



MUSÉE DE LA CHASSE & DE LA NATURE



press release



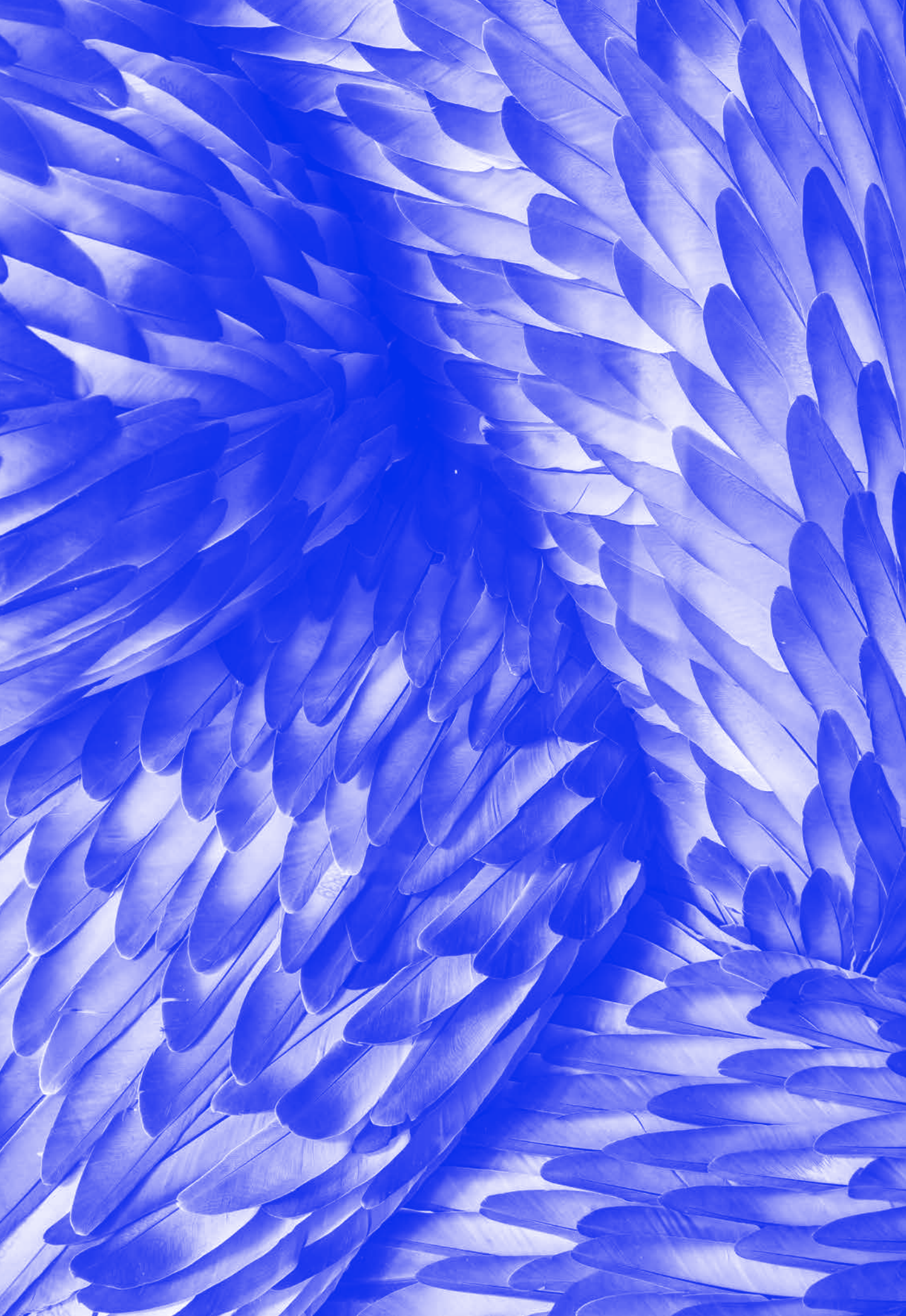
FONDATION FRANÇOIS SOMMER





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INTRODUCTION

“Ever since I discovered it,
it’s been my favourite Parisian museum!”

