



MACS

Musée des Arts Contemporains
Grand-Hornu

Lucia Bru
Aux choses mêmes

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Introduction to the exhibition

Over the past thirty years, Lucia Bru (°1970, Brussels) has developed a sculptural practice grounded in an experimental approach to materials – paper, crystal, porcelain, cement, and plaster – in which geometry and chance converge to form structures that are at once minimal and complex. The cubes, cages, grids, squares, and even mirrors that constitute the main ‘families’ of her work emerge as the empirical outcome of deliberate interventions and the erratic reactions of the materials. Attentive to the responses of the materials she explores through a creative process open to chance, the sculptor positions herself as an interlocutor for a mineral world whose agency, memory, and surprising fluidity she acknowledges, opening it to the organic, the animal, and the human. Through drawing, photography, and video, Lucia Bru seeks to render tangible the fragile and transient presence of a breath, a reflection, a fold, a curve, a hollow, or a shadow. This same attentiveness to the sketch – vulnerable by nature – has, since her early days, led her to preserve every attempt on the shelves of her studio, gradually forming a living and vital archive of her own practice. These experimentations – as discreet as they are surprising – whose composition recalls Eva Hesse’s celebrated *Test Pieces*, offer both a retrospective and forward-looking view of Lucia Bru’s practice.



Lucia Bru



Lucia Bru (b. 1970, Brussels) is an artist working primarily in sculpture, but also in drawing, photography, and video. Over some thirty years, she has developed her practice by grounding it in an experimental approach to materials – ceramics, terracotta, porcelain, crystal, paper, cement, and more – while remaining attuned to matter itself: its history, its evolution, and its trajectories, including imperfections, contingencies, and accidents.

The objects Lucia Bru creates seem imbued with a life of their own; the artist lets the material live and express itself with no fixed outcome in mind. The way her sculptures occupy space – often shown without plinths, directly on the floor – is shaped by the relationships her pieces form with the exhibition venue – in dialogue with the architecture (here, the distinctive architecture of MACS, conceived around natural light), but also by the relationships her sculptures create with one another and with the public.

Aux choses mêmes invites visitors to return to the essence of things: with great sensitivity and humanity, the artist works to make visible the existence of a breath, a reflection, a tension, a gesture...

« With quiet subversiveness, Lucia Bru unsettles the viewer: the stools are de *guingois* – lopsided, their legs curved and undulating. »



Tour of the exhibition

Lucia Bru's works have been grouped, a posteriori, into 'families of objects' and communities of forms – though these always remain interconnected: like communicating vessels, the different categories bleed into one another. The names of the families appear in brackets.

SALLE 1

A large shelf occupies a corner of the room. In every studio she has worked in – a true 'laboratory of intuition' – Lucia Bru has always kept a shelf on which to place her small-scale works, in no particular order.

The shelf can be read as a mental map of her practice, a snapshot of where her work stands. This broader view allows the artist to return to a piece, rework it, or pair it with another – and also allows connections to sometimes arise naturally between pieces not originally intended to be shown together. Her works can therefore be combined: elements can be moved, rearranged, or restaged – a playful dimension runs through her practice. Equally, their positions relative to one another within any grouping are not immutable. Nothing in Lucia Bru's work is ever truly fixed; her sculpture is alive. She lets the materials live and express themselves, and the verbs she uses to describe her works are ones we would normally attribute to human beings – to arch, to tense...

Like an exhibition within an exhibition, the shelf from her studio has been transplanted into the museum gallery, though here it is much larger. The shift in scale is central to both the artist's thinking and the exhibition itself. Moving through the space along the wall, visitors – who are invited to bring a degree of attentiveness – must draw close and take time to observe each small piece across the different levels of the shelf, performing a kind of tracking shot across the artist's body of work: like a library of forms, the various elements that make up her work are gathered here.

(cages) en (tabourets)

A primary structure for the human body, the stool is a simple, geometric object. In the cages, the artist is drawn not to the idea of confinement but to the interplay of verticals and horizontals.

