

Kiedy wystawianie sztuki staje się sztuką – w stronę hybrydyzacji

When display makes art: towards hybridisation

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ABSTRAKT: Artykuł analizuje współczesne praktyki artystyczne na styku sztuki, scenografii i kuratorstwa, koncentrując się na twórczości Philippe’a Parrena, Tacity Dean, Grace Ndiritu czy Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster. Ich działania ukazują, jak myślenie scenograficzne staje się dziś istotnym narzędziem redefiniującym wystawę jako przestrzeń doświadczenia, nie tylko kontemplacji. Scenografia nie pełni już wyłącznie funkcji organizacyjnej – staje się językiem poetyckim, który operuje światłem, rytmem i nastrojem, umożliwiając przekształcenie muzeum w przestrzeń porowatą, żywą, współtworzoną przez artystów. Zacierając granice między dziełem, choreografią a instalacją, artyści odpowiadają na potrzebę głębszego zaangażowania widza, o którym pisał Boris Groys – wskazując na konieczność zwrócenia się ku doświadczeniu obecności i materialności. W rezultacie wystawa staje się sceną transformacji, a scenograficzne gesty – nie podporządkowane, lecz twórczo samodzielne – zyskują należne miejsce w historii sztuki i kuratorstwa.

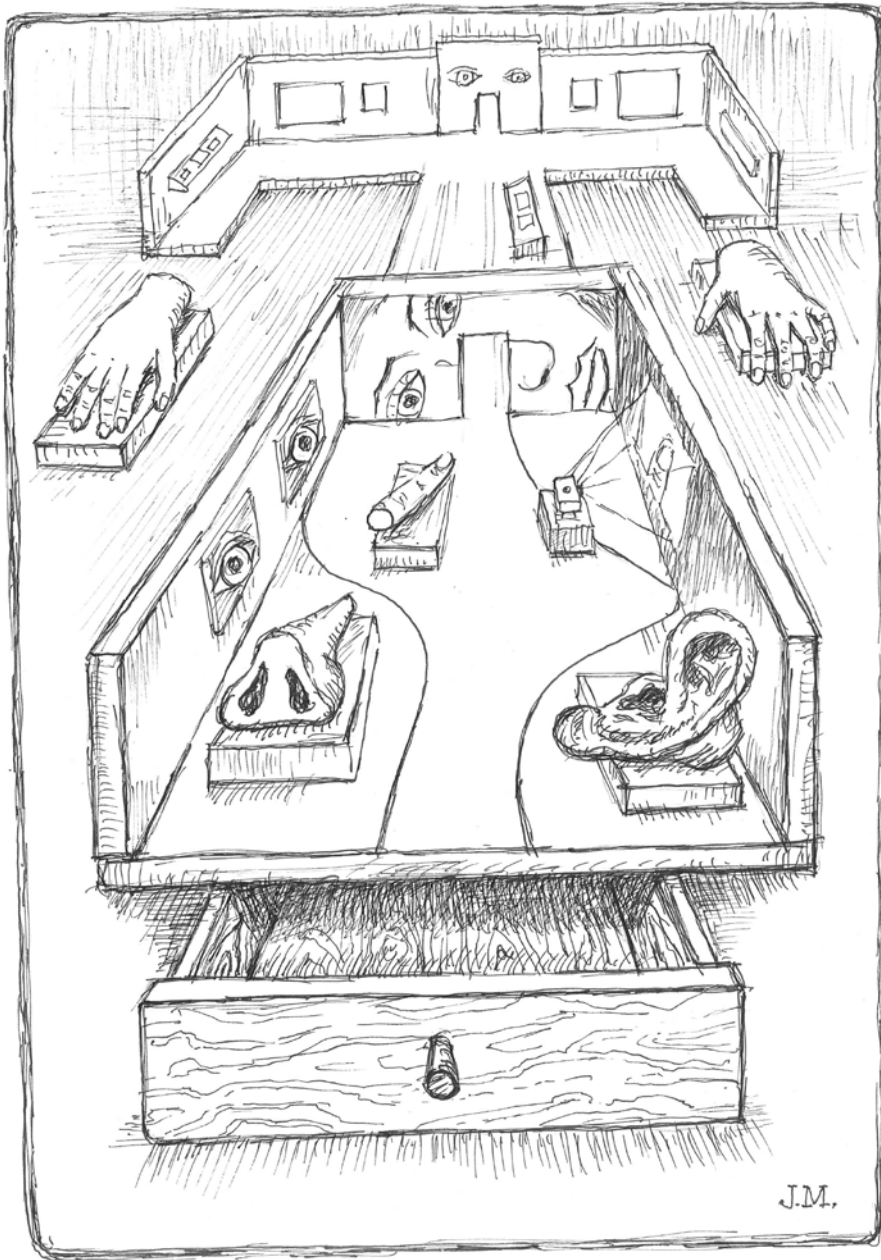
SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: autonomia dzieła, scenograficzny gest, choreografia wystawy, Philippe Parreno, Boris Groys, muzeum jako medium, dramaturgia przestrzeni

