



# LIEU-DIT

THE JOURNAL OF THE FONDATION D'ENTREPRISE HERMÈS



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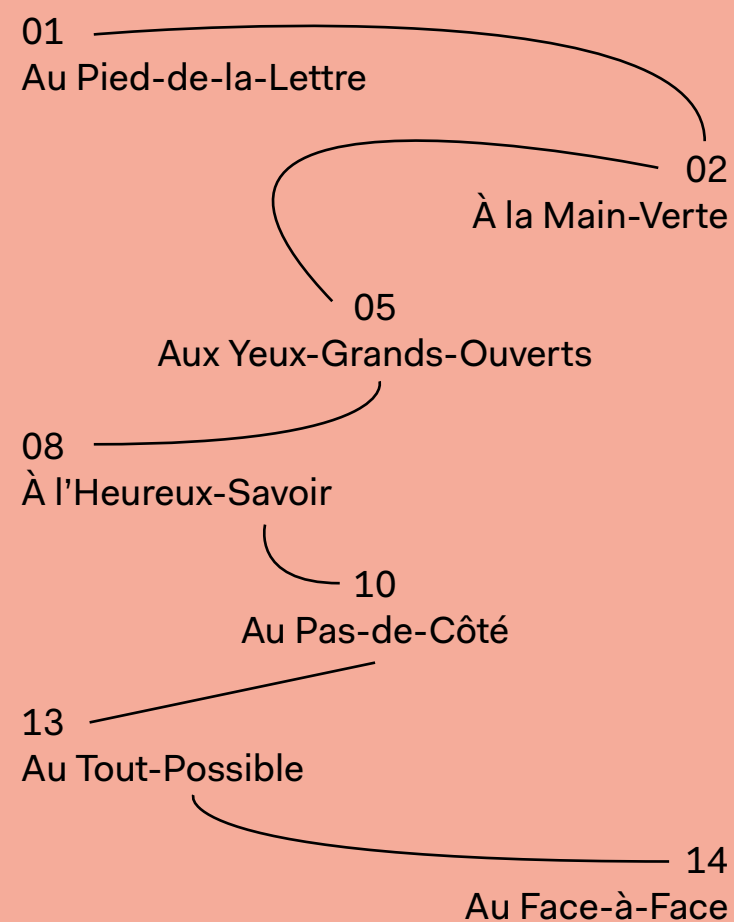
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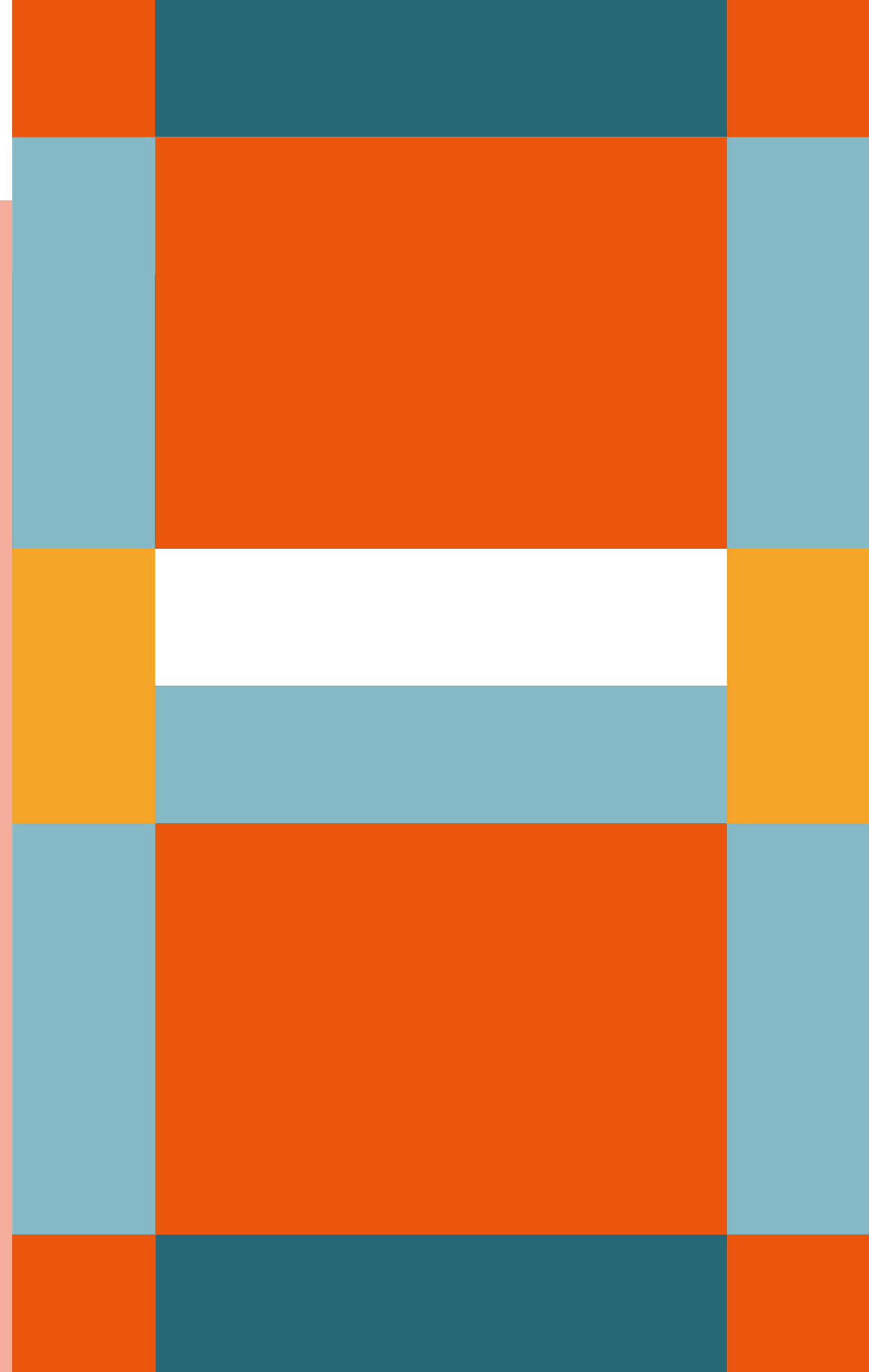
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LIEU-DIT is the journal of the  
Fondation d'entreprise Hermès.  
It is a mouthpiece for the communities  
the Foundation partners with the ground  
in the creation of new work across the  
arts, the transmission of skills and  
know-how, the preservation of biodiversity  
and the promotion of social solidarity.  
Since 2008, the Foundation has brought  
together a network of individuals  
committed to implementing diverse  
gestures of support at the local, national  
and international levels.