Choosing porcelain for these pieces is in itself a bold act. With quiet subversiveness, Lucia Bru unsettles the viewer: the stools are *de guingois* – lopsided, their legs curved and undulating. This deformation gives the impression that they are on the verge of movement, as though life had been breathed into them, lending these seemingly fragile objects an unmistakably poetic dimension.

In fact, these deformations stem from a kind of memory inherent to terracotta, and to porcelain in particular: during firing, the material restores something of the forces and movements impressed upon the raw clay in the course of working it. Starting from a geometric vocabulary, the artist introduces an extra dimension – a vitality – ensuring that the geometry is not cold but, as she puts it, 'jostled'.

(équerres)

The set square – instrument of precision and draughtsmanship – conjures precision in the collective imagination: it checks angles, it measures. One thinks of medieval masons who, armed with such tools, would take the measure of their work on site, wrestling with the geometry of the real world, composing within its constraints. Here, though, the set squares – made in porcelain, and without perfect straightness – have shed both their function and their structural role.

At rest, they exude a deceptive rigour; introduced into an architectural context, they spring to life.

(lignes)

Along the floor, running beneath the windows, a multitude of small porcelain cubes are arranged in single file. Unfixed, they are free to move. These lines, repetitions of cubes that appear identical yet are each singular, seem to lead nowhere. And yet, in following the line, in tracing its length, visitors are drawn inward – back to themselves, to the body within the museum space – in a form of introspection attuned to Eastern contemplative traditions, and to the Buddhist teaching that underlies the exhibition's title: to return to 'the things themselves'.

Photography

Leaving the gallery, the visitor comes face to face with an intriguing image that fires the imagination, something suggestive of a structure, a shelter, a corner, a bed... The artist had been making porcelain cages that had to be transported elsewhere for firing. To move them safely, she built foam-lined crates to contain them, and it was these containers – small architectural objects in their own right – that she photographed and enlarged. Distorted by enlargement, the image is neither smooth nor perfect; its grain introduces blur and softness. The shift in scale has now moved towards the monumental.

BASEMENT

Video

A tabby cat, Léon, moves freely among Lucia Bru's sculptures.

'(...) The film traces this quiet, unhurried wandering as the cat settles into the atmosphere of the studio. He brushes against fragile objects, recognises the space and its contents, rubs himself gently against them, finds a spot to rest. He makes himself at home among the sculptures – stretching voluptuously, claiming a space that suits him, leaning against a tottering geometric form, nestling behind a porcelain piece, falling asleep with his head resting on a small pile of stones. The sculptures and the cat, then, are perfectly still, perfectly at ease.'

Michel François, extrait du texte « Léon » dans le catalogue Lucia Bru, publié par le MACS et le Fonds Mercator (en vente à l'artshop du Grand-Hornu).

Collapsing the hierarchies between artwork and domestic animal, as well as the boundaries between the animal and mineral worlds, the video projection fills the entire wall. The cat appears larger than the viewers, the objects too larger than they are in reality. Here again, the artist plays on scale. The work evokes contemplation and mindfulness, qualities the artist finds embodied in the cat, an animal she particularly admires as an embodiment of serenity.



ROOM 2

Unlike the first gallery, this one – architecturally identical – introduces visitors to works on a larger scale, in which the notions of void and geometry – framing, boundary – come to the fore.

(grands papiers)

This work, at once monumental and unassuming, was created specifically for the exhibition, and for this gallery in particular. A large rectangle is drawn directly on the wall in pencil, then covered with a layer of translucent paper. In a kind of *mise en abîme*, a second rectangle overlays the first, forming a kind of screen. The shimmering paper catches the light and throws off reflections. Ghostly in appearance, it stirs as visitors move through the space, emitting the faintest rustle. The work engages the senses with quiet subtlety, playing on the notion of presence and absence.

(aérocubes)

The family of *aérocubes* (air cubes) arises from the encounter between seemingly opposite materials: cement and crystal, for instance – both mineral, yet carrying very different cultural weight. Crystal and porcelain are habitually perceived as luxury materials, precious and fragile; yet in fact, they are exceptionally resilient. Cement, by contrast, is associated

with masonry, with the humble and unprestigious. The artist takes quiet pleasure in dismantling these cultural hierarchies, the assumptions our Western culture has imposed on matter.