MATHILDE ROMAN jest francuską krytyczką sztuki, kuratorką i badaczką, specjalizującą się w historii wystaw i scenografii. Pełni funkcję profesorki w Pavillon Bosio – École Supérieure d’Arts Plastiques de la Ville de Monaco, gdzie prowadzi zajęcia z zakresu sztuki i scenografii. Jest autorką książki *On Stage* oraz *Habiter la scénographie. Quand le display fait œuvre* (2025), w której analizuje współczesne praktyki ekspozycyjne. Aktywnie uczestniczy w międzynarodowych projektach kuratorskich i badawczych, koncentrując się na relacjach między sztuką, przestrzenią a ciałem.

ABSTRACT: This article analyses contemporary artistic practices at the intersection of art, scenography, and curating, focusing on the work of Philippe Parreno, Tacita Dean, Grace Ndiritu, and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster. Their projects reveal how scenographic thinking has become a vital tool in redefining the exhibition as a space of experience rather than mere contemplation. Scenography no longer serves solely an organizational function—it emerges as a poetic language that operates through light, rhythm, and atmosphere, transforming the museum into a porous, living space co-created by artists. By blurring the boundaries between artwork, choreography, and installation, these artists respond to the need for deeper viewer engagement, as articulated by Boris Groys, who emphasised the importance of turning toward the experience of presence and materiality. As a result, the exhibition becomes a stage of transformation, and scenographic gestures—no longer subordinate but creatively autonomous—are gaining their rightful place in the history of art and curating.

KEY WORDS: artwork autonomy, scenographic gestures, exhibition choreography, Philippe Parreno, Boris Groys, museum as medium, dramaturgy of space

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Mathilde Roman
**WHEN DISPLAY MAKES ART:
TOWARDS AN HYBRIDISATION?**

Translated by Grzegorz Kozłowski

“Today, there is no longer any «ontological» difference between making art and staging art”, Boris Groys, “Politics of Installation”.¹

“To create an aura, an atmosphere belonging personally to the objects, rather than merely building an edifice against which the objects look well, is the purpose of the Museum’s installation plan”, Jermaine MacAgy, “On Installation”,²

The history of the relationship between artist and exhibition is long and fascinating, and in particular the way in which artists have seized the position of curator, sometimes inventing exhibition-work formats. Returning to Dorothea von Hantelmann’s thesis in which Marcel Duchamp introduced a new paradigm of creation by basing it not on the production of objects but on selection³, Elena Filipovic⁴ proposes to think about this paradigm shift in terms of the way Duchamp conceived of the exhibition as a tool for critically questioning what artworks and institutions are/do. In “Politics of Installation”, the German theorist Boris Groys sees the practice of installation as a way for artists to reassert their sovereignty in the face of the increasing symbolic power of the exhibition and the role of the curator and the public, which would undermine their position. This thesis is defended by many theorists and artists, such as Liam Gillick who, in “The Complete Curator”⁵, describes the reign of the curator and emphasises the fragility of the work. The impact of a curatorial project and the democratic diktat of art can in fact seem to weaken the autonomy of the artist’s project, encouraged in mainstream events such as biennials to favour an effective and universal plastic language that is part of an overall vision, or even a collective narrative. In an installation, artists regain their freedom of choice, since

