

INVENTORY NO.	ARTIST	DATE	TITLE	FRAC COLLECTION
00-007	Chen Zhen	1993-1995	Landsobjectscope	Alsace
90-003	Chen Zhen	1990	L'information condensée/L'écriture bloquée	Alsace
CNAC 06-630	Mounir Fatmi	2003-2004	Saves Manhattan 01	Alsace
99-473	Matthieu Laurette	2000	El Gran Trueque	Aquitaine
86-182	Cindy Sherman	1980	Untitled n°67	Aquitaine
86-181	Cindy Sherman	1985	Untitled n°149	Aquitaine
AUP00601	Luc Tuymans	2005	Evidence	Auvergne
AUP99304	Luc Tuymans	1987	Curtains (rideaux)	Auvergne
AUP99305	Luc Tuymans	1989	Sans titre	Auvergne
FBN 2003-05 (I-7)	Sophie Calle	2003	Unfinished / Cash Machine	Basse-Normandie
FBN 2004-06	ORLAN	1988	Orlan avant Sainte Orlan	Basse-Normandie
9850025	Daniel Buren	1983-1985	Peinture sur/sous verre n°15 recouvrant partiellement un ess	Bourgogne
2009-10	Lara Almarcegui	2005	Matériaux de construction-Dijon centre historique	Bourgogne
9840015	Gerhard Richter	1982	Merlin	Bourgogne
9950010	Philippe Parreno	1994-1995	Un homme public	Bretagne
92571	Louise Lawler	1990	Is she ours?	Bretagne
92572	Louise Lawler	1989	Presse-papier, Sans titre/Untitled	Bretagne
95696	Raymond Hains	1993	Coquille Saint-Jacques	Bretagne
95695	Raymond Hains	1993	La Shell de Rotella	Bretagne
S95.7	Jimmie Durham	1994	Paradigm For An Arch	Champagne-Ardenne
DIV98.19	Raymond Hains	1987	Shell	Champagne-Ardenne
2004.29	Raymond Hains	1996	Rodin/Champs-Élysées de la sculpture/Balzac déplacé	Champagne-Ardenne
F87.12	Raymond Hains	1987	Paris-Paris: Les équipes en lice (avec Raymond Bianco)	Champagne-Ardenne
F87.11	Raymond Hains	1987	Paris-Paris-Poste chrétien de Troyes	Champagne-Ardenne
2004.36	Raymond Hains	1998	Le Cheval de Reims	Champagne-Ardenne
DIV99.5	Gustav Metzger	1996-1999	Historic Photographs: To Walk Onto, a.o.	Champagne-Ardenne
13.11.05.3D	Subodh Gupta	2008	Thing	Corse
83.072	Cindy Sherman	1982	Sans titre/Untitled n°106	IAC, Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes
83.073	Cindy Sherman	1982	Sans titre/Untitled n°107	IAC, Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes
87.009	Hans Haacke	1981	Creating Consent	IAC, Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes
2010.001	Latifa Echakhch	2008	Hospitalité	IAC, Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes
2010.006	Michel François	2004-2009	Walk through a line of nest lights	IAC, Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes
D O 1600 (I-31)	Frédéric Bruly Bouabré	2009	Sans titre	Île-de-France
98O310T628	Gabriel Orozco	1997	Ventilator	Languedoc-Roussillon
199311	Douglas Huebler	1982	Variable Piece n°70 (In Process), Global, Crocodile Tears II, Eric Lord	Limousin
201015 (01-05)	Bruno Serralogue	1994	Courses de Karts, 10 Juillet 1994; Fête du Cheval, 10 Juillet 1994; a.o.	Limousin
01.02.01	Dara Birbaum	1984	Damnation of Faust	Lorraine
95.02.03	Niung Yang Ping	1995	Bala laveur	Lorraine
09.08.01	Hakim Farocki	2006	Arbeitser verlassen die Fabrik in elf Jahrehmen	Lorraine
07.11.01	Boris Ondrejicka	1999	I am the wall	Lorraine
03.03.01	Monica Bonvicini	1998	Hammering out (an old argument)	Lorraine
21-01-03	N55	2001	Shall Shell System	Midi-Pyrénées, les Abruzzois
11.018.001	Bouchra Khalili	2011	The Constallation n°7	Nord-Pas de Calais
11.019.001	Bouchra Khalili	2011	The Constallation n°8	Nord-Pas de Calais
07.30. (I-3)	Claire Fontaine	2007	Untitled (Identité, souveraineté et tradition)	Nord-Pas de Calais
00.30.1	Joël Suerlinckx	1999	Ronds Sur le Sol	Nord-Pas de Calais
04.19.1	Simon Starling	2003	Carbon (Perderson)	Nord-Pas de Calais
02.19.1-02.19.8	General Idea	1989	Eye of the beholder (Ensemble d'écussons)	Nord-Pas de Calais
10040309 (I-01)	Lili Reynaud Dewar	2011	Some Objects Blackened and X Body too	Des Pays de la Loire
2041305	ORLAN	2007	Élude Documentaire: Sculpture de plis ou robe sans corps n°1	Des Pays de la Loire
999011303	ORLAN	1993	Sourire de plaisir	Des Pays de la Loire
011020501 (I-14)	Jimmy Robert	2010	Untitled	Des Pays de la Loire
993020401	Renee Green	1991	Mise en Scène	Des Pays de la Loire
08-004	Yan Pei-Ming	2007	New Born, New Life	Picardie, des mondes dessinés
CNAC 2014-0103	Dennis Adams	2012	Malraux's shoes	Aquitaine
081262 (2)	Ursula Bleemann	2008-2007	Desert Radio Drone	Bretagne
F87.6	Raymond Hains	1987	Les Vérités de la Palisse	Champagne-Ardenne
12/12.03/DVD	Antoni Muntadas	1995	Portrait	Corse
16/12.03/V	Agnès Accorsi	2002	L'âme hospitalière	Corse
7/10.08/V	Şener Özmen/Cengiz Tekin	2004	The meeting or Bonjour Monsieur Courbet	Corse
2012.071.1	documentation céline duval & Hans-Peter Feldmann	2001-2002	Cahiers d'Image n°17, documentation céline duval & Hans-Peter Feldmann	Corse
2012.076.6	documentation céline duval	2005	Les temps d'un site	Haute-Normandie
2012.075.5	documentation céline duval	2010	Sur un pied	Haute-Normandie
2013.071.15	documentation céline duval	2013	Coeur, point et ligne sur plan	Haute-Normandie
2012.078.8	documentation céline duval	2010	Cahier du Musée	Haute-Normandie
2010.121.2	Hans-Peter Feldmann	2005	Paris	Haute-Normandie
2012.090.6	Hans-Peter Feldmann	1998	1000 Frauen. Die Sammlung Hansen	Haute-Normandie
2012.088.4	Hans-Peter Feldmann	1994	Porträt	Haute-Normandie
s.n.	Bibliothèque Fantastique	s.a	*Ciprian Homorodean, Antoine Lefebvre, Farah Khelli, a.o.	Haute-Normandie
87.004	Sarkis	1983	Le Forgeron dans le rôle de KRIEGSSCHATZ	IAC, Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes
IE07798	Cao Fei	2006	Whose utopia	Île-de-France
IE06767	Alex Chan	2005	The French democracy	Île-de-France
061A0818	The Atlas Group/Walid Raad	2001	I only wish that I could weep.	Languedoc-Roussillon
198314 (31)	Henri Coldeboeuf	1981	Fête Foraine	Limousin
198314 (35)	Henri Coldeboeuf	1981	Ostensions	Limousin
12 10 06 (I-6)	Marta Caradec	2012	Serie: Audun-le-Tiche	Lorraine
994.10.1	Carsten Höller	1991	Komm Kleines Kriegst was Feines	Poitou-Charentes
992.24.1 à 28	Domenique Gonzalez-Foerster	1992	Cabinet de Pulsions	Poitou-Charentes
994.12.1	Paul McCarthy	1983-1994	Colonial Tea Cup	Poitou-Charentes
988.5.1	Raymond Hains	1974-1988	Palimpsest Sainte Radegonde	Poitou-Charentes
2011.734 (A)	Bouchra Khalili	2011	The Constallation n°4	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
2011.734 (B)	Bouchra Khalili	2011	The Constallation n°5	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
2011.734 (C)	Bouchra Khalili	2011	The Constallation n°6	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
2001.466	Jessica Stockholder	2000	Untitled (n°338)	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
2006.567	Yto Barrada	2001	Détroit de Gibraltar, Tanger 2003	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
98.372	Thomas Hirschhorn	1988-1990	Éponges	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
97.329	ABSALON	1993	Botaille	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
1007.574	The Atlas Group/Walid Raad	2001	We can make rain but no one can't do it	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
2013.11.02	Mehmet Gaba	2012	Pierre et Anne Curie (sans astrucque mava)	Reunion
2012	Mehmet Gaba	2012	Alfred Jodet (sans perdue mava)	Reunion
006301	Pierre Huyghe	1996-1997	Dubbing	Poitou-Charentes
990 0101	Ben (Benjamin Vautier)	1990	Étude relative à la commandes passée par le FRAC Centre.	Centre
2007-101	Jean-Christophe Norman	2006	A Quarter Upside Down	Franche-Comté

French Regional Collections of Contemporary Art

Van Abbemuseum

**A
RE
PUBLIC
OF
ART**

4

Foreword

Bernard de Montferrand

7

Charles Esche

11

Introduction

Annie Fletcher

16

A Take of Two Collections

Diana Franssen

26

On the Diversity of the FRACs

VAM in conversation with Catherine Elkar, Xavier
Franceschi and Laurence Gateau

38

**For a Chronopolitical Approach to the Internationalisation
of Art Collections**

Aliocha Imhoff and Kantuta Quirós

47

Deactivating the Collection's Aesthetic Function

Stephen Wright

57

FRACs: Back to the Future

Ami Barak

65

Biographies

71

Colophon

A REPUBLIC OF ART

Foreword

It is a great honour for the French FRACs that the Van Abbemuseum has chosen to present their collections as a whole.

This exhibition first of all casts a fresh light on French cultural policy, and on one of its most original aspects: the Fonds Régionaux d'Art Contemporain (FRAC). The FRAC adventure started just over thirty years ago, when a basic structure was set up in each of France's regions, financed equally by the State and the regional authorities. The mission of these associations was to put together collections of contemporary art and make them available to new publics across the entire regional territory. This model has worked well. Today, the twenty-three FRAC collections are among the finest in France and in Europe.

This show at the Van Abbemuseum is a recognition of the work carried out by the FRACs - remaining constantly in touch with artists from France and around the world, while examining the means to make new audiences appreciate today's artistic productions. Our neighbours often see France as being a highly centralised, and self-regarding country. We are pleased to provide them with a more realistic image of our country, which is decentralised and resolutely international.

But this show above all is about the view of a great Dutch museum of the FRACs' actions and their collections. How have small, regional French structures managed to bring together these international collections, expressing in such an exceptional manner all of the diversity of the past thirty years of artistic expression? It is thanks to the Van Abbemuseum's renowned rigour that it is particularly appropriate to answer this question, and lay bare the profound nature of our collections.

I was fortunate enough to be friends with Edy de Wilde - one of the museum's most remarkable directors - and Charles Esche together with his team is carrying on de Wilde's experimental tradition. Thus, the homage they are paying to the "republic of art" has a particular value for the FRACs. I affirm this all the more strongly given that I used to be the French Ambassador to the Netherlands: a country which is at once so near and so different from our own, and which always observes France with a friendship, which is all the more solid for being free from indulgence.

There is often talk of a "European culture" as a past reality and a sharing of our impressive national heritages. But a new European culture of our own time, was born before us. It is above all a communion of thoughts and feelings regarding the works of living

artists who raise tantalising questions about the meaning of our lives, and of a world in which the only answer provided by progress is to push back its limits ever further.

I hope that the exhibition *A Republic of Art* will add at least another brick to the distinctly vital construction of tomorrow's Cultural Europe, and will incite other foreign curators to propose new readings of our collections.

The FRACs gratefully thank the Van Abbemuseum its director Charles Esche, and in particular the curators Annie Fletcher and Diana Franssen, who took the time to travel around France and visit a large number of FRACs so as to get to know and understand them with friendly curiosity. Our thanks go to the three FRAC directors Catherine Elkar, Laurence Gateau and Xavier Franceschi - associated curators for this project - as well as to Anne-Claire Duprat, the General Secretary of PLATFORM, who played an essential role in the coordination.

The FRACs also express their gratitude to the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication and the Institut Français, as well as to all of our French and Dutch partners, and in particular the Ambassade de France aux Pays-Bas, the Ministère des Outre-mer, the Fondation Hippocrène and the VSB Fonds,

whose generous patronage has made this exhibition possible.

A REPUBLIC OF ART

Foreword

It is a great pleasure to be able to introduce here in Eindhoven one of the artistic jewels of the French fifth republic to a non-Francophone public for the first time. The creation of the Fonds Régionaux d'Art Contemporain (FRAC) represents an act of determined cultural will on behalf of a national government that is hard to imagine in Western Europe today. The principle of taking the most challenging of contemporary cultural expressions into the provinces of a western European country is one with which we have both experience and sympathy at the Van Abbemuseum, though the commitment of central government to do so is much less familiar here. Our Eindhoven museum grew out of an individual citizen's desire to bring modern bourgeois culture to the southern Dutch province because he saw there was a lack of high culture in the growing industrial city. In keeping with the Dutch state policy - the so-called Thorbecke principal - such actions are not the role of government but of private initiatives. The FRACs' mission in contrast has always been one shaped by French national cultural policy and statist in operation though allowing for the eclectic selection of works through various independent acquisition committees. The ambition of the state from the 1980s onwards has remained to develop an understanding of interna-

tional contemporary art throughout French territory - not just in the capital - as a way to ensure wide access to new forms and ideas that living artists produce around the moment of their creation. This ideally creates the possibility for a shared contemplation of the world today through art, one that extends across French society. While never quite articulated in these terms, we might imagine that the hopes of the state funders have centred on the potential for a public discussion about the artistic and social function of art that is based on more than economic value. The extent to which this hope has been fulfilled is open to debate but, in all events, it is unquestionably true that French citizens across the country continue to have extraordinary access to esteemed contemporary artists and their engagement with the complexities of the world today.

