

# Review of exhibition “Le temps d'un rêve / In the space of a dream”, at Musée des Confluences, Lyon, France – 18th October 2024 to 24th August 2025

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**Summary.** Possibly the largest ever exhibition on dreaming, *Le temps d'un rêve / In the space of a dream*, is on show at the Musée des Confluences in Lyon, France, from 18th October 2024 to 24th August 2025. As scientific consultant for the exhibition and/or contributors we review its massive collection of neuroscience, cross-cultural artefacts, art, film and dream diary exhibits. The exhibition covers the science of dreaming, responses to and induction of dreams across different cultures and centuries, artistic representation of individual dreams and of oneiric processes, and the relating of dreams in diaries, surveys or for artistic endeavour (e.g. films) showing what can be at stake in individual and collective dream reports. The exhibition is divided into a series of very high quality environments designed to reproduce the various spatial or historical atmospheres presented. They incorporate visual and scholarly information next to each of the very many artefacts, artworks, films, sound beds and wall art. Spending several hours at the exhibition is greatly recommended for anyone interested in dreams and dreaming.

**Keywords:** Dreaming, Art exhibition, Lyon/France

One of the largest and most comprehensive exhibitions on dreaming, if not the largest ever, is being held at the vast Musée des Confluences in Lyon, France, from 18th October 2024 to 24th August 2025 [Figure 1]. This exhibition is perfect for the wide remit of the museum, which hosts major permanent and temporary exhibitions that span science, anthropology and art in a very modern, spectacular building, but which has a very long history as an institution. The museum has inherited collections from across 5 centuries, and has 3.5 million artifacts from natural science, human science, and science and technology. Its origin dates from acquiring a cabinet of curiosities in the 17th century, with medical and natural history collections added in the 18th century, all being opened to the public in 1777. Geology, zoology and ethnography were added in 1879, Asian collections were added in the 19th and 20th centuries, and from 1979 artifacts from Asia, Oceania, Africa and the Americas were added. The museum's modern building [Figure 2], designed by the Austrian agency Coop Himmelb(l)au, was opened in 2014, hosting permanent and temporary exhibi-

tions. In terms of attendance, it is the second most visited museum of natural history in France, after the one in Paris, with about 450,000 visitors for the last 10-months temporary exhibition (*A nos amours / All our loves*, opening with the sleeping heart -2017- by Annette Messager, Figure 3) and 600,000 visitors per year.

The exhibition *Le Temps d'un Rêve / In the Space of a Dream* presents various aspects of dreaming, notably scientific, historic, ethnographic, artistic, psychological and sociological perspectives presented in eight thematic and successive rooms: 1- sleep physiology and lucid dreaming, 2- dream incubation temples, 3- a door between two worlds, 4- artistic visions, 5- nightmares, 6- dream dictionaries, 7- psychoanalysis, 8- dream diaries - personal and collective aspects of dreaming [Figure 4]. The exhibition



Figure 1. Entrance to the exhibition, with video of an octopus.

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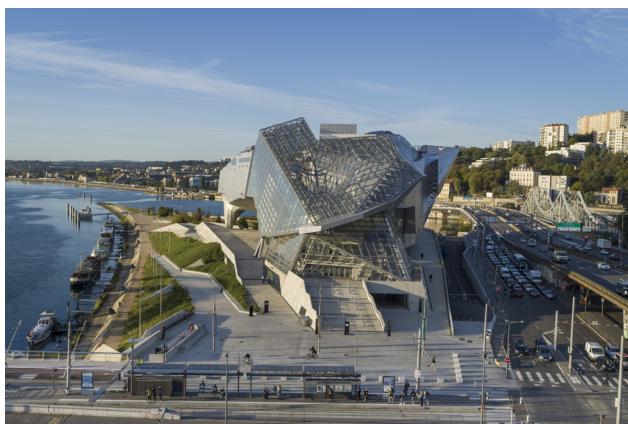


Figure 2. Musée des confluences, built at the confluence of the Saône and Rhône rivers in Lyon, France.

space is situated in what could be described as a vast darkened hanger. Above the walls of each section a constantly morphing AI dream-like animation film runs continuously above the sight line, in what appears to be the sky. Similarly, double beds throughout the exhibition allow 2-adults or small family groups to lounge underneath directed sound pieces, adding to the informative, experiential and multi-sensory nature of the exhibits. English or French versions can be chosen at the push of a button, and quotations are voiced and explained while music is played. Perrine Ruby, dream researcher at the Lyon Neuroscience Research Centre (Figure 5), and Jacqueline Carroy, Professor of History of Science at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociales (Paris), were the scientific consultants for the exhibition (curator: Yoann Cormier). In parallel to the exhibition, several events have been programmed: a conference on dream research by [Perrine Ruby](#), the screening of a documentary movie on lucid dreaming (*Voyage en rêve inconnu*) followed by a [discussion with the public](#), a [white night of dreaming with a selection of movies addressing dreams](#) (e.g. *Réalité*