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- 1 *E-flux journal*, no. 2, January 2009; available online at <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68504/politics-of-installation/>
 - 2 California Palace of the Legion of *Honor Bulletin*, vol.11, Nos. 1&2 (May-June 1953). Quoted in *Jermaine MacAgy A Life illustrated by an exhibition*, University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas, 1968, p.21
 - 3 D. von Hantelmann, “The Curatorial Paradigm”, *The Exhibitionnist*, n° 4, June 2011.
 - 4 Originally published in the Italian magazine *Mousse*, this collection of contributions on history of exhibitions curated by artists has been collected and published by Elena Filipovic under the title *The Artist as Curator: An Anthology*, London, Mousse Publishing/Koenig Books, 2017.
 - 5 “The integral curator is the expression of the lack of art.” L. Gillick, “The Complete Curator” (2013), *Industry and Intelligence. Contemporary Art since 1820*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2016.

they are no longer subject to a network of immediate relationships devised by a curator. By appropriating the space, its constraints and its possibilities as an artistic territory, the artist brings the exhibition as a format into play, and also explores scenography, with its codes, its vocabulary and its history, even if it is still largely unknown. Ever since Marcel Duchamp's first exhibitions as a "generator-arbiter", a term he coined to describe the role he took on as curator for Surrealist exhibitions such as *First Paper of Surrealism* (NYC, 1942), it has been notable that in taking on this role, the artist also took on that of scenography. In *Mile of String*, Marcel Duchamp made a critical scenographic gesture by installing a thread stretched between the picture rails that disrupted the exhibition and by inviting children to play ball in the exhibition on the evening of the opening. The "arbiter-generator" not only takes care of the arrival of the works and their joint hanging, but also intervenes to produce a surrealist experience in the exhibition, even if it means disrupting the perception of the paintings. Marcel Duchamp's scenographic gesture exemplifies the erasure of ontological difference described by Boris Groys.

Does this possible slippage between the positions of artist, curator and scenographer, and the artist's ability to make work through scenographic gestures, produce a hybridisation between these two terms? Hybridisation is the joining together of two separate elements to create a new unity. When it is the result of a human decision and therefore controlled in its operation, it is intended to serve a positive evolutionary vision for humanity, for example by improving production capacity. In our case, we are witnessing a clear decision to integrate the scenographic dimension into the artistic register, of which the practice of installation art is a logical development, but also the increasing integration today of scenographic logics into contemporary artistic creation. The artist, and sometimes the curator as well (as Jermaine MacAgy did in the United States in the 1950s and 1970s), thinks not only about the way the works are hung, but also about how they are arranged in space and the way they are displayed, designing pedestals, inventing displays and defining the lighting atmosphere. Does this mean that we are witnessing hybridisation, in other words the production of a new genre, the result of cross-fertilisation, which then needs to be thought through in terms of its specific unity, or are we witnessing a shifting, elastic, non-specific porosity, which requires us to broaden our knowledge of the two fields?

Works and scenography: porosity and slippage

The question of the slippage between scenography and artwork is very clearly raised by the generation of French artists Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Philippe Parreno, Pierre Huyghe and Xavier Veilhan, who see the exhibition as a dynamic, temporal, cinematic format. An