With this exhibition, we celebrate the exceptional collections of the FRACs that have been at the disposal of regional audiences for more than thirty years. In that time, the collections have built their own history and naturally offer a particular but extensive overview of the development of art over the period just passed. Combining all the FRACs together gives the Van Abbemuseum a unique opportunity to look back at the changing idea of the contemporary

from a French and Western European point of view. Making the selection has meant addressing some 26,000 artworks and weaving a chronological narrative out of a hugely diverse range of material. I would like to thank sincerely Annie Fletcher and Diana Franssen of our museum for rising to this challenge, as well as all the directors and curators of the individual FRACs who have been so generous with their time and willingness to lend works for the project.

Broadly, the exhibition begins in the early 1980s, when the post-1945 condition was still dominant in Western Europe - shaped by the shadow of the Cold War and a political commitment to autonomous art. It moves through this period to arrive at more contemporary moments in the 1990s when relational aesthetics was at its height, an art movement named in France and heavily influenced by French artists. Finally the exhibition ends in our present moment with the worldly, differentiated and narrative-intense artworks of this century. This chronology is, of course, one possible thread that could be drawn through the collections and, inevitably, it takes its lead from the research and exhibition making of the Van Abbemuseum over the past decade. A comparison between the *A Republic of Art* exhibition and our collection displays in the museum's new building might

therefore be a rewarding experience for the visitors. Although each exhibition follows a different time span, the reading of artworks in terms of the society in which they were produced and the encouragement to read history from today's point of view is shared.

The differences between the two exhibitions are however noteworthy. The Van Abbemuseum has a different geographic focus in general, though some artists from the late 1990s are common; the FRAC collection, being much broader, includes artists who were never considered by the Van Abbemuseum and yet have come to be seen as key figures of the late modern and contemporary past. The Van Abbemuseum has fewer individual artists but often collects in greater depth, being associated with the decisions of particular directors or curators. This would equally be the case of an individual FRAC but, united together, they show a collecting policy mediated by social, political and economic conditions that reflects general artistic developments as seen from France. Perhaps this aspect is where a reflection about the nature of a "republic of art" might be most relevant. The commitment to establish and ensure the sustainability of the FRACs is an expression of the will of a republican central authority in France that is less familiar in other parts of Europe. Cultural

France is understood as an entity in its own right, an idealised national project and projection of a French estimation of civilised society. As such, this entity sometimes intersects awkwardly with contemporary arguments for relativism, “Anglo-Saxon” pragmatism and the breaking down of distinctions between artistic forms or high and low culture. Yet, the fact that it is maintained is valuable in its own terms, as a defence against the flattening of all distinctions in the name of free market realism. The FRAC collection exhibition - this manifestation of a republic of art - will allow the Van Abbemuseum’s public to make their own judgements, not only about the artworks on display, but also about the policy that allowed them to be here in the first place.

A REPUBLIC OF ART

Introduction

A Republic of Art is an exhibition about the world of visual culture in the French republic from the establishment of the FRAC system in the early 1980s right up to current developments in contemporary practice today. Tracing, for the first time, the visual culture of the past thirty years *A Republic of Art* draws on the extraordinary art collections put together by the FRACs (Fonds Régionaux d'Art Contemporain).

The achievements of the FRACs tell a story of art, and how its forms and subject matters have changed as society and technology have developed. It also speaks of how this European country understood the importance of contemporary culture in the development of civil society. Established in the 1980s these new art centres were radical indeed because they supported experimentation and dialogue with living artists both in France and abroad. They supported new art practice while building a new public collection of contemporary art for the people .

Given these parameters, each FRAC ventured into unknown territory - as it were - building the path as they were walking over it. According to Ami Barak in his essay, this worked because adventurous young curators (a relatively new discipline at that time) were employed rather than their more rigidly professional counterparts in the museum. He notes “FRACs

were structures that were simple and full of common sense”. These directors negotiated a complex terrain between working with art and artists of that moment and deciding (without the leisure of time or hindsight) what to collect for their community. As time went on, this presented many interesting challenges which all public collections face. What should one collect for the public? To whom was one speaking? Were these contemporary art practices reflective of recent cultural and aesthetic developments? When the world was opening through Internet and increased global mobility - which works would prove significant and resonant over time? Would these internationally oriented collecting institutions attend to the new global artistic developments in the peripheries and new centres of culture or remain oriented towards the “old” centres? Each FRAC in its own way found the balance between developing consistent collections by determining the resonance of an artwork in the present as it is occurring - no mean feat by any account.

We are delighted to present this accompanying publication which substantiates this story through a series of interviews and commissioned essays. In order to do this, we invited a diverse set of interlocutors working widely in the field and we included

a rather more local perspective - that of the Van Abbemuseum - as a collecting institution functioning with all of the same concerns over the same time period.

To begin with, Van Abbemuseum curator Diana Franssen delves into the origins of the FRACs and casts an archival expert's eye on how the policy and institutional set-up determined a set of radical propositions for how contemporary art might be produced, collected and dispersed throughout the community in its own time. In her essay she also reflects on the similarities and differences between the Van Abbemuseum's own history of collecting over the same period.

Already in 1982 the FRACs were pointing towards a flexible policy of "using" artworks and "deploying" the collection by constantly and actively displaying and discussing the works throughout the region (in schools libraries and other public spaces). This policy of dispersal is one of the most enduring and important legacies of the FRACs. While obviously the pressure of increasing market values has made such robust use more problematic - it is towards this very philosophy of a collection's use and dispersal that the Van Abbemuseum finds itself drawn towards in 2015.

An extended interview follows, between three chosen representative directors of the FRACs, Catherine Elkar (Director of FRAC Bretagne), Laurence Gateau (Director of FRAC des Pays de la Loire) and Xavier Franceschi (Director of FRAC Île-de-France), who explain the character of their collections and how they programme in their own working contexts in relation to the aims and values of the FRACs. The interview provides a compelling insight into these working institutions - from where they began in 1982 and how they have transformed into the entities we know them as today. The interviewees generously share their visions on the challenging years ahead and how they might develop collections of the future while defending the distinct differences, qualities and ambitions that drive the FRACs towards their goals.

For this publication, we also invited four interlocutors living and working in France right now to critically appraise the collection and comment on the FRACs' development from an "engaged" distance. These diverse voices consider the FRACs' extraordinary legacy in relation to their own experience of living in France with these institutions in their midst. Each of these writers Ami Barak, Aliocha Imhoff and Kantuta Quirós and Stephen Wright took the

opportunity to read the collections and their institutions to understand their potential and limitations as they exist in the France of today. Most interestingly they suggest a variety of perspectives and strategies for how these entities might develop in the future.

Aliocha Imhoff and Kantuta Quirós, also known as *Le peuple qui manque*, in their role as writers and curators in the field of global cultural politics, ask how one can form a collection in the twenty-first century which actively challenges the epistemic and historical limits of the art historical canon as it stands in France now. Could one really generate a republic of art and what would that look like? They point towards alternative strategies to the institutional policies of collecting in France predicated on expanding and including the global south and other peripheries into the collections as happens now. Here, the writers call for a different kind of collecting predicated on a reinterpretation of art history from a postcolonially decentred standpoint. They point to new exhibitionary strategies and methods which might open up such a dialogue and question the hegemonic structure of art history providing a more complex critical counter-reading of the dominant institutional narrative in Europe today.

Stephen Wright provides a witty and thought-provoking essay, which asks what a public art collection is, and perhaps more importantly, what it could be? He reports on his own role and motivations as a theoretical agent provocateur on the acquisitions committee over the last six years in Poitou-Charentes. Through a series of compelling examples Wright asks how we can truly account for contemporary and experimental art practice, which actively deviates from modernistic logic of the discrete art object. How do you collect, he writes, when artists insist on operating beyond the structures of traditional representation - in real time and real space - or, as Wright himself would put it, on a 1:1 scale?

Ami Barak looks back at his time as both a FRAC director and member of the acquisition committee and explains why these entities were so important as harbingers of change in the 1980s. Barak's extensive experience as someone who both drove the institutional mission and then actively contributed to the collection's larger presence over time leads him to offer a very heart-felt and sincere review of the FRACs' potential but also its frailties. More sanguine about recent tendencies towards the larger institutional role and buildings for the FRACs, Barak recalls their early simplicity and flexibility as the core reason

they were so dynamic. He acknowledges however, that the playing field has altered dramatically and in a way makes the future difficult to forecast. He lays out in great detail the complex political terrain in which the FRACs have always operated given their origin - quite literally born of politics. This tricky terrain (not unknown to most public institution in Europe) demands innovative strategic and diplomatic thinking from all of the directors. Increasingly so now as these structures are more vulnerable in today's very different and increasingly privatised cultural climate.

It is perhaps only now after thirty years of growing into themselves as institutions that we can somehow try to generate a broader perspective and critical reading of the FRAC collection - both as a material whole with over 26,000 works and as a significant cultural legacy. For this moment in time - namely the exhibition *A Republic of Art* and this publication - we can productively divorce it from all of its current existential intentions and concerns of everyday survival, in order to read it for the extraordinary cultural movement and collection it is. We are extremely grateful for the generosity and collaborative nature of all of the FRACs that they have made this reading possible.

A REPUBLIC OF ART

A Take of Two Collections

The Van Abbemuseum has had its own “home” since it was founded by cigar manufacturer Henri van Abbe with private money in 1936: supported by local government, it developed with relative freedom into an international museum for contemporary art. But like so many other museums, the Van Abbemuseum has been confronted in recent years with the question as to what the function of a museum in the twenty-first century could be. The answer heard ever more often, from the public domain, too, is: dispersal. Not showing art in its own “home” but “using” it outside. A decentralised approach to the public, like that taken by the French FRACs, might promote artistic and cultural education and make art an indispensable part of daily life. The institutions of the French FRACs (Fonds Régionaux d’Art Contemporain) were created in 1982 as a government initiative in collaboration with the regions. They provide an early historical and ambitious example of a policy of dispersion. Twenty-three in total, one in each region (except Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana and Mayotte) they were assigned to purchase (contemporary) art and to show it, but without a strong museological framework. FRACs operate via executive decisions and strict guidelines regarding the distribution of the collections across all the *départements* of each

region. Initially, these institutions did not even have permanent exhibition spaces (although they did have offices and depots), and were housed in their various regions in empty buildings, heritage sites, castles, schools and universities and sometimes even hospitals, where they presented their programmes in a radically dispersed manner - confronting a general public directly with contemporary art. In the course of their thirty-year existence a number of these institutions eventually opted to build large scale, customised premises, resulting in prestigious architectural projects in collaboration with renowned architects.

For some time now museums for contemporary art like ours have been studying how, besides using their own “home”, they can reach a wider public with their collections and also make these collections accessible outside museum walls. Does the original objective of the FRACs provide a lead here, and perhaps a solution to this conundrum? Is it the many locally managed community projects, special tours and programmes and policies of inclusion that elicit positive responses?

Or is it the FRACs’ location throughout the provinces, functioning autonomously, far from Paris, and the way they work with region-specific traditions and customs which makes the model so successful?

No Museums

“A museum is part of a society’s collective memory. A museum acquires, documents and preserves objects and other “evidences” to a culture and to us and our environment, and provides information about this. The museum develops and promotes knowledge and provides experiences that appeal to the senses. The museum is accessible to the public and contributes to the development of society. The objective of the museum is to enable the acquisition of knowledge and insight.”

This description, found in Boris Groys’s *Die Logik der Sammlung*, articulates the tasks of a traditional museum model.¹ In their collections, museums often focus on historical relevance, attempting to capture the zeitgeist through art so that in hindsight, an impression of this zeitgeist can be derived from a collection; there is also a tendency to look to the past to learn lessons about current problems and issues.

1. Boris Groys, *Logik der Sammlung. Am Ende des Musealen Zeitalters*, Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich/Vienna, 1997.

These changing attitudes affect the nature of a museum’s collection and its manner of collecting. A museum collection is not an accumulation of solidified

material; instead it can be viewed as a rich open archive of images and experiences – challenging a linear vision of history, interrupting time and attempting to discover the utopian potential of the past. The story of a collection is also an account of the history of its display in the context of the museum: its own “home”. There is a link between the works that constitute the collection and the collection itself; between the artistic expressions and the museum; and between the narrative we write and our activities as the bearers of (cultural) history.

While the Van Abbemuseum’s collection is the result of a strategic interplay of forces, with various actors in the field of art and outside (staff, committees, critics, sponsors, political organs, the public), it has been organised and developed within the framework of a traditional museum. However, as is the case in almost all museums, this does not imply a homogeneous development following one vision from 1936 until now. The Van Abbemuseum’s origins are diverse and reflect a range of complexities and contradictions that are characteristic of recent cultural and political history. This context provides a recurring tension between the museum’s framework that demands unity and the historical reality that its collection is heterogeneous and sometimes

even contains conflicting visions. Viewing the collection from the perspective of its “home” means that a continuous reflection on the collection is essential; while at the same time, this “home” has the vital task of remaining up to date with the latest cultural, social and political developments. In short, collecting must be continuously checked against the identity of its “home”, and the aim is to achieve coherence.

In *A Republic of Art*, which celebrates thirty years of collecting by the FRACs, we read their collections in a similar way, although they are not museums working according to this scheme of museological classification. We attempt to look at the twenty-three collections as a whole, neither assuming a collection with a set beginning or end point, nor seeking an established chronology, but rather analysing the collection in terms of its possibilities

2. Stephen Wright: “Art users are not passive consumers, nor merely even viewers. Rather, the term refers to a broad category comprising all those people who have a stake in art taking place; the broadest possible category of the framers of art, who ultimately generate its relationality. Usership

for the now, allowing various narratives to capture our increasingly diverse and complex present.

For a museum to be able to leave its “home” and bring about decentralisation it might be necessary to view the museum’s collection from a different perspective. Not its coherence but

the “use” of art could be the focal point, as implied by the FRACs’ original objective way back in 1982. The term “use value” as defined by Stephen Wright enables us to strip art off its autonomous “untargeted” target (Kant), the aura that surrounds art, and to find a public that, as a “user”, can become an interested spectator.

“Usership breaks down obsolete binaries between authorship and spectatorship, production and reception, owners and producers, publishers and readers, for it refers to a category of people who make use of art and whose counter-expertise stems from that particular form of relationality known as use-value in their lifeworlds.”²

This type of development for the museum of contemporary art has by now been paired with an ideological programme involving the demystification of autonomous art, democratisation, and public participation.

breaks down obsolete binaries between authorship and spectatorship, production and reception, owners and producers, publishers and readers, for it refers to a category of people who make use of art and whose counter-expertise stems from that particular form of relationality known as use-value in their lifeworlds. Like consumer-protection groups, citizens’ initiatives, neighbourhood associations and so on, art users experience the use-value of art directly.” In the 2007 lecture, “Users and Usership of Art: Challenging Expert Culture”, viewed 5 May 2015, <http://transform.eipcp.net/correspondence/1180961069#redir>.