Figure 3. Sleeping Heart, Annette Messager, 2017, from *A nos amours / All our loves* exhibition, 2023-2024.

by Quentin Dupieux, *Paprika* by Satoshi Kon, *Nimic* by Yorgos Lanthimos), and a podcast [The worlds of dreaming](#) in 6 episodes.

The exhibition opens with a film of an octopus changing colour during sleep, suggesting both the mystery of sleep and dreaming and its poetry. The first room covers the science of sleep and dreaming, in a scene evoking a scientific lab with definitions and equations written on the walls. Visitors can discover various animals sleeping on one side (Figure 6), and explanations of sleep physiology and dreaming on the other. The electrophysiology of sleep is described across multiple panels and artefacts (e.g., the original 12-channel EEG machine used in Lyon by the French researcher Michel Jouvet to record animals' sleep, and a piece



Figure 4. Layout of the exhibition



Figure 5. Dr Perrine Ruby, senior researcher at the Lyon Neuroscience Research Center, Lyon, France.

of art representing slow wave sleep in 3D by Justine Emard [Figure 7]. It mentions how in 1975 Alan Worsley made pre-arranged eye movements while sleeping so as to signal that he was in a lucid dream, which led to lucid dreaming finally being taken seriously as a research theme. An excerpt of a recent French documentary on lucid dreaming (*Voyage en rêve inconnu*) is presented as well as an original edition of Leon d'Hervey de Saint-Denys' (1867) book *Les Reves et les Moyen de les Diriger / Dreams and how to Direct them: Practical Observations*, with its beautiful colour illustrations [Figure 8]. Finally, scientific information on parasomnias sits next to an extract of the 1920 gothic film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, which features a clairvoyant sleepwalker.

Next is a room about dreaming in classical Greece, with a statue from the 2nd century of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine [Figure 9]. This room details incubation temples from the Sumerian era to the Egyptians and to the Greeks in the city of Epidaurus, where, for centuries, sick pilgrims would come to the temple of Asclepius, hoping for a cure from a divine vision brought to them in a dream. A large animated film projection attempts a historical reconstruction of how a person would sleep in the temple, expecting to receive a medical vision in a dream, which would be in-



Figure 6. Animals of various species sleeping in the first room.

terpreted upon awakening by the sanctuary priests. Three small amulets are displayed from Greek and Roman times that depict Bes, the ancient Egyptian God of sleep, who would communicate with sleepers and offer advice and prescriptions. There is also an Egyptian headrest with figures of Bes, and an Egyptian statuette of Bes. A quotation on the wall is from Homer, distinguishing between truthful dreams, and ones that are fantasy, illusion and confusion. The quote can also be listened to while lying on a bed. To illustrate the wide remit of the exhibition, there are extracts from a video tour of ancient Greece, from France's leading video game publisher.

Next is a large cross-cultural collection, including African head-rests and masks that are used for a ceremony exorcising attacks from forest spirits: the masks have dream images of a crocodile and eggs, the dream being a place of interaction with the forest spirits. Early 20th century agiba from Papua New Guinea are shown. These are flat, wooden, decorated hooks from which would hang the heads of defeated enemies [Figure 10]. The design of each agiba is



Figure 7. EEG machine used in Lyon by the French researcher Michel Jouvet and piece of art representing slow wave sleep in 3D (Justine Emard).



Figure 8. *Les Reves et les Moyen de les Diriger / Dreams and how to Direct them: Practical Observations*, Leon d'Hervey de Saint-Denys, 1867.