A visitor, GuestViews digital
guestbook, 29/06/2024



A place that is one of a kind

The Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature is a confidential Parisian address valued by lovers of art and of the unexpected. It is a jewel box of beauty and nature set right in the heart of the French capital, and it takes visitors on a dazzling journey through time and place, far removed from the usual conventional or aseptic museums. Let the exceptional atmosphere of this private collection captivate you!



A house that is also a museum

This unique setting is both intimate and unusual, it combines the charm of a collector's home with the excellence of a major art museum. It is the fruit of François and Jacqueline Sommer's visionary legacy: these pioneers devoted their lives to their Foundation, were great lovers of hunting and ardent defenders of biodiversity, and were keen to raise public awareness of the magnificence of nature through art and culture. Their museum also illustrates the changing status of wild animals in our society.







↑ Library dedicated to Claude Lévi-Strauss, Markus Hansen, 2021 © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Béatrice Hatala – ADAGP, Paris, 2024





↑ Stag and Wolf Room © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – David Giancattarina



A unique experience in the heart of the historic Marais district

The museum's museography evokes the splendour of the great Parisian mansions of the 17th and 18th centuries, this serves its aim to bring together different styles and periods, from Antiquity to the present day. An exceptional selection of works of art, an impressive collection of weapons and taxidermised animals all draw us into an intense aesthetic and reflective experience. You'll feel a sense of wonder, will stroll and reflect as you make your way through the many details and references that will surprise a curious and the discerning visitor. Just like when you are on a walk in the woods, you'll need to keep your eyes peeled for all the marvels and humour that are to be found in this museum that is also a home.

Some exceptional works of art

With a collection that has been steadily growing for over sixty years, the museum stands out thanks to its eclecticism that goes far beyond classic hunting scenes: here, you can see contemporary creations (Jeff Koons, Eva Jospin, Philippe Cognée, Sophie Calle, Françoise Pérovitch, Mircea Cantor, Théo Mercier, etc.), and masterpieces by Lucas Cranach, Pierre Paul Rubens, Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Alexandre-François Desportes, Carle Vernet, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and André Derain are displayed alongside the *naturalia*, like a dazzling cabinet of curiosities. Among all these treasures, the institution holds four still-lives by an eighteenth-century master, the illustrious Jean Siméon Chardin, who was famous for how he excelled at painting light. A vast collection of furniture from every period enriches the discovery of this space that is both a home and a museum and that is steeped in history: a sixteenth-century German cabinet sits alongside a pair of nineteenth-century buckskin armchairs, and a flat desk by the famous Louis XIV cabinetmaker André-Charles Boulle stands next to a more recent acquisition : a bench decorated with sunflowers and snails by Dewar & Gicquel.







↑ A refuge in the woods © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Béatrice Hatala – ADAGP, Paris, 2024



A place for all

The museum is designed to be accessible and inclusive, it respects the sensitivities of all visitors, with works of art and interpretive tools for all ages and all audiences. Educational cabinets allow visitors to become a woodland tracker for a few minutes, for them to learn how to recognise footprints or watch for the fleeting silhouette of an animal through binoculars... The exhibitions, like the many events that punctuate the year, are all tools in service of a successful dialogue with our times.

A museum for ambassadors

After they first discover the museum, visitors often become ambassadors for this little known museum, and are keen to share it with their friends and family.



What visitors say:

“This is magnificent museum, an absolute must-see. Each room is an enchantment where ancient and contemporary art enter into dialogue. What a pleasure to see visitors (young and old) enter the rooms and say “wow”. The scenography showcases the collections to their best advantage: it’s a real journey. It’s a magical experience”.

Sassou, Trip Advisor, April 2023

“A visit to be recommended! You could expect a slightly old-fashioned museum, but what a surprise: you discover a fabulously staged collection in a beautiful town house. It is a collection that makes you think, it goes beyond hunting, it make you consider the challenges of protecting nature and human and animal cohabitation. The addition of a very fine pieces of contemporary art is the cherry on the cake, as it casts a fresh and dynamic light on the whole. What’s more, the staff are delightful, always quick to explain and help visitors discover the little surprises scattered around the museum”.