The Van Abbemuseum has been experimenting with this philosophy over the past years to develop a critical attitude towards its own collection. By leaving aside the traditional interpretation of individual artworks, their art historical context, the museum aimed at breaking down the collection's coherence and resisting its standardisation through the established canon. The Van Abbemuseum tried to focus far more on the specific situation in which an artwork was produced and to learn about the time and place of its origin based on, for instance, an anthropological point of view. Reading the collection in this way opened up an opportunity to rethink narrative structures at work in the making of art's history and how they are informed by a perspective of "use" for the here and now. Looking at an individual artwork from a biographical perspective, seeing it as a witness to historical events, can lead to new historical insights that differentiate largely accepted narrations - an approach that could also be interesting for the FRACs.

Making a work of art public begins this process, a practice the FRACs are very experienced with since the 1980s.

The Fonds Régionaux d'Art Contemporain (FRAC)

The foundation for an official French policy on culture was laid in 1959, in the early days of the Fifth Republic, when the Ministry of Culture was established under the leadership of the visionary André Malraux. Democratisation was a key feature of this policy and it aimed at ensuring broad access to a conventional canon of artistic and cultural works that were seen as representative of high culture, heritage and artistic excellence.

This new ministry drew on a long history, a considerable body of theory and legislation, as well as a large number of cultural institutions who provided it with an infrastructure. However, these institutions were all situated in and around Paris. Criticism of Malraux's policy grew because of the so-called "elitist" nature of his ideas regarding the function of art in society. In the 1970s and 1980s his mission and vision were called into question by the Left, resulting in the addition of a non-hierarchical approach to cultural expression, an expansion of the ministry's activities, and support for the "low-brow" arts.

3. Jack Lang, Mexico City, 1982. Lang's famous phrase "economy and culture, same fight" appeared in his "Culture and the Economy" lecture, and he went on to say: "the first right as far as culture is concerned is the right of a people to self-determination. And when one observes here and there across the world, then one feels a little ashamed to speak of art and beauty." In Jeremy Ahearne, ed. *French Cultural Policy Debates. A Reader*, Routledge, London/New York, 2002.

In the 1980s the French government introduced a policy of decentralisation that shifted responsibility to the local government and the regions. An initiative of the then Minister of Culture Jack Lang as well as the ideas of politician, writer and photographer Claude Mollard, led to the implementation of the new FRAC concept, alongside other large-scale cultural programmes such as "Les Grands Travaux". In his 1982 speech in Mexico City,³ Lang made a link between the economy and culture that was reflected in the structure

of the Ministry of Culture and Communication: on the one hand it was a ministry for artists, institutions and those employed in the culture sector; on the other hand it became a ministry for promoting the culture industry.

The FRACs have three stipulated missions: to build a collection, disseminate it, and educate through it. The following political objectives form the basis of the FRACs: to support the professional sector, and provide services for art and art education for

the public. This means that art as a profession and the art trade are stimulated, while art education is supported.

France has twenty-three FRAC collections, one for each region with very few exceptions. In the early years, the Ministry of Culture and Communication and politics in general advocated twenty-three separate institutions whose only similarities were their government-established objectives. The original FRACs were not museums, nor were they cultural centres. They could not be defined in terms of an exhibition programme but rather by their ability to move and disperse art. Because the FRACs did not have a fixed address, they were very flexible in the way they could talk to the public through individual works of art. As the identity of the FRACs during this experimental period was centred around these artworks the public remained unaware of their presence as FRAC organisations. However, this has now changed: thanks to a diverse network of partners the FRACs now organise more than 500 educational exhibitions every year; they commission artists to work on collaborative projects with the public or reflect on a region's cultural specificities; and they work with their public, usually in places that were not originally intended for art.

The FRACs have developed new forms of communication and dissemination that emphasise the specific characteristics of each region. They reach a wide public (primary and secondary schools, art academies and universities, and the general public) and raise awareness of what is relevant today in an easily accessible way using educational methods that have been specially developed in collaboration with artists - methods which can also be used to translate the sometimes complex thinking of an individual artist into a publicly accessible form. In this regard the FRACs act in a quite radical way and can surely be understood as a role model.

Demography of the FRAC Collections

The FRAC collections can also be understood as the result of a strategic interplay of forces including various actors from in- and outside the arts. During their early years in particular, when the focus was on dissemination and decentralisation, collections of visual art by professional artists developed; while the works were certainly of a high quality - with major acquisitions of well-known artists such as Christian

Boltanski, Gilbert & George, Jeff Koons, On Kawara, Luciano Fabro and Daniel Buren - the acquisitions also appear to have been motivated by the potential effect of individual objects on the public. Seen from a museum's perspective, these collections lack coherence but the individual artworks are of such a high quality that they are the envy of many museums.

Rather than providing an art historical or aesthetic lens, *A Republic of Art* explores the possibility of a different narrative by focussing on the artworks themselves and the FRAC collections as a whole. By bringing together works of Hans Haacke and Jimmie Durham under the notion of the "politicised object" and works that question the "status of the image" like those of Luc Tuymans and Gerhard Richter, a hybrid setting is being created that outlines diverse artistic practises from the 1980s. Pieces by Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster from the 1990s for example, sketch out a comprehensive and ambitious collection of relational aesthetics. Alongside these works, Renée Green's installation *Mise en Scène* (1991, FRAC des Pays de la Loire, purchased: 1993) and Gustav Metzger's *Historic Photographs: To Walk Onto/To Crawl Into-Anschluss, Vienna March 1938* (1996-1999, FRAC Champagne-Ardennes, purchased: 1990 from the artist) create a

context that allows the deconstruction of meaning framed by the artworld. While the broader and more varied post-2000 collections speak to the fact that hierarchies and categories have not yet emerged - here narratives are told from non-artistic perspectives such as those of globalisation, the environment, migration and post-colonial situations, popular culture and networking.

The ten rooms of the exhibition follow a path in which constituent elements are interrelated or arranged in a nonconformist way, drawing attention to the period of the FRACs' existence - a time in which the role of the artist in society as an individual producing symbolic capital, innovative ideas and flexible solutions is more valued than ever before. *A Republic of Art* tries to explore how artistic subject matter spiralled out in all directions and media, merging with life while becoming both luxurious and popular at the same time.

The FRAC acquisitions are made by a committee of experts in the visual arts. Only the work of living artists is purchased, and 55% must be French. As the FRAC were constituted to support the young French art scene and stimulate the French cultural climate, they collaborate with artists and purchase their works from galleries located in France or the artists

themselves. A part of the acquisition budget is also reserved for the purchase of international artistic practice. According to the Ministry of Culture and Communication the FRACs have purchased a total of 26,000 works of art from 4,200 artists. This means the collections are not built up along traditional museum lines; instead, there are several collections that reflect the diversity of artistic production. The existence of FRACs is also justified by their public function, as they reduce inequalities in physical access to art, especially in a geographical sense.

In the FRAC collections and their use, the tendency to “museumify” is striking. The “circulaire” dated 28 February 2002,⁴ stipulated that the collections should be inalienable, as is usually the case for public museum collections. This was new: while the collections were initially built up with dissemination as their main objective, this “circulaire” stated that “it is important to reinforce the cohesion [of the collections]”. In 1982,⁵ the word “eclectic” was still used for the composition of the collections but in 2002, the emphasis had shifted to attaining a “coherent”

4. Circulaire, No. 1982, 23-06-1982, published by Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication.

5. Circulaire, No. 2002/006, 28-02-2002, published by Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, viewed 5 May 2015, <http://www.frac-platform.com/uploads/frac-circulaire-2002.pdf>.

collection, thus paving the way for the “museumification” of the FRACs.

The directors’ roles have also changed: their earlier administrative functions have evolved into positions of responsibility that include the membership of acquisition committees and making policy decisions for the individual FRACs - their positions have thus also acquired a museum-like status.

A number of FRACs expanded their missions to include production and collaboration with galleries (FRAC Île-de-France, FRAC Languedoc Rousillon and many others), guest ateliers (FRAC Basse-Normandie, FRAC des Pays de la Loire, and FRAC Champagne-Ardenne), and specialisation in a single field such as architecture (FRAC Centre) or drawing (FRAC Picardie) or sound and the performative (FRAC Franche-Comté). Distributing the works and constantly moving them gradually came to be seen as a threat to the works themselves in view of their conservation, stewardship, and complexity - cases in point are Simon Starling’s large in situ installation *Carbon (Pedersen)* (2004 FRAC Nord-Pas-de Calais, purchased: 2004 Galerie Neugerriemschneider, Berlin) and Paul McCarthy’s semi-permanent (no longer outside) sculpture *The Colonial Tea Cup* (1983-1994 FRAC Poitou-Charentes, purchased: 1994

Galerie Air de Paris, Paris).

In the French cultural landscape the FRACs have developed into important players alongside museums and other state collections, but “museumification” and the risk of their collections becoming less mobile - meaning they will no longer reach all parts of a region - will make way in the future for a traditional museum approach to a collection’s visibility and impact. Here, the two worlds of the museum and the FRACs will collide, but what will distinguish them in the long term?

Another effect of “museumification” can be seen in the metropolitan architecture projects of, for example, FRAC Aquitaine in Bordeaux (Big Bjarke Ingels Group, 2015), FRAC Centre in Orléans (architects Jakob and MacFarlane, 2013), and FRAC Nord-Pas-de-Calais in Dunkirk (architects Lacaton and Vassal, 2013).⁶ How do these buildings promote the mobility of the collections? Isn’t there a danger that the threshold for the public will be raised? These are issues that traditional museums have struggled with for some time. And then there are the management aspects, as well as the specific measures taken by

6. *L'évènement: Nouvelles Architectures - Centre Pompidou*, Paris, 2012. See Youtube channel on all architecture projects including interviews with FRAC directors and architects, viewed 5 May 2015, <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/id/cjGRz9/>.

Minister of Culture Aurélie Filippetti in 2012 in response to the financial crisis: new economic models for culture must increase their contribution to the economy in terms of growth and employment.

The success of the FRACs lies in democratising access to culture, in the flexible, in the temporary and in the processual. The future for both museums and the FRACs depends on their commitment to link a work of art and a location in a relationship that successfully interprets the mutual interest of each. Museums rely on their “home” to do this; the FRACs rely on their expertise and ability to distribute and disseminate. In this regard, it is important that these players in the cultural field abandon their ambition to reach each and every citizen, and instead formulate their objectives more clearly. It is possible that museums and the FRACs will converge in their quest for forging new links between art and society in the form of self-organisation and self-determination, activism, the search for critical platforms of citizenship, as well as life-long learning.⁷

In looking at the FRAC model, we learn about the value and opportunity of a mobile collection to focus on micro-histories or, to use a definition given by historian Charles Joyner: “[to ask] large questions in small places”.⁸ The FRACs could use their collective

heritage, “use” their collection’s capacity to mobilise, to create alliances and unexpected relationships, to tell stories about the past, the present and the future by listening to their subcultures.

7. Raunig proposed the term “instituent practices”, thus linking the field of changing art institutions to social movements and activism, rather than individual artistic practice. See Gerald Raunig, 2006, “Instituent Practices - Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming”, *Transversal - Multilingual Web Journal*, No. 1, viewed 5 May 2015, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en>.

8. Charles Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture*, University of Illinois, Urbana, 1999, p.1.

A REPUBLIC OF ART

On the Diversity of the FRACs

Annie Fletcher and Diana Franssen in conversation with Catherine Elkar,
Xavier Franceschi and Laurence Gateau

vanabbemuseum

PLATFORM

Annie Fletcher and Diana Franssen (VAM): The more we get to know the twenty-three FRACs as institutions, the more we realise how diverse they are. As directors you all have very different positions, engaging with different situations, and collectively you are in charge of 26,000 artworks. But how do you perceive your own collections, the ones that are you are individually in charge of in FRAC des Pays de la Loire, Bretagne or Île-de-France?

Laurence Gateau (LG), Director of FRAC des Pays de la Loire: Starting out in the 1980s many FRACs collected quite freely without focussing on a specific topic. Jean de Loisy, the first director of FRAC des Pays de la Loire, laid the foundation for the collection and Jean Francois Taddei continued to extend it without focussing on a specific theme or a particular medium. The concept of the FRACs, as I understand it, is geared towards working closely with artists, and FRAC des Pays de la Loire does this within the scope of the International Art Studio Residency - a programme that is of crucial importance for our collection policy. Twenty percent of the works in the collection are produced in situ during the artists' stay in the residency over a period of two months. We are interested in the context we are situated in and how artists deal with it.

After I arrived in 2005 to direct the FRAC des Pays de la Loire, I felt it was important to open the collection in a variety of ways, as well as commissioning artists with a political interest in the slave trade history of the region, such as Igor Eskinja and twenty years earlier Renée Green. There is a strong presence of artists who are politically involved with many different ideas of the past and of history like David Maljkovic, Yves Béloge, Bruno Serralongue and Eva Kot'átková. So there was an interest in the reinterpretation of the history of art, but also around questions regarding modernity: architecture and the city; artwork and its context; abstraction. Or even around certain gestures and postures like performance reflecting the work of Gina Pane, whose body of works forms a significant core in our collection.

Also FRAC des Pays de la Loire has changed its location several times and each situation influences the work. Through emphasising production, the FRAC created a support activity, which contributed to enriching its collection in an original way. It became a place of research, exchange and production, the workshops and residencies became an active and reactive laboratory.

Xavier Franceschi (XF), Director of FRAC Île-de-France: In the 1980s the collection of FRAC Île-de-France was very much oriented towards painting - especially figurative painting. Then the focus developed around specific themes and issues like the question of representation in painting and the place of the object in sculpture. I tried to infuse a lot of diversity in the collection, to open it up to diverse fields of contemporary art and many forms of expression including drawing, painting, photography, sculpture, installation, video, film and design - a universal collection in this regard. But I have also been interested in developing a specific set of artworks with some kind of modular system conceived by artists to present and expose the collection in the region. When I started in FRAC Île-de-France there was yet one artwork by Fabrice Gygi called *Vidéothèque mobile* (1998) in the collection, which gives a good example for my ideas regarding the diffusion of artworks from our collection into all kinds of purpose buildings. It is a sculpture but as a piece of art it also serves a utilitarian task, namely showing videos of other artists. These very specific artworks - to be related to one of the FRAC's main missions: the collection's diffusion - have a certain autonomy and they can be placed

anywhere to activate different ideas of an exhibition.

