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art review

Five decades of a world-class painter from Luxembourg

by [Yasemin Elçi \(https://wort.lu/en/author/k_yelciergun\)](https://wort.lu/en/author/k_yelciergun) 2 min. 23.04.2021



Robert Brandy has a thriving career as a painter on the global art stage, something that few other Luxembourgish artists can say. Now his home country is showing an oversight of his works from the past 50 years at the National Museum of History and Art.

The show, *face à lui-même*, brings together works borrowed from public and private collections and offers a concise guide to the work and life of a prolific and multi-disciplinary Luxembourgish artist and the different styles he deployed over the decades.

Brandy is a rare case of a Luxembourgish artist who held most of his shows abroad. Having exhibited in France, Germany, USA, Japan, Dubai, Switzerland and other countries, Brandy's work could only be seen in Luxembourg itself on a quarter of occasions.



He also accomplished something that was absolutely inconceivable in 1970s Luxembourg: making a living as an artist. It inspired other artists and helped develop the local art scene. Brandy went to Aix en Provence to study art in 1972, in search of the light in Paul Cezanne's works. While studying, he picked grapes for a short while to make money.

In his collages of that period, made with fruits or posters he found, Brandy gives new life to such organic and inorganic material. It was also when he started to write quotes on his paintings for the first time.

In his early "White Period", Brandy reduces his use of color to bring out the transparency of the canvas and the wooden frame behind it, moving away from the traditional process of painting. Due to his avantgarde approach, Brandy was invited to represent Luxembourg at the 11th Biennale de Paris in 1980 – at a time when Luxembourg did not yet take part in the Venice Biennale.

Such experiments with colour and materials are also the first examples of Brandy's involvement with the artistic movement Supports/Surfaces (1966-1972), a reaction against French politics of the time that aimed at deconstructing modern painting. The group questioned the relationship between canvas and paint and built paintings as architectural installations consisting of fabric and objects. Brandy's tutor in Aix en Provence, Vincent Bioules, was part of the movement and a great influence. Resonating with Brandy's show, MNHA exhibits a selection of its works from the Supports/Surfaces movement on a separate floor.

One of the most intriguing pieces in the exhibition is a gift presented to Grand Duke Henri during his coronation in 2000. Luxembourg's Bankers' Association (ABBL) had commissioned the work, and Brandy glued banknotes to the painting. Borrowed from the royal art collection and displayed publicly for the first time, the painting also contains an interesting quote: "Property is also a question of leadership".

"Every painting is a moment of my life. I translate what I'm feeling," Brandy told the *Luxembourg Times* in an interview.

His career spreading over five decades contains too much to fit in one exhibition and face à lui-même only represents the tip of the iceberg. Next year, Brandy plans to have another retrospective at the national library, which will show his serigraphies and books, another essential part of his vast archive.

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