

A JUNK MAIL JUNKIE

JEAN-NOËL HERLIN

Exhibition: From 20 January to 20 April 2024

Opening: Friday, 19 January, from 4pm to 9pm

Research and concept: Sara Martinetti

Audiovisual installation and music: Cengiz Hartlap

Exhibition design: MPM Architecture

(Jeanne Lefrand and Charles Marmion)

Graphic design: Emma Kildea

PRESS MATERIALS

From Wednesday to Friday, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Saturday from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. Free Entrance

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BÉTONSALON
CENTRE FOR ART
& RESEARCH

“When it comes to art, I am a junk mail junkie. Have been one for nearly thirty-five years. Well, thirty-four years to be exact, during which I have created an archive of some 300,000 items pertaining to the international visual and performing arts since 1950. If numbers speak, it contains material on more than 50,000 artists, runs 600 linear feet, and weighs five tons. A folly! A folly that has elicited ‘eternal gratitude’ from artists, scholars, and curators, and from others, glazed eyes and slack-jawed bafflement,” wrote Jean-Noël Herlin in 2007 in the introduction to an article in *Art on Paper*, where he explains “how yesterday’s junk mail becomes today’s ephemera.”

Born in Paris in 1940, Herlin moved to New York in 1965, where he was active as a bookseller, archivist, and expert in all genres of modern and contemporary art. A voracious reader throughout his life, he considers printed matter as a “vehicle.” In his own work methods, he appropriates and hybridizes the artisanal approaches underpinning European book history and the artistic movements that emerged in the 1960s.

From 1966 onwards, he worked for Kraus Periodicals, a company specializing in the purchase and sale of periodicals and thematic book collections, which left a lasting mark in the history of bookselling in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1972, he founded J.N. Herlin, Inc., a pioneering antiquarian bookshop specialized in twentieth-century visual arts, performing arts, and film. Initially located in Greenwich Village, it moved to a loft at 108 West 28th Street and finally to SoHo, publishing nearly thirty catalogs or bookseller’s lists and organizing sixteen exhibitions along the way.

In 1973, as an extension of his bookselling activity, Herlin started what went on to become the Jean-Noël Herlin Archive Project, as part of which he collected and classified ephemera relating to modern and contemporary art: exhibition announcements, posters, press releases, brochures, press clippings, photographs, etc. As an attempt to encompass all forms of creativity, his “inclusive, panoramic, and non-hierarchical” archive, with its novel approach to so-called primary sources, is a critical contribution to an art-historical narrative that embraces a wide range of forms from different disciplines and manifestations. Since closing his bookshop in 1987, he has on numerous occasions been tasked with appraising artworks and archives, notably with a view to their inclusion in institutional collections in the U.S.

In 2014, as part of my research, I in turn contacted Herlin asking for access to various files from the Archive Project. On this occasion, I discovered his unique, all-absorbing commitment to his work with written documents. Although he consciously situates himself outside the worlds of art and academia (among others by refusing to be recorded), I was able to persuade him to contribute to a film documenting his daily work, economy, and ideas.

In the course of our collaboration, in which we were joined by sound artist Cengiz Hartlap, it appeared that Herlin's "writing practices" encompass broader notions than what the term "writing" might suggest. Some, like compiling an index or writing cross-reference cards, are a continuation of intellectual techniques introduced during the Renaissance. Others, such as exchanging or buying items of mail from art critics or artists that would otherwise have ended up in the trash (their junk mail, in effect), are archival inventions. Still others are common practice pushed to the extreme, such as handwriting bibliographic captions for each ephemera or assigning a price to the thousands of objects that populate artist Lil Picard's overcrowded apartment. Others, finally, play with expectations, for instance when he turns his bookseller's catalogs into erudite works of art inspired by Conceptual Art.