Catherine Elkar (CE), Director of FRAC Bretagne: Brittany of the early 1980s was devoid of any contemporary art collection - public or private. So we decided to start with artworks from the 1950s and 1960s to create a solid grounding that would allow a reading of the more recent works from the 1980s onwards, which we acquired at the same time. The artists Raymond Hains and Jacques Villeglé were in a way the first artists in the list giving the collection a strong historic anchoring. So in this regard the collection is marked by an interest in the literary side of art. I would say that today the FRAC Bretagne collection is open to numerous artists as well as a variety of forms and languages. In accordance with the founding spirit of the FRACs we propose a wide and open view on today's artistic production, though we stick to certain conceptual guidelines such as abstraction, landscape and artists' relationship to history, in order to create a certain consistency. Furthermore, of fundamental importance for our practice is an ongoing conversation, and sometimes even companionship, with artists developing monographic and solo projects for FRAC Bretagne.

VAM: Despite the very different positions you occupy, one common priority seems to be your

intense collaboration with living artists. Is this what informs the development of the collection?

XF: We support artists by commissioning artworks - but working with artists and working with the collection are not for me two separate things. We often invite artists to make exhibitions with our collection and sometimes their projects manifest in new pieces of art that serve the display of the works they choose from the collection. The exhibitions we make at Le Plateau, often include new commissions that can result in new acquisitions. Over the last years our collection was extended with works by Ulla von Brandenburg, Richard Fauguet, João Maria Gusmão and Pedro Paiva, Keren Cytter, Charles Avery, Michel Blazy, Ryan Gander, Philippe Decrauzat - all artists who have had an exhibition at Le Plateau before.

CE: An exhibition is the perfect setting to settle an acquisition. In the acquisition committee I often stress the qualities of an open artwork, its capacity to dialogue with other pieces, might they be by the hands of an experienced or an emerging artist. A significant number of artworks acquired are by emerging artists and we are very attentive to what is happening in the four art schools of Brittany and within the art department of Rennes University. For example, we are developing a graduate exhibition for September 2015.

LG: The International Art Studio Residency programme was already established in 1984 and we can link it closely with the acquisition policy - that's a wonderful possibility at FRAC des Pays de la Loire. As director of an institution like the FRAC, I consider it important to contribute to a vivid art scene in the region. I feel that this role requires me to discover new artists living not only in France but also elsewhere. Some artists already live in the region, such as François Morellet, Jean-Michel Sanejouand and Fabrice Hyber. Nantes's art academy and its post-graduate programme is very dynamic and several interesting artists like Saâdane Afif, Bruno Peinado, Lili Reynaud-Dewar, Wilfrid Almendra, Olive Martin & Patrick Bernier, Mathieu Mercier and Kristina Solomoukha, stayed in the area. Regularly in our artistic programme I invite artists living in Nantes to organise exhibitions or produce new work and I find it important to support young artists in developing their practice. I think to continue a collection, one must keep it open to the young generation - not exclusively but at least with consideration given to this new generation of artists, more generally speaking.

VAM: This is interesting and different from how most museums collect: with a consciousness towards art history in a process of adding

comprehensively to a collection seen as a whole. If the FRAC collections could tell a story about the last thirty years in France or of the existence of the FRACs - what kind of story would that be? Can you define a particular characteristic or formulate a commentary of French culture and society over the last thirty years?

LG: The moment of decentralisation in the beginning of the 1980s meant a significant change for the cultural landscape in France. Back then Paris was the main hub and there was little going on outside the capital. Of course the Museum of Grenoble, the museums of contemporary art in Sainte Etienne or Lyon, and CAPC Bordeaux already existed, but besides that there were few places to show art in France. Today there are twenty-three FRACs and many contemporary art centres (CACs). After a thirty-odd year history of cultural activities, the public is now much more engaged with art. The FIAC has grown to be one of the main art fairs worldwide and many new private foundations have been established.

CE: Yes, major changes in our society are the result of a policy of decentralisation, which has extended to culture as well. But there is a global change whose mechanisms and effects are, in my opinion, not sufficiently shared and discussed. In addition to the economic effect of globalisation it generates a fear for the future. The FRACs, like a lot

of other institutions, will have to face a noticeable decrease of public endowment. The question, to put it harshly, is the continuation of our missions in this new and difficult context.

XF: The other major evolution lies in the relationship between the network of public institutions - including the FRACs - created by the Ministry of Culture and the regions and the private sector. After the golden years of the 1980s and 1990s the French model is slowly giving way to the Anglo-Saxon model, with a massive dependence on the private sector. The biggest contemporary art institution in France, the Palais de Tokyo, can be seen as a good example of this development.

VAM: Has the definition of contemporary art changed over the course of time and does this affect the modes of working?

CE: Well, even subjectivity has changed. Artworks seem to be easier to grasp by a public that has faced the spread of images. But in deepening the question: we realise that most artworks, favoured by today's public, are paintings and productions of renowned artists with a high market value, while documentary pictures, non-narrative videos and some "brutal" artistic installations are still perceived as disturbing and create misunderstanding. This is the consequence of a general emphasis on event culture and the

spectacle and indicates the whisper of the market.

LG: What I can criticise is the tendency to think about art programming from a marketing perspective. With the growing number of spectacular events comes the tendency to communicate *through* artists instead of making research *with* them. There is little understanding and sensitivity to how artists actually work. Large-scale events are useful, of course, as their scope and media attention allow us to open up contemporary art to a larger public. But in the long term, for how art is valued and produced: is it really a good thing for the future? The kind of experimental research we do in our institutions is less valued and there is little space for artists to simply experiment and just try out new things without being concerned about visitor numbers or that it will not be understood immediately. Maybe even as specialists of contemporary art we do not always understand what young artists are forecasting for the future, but I like the potential of these things I don't understand yet.

CE: Yes, the fields of contemporary art are difficult to define on the crossroad between historical, economical and sociological criterium. In the 1960s and 1970s, when only a small amount of the population was concerned, it was probably easier. Contemporary art today is everywhere and

in everything, under the mixed influence of cultural democratisation and the dominance of other aesthetic fields such as advertisement, cinema and fashion. In our consumer society with its multiple outcomes, instant sweeping success and short periods of notoriety of four or five years, artworks become obsolete just like mobile phones or other technological appliances. The time spans for the production as well as the reception of artworks are getting ever shorter. In the past time was slower and the "history of art" was easier to define. For me, contemporary art is when artists think "clairvoyantly" and detect the future, underline and reveal actions, facts, and describe a landscape, which we, with the common tools of thinking, would neither see nor understand. I appreciate when artists forge an original language to share their vision of the world. This is what we, as FRACs, want to support.

VAM: In the nearer future the number of regions in France will be drastically reduced. This poses a challenge to the FRACs as they are right now. How do you think about this and how do you face this challenge? What are your hopes for the future for the FRACs? In how far should they change or continue the way they are?

LG: It's a complicated situation because there is less and less money and the political situation of France is changing. The twenty-three regions throughout France will be reduced to a number of thirteen, which means that for some regions there will be three FRACs, so many of these institutions will be merged. It is a big change, indeed, and we'll have to redefine our legal status as well with regard to securing the stability of the collections. But in the spirit of adventure in France (which began with the very decentralisation which established us), many things are in flux! If we become bigger institutions like museums, I think it would be much more difficult to work with the present and continue to have a view on the future. Transformations are always interesting but we need to remain flexible and nimble without too many heavily-set rules and regulations.

XF: As you say, it's a big challenge, knowing that, as Laurence says, there is less money at the moment. I think, in this particular situation, we'll have to continue to develop this practice that we've been involved in over the last thirty years - to continue working with and for artists, introduce their work to an extended audience under the best possible conditions and build a collection that has become really significant today. The merging of the FRACs could lead to some

challenges and tensions that could be detrimental to the setting up of experimental projects. That must be avoided.

VAM: The FRACs have very different sites and have come to work with varied architectural solutions for the future. It is a noted phenomenon that many FRACs in recent years have commissioned new large-scale centres, like you Catherine in Bretagne, with the recently-opened building designed by Studio Odile Decq.

CE: Being nomadic for thirty years, FRAC Bretagne aspired to find better conditions for the display of its collection. Our new building, which opened in 2012, allows us to create a programme based on conviviality and hospitality, which we consider an important means to build a strong relationship with our public - for example - it has enabled the development of the Friends of the FRAC association. Many parts of the collection can be exposed in good conditions now and especially pieces that were rarely exhibited before. So these are quite exciting developments that came together with this new building.

VAM: Xavier, you made quite a different decision regarding your architectural presence within the city of Paris and around it. So you disperse your activity quite differently. Could you talk about this?

XF: As you know, Paris, situated in the Île-de-France region, has a very dense cultural community with galleries, museums, emerging foundations and other cultural institutions. Creating new and huge gallery spaces for the FRAC Île-de-France doesn't seem to be suitable in such an environment, so we are rather seeking to develop several specific places - like cells - spread all over the region. Since 2002 we have been situated inside Paris with Le Plateau and recently, thanks to a partnership with the communities of Marne and Gondoire, we were able to expand the FRAC Île-de-France to a second venue situated in the suburbs in the east of Paris: the castle of Rentilly. We renovated the castle, built in the 1950s, in collaboration with the artist Xavier Veilhan, the architects Bona-Lemercier and the designer Alexis Bertrand, seeing it as an artwork - the castle as a sculpture - and as a real functional place at the same time. From now on, the castle - Le Château, Rentilly - will be our second venue as part of a multi-site project we hope to develop in the future.

VAM: So you can be more flexible?

XF: In a certain sense, yes. I think, the strength of the FRACs and of the FRAC Île-de-France in particular, is a flexibility that allows us to realise various projects in really different places and contexts. And,

when we have the means, to create something new, with artists for example.

VAM: Laurence, you also have a relatively new building in the small city of Carquefou and a sizeable industrial warehouse in Nantes, which you use periodically.

LG: Yes, I like the size of this building in Carquefou, it is quite useful. The architect, Jean Claude Pondevie, is not as known as Jean Nouvel, but he built something very appreciated by the artists who work in it. It's also a good place to manage the collection. It's not a problem to be in a such small location like the city of Carquefou because this FRAC is a working place for research and resources in a quiet and functional building. And we organise a lot of exhibitions throughout the regions, notably in HAB Gallery - a large space of 1,500 square metres in the city of Nantes - so we have a lot of flexibility. It would be ideal to add other situations in the region to the Carquefou building. I think this would be much more interesting to work in a dispersed manner between several locations for exhibiting contemporary art everywhere.

VAM: You are very interested in what the historical context of the region can provide for artists in the community. Can you talk about how this works, as well as what challenges and potentials the situation provides?

LG: Nantes and the wider region are dynamic but of course the wealth achieved by the Atlantic slave trade marks its history. For some artists this was very important to consider, and for Renée Green for example it proved pivotal. It was fantastic to have her in our International Art Studio Residency in Garenne Lemot Clisson to do research and produce a work that is so directly related to the region - and now we have it in our collection. The work is called *Mise-en-Scène* (1992) and it is an investigation of the role French commerce played in the Atlantic slave trade.

VAM: Yes, this piece by Renée Green is an exciting example of how the FRACs are engaging in interesting production processes with artists, bringing the resulting works into their collections. What do you ask the artists when they come for the first time to FRAC des Pays de la Loire for example? Do you specifically ask them to deal with the context? Do you tell them about the history or do they start diving into archives independently?

LG: That is a good question. I think artists should not be obliged to work with the context and, of course art can be found and produced everywhere. "Context" can be understood in various ways: it can be political, social, or environmental, it could even be the space of the building itself. So it's really up to the artists. I never push them to go in a certain direction but sometimes I advise it. I invited Igor Eskinja, an artist from Croatia, who recently made a beautiful dust carpet in collaboration with a prison in New York, and I proposed to him to make a similar work in relation to the history of Nantes. Now the piece *Sans titre (résultat des opérations)* (2012) is in our collection. I mentioned before that Artur Zmijewski is a significant artist in our collection. In the piece *Zeppelintribüne* (2002) we bought, he refers to Leni Riefenstahl and re-imagines her photographs of Nuremberg. In France it's important to have works like this that consider the Second World War. We also have a piece by Deimantas Narkevicius in our collection: his work is very interesting in terms of understanding Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The expansion of Eastern Europe in the 1990s is something very important and we have been able to collect the work of many interesting artists as a result, such as that of Thea Djordjadze, Maja Bajevic, Maria Loboda and Mircea Cantor.

VAM: Catherine, what has your policy been in relation to the idea of Europe and the International? Has it changed over the last thirty years? Are there artworks that represent these ideas and the changes to them in particular?

CE: The presidential election of 1981 won by the socialists in France marked the beginning of a movement towards artistic decentralisation and cultural democratisation. Then of course a major event was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the reunification of Germany. As for myself, I lived it in a very practical and effective manner, through an exhibition project with the Czech artist, Stanislav Kolibal, at the art centre Le Quartier in 1993, which was followed by the acquisition of six pieces. Kolibal's testimony on the working conditions for artists during the 1950 through to the 1980s was striking. Another important artwork is *les 52 Entretiens dans la cuisine communautaire* (1991) by Ilya Kabakov. Also note Olga Chernysheva's video *Marmot* (1999) and a series of photographs *After the Wall, Traces of Soviet Empire* (2007-9) taken by Eric Lusito. The first Gulf War is represented in collection through two photographs from the series *Fait* (1992) by Sophie Ristelhueber, and a photograph from Thomas Ruff's series *Nacht* (1992-6). The

war in Lebanon is represented with a work by Lamia Joreije and another work from the artist duo Khalil Joreije and Joana Hadjithomas. *Horizon of a world (II)* (2001) by Marie José Burki offers a reflection about the events of September 11th. The developments and effects of the global economy as well as their disturbances are wonderfully articulated in *Fish story* (1988-93) by Allan Sekula, *le Miroir* (2006) by Mohammed Bourouissa, and *Ruins of Private Property* (2007) by Vahram Aghasyan, to name but a few. Since 1989 there has been an increasing interest in a broader geographical context including Russia, the Middle East and the Balkans, and to a lesser extent the African continent with artworks of Ângela Ferreira from Mozambique and Malick Sidibé from Mali.

VAM: How do you engage with the effects of globalisation in terms of migration? Do you have any specific policy when dealing with new migrant populations or different subcultures within the region? And is this represented in your collection?