Emmanuelle B, Trip Advisor, November 2023

“This is a superb museum which, contrary to what you might expect, is quite modern and contemporary, and doesn’t get bogged down in its ageing collections. The decoration is sublime, there are brilliant contemporary art exhibitions, this museum has a lot of charm! What’s more, the staff are extremely pleasant.

Benjamin, Google Avis, May 2024

“I have to admit that the name of the museum didn’t really tempt me at first... But then I went through the door with some friends and was very pleasantly surprised. The building alone is superb! The themes dealt with are certainly related to hunting, but from all angles: positive and negative, with a very interesting vision of the relationship between man and nature. For children, there are various sounds of nature to recognise and lots of stuffed animals with a focus on some and explanations. “

Malika P, Petit Futé, April 2024

“We love absolutely everything about this museum. The two mansions are magnificent, the scenography is exceptional, the curiosity cabinets are fascinating, especially for children, even very young kids...”

Familparis.fr

4.5/5

Google reviews

4.5/5

Trip Advisor
Travellers’ choice 2024

4.5/5

Petit futé

9.5/10

GuestViews
(the Museum’s digital
guest book)



PARTENAIRE
OFFICIEL
2024





↑ Sitting Room © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Béatrice Hatala – ADAGP, Paris, 2024





2

THE GENESIS OF THE MUSEUM

“François Sommer, a Companion of Liberation,
sought to humanity’s social spirit
and devoted himself to the enhancement of a nature
that is both alive and wild.”

Épithaphe de François Sommer



The founders: a couple of enthusiasts

Just after the war, François Sommer (1904-1973), who had taken over the family felt business, met Jacqueline Le Roy des Barres (1913-1993) a journalist and photographer. They married in 1949, and shared a passion for hunting and nature, which they were to put to the service of French society.

A quest for freedom

François Sommer was born in the Ardennes into a family of textile manufacturers based in the region. He shared his father's passion for exploration, hunting and aviation from an early age. At the age of thirty, he flew over Africa in a Fairchild aircraft, and began to develop a fascination for the continent, its wide open spaces and its biodiversity. After joining the Resistance in 1940, he joined General de Gaulle in 1943 and enlisted in the Free French Air Force. His courage on the battleground earned him the title of Companion of Liberation. His comradeship in arms brought him into close contact with an important figure in the history of the Foundation: the future Minister of Cultural Affairs: André Malraux.

Two nature lovers

From the moment they met in 1945, François Sommer and Jacqueline Le Roy des Barres shared a love of hunting and nature, which they portrayed in their film *François le Rhinocéros*, which won the documentary prize at the 1954 Venice Film Festival. They were keen to take very practical action to preserve species, and also set about reintroducing deer, fallow deer and mouflons, then on the brink of extinction, to their Belval estate in the Ardennes. This site was opened to the public in 1973 and is now the epicentre of the Foundation's activities for the natural environment. As President of the National Association of Big Game Hunters, François Sommer defended the creation of the hunting plan, but as he was well aware that French society was gradually moving away from its rural roots, he also helped to raise awareness on the need to create a Ministry of the Environment. In 1955, the couple set up the Association Sportive de Chasse Photographique Française to bring together nature lovers who immortalised animals ranging free in their natural environment, this is clear evidence of a paradigm shift in their relationship to hunting.

The desire to communicate and share

In 1961, the Sommers, who had long been collectors of valuable books and trophies, began acquiring superb hunting paintings by Desportes, painter to Louis XIV and Louis XV, they were soon followed by masterpieces by Chardin (1699-1779), Oudry (1686-1755) and Carle Vernet (1758-1836) this heralded the birth of an impressive collection. In 1964, they filed the articles of association for the Fondation de la Maison de la Chasse et de la Nature, which was recognized as promoting the public utility in 1966, this was the starting point for their ambitious museum project. As well as being a skilful entrepreneur who succeeded in establishing his company as one of Europe's leading flooring manufacturers, François Sommer also dedicated himself to writing. His book *La chasse imaginaire*, in which he sets out the visionary concept of hunting that respects its natural environment, was awarded the prestigious Prix de l'Académie française in 1969. Following the death of her husband in 1973, Jacqueline Sommer became Chairman of the Foundation and determinedly pursued her late husband's mission of passing on a passion and his desire to raise awareness, this mission remains as relevant today as it ever was.