Figure 9. Statue from the 2nd century of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine.

taken from a human or non-human spirit seen in a dream. The wood that it is made from is taken from a no longer useable canoe, such that the spirit goes from the tree to the canoe to the *agiba* and then to the dreams of the clan members. Other larger wooden sculptures were created after spirits, *yipwon*, appeared in a dream. These spirits would give advice on hunting and fishing. Geometric designs from Utopia in northern Australia show the intricate path held to be taken by a small marsupial (bandicoot) across the landscape in its Dreaming, with the many dots showing its footprints. There are many artifacts from across the world here, including African *Wawa* pods and seeds [Figure 11, left], which induce an altered state of consciousness and lucid dreams for spiritual and medical practices, and materials, such as quartz, for collecting dreams, and then passing on dreams to the sleeper. Captivating also is the account of the Baule people in Africa, each of whom has a spirit husband or wife who lives in the other world, from which we come at birth and return after death. A statue can be made of this otherworldly person, who can be seen in a dream. Several of these statues are displayed in the exhibition [Figure 11, centre]. Inducing altered states of consciousness, through fasting and sleep deprivation and psychotropic substances is also shown in the Hopi Native American exhibit, and the



Figure 10. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century *agiba* from Papua New Guinea.

incorporation of dream visions into the designs of Plains Indians shields. Another section shows a video about *ayahuasca*. Many dream catchers, originally created by Algonquian speaking First Nations people of North America, are also displayed.

The art section covers the prophetic, poetic, personal, symbolic, mystic and surrealist artworks inspired by dreams, depicting dreams/nightmares or suggesting a dream-like atmosphere. It opens on a massive uniformly grey and round sculpture representing a little girl sleeping



Figure 11. African *Wawa* pods and seeds [left] and African Baule statues of spirit husbands and wives [centre].

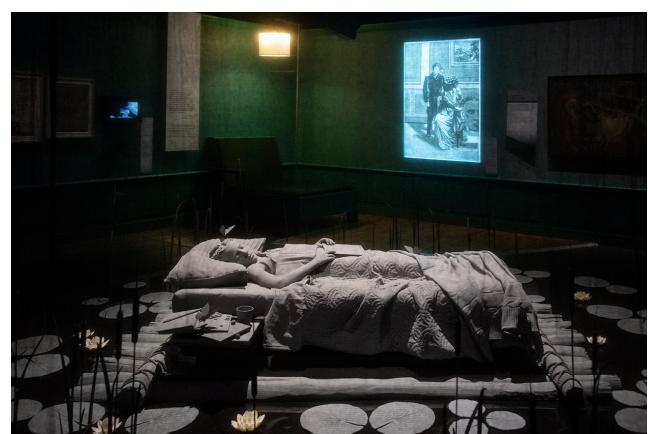


Figure 12. *My bed a raft, the room the sea, and then I laughed some gloom in me*, Hans Op de Beeck, 2019.



Figure 13. One double page of the exposed 1847 edition of Jean-Ignace-Isidore Grandville's book *Engravings of Dreams / Gravures de Rêves*.

in a bed which is on a raft floating on waters covered by ne-nuphars (*My bed a raft, the room the sea, and then I laughed some gloom in me* from Hans Op de Beeck, 2019) [Figure 12]. Paintings include Odilon Redon's (1892) *The Mystical Knight* (Redon was nicknamed 'The prince of dreams'); Jean-Baptiste Claudot's *Jacob's Ladder*; Henri Fantin-Latour's *Sleeping Nymph*; Jean Auguste Dominique's *Study of the Dream of Ossian*; Jean Godefroy's (1800) *The dream of Daphnis*; and Adrien Guignet's (1845) *Jacob Explaining Pharaoh's Dreams*. The exhibition is a wonderful introduction to Symbolist painting, which in the nineteenth century reacted to the realism of much art and of photography in order to emphasise finding the unseen essence of the world. This trend is notably presented through the original 1847 edition of Jean-Ignace-Isidore Grandville's book *Engravings of Dreams / Gravures de Rêves*, opened on pages showing sequences of dreamlike fantasies, or hypnagogic images, including a carriage becoming a cotton reel, a bellows fireplace, a bird, an umbrella and then a mushroom [Figure 13]. The exhibition also covers surrealism, with a video montage of Max Ernst's (1934) images of *A Week of Kindness*, or the *Seven Deadly Elements*. Romanian surrealist artist Victor

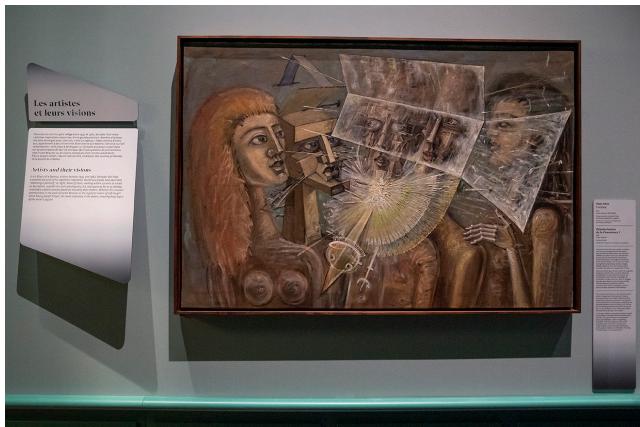


Figure 14. *Dépolarisation de la Conscience I*, Victor Brauner, 1952.

