition will include 70 works on paper and two large-scale paintings. The exhibition includes 70 works on paper and two large-format paintings. The exhibition is sponsored by the Consul General of France in Saarbrücken, Sébastien Girard.

4.2 Images available for the press

All images in this press kit are available.



Chandra Shekhar, 2021, He who wears the crest of the moon on his head, Shiva, Telugu (Andhra Pradesh, India), acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Bagdasar, 2021, Light, bouquet of rays, Tatar (Tatarstan, Russia), acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inàs Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Cutarmani, 2021, Luminous jewel, solar core, Tamil (Southern India), acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Thera, 2021, Pleiades constellation, Arabic dialect in the folk tales (Arabian Peninsula, Yemen), acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Ma' al-Sama, 2021, Water of the heavens, Arabic dialect in the folk tales (Arabian Peninsula, Yemen), acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



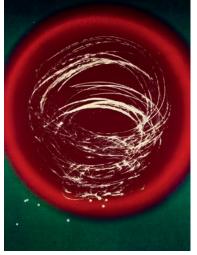
Asman, 2021, Sky, Avestan (ancient Iranian), acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Yunseul, 2021, metallic reflections off ripples in the light of the sun or moon, Korean, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022

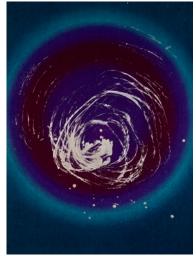


Avana, 2021, Rainbow, halo, light, sparkle, brilliance, Malgache (Madagascar, Mayotte), acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, ® Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022

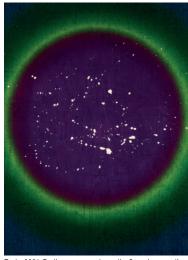


Nonkanyamba, 2021, She who is intense storm, Xhosa (Southern Africa), acrylic and mixed media on canvas,183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, @ Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022

All images in this press kit are available.



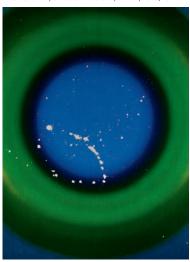
Aakash, 2021, Celestial vault, firmament, void, atmosphere, Telugu (Andhra Pradesh), India, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



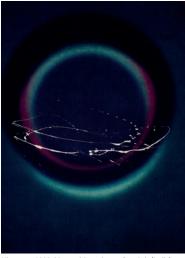
Tsala, 2021, Radiance, aurora borealis, Georgian, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



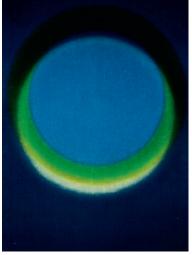
Dara Reaksmey, 2022, Star ray/light, Khmer (Cambodia), acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Celestino, 2022, Heavenly, Italian, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Himamsu, 2022, Moon with cool rays, Sanskrit (India), acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Chandrahas, 2022, Smile of the moon, Telugu (Andhra Pradesh, India), acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 183 x 135 cm, photography: Inès Delieman, © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Fabienne Verdier in her studio, Chambly, photography: Laura Stevens © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022



Fabienne Verdier in her studio, Chambly, photography: Laura Stevens © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022

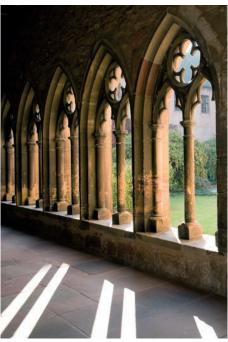


Fabienne Verdier in her studio, Chambly, photography: Laura Stevens © Fabienne Verdier, ADAGP, Paris, 2022

5 The Musée Unterlinden, Colmar

5.1 Presentation of the museum







The Musée Unterlinden officially opened on 3 April 1853. As well as the 3rd-century mosaic discovered in Bergheim in 1848 and the plaster casts of ancient sculptures, the erudite local audience was able to admire artworks such as the Isenheim Altarpiece and Martin Schongauer's Altarpiece of the Dominicans that had been confiscated during the French Revolution.

