



# MAGDALENA ABAKANOWICZ

## The Thread of Existence

20 November 2025 to 12 April 2026



*Red Abakan*, 1969, Magdalena Abakanowicz. Tate, Presented anonymously, 2009.  
Photo: © Magdalena Abakanowicz

The Musée Bourdelle presents France's first exhibition dedicated to Magdalena Abakanowicz. A major artist on the 20<sup>th</sup> century Polish art scene, Abakanowicz (1930-2017) experienced war, censorship and deprivation from a young age under the Communist regime. She produced immersive, poetic, sometimes troubling and often political sculptures and textile works. Inspired by the organic world, seriality and monumentality, her work possesses an undeniable power and presence, resonating with contemporary environmental, humanist and feminist issues. Abakanowicz's radical, pioneering work has been shown regularly abroad, from the United States to Japan and Europe, and more recently at the Tate Modern in London and the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne. The Musée Bourdelle exhibition offers biographical and political insights with a chronological and thematic journey taking in 70 ensembles – 33 sculptural installations, 12 textile works, drawings and photographs.



The artist with *Red Abakan* at the exhibition at Pasadena Art Museum, Los Angeles, 1971  
 © Marta Magdalena Abakanowicz Kosmowska and Jan Kosmowski Foundation, Warsaw, Poland.  
 Photo © Jan Kosmowski

#### GENERAL CURATOR

Ophélie Ferlier-Bouat,  
 Director of the Musée Bourdelle

#### SCIENTIFIC CURATOR

Jérôme Godeau  
 Art historian

With the collaboration of Colin Lemoine  
 Art historian

Assisted by Margaux Coïc  
 Exhibition assistant

#### COMMUNICATION MANAGER

Marie Couraud

In the 600 sqm Portzamparc wing, whose concrete walls have been renovated for the occasion, the exhibition focuses on Abakanowicz's sculptural production, in order to restore the artist to her rightful place among the great sculptors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The exhibition's subtitle, "The Thread of Existence" combines two terms used by the artist to define her work. She saw tissue, or fibre, as the basic element of the human body, marked by the vagaries of its destiny.

The project is the fruit of three years' work, with the active support of the Marta Magdalena Abakanowicz Kosmowska and Jan Kosmowski Foundation in Warsaw, the Polish Institute of Paris and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute. The works have mainly been lent by the Marta Magdalena Abakanowicz Kosmowska and Jan Kosmowski Foundation in Warsaw, the Toms Pauli Foundation in Lausanne, the Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź, the Tate Modern in London, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków and the Museum of Modern Art in Paris.

### VISITOR JOURNEY

In the street-side garden, the monumental *Big Figure* greets the visitor as they begin their journey into the exhibition.

In the corridor of the Portzamparc wing, the first part gives an idea of the scope of the Magdalena Abakanowicz's work: the early textile pieces, small (often anatomical) sculptures, drawings and projects for public spaces.

The journey through the exhibition continues with the cycle of monumental works begun by Abakanowicz in the 1960s: the *Abakans*, a series of spectacular textile pieces that hang from the ceiling. Although materials were scarce, the artist wove these objects made of natural fibre using ropes and old fabrics she collected and folded away under her bed.

In the 1970s, Abakanowicz's practice opened up to human figuration and she adopted the principle of seriality, which she developed with *Backs* and *Dancing Figures*. The third part of the exhibition focuses on these identityless husks, which question the notions of presence and disappearance.

The fourth part begins with her iconic installation *Embryology*, which was unveiled at the Venice Biennale in 1980. Somewhere between bodies, organic matter and rocks, these clusters of cocoons immerse the viewer



in an ambiguous hybrid space. Illustrated with drawings and reliefs *Landscapes*, the exhibition journey highlights the materiality of Abakanowicz's works and her interest in metamorphoses.

Next in the concrete cells of the museum, the visitor discovers two more ensembles, *Mutants* and *Crowd V*. While the *Mutants* occupy the space haphazardly, the faceless, disturbing figures of *Crowd V* materialise Abakanowicz's idea of "the crowd acting as a brainless organism".