Brauner's (1952) painting *Dépolarisation de la Conscience I* is displayed [Figure 14], and his 1927 drawing *Untitled*. The drawing is of two injured faces, and was prophetic of an accident 11 years later in which he lost an eye. Such 'objective chance' was a feature of many surrealist artworks. Connect-

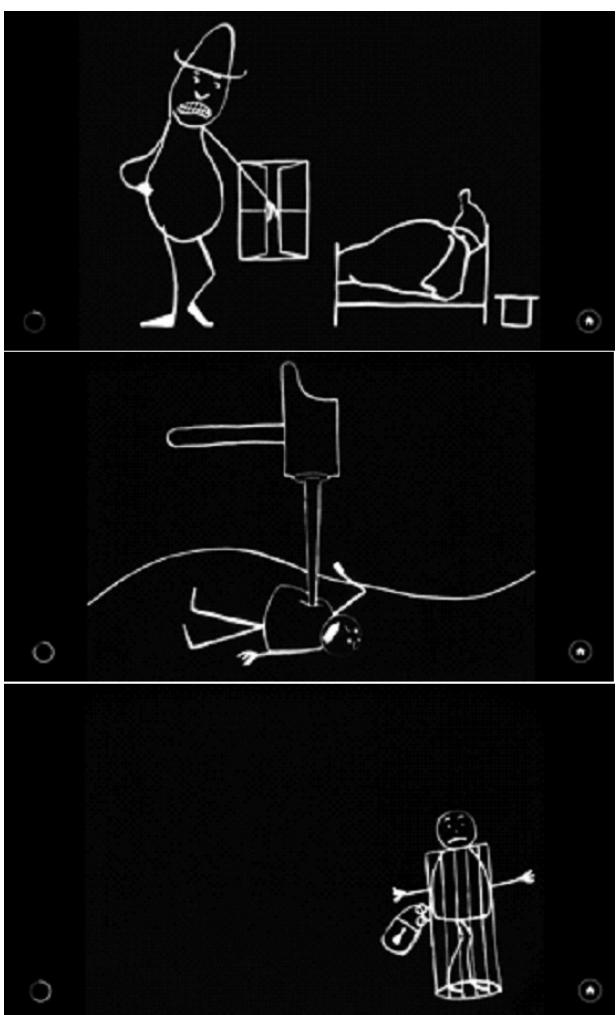


Figure 15. *Dream object*, Jim Shaw, 1998, and *Le petit deuil / The small mourning*, Delphine Bally, 2021.

Figure 16. Three different scenes of the animated movie *The Puppet's Nightmare / Le cauchemar de Fantoche*, Émile Cohl, 1908.



Figure 17. Dreamachine, Brion Gysin in collaboration with William Burroughs, 1960 – 1976.

ed to surrealism, the recent picture of Delphine Balley titled *Le petit deuil* (*The small mourning*, 2021) represents two isolated legs of uneven size standing straight, and the *Dream object* -1998- by Jim Shaw issued from one his dreams and looking like a mix between a face and a column [Figure 15].

Animations are also shown, including from The Simpsons (1991, *Lisa's Pony*), George Méliès' (1904) *The Clockmaker's Dream*, and Émile Cohl's (1908) *The Puppet's Nightmare* (*Le cauchemar de Fantoche*) which was created in Lyon [Figure 16]. Finally, *Dreamachine* is presented. It is a rotating cylinder with spaces to look through, designed in 1960 – 1976 by



Figure 18. *Invisibility*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2016.

Brion Gysin in collaboration with William Burroughs; its stroboscopic lamp induces an altered state of consciousness [Figure 17]. As well as the original object, there is a film of Burroughs talking about its use for literary creativity. Next to this, a large dark room invites visitors to a moment of poetry with a silent movie made of shadows, *Invisibility* (2016) by Apichatpong Weerasethakul [Figure 18]. On the other side of the room, as if optional, a room not advised for children is dedicated to nightmares. It shows artistic depictions and references Roald Dahl's (1982) *The BFG*, and also Nielsen and Levin's fear memory reduction theory of dream function. Three excerpts (*Mulholland Drive* -2001- by David Lynch, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* -1984- by Wes Craven and *Wild Strawberries* -1957- by Ingmar Bergman) and one uncanny and scary short movie (*The Fall* -2019- by Jonathan Glazer) displayed on a wall, show the various ways nightmares have been represented in movies and the disturbance or anxiety that a nightmare can cause. Appropriately, the exhibition has a reminder of the warning by Jean Cocteau, *Le sommeil n'est pas un lieu sûr / Sleep isn't a safe place!*

