

Presque partout

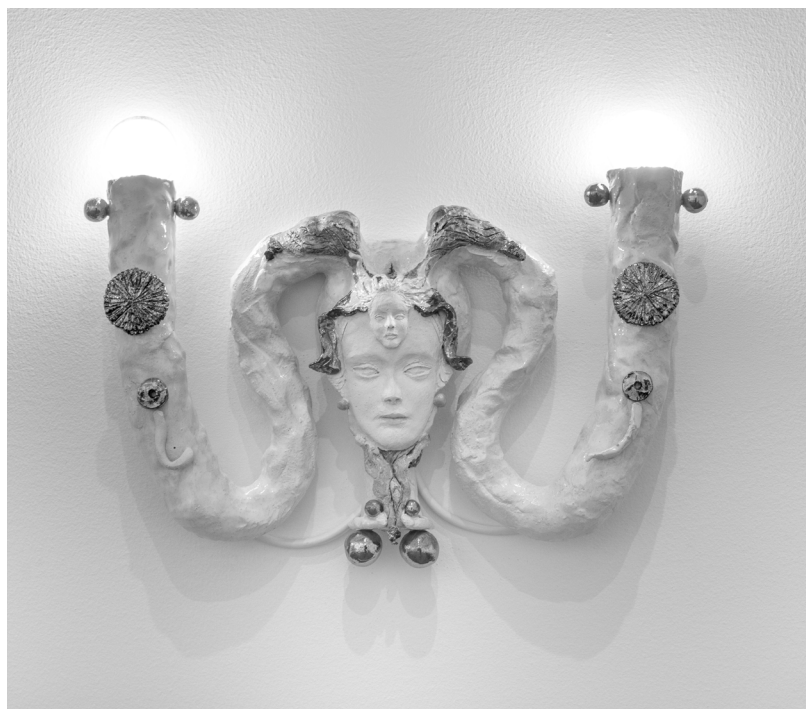
This exhibition revolves around a perennial question: in what contexts do we — literally — run into art? To mark the 20th anniversary of our building's opening, we take a fresh look at our space to explore different ways of approaching art.

Like most contemporary exhibition venues, our spaces are made up of a succession of — supposedly neutral — white cubes. As a mode of display purportedly presenting artworks as autonomous objects detached from any context, such a configuration may at first glance seem conducive to concentrated looking. However, such white cubes are far from neutral: they result from a very specific cultural history. Ultimately, they have more in common with the laboratory or the office than, say, with the domestic space.

Over the course of numerous projects we carried out with our partners in the region, the works in our collection have been confronted with very different realities, ranging from schools, museums, hospitals and prisons to parks, media libraries, social centers and so on. Each locale shapes our experience and perception of a given work. Exhibitions organized by the Frac Lorraine throughout the Grand Est region have revealed a specific phenomenon: people's perceptions of given works changed depending on where they were exhibited. *Presque partout* [Almost Anywhere] takes this transformative quality as a starting point to reflect on what happens within the very walls of the Frac.

The exhibition's title can be read as an allusion to our architecture's typology — the sort that can be found in museums all over the world — but also to the fact that the Frac's collection is mobile and can be exhibited *Almost Everywhere*. Each exhibition, nonetheless, constitutes an act of uprooting: a work is removed from the artist's studio (and the period of its production) to be placed in a new context. As such, each subsequent iteration marks a departure from the context of the work's birth.

In our off-site projects, we experiment with geography, types of venues and the kinds of audiences with which we establish links. But how far can a collection go without damaging the works or betraying the artist's intentions?



Soshiro Matsubara, vue d'installation, *A Lover's Discourse*, Aspen Art Museum, 2023. Photo: Tony Prikrýl

An inside-out exploration, *Presque partout* offers access to a multiplicity of perspectives. Revolving around a spatial design by Soshiro Matsubara, the exhibition was constructed in reverse: the desire to create a manifold context was at play even before the actual selection of artworks. The architectural structures of the Vienna-based Japanese artist act as a portable environment; inspired by various cultural traditions, they have been transformed by the artist beyond ready identification. Designed specifically for the Frac's premises, they form an ambivalent installation, half-backdrop/ half-spatial device. They house sculptures, drawings, photographs, videos and other media from our collection. These architectures (transparent at times) act as a means of repositioning ourselves in relation to the works. Soshiro Matsubara's contribution to the exhibition fragments our perception, confuses our bearings, and pushes us to accept that we no longer have full visual control over the room in which we are standing. In contrast to Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* — conceived of in the 18th century with social reform in mind — which imagined a central system of observation and surveillance in hospitals, schools, factories and prisons, Soshiro Matsubara's wood and painted fabric structure prevents our gaze from dominating the space; instead, we discover the artworks as we proceed through the space, through the movement of the body rather than simply through the eye.

