

21 JUNE 2025 → 28 SEPTEMBER 2025
OPENING ON FRIDAY 20 JUNE 2025 AT 7PM
MO.CO. Panacée

La cinquième essence

Jean-Marie Appriou



Jean-Marie Appriou
Event Horizon (primordial vessel), 2024
Patinated aluminum, 280 × 194 × 27 cm (2 parts)
© the artist and Perrotin
Photo: Claire Dorn © Adagp, Paris, 2025

This summer, MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain presents solo exhibitions by two major figures of the French contemporary art scene: Françoise Pétrovitch at MO.CO. and Jean-Marie Appriou at MO.CO. Panacée. In parallel, the 2025 graduate exhibition from MO.CO. Esba (curator Sophie Lapalu) will be held at the remarkable heritage site of the Faculty of Medicine in Montpellier.

Jean-Marie Appriou is an alchemist in its medieval description: he gives shape to the shapeless and explores materiality by questioning Man's connection to cosmos. He etches human figures, plants and animals on paper, carves and models clay, melts aluminum and bronze to delight the world, whispers to his blown glass, merges volcano rocks together.

His mythical universe explores the microscopic and the infinitely large. His artworks are poetic fictions, full of hybrid creatures, "exonautes", painting and literature characters as well as invasive plants. The gaze goes from the primordial soup to the stars. The exhibition is conceived like a journey crossing different worlds and combining the elements through their materiality.

La cinquième essence allows the artist to explore his medium of choice, sculpture – aluminum, bronze, glass, clay – and uses MO.CO. Panacée architecture, built around a patio, to distill the four elements employed in

his work: water, earth, air and fire. Alchemy introduces a fifth element, or a fifth essence: ether. According to its antique and medieval definition, ether is the invisible element that fills the void. It is everything and nothing, it gives life to others. That's how Jean-Marie Appriou approaches sculpture: "it is a matter of balance, of emptiness and fullness, of mass, like another part of life".

The journey starts with water, the cradle of life. Man is the child of the ocean, particularly Jean-Marie Appriou, born in Brittany in 1986. For him, "sculpting is like watching the sea recede from the shore. The final sculpture reveals itself as fragments are removed". The wind pushes the water, a wave is rolling (*Ressac*, 2025). The rising and ebbing tide carves the relief of *The cave of time* (2018) in which hands are emerging and suggesting an incantatory gesture. The sea submerges them. Through them, we travel at the mercy of life and death. *The lighthouse watcher* (2025) guides the visitor and enlightens the upcoming way. The landscape is marked by a boat erected on its oars (*The Boat*, 2025) on which a figure observes the horizon. The journey is spiritual. Mythological and historical references pervade Jean-Marie Appriou's work, inspired by art history, classical literature, science-fiction and comics. These are the roots of his creation.

The journey continues on earth, carrying the memory of landscapes and the echo of depths. The earth bears the imprint of the world. The shapes are raw, organic, mineral. This journey takes us

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Jean-Marie Appriou
Crossing the parallel worlds, 2018 (détail)
Aluminum, 235 x 160 x 80 cm
Collection of the Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France
© the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber
Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zurich
© Adagp, Paris, 2025

through elements, but also history, civilization and the cycle of life, for which the earth is the base. Man leaves its mark on earth literally and figuratively. He cultivates and domesticates it. He rises with the work of the land (*Crossing the parallel worlds*, 2018) before nature reasserts itself. Is the gaze of Man covered by lenses or coins? Is he looking at the sky, or above? Regardless of the answer, he invites us to visit another world, the one of air (*The breath of the suns*, 2018).

The face turned upward, he scrutinizes the past and the future: the moon and the stars, the Big Bang, the first second of the universe. Chinese and Western astrology combine the ephemeral and the permanent. Depending on stars position, the man defines a map guiding him through life. The shapes are the result of the human psyche. The twelve constellations are animals. The dragon appears with the hare, the cow with the scorpion, etc. They symbolize the different elements and the different worlds. An astronaut (*Mitosis (cellular being)*, 2023) floats in the center of the clock and sends us to the moon.

Nearby, glass paste stars enable the diffusion of light and the appearance of figures, creating an illusion of presence and materializing the immaterial, the fifth essence: ether. This essence is the key to tying the elements together, as shown by the etching figures. Just like a pyramid (*The Keeper (gravity)*, 2024),

a man-made mountain, is the connection between the earth and the sky, as a symbol of human spiritual elevation.

Tightly connected to the nourishing air, and a source of light, fire ends the journey; it is transformation and fusion; it seals other substances together. Like a lighthouse for the soul, it invites us for a gathering and will be activated on the night of the opening to joyously celebrate the beginning of summer. Just like fallen stars, phosphorescent glass fireflies will shine during summer nights.

Jean-Marie Appriou is a “quintessence abstractor”, from Latin *quinta essentia*, the fifth essence. He invites us on this poetic journey, with about forty artworks including half produced for MO.CO.. He assembles the elements in a quest on the original matter of life, the different doors of perception for which ether is the key.

Curators:
Caroline Chabrand, Curator,
Numa Hambursin, Chief
Executive Officer

Exhibition Production:
Julie Chateignon, Conservation
Officer

Assisted by Lou-Ann Dubost,
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With the participation of
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MO.CO. Montpellier contemporain, 2022 © Photo : Salem Mostefaoui

ABOUT MO.CO.

MO.CO. is an artistic ecosystem that goes from training to collection, production, exhibition and mediation, due to the convergence of an art school and two contemporary art centers: the MO.CO. Esba (Superior School of Fine Arts of Montpellier), the MO.CO. Panacée (laboratory of contemporary creation) and the MO.CO. (space dedicated to exhibitions of international scope).

EXHIBITIONS

MO.CO.

On a Bone, Françoise Pérovitch
Exhibition from 21 June to 2 November 2025
Opening on Saturday 21 June 2025, at 1PM
Curators: Rahmouna Boutayeb and Numa Hambursin
at MO.CO. (13 rue de la République, Montpellier)

MO.CO. Panacée

La cinquième essence, Jean-Marie Appriou
Exhibition from 21 June to 28 September 2025
Opening on Friday 20 June 2025, at 7PM
Curators: Caroline Chabrand and Numa Hambursin
at MO.CO. Panacée (14 rue de l'École de Pharmacie, Montpellier)

MO.CO. Esba

J'accueille avec plaisir tout ce qui viendra ensuite, MO.CO. Esba 2025 Graduate Exhibition
Exhibition from 18 June to 2 July 2025
Curator: Sophie Lapalu
at the Faculty of Medicine (2 rue de l'École de Médecine, Montpellier)

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MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain
13 Rue de la République,
34000 Montpellier
Open Tuesday to Sunday, from 11 AM to 6 PM (October–May)
and from 11 AM to 7 PM (June–September)

MO.CO. Panacée
14 rue de l'École de Pharmacie
34000 Montpellier
Open Wednesday to Sunday, from 11AM to 6PM (October–May)
and from 11AM to 7PM (June–September)

Photos and Credits
Exhibition visuals available online in the press section
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