Next is a room about dream interpretation books from several centuries, including Artemidorus (1539), de Saint-Mesmin (1818), d'Angers (1846), and a cabinet of books on dreams and the Italian lottery [Figure 19]! Postcards representing dream interpretation keys/associations are shown as well as dream dictionaries from different cultures [Figure 20].



Figure 19. Advertisement for the national lottery saying "If you dream of - picture of an elephant- buy a ticket of the national lottery".



Figure 20. Postcard representing dream interpretation keys/associations, e.g. if you dream of matches it means that you are being deceived, open you eyes!



Figure 21. Room reproducing the interior style of the clinical office of Freud.

Following this, a room reproducing the interior style of the clinical office of Freud (bookshelves, couch, carpet) [Figure 21], announces that we arrive in the realm of psychoanalysis. A miniature of Freud's home office in Vienna is presented, as well as an original version of the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and *The Red Book* by Jung [Figure 22]. *Misfit Âne/coq*, by Thomas Grünfeld, 1996, a taxidermal chimeric animal, half rooster, half donkey (Coq-Ane in French) [Figure 23], also represents perfectly the process

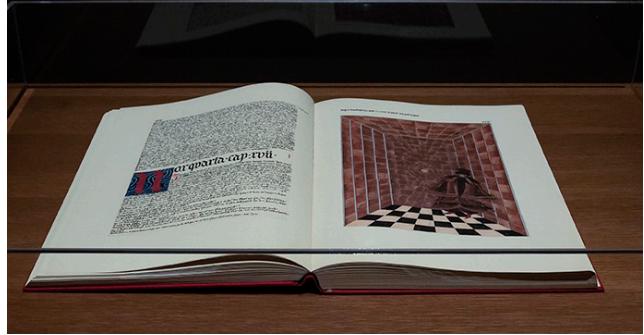


Figure 22. *The Red Book*, Carl Jung, 2009.

of dreaming and its metaphors (Passer du coq à l'âne in French means changing subject without transition). Two excerpts of film are presented, *La Maison du Docteur Edward* -1945- from Hitchcock, whose scenery was designed by Salvador Dali, and *A Dangerous Method* -2011- by Cronenberg, staging the lives and relationships of Freud and Jung. The contemporary work of artist Julia Lockheart, who has three artworks exhibited [Figure 24], is a delicate homage to Freud and to the insightful and self-revelatory power of sharing and discussing dreams and their waking life associations. In Lockheart's work, a dream, while being discussed (through associations notably with waking life memories) in a public assembly facilitated by psychologist Mark Blagrove, is painted live onto pages torn from *The Interpretation of Dreams* (see Blagrove M. & Lockheart J. -2023-, *The Science and Art of Dreaming*, Routledge, for details). The process allows the dream to return to visual form, while unconscious and self-revelatory processes circulate between the dreamer, the assembly and the painter. This often results in insight for the dreamer during the discussion and/or in response to the final artwork, which is composed of an original confluence of Lockheart's visual representation of the dream and words of Freud which resonate with the dream discussion. One of the paintings depicts an Opera Singer's



Figure 23. *Misfit Âne/coq*, Thomas Grünfeld, 1996.



Figure 24. Three artworks, each with painting and text of a dream, Julia Lockheart, *Choosing Between Two Sets of Keys*, 2022; *Lockdown Dream of Parental Home*, 2020; *Dora's Dream of Being Rescued from a Burning House*, 2020. See DreamsID.com for details.

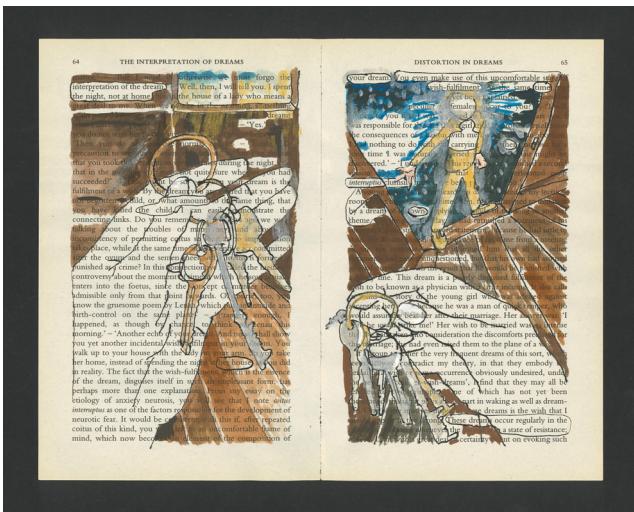


Figure 25. Detail of artwork showing painting of *Opera Singer's Dream of Choosing Between Two Sets of Keys, One Set Familiar, One Set Unfamiliar* (2022).