In 2017, she took part in a residency at the Cristallerie Saint-Louis in Moselle, which gave her the opportunity to explore her experimental approach further. The two materials, each with its own energy, meet – pressing against one another, even entering one another.

(movidas)

The artist chose the Spanish term *movidas* for its capacity to express external and internal movement simultaneously. It also evokes the *Movida*, the explosion of artistic and cultural renewal that transformed Spain in the early 1980s.

The *movidas* are sculptures made up of small cubes – roughly equal in size, in crystal and porcelain – that can take the modest form of larger or smaller piles, of stray lines, of loose groupings; but also of single cubes or small handfuls that she gives away and that travel to the far corners of the world, slipping beyond her reach, participating in an invisible construction that has no fixed form, no fixed place, and yet exists. Opaque porcelain cubes are mixed in with crystal ones that come in two textures: polished or sandblasted. The interplay between elements is central to her practice: individuals, couples, trios, groups – all elements to be composed into the whole. These accumulations of cubes press on the very definition of sculpture: what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a sculpture to exist? They point to a vision of matter as something living, shifting, never quite settled.

The *movidas* emphasise the role of the ground in the work, calling to mind the mound-like forms that appear in nature – termite hills, volcanoes – and in human activity: tumuli and spoil heaps, which resonate with the mining history of the Grand-Hornu site.

For Lucia Bru, a work becomes fully legible only within the cycle that connects it to the raw material from which it came and to which it will inevitably return, evoking, in this way, the humble cycle of life.

(limites) n°1

The sculpture is a self-supporting form evoking a right angle, a corner, something that marks an edge in space or announces the beginning of a territory. The interior of the angle is smooth and clean, its different layers visible, bearing witness to the stages of its making. The exterior is another matter: here the material is pressed and modelled by hand, a way of breathing life into mineral and geometry alike.

(miroirs)

The mirror speaks to the memory of passing time: like a machine for images, it has captured and cast back every fleeting reflection of the past. The artist creates her own mirrors in porcelain; their reflective surface achieved through the use of platinum, a precious metal applied to glazed



porcelain and fired at low temperature. These mirrors reflect our image and the surrounding space, both subtly distorted. Also on show here is a mirror in plaster saturated with graphite and then polished to a finish that gives it the dark, lustrous quality of a black mirror.

SMALL HALL

(cubes)

For over twenty years, Lucia Bru has been collecting newspapers, chosen solely for the images that catch her eye. She mounts the newspaper page on wood, then adheres small juxtaposed blocks of porcelain, like the tesserae of a mosaic, over the text, following the lines of varying length that give rhythm to the typography and structure the printed image. It is meditative work, one in which the artist need make no decisions: the structure is already given by the columns of type on the page.

The columns become small structures in their own right, the white porcelain cubes introducing a kind of silence around the image. The photograph reclaims its primacy, existing on its own terms – acquiring meaning independent of the text to which it was once subject. Freed from caption and commentary, the image turns enigmatic, mysterious.

The work inevitably calls to mind Marcel Broodthaers's 1969 erasure of Stéphane Mallarmé's celebrated poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1897). In the face of the excess of discourse that crowds out the image, Lucia Bru seems to seek her way back, to *the things themselves*...