# EMBRACING DIFFERENCE

The sixth edition of LIEU-DIT invites us to expand our horizons – a core ambition of the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès. Each of the personal narratives presented here inspires us to reach out, engage with others, embrace difference and diversity, and explore alternative approaches.

Guided by the humanist values passed down by the house of Hermès, the Foundation commits to individuals and organisations who work – in communities and localities worldwide – to deliver our programmes in support of creativity, the transmission of skills, the protection of biodiversity, and solidarity. LIEU-DIT showcases their actions in their own words. Each account is a window onto the world: from practical workshops designed to raise awareness of biodiversity through new educational opportunities for pupils who speak languages other than French, to a programme of works for the stage that challenge the ways we live together today and an exploration of Japanese skills and expertise around a universal raw material. You will also find reflections on shared curatorial practices across continents and cultures, personal stories from Hermès team members on their involvement with a vital solidarity initiative, and lastly, a photographer's journey of discovery to a remote, little-known reality.

Everyone featured here is committed to shaping a world where generous, local philanthropy takes pride of place. A world where shared knowledge and experiences drive our collective growth: a public-interest mission carried forward by our beneficiaries, partners, supporters and Foundation ambassadors, with whom we are proud to stand shoulder to shoulder.

Cover: François-Xavier Gbré, "Radio Ballast" series, *Dimbokro*, 2024 © François-Xavier Gbré, ADAGP, Paris 2025

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# HORTICULTURE: FERTILE GROUND FOR LESSONS OF EVERY KIND

At Collège Paul Valéry in Metz, Manuterra is now part of the teaching programme for a class of pupils who have recently arrived in France, speak languages other than French, and are entering the state school system for the first time. Children aged 11 to 16 learn French and build self-confidence as they discover practical horticultural skills, bond with classmates and showcase their existing talents. Class teacher Constance Jacob talks to LIEU-DIT about this exciting shared experience.