LG: Your question is a very important and we need to consider it seriously. We try to think a broader picture of the world including the south of Europe, Africa and our relationship with Algeria, which is very important in our history of course. Over the last ten years our acquisition committee had

several members who came from the east of Europe, like Ami Barak and Adam Budak. In the frame of the International Art Studio Residency, we bought some pieces from artists coming from southern Africa, from China and Latin America. Obviously we don't choose the artist in relation to their nationality, but we are interested in their views on political and social behaviour, past and present. We are now purchasing and supporting more artists from Asia and Africa, and currently there is an artist from Singapore taking part in our residency programme. This is very new for us. In general there are very few artists from Asia represented in French collections and I think we have to make an effort to get a better perspective on art in Africa and Asia. Cultural and artistic exchange is very important in the development of our understanding and ideas of the world.

VAM: Yes, indeed, something which we can track in interesting ways throughout the display for the FRAC collections and in our exhibition *A Republic of Art* here at the Van Abbemuseum. Thank you all so much for your time and these valuable insights into your projects.

A REPUBLIC OF ART

For a Chronopolitical Approach to the Internationalisation of Art Collections

1. Hartmut Rosa defines chronopolitics as follows: "The question who determines the rhythm, duration, sequencing, and synchronization, of activities and event forms a central arena for conflicts of interest and power struggles. Chronopolitics is thus a central component of any form of domination and in the historical process, as above all, Paul Virilio never tires of postulating and elucidating, domination is a rule the domination of the faster." Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2013, p.12.

2. Against the "monoculture of knowledge" the sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos proposes the notion of the "epistemologies of the South" based on a new ecology

If the "French case", as Françoise Vergès once wrote, has long been characterised by a republican resistance - acting mostly as a veil over its colonial past - to the "epistemologies of the South" and postcolonial critique,² how do we go about reinventing innovative cultural policies that take these contributions into account? How can we

of knowledge including knowledges that were disqualified in the modern division of the order of knowledge that favoured only one of all possible forms of how knowledge articulates. "I understand "epistemology of the South" as a new production and evaluation of knowledge, scientific or not, and new relationships between different types of knowledge, taking into account practices of social groups that have suffered systematic inequality and discrimination through capitalism and colonialism. The South is not only a geographical concept [...]." Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*, Paradigm Publishers, Boulder, 2014, p.17.

do this while setting time back in motion, liberating us from the presentism to which we seem compelled in Europe, particularly in France?³ How should we rethink the question of the collection, the constitution of a collection of international works emancipated from the positivism of history, if not by questioning the "regimes of veridiction" and their underlying time scenarios?⁴

3. For a couple of years we've been witnessing a rather discouraging discourse depicting the end of history and the end of art's critical potential. With the Fall of the Berlin Wall these kind of discourses found their temporary post and seesaw which led to the assumption that the 1980s and 1990s were "winter years", as Félix Guattari puts it: a period of glaciation of potentialities. According to François Hartog, the dominating regime of historicity since 1989 was "presentism". Hartog defines presentism as a temporal order of static historicity, characterised by the end of expected horizons. See François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and the Experience of Time*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2015.

4. The notion of the regime of veridiction here refers to a "set of rules enabling one to establish which statements in a given discourse can be described as true or false." Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, eds. Michel Senellart, François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana, trans. Graham Burchell, Palgrave, London, 2010, p.35.

A French Anthropological Paradigm to Apprehend the Internationalisation of Art in France

5. It would be interesting to examine the way in which the anthropological paradigm remains central to historiographical and museological discourses in France and the link to the universalist tropism of the republican imaginary. This tension between the universal and the individual is precisely the matrix that has long led to a suspicious attitude towards postcolonial criticism (criticism directed towards the constitution of the canon and modes of recording art history, the sequencing of historical time and the organisation of museum collections into periods) and towards the

With regards to the internationalisation of the art sphere, our first observation about the French situation is the predominance - until recently - of the anthropological paradigm used as an heuristic matrix with which to approach non-Western artworks, at the expense of approaches that emerged from postcolonial studies. Indeed, the inclusion of artists coming from the art scenes of the South into an extended art history canon was permitted during the resounding exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* in 1989, albeit at the cost of an anthropological approach with notions of ritual and magic. Postulating the defeat of Western

art histories in order to apprehend these scenes, Jean-Hubert Martin called on ethnographical and anthropological discourses as heuristic tools that would take the place of the endogenous art historiographies - written from the perspective of the South - in the very same way.⁵ In that same year, the artist and theorist Rasheed Araeen was already pitching the exhibition *The Other Story* to the Hayward Gallery in London - an exhibition that would lay down the conceptual premises of a reinterpretation of art history from a postcolonially decentred standpoint. The paradoxes contained within *Magiciens de la Terre* have long fuelled historiographical and museological debates in France on global art - whether to claim affiliation with it or instead, to operate a critical deconstruction of its presuppositions still today.⁶ This was again apparent at the Paris Triennale in 2012 when its curator, Okwui Enwezor, considered it necessary to come back to a certain genealogy of French anthropology,

artists that incorporate the question of identity into their practice.

6. Worthy of mention here is a symposium on *Magiciens de la Terre* that took place in March 2014 at the Centre Pompidou and proposed sort of a revision of the exhibition twenty-five years later, as well as a book edited by Pablo Lafuente and Lucy Steeds: *Making Art Global (Part 2): Magiciens de la Terre 1989, 2013* in the series *Exhibition Histories* by Afterall, dedicated to the exhibition's legacy. Also see the symposium-performance *Au-delà de l'effet Magiciens* on 6, 7 and 8 February 2015, curated by the authors.

7. Highlighting the French anthropological discourse by Enwezor and his associate commissioners, as the first condition of his protest. See Okwui Enwezor, ed. *Intense proximity: An anthology of the near and the far: La Triennale*, Artlys Editions, Paris, 2012, with texts concerning French anthropology (Marcel Mauss, Claude Lévi-Strauss) contrasted with postmodern anthropology (James Clifford, Johannes Fabian) and postcolonial criticism (Françoise Vergès, Manthia Diawara, Elvan Zabunyan).

8. Art spaces such as Bétonsalon, Espace Khasma, Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Maison populaire, FRAC Lorraine, INHA, Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, as well as the curatorial platform *a people is missing* implemented a number of projects. The MNAM/Centre

though this time in a critical way confronting and exposing it by means of the critique emanating from postmodern anthropology and postcolonial theory.⁷ We've also noticed a positive development over the last ten years since the publication and translation of a series of canonical texts out of the postcolonial studies (by publishers such as Les Prairies Ordinaires, éditions Amsterdam, Multitudes, La Fabrique, and so on), and the parallel emergence of certain interesting curatorial initiatives and manifestations.⁸ But unquestionably, despite a few remarkable exhibitions and propositions, the persisting difficulty of France's larger museums and cultural institutions - including the FRACs - to produce exhibitions driven by those epistemologies of the South, cannot be ignored. After the Musée du Quai Branly was criticised (in particular

by Albert Bastenier (2007) and Maureen Murphy (2009)) as well as the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration and the general absence of a slavery museum in France,⁹ we believe in the urgency of a present-day reflection on the notions of a museum and a collection the international dimensions of which would be driven, from its very conception, by postcolonial poetic epistemologies.

Pompidou's reflections on the globalisation and internationalisation of their collections also indicate a change in zeitgeist.

9. To which the Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires, or Representative Council of France's Black Associations, responded by laying the first stone of this museum, thereby proposing an imaginary museum - a speculative museum on what such a slavery museum could be.

The Night of Art History's Colonised

The critique of the orders of knowledge that came out of postcolonial and decolonial studies relating to modern knowledge production disciplines - and historiography in particular - has led the latter to revive a reflection on the potentialities of fiction as history. The distinction between fiction and history has been a very efficient structuring element to

turn history into a modern scientific discipline, seeking to establish its scientificity from the distinction between *res factae* (the factual) and *res fictae* (the fictional), as well as from the proscription of oral history or the methodological rupture between the

10. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1993.

11. See Valentin Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (1988), *Parables and Fables: Exegesis, Textuality and Politics in Central Africa* (1991) and *Tales of Faith* (1997), at the heart of his project aiming to “decolonise the social sciences” and his critique of the division of discourse between fiction, myth and science, making way for a new thinking on historiographical fictions, in particular those proposed by writers or artists.

writing of history and its experience, between the artist and the art historian, between the archive producer and the archivist, between fact and affect. Faced with this modern “Great Divide”,¹⁰ postcolonial and decolonial theorists such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Walter D. Mignolo and Valentin Mudimbe have worked towards epistemic decolonisation and the emergence of a new desire for truth that would give (back) legitimacy to the knowledge and sources of knowledge proscribed by the modern order of knowledge. The work of Valentin Mudimbe has thus sought to re-evaluate in formerly colonised and in African societies in particular the value of myth as a so-called

“memory-text”, as a set of systems of intelligibility and sources of knowledge of the past, abjected by the categories that govern the perceptive schema of history as a science.¹¹ Equally, in the field of Creole literature, Patrick Chamoiseau considered fiction as a means of subverting history: “while History writes the day of the colonisers, fiction is called on to tell the night of the colonised.”¹² Fiction transforms history into an “existential situation,” a field of possibilities, something that is to come.¹³ As a result of this confrontation, the aim here would be to extend this critique to art history as well as to museological narratives, that is, to recognise fiction’s at once cognitive and performative potential in a decentred (re)writing of museology.

Regularly making up for the absence of an archiving policy, artists coming from scenes formerly characterised as “peripheral” will indeed have been the first art historiographers of these scenes. Whether they intertwine autobiographical

12. Ioana Vultur, “Quand la fiction écrit l’histoire”, paper presented at the symposium “Écritures de l’histoire, écritures de la fiction”, BNF, 16-18 March 2006.

13. Ioana Vultur, “Quand la fiction écrit l’histoire”, *ibid.* about Patrick Chamoiseau, *Écrire en pays dominé* (1997), Collection Folio (n° 3677), Gallimard; Texaco (1992). See Translation by Rose Réjouis and Val Vinokur. Texaco (Random House, 1997)

strategies, recollection or art history and archaeology, artists indeed make up for the failings of institutional curation by becoming their own art historians and archivists. This was evident for example in the exhibition *Interrupted Histories*, curated by Zdenka Badovinac, which presented works conceived as the tools that could carry out new art historicisations. The *Knowledge Museum* and the *Subjective Art History (from modernism to today - 1800-2011)* by Lia Perjovschi as well as the *Contemporary Art Archive / Center for Art Analysis* propose exhibitions, diagrams, timelines and mental maps as so many subjective art histories, taken apart and put back together. With the Atlas Group or the Arab Foundation of Image, and *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World (2007-)*, Lebanese artist Walid Raad, has made an effort to tell the story of the history of a culture and of a country, the artistic historiography of which has been repressed. The historicity Raad discloses breaks through the boundaries between memorial traces of events that actually existed and fictional events. These forms of self-historicisation have opened up opportunities to invest museum historiography with imaginaries,

14. Category employed by Zdenka Badovinac, director of the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana, in *Histoires interrompues, Les Promesses du Passé*, Centre Pompidou editions, Paris, 2010.

between memorial traces of events that actually existed and fictional events. These forms of self-historicisation have opened up opportunities to invest museum historiography with imaginaries,

with poetical epistemologies.¹⁴

Moreover, if we consider the question of the imaginary museum - a topic recently in the spotlight¹⁵

- the museum itself appears to be caught in multiple games of fictionality and especially the museum as fiction with fictitious museum institutions conjured up by artists.¹⁶ There is, for example, the *Museum of Non-Participation* by Karen Mirza and Brad Butler, Gustavo Buntinx's *Micromuseo, El Museo Travesti del Peru* by Giuseppe Campuzano, the *Museum of Contemporary African Art* by Meschac Gaba, and the *Hawaii Museum* by Fernando Bryce, to name but a few who moved away from the "first generation" of fictitious museums that came out of the early wave of institutional critique¹⁷, inasmuch as their first instinct is to revise the narrative forms of historiography and open up narratives of potentiality, often in the face of real

15. Andre Malraux's *Museum Without Walls* has been recently revisited by Georges Didi-Huberman in his book *L'album de l'art à l'époque du Musée imaginaire*, Editions Hazan, Paris, 2013. The symmetries between literature and art history play out in many recent texts that mobilise the literary sphere as an imaginary museum. Also worthy of mention here is Orhan Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence*, Vintage, New York, 2010.

16. See also "mockstitutions" according to the term coined by Gregory Sholette in his book *Dark Matter. Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, Pluto Press, London, 2010.

17 Such as the *Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles* (1968-72) by Marcel Broodthaers, the *Museum of Drawers* (1970-77) by Herbert Distel, Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (1936-41), the *Mouse Museum* (1965-77) by Claes Oldenburg, *Eat Art* (1967-) by Daniel Spoerri, *Armoire* (2004-) by Ben Vautier, etc.

18. Gustavo Buntinx, *Museotopias / vacío museal*, viewed on 11 May 2015, <http://www.micro-museo.org.pe>.

19. Due to a coalition, the communist party of Réunion was the leading party until March 2010.

20. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, new ed. 1992.

of slavery and colonisation exceeds documentation, archiving or “knowledge through [material] traces”²⁰, and is manifested in the immaterial history of songs,

museum institutional failings.

In France, these “museotopias” - according to a term coined by the art historian and curator Gustavo Buntinx¹⁸ - were the inspiration among other things for the *Maison des civilisations et de l'unité réunionnaise* (MCUR), supported by the regional council of Réunion and Françoise Vergès. The project was shut down before its construction however, due to a change in the governing majority in the region in March 2010.¹⁹ Structured around oral transmission, tales and social practices, this museum was conceived as a house, an agora. Intended as a museum documenting the different cultures that mixed and underwent creolisation in the history of Réunion, it was based on the assumption that the memory

rituals, and the “whispers of singular lives”.²¹ The house was conceived as a dialogical, dynamic space with the ambition of being a museum of the present, working in the here and now in order to create a possibility for a different future. The basic concept was to expose a non-linear interpretation that would reveal the process of creolisation and invite the spectators to “dialogue” with what they saw. A postcolonial archive that was essentially an archive of ghosts, of the vanished and the anonymous - and rather than searching for the lost object or attempting to make up for a deficit, it was the great ambition of the project to imagine or invent a methodology, a museology of creolisation, a postcolonial museology of a museum without objects. Following its failure, the *Maison des civilisations et de l'unité réunionnaise* became a fiction, a scenario, a script for museums to come: a speculative archive that it would be necessary to reactivate with future institutions in mind. If, once again, this French refusal has objectively reduced a postcolonial chronopolitical project to fiction, then there is no doubt that we should increase our efforts in order to achieve a greater agency of fiction on future art narratives.