The first monographic exhibition devoted to Jean-Noël Herlin brings together a selection of five hundred documents and works, mainly from his personal archives, grouped according to his four main "writing practices": reading/writing/indexing, bookshop, archive, expertise. The presentation was conceived in conjunction with an immersive audiovisual installation whose scenario unfolds over eight hours and connects several threads: a day in the life of Herlin; the four sequences of his life's journey in writing; events and encounters in New York and Paris. Following the different facets of his work, the exhibition reveals the complexity and sometimes unsettling implications of his radical commitment, which he himself describes as "utopian."

Sara Martinetti

↳ The exhibition is co-produced by the École supérieure d'art et de design d'Amiens and is supported by Villa Albertine. Sara Martinetti received support to conduct research in art theory and critique from the Centre national des arts plastiques in 2022.

Biographies

Jean-Noël Herlin (born 1940 in Paris, has been living and working in New York since 1965) is a bookseller, archivist, and expert. The author of an archive of ephemera linked to modern and contemporary art, he is currently developing his activities via a website that sells primary sources and documents relating to twentieth-century art history (www.jeannoelherlin.com).

Sara Martinetti is a researcher in art history, anthropology, and theory who lives and works in Paris. Her doctoral thesis, supervised by Béatrice Fraenkel and defended in 2020 at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS), focused on the writing practices and theoretical aspects in Seth Siegelau's work in Conceptual Art, activism and scholarship. She has curated several exhibitions and publications in connection with this topic, including "The Stuff That Matters: Textiles Collected by Seth Siegelau for the CSROT" (Raven Row, London, 2012), "Seth Siegelau: Beyond Conceptual Art" (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2015–16; cat. Walther König, 2015), and "Seth Siegelau: 'Better Read Than Dead,' Writings and Interviews, 1964–2013" (cat. Walther König, 2020). Following a similar method, she has been working since 2014 with lawyer Michel Claura, who was active as an art critic and exhibition organizer between 1967 and 1982. Their collaboration has resulted in the publication of two research reports made possible by grants from the Centre national des arts plastiques (Cnap) in 2017 and the Friends of the Centre Pompidou as part of the Mission Recherche scheme in 2020. In 2022, she organized the exhibition "Anka [Ptaszkowska], au cas par cas" at Capc Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux.

Cengiz Hartlap is a sound artist who lives and works in Paris. A musician, sound designer and sound engineer, he has a degree in electrical engineering and has played in several musical formations as a bassist, drummer, percussionist, and backing vocalist. He regularly composes for theater and dance (Philippe Découflé, Nasser Martin-Gousset), film (among others in collaboration with sound designer Nicolas Becker), and advertising. Since 2009, he has worked regularly with Philippe Parreno, notably on the occasion of the artist's solo exhibitions at Palais de Tokyo, Armory Show in New York, Pirelli HangarBicocca in Milan and Tate Modern in London. In 2021, he was invited by art critic Federico Nicolao as part of a residency at Ateliers des Arques (Lot) to contribute to the exhibition "Paysage ouvert – La Suite des danses". In 2022, he collaborated with Sara Martinetti on the project "Anka [Ptaszkowska], au cas par cas" at Capc Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux.

The architectural practice MPM (material–proportions–matter) is a cooperative of architects, among whom Jeanne Lefrand and Charles Marmion. Their "manifesto" states: "While we take turns collaborating on architectural projects, we are guided by a shared commitment. We want our work to be part of an ongoing research exploring both traditional skills and new techniques so as to produce architecture that materializes and supports a deeper understanding of use and implementation."

Emma Kildea is a graphic designer who is currently completing her studies at the *École supérieure d'art et de design d'Amiens*. As part of her *Diplôme national supérieur d'expression plastique* (DNSEP), she has written a dissertation on the relationship between graphic design and contemporary art. In 2022, as part of a several-month residency at FRAC Picardie, she was able to research these artistic and institutional issues in the field.



View from the exhibition Jean-Noël Herlin, "a junk mail junkie", Bétonsalon - centre for art and research, Paris, 2024. Photos: Aurélien Mole.