→ Jacqueline and François Sommer
© Fondation François Sommer
↓ Wedding of Jacqueline and François Sommer,
June 30, 1949
© Fondation François Sommer



Going from a private collection to an art museum

Since the 1930s, François Sommer's personal collection had consisted of precious hunting treatises, trophies and weapons. But when he and his wife Jacqueline decided to dedicate a site to their passion, they decided to bring together works of art to illustrate the world of hunting in a way that was tangible for the novice visitor.

They enlisted the help of eminent specialists to advise them, foremost among them was Pierre-Louis Duchartre, Inspector of French Museums, and Georges de Lastic, Curator of the Senlis Hunting Museum. Georges de Lastic was appointed curator of the Musée de la Chasse as soon as it opened, and played a decisive role as artistic advisor in the transformation of a private collection of objects assembled by a connoisseur into a genuine fine arts museum. This was achieved thanks to an ambitious acquisition policy that still exists today. Nevertheless, from the outset of the project, the Sommers were keen to bring these antique pieces and the many objects linked to the world of hunting and contemporary art together. In 1963, they commissioned the artist Bernard Lorjou (1908-1986) to create a brightly coloured painting that still adorns the ceiling of the trophy room. The collections now include eight and a half thousand objects, of which almost one and a half thousand are on display. The collections have grown steadily, not only through regular acquisitions, but also through long-term loans from major institutions (the Louvre, the Musée de Sèvres, the Musée de l'Armée, etc.). This is in line with François and Jacqueline Sommer's vision: to offer the public a museum with superb artefacts, bringing together places and eras, in a space that has quiet charm, that immediately brings to mind the subdued atmosphere of a passionate collector's cabinet of curiosities. This intimate, refined atmosphere, in which a wide variety of works of art and objects are displayed, has been crucial for the success of this institution, which was awarded the 'Musée de France' label in 2003.



↑ Hôtel de Guénégaud before restoration,
façade rue des Archives © Jouve



→ Hôtel de Guénégaud, garden façade at the
start restoration work, circa 1965 © Jouve
↓ Hôtel de Guénégaud, after restoration
© Fondation François Sommer – Sophie Lloyd



L'Hôtel de Guénégaud, the historic headquarters

The Hôtel de Guénégaud is at the heart of the Foundation and the museum, with its great sobriety and refined volumes, it is emblematic of 17th-century private residences; its famous staircase was described in a work by Henri Sauval as early as 1655. It is the only completely preserved Parisian mansion by the great architect François Mansart (1598-1666), a precursor of French classicism. It was threatened with demolition when, in 1962, it was finally listed as a historic monument at the instigation of André Malraux, de Gaulle's Minister of Cultural Affairs and was subsequently acquired by the City of Paris. The Sommers were close friends of André Malraux, they responded to his appeal to save the Hôtel de Guénégaud by establishing the headquarters of their Foundation there. They were to play an active role in the cultural policy of preserving historic monuments in the Marais district by undertaking to finance and supervise the complete restoration of the town house, which remained the property of the City.

Since 1967, the Hôtel de Guénégaud has been home to the Foundation, the museum and a club for, in the words of François Sommer, 'indisputable sports hunters or [...] true friends of nature, regardless of social class'. The building is organised around a formal garden, and now houses a large group of reception rooms and lounges reserved for members of the Club de la Chasse et de la Nature.