21. Françoise Vergès, “Le musée postcolonial: un musée sans objets”, *Ruptures postcoloniales*, La Découverte, Paris, 2010, p. 576.

Accelerating Cultural Policies - the FRACs and Their Context

Protected under the French museum law of January 4, 2002, the inalienability of museums' public collections is part of the legacy of the "universal museum" created during the French Revolution in order to make the national heritage accessible to all. It's due to this principle of inalienability that public collections today are protected from speculation with and privatisation of the common good advocated by ultraliberal politics. By virtue of austerity, measures passed in times of debt crisis, such ultraliberal politics, have chipped away at public cultural policy and the sovereignty of French museums. As non-profit organisations the FRACs, governed by private law though the artworks in their collections were acquired using public funds, are, from a legal standpoint, designated in a number of official reports as the Achilles heel towards the alienability of their collections and, moreover, towards a new museum regime in the context of the

knowledge economy and cognitive capitalism: the museum as a speculative collection.²² How do we escape having to choose between free-market flexibility (the alienation of artworks, the museum as brand and speculative collection) and conservative resistance (resisting ultraliberal attacks, guaranteeing the inalienability of artworks, surviving despite budgetary restrictions, the end of the welfare state, etc.)? How should we reinvent the future of public cultural policy for which the FRACs, according to the initial project, were to have been the innovating arm? Confronted with such an aporia between late capitalism and a strictly reactive resistance eventually leading to the obliteration of any programmatic ability, political theorists Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek published a manifest for an accelerationist politics in 2013. Going against the grain of the anti-growth stance and calling on the

22. An initial ministerial report on the economy of the immaterial (Maurice Lévy and Jean-Pierre Jouyet, eds. *L'économie de l'immatériel. La croissance de demain*, La Documentation française, 2006) sparked things off in 2006 by recommending that the cognitive capitalist model emulate the way that public collections and museums worked - effectively making the museum a commercial brand. This was followed by the Rigaud Report, a reflection on the possibility for public operators to alienate artworks of their collections, delivered to Christine Albanel, Minister of Culture and Communication, and by a report from the think tank iFRAP in 2013.

23. Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, 2013, “#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO for an Accelerationist Politics,” *Critical Legal Thinking*, viewed on 14 May 2015, <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/>.

green movement to accelerate technological progress which neoliberal capitalism is holding back, accelerationism seeks to preserve the gains of late capitalism while going further than its value system and governance structures will allow.²³ In the same vein then, should cultural policy be accelerated in order

to escape the binarity of this set of alternatives?

Reactivating the Politics of Time

In any case, it is by engaging in a new politics of time that an international collection could emerge, attempting to escape the alternatives we have just denounced while acknowledging the epistemological contribution of postcolonial critique - an international collection characterised by forms of reversibility, long time arcs, heterochrony, and even accelerations. If, as Michel de Certeau claims, “Western historiography is defined by the break that separates past from present,”²⁴ it is now necessary to modify the way in

which historical narratives have been temporally organised, based on fragmented visions and the proliferation of atomised narratives, on “overlapping, interlocking but non-corresponding ‘histories’” (Stuart Hall), on anachronistic, elliptical (Catherine de Zegher), and retrospective (Griselda Pollock) views, or even delay effects (Okwui Enwezor). It is necessary to re-engage temporalities that rouse us from presentism while reconsidering the category of the “contemporary” which is mobilised by all but rarely questioned, and though rooted in a progressive and linear view of time, is paradoxically trans-historicised. As Lionel Ruffel remarks, contemporaneity is only measured according to an “order of discourse” and we’ve seen how this is often denied non-Western works, which must always be referred back to their “allochrony” or to a “delayed modernity.”²⁴ If the recent debates on museum acquisitions have largely centred around what constitutes an archive and how to buy performance and immaterial works,²⁵ how do we now contemplate a chronopolitics for collections?

The hypothesis that we would like to put forward here, by way of a conclusion, is founded on what has been characterised elsewhere as scriptology,²⁶

24. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley, Columbia University Press, 1988, p.17.

24. Lionel Ruffel, *Qu'est-ce que le contemporain?*, Cécile Defaut editions, Paris, 2011. Peter Osborne has likewise defined the contemporary as an "operative fiction". Claire Bishop in *Radical Museology or, What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?*, Walther König, Cologne, 2013, focuses on three museums including the Van Abbemuseum, the Museum of Contemporary Art Ljubljana and Reina Sofia, the historical collections of which have become testing grounds for what she calls "multi-temporal and non-presentist contemporaneity". Bishop calls for a "dialectical contemporaneity", which functions less as a periodisation of works but rather as way to approach them.

possibilities enclosed in the past with its unrealised potentialities.

that is the science of works yet to come, writings of potentiality, opening up intervals of possibility that break free from the tyranny of the present - the confiscation of the future. By modelling ourselves after those prescriptive artists in the fictitious museums and institutions mentioned, we would still be "fabling the collections". Beyond "contemporary" artworks, could we in fact buy those that are still to come, works that could have been, non-existent artworks and projected ones, that is, invisible artworks and oral stories? The scriptology of works would become the science of acquisition. Acquiring artwork scenarios in a retrocipatory manner: selling before buying, deepening the latency trends of the real; buying artworks to come of the past, the

A republic of art for the twenty-first century - legislated by potential artworks²⁷ according to an ontology of the not-yet-being, like so many discontinuous temporalities in the collection - would work towards setting time back in motion, as well as ending the reification and the patrimonialisation of artworks.

25. See for example Béatrice Josse, 2014, *Oeuvrer avec l'incertitude*. Mouvement, no. 73.

26. "Can we conceive of a science that would pay as much attention to the ways of predicting, of planning, of imagining as to those of archiving, of re-reading and linking together, a science that transforms texts into images of the future and images into texts of the past? Taking film as a fundamentally divided object between "what is to come" and "what has been", "thought images" and "realised thoughts", modes of empirical and speculative action on texts and images," as art historian, Morad Montazami defines it in his 2011, *Notes sur la scriptologie*, *Journal de Bétonsalon*, n°11.

27. Camille de Toledo, Aliocha Imhoff, Kantuta Quirós. *Manifeste d'art potentiel*, Manuella Editions, Paris, 2016 (forthcoming).

Deactivating the Collection's Aesthetic Function

“donner la force de rompre les règles dans l'acte qui les fait jouer.”

Michel Foucault (1982)

What is a contemporary public art collection? What might it be? Asking such ontological questions becomes somehow inevitable in our times where art itself is in the throes of changes so sweeping that it is no longer clear, particularly as it merges into other avenues of human endeavour, that art even has an ontology of its own. How to collect, systematically even if not exhaustively, artefacts of an activity that appears to be eschewing the very autonomy and the specificity that have defined it for the past two centuries, to such a degree that it actually seems to be seeking to escape from itself, or at least from the overarching codes and narratives that assign it to the field of art, just art? It would be easy to get bogged down in such vast questions. Yet at the same time, they are somehow inescapable inasmuch as they frame the discussion in which public funds are being used to validate and preserve something deemed to be a public good. Perhaps a simpler way to approach the question then is to ask: who gets to decide what a public collection is?

The FRACs of France have their own answer to this question: the experts. That may sound reassuring to some, less so to others. In any event, from their inception in the early 1980s, each FRAC had to establish a purchasing committee, made up of unpaid art-world experts, nominated by the director, and ratified by the board of trustees, whose task it is to define the broad orientation of the collection. The idea, obviously, is to steer a clear course between the reefs of populism and demagoguery on the one hand (a particular dread of the elite with its republican conception of public space) and the perils of cronyism and cooptation on the other, selecting on the basis of expert-defined criteria works of unassailable excellence. Such an arrangement doesn't seem to make much room for usership - indeed, it seems designed to ensure the stable reproduction of the system and its values - inasmuch as all the committee members are themselves already prominent artworlders. Yet the artworld is a house of many mansions, and though it really cannot be claimed that the system is democratic, it is self-regulating, founded on transparent debate and decision-making. The expert committees are sovereign, and though their propositions are in the last analysis ratified by the board of trustees, including elected officials, they are rarely challenged.

Not only is there a respect for the public purse (though not to the extent of actually consulting the public) but also a deep appreciation of what it means to allocate public money to art for the purposes of a developing a collection. Epistemocratic though they may be in one respect, the FRACs can genuinely be described as instituting and embodying a kind of “republic of art”.

So who are these “experts”? Well, I have been one of them, serving two consecutive three-year terms between 2008 and 2013 on the acquisitions committee of the FRAC Poitou-Charentes, in Angoulême, invited by the incoming director along with two other artworld professionals of very different profiles. One was the director of a large and well-endowed contemporary art museum. Another was artistic director of an alternative, though highly respected regional art centre. I was a research fellow at the National Art History Institute, and later professor of the practice of theory at the European School of Visual Art in Angoulême - though I was explicitly invited by the director for having written about and accompanied practices deliberately at odds with mainstream artworld values, challenging dominant regimes of disinterested spectatorship in favour of modes of usership - an orientation that would

naturally colour my role and positioning within the group. The make-up of the committee is ultimately the key to the future orientation of the collection, since above and beyond the singular propositions of members, everyone on the committee has their own profile and perspective as to what a collection is and ought to be. And though the acquisitions budget is modest - some 100,000 Euro per annum - there are no restrictions on the number, nature or the value of the acquisitions proposed by each member: everything is up for grabs! The committee meets once or twice yearly, and members put forward their proposals - which in essence represent their vision of what a collection ought to be today - in round-robin fashion, and once everyone has made their case (the initial combined total sometimes wildly exceeding the yearly budget), the debates begin.

These debates are invariably passionate because once again, though one might think they are just about some experts waxing on about art, they engage fundamental questions about symbolic representation, history, and public priorities. A philosopher like Jürgen Habermas could do worse than to reference them as exemplary of a kind of discursive reason in action, where rational arguments and counter-arguments collide until such time as the best one prevails,

meaning there are only winners. But it is probably closer to the spirit of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theory of an agonistic social space, where irreconcilable antagonisms are channelled into non-violent confrontation without any expectation of consensus. As one gets to know one's fellow members, and gains insight into their aesthetic and artistic visions - even their conceptual vocabularies and rhetorical strategies - the exchanges only become more spirited, as camaraderie allows greater latitude in upholding certain options, while challenging others. I have often regretted that these debates of public interest, deeply embedded as they are in the processes of legitimation and potentially the reification - at any rate, the public validation - of art, are not open to a broader usership, for they are truly real-time focal points in the constitution of art's multiple histories. They are the site where what is asserted to be collection-worthy is constantly being redefined; perhaps even more so, the catalytic moment where what is collection-compatible at all emerges, or fails to. And just as a catalyst may be necessary for a chemical process to take place, although no further trace of it remains in the final compound, these moments which give insight into how art's histories are advanced or tested, ultimately end up eclipsed as

previously absent approaches and practices become bona fide components of the collection.

Okay, so that's how it works in theory. How about in practice?

My personal take on what a public art collection ought to include, if it is to be in step with our contemporaneity, extends above all to art *whose aesthetic function has been deactivated*, though I didn't perhaps initially formulate it in such stark terms. To speak of deactivating art's aesthetic function - a wonderful formula I take from art historian Mabel Tapia - is not to imagine some kind of aesthetic-free art, which would be absurd, since all perceptual experience has some aesthetic dimension. Rather, it is to acknowledge that art's aesthetic function has slowly come to define art since the eighteenth century to the detriment, and now even to the exclusion, of countless other potential functions. Deactivating it allows those other functions - heuristic functions, documentary functions, even didactic or usological functions - to be brought to the fore. It seems to me that if anything characterises emergent artistic practice today, it is the deactivation of the aesthetic function, and even in those practices where it apparently remains active, it is often as a lure or a decoy.

However, because art's aesthetic function has

become so dominant as to be identified with art as such - even though it characterises only a parenthetic moment in art's history, and was unknown before the eighteenth century -, propositions for acquisition based on that principle are not always embraced with spontaneous enthusiasm, but instead have triggered some thoughtful discussion between me and my fellow committee members. In some cases, the proposals ended up being shelved - ultimately always on the basis of the ontological argument that they were not art in the proper sense of the term, a crucial point to which I will return in a moment - and though what is rejected in such cases represents a telling counter-history to what is integrated, I propose here instead to consider several different ways in which the deactivation of art's aesthetic function plays itself out in proposals which ultimately were brought into the fold, though often in paradoxical ways. I choose these examples because I think they are exemplary of the potential, and also the limits, of institutional repurposing, and why it is imperative to see public institutions such as the FRAC collections as constantly morphing assemblages, rather than writing them off as cultural Leviathans, and setting out on some romantic Robinsonade beyond the walls of institutionality.

Collecting Performative Documentation

One way in which the deactivation of art's aesthetic function manifests itself is in the relatively recent proliferation of what I have elsewhere referred to as "performative documentation". By this I do not mean the documentation of performance (which is itself a recognised and today an almost omnipresent artistic genre) but rather documents which perform or activate the artistic dimension of some activity or passivity that took place outside of any artistic framework, such that although its self-understanding was grounded in art, it was not initially perceived as such, leaving its coefficient of artistic visibility strategically impaired. In this respect, a performative document is a kind of ontological shifter: it shifts the ontology of the event from being merely what it is towards a secondary ontology as an artistic proposition of what it is. In other words, performative documents are not exhausted in the act of documentation, but operate as ontological activators. And though they invariably use well-known artistic means to do so (video, text, drawing...) they are sadly disappointing if we look at them as art, for they merely point to the fact that art

as action is elsewhere, and never embodied by the documented object, nor indeed by any object.

In 2009, following a proposal I made, the FRAC purchased, from Montréal-based artist Michel de Broin, performative documentation of a multi-stage intervention carried out in urban space. De Broin, whose work involves the skilled repurposing of objects and forms, modified a 1986 Buick Regal two-door by gutting it of virtually all its original moving parts and installing in their place a four-person, pedal-driven propulsion system. He and a group of accomplices then took the car-like bicycle out for a test drive through the streets of Toronto, where they were soon pulled over by a posse of good-natured but conscientious police officers. A discussion ensued regarding the definition of the vehicle (is it a car with pedals, or a bike with a Buick body?) and of art (is driving, or cycling, down the road an artistic practice?). Unable to resolve these ontological issues on site, the vehicle was impounded, a court date was set, and ultimately a judge ruled that just because a bike looks like a car doesn't mean it's not a bike - a ruling very much in line with how contemporary art understands assisted readymades. Documentation - including video footage and court transcripts - of all the different phases of this playful yet incisive

intervention were purchased in 2009 by the FRAC Poitou Charentes.

