

# KUNSTMUSEUM THUN



## FABRICE HYBER L'ARTISTE AGRICULTEUR 21.3. – 2.8.2026

### ENGLISH

“Basically, I do the same thing with my works: I sow trees, as well as signs or pictures. They are there, like seeds I sow visible thoughts, they sprout and grow. Then I have no more power over them.”

– Fabrice Hyber

Fabrice Hyber (born in 1961 in Luçon, France) is one of the most inventive figures of contemporary European art. As an artist, farmer and educator, he connects different areas and opens up a world to the general public, raising awareness of nature and the needs of the Earth. He often uses organic processes and natural materials in his works: plants, growth, transformation and cycles form the basis of his thinking.

Since the 1990s, Hyber has been growing a forest in the commune of Mareuil-sur-Lay-Dissais in the heart of France's Vendée region, on land formerly belonging to his parents who were sheep farmers. It was here that he founded the studio “La Vallée” as a place of learning, experimentation and reflection. This has been the starting point for his entire artistic work ever since. Together with his father, he has meticulously sown about 300,000 tree seeds from several hundred species, gradually transforming the former farmland into a forest of several dozen hectares. The landscape itself is thus becoming a work of art. Hyber no longer regards the studio as a closed space but as a laboratory,

garden and field of experimentation. He often works on up to 100 canvases at a time and the pictures grow like trees – he adds a sentence here, draws a root there, and then expands the work organically for years. To create his works, Hyber uses heavily water-diluted oil paint with very little binder. This technique is similar to watercolour painting and results in a high degree of transparency. As a result, underlying sketches, notes and corrections remain visible like a palimpsest, capturing the processes of thought and growth in the image. His works do not follow any particular compositional pattern but are created in an intuitive and process-oriented manner.

Hyber's artistic practice is multidisciplinary, ranging from painting and drawing to sculpture and video installation. Since the 1980s he has been developing his so-called *POFs* (Prototypes d'Objets en Fonctionnement [Prototypes of Working Objects]). These are everyday objects that he assembles, melts down or transforms to create new objects with new functions. By transforming their original purpose, the *POFs* reflect the audience's relationship with everyday objects and works of art and challenge their imagination. Hyber's *POFs*, installations and drawings are like parts of a larger ecological network or system that he has built up over many years. Yet he remains a silent observer who prefers to sow rather than explain – which is what makes his work so multifaceted and open.

Fabrice Hyber. *L'Artiste Agriculteur* was conceived in close collaboration with the Kunstmuseum Thurgau, which is simultaneously showing *Fabrice Hyber – Homme de Terre* (29 March – 30 August 2026). The two exhibitions represent the artist's most comprehensive solo exhibition in Switzerland to date. At the Kunstmuseum Thun, the focus is on agriculture – a central field of research in Hyber's oeuvre.

While the German word for agriculture, *Landwirtschaft*, primarily emphasises the economic aspect of the concept, the English and French *agriculture* refers to the "culture of the earth". Here, agricultural practices appear not only as production techniques, but as cultural actions that shape landscapes, influence ecological relationships, and form social notions of nature. *L'Artiste Agriculteur* thus shows Hyber as someone who does not produce art but cultivates it. In this sense, his works combine aesthetic, ecological and social issues, and open up a terrain in which learning, observation and action are inextricably linked.



Fabrice Hyber at "La Vallée"