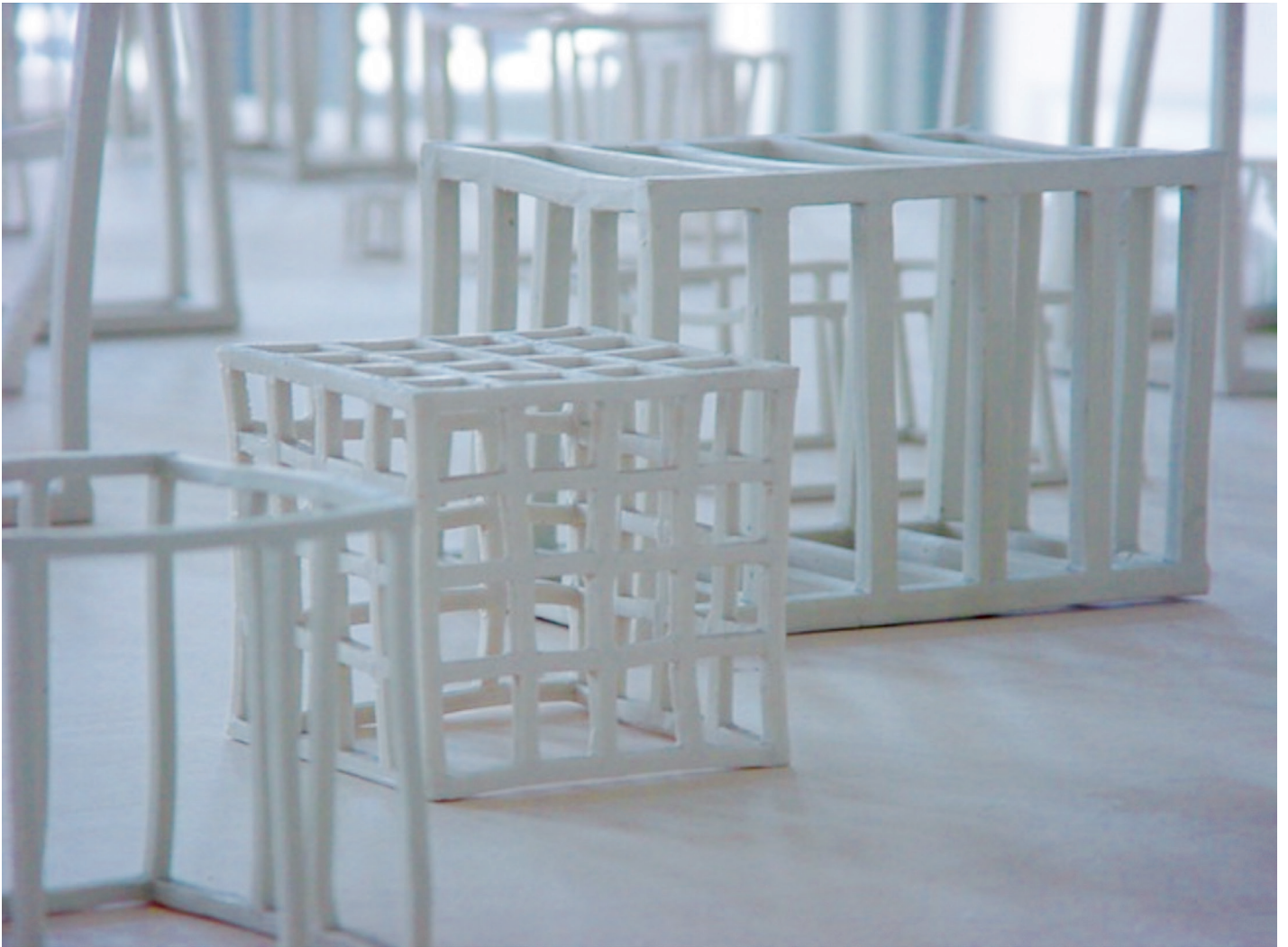
‘Among the different families of pieces in Lucia Bru’s oeuvre, there is one in particular that could be interpreted as a quasi-manifesto of her practice, because it highlights the way the sculptor actually conceives her ceramics as a statement on the current events of her time. These pieces consist of newspaper pages on which she has covered the text – the newsprint – with small blocks of porcelain juxtaposed like mosaic tiles, leaving only the image visible. Intuitively, we sense that what is revealed here is a desire to highlight the modes of expression and language prevalent in our culture before words, discourse and rational logic established their hegemony. Faced with the overload of meaning that dominates modern space, Lucia Bru seems to want to go ‘back to the things themselves,’ starting with the material that constitutes them as the physical supports we use to symbolise them – every image, every piece of writing, every medium necessarily having a materiality.’