L'Hôtel de Mongelas, the time of expansion

Like the Hôtel de Guénégaud, this vast residence is characterised by a certain classicism. It was built in the early 18th century. Its attribution remains uncertain, it was possibly designed by Jules Hardouin-Mansart (1646-1708), grand-nephew of François Mansart and architect to Louis XIV. The Hôtel was home to noble families until the French Revolution, and in the following century it housed various commercial activities. Major restoration work was required once again when the Foundation acquired the building in 2005, restoring it to the state it was known and documented to be in in 1705, in particular by restoring the façade and courtyard to their former monumental glory. It is now linked to the Hôtel de Guénégaud, and this afforded the opportunity to develop a more ambitious itinerary, which was designed by Claude d'Anthenaise (director of the museum from 2007 to 2019). In 2007, it was possible to open a completely redesigned Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, that was equipped with new areas such as a one hundred and twenty-seat auditorium and a temporary exhibition room. The Hôtel de Guénégaud then became the museum's main building.



← Bernard Lorjou working on the ceiling (mounted canvas)
of the trophy room, 1967 © [Daniel Frasnay](#)

↗ Jacqueline Sommer and André Malraux at the museum's inauguration, 1967 © [Fondation François Sommer](#)

Extensive works carried out between July 2019 and April 2021 have allowed the museum to redesign its itinerary and scenography. Thanks to the relocation of the administrative areas, the museum has been able to move into the attic space of the two town houses, thus increasing exhibition space tenfold and improving visitor comfort, while opening a bookshop and a larger area devoted to educational activities.



The refurbishment of the door and window frames, the parquet flooring and the air-conditioning has significantly improved exhibition and conservation conditions. These works have also provided an opportunity to carry out a major overhaul of the collections (including the stocktaking and the restoration and packaging of certain works), as well as providing the space needed to display large-scale commissioned works, such as François Malingr y's *Anthropocene diorama*, Markus Hansen's *Library dedicated to Claude L vi-Strauss*, and Philippe Cogn e's *Forest seen from the train*, which mark a new, more modern and reflective paradigm in the design of the museum's itinerary.

↑ Anthropocene diorama
  Mus e de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – B atrice Hatala – ADAGP, Paris, 2024



An immersive second floor that offers scientific and philosophical perspectives

Led by scenographer Sophie Liger and interior architect Christophe Giraud, under the governance of Christine Germain-Donnat (director of the museum from 2019 to 2024), the museography work in the beautiful attic spaces on the second floor now offers a unique experience. The atmosphere contrasts with the hushed ambience of the first floor: here, a distinctly more philosophical dimension unfolds from the outset. At the start of this second itinerary, visitors are greeted by a diorama from the Prélud studio, which takes a non-moralistic look at our impact on living beings, thus opening up the possibility of reflecting on the relationship between humans and nature. Then come three rooms, named after the palaeontologist Charles Darwin (1809-1882), the biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944) and the ecologist Aldo Leopold (1887-1948). However, these figures are not inviting us to engage in cold scientific reflection, but rather to take part in a sensory, emotional and intellectual experience, where the tender, the beautiful and the strange come together in contemporary creations by Edi Dubien, Janine Janet, Jean Girel and Eva Jospin, amongst others.

A new visitor experience

The renovation has made it easier to move through the museum and has made the premises more accessible and comfortable. This ambitious project has led to the creation of a specialised bookshop, which seemed an obvious choice given that François Sommer was a true bibliophile. A pedagogical workshop has also been created to host activities for school groups and curious young people.



→ *Forest seen from the train*,
Philippe Cognée, 2021
(in the foreground, *Forest*,
Eva Jospin, 2010)
© Musée de la Chasse et de
la Nature – Béatrice Hatala –
ADAGP, Paris, 2024

An acquisition policy that is both open to heritage and to contemporary art

Through their acquisition policy, the museum and the Foundation continue to extend and expand the project initiated by François and Jacqueline Sommer.

The museum's strong point and recognised speciality is, of course, hunting art, which is given special consideration, not least through an assiduous monitoring of the market. In 2021, for example, the Foundation was able to pre-empt a major work in French art history at a public auction at Hôtel Drouot: the presumed portrait of Baron du Pille with his dogs, by two artists, Jean Daret (1614-1688) and Nicasiaus Bernaerts (1620-1678). More recently, the Foundation's swift action enabled a sumptuous *Diana and her dog* by Michel Dorigny (1616-1665), a brilliant pupil of Simon Vouet, to remain in France. This seventeenth-century masterpiece narrowly escaped being shipped across the pond, where it was coveted by a famous museum. At the museum, it has been returned to what is, in fact, its original environment, as it was designed for a private mansion in the Marais district.