## ROOM 1

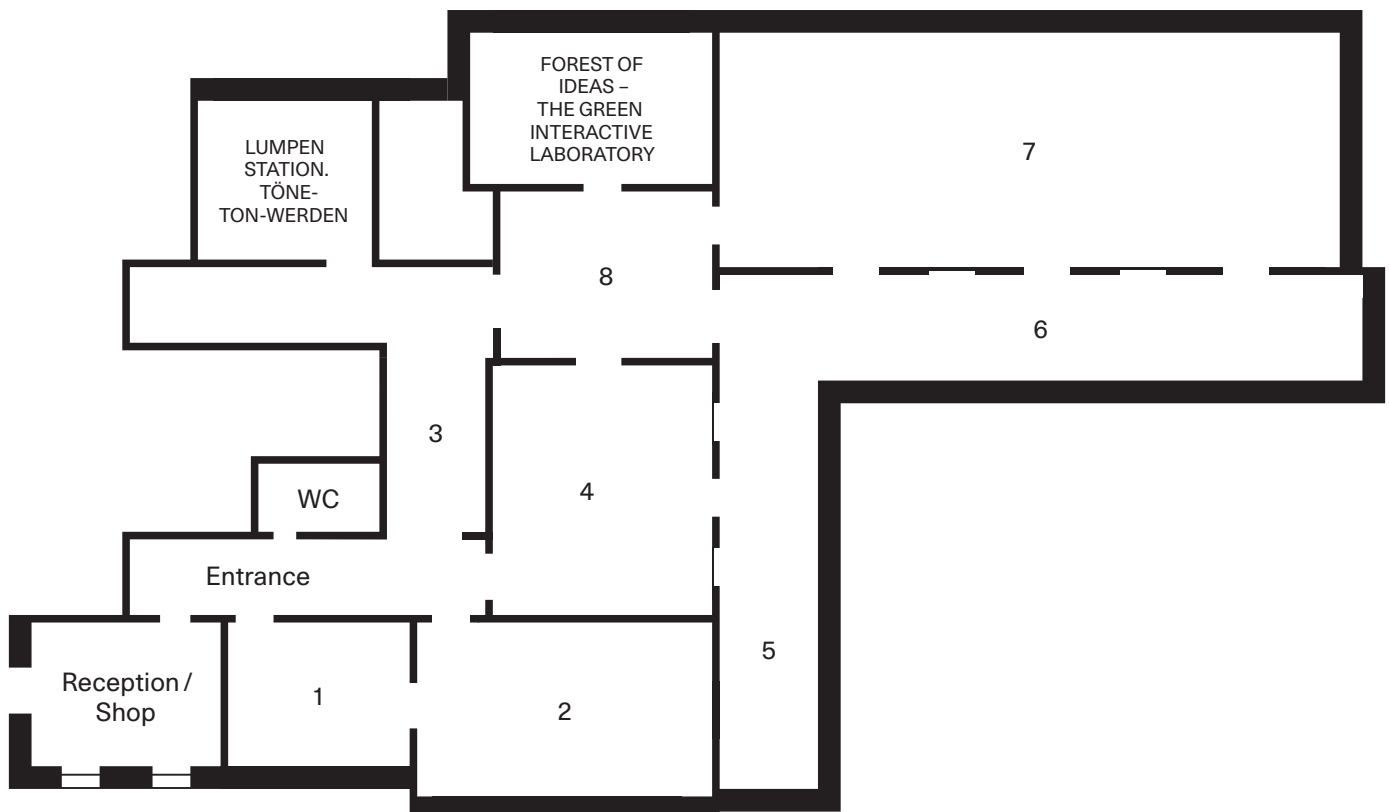
In *Naissance de l'agriculture* (2008), Hyber explores the origins of agriculture. Human intervention, driven by the desire to control nature, transforms the landscape. Hyber symbolises this through anthropomorphised trees, suddenly endowed with legs and deliberately positioned within the landscape. By attributing human characteristics to nature, he suggests that agriculture uproots the tree from its natural, fixed location, turning it into a mobile agent within a system planned by humans.

## ROOM 2

Hyber's artistic practice is rooted in his upbringing and combines artistic thinking with agricultural experience. In *Camoufl* (2023) and *Les énergies du ruminant* (2023), cows are a recurring theme which epitomise this approach. The cow appears as a real animal, as an abstract form, as a series of spots or as a cloud. Hyber uses it as an image for a way of thinking that is slow, circular and deeply connected to the land. Rumination becomes a metaphor for mental processing: knowledge does not arise linearly, but through repetition, variation and patient observation.

*La plante idéale / totale* (2022) is a more recent work that shows a fictitious plant in its entirety, in both its surface and subterranean dimensions. Hyber has felt very attached to nature since his childhood. Influenced by his family, his parents instilled a deep knowledge of plants and ecological relationships in him in a completely natural manner. In this work, Hyber combines elements of various types of fruit and vegetables – leeks, grapes, apples, radishes, potatoes – into a single "super plant" that has strong roots and a sturdy green stem bearing many fruits. It is a complete plant with

## OVERVIEW



superpowers that embodies Hyber's vision of an ideal, imaginary nature. It exists only as an image and is brimming with fantasy, energy and vitality, but makes no claim to permanence. Its complexity invites you to think about growth, transformation and the possibilities of nature: it is both botanically inspired and artistically invented.