“My pupils and I took part in Manuterra over the course of the last school year. My class is quite unique – as a UPE2A (*Unité pédagogique pour élèves allophones arrivants, non scolarisés antérieurement*) it consists of pupils who speak languages other than French and are entering the French state school system for the first time. The children are supported as they learn to read, write and do maths in French. As you can imagine, sitting for hours and listening to an unfamiliar language is a challenge they tackle bravely day by day, but it can quickly become exhausting.

How else can we help them learn? It seemed to me that working together outdoors, hands-on, in a garden, would be a great alternative. The Manuterra programme provided 12 two-hour sessions with a professional expert across the school year. This isn't the first time that Eric, from the not-for-profit association CPN Coquelicots (*Connaître et Protéger la Nature*), has worked with children who speak languages other than French. We've collaborated before, and he always brings the adaptability and understanding you need to motivate a sometimes reluctant group, especially when it comes to weeding their garden plot

in the rain! He doesn't hesitate to encourage girls to use tools alongside the boys – something they may not have thought possible in their home cultures – and they quickly find that they're just as capable, if not more so.

Pupils are given a richly illustrated logbook to help them learn new vocabulary – the names of vegetables, fruits and plants and the tools needed for garden work. First, the class thought about the kind of garden they wanted, drawing up plans and lists of things to plant. Next, they learned gardening terms and techniques, before being 'kitted out' with (sometimes oversized) boots and overalls. Finally, they got started!

Girls newly arrived in France from Afghanistan pulled on their gardening gear over traditional dress, unsure what to expect but smiling all the same, ready to get to work with a shovel or a hoe. Pupils from all over Africa walked in snow for the first time. Everyone spoke different languages and came with varying levels of scholastic attainment, but all shared the same goal: to taste a strawberry and prepare a salad with the fruits of their collective work.



What better way to learn new vocabulary than through hands-on workshop sessions, holding and working with objects, and discovering practical, concrete life skills? And where better to do that than a garden? Some pupils were already expert gardeners, and enjoyed demonstrating their abilities outside the classroom, where they still have so much to learn. It was a huge pleasure for them, and for me, too! Others enjoyed moving from one new discovery to the next as they gained new confidence in this green, open-air classroom.

Inevitably, in a class of children aged 11 to 16, there are significant age gaps, coupled with their diverse languages, cultures and nationalities. Often, it can be difficult for each child to find their place in such a unique, heterogeneous group. But out in the garden, everyone has to communicate to get the job done, and barriers are more easily overcome. Participants help one another and work as a team. I remember one pupil on the autism spectrum who needed lots of time to put on his boots – which were invariably a little too big or small – and who initially refused to get wet or dirty. From one session to the next, he gradually became more confident and enjoyed working in the garden so much so that he forgot the bother of his badly fitting boots. Little by little, our garden began to take shape, the children's vocabulary



Launched by the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès in 2021, Manuterra, Learning from the Living World, introduces school pupils to the importance of biodiversity while they discover horticultural know-how.

developed naturally and effortlessly, and they became noticeably more self-assured. Our garden backs onto one of the school buildings. It's a large, green space that had been left completely unused before we decided to turn it into a space for teaching and learning about plants. The class's participation in Manuterra encouraged the school to buy, assemble and install tables and benches, so that pupils can enjoy lessons outdoors. But above all, our garden is of course a place for planting and growing. We created a spiral of aromatic herbs and sowed courgettes directly into the ground, while strawberries, onions, radishes and salad greens were planted in raised beds that we built ourselves. We also planted a hedge of small fruit bushes (raspberries, gooseberries and more) and a permaculture mound, using old cardboard boxes and organic waste to grow pumpkins. We even planted trees. All of this helped raise the pupils' awareness of ecology, a concern that had previously felt far removed from their daily lives, but whose importance they quickly grasped, with the help of their Manuterra logbooks. Promoting respect for nature is a very important aspect of teaching at our school, and projects like this contribute so much to that mission.