important reference point for them is the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1985, conceived by Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput. This project, driven by the philosophical and societal challenges of the growing virtualisation of all data and by the shift to post-modernity, and conceived more as a demonstration than an exhibition, preferred darkness to museum whiteness, the labyrinth to the didactic path, plurality to ambient formalism, mixing objects derived from technologies with works of art, or accounts of works. Combining five routes linked by airlocks, this “archipelago exhibition”, as defined in the curatorial project, was made up of sites from different transmitters, each associated with a card published in the *Inventaire*, a catalogue made up of seventy-one unpaginated cards. Faced with a new ontological regime in which matter is no longer necessarily an assumption but the production of a mind, possibly without an author since it is the product of machines, codes and techno-science, *Les Immatériaux* explored the exhibition as a network of philosophical questions, technological advances and artistic explorations. The real space was treated as a mental space, a conceptual matrix made up of sites divided into thematic strands. The testimony of Philippe Délis⁶, who was responsible for the scenography as part of the collective process of building the exhibition, is invaluable. He explains that the choice of how to treat the real space, the rolls of metal grid used to delimit the sites, was a response to the terminology used by Lyotard in the discussions: blur, fog, filter. For a long time, the sites had been defined as identical, floating cubes, and they expanded into the real quite late, depending on the objects to be presented. In opting for visual fog, *Les Immatériaux* placed a great deal of importance on listening, through audio headsets distributed to spectators, connected to different frequencies depending on where they were. Philippe Délis emphasises the importance that this scenographic device places on the role of the visitor, who is encouraged to be an active body, to participate in the construction of meaning. Beyond the works on display, what has left its mark on a whole generation of artists is this conception of the exhibition as a mental matrix, inventing a new way of conceiving the relationship to reception, rejecting the diktat of clarity.

Xavier Veilhan draws on the codes of museography and urban furniture, reinvesting their formats and revealing the underlying ideological schemes, integrating the social and the public space into the exhibition. For his solo exhibition *Le Plein emploi* at the Musée d’art moderne et contemporain in

⁶ The video recording, transcript and images of his lecture at the “Retour sur les Immatériaux” conference presented by Manuella de Barros at the École nationale des arts décoratifs on 30 March 2005 are available online: <http://www.arpla.fr/canal20/adnm/p=3798>.



Le Plein emploi – Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Strasbourg, France (2005–2006).
 Exhibition by Xavier Veilhan, Set design by Alexis Bertrand
 Photo: © Florian Kleinfenn © Xavier Veilhan, Alexis Bertrand /ADAGP, Paris 2025

Strasbourg (2005–2006), John C. Welchman summed up his multi-faceted position as follows: “Veilhan acts here as the curator and scenographer of his own exhibition, or should we say, as a clever blend of social anthropologist, zookeeper and landscape engineer”.⁷ A vast plateau accommodated works and visitors on different levels, creating a non-hierarchical circulation that produced a range of experiences. This project was the beginning of a long collaboration between Xavier Veilhan and the scenographer Alexis Bertrand, whose role is however much more transversal. For the artist, the exhibition is the site of the work, and he and the set designer share a reflection on the architecture, lighting and physical presence of the spectators who are part of the installations. *Le Plein Emploi* foreshadowed *Le Baron de Triqueti*, a sculpture exhibition module that integrates the viewer and places him alongside the works, without hierarchy, as well as *Studio Venezia*, French Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017),

7 J. C. Welchman, «Un musée d’histoire non naturelle», in *Xavier Veilhan, Le plein emploi*, Strasbourg, Éditions des Musées de Strasbourg, 2006, p. 44.51.

a transformation of a music recording studio into a sculptural installation that again allows visitors to integrate the module. Since the *Mur de Verre* (2003), a vast transparent structure designed to hang works that are not his own, Xavier Veilhan has been making powerful scenographic gestures that reflect on the exhibition as a social moment and a political construction, but also as a gesture of hospitality. He creates a work that supports the works of others, showing the backgrounds of the paintings, inviting visitors to move around the site of the work or to sit right on the architecture. The floor is an extension of the plinth, placing the photographs and sculptures in direct dialogue with the walking bodies, playing with heights to create a dynamic vision of the space. While Xavier Veilhan has been thinking about the ideological construction of the exhibition through scenographic gestures since the beginning of his work, the recurring collaboration with scenographer Alexis Bertrand since 2006 has given them a different scope. The projects become co-signed, creating a relationship that goes beyond a classic collaboration in which the scenographer interprets the artist's intentions by choosing materials, scaling spaces and inventing technical solutions. In this case, it's also an artistic collaboration that is being built up, in particular with the model tool that each of them uses, but also with photo-montage for Alexis Bertrand and drawing for Xavier Veilhan. The scenographic module is an extension of the sculpture, but also a central stage in finding its relationship to the space, giving it a place and integrating it into an exhibition conceived as a stage set. Are we witnessing a hybridisation between art and scenography, or a shared creation in which gestures and tools combine to reinforce each other? Insofar as one does not integrate the other, and each remains in its place in the common work, hybridisation does not seem to us to be a real name.