The exhibition concludes with a cycle of monumental sculptures entitled *War Games*, consisting of enormous tree trunks encircled in steel hoops. It echoes the destructive power of war, and completes the symbolic force of this unique artist with her singular place in the creative world of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



The artist and her *Backs*, 1980 © Marta Magdalena Abakanowicz Kosmowska and Jan Kosmowski Foundation, Warsaw, Poland. Photo © Jan Kosmowski



## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The exhibition runs from 20 November 2025 to 12 April 2026 and is open from Tuesday to Sunday from 10 am to 6 pm (last admission 5.15).

### Exhibition tickets

Full rate: €12

Reduced rate: €10

Free access to permanent exhibitions.

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## MEDIATION

All through the exhibition, room information panels and detailed labels with English and Polish translations accompany the visitor. Labels for families are also available, illustrated with the artist's famous *Mutants*. In addition, a programme in the museum's visitor app proposes texts written by Magdalena Abakanowicz herself.

Extracts of the artist's film *Abakany* made in 1969 in collaboration with film director Jarosław Brzozowski are projected within the exhibition and show the *Abakans* situated in a lunar landscape on the Baltic. Previously unseen images of the artist's studio exclusively made available for the exhibition, offer an insight into the intimate creative world of Magdalena Abakanowicz.

At the end of the exhibition, a material library familiarises children and adults with the materials and techniques used by the artist, including the weaving of plant and animal fibres (wool, cotton, burlap, sisal and horsehair, linen, hemp, etc.).

A visitor guide completes the range of interpretive media on offer.

## EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

With contributions from international specialists in modern and contemporary art as well as sculpture and textile art, the exhibition catalogue brings the artist's modernity into sharp focus through the prism of her life and the conditions of creation under Poland's Communist regime. Enhanced with detailed notes on all the works in the exhibition, it highlights the originality and power of Magdalena Abakanowicz's work compared to that of her contemporaries.

In collaboration with the Marta Magdalena Abakanowicz Kosmowska and Jan Kosmowski Foundation, Warsaw, Poland:



With the support of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage:



With the support of:





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## MUSÉE BOURDELLE

Bourdelle (1861-1929) was a contemporary of Auguste Rodin and Aristide Maillol. He developed a powerful style, culminating in his masterpiece, *Hercules the Archer*. During his lifetime, he was recognised as one of the great French sculptors, especially in monumental sculpture. His international reputation earned him a commission from the Argentine Government to create a Monument to General Alvear for the city of Buenos Aires.

The Musée Bourdelle is located in premises that were occupied by the sculptor for over 40 years. Bourdelle joined the artistic community in Montparnasse when he was 23 years old. As his success grew, he gradually extended his home and workspace, adding studio after studio. His widow Cléopâtre and his daughter Rhodia worked hard to open the museum in 1949. Some areas, such as the iconic sculptor's studio, are exceptionally well-preserved.

A visit to the museum takes you through two gardens, populated by sculptures. Under the arcades of the street-side garden, the Hall of Plasters houses monumental works. At the end of the portico, a pavilion contains the painting studio. Under the covered passageway, a door leads to the museum's collections displayed in rooms around the inner courtyard. Opposite, you will find the immaculately preserved sculpture studio and a room that presents the techniques involved in sculpting. The tour of the collections concludes in the walkway. Temporary exhibitions are held in the modern wing built by Christian de Portzamparc.

The museum reopened in March 2023 after a two-year refurbishment. The Hall of Plasters has also been renovated and reopened in March 2025.





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## PARIS MUSÉES

**Paris Musées is a public institution that brings 12 museums and 2 heritage sites under one umbrella. It is Europe's leading museum network, and in 2024 welcomed over 4.8 million visitors.**

It includes art galleries (Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, Petit Palais – Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris), history museums (Musée Carnavalet – Histoire de Paris, Musée de la Libération de Paris – Musée du Général Leclerc – Musée Jean Moulin), former artists' studios (Musée Bourdelle, Musée Zadkine, Musée de la Vie Romantique), writer's homes (Balzac's house, Victor Hugo's houses in Paris and on Guernsey), the Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, museums housing the works of great collector-donors (Musée Cernuschi – Musée des Arts de l'Asie de la Ville de Paris, Musée Cognacq-Jay) as well as two heritage sites, the Paris Catacombs and the Archaeological Crypt of the Île de la Cité.

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