To celebrate the end of the year, we organised a fete and invited the entire school. We even produced a podcast broadcast on Radio Paulette, the school's online radio station. I love my job, though it can be challenging at times. Projects like this are as exciting and energising for me as they are for the pupils – we all enjoyed our life lessons from Nature herself, the very best teacher."

# TRANSFORME, A PROGRAMME THAT EXPLORES THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD

By Marc Le Glatin,  
Director of the Théâtre  
de la Cité Internationale, Paris



This autumn, the Théâtre de la Cité Internationale in Paris presents the opening performances of the third edition of the Transforme festival, which will subsequently tour to Clermont-Ferrand, Lyon and Rennes. For LIEU-DIT, director Marc Le Glatin examines the theatre's foundational values, their close resonance with the themes and ideals that define the actions of the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès, and the choices that shape the festival's programme.

"The Foundation's programme, New Settings, the first iteration of the current Transforme festival, was an established feature at the Théâtre de la Cité Internationale (TCI) when I arrived in 2016. Very quickly, I met with the Foundation's team to discover the principles underpinning its activities, and the values of its parent company, the house of Hermès. The Foundation's work in the performing arts is deeply rooted, it seems to me, in the concept of freedom. Freedom from conventional theatrical forms; free-ranging, fertile crossovers between disciplines; and a willingness to examine and challenge the world around us, in productions that will, it's hoped, prove liberating and inspirational for their audiences. This last aim is further enhanced by a new initiative, 'Going Further', which broadens the theatrical experience for specific audience groups by extending the reach of Transforme productions, through talks with performing artists, workshops, and opportunities to engage with the sometimes small-scale performances that some pieces lend themselves to.

For our part, the TCI is located at the heart of Paris's Cité Internationale campus, which is itself a utopian space, founded on the hopes for peace and humanism that sprang from the atrocities of the First World War. The words of our founders in the 1920s still ring true today, but we must work to apply them to the issues of tomorrow: the future of the biosphere, the development of an intelligent infosphere, and the ways



communities can organise to clarify the perception and shaping of our shared destiny. It so happens that the Transforme festival's guiding principles clearly articulate this aspect of its work: a profoundly reflective approach that complements its high artistic standards and drives its embrace of cross-disciplinary, experimental theatrical forms. Transforme's guiding principles are doubly demanding. Their aims are also those of the TCI, as expressed in our mission statement over the past nine years.

Should organisations and venues like ours be working 'for the common good'? It's a protean concept. In reality, it falls to democracy, and the outcome of public, often heated debate, to define the contours of the 'general interest' or 'common good' at any given moment. Nonetheless, it remains true that not-for-profit associations, foundations, cooperative organisations and a whole, extended community of consciences are alert to these concerns, and likely to be motivated by them to take action. At the TCI, our support for the making and staging of new artistic works contributes to sharpening, disrupting, and, on occasion, shifting consciences – not least our own.

These aims underpin regular, in-depth exchanges between the Foundation and the four national theatres that host the Transforme festival. Our staging of bold theatrical gestures is the measure of our authentic commitment to sometimes opaque, elusive forms. It is also, frankly, part of what makes the festival so much fun: entertainment with purpose, made possible by a powerful concept – the determination of the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès to locate its activities away from a single, centralised venue. As such, no aspect of Transforme would be possible without our partners. From the outset, that core concept has been reaffirmed and carried forward in regular discussions between the five executive entities: performing arts professionals working in diverse contexts shaped by politics, territorial constraints, and socio-demographics.

Transforme – Paris 2025 runs from October 2 to 17. It's important to frame the event as a festival, with all the energy that implies. Over fifteen days, twenty-five presentations of six theatrical works forge a diverse community of spectators, as they rebound from one performance space to the next.



In October 2025, a powerful, unifying theme promises to make the festival buzz louder than ever: the TCI's theme for our 2025-26 season is *Moins* ['Less'], with a string of shows that explore society's obsession with 'growth' – and how growth preys upon the natural world and the humans who inhabit it. Coincidentally (or not...), as the curtain-raiser to the TCI's 2025-26 season, Transforme sets the prevailing tone of 'serious fun', with two jubilant, playful dance works. Tatiana Julien's *En fanfaare!* and Mette Ingvartsen's *Delirious Night* celebrate the profoundly social nature of the human condition, the setting-aside of social constraints for shared enjoyment, the joy in letting go, and a kind of earthly transcendence, tinged with gaiety and melancholy in equal measure. Because we must all rid ourselves of the tensions and