For her part, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster has been developing her work as an artist and her collaborative scenographic production in parallel for several years. Conceiving of space as a room and a stage, her projects are also closely linked to her curatorial experiences. Her set designs are developed within a collective called Poste 9, where she combines her skills with those of lighting designer Benoît Lalloz and interior architect Martial Galfione. Although she is involved in the process as an artist, what happens in this laboratory is clearly separate from her visual work, although her approach to scenography is particularly "informed by the history of the exhibition"⁸. *1984–1999. La Décennie*, an exhibition presented at the Centre Pompidou-Metz in 2014–2015, in which Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster appears as scenographer of a project

8 Interview with Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster published in *Habiter l'exposition. L'artiste et la scénographie*, M. Roman, ed. Manuella, 2020.

curated by Stéphanie Moisdon, nevertheless leads us to think together about her approach to art and scenography. The relationship between the curator who conceives the exhibition and the scenographer who serves the project, usually hierarchical, is different here, since Laurent le Bon, then director of the museum, jointly invited Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Stéphanie Moisdon, linked by a family of artists and by their involvement in the magazine *Purple*, to design an exhibition “on the spirit of this period, its foundations, its beauty”⁹. But the duo’s thinking led to a division of roles, a separate collaboration, and a central place for the scenography. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster designed a highly cinematographic set-up, juxtaposing different trays housing works of art, models of emblematic architecture from the period, books and film posters, allowing the spectator to wander between different islands devoted as much to the works as to the state of mind of an era through which the artists brought together had passed. The idea was to immerse the works in a narrative atmosphere. In an open-ended exhibition, the works on display were not the most striking, but they were the protagonists of a story. The general atmosphere of 1984–1999. *La Décennie* was marked above all by the scenography, which made a strong statement through its choice of materials – tinted medium for the picture rails – and its decision to include the floor and close off the openings. With this total landscape, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster has designed an island exhibition, creating a visual and conceptual texture that acts as a mirror of the 1990s. Gonzalez-Foerster’s decision not to associate the work with the scenography raises a number of questions, insofar as the experience of wandering through the exhibition leads the viewer to experience the whole as a vast installation, encouraging us to think about forms of hybridisation between the work and the scenography.

In a dialogue with Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Elie During reflects on his experience of Melik Ohanian’s *From the Voice to the Hand* exhibition in 2008, held in a number of venues in Paris and its suburbs, a “dispersed totality” orchestrated by the artist: “This kind of exhibition opened up the possibility, not of completely missing the event, but of passing through it, so to speak. You can have a partial, lateral relationship with an exhibition, and still experience it fully, as long as the impossibility of totalising it is part of the process. I could probably have visited five or six of the venues in this exhibition if I’d loosened the constraints of my timetable a little. I would certainly have seen more works, but would that have given me a better perspective on the exhibi-