Contemporary art is the other pillar for the development of the collection. Commissions and purchases, sometimes in the aftermath of temporary exhibitions, are a natural part of a museum tour that skilfully blends the past, the present and the future. There is thus the donation of six works by Sophie Calle in 2017, the *Library dedicated to Claude Lévi-Strauss* by Markus Hansen, acquired in 2020, and *Forest seen from the train* and *Steep landscape*, two pigmented wax creations by Philippe Cognée, which were added to the exhibition space in 2021. More recently, the Foundation acquired a ceramic by Carolein Smit, photographs by Vincent Fournier, and a Scottish fox by American painter Sean Landers, this was following their respective retrospectives. Design, the art of living, also play a key part in this policy: in 2023, the Foundation acquired the *Oak Bench* by French artists Daniel Dewar and Gégory Gicquel.

The Friends of the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature association also plays a crucial role in keeping the collections alive, as is demonstrated by the sponsorship that enable the acquisition in 2023 of an astonishing painter's palette, *The hunter's dream*, signed by seven German hunter-painters.



← *Oak Bench*, Daniel Dewar and Gégory Gicquel, 2023
© Daniel Dewar & Gégory Gicquel. Photo Fabrice Gousset, courtesy Loevenbruck, Paris.



↑ *Portrait of Baron du Pille with his dogs*,
Jean Daret and Nicasiaus Bernaerts, 1661
© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature
Béatrice Hatala – ADAGP, Paris, 2024



↑ *Diane et son chien*, Michel Dorigny, 17th century
© Didier Aaron – Thomas Hennocque



3

A FOUNDATION
THAT IS
at THE CROSSROADS
OF LIFE SCIENCES,
art and
SUSTAINABLE LAND
MANAGEMENT



For sixty years now, in keeping with its founders' vision, the François Sommer Foundation has been pursuing an ambitious cultural policy through the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, as well as cross-disciplinary initiatives in the fields of nature management, scientific research, patronage, the organisation of events and the publication of a magazine. These initiatives are more relevant than ever these days as we are faced with climate change and the collapse of biodiversity.

François and Françoise Sommer were forerunners when it comes to ecological thinking and in their conception of hunting, which they wanted to be respectful of the environment. From 1971 onwards, at the request of President Georges Pompidou, François Sommer took part in the projects of the new Ministry for the Protection of Nature and the Environment, particularly with regard to the hunting plan (hunting regulation), which he invented. In France and in Africa, he led pioneering initiatives that aimed to reintroduce animal species into the wild. This brand of humanistic ecology, which seeks a balance between human presence and the protection of nature, is still very much current nowadays: the Foundation still looks to the future, thus perpetuating François and Jacqueline Sommer's legacy through its concrete actions.

A foundation that is active in the management of natural spaces

The Belval site, which has been the Foundation's historic estate since 1971, is located in the heart of François Sommer's native region, the Ardennes. It covers more than a thousand hectares of forest, meadows and wetlands, and deer were reintroduced there in 1972. 3,000 trainees have been trained in hunting management and the forest-game balance there since 1995. All this contributes to its being a place dedicated to passing on hunting knowledge and best practices. The creation of the Nature Centre in 2014 marks a turning point in the history of the estate, and accompanies the transformation of this site, which is set to become centre of the Foundation's scientific endeavours.





FOCUS/INSET: GILÉ NATIONAL PARK IN MOZAMBIQUE

François Sommer had been fascinated by Africa, its sumptuous landscapes and its wildlife, ever since he first went on safari at the age of thirty. In 1951, he set about creating the 114,000 hectare Manda nature reserve in Chad. This is why, in line with his desire to work towards preserving natural areas in Africa, the Foundation has managed Gilé National Park since 2007, in partnership with the government of Mozambique and with the financial support of the Agence Française de Développement and the European Union. Covering an area of 439,000 hectares, this immense natural site is home to incredible biodiversity, including dozens of elephants, zebras, buffalo and almost three hundred species of bird. The Foundation employs dozens of people to protect the species and supports local communities through development programmes for the harvesting, processing and sale of forest products, in an approach that is always respectful of the environment.