The works presented here are marked by attention to the body; they inhabit the space almost like physical presences, or perhaps, rather, like bodies turned into traces or fragments. Together, they form a heterogeneous corpus, like memories of various experiences. They are articulated in and through Matsubara's surrounding structures to form a spatial ensemble — a necessarily foreign body which does not seek to assimilate or conceal itself within the space's whiteness. This assemblage contains zones that are numb, others in suspense, or on edge. Lighting is also part of Soshiro Matsubara's work. His use of light aims to perceptibly influence our gaze rather than disguising itself as a purely functional element. The artist's deployment of lighting casts it as an architectural component that refuses neutrality. Far from making each work visible — as is usually the case in exhibition spaces — Matsubara's lighting design toys with the gaze, turning the act of looking into a (self) conscious gesture.

More than a celebration centered on our institution's anniversary, the exhibition operates as a kaleidoscope of sorts, bringing together works and stories. Dispersed throughout the rooms, the latter recount various experiments that have sought to transform access to art. Most of these independent initiatives have been set up by artists themselves; as such, they offer new ways of inserting art into life. As sources of inspiration for the Frac, they are shared here as ways of rethinking our links with culture - or rather cultures - a notion that can be understood here as shifting, multi-dimensional fields. These initiatives each seek to overcome wedges driven between different cultural areas; for example between East and West: the artist Li Mu has rematerialized works from the collection of the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven (Netherlands) and installed them in his native village in China. In doing so, he points out how the question of cultural references' accessibility always hinges on a given geographical area. Such relations can also be explored from the perspective of class; after founding a space in a working-class suburb of Los Angeles, artist Noah David is confronted with the refusal of a well-established local museum to lend works from its collection. As a solution, he decides to recreate some of the collection's iconic pieces. These links can also be woven between oneself and roots threatened with erasure, as with Khalil Rabah's *Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humanity*. Each of these stories reminds us of the fundamental need to keep alive links with our chosen cultures — whether to connect with our roots or with the society in which we live.

Providing access to culture is the central mission of the Frac — but to what cultures are we providing access? A multi-faceted exhibition, *Presque partout* makes detours and meanders, reminding us of art's capacity to open up to the world, to others, to oneself.



Ghislaine Leung, 58: 96 / 49, 2018
Photo: Maxwell Graham/Essex Street, New York

Presque partout is an exhibition curated by Fanny Gonella, director of 49 Nord 6 Est – Frac Lorraine, in collaboration with Sophie Potelon, head of program.

The exhibition is the fruit of teamwork involving: Emeline Aubertin, Iris Aubry, Clara Brandt, Léo Desforges, Lucie Didion, Pauline Esmez, Mathilde Fauvé, Fanny Gonella, Hélène Griffault, Marine Hardy, Abel Larat, Joëlle Lehnen, Célia Muller, Sophie Potelon, Magali Réard, Botagoz Serikbaeva, with the assistance of Asma Smadah.

Exhibition set-up: Irfann Montanavelli, Jeanne Etienne, Benoît de Mijolla, Salim Mohammedi

Maintenance of the exhibition space: Entreprise ESP (Mr and Mrs Fehr)

French translations: Mona Varichon

The texts presenting the exhibitions were written by Fanny Gonella and Sophie Potelon.

The texts about the single artworks were written by Franck Balland, Clélia Barbut, Sophie Bernal, Marie Canet, Yann Chateigné, Louise Chignac, Guillaume Désanges, Fabienne Dumont, Hélène Guenin, Sophie Lapalu, Elena Lespes Munoz, Estelle Nabeyrat, Damien Sausset, Katia Porro

English translations: Sasha Rossman and Áron Rossman-Kiss

Graphic design: Matteo Venet, Futurneue
Printing: Imprimerie Moderne

The Frac Lorraine wishes to thank the artists, as well as Johanna Adam (Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn), Lise Augustin, Nana Oforiatta Ayim, Leïla Neirijnc (Alambret communication), the team at Croy Nielsen Gallery, Vienna, Bornybuzz, Delphine Paris (David Zwirner Gallery, Paris), Fred Dott, Jean-Jacques Dumont, Fernando Garcia Dory, Olivier Durand (Tirage à Part), Fab Production et Services, the team at Frac Alsace, Ponny Gouttegata, Yasuaki Hamada, Renaud Hauray, Anna Gritz and Pia-Marie Remmers (Haus am

Waldsee, Berlin), Sandrine Issartel, the team at Katz Textile, Strasbourg, Prem Krishnamurthy, Antoine Lozaro, Jan Mot, Li Mu, Patrick Nerrault (Multiprint), Anne Wheeler (One Million Years Foundation, New York), Benoît Bradel, Valérie Guelton and Louise Beauchêne (Passages Transfestival), Patrick Perrin (Cité Musicale, Metz), Khalil Rabah, Valérie Susset, Margaritha Thurn (Phileas - The Austrian Office for Contemporary Art), Elena Weickmann (galerie SFEIR-SEMLER, Beirut), Ajda Ana Kocutar (ULAY Foundation), Valentin Wattier, Bady Zeater

With the support of Phileas - The Austrian Office for Contemporary Art and the Federal Ministry for the Arts, Culture, Civic Services and Sport of the Republic of Austria.