Nowadays, the Musée Unterlinden is a place of discovery offering its numerous visitors dialogue and knowledge, pleasure and emotions. They can explore a permanent collection covering nearly 7,000 years of history, from Prehistoric times to 20th-century art. In parallel to this journey through time within its collections covering the fine arts, history and society, visitors can also discover the multiple facets of the museum's architecture, which were unified and enhanced by the refurbishment and extension project undertaken by the architects Herzog & de Meuron, completed in late 2015.

Exploring the rooms of the 13th-century former convent, the old Municipal Baths inaugurated in 1906 and the contemporary spaces built in 2015 alongside the collections, visitors can admire the successive stages of over 150 years of the museum's history. The walls and the artworks bear witness to the dynamic work of the Société Schongauer, the charitable association that has run the Musée Unterlinden since 1853.

5.2 The Isenheim Altarpiece







Between 1512 and 1516, the artists Niclaus of Haguenau (responsible for the sculpted portion) and Grünewald (the painted panels) created the famous altarpiece for the Antonite monastic complex of Isenheim, a village located around 20 kilometres from Colmar. The polyptych, which adorned the high altar of the church at the Isenheim convent prior to the Revolution, was commissioned by one of the order's superiors, Guy Guers, who served as preceptor between 1490 and 1516.

Founded in around 1300, the monastic complex of Isenheim was attached to the Antonite order, which was officially founded in 1202. The order's vocation was to care for those suffering from St Anthony's fire, which was a genuine plague in the Middle Ages.

Faith in St Anthony, who was said to be able to cure the disease but was also a vindicative saint who could be the cause of the illness, brought pilgrims and sufferers to Isenheim. Early 17th-century medicine showed that the illness was linked to the ingestion of rye contaminated with ergot, a parasitic fungus affecting the cereal, which caused a shrinking of the blood vessels that could lead to necrosis of the limbs and hallucinations.

To help those suffering from the disease, the Antonites served them good quality bread and prepared the saint vinage, a beverage based on wine in which the monks macerated plants and in which the relics of St

Anthony were soaked. They also produced an ointment based on plants with anti-inflammatory properties.

The institution gradually acquired considerable wealth, as is evidenced by the numerous works of art it commissioned and financed, including the Isenheim Altarpiece. It remained in the care of the religious institution up until the French Revolution. To prevent its destruction, it was taken to the district's National Library in Colmar in 1793. In 1852, it was transferred to the church of the former Dominican convent of Unterlinden, where it formed the centrepiece of the museum being established there at the time, and where it has continued to fascinate and enchant those who come to see it.

Having been regularly maintained and varnished since the 18th century, it underwent an exceptional full restoration project beginning in autumn 2018 (encompassing the painted panels, sculptures and frames). The process was completed in late June 2022, with visitors able to view the work being carried out.

The masterpiece has now regained its original vivid colours and continues to dazzle the museum's visitors with its beauty and monumentality.

Grünewald, Isenheim Altarpiece, 1st opening, The Annunciation, The Concert of Angels, The Virgin and Child, The Resurrection, 1512-1516, mixed media on lime wood (tempera and oils), photography: Le Réverbère / Mulhouse, Musée Unterlinden, Colmar

6 Practical information and press contacts

Address

Musée Unterlinden

Place Unterlinden – 68000 Colmar Tel. +33 (0)3 89 20 15 50 info@musee-unterlinden.com www.musee-unterlinden.com

Opening hours

Open daily except Tuesdays, 9am-6pm

Tuesdays: closed Closed 25.12 & 01.01.23

Full price: €13 Concessions: €11

Young people (12 to 18-year-olds and students under

30): €8 Families: €35

Free entry: under 12s /

under 18s on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays

Press contacts

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