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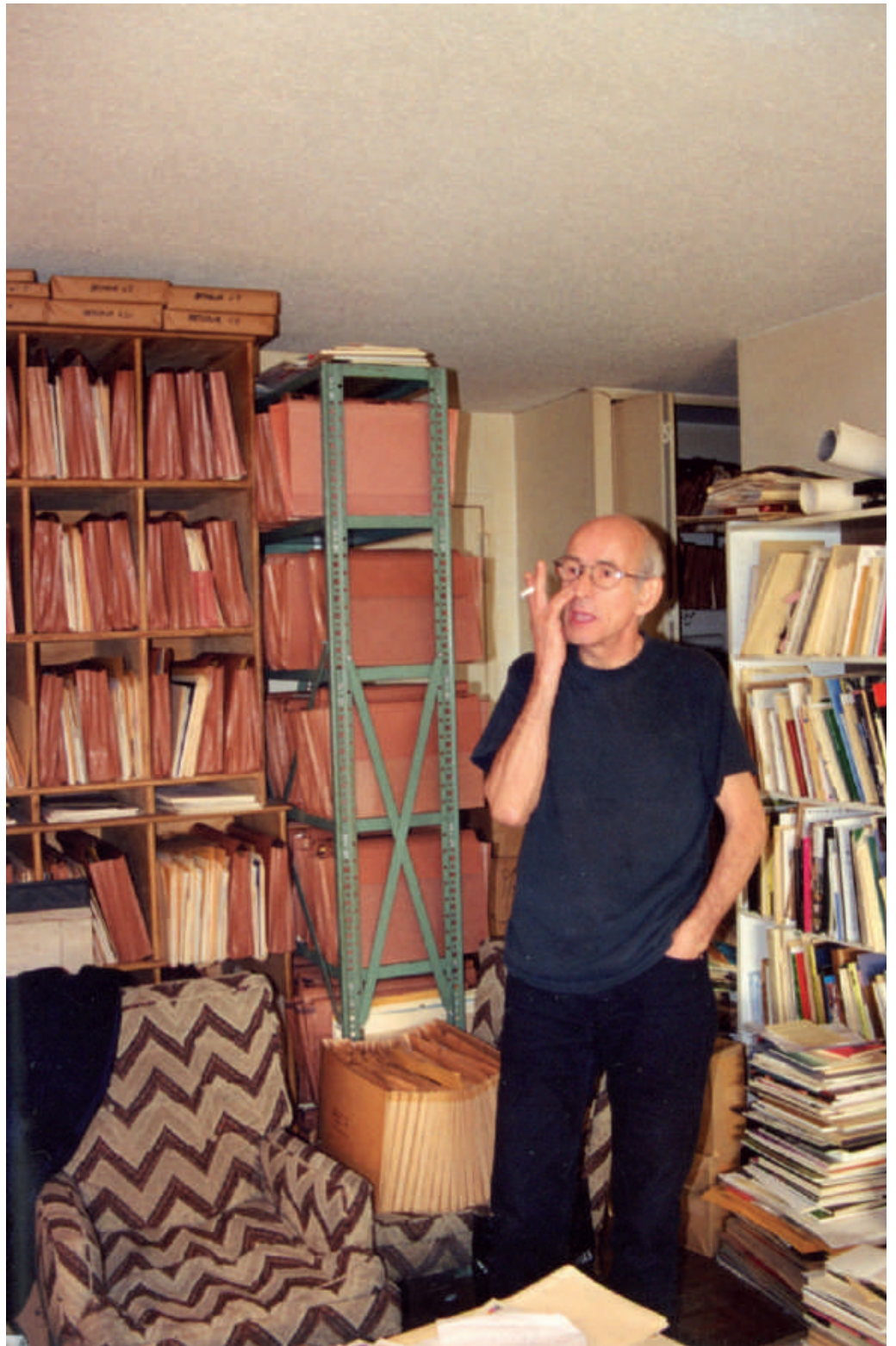
View from the exhibition Jean-Noël Herlin, "a junk mail junkie", Bétonsalon - centre for art and research, Paris, 2024. Photos: Aurélien Mole.