toxins that accumulate when too much is... just too much. Accompanying these two dance pieces, a quartet of works invites us to share a spectrum of sensory experiences: water and wind, in *Je suis une montagne* by Eric Arnal-Burtschy; a reverie on the clunky clockwork of the heavens in *Le Bruit des Pierres* by Domitille Martin, Nina Harper and Ricardo Cabral; the rejection of a sense of kinship in *Radio live – Réconciliations* by Aurélien Charon; and wanderings on the shores of the Mediterranean, where life journeys are reinvented in *Le rêve d'Elektra* by Clément Bondu. Each is an invitation to explore avenues of the utmost seriousness: how can we find alternative means of production, consume less, and live more?"

Transforme – Paris  
Théâtre de la Cité Internationale  
October 2 → 17, 2025

Launched by the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès in 2023, the Transforme festival presents cross-disciplinary theatrical works that engage with the contemporary world.



# METAL: SPEARHEADING THE ACADEMY IN JAPAN

By Reiko Setsuda,  
Director, art and culture, Hermès Japan,  
and Curator of Le Forum

After wood and clay, the third edition of the Skills Academy Japan is dedicated to metal. Directed by Reiko Setsuda, the programme beginning in autumn 2025 will include a publication, exhibition and workshops. In a conversation with LIEU-DIT, Setsuda discusses preparation for the next edition of the Academy, which explores a rich array of topics, including artisan skills, the properties of metal, and its particular uses in Japanese culture.

"When we launched the first edition of the Skills Academy Japan in 2021, dedicated to wood, we aimed to redefine the role of artisan woodworking skills and know-how, for generations to come. Today, new technologies, especially AI, are transforming our lives. Will what we call 'know-how' carry the same meaning in the future? Conscious of the vital importance of studying these essential, universal materials, we decided to align our themes with those explored by the Skills Academy in France.

In autumn 2025, we began planning the third edition, focused on metal, an essential material in human society since the dawn of civilisation. In Japan, each edition begins with the launch of a dedicated study. This third volume, produced in collaboration with Iwanami Shoten, includes translations of eleven articles selected from the French edition, *Savoir & faire – Le métal* (2018), covering topics such as lock-making, metal casting for sculpture, and goldsmithing, with personal testimonies from artists including Ron Arad, Marc Mimram, Richard Serra and Dominique Perrault, alongside twelve original texts by Japanese contributors.

Our preparatory research for the publication deepens our understanding of this vital raw material. The period leading up to the 2026

workshop is an opportunity for us to meet specialists in the field and enhance our knowledge of related issues. In this context we began exploring *tatara*, the traditional Japanese steel- and sword-making technique. The book also documents a legendary, gold-based remedy from ancient China, which is thought to confer longevity; the Japanese tradition of articulated, metal animal figures (*jizai okimono*); and the use of items of weaponry in peacetime. The Japanese edition also features two original photographic portfolios, one of which is dedicated to the iconography of metal music.

To mark the book's publication, Le Forum will present an exhibition titled "Ambivalence" featuring works that explore the ambivalence of metal, notably through the iconography of metal music, the representation of metal in films, and its place in the work of the celebrated Japanese avant-garde artist Chu Enoki."

"Ambivalence"  
Le Forum, Tokyo, Japan  
October 2025 → February 2026

*Since 2021, the Skills Academy has invited young people, students and professionals to come together to explore a universal material, across a spectrum of disciplines, with the accent on innovation, experimentation and eco-responsibility.*



# EXCHANGING PERSPECTIVES AT LE FORUM

By Reiko Setsuda,  
Director, art and culture, Hermès Japan,  
and Curator of Le Forum

Le Forum curator Reiko Setsuda was invited by Joël Riff, her counterpart at the Foundation's Brussels gallery La Verrière, to co-curate "Spektrum Spektrum", an exhibition shown at the Tokyo art space in spring 2025. As a new exhibition opens – "Faire corps", co-curated with Keren Detton, director of the FRAC Grand Large in Dunkirk – Reiko Setsuda reflects on her curatorial vision for Le Forum.