9 Extract from the press release.

tion?¹⁰. This observation by Elie During is very much in line with a recent development in the exhibition, which can be seen, for example, in some of Philippe Parreno's proposals. In an interview published in *Timing. On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*, he explains how he approached the transformation of the film *Zidane* (2006), made with Douglas Gordon, into the format of an installation: "Rather than transposing the temporal mediums into the exhibition, I proceeded in the opposite direction, bringing the exhibition into the format of the temporal mediums".¹¹ His choreographic and dynamic conception of the exhibition led him to attach great importance to light, scenographic codes and architecture. When curator Carlos Basualdo recalls the artist's role in *Dancing around the Bride* in 2012¹², a group show featuring works by Marcel Duchamp, Jasper Johns, Raoul Rauschenberg, John Cage and Merce Cunningham, he recalls that it was his desire to take up the temporal devices that Parreno had just experimented with in his solo show at the Serpentine Gallery in London that motivated their collaboration. By mutual agreement, they decided to call Philippe Parreno "metteur en scène" (director), to describe the way in which he orchestrated the exhibition. His proposals played on sound and light, creating ghostly atmospheres that evoked the myths of the artists brought together for the occasion: a mechanical piano playing a performance by Marguerite Latan, an interpreter of John Cage, a stage from which emerge the steps of dancers from the Cunningham company (*Dance without Dancers*), the sound of a train passing by. By introducing movement and instability into an exhibition of objects and artists who have died, Philippe Parreno sought to produce an experience of dialogue with mythical figures from the history of art, to collaborate with the past to produce the present, the living, including the spectator in these appearances/disparitions. He explains that "the exhibition becomes a single machine. Not only do sounds, images and actions appear and disappear according to a series of algorithms programmed into the exhibition space by those who control the museum, but people appear and disappear according to the script of the exhibition's programming".¹³

10 E. During, D. Gonzalez-Foerster, D. Grau, H.U. Obrist, *Qu'est-ce que le curating*, Paris, Manuella éditions, 2011, p. 71.

11 Philippe Parreno, interview with Jörn Schafaff, in B. Bismarck, et al. (eds.), *Timing. On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2014, p. 163.

12 Exhibition presented at the Museum of Art in Philadelphia in 2012, then at the Barbican Center in London in 2013.

13 Conversation between Carlos Casueldo and Philippe Parreno published in the catalogue *Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World*, London, Koenig Books, 2014, p. 22–47. All the quotations that follow are taken from this interview.

Philippe Parreno has developed artistic gestures in the field of scenography. Unlike Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, he considers the pieces produced in this context to be works of art rather than scenographic devices, thus asserting their autonomy in relation to the project and context that initiated them. He showed *Dancing without Dancers* as part of his carte blanche *Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World* at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2013, without this shift in status, or at least function, ever being questioned or even mentioned in the catalogue. Yet, isolated in the open architecture of the Palais de Tokyo, which necessitated the addition of movable walls to spatialise the sound, disconnected from Cunningham's shadow, the collaboration with the ghosts did not seem as relevant to us. Another interesting example: in *All the Word's Future* in 2015, Okwui Enweso's group show at the Venice Biennale, presented at the Arsenale, Philippe Parreno placed tubular lights that flickered and intermittently illuminated a very dark hanging. Here, too, the work sought above all to create an atmosphere, and to do so it very clearly invested the vocabulary and the place of the scenography. The device had already been present in Philippe Parreno's solo exhibitions, but it emerged more clearly as a scenographic element in the context of a group exhibition questioning our projections into the future. By not dissociating the roles of artwork and scenography, the artist creates a positive confusion, adding visual and sonic poetry to a dimension of the exhibition that is usually little explored.

The role of scenography, which has long been underestimated and often erased from the aesthetic debate, is now making a strong comeback with a broader definition that also broadens the vision of the museum. The is no longer the mortifying, bourgeois temple rejected by the avant-garde, but an open, urban, sonorous, living space. A dynamic museum, a space of possibilities and of movement between outside and inside, between different temporalities, a place of redistribution of places, of porosity. This approach also echoes philosopher Édouard Glissant's reflections on related identities and non-linear relationships with time, which led him to imagine a museum in Martinique as a research laboratory, an archipelago of relationships, rather than a continent¹⁴. Whether the artist becomes a scenographer, playwright or curator, or the choreographer turns the exhibition into a stage and the work into a movement of bodies and thoughts, these are all shifts that do not endanger the art world or its professionalisation, but rather prevent it from becoming entrenched in fixed positions.

14 See the interview between Hans Ulrich Obrist and Édouard Glissant, in a version of which is available online: <https://tout-monde.com/sites/utopic.pdf>.

