

# Contemporary Art and the Museum: from the Musée du Luxembourg to the present day (1818-2018)

International symposium

Archives Nationales, Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Orsay - 10-12 October 2018

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Designed as an extension to the displays and exhibitions organised at the Pompidou Centre and the Musée d'Orsay, the results of the project "Exhibiting the History of a Collection: The Museum for Living Artists" organised as part of the Labex CAP, the international symposium "Contemporary Art and the Museum: from the Musée du Luxembourg to the present day (1818-2018)" will be held in autumn 2018 at the Archives Nationales, the Centre Pompidou and the Musée d'Orsay.

The celebration of the bicentenary of the first museum of contemporary art in the Palais du Luxembourg in 1818 will thus be an opportunity to set out a historiographical appraisal of the institution and of the issues that exhibiting "contemporary" art continues to raise, taking a transnational and interdisciplinary approach. It will therefore take a retrospective and reflective look at how public and private museums, past and present, position themselves when faced with the art of their time.

Universally known as the "Musée du Luxembourg", this first contemporary art museum positioned itself as a body providing interim artistic recognition between the Salon and traditional museums (Louvre, regional museums): it therefore did not have a collection of its own. The preference for an official name inspired not by its missions but by its initial location concealed a persistent misunderstanding: far from being a "museum for living artists", the Musée du Luxembourg was *de facto* a "museum for contemporary artists" (Bénédite, 1892), a *musée de passage*, where the dead rubbed shoulders with the living until the fate of the works on display was decided.

An organism for the dissemination of contemporary art on a national scale (Bertinet, 2015), the Musée du Luxembourg was one of the models most frequently adopted by the great capitals of the world in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Lorente, 2009). This international influence, however, reached its height just at the moment when the museum was going through a real crisis brought about by its artistic representativeness being considered incomplete, (an absence of any real acquisition policy, out of step with contemporary artistic production) and by a failure to offer good examples in architecture and museography (unsuitable and temporary buildings, saturation of exhibition spaces) (Bastoen, 2015). This crisis was thus particularly symptomatic of and inseparable from the reversal in the position of Paris museums, surpassed by the innovative and creative model embodied in new cultural capitals such as Berlin, New York and Chicago (Tarasco-long, 2009).

The disputed legitimacy of the Musée du Luxembourg goes back to the question, still relevant today, of the aptitude of museum institutions to deal with contemporary artistic production, both in terms of an acquisition policy for artworks and their presentation to the public. The symposium programme will endeavour to develop the bases of an

interconnected history of contemporary art museums in a global context, in a constant dialogue with current practices.

Continuing the work undertaken by the Labex CAP and the 2017 edition of the Bibliothèque Kandinsky's Summer University, we will welcome papers examining the following themes in particular:

**Scope of the contemporary:** because it is interested in “art in the process of being made” and not in “inherited art” (Pomian, 1989), the museum of contemporary art immediately raises the issue of its own temporality. How have museum institutions devoted to contemporary art defined the chronological limits and object categories relating to them? The diversity of the terms adopted - museums of “living”, “modern”, “contemporary” art - like the random nature of forming the collections and their fate through history, demonstrates this ambiguity.

**Sources of the contemporary:** the diversity of people involved in contemporary art museums and related institutions leads to the production of sources that are little known, totally new even, in some cases. How do contemporary art institutions and archive departments make these sources their own, which they do not necessarily produce? How do they envisage their historic and scientific value? What are their strategies for acquisition, conservation, communication, and enhancement?

**Creating narratives:** moreover, the choice of acquisitions, the opportunities offered by donations and bequests, as well as the display, dissemination and circulation of artworks oblige the museum to create a fairly powerful discourse on the history of contemporary art and its current situation. Rarely consensual, these narratives can be prescriptive about the value of an artist, a movement, or even of a local or national art scene. The growing globalisation of culture and the recognition of cultural areas long ignored by a history of modern art mainly centred on the West makes this critical dimension particularly sensitive today.

**Museum policies:** the creation of contemporary art museums also raises somewhat significant issues when it comes to economics, politics, architecture and town planning, as the recent multiplication of private foundations and offshoots of great institutions shows. In this respect, we particularly welcome proposals examining the relationships or conflicts between public and private museums, between the role of the State and that of the market, between the collector's activities and curator's profession, which often reveal great disparities from country to country.

**Museums and contemporary creation:** a work entering a museum, whether this is desired or denounced, calculated or imposed, early, late or even posthumous, has always been an important factor in an artist's biography. Not only should the multiple issues of the process of becoming a museum piece be examined, but also the place of the contemporary art museum in the creative process. Particular attention will therefore be given to the possible interactions of an artwork with a museum institution, its space, its function and its history, both from a practical point of view and a symbolic one.

Proposals for papers (around 2500 characters (with a small abstract by the author) should be sent to [bicentenaire.museeduluxembourg@gmail.com](mailto:bicentenaire.museeduluxembourg@gmail.com) **before 16 April 2018**. The languages for the symposium will be French and English.

Bastoen (2015). Julien Bastoen, *L'art contre l'Etat? La trajectoire architecturale du Musée du Luxembourg dans la construction de l'illégitimité de l'action artistique publique. 1848-1920 (Art against the State? The Architectural Trajectory of the Luxembourg Museum in Constructing the Illegitimacy of Public Artistic Action, 1848-1920)*, European doctoral thesis in architecture, Université Paris Est, 2015.

Bénédite (1892). Léonce Bénédite, "Le Musée des artistes contemporains (The Museum of Contemporary Artists)", *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, May 1892, p. 401-415.

Bertinet (2015). Arnaud Bertinet, *Les Musées de Napoléon III. Une institution pour les arts (1849-1872) (The Museums of Napoleon III. An Institution for the Arts (1849-1872))*, Paris, Mare et Martin, 2015.

Lorente (2009). J. Pedro Lorente, *Les Musées d'art moderne et contemporain : une exploration conceptuelle et historique (Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art: Conceptual and Historical Exploration)*, translated from the Spanish by Julien Bastoen, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2009.

Pomian (1989). Krzysztof Pomian, "Le musée face à l'art de son temps », *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*" (The Museum confronted with the Art of its Time), *Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne*, 03/1989, Contemporary Art and the Museum, p. 5-10.

Tarasco-Long (2009). Véronique Tarasco-Long, "Capitales culturelles et patrimoine artistique : Musées de l'ancien et du nouveau monde" (Cultural Capitals and Artistic Heritage: Museums of the Ancient and New World) in Christophe Charle (dir.), *Le temps des capitales culturelles (The Time of Cultural Capitals)*, Seyssel Champ-Vallon, 2009, p. 135-170.

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