Dream of Choosing Between Two Sets of Keys, One Set Familiar, One Set Unfamiliar (2022) [Figure 25], which mirrors the psychoanalytic aim of guiding dreamers towards a better understanding of their unconscious mind and waking life experiences.

To exit the room inhabited by the unconscious mind, one walks through a short and dark corridor illuminated by animated abstract, coloured forms [Figure 26] on the floor which represent the passage between sleep/dream and wakefulness. At the end of the corridor one can find a bunch of alarm clocks in a vitrine; this is the entry to the last room, which is full of light, in contrast to the dim light of the previous rooms. This is the room of dream diaries, presenting the personal and collective aspects of dreaming. The walls

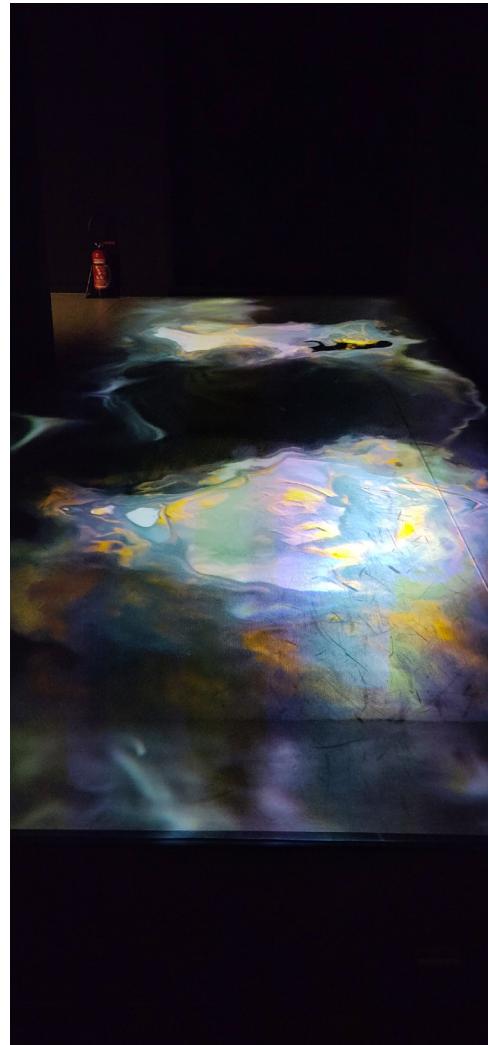


Figure 26. Corridor between rooms illuminated by animated abstract, coloured forms.

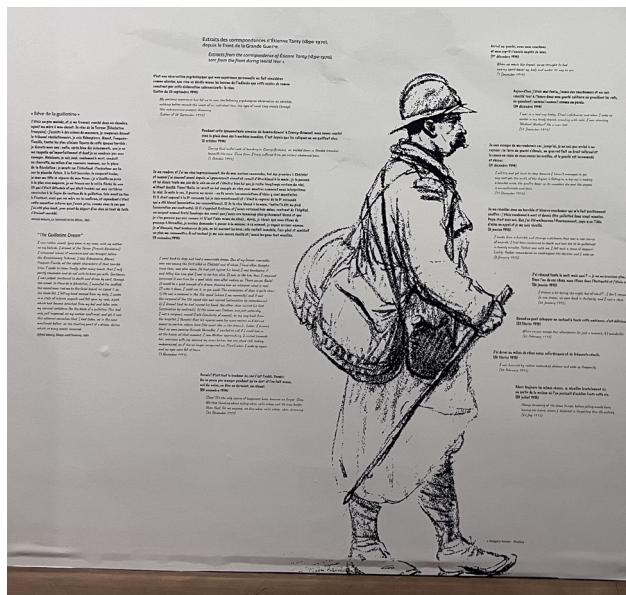


Figure 27. Excerpts of the dream diary of the French soldier, Etienne Tanty (1890-1970), in the trenches during the first world war.