Denis Gielen, ‘Trouble dans la matière’ (Trouble in Matter), excerpt from *Lucia Bru*, 2026













Interview with the artist

How did you conceive the exhibition *Aux choses mêmes*? What inspired you?

The museum space, with its two large and two small rooms, immediately prompted me to reflect on scale, a notion central to my research.

It quickly occurred to me that, in the first room, the viewer would move towards the things, whereas in the second, the things would come towards them.

I often use the word 'thing' because it goes to the heart of the matter. It returns me to questions of immediacy and perception, and to a form of simplicity.

Today, it seems important to me to return to simple forms of contact: concrete, physical and perceptual, without necessarily resorting to discourse.

Aux choses mêmes is a way of saying: 'let us return to the simplicity and pleasure of looking at a sculpture'.

'Aux choses mêmes is a way of saying: 'let us return to the simplicity and pleasure of looking at a sculpture'.'

How do you approach an idea, a sculpture?

For a very long time, my work has been structured around families of objects – communities of forms, as I like to call them. Over time, forms of coexistence and relationships have emerged, one thing giving rise to another.

I like to enter into dialogue with materials. I organise things in such a way that I do not have complete control, allowing the materials a degree of freedom. The kiln, for example, reveals things that had remained silent within the form, bringing to light the impulses, caresses and gestures impressed into it.

My formal vocabulary, which is fairly abstract, is made up of simple geometric forms into which I try to breathe life, a sense of vitality. Materials come into contact with one another: crystal, cement, porcelain, newspaper... I like to see how porcelain will react to cement, how crystal – which we associate with a certain fragility and richness – can contain the far denser material of cement.

Light is also an important element. It reveals the objects. It gives them a temporality and it constructs the space. In the studio, it gives rise to forms that arrest my attention, which I document through photography or video.

How would you describe your practice and the relationship you have with the works you make? Could you, for example, tell us about the shelves in the first room of the museum?

My gestures are intuitive. Even when I repeat them, I never produce exactly the same thing. The forms shift with the material itself – clay that is more or less dry – but also with my moods, and with the environment. These imperfections introduce a human quality, at times even a form of anthropomorphism.

The sculptures become companions.

I have had around ten studios in Brussels. Each new space is a new beginning. Each time, before beginning anything else, I installed shelves on which to place my sculptures. Denis Gielen speaks of a ‘library of forms’. It was a way of putting down my bags and finding my bearings again. The shelf allows me to see where I am; I can return to a piece or put it on standby.

The exhibition *Aux choses mêmes* begins with shelves holding small-scale sculptures to which I wanted to give importance, since so much attention is often given to what is large.

These shelves also make it possible to follow the architecture of the building. The visitor moves through the space from one sequence to the next. One might imagine a kind of temporal or formal tracking shot. It is a way of presenting these thirty years of research.

Monograph



Published on the occasion of her solo exhibition *Aux choses mêmes*, organised by the MACS at Grand-Hornu, this richly illustrated first monograph offers a retrospective view of a practice resolutely devoted to experiments that are as understated as they are surprising.

- **Format:** 27,5 x 21 cm
- **168 pages**
- **Price:** €39
- **Graphic design:** Casier/Fieuchs
- **Publishers:** MACS, Fonds Mercator

‘Lucia Bru is a poet of materiality and a philosopher of space. Her artistic vocabulary is written in cement, crystal, paper, and ceramics — each term relentlessly asking: What is a thing? How do we perceive things? In her hands, things are no longer passive objects to be used; they become subjects capable of dialogue and memory. When we enter the field she creates, the first thing we discover is that our habitual patterns of perception are interrupted. A new way of sensing begins to emerge. Thus we step into a play — a game between things and intuition.’

Qilan Shen, *A Small Lexicon of Philosophy of Materiality —on the Art of Lucia Bru*, 2026

The MACS | Grand-Hornu



Established in the former Grand-Hornu colliery (an example of 19th century industrial archaeology now listed as UNESCO world heritage), the MACS is acknowledged as one of the most successful examples in northern Europe of the conversion of an abandoned industrial site into a cultural centre. Since it was opened in 2002, the museum has indeed offered a broad public the opportunity to discover major international exhibitions within an architectural showcase that combines the site's history with contemporary creation.