You have been overseeing the artistic programming of Le Forum since 2011. What is your curatorial approach? What guides the choices you make for Le Forum?

**Reiko Setsuda** Through programmes such as the Skills Academy and our exhibitions, my perspective is to make a microclimate: a space where art can both engage with

contemporary society and maintain itself as an experimental field, a site for creation or contemplation. The artists selected for Le Forum are those who are willing to take up the challenge of experimentation at this space, pursuing alternative values by thinking and practicing around urgent issues in a contemporary manner, from plural perspectives. Urgent issues also



How has Le Forum's audience responded to "Spektrum Spektrum"?

We need to recall that every experimental exhibition in history was created first and foremost for the artists themselves. "Spektrum Spektrum" is no exception. The cross-genre exchanges and spontaneous interventions by the participating artists showed that they are also a wonderful audience for each other. The audience commented on the freshness of the cross-genre installation and meticulous interlay of video/frame/mirror. In "Spektrum Spektrum", you will discover how all the works spontaneously enter into dialogue together. It may also stem from the etymology of the word 'forum', a place to meet people and exchange ideas!

Besides Emmanuelle Castellan could you talk about the other artists participating in the exhibition?

include enduring concepts, such as time and the body. Art needs to regain its inner space in the current society by securing time for people to contemplate these matters in the heart of a gigantic city, such as Tokyo, and to be exposed to artistic language. This notion of time has been shaping a unique climate that brings all kind of weather, and Le Forum has grown into a special place within the Tokyo art scene.

How did the project "Spektrum Spektrum" come about?

"Spektrum Spektrum" was born out of a conversation with Joël Riff, curator of La Verrière in Brussels. Our dialogue ranged from the exchange of information about artists to exhibition criticism, but I was particularly inspired by Emmanuelle Castellan's exhibition "Spektrum" held at La Verrière in Belgium last summer. Since arriving at this gallery, Joël has been pursuing his own approach with the 'extended solo,' [by enriching a solo exhibition with the inclusion of work by other creators] and I found this interpretation very interesting. Furthermore, the narrative that Castellan constructed was composed of multiple layers and phases, viewing the exhibition space as an 'atelier/studio/film set.' I suggested to Joël that he respond to this exhibition with another 'extension'. Using the amplitude and resonance contained in the word 'spectrum' as a mirror tool, I thought that the 'extension' at Le Forum in Japan could be conceived as a novel-exhibition, a place where one can exist at the core between the reality and the fiction.

I had the real of joy introducing Johannes Nagel's ceramics, as well as Walter Swennen's paintings from Brussels show. Michiko Tsuda applies principles of moving images to render spatio-temporal amplitudes visible. Motoyuki Daifu's photographs deploy aquatic spectres, manifesting on streets, with strong doses of humour, while Kentaro Kawabata's objects imbue the concave surfaces of vessels and spoons with erotic illusions, establishing boundaries. Marie Laurencin (1883-1956) invites us to revisit a historical figure, elevating reality to the realm of the decorative sublime in luminous pastel hues.

Could you introduce the exhibition "Faire corps", which you are co-organising with Keren Detton, the director of Frac Grand Large?

It is significant to present works from the French public collection FRAC Grand Large – the Regional Collection of Contemporary Art – at Le Forum. But why? First, Dunkirk is located on the border with Belgium and is also close to the UK, just across the sea. The question of boundaries has implications for the issues of hegemony and geopolitics that we face today. In this century, we cannot avoid thinking the notion of demarcation. Secondly, as we cast an eye on the FRAC Grand Large collection, its interdisciplinarity – painting, sculpture, video, performance and design – reflects a broader vision regarding questions of hierarchy and gender. Design, in particular, plays a key role in exploring the social connection of art. With Keren Detton, we structured the exhibition "Faire corps" around the theme



of the ‘social body’. Are you familiar with the famous feminist slogan ‘The personal is political’? Even if it remains unclear who said it first, it shows how a deeply personal gesture can open up to broader sociopolitical issues. How do we consider our body, or the body of someone else, in relation to our social environment?

Which artists are showing this autumn at Le Forum?