Designing the space of the work to take care of the aesthetic experience

In 2022, Tacita Dean dedicated a large part of her exhibition at the MUDAM (Luxembourg) to her works designed for the scenography of the ballet *The Dante Project* (choreography by Wayne McGregor and musical creation by Thomas Adès for the Royal Opera House in London). Presented without documentation or contextualisation in relation to the ballet, the backdrops, created for each act using a different medium – drawing, photography and film – are fully autonomous, asserting an aesthetic and conceptual force that benefits from the exhibition's long viewing time. Later, when I saw them again on stage at the Opéra national de Paris¹⁵, the experience would be quite different, with Tacita Dean's works becoming inseparable from the choreographic movements, the dancers' bodies, the costumes she had designed, the lighting design and the musical score, producing strong, highly specific atmospheres for each act. During my visit to the MUDAM in the company of Christophe Gallois, curator of the exhibition, I realised how important it was for Tacita Dean to detach her works from their scenographic status, thus affirming their full participation in her own artistic journey, motivated by long-term research of which this ballet is only one stage. Collaborating as an artist with stage design has a long history dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century, and Tacita Dean is making a gesture that many other artists have made before her, particularly during the Ballets Russes, but by exhibiting her works in a disconnected way, she is asserting their primary autonomy from the scenographic context. Nevertheless, as I was leaving and absent-mindedly reading the colophon on the wall, I noted with surprise that the artist had been credited with the exhibition's scenography in collaboration with Polaris Architect. So while on the one hand the work obliterates its scenographic dimension by exhibiting itself, on the other Tacita Dean claims to have scenographed the exhibition, a gesture long neglected by artists. While the works are not scenographies, although they may have the function of being scenographies, the artist does the action of scénographier, and the shift from the passive terminology of the noun scénographie to the active terminology of the verb scénographier makes sense here. It's a question of naming an artistic dynamic in which scenography plays a part in enhancing the spatio-temporal formats of the exhibition as part of the creative process, by including aspects that have long been left on the sidelines, such as the itinerary, the lighting, the seating, the label, the plan, and of course the picture rail in a broader sense. In designing the exhibition, the artist sometimes works with scenographers, always with stage managers and technicians, and with the whole of the venue's staff, to produce artistic gestures in keeping with the exhibition format.

15 The Opéra national de Paris added *The Dante Project* to its repertoire in May 2023.



Grace Ndiritu, *The Blue Room*, 2024, La Biennale de Lyon, Musée d'Art Contemporain. Photo M. Roman

In 2024, Grace Ndiritu was invited to take part in the Lyon Biennial, where she designed and staged an installation entitled «Blue Room» on the top floor of the Musée d'Art Contemporain, inviting the public to enter after removing their shoes. In an immersive environment, they discover a meticulous display of works from different periods borrowed from public collections, all staged in a wooden device created by Grace Ndiritu. Inspired by a modernist vocabulary, but also by the places where the artist regularly goes on spiritual retreats, visions from her shamanic experiences and her stays in her grandmother's hut in Kenya, it operates at the junction between different practices and also welcomes green plants. The floor, walls, ceiling and lighting are all part of a scenography that invites us to broaden our vision, to take a long time, to combine aesthetic experience and spiritual journey. Grace Ndiritu asks the audience to take off their shoes, immersing them in a colourful atmosphere that conveys a meditative energy and focusing on a visual shock to the body, encouraging us to sit down, lie down, close our eyes and open them again. *Blue Room* is both an artistic gesture and a scenographic gesture, an attempt to counter the consumer-