Located away from major urban centres, the Grand-Hornu site is noted for the “genius of the place” which for 20 years has inspired a number of internationally recognised artists, including Christian Boltanski, Anish Kapoor, Giuseppe Penone, Tony Oursler, Adel Abdessemed, Matt Mullican and Haim Steinbach, to create specific projects here. As an engaged partner alongside the artists, the MACS supports the production of ambitious works, notably through its artists' residency policy, undertaken by the museum's team both in situ and extra-muros (LaToya Ruby Frazier, Fiona Tan and Daniel Turner), and pays particular attention to the visual arts scene in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation through its monograph exhibitions. Together with the Centre for Innovation and Design of the Province of Hainaut (CID), the MACS forms a cultural hub which, has become a popular destination for art lovers and cultural tourism, not least as it can also offer them the pleasures of a park, a gastronomic restaurant and a specialist design and contemporary art shop.

Engagement programme and arts education activities

MACS is dedicated to making contemporary art accessible to everyone through a variety of engagement activities. These include free daily guided tours, creative workshops, family days, meetings, debates, and lectures. The museum places a strong emphasis on serving schoolchildren, for instance, by offering mobile classroom activities as part of the PECA (Cultural and Artistic Education Public Programme). Additionally, MACS is committed to including vulnerable audiences and collaborates with local institutions to create innovative partnerships that support mediation and arts education activities.

ALL ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS ORGANISED AROUND THE EXHIBITION CAN BE FOUND ON THE MUSEUM'S WEBSITE.

Captions

P. 5

(grands papiers) no. 1, 3 elements, paper: 226 × 190 cm; porcelain: 34 × 28 × H 25 cm, 2021. Collection Musée d'Ixelles. Photograph: Jan Liégeois

P. 7

Lucia Bru. Photograph : Tom Vanhee

P. 8

Studio view, 2021. Photograph: Lucia Bru

P. 11

Exhibition view, *Twenty-First Floor* (both), HD video, colour, silent, 19 min. 27 sec., 2019. Photograph: Kitmin Lee

P. 13

(movidas) Amas, Saint-Louis crystal, porcelain, variable dimensions, 2017. Photograph: Lucia Bru

P. 15 – left

(cubes), newspaper mounted on wood, porcelain, anti-UV varnish, 55 × 35 × 1.2 cm, 2024. Photograph: Jan Liégeois

P. 15 – right

(cubes), newspaper mounted on wood, porcelain, anti-UV varnish, 35 × 27 × 1.2 cm, 2017. Photograph: Jan Liégeois

P. 17

Studio view, 2019. Photograph: Tom Vanhee

P. 18

(équerres), porcelain, variable dimensions, 2004. Photograph: Lucia Bru

P. 18

(limites) no. 1, papercrete, 132 × 117 × H 132 cm, 2021. Collection Musée des Arts Contemporains au Grand-Hornu, property of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. Photograph: Lucia Bru

P. 19

(cages), 59 elements, Limoges porcelain, Westerwald porcelain and bone china, variable dimensions, 1999. Photograph: Lucia Bru

P. 20

(grands papiers) no. 2, 2 elements, paper: 193 × 150 × 1.2 cm; cement: 30 × 20 × H 27 cm, 2022. Photograph: Lucia Bru

P. 21

(both), 2 elements, stoneware, 18 × 31.5 × H 35.5 cm, 2019. Photograph: Lucia Bru

● Lucia Bru © SABAM Belgium 2026

Practical information

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MACS

Ravi de te connaître. Les dons au Musée
14.06 > 16.08.26

Le Regard éloigné. Un choix dans la collection
14.06 > 16.08 et 06.09 > 01.11.2026

CID

Memo. Souvenirs du futur
29.03 > 30.08.26

Damien Gernay. Mimesis
14.06 > 15.11.26