### ROOM 3

*Trésor* (2012–2022) is the culmination of his thinking and creativity. Here Hyber redefines the concept of wealth by considering the regenerative power of nature to be its most important asset and resource. The monumental apple tree mutates into an allegory of life and produces oxygen, food and genetic information. Hyber uses diluted, transparent layers of paint to make the invisible visible. The vibrant green marks places of vitality and photosynthesis. The canvas acts as a drawing board on which notes and root networks show the tree as part of an infinite, fluid cycle.

### ROOM 4

The sculptural installation *La douche de jus de fleurs* (2012) is a typical example of Hyber's artistic practice in which natural processes, organic materials and poetic transformations play a central role. The title – which literally means “the shower of flower juice” – refers to something that can be understood both literally and metaphorically. Hyber uses such terms to blur the boundaries between art, biology and everyday life. The withered flowers sit in a net-like container. As they slowly decay, gases, moisture and coloured juices are released which drip through the sieve-like floor giving the impression of a shower of flower juice.

In this work, Hyber explores the idea that plants are not only aesthetic objects, but also carriers of energy, knowledge and movement. The “flower juice” represents the living cycle of extracting, condensing and distributing plant matter. As is the case in many of his works, it is less about the finished object than the process – about flowing, transforming and circulating. The work can also be read as a kind of material research in which the artist investigates how natural materials become bearers of meaning. Meanwhile, the poetic title creates a lightness that is typical of Hyber's oeuvre. The work is intended to remind us that we can not only look at nature, but also feel, smell and experience it.

In *Graines* (2025), Hyber fills the entire picture surface with seeds of different sizes, colours and patterns. These variations are not merely aesthetic decisions but are an expression of his fundamental exploration of the principle of living things. The seeds come across as elementary units which multiply, connect and form new structures. By varying the scale – from microscopically small to oversized characters – Hyber reveals how complex systems emerge from inconspicuous beginnings. The diverse colours reinforce this impression of a dynamic, constantly changing organism. Each colour represents a different energy, a different potential, a different development. The arrangement of the seeds in groups, lines or scattered constellations refers to biological, social and mental processes: germination, propagation, mutation, cooperation. *Graines* thus becomes a visual metaphor for the origin of life. Hyber shows that growth is not linear but occurs in a variety of rhythms and patterns. The seeds are both a beginning and a possibility – bearers of a future which only unfolds by interacting with its surroundings.

### ROOM 5

In *War* (2008), Hyber depicts an organic network of legumes and vegetables under the earth's surface, interwoven in peaceful coexistence. This hidden world seems stable, nourishing and self-contained. Above the surface, however, a completely different picture unfolds numerous dramatic lines cut across the sky, seemingly emanating from invisible points beyond the mountains. They remind us of missile trajectories, communication signals or bundles of energy – a network of forces torpedoing the calm harmony of the ground.

Hyber uses this stark contrast between the quiet, fertile underground and the charged, potentially aggressive atmosphere above, to explore the tension between nature and human influence, between growth and destruction, between hidden stability and visible unrest. Numbers, words and excerpts from the right-hand panel (the one depicting Hell) of Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (from around 1490) are also integrated into the picture. Here, the image becomes a kind of notice board, where different elements are brought into play at the same time to stimulate reflection on several levels and about different topics. The colour palette is rather muted, with beige below ground and a grey hue for everything above ground. This work is one of the first in which the artist focused his attention on the “underground”. *War* is an early example of Hyber's approach to life on the ground and his fascination with hidden ecological and social contexts. A look into the ground shows that life, hope, peace and harmony always exist together under the earth's surface. At the same time, the artist is warning the viewer: this subterranean harmony is not an inexhaustible reservoir and it can only exist as long as the world does not fall completely out of kilter. If the visible surface is devastated, the invisible in the soil will also lose its regenerative power, and nothing will remain that could flourish again.



Fabrice Hyber, *War*, 2008

### ROOMS 5 & 6

*POF n° 141: la centrifugeuse* (2008) is part of Hyber's series of POFs, in which everyday objects and natural elements are transformed into new, often playful forms. In this work, a plant and its pot are mounted on a mechanism that allows them to rotate at high speed on their own axis. By referring to a functional object such as a centrifuge, Hyber evokes the idea of the movement, separation and reorganisation of matter by transposing an everyday object into an artistic context. With its playful qualities, the work can be read as a reflection on the processes of transformation and change, not only in relation to the nature surrounding us, but on everything that exists, including ourselves. The ease with which Hyber shifts, combines and rearranges forms points to the constant movement within which life takes place.