↑ Gilé National Park
© Fondation François Sommer – Thomas Prin

At the service of knowledge and research

Knowing nature is crucial for caring for it. This is why the Foundation supports scientific research. To date, around a hundred researchers have benefited from its financial support, in mainland France and in the overseas territories, as well as in Africa. The foundation's initiatives don't stop there however: its Nature division, which has established an international network of prestigious partners (French and European universities, the Italian National Research Council, INRAE, etc.), has undertaken many initiatives to promote the sharing of knowledge and research into ecology and the preservation of biodiversity. One good example of this expertise is that in 2022, the Belval estate was certified as a research site for the Argonne rural workshop zone (ZARG) by the CNRS, thus enabling new research programmes to be set up in the fields of ecology and socio-economics. A new 2,500 m² center for research, training and artistic creation, that is due to open in 2026, will be the centre-piece of these scientific ambitions.



↑ Future Belval center for training, research and artistic creation
© Matière d'architectures / Atelier Landauer

One of the pillars of the foundation: Patronage

By restoring the Hôtel de Guénégaud, which is an architectural masterpiece from the seventeenth century that was then in ruins, in order to house its future museum, the Foundation ushered in sixty years of a dynamic patronage policy. This policy has quite naturally involved the commission and acquisition of works of art, but it has not, nonetheless neglected projects aiming to promote culture, research and conservation. Every year since 1980, the Foundation has awarded the François Sommer literary prize for works on the relationship between man and nature, as well as the Homme Nature scientific prize, which is awarded to five winners every two years. For over ten years it has also supported the COAL association (Coalition pour une écologie culturelle), with which it organises the annual COAL Prize, which awards a financial prize to artists whose work deals with ecological and environmental issues. Finally, it supports associations and non-governmental organisations through annual calls for projects. Sixteen have been funded to the tune of over €1 million between 2017 and 2019, including initiatives to resolve conflicts between wild animals and farmers (wolves in the Var, brown bears in the

A meeting place

Open to society and to current debates, the Foundation is a place where passion and reflection cohabit harmoniously: it therefore regularly organises conferences, round tables and screenings that bring together artists, scientists, philosophers and writers. This is the role it was playing when, in 2023, it launched the Rencontres Homme Nature series, a series of events which seeks to raise awareness of work linked to agro-ecology and the protection of animal species. As it is keen to continue bringing together art and the preservation of living beings, since 2012 the Foundation has published the twice-yearly magazine *Billebaude*, which expresses its aesthetic and ecological sensibilities. A good example of how legitimate it is in the eyes of the authorities, its forward-looking study on the future of hunting in France, which was carried out between 2017 and 2021, is now considered a seminal work. Through all these actions, the Foundation is working towards the promotion of the ideas and values it has embodied since 1964.

POUR ALLER PLUS LOIN

Disponible sur le site

fondationfrancoissommer.org :

⇒ [le rapport d'activité de la Fondation](#)

⇒ [les 5 missions de la Fondation](#)



4

an interview WITH ALBAN DE LOISY

DIRECTOR GENERAL
OF THE FONDATION FRANÇOIS SOMMER

“The Sommer legacy
is a love of life and beauty”.

Alban de Loisy, extrait de l'entretien





↑ Dog Room,
© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Béatrice Hatala – ADGAP, Paris, 2024



How do you see your roles and responsibilities?

ALBAN DE LOISY: Given the diversity of the Foundation's missions, which encompass the life sciences, art, the management of natural areas, education, etc., the Managing Director cannot have full proficiency for every subject, so he or she must draw on the teams' expertise. Our teams number around fifty employees and almost as many professions: forest worker, researcher, heritage conservationist, accountant, mediator or even Maître d'Hôtel. I also have to ensure that we live up to our founders' commitment to excellence and exemplarity, and that we deal with our issues with legitimacy whilst maintaining our independence. If governments and international institutions are currently turning to the Foundation for its expert advice, it is precisely because the Foundation brings this relevance, that it is able to identify and support the most innovative projects, whether it is cultural projects or our actions to promote biodiversity and protect wildlife. My role is to continue to establish this legitimacy.