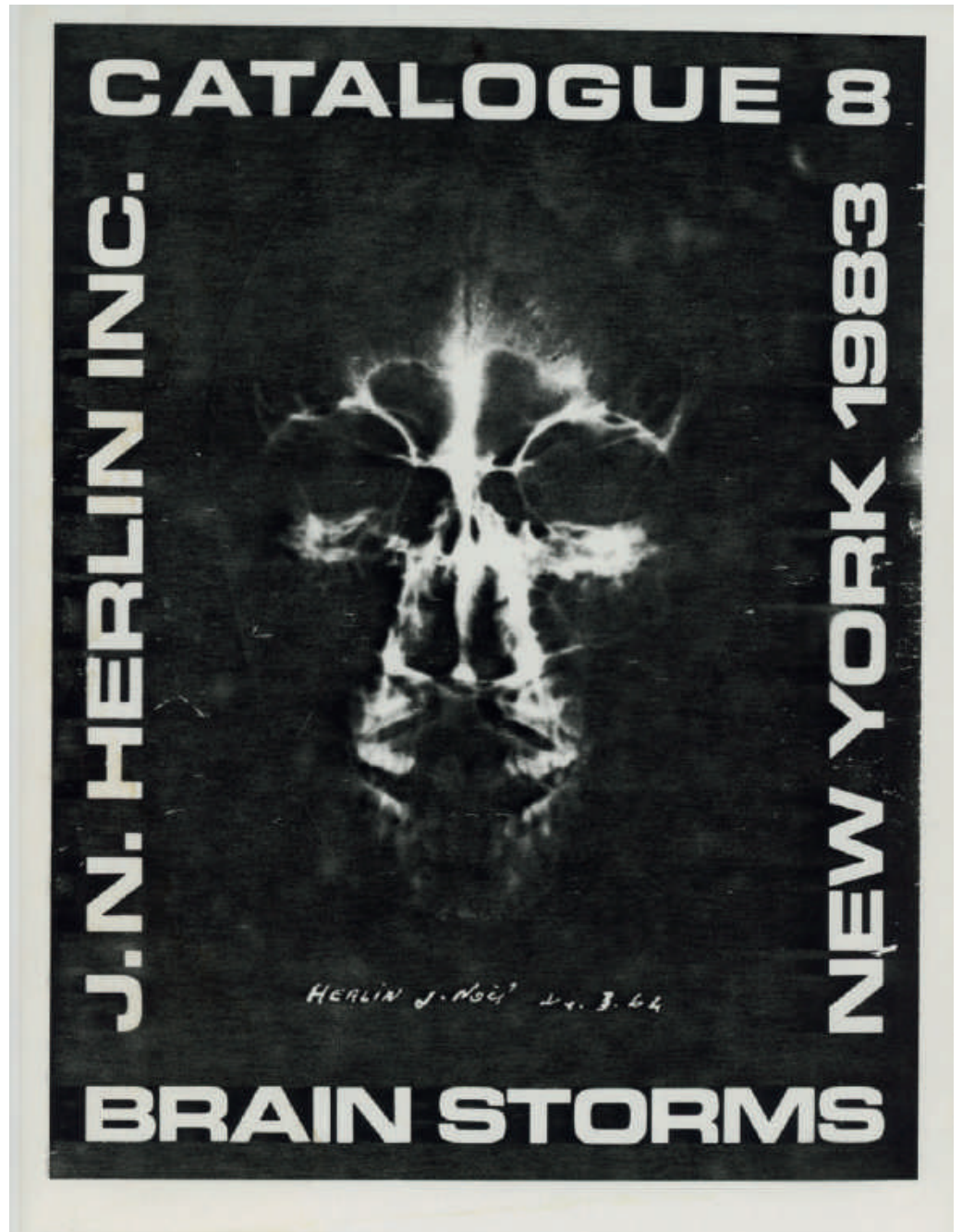


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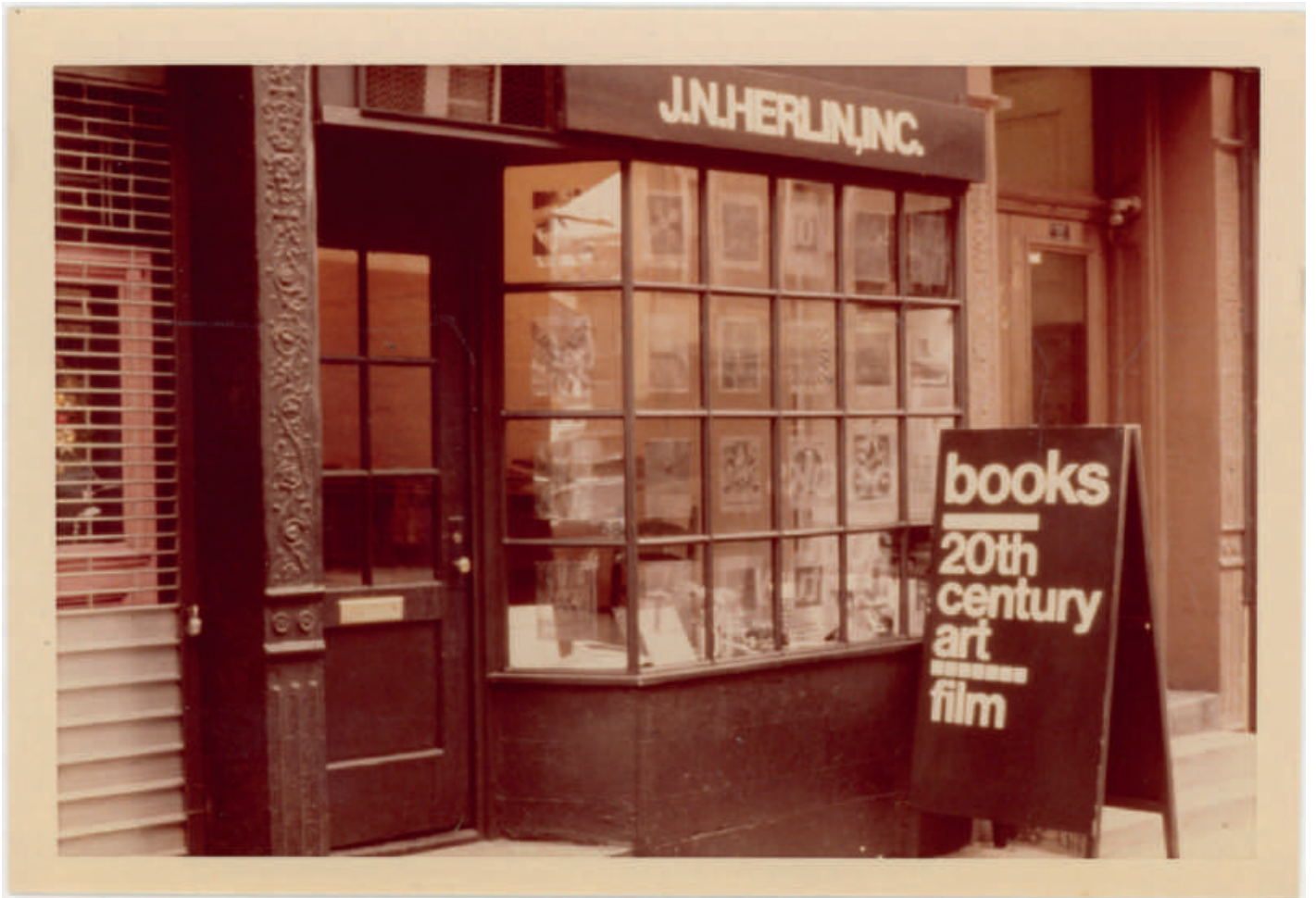
Jean-Noël Herlin's apartment, 40 Harrison Street, New York, 2000. Photograph by Gianfranco Mantagna.



Jean-Noël Herlin, Catalogue Number 8: Brain Storms. New York: J.N. Herlin, Inc., May 1983.
Design: Joseph Vasta.