This exhibition features 13 artists from Europe (Belgium, Greece, France, Italy, Romania and the UK), the USA and Japan, with artworks spanning from 1973 to 2025. We’re beginning to look back at the history of performance, an art form closely tied to the body. Starting with the gender-questioning photographs of Helen Chadwick and the artwork of the 1970s movements such as André Cadere’s *Round Bar of Wood*, we’re also introducing Ana Torfs’s video exploring metamorphosis, and Nefeli Papadimouli’s *Être forêts*, composed of ten costumes and a video installation. A selection of drawings by Christine Deknuydt, a local artist from Dunkirk, reflects the boundary between humans and animals. The exhibition also

features works by Jesse Darling and Paul Maheke, who symbolically engage with fragile bodies; Tarek Lakhrissi, who explores questions related to his native language, and the artists’ collective Abake and Japanese artist Kohei Sasahara, who present works created through collective bodies, allowing diverse perspectives to intersect.

“Faire corps”  
Le Forum, Tokyo, Japan  
July 19 → October 12, 2025

An active supporter of contemporary art since its inception, the Fondation d’entreprise Hermès programmes exhibitions at four gallery spaces in Europe and Asia.

# HOME IS WHERE WE LIVE TOGETHER

For almost ten years, the not-for-profit association Lazare has been organising shared housing across France, bringing together young professionals and people experiencing housing insecurity. In Clermont-Ferrand, a property was refurbished in 2024 to welcome a new community living initiative. The Fondation supports the project as part of its programme H<sup>3</sup> – Heart, Head, Hand, having been introduced to Lazare by Hermès staff. Two of them, now H<sup>3</sup> ambassadors, tell us how this home came to be.

“Lazare is a not-for-profit association created in 2006 by three young people who chose to open their rented accommodation to people experiencing housing insecurity. More than a roof over their head, they sensed that human contact was vital. Today, a network of twenty properties hosts young professionals committed to helping those in need.

This human connection is an opportunity to serve together, and to give something back to society, from which we’ve been lucky to be given so much.”

Thomas Mercelot  
Director of human resources,  
Pôle Les Manufactures d’Auvergne

We were impressed by the dedication and passion shown by the association’s executive team, and by the stories they shared of the people they’ve helped. And so we sought the Foundation’s support via the H<sup>3</sup> programme, and for artisans to contribute to the day-to-day running of the organisation. The H<sup>3</sup> committee approved our request, and provided a grant that enabled Lazare to refurbish a house in Clermont-Ferrand.

“The first time I heard about the Lazare house was at a presentation by Louis [the project leader], at the Maroquinerie de Sayat. His mission wasn’t just to raise funds from major local enterprises, but also to share his own experience. I saw how fulfilled he was by the simple act of reaching out to others. I was deeply moved by the project, because any one of us could find ourselves lost and struggling at any time. And we all have the capacity to help. At the Maroquinerie, we come from different backgrounds and have a range of skills that we can bring to the project, to help people bounce back.

After months of work and the arrival of Laure and Louis, the couple responsible for the property, the home was opened in September 2024. Four house-sharers – two young professionals and two people in difficult circumstances – joined the house community in November, with another two arriving in March.

The building is an old, large townhouse with lovely, leafy grounds that need looking after: it’s a great opportunity for the workshop artisans to refresh and restore this living space, while also sharing their skills with the tenants. It’s the kind of experience that will, inevitably, help us to grow and develop as individuals.”

We’re just beginning to collaborate with team members at house of Hermès workshops: artisans are invited to take part in upcoming solidarity projects: gardening, creating a vegetable plot, building a bike shelter, a cookery session and friendship lunch on the last Sunday of each month...

Sandrine Brogniez  
Artisan leather-worker,  
Maroquinerie de Sayat

With the H<sup>3</sup> – Heart, Head, Hand programme, the Fondation d’entreprise Hermès encourages house of Hermès staff members to engage in public interest initiatives since 2013, either by sharing their skills or through the Foundation’s direct financial support.



# "THE SHORTEST ROUTE IS NOT A STRAIGHT LINE, BUT A DREAM"

Interview with François-Xavier Gbré  
by Clément Chéroux, Director,  
Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson

In 2024, Latitudes' first laureate, French-Ivoirian photographer François-Xavier Gbré, photographed a new series following the railway that connects Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire with Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso. Both poetic and documentary, his work reveals a little-known piece of railway heritage, steeped in the region's personal stories and political histories. In conversation with Clément Chéroux, the mentor for Latitudes' first edition, Gbré discusses his series titled "Radio Ballast", which is now on show at the Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson and published as a monograph with Éditions Atelier EXB.