ist appropriation of art by proposing a situation experienced over a long period of time, without a label, favouring emotional shock (which can then be continued by reading the carefully designed booklet). For Tacita Dean, as for Grace Ndiritu, the exhibition is a place to be transformed by experiments carried out outside, in order to charge it with new energy and attention, while remaining focused on the production of an aesthetic force that has its own purpose. In these troubled atmospheres, where the artist goes beyond the frame, the spectator is charged with intensities in his gaze and in his body. If form and process are hybridised, do the experiences we have in these spaces have a different ontology to those we have face-to-face with a painting in the Louvre? At the Louvre, it's hard to find somewhere to sit, your body has to constantly weave its way through thick crowds to catch a glimpse of a masterpiece, and you have to fight against the screens and against the self-staging that is a constant ballet of gazes that prefer to focus on their selfie rather than on the work in the background. The attention paid to works of art is a central issue in the face of visiting habits that consume the aesthetic experience. As Laurence des Cars, President of the Musée du Louvre, explained in an interview with *Le Monde*: "We have to respect the public's desires, and if they feel the need to make a work their own with selfies, we have to accept that. We need to talk to the public in the 21st century, listen to them and not look down on them"¹⁶. However, the ban on taking photographs during a live performance has never been seen as an obstacle to the audience's freedom, but as a way of taking care of the actors and the work, guaranteeing the attention needed to enjoy an aesthetic experience. The works are not alive in a museum, and protection does not go beyond guaranteeing their material safety. Grace Ndiritu's gestures echo the approach of other institutions such as the Manchester art gallery, which has just opened *Room to Breathe*, a silent, dark room inviting the public to slow down, breathe, sit and look at a work in a state of expanded concentration¹⁷. While lighting is seen as a primary condition for the visibility of a painting, and Hubert Robert's struggle to integrate a glass roof into the Galerie du Louvre to obtain natural light is of the utmost importance, overexposure is just as problematic. Favouring semi-darkness, as in *Les Immatériaux*, is a way of encouraging the public to allow time for their gaze to adapt, and to broaden their vision. This is also how Jakuta Alikavazovic felt after spending a night alone in the Louvre, and she recounts her transformed encounter with the sculptures: "Darkness changes everything. It's electricity that freezes the statues. It is electricity that makes the walls and floors immo-

¹⁶ Interview by Roxana Azimi, published on 5 February 2025.

¹⁷ This proposal is part of the Mindful Museum Campaign initiated by Louise Thomson. See the article "The new museum trend helping us regain our last attention", Laura Hall, BBC, 5 January 2025.

bile”¹⁸. Most of the Surrealist exhibitions organised by Marcel Duchamp were also left in the dark, preferring the model of the cave with its irregular walls, floor underfoot and ceiling charged with intensity to that of the neutralising white lit wall that dominated the construction of the aesthetic regime. Turning off the lights, closing your eyes and lying down are invitations to give free rein to the imagination, to the desire to appropriate. The scenographic gesture does not attempt to create a work in place of the work, but to place the work at the centre of a living, porous, temporal relationship, for which the scenography is a support.

Rehabilitating scenography

The dialogue between the artist and the scenography, and sometimes the scenographer, is an important issue in contemporary creation, and above all it encourages us to gain a better understanding of what emerges from these scenographic gestures by integrating them into the history of art¹⁹. The theatricalisation of art and exhibitions is a well-integrated development, the ideological battles waged by Michael Fried in the 1960s seem a long way off, and this change invites us to learn more about the dramaturgic exhibition designs of Frédéric Kiesler, for example. Similarly, the search for an active place for the spectator in the practice of the selfie leads us to discover the modular installations proposed by El Lissitzky in Germany in the 1930s, and by Franco Albini and Franca Helg in Italy from the 1950s onwards. Lina Bo Bardi’s lifelong ambition to integrate the viewer by enabling them to feel closer to the works, to break out of patterns of domination, and to blend the aesthetic experience with their everyday lives, was explored in her museum and exhibition architecture and scenography in Brazil. Immersing ourselves in these scenographic projects, which have their own tools and specific ambitions, produced alongside artists, and sometimes in their midst, enables us to grasp the strength of the companionships and friendships between artists, curators and scenographers, and to fully integrate scenography into the history of art, just as the history of exhibitions was progressively integrated in the second half of the twentieth century. From there, porosities, semantic shifts and hybridisations will undoubtedly emerge.

¹⁸ *Comme un ciel en nous*, ed. Stock, 2022, p.20.

¹⁹ Cf the two books I have published on this subject: *Habiter l'exposition. L'artiste et la scénographie*, ed. Manuella, 2020 and *Habiter la scénographie. Le geste scénographique comme geste artistique*, ed. Manuella, 2025.

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