Now here's the interesting part. The following year, another member of the committee proposed that the FRAC purchase the *Shared Propulsion Car* itself - as if the object, and not the action were the site of the art - for many times more than the cost of the performative documentation already in the collection. Of course, the price is not really the point here, and it is common practice to complete previous purchases by acquiring further pieces from a series, but this was clearly something else: both the surplus value and the nature of the object suggested that the car itself was the artwork and that the earlier purchase, far from being performative, was nothing but supporting documentation. A majority of the committee voted in favour of the purchase, which thus went ahead, and I'm sure the FRAC can look forward to re-enacting thought-provoking legal battles in French courts about the respective definitions of bicycles and artworks. I mention this case of two diametrically opposed visions of art today - not so much regarding what it is, as to where it is - because it strikes me as an exemplary case of how institutions tend to square circles, particularly at transitional moments in history, hedging bets on experimental

practices by covering them with tried-and-true, twentieth-century values. One might argue that it is in the collection's interest to nurture diversity, which is true; however, it is not clear that this kind of pluralism really fosters art's free development. The arguments advanced for purchasing the car were based on its aesthetic function alone (its undefinable look), whereas it had already been established, through the purchase of the documentation, that the art it had enabled was elsewhere. And of course as the price disparity underscores, collection practices may have opened up, performative documentation still doesn't enjoy anything like the kind of ontological prestige that art objects do.

Collecting Services

What about the increasing number of art-related practices that are service related, remunerated by fees rather than by the production and sale of objects? Can they be integrated into a public collection? Should they be, given that they exist and in some cases even prosper in other art-sustaining environments? This again raises the ontological question of the collection: is it a kind of display-engendering

machine, fuelled by artworks and objects that fall under that heading? Or is it a more versatile device that can be made to include practices and activities, all and sundry, that have some demonstrable coefficient of art? Take the example of Bernard Brunon's house-painting outfit, *That's Painting*, which is both what it is - a prosperous small painting business, now based in Los Angeles, whose motto is "Quality Work, Done on Time, at Reasonable Prices" - and a full-fledged conceptual art project, which Brunon has been running for over thirty years now, since moving to the United States after severing his ties with the 1970s conceptual painting group, Supports/Surfaces. Though most of *That's Painting's* customers know nothing of Brunon's self-understanding of his practice - all they want is a decent paint job in their living rooms - meaning that he has entirely autonomised himself from the art economy, he does make occasional forays into the artworld, often to clean up after art, as it were, and restore gallery spaces to their pristine white cubic splendour. Considering this exemplary of a post-autonomous practice operating on the 1:1 scale, I proposed the collection purchase a paint job.

Now, the logical response to that collection-provoking suggestion was to retort that if indeed a paint job was required - and it would no doubt be appealing

to have it done by *That's Painting* - shouldn't the painter be paid out of the maintenance budget rather than the collections budget? This logical, if somewhat leading question, while exactly to the point, also seems to operate on the assumption that once a practice has withdrawn from the realm of autonomous art, it no longer has any place in a public collection and must live its socially-embedded destiny to the bitter end. In a way, this kind of bifurcation makes sense, but it comes at a steep cost for art-historical understanding, since all such practices would be lost to posterity and what art history is would be defined by a narrowed understanding of what art can do and be. Though in this case the committee decided that a work by *That's Painting* (in the form of a paint job, that is) would indeed be purchased using the collections budget - thus opening the way, in principle, to collecting services - this did not resolve a whole host of other issues, such as: what exactly was being collected? How, once done, could the "work" fulfil the FRAC's mission of travelling to other venues in the region and beyond? These questions, which were the object of a protracted correspondence between the FRAC, the artist and me, extended the collection process over a period of many months, and will be the object of an upcoming publication. The outcome of

this exchange, at any rate, was that far from being a recipient of autonomous art, the collection found itself reinvented as creative co-author of the work's protocol - and by extension, of itself.

Collecting Social Practice

This is why collecting work, which, rather than being autonomised, has been socialised, inevitably entails not merely adding to the existent collection, but to some extent reinventing it. Whereas any collection of autonomous art is made up of creative works, collecting social practice - and not merely its residues or by-products - is itself something of a creative practice, inasmuch as it involves defining, sometimes even inventing what is to be collected. For oftentimes, the initiating artist has never given any thought as to how, if at all, the practice could outlive its socialisation in life processes. This is the case, amongst others, of the FRAC's more recent purchase of *Promoción de Julio* (2006-) by Argentinian conceptualist Hugo Vidal: an action never conceived to be "collected" and which, though stemming from a lineage of concept art, one is hard pressed to reduce to the status of a "work" of art. In order to maintain alive

the memory of Julio Lopez - a key witness in the trial of the perpetrators of the genocide carried out during Argentina's "dirty war", and who was "disappeared" for the second time in 2006 shortly after giving testimony and whose memory is slowly fading from the public mind - the artist has taken upon himself to use a homemade rubber stamp to imprint the words "Aparición con vida de Julio" [Appearance, alive, of Julio] on the labels of LOPEZ brand wine bottles in local supermarkets, thereby repurposing the popular brand name into a readymade signifier in this self-styled "promotion" campaign. Since 2006, and until such time as Lopez's whereabouts is made public, the artist has been going to the wine shelves of local supermarkets and randomly stamping bottles, which then enter into circulation and may, under the right circumstances, bring their message to random wine drinkers who may notice it, and perhaps, recognise its meaning. Interventionist practices of this kind explicitly raise the question of their artistic ontology. Though the practice owes its conditions of possibility to acknowledged conceptual art practices - Cildo Mereiles's Insertions into Ideological Circuits, for instance - it cannot simply be ontologically stabilised as art, that is, as just art. In other words, though art made it possible, it cannot be reduced to art.

Yet it is not not art; such is its operative value.

When invited to have some fragment of this ongoing interventionist project become part of the FRAC's collection, the artist had no idea what to suggest: a stamped bottle of wine would suggest a removal of the operative object from its circuit; a mere documentation would transfer the site of the art itself from the moment of potential recognition at some anonymous dinner table to the moment of secondary encounter in the gallery space, etc. And of course to not include such a practice in a collection at all simply because it was not intended - that is, formatted - to be collected, would be to deprive a collection, and the myriad narratives that a collection enables, of one of the most emblematic social practices being carried out today in the name of art. Ultimately, a suitable configuration of elements was defined and the "work" was purchased by the FRAC - but this required that the FRAC co-invent with the artist himself what exactly was to be collected, rather than considering that it was the artist's role to define his "work", as had typically been the case under standard, "autonomous", modernist conventions. Collecting work that has been socialised, rather than autonomised, requires simultaneously reinventing a more proactive notion of what "collecting" can mean.

Collecting Coefficients of Art

This brings us back to our initial question regarding the ontology of a contemporary public art collection, in possession of a unexpectedly paradoxical answer: perhaps it has no ontology. From an institutional perspective, this is paradoxical indeed, because dominant wisdom (and theory) contends that art is what the institution says it is. Perhaps, as Lucy Lippard once argued in her landmark book *Six Years: the dematerialization of the art object 1966 to 1972*, “if art could be anything at all that the artist chose to do, I reasoned, then so could criticism be whatever the writer chose to do,” and by extension, the collection anything the collection’s usership decides to make of it. Obviously, the expert culture embedded in the FRAC structure is not quite there yet, but the conditions do seem to be ripe, and the ongoing reinvention of collections necessitated by contemporary practice is pushing in that direction. Art today - or at least the practices mentioned here, and there are countless more of them, in all of the FRAC collections and elsewhere - seems to be living a kind of deontologising moment, seeking to escape the overcodes of art,

yet without renouncing art per se. As it is socialised, art becomes an ingredient, an agent, an energy to be injected into other activities; rather than a category of symbolic configurations, it is seen as a *modus operandi*. The question is thus less: is it art? But rather: how much art do we have here? Or there? A question of coefficients of art, which vary according to circumstance and context. By acknowledging that - and trying to figure out how to collect such practices - contemporary public art collections have already made a step towards deactivating art’s debilitating aesthetic function, and reinventing what they themselves can become.

A REPUBLIC OF ART

FRACs: Back to the Future

I am writing as an insider, in other words, a delinquent who goes unpunished because he is familiar with the inner workings of the institutions and can therefore make a detailed and informed judgement – a consequence, admittedly, of having directed a FRAC (that of Languedoc-Roussillon) for nine years (1993–2002). It was an iconic decade – the end of a century and a millennium – and, as far as I was concerned, the perfect opportunity to support the work of a generation of artists (Pierre Huyghe, Douglas Gordon, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liam Gillick, Claude Closky, Angela Bullock, Philippe Parreno, Maurizio Cattelan, Pierre Bismuth and many others) while discovering exciting contexts such as Glasgow, with its plethora of young talented artists who caught my attention (Simon Starling, Christine Borland, Jonathan Monk, Roderick Buchanan and others), but also the first showings of West Coast artists like Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy and Chris Burden, or the Canadian artist Rodney Graham. The list of exhibitions and acquisitions made during that time would be too long to mention here, but one only needs to delve into the archives to find out more.

I continued to interfere in daily affairs as co-curator of *Trésors publics*, a series of exhibitions marking the FRACs' twentieth anniversary, and for another eight years I was a member of the technical

committees of the FRACs Champagne-Ardenne and Pays de la Loire. The members of these committees each play an active role as they are expected to make proposals and at the same time assist directors in implementing their acquisition policies. I can say today that my suggestions and initiatives were highly appreciated by the main protagonists, namely, the directors of these collections.

All of the above, in sum, warrants that I feel encouraged to speak my mind – not about the past, but for the sake of playing the role of a Cassandra, or rather a fortune teller, while reflecting on the future, dark or bright, of these regional collections of contemporary art and distinguished institutions. Ten years ago I would have more been optimistic about their future, but today I must confess that I am overwhelmed by doubts about their sustainable and peaceful development. The world is changing, and society does not respond with the same kinds of assertions as in the past. Contemporary art has become familiar to a wider public. The French know now what a FRAC means and what it represents, but ironically this does not entail their unconditional support, and the risk of a regression remains high. Because these institutions are mainly financed with public money, their involvement in the contemporary cultural world is determined in

an increasingly insidious way by the political fate of the regions and the cultural visions of their leaders.

In addition to this preamble, I would say that the original, the initial idea behind this form of institution for the promotion and dissemination of contemporary art has always inspired in me a mixture of support and enthusiasm. At the risk of repeating an often-told story, the Fonds Régionaux d'Art Contemporain, from the very moment they were invented and instituted in the early 1980s, were one of the most original and inventive tools in the cultural decentralisation, or regional devolution, of France. The territories of the republic, divided into twenty-two regions, were suddenly dotted with contemporary art outposts, which immediately started collecting by acquiring works and simultaneously engaged in acquainting and familiarising the general public with art. The idea presiding over the creation of these structures was simple and full of common sense: "spreading the word" about contemporary art in the making, everywhere in the country, especially in remote corners that were not really receptive to current forms of living art and contemporary artistic production – in other words, places outside of the capital. And where knowledge was limited or non-existent, what could have made more sense than to introduce audiences

to art by way of living proof? Collecting artworks and bringing them to the attention of diverse audiences – with a special focus on schools – was among the sovereign powers of the newly created regions, along with building, maintaining and financing secondary schools. One of the key demands expressed by regional supervisory bodies therefore concerned the FRACs' educational mission, particularly towards secondary school students. The FRACs' mission brief has essentially remained the same since their establishment: acquisitions, exhibitions, residencies, talks, education and, last but not least, local involvement – presence, authority and a reputation of leading players.

From their very inception a shared set of cultural values was put in place so as to ensure high professional standards in acquisition policies and contemporary art mediation aimed at a global audience in the making. To this end a partnership between the French State and the regions introduced the principles of joint financing and equal distribution of means for the acquisition and dissemination of art. To gain the support of regional parliaments and elected representatives with standardised intellectual backgrounds, the State stressed the FRACs' cultural legacy, the rewards of which would eventually be

reaped solely by the regions – provided they agreed to set criteria and choices and stayed immune to day-to-day political considerations. This quid pro quo succeeded beyond anyone’s initial hopes. The benefits from these investments took a while to become apparent. But the story is not without its twists and turns. Cultural realpolitik likes to minimise the pitfalls and, of course, magnify the results. Because today these collections are rich and instructive. In retrospect it appears that the number of works of good quality and by major artists is high and covers the entire international map of predominantly Western art. Today this relationship between the amount of works acquired and the choices that are now becoming apparent ensures that these collections receive the esteem they deserve. Yet, paradoxically, their exemplary nature was cause for constant battles, fought by the various protagonists who presided over their fate throughout their thirty-odd years of history. The centrifugal forces and populist politics specific to the French provincial context have taken their toll and continue to infuriate many stakeholders.

It might be worth recalling that the history of the FRACs was punctuated by persistent misunderstandings on behalf of its bosses. A quick recap could be useful, as many things have changed in the artistic

and sociological landscape of contemporary art over the last thirty years. But with every political change or board reshuffle, it’s as though the dice were thrown anew and brought us back to square one. The grievances remain the same, among which a persistent lack of investment in local artists, and its corollary, a pernicious tendency to focus on the international scene. Yet things are much more balanced and consensual than they appear to be. They could have made better use of the gap between the circumstantial support given to collections, whose final aim, beyond their status as cultural legacy, would have had beneficial collateral effects. Because investing in the present facilitates and enables better support of reformative processes. On an analytical and political level this type of support is even more of a low-cost act of redemption. It is a well-known fact that the role of local policies is to ensure the economic and social development of the communities from which elected representatives have received their mandate. While in office, politicians are busy allocating budgets towards one thing only: hard infrastructure. Only a fraction of the money is directed towards soft power – and this category includes all these regionally based collections. But instead of acknowledging or even applauding such a sophisticated and simultaneously

progressive outcome, they continually vent their frustration and campaign tirelessly to inflect acquisition policies for clientelist purposes. Similarly, the only valid reason they see for dissemination policies is their educational and social counterpart, and they are increasingly averse to the experimental “laboratory” aspect the FRACs are naturally inclined to.