Performative portrait of Jean-Noël Herlin by Lawrence Weiner, taken during a visit to his workshop to pick up mail, New York, Herlin, September 2011. Two polaroid photographs.



Window display by Barbara Anello using photocopied covers of the publications listed in Catalogue Number 6: Constructivism and Geometric Abstraction, J.N. Herlin, Inc., 68 Thompson Street, New York, December 1980. Photograph by Barbara Anello.

Full programme available on www.betonsalon.net

Events

- Friday, 19 January, from 4pm to 9pm
Opening of the exhibition
- Saturday, 27 January, from 5pm to 6pm
Discussion between Jean-Noël Herlin and Émilie Renard
- Saturday, 2 March, from 5pm to 6pm
Conference with Benjamin Thorel, author, editor et curator, co-founder of the bookshop After 8 Books
- Saturday, 23 March, from 5pm to 6pm
Concert by Cengiz Hartlap, sonic artist

Parallel Programme

- Fridays, 2 February, 1 March and 19 April, from 6pm to 8:30pm
Written with mittens: a writing workshop on and around, for, with, under and alongside art
- Saturday, 9 February, from 3pm to 6pm
Béton Book Club: collective arpentage session of *Mal d'archive* by Jacques Derrida (1995)
- Thursday, 7 March, from 12pm to 2pm
Midi-deux: Flash visit of the exhibition and pay-what-you-can lunch with Résoquartier's solidarity foodtruck
- Friday, 5 April, from 3pm to 6pm
Parties prenantes: retroperspectives on the history of Bétonsalon around the exhibition "They remember only the photographs", 2013

Workshops

- Wednesday, 14 February, from 2:30pm to 4:30pm
BY THE ARTIST(S)
Stamp pad family workshop, from ages 4 and up
- Saturday, 9 March, from 2:30pm to 4:30pm
Catalogue Number 3
Binding workshop, for adults
- Wednesday, 27 March, from 2:30pm to 4:30pm
Drip drip drip
Spills and stains workshop, for children, from ages 6 and up
- Saturday, 6 April, from 2:30pm to 4:30pm
Paper Inc.
Linocut family workshop, from ages 6 and up

All our activities are free, upon registration :
publics@betonsalon.net
For more information, visit
www.betonsalon.net

Tours

Tours are led by a mediator and adapted to all audiences. Visits in a foreign language or in LSF on request, within 4 days.

About Bétonsalon

Bétonsalon develops activities in collaborative ways, with local, national and international organisations. Our program includes solo or collective exhibitions, with emerging, reemerging, confirmed or forgotten artists, multidisciplinary events with the best exchange quality, actions and research focused on mediation and experimental pedagogy, research and creation residencies, outdoor projects engaged with local visitors and structures, and other actions which are yet to be defined.

Bétonsalon is a nonprofit organisation established in 2003. Inserted within the campus of Université Paris Cité in the 13th arrondissement since 2007, Bétonsalon is the only certified art centre to be located inside a French University.

Practical information

Bétonsalon
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Access:
Metro 14 & RER C:
Bibliothèque François-Mitterrand

Free entrance
from Wednesday to Friday,
from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.,
Saturday from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m.

All events are free of charge.
The entire space is wheelchair-accessible. Group visits are free of charge with advanced booking.

Please check our program on social media. X · Facebook · Instagram: @
betonsalon

Press contact

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With the support of

Bétonsalon – Centre for Art and Research is supported by the City of Paris, the Île-de-France Regional Board of Cultural Affairs – Ministry of Culture, and the Île-de-France Region, with the collaboration of Université Paris Cité.

Bétonsalon – Centre for Art and Research is a cultural institution of the City of Paris, certified institution of national interest by the Ministry of Culture.

Bétonsalon – Centre for Art and Research is member of DCA / association for the development of art centers in France, Tram, réseau art contemporain Paris/Île-de-France, and Arts en résidence - Réseau national and BLA! - national association of mediation professionals in contemporary art, as well as a partner of the Souffleurs d'Images service for access to culture for blind and visually impaired people.