**Clément Chéroux** What was your starting point for the series "Radio Ballast"?

**François-Xavier Gbré** There were several. Some aspects reach far back into my subconscious, no doubt, because my grandfather was a railway worker. Also the fact that this line was built by France in Côte d'Ivoire, and so it connects my two nationalities: my father is Ivoirian, and my mother French.

There's a very strong resonance in your photographs between nature and industry. Is that relationship something you tried to pacify in your photographs, or did you set out to highlight tensions between the two?

The tension is constant. I wasn't *trying* to create tension, since it already exists, but rather to express that tension, to transcribe it in pictures. Côte d'Ivoire is a mutilated territory that has suffered much deforestation over the past century. My idea was to observe that landscape. The pictures reflect things I've already seen in cities, in

the vast metropolis of Abidjan. Here, the idea was to discover those same things in the interior, in more rural areas. And to show nature reasserting itself, especially along the abandoned sections of track, because the route has evolved over time. There, we see very clearly how *nature* finally gets the upper hand over *humankind*.

How would you define your documentary approach?

Is it fundamentally documentary? I certainly bring a desire to document and inform to this work, but I wouldn't define it as truly 'documentary' because it leaves a great many doors open, and plenty of scope for the viewer's subjective interpretation. The viewer is free to imagine, to invent their own stories as they look through these images. I'm halfway between poetry and documentary. I need both – I can't work without one or the other. I think the two approaches are complementary, they respond to each other. The documentary aspect is the driver, the best way to get a



project started: it gives you something to aim for. We look for information, but there's no guarantee we'll find it. And it's there, as I see it, that creative freedom intervenes.

How does that translate into pictures?

The picture of the village of Rubino (*page 17 of the French section*) near Agboville, is a good example. It's a highly charged image. In the foreground, a tree is growing between the rails. I photographed this place because it played a very important role in the revolt of the Abbey people against French colonial rule. The railway track was taken apart and thrown aside, down its embankment, which caused a train to derail. The event led to the capture of a French colonial agent, Rubino, who was subsequently executed and the village then named after him.

Tell us about the importance of colour in your work?

I am a colourist, I'm in love with colour. It's not the meaning of colours that interests me as such, because that can change from one society to another; it's more about their combinations. Colours are like musical notes. The space they occupy in a picture is like a note in music: long or short, loud or quiet. Actually, it seems to me that colours can communicate feelings. Côte d'Ivoire's flag is orange, white and green, representing the savannah in the North, peace in the middle, and forest in the South. I looked for those three colours in the landscape, for places where they combined or were juxtaposed. I worked with them in compositions that were shot mostly in quite strong mid-afternoon light. Compared to my earlier work, late-afternoon light, twilight and artificial light have taken on greater importance. In a way, I wanted light to become the subject of the picture, to achieve particular effects and reveal specific meanings. I'm thinking especially of the picture of Dimbokro (*next page*), where you can just see a corner of a colonial house at sunset. The light at dusk offers a kind of revelation. I went there in broad daylight, too, but the effect was completely different, the image didn't hold the same interest. I wanted an intriguing, troubling atmosphere, a feeling of suspense, as if something is about to happen. You can see it in the mix of artificial lights in a photograph of Bouaké

(*on the opposite page*), with the Sitarail logo and that red glow. There's something unexpected, surprising, a sense of something emerging in the picture. A tipping point, not so much into fantasy, which I often look for in my work, but into a kind of strangeness.

What's your takeaway from the project?

The shortest route between two points isn't a straight line, but a dream. What that means is that it's better to avoid the motorway and rather take the side roads, to get off the beaten track and go searching either side, for surprises, accidents. I think we need to stray from the straight line, the path that's already been laid down. The railway was all about staying on track because you couldn't do otherwise. So I looked for ways to find interesting stories to tell, either side of the tracks. I think you find your dreams where you least expect them.

François-Xavier Gbré, "Radio Ballast"  
Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paris  
October 29, 2025 → January 11, 2026

Since 2024, Latitudes by the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès has supported international art photography by assisting in the creation and presentation of new photographic series.