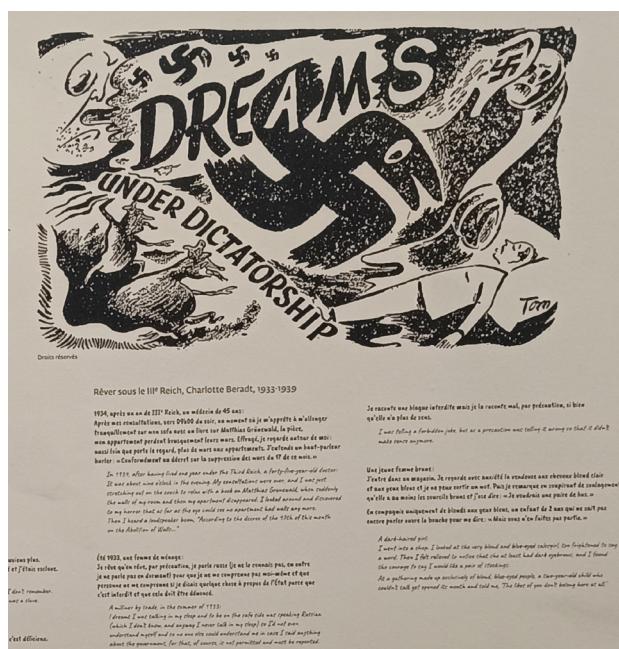


Figure 28. Excerpts from *Dreaming under the Third Reich*, Charlotte Beradt, 1966.

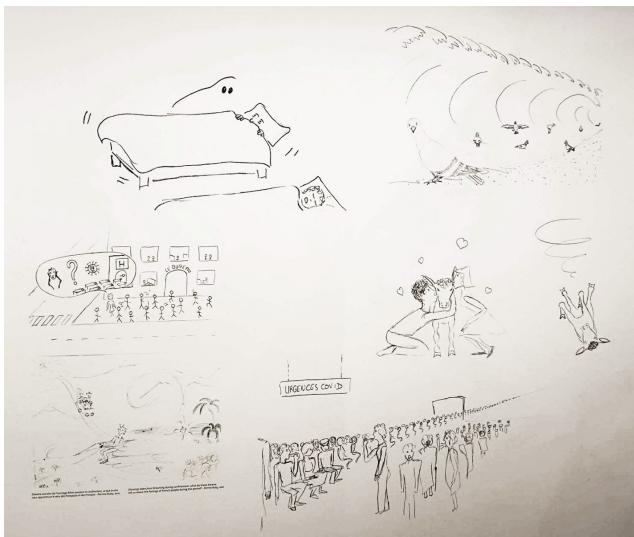


Figure 29. Drawings of dreams collected during the first 2020 lockdown in France and reported in the book *Rêver pendant le confinement* (Ruby, EDP Sciences 2021).

are covered by dream reports from the nineteenth century onwards, and including Alfred Maury's famous (1861) Guillotine Dream. Many dreams on the walls were made by persons in extreme, dangerous and coercive situations such as war (excerpt of the dream diary of a French soldier in the trenches during the first world war [Figure 27], *Dreaming under the Third Reich* -1966- by Charlotte Beradt reporting dreams had by German people between 1933 and 1939 [Figure 28]), prison (prisoners' dreams collected in 2024 in the French prison of Roanne by Arnaud Théval), and lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic (Drawings of dreams collected by Perrine Ruby during the first 2020 lockdown in France and reported in the book *Rêver pendant le confinement*, EDP Sciences 2021) [Figure 29]. They illustrate how dreams extract the true emotional substance of what is lived during the day, fears and desires, and show the powerful, striking and enlightening metaphorical symbolisation of emotions in dreams. This characteristic of dreams, showing our true emotional colours, makes the dreaming process political in the sense that dreams can show, without the censure of moral and social rules/norms, what causes

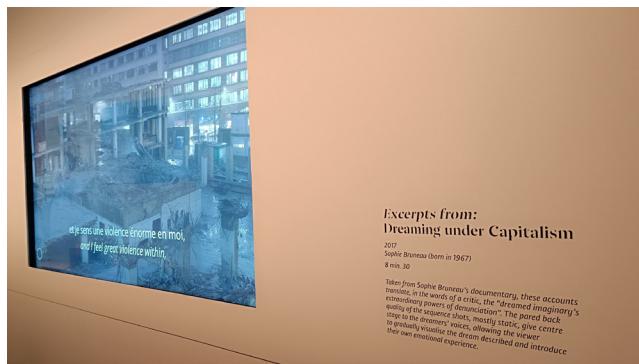


Figure 30. *Dreaming under Capitalism*, documentary film by Sophie Bruneau, 2018.