The video series on display is also part of the *POFs* series. Produced in the early 2000s, these videos depict everyday objects undergoing transformation. They are staged in a theatrical manner by Eliane Pine Carrington. By capturing the works in video format, the *POFs* shift from a sculptural medium toward a narrative dimension, linking the sculptural concept to its (hypothetical) application in everyday life. Carrington's theatrical staging deliberately breaks with the distance typically associated with museums and places the interaction with the object at the forefront.

#### ROOM 7

For Hyber, art is a process of learning, observing and constantly making new connections. In the exhibition, this idea can be experienced spatially, as the exhibition space itself is modelled on a place of learning. The seating reminds us of school desks and classroom chairs – places where knowledge is created, shared and questioned. The exhibition invites us to position ourselves not as observers, but as learners, as part of an open, moving system. The works stand on wheels, as though they could be moved, rearranged or placed in different contexts at any time. This mobility refers to the possibility of changing perspective, shifting order and rethinking the bigger picture. Visitors are invited to find their own position and reorientate themselves in this space, as it does not offer ready-made answers but instead makes the processes visible.

The large-format works presented here are much more than classic landscape painting: they form a visual ecosystem in which art and biology merge inseparably and invite further reflection. In *La Serrie, paysage biographique de mes parents* (2022), Hyber draws a parallel between his personal background and ecological transformation. This work is a profound exploration of his roots. *La Serrie* is the place of his childhood, where his studio now stands. In this biographical landscape Hyber links the story of his parents with the transformation of the barren land into a thriving forest.



Fabrice Hyber, *La Serrie, paysage biographique de mes parents*, 2022

#### ROOM 8

*Maquette de la Vallée* (2023) is a three-dimensional representation of the landscape that has been at the very heart of Hyber's artistic thinking for many years. Hyber understands "La Vallée" not only as a geographical location, but also as a laboratory, studio and living archive. It is here that he plants trees, observes ecological processes and develops the open systems that shape his entire oeuvre. The model translates this real environment into an abstract but accurate form. Contours, elevations, watercourses and paths become visible and provide an overview of the spatial relationships that connect Hyber's projects. This miniature landscape makes it possible to experience how art, nature and time intertwine in "La Vallée": places where Hyber has planted trees, zones where vegetation proliferates, and areas where new works are created all interact with each other. As an artistic object, the model serves not only as a guide, but also as a tool for reflection. It depicts

"La Vallée" as a growing, constantly changing ecosystem that Hyber has shaped over many years and which in turn shapes his works.

For the past two years he has also been breathing new life into his home village. He is designing large-scale murals for the abandoned church of Château-Guibert, and in the centre of the village he wants to reopen a restaurant that brings art, agriculture and regional cuisine together. The village itself is thus becoming a living part of his artistic ecosystem.

#### FOREST OF IDEAS – THE GREEN INTERACTIVE LABORATORY

To accompany the exhibition, the museum invites you to an open ideas laboratory – a space for artistic creation, experimentation, learning and joint reflection on nature, forests and our relationship with the environment. The ideas laboratory is not a classic workshop, but a lively, changing environment where artistic work, knowledge transfer and discussion join forces. Inspired by Hyber's interdisciplinary approach – between art, science, drawing, botany and philosophy – this space becomes a place where questions are more important than ready-made answers. The room is therefore open, playful and process-orientated in its design. Natural materials, drawings, texts and workstations create an atmosphere simultaneously reminiscent of a forest, a studio and a laboratory of thought. Visitors are invited to linger, observe, read, discuss and develop their own ideas. The space constantly evolves throughout the exhibition thanks to the contributions of the participants. In guided and open formats, artistic practice and learning go hand in hand in a playful, exploratory and intergenerational manner.

#### COMMUNITY GARDEN IN THE MUSEUM'S OUTDOOR AREA

In the museum's outside area, planted vegetable boxes provided by OGG Bern [Bern Economic Non-Profit Organisation] invite visitors to get involved. The raised beds are intended to serve as an extension to the exhibition and an additional learning space.