There is another aspect of this part of the history, which, in my eyes, has played a decisive role in the development and professional success of the collections. Among the directors of FRACs, very few come or came from a museum conservation background. As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority of them have or have had a curatorial profile. Their practical work has been based on the norms and philosophy specific to curatorial thinking, which looks at contemporaneity as a well of ideas and knowledge to be mined rather than objects to be analysed, let alone maintained and preserved. The role of the curator was seen as one of promoting and enabling dialogue, of initiating debate and asking questions rather than being reduced to a keeper of collections or exhibition organiser modelled on a predefined template. These directors have all made a point of keeping abreast of and remaining attentive to the diverse expressions and developments of contemporary art. They proudly

assumed the role of trendsetters, and for the time being, their bets have paid off in every sense of the word – both in terms of history in the present and as regards market value, which in itself should convince the “investors”, who surely weren’t expecting any such return.

Not long ago the insurance values for Paul McCarthy, Mike Kelley, Luc Tuymans, Maurizio Cattelan, John Currin, Gabriel Orozco, Francis Alÿs or even Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno have had to be updated. Six-figure numbers made people’s heads spin, but at the same time the rise in insurance premiums gave managers a cold sweat. From the point of view of FRAC directors, focusing their curatorial efforts on one generation of artists initiated a substantial and elaborate chapter in their institutions’ history, while opening up new and bold paths for the profiles of contemporary art collections and their prospects in general. This has never been an easy task, and I know that all of them, without exception, deployed an abundance of cultural diplomacy as well as countless stratagems to carry through a coherent acquisition policy relying on well-informed choices rather than the contextual options a number of local decision-makers had in mind. A great many contortions were required to escape the pressure of all

those who considered that supporting a regional collection meant above all encouraging and financing a local artistic community. Living and working in the region were the recurring criteria invoked to justify this degree of lobbying. Thankfully, ministerial authority generally allowed the FRACs to remain focused on goals that were founded on far more solid and serious criteria of choice. And, more importantly, the personality of those in charge mostly contributed to maintaining a steady waterline and constant cruising speed through quite a few storms.

Other aspects deserve to be clarified, and among these, I would like to mention two parameters that have changed a great deal over the last three decades. I am referring to international historical trends and the development of the art market. The first decade of the FRACs, the 1980s, was one of trial and error, but the national and international context of contemporary art was conducive to acquisitions that proved invaluable. Fortunately, postmodernism and trans-avant-gardes left few traces in these collections, and the contemporary art market had not yet become overwhelming in those years. Some FRACs got a head start in this initial period, notably those of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Rhône-Alpes, Aquitaine and Pays de la Loire. Their collections reflect the zeitgeist

to at the best, and quite paradoxically, if we look at some museums in Europe that were at the forefront at that time, such as the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven or S.M.A.K. in Ghent or CaixaForum in Madrid, we see similar acquisition patterns. The 1990s were marked by a general recession and modest market levels, which enabled ambitious and large-scale acquisitions, but also purchases aimed at emerging scenes that became permanent focal points of the collections. Those years did not see the kind of sudden and speculative booms and busts we have now become used to. The number of galleries dedicated to contemporary art was as contained as the number of collectors with exclusive passions, which meant that the FRACs, with their collections, were important clients for the few galleries in France, Europe or the United States trading primarily in contemporary art. Throughout this period, institutional purchases remained substantial transactions for the majority of actors in the market.

The 2000s witnessed a radical change in the landscape. The appearance of new generations of well-heeled buyers, an increase in the number of galleries, a burgeoning interest in contemporary art in emerging countries and the influx of artists into the market straight from school all contributed to

an acceleration that completely changed the rules of the game and almost instantly resulted in devaluing the FRACs' collections and subjecting them to unfair competition. The relationship between the most advanced galleries and the FRACs had long been one of complicity. There had been concerted efforts to support artists who stood in a radical and/or politically and socially militant tradition. For many years a feeling of fighting for a common cause prevailed, but the times have changed and the marketers have gained the upper hand. And while a new clientele has imposed its will, it is not necessarily bothering with such forward-thinking rationales. It is now widely known that most of the stakeholders working in the field of contemporary art do anything to please, on the one hand, buyers who now know what they want, and on the other, guardians of the public good who demand a politically correct payoff. The FRACs' acquisition budgets have not kept pace with spiraling inflation, and moreover, prospection and support for creation have become a general phenomenon, to the effect that the FRACs have lost their status as trendsetters and pioneers. But, more importantly, the consistent lack of means has been an increasingly crippling factor in the competition against shrewd collectors. And a closer look at the acquisitions of the

last ten years reveals a worrying increase in modest purchases without any real mid-term perspective.

On an institutional level the FRACs' future seems no brighter, despite public speeches to the contrary. The collections have continued to grow and develop, and managing them has become more complex. There are now so-called second generation FRACs, equipped with much larger premises and storage spaces. The work force are more professional, and human resources have had to adapt – but they are not always staffed and financed as they should be. What the FRACs feared most – the loss of their specificity, their atypical nature – is becoming a reality. Several events are conspiring in this. Their heritage role is leading them inexorably towards rampant museumification, and the new regional map and the reduction in their numbers will probably lead to a concentration and merging of the collections into larger entities, the management of which will inevitably follow museum practices. Museumification and normalisation are the future faces of the FRACs. The wealthier they become, the higher their management and maintenance costs, and it seems inevitable that conservation is prioritised at the expense of innovative forms of dissemination and creative support. And so the page turns; and even if “history doesn't pass the

platter twice”, as Louis-Ferdinand Céline puts it, it is sometimes reheated.

Because museumification is inevitable and because we are inescapably reaching the end of a cycle, I believe that to overcome the persistent difficulties – namely, the perpetual misunderstandings with managers, the decline of financial means and the global feeling of an uncertain future, particularly as concerns the development of the collections – we must revise the original philosophy. We should contemplate a fresh start and therefore radically rethink the role of the museum, its status and its functions. If the model remains the academic museum development, the times ahead will be cruel. If the reinvention takes the shape of a new museum dedicated primarily to promoting contemporary artistic creation, and if the concept of legacy is revisited in an anhistorical sense, then the future is bright. If not, historians will have but one chapter to write.

A REPUBLIC OF ART

Biographies

Ami Barak is an independent curator based in Paris. Among recent projects are: *Art of the world (the Expo) the City of Forking Paths*, World Expo Shanghai 2010; *Performing History*, the Romanian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011; *Foreigners everywhere (works from Pomeranz collection)*, JMW Vienna in 2012 and JMTc Moscow in 2013; *I am also... Douglas Gordon*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art in 2013; *Honey I rearranged the collection, works from the Philippe Cohen Collection*, Petakh Tikva Museum of Art, Passage de Retz, Paris, 2013 and Multimedia Museum of Art, Moscow in 2014; *An Estranged Paradise*, works from DSL collection JMTc Moscow; *Stuttering - Melik Ohanian*, Crac Sete, 2014; *Taryn Simon. Rear Views, A Star-forming Nebula, and the Office of Foreign Propaganda*, Jeu de Paume, Paris in 2015; *Une saison en enfer, Nøne Futbol Club*, Les Eglises Chelles in 2015; *Smash & Grab Nøne Futbol Club*, Iconoscope Montpellier, 2015, *Tim Parchikov - Features of Intuition*, Mmoma Moscow, 2015. He is currently a lecturer at the Paris-Sorbonne University and a former president of IKT - International Association of Curators of Contemporary Art.

Catherine Elkar has been the Director of FRAC Bretagne since its very inception in the late 1980s.

She has accompanied the evolution of the institution from the nomadism of its origins up until its opening in a building designed by the architect Odile Decq in 2013. Numbering more than 4,000 artworks, the FRAC Bretagne collection confronts historic figures of the 1960s and 1970s with artists of younger generations. In close connection with artists such as Victor Burgin, Tacita Dean, Benoît Laffiché, André Raffray, Didier Vermeiren, Jacques Villeglé or, more recently, Esther Ferrer and Ane Hjort Guttu the programmes and acquisition policy of the FRAC mutually enrich each other. Every year numerous projects are organised in both indoor and outdoor settings. The FRAC's programme in 2015 includes projects with, for example, Pascal Pinaud, Christophe Cuzin, Raymond Hains and Gilles Mahé at Mamco. Among the most recent monographic catalogues of the FRAC Bretagne are *Dieter Roth, Processing The World* and *Renée Levi, 200 drawings*.

Charles Esche is Director of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, and co-editorial director and co-founder with Mark Lewis of *Afterall* journal and books based at Central Saint Martins, London. He has recently curated the São Paulo Biennial with a team of seven. In addition to his institutional curating, he has (co-) curated a number of major international exhibitions

including U3 Triennale, Ljubljana (2011); Riwaq Biennale, Ramallah, with Reem Fadda (2007 & 2009); Istanbul Biennale with Vasif Kortun (2005); Gwangju Biennale with Hou Hanru (2002); *Amateur*, Gothenburg with Mark Kremer and Adam Szymczyk (2000).

Annie Fletcher is Chief Curator at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, and tutor at de Appel, Amsterdam. She has most recently curated mid-career retrospectives on Hito Steyerl and Sheela Gowda and worked on the *Museum of Arte Util* with Tania Bruguera, which opened in the fall of 2013 at the Van Abbemuseum. In 2012 she was curator of the biennale EVA International. She was co-founder and co-director of the rolling curatorial platform *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution* with Frederique Bergholtz (2005-10). As a writer she has contributed to various magazines such as *Afterall*, *Metropolis M* and various publications.

Xavier Franceschi is Director of the FRAC Île-de-France/Le Plateau. Previously, as the director of the CAC Brétigny (1991-2002), he curated and organised more than fifty exhibitions including solo shows with Ghada Amer, Philippe Perrot, Claude Closky, Richard Fauguet, Carsten Höller, Franck Scurti,

Michel Blazy, Maurizio Cattelan, Atelier van Lieshout, Xavier Veilhan, Pierre Bismuth and Bojan Sarcevič. From 2002 to 2006 he worked for the French Ministry of Culture especially on projects for public space, in particular these made with Tobias Rehberger (Mulhouse), Pierre Bismuth (Nancy) or Jeppe Hein (Rhin/Rhône canal). Since 2006, at Le Plateau in Paris, his programme has included solo shows with Ulla von Brandenburg, Richard Fauguet, Keren Cytter, Charles Avery, Joao Gusmao/Pedro Paiva, Elise Florenty/Marcel Türkowsky, Michel Blazy, Ryan Gander, Alejandro Cesarco, Aurélien Froment, Haris Epaminonda, as well as group shows made with the FRAC collection. He has edited numerous publications and catalogues in parallel with all these different exhibitions.

Diana Franssen (1954) studied Art at the Art Academy in Tilburg and Art History at the University of Utrecht, Netherlands. Co-founder of the artist initiative De Beeldunie in Tilburg (1986-1988) and co-curator of De Fabriek in Eindhoven until 1997, Franssen has acted as a curator and policy worker at the (Nieuwe Brabantse Kunststichting) NBKS. Between 1991 and 2005 she worked as the Head of library and archive and since then, Curator and Head

of research at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven - providing access for a broad public to modern and contemporary art and in doing so to encourage critical reflection on their part about the relationship between art, design and wider social conditions. She has curated solo exhibitions on Cosey Fanny Tutti, Lynda Benglis, Piero Gilardi, Mark Lewis and Jan van Toorn and developed and accompanied the exhibition project *Living Archive* from 2005-2009. Co-curated projects include *Chapter 2: Museum Modules*; the eighteen-month programme *Play Van Abbe*; and the five-year presentation of the collection and archive *Once upon a time...the collection now from 2013-ongoing*. Curated projects on feminism and women in art include *From the Center* and *On Difference*, and *Eindhoven in Action* on the alternative art scene in the period 1960-1980, from 2013-2014. Franssen is Co-editor of the online platform of L'Internationale - a transinstitutional organisation of six European museums and archives.

Laurence Gateau has been the Director of FRAC des Pays de la Loire since 2005, in charge of a collection comprising 1,600 artworks and the International Art Studio Residency programme. In the exhibition *Women at Work* in 2012, a selection of works from

the FRAC des Pays de la Loire collection was shown at the 3rd Caochangdi PhotoSpring Festival, Beijing. Laurence Gateau was previously the director of the National Centre for Contemporary Art, Villa Arson, Nice (2000-2004) and of the *Le Creux de l'enfer* Contemporary Art Centre, Thiers (1989-99). In 1996 she was curator for France at Alain Séchas's São Paulo Biennial.

Aliocha Imhoff and Kantuta Quirós are art theorists and curators based in Paris, as well as the founders of the curatorial platform *a people is missing*. Among the last exhibitions they have curated are: *Cinéma Permanent in Leiris & Co*, Centre Pompidou Metz, 2015; *Beyond the Magiciens Effect*, Fondation Gulbenkian, Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, 2015; *The Accelerationist Trial*, Centre Pompidou, 2014; *Geography is used, primarily, to make war*, Museo de la Memoria, Bogota, 2014; *A Thousand Years of Non Linear History*, Centre Pompidou, 2013; *Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.*, Bétonsalon - Centre d'Art et de Recherche, 2013; *Artist as ethnographer*, Quai Branly - Centre Pompidou, 2012; *What is to be done? art/film/politics*, Centre Pompidou, 2010. They recently edited the publication *Géoesthétique*, a collective

project focussing on the spatial turn in art (Editions B42, 2014), and *Histoires afropolitaines de l'art, a double issue* (nos. 53-54) of the journal *Multitudes* (2014). Kantuta Quirós is an Associate Professor at the l'Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture in Nantes. Aliocha Imhoff teaches at Université Paris 1. In 2015, they are now resident fellows at French Pavilion, Chicago (directed by Guillaume Désanges) - Rebuild Foundation (Theaster Gates).

Bernard de Montferrand is a Diplomat and former Ambassador of France in Germany (2007-2011), Japan (2003-2006), India (2000-2002), the Netherlands (1995-1999) and Singapore (1989-1993). He is President of FRAC Aquitaine since 2007 as well as President of PLATFORM, the network of the twenty-three Fonds Régionaux d'Art Contemporain (FRAC), since November 2010. He is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Foundation of France and a consultant.

Stephen Wright is a Paris-based art writer and Professor of the Practice of Theory at the European School of Visual Arts. Over the past decade, his research has examined the ongoing usological turn in art-related practice, focusing on the shift from modernist categories of autonomy to an art on the

1:1 scale, premised on usership rather than spectatorship. A selection of his writing in English may be found on the collective blog northeastwestsouth.net. In 2013, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* was published by the Van Abbemuseum. He has been a member of the acquisitions committee of the FRAC Poitou-Charentes in Angoulême since 2008.

Catalogue

[a photographic documentation
of the show will be added here soon]

A REPUBLIC OF ART

Colophon

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