our strongest emotions. Several artwork/oeuvre in the room were made to show this aspect of dreaming (e.g. *Dreaming under Capitalism* -2018- documentary film by Sophie Bruneau) [Figure 30]. The metaphoric, personally meaningful, insightful, poetic and cheerful aspects of dreaming are also presented through various film/works, notably: Akira Kurosawa's movie *Dreams* (1990); a 2012 series of short animation movies *J'ai revé du président* by Étienne Chaillou and Mathias Théry representing French persons' dreams about recent French Presidents (Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy) [Figure 31]; Rachel Deville's (2013) comic book drawings of her nightmares; *The venomous house* from David B. outstanding comic book representing some of his dreams notably one impersonating death (*Le cheval Blême*, L'association 1992) [Figure 32]; dreams that have led to musical and scientific inspiration; a dream from Michel Jouvet with an oneiric map of the city of Lyon; and the dreams and accompanying illustrations and coloured drawing from Federico Fellini's massive *The Book of Dreams* (2007) [Figure 33].

Some may find that the downsides of the exhibition are a lack of a general framework or understanding showing the connections between the different perspectives on dreaming across time, culture and space, and also the absence of the erotic aspect of dreams. The requirement for a public place such as a museum in France to be politically correct



Figure 31. Short animation movies *J'ai revé du président* / I dreamt of the president by Étienne Chaillou and Mathias Théry, 2012.



Figure 32. Comic book *The venomous house*, David B., *Le cheval Blême*, L'association, 1992.

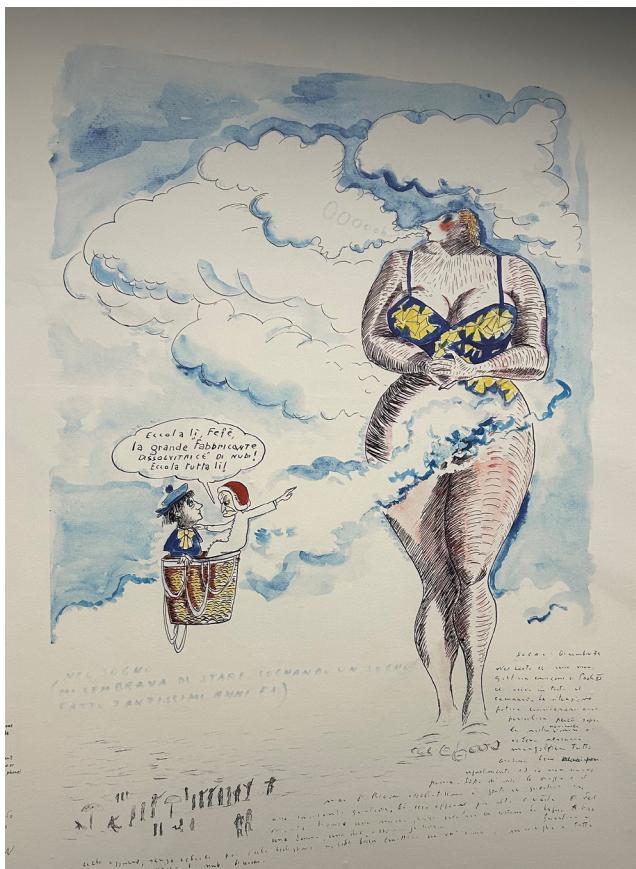


Figure 33. Drawing from *The Book of Dreams*, Federico Fellini, 2007.

also hampers the discussion of the amoral and/or political aspects that dreaming can have. Lastly, the representation of dream bizarreness through artificial intelligence in a giant animation movie presented on the top of the wall along the whole exhibition misses the true bizarreness of dreams (which are issued from personal representations and formed through a meaningful process according to many psychological theories). This exhibit could have represented the bizarre elements of real dream reports instead. This is even more surprising in that the exhibition ends with an artificial intelligence set to draw live the visitors' dreams that are orally reported in a microphone.

At the practical level, being in the exhibition and interacting and experiencing the juxtaposition of artifacts, imagery, sound and scholarly information within the rich thematic environments takes many hours to view and to take in. Spending several hours at the exhibition is very much recommended for anyone interested in dreams and dreaming. The success of the exhibition is shown in that in December 2024, "Le temps d'un rêve" welcomed 52,000 visitors.

## Acknowledgements

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