What does the Sommers legacy and vision mean to you?

Over and above their desire to showcase hunting through the arts, the Sommers' legacy is first and foremost the love for life and beauty. Human beings have been hunting since the dawn of time and the founders set themselves the goal of exploring the relationship between humanity and nature through the prism of this anthropological fact. From the outset, François Sommer's vision was to combine these various missions. He was committed to preserving biodiversity from a very early stage, not only through his Foundation, but also by intervening directly with the public authorities in favour of the regulation of hunting and a ministry dedicated to the protection of the environment. The museum had to be in line with this humanist vision of ecology. We are determined to remain faithful to this original spirit. François Sommer gave us a head start, and we need to keep it if we wish to remain relevant and innovative.



↑ Alban de Loisy
© Fondation François Sommer





What are your ambitions for the years to come?

After the crucial step represented by the reopening of the museum with an expanded and redesigned exhibition space in 2021, one of our major projects for the coming decade concerns the Belval estate, where we are undertaking major works. We will be opening a new 2,500 m² centre, made up of 9 pavilions, designed to host training, research and artistic creation initiatives, as a continuation of the site's historical activities. We are also designing conference and catering facilities, a laboratory and accommodation for artists in residence. It was essential for us to develop this cross-disciplinary project with an international vocation, rooted in the Ardennes region, the birthplace of the Sommer family's industrial activities.

More broadly, our ambition is to consolidate our influence by developing 'outside the walls' initiatives; the aim is to attract new audiences, in particular those who are more distant from the cultural offer. As a result, we have stepped up the number of projects we have, in order to attract new visitors and get involved in new venues, including a street art exhibition and a contemporary art trail at the Château de Fontainebleau. The founders' own desire for openness and dialogue encourages us to reach out to all kinds of audiences, through our partnerships with schools in priority education or urban policy networks, and through our commitment to accessibility for people with disabilities.



In your opinion, what makes the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature so unique ?

First and foremost, there is the concept of a house that is also a museum, and the charm of a great collector's cabinet of curiosities, that brings us up close and personal with real masterpieces. Our visitors tell us how thrilled they are to be able to get up close and personal with paintings by Desportes, Chardin or Brueghel, this offers them a direct experience of beauty. The successful dialogue between classic works of art and contemporary creations is also one of the reasons for our visitors' attachment to the museum. This bridge between places and times, which constantly puts our perception of nature and the living world into question, offers a perspective that is sometimes offbeat, impertinent and unexpected, and this is one of the keys to our success, enabling the Foundation to resonate with the times and wholeheartedly participate in contemporary debates. It invites visitors to question their relationship with the wild world around them and, ultimately, their own responsibility.

LA FONDATION ET LE MUSÉE EN QUELQUES DATES

◇ 1962

Purchase of the first painting by François Desportes, followed by the first works by Jean Siméon Chardin, Jean-Baptiste Oudry and Carle Vernet... this is the beginning of a major art collection.

◇ 1964

Creation of the Maison de la Chasse et de la Nature Foundation.

◇ 1966

The Fondation de la Maison de la Chasse et de la Nature is declared of public utility.

◇ 1967

André Malraux, Minister of Cultural Affairs, inaugurates the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature.

◇ 1973

François Sommer dies. The Belval estate is opened to the public.

◇ 1980

Creation of the François Sommer literary prize.

◇ 1993

Death of Jacqueline Sommer.

◇ 1999

The museum is equipped with a documentation centre on the work of François and Jacqueline Sommer, animal art, hunting and contemporary environmental thinking.

◇ 2002

The museum is awarded the 'Musée de France' label.

◇ 2005

The Foundation acquires the Hôtel de Mongelas.

◇ 2007

Inauguration of the new museum after three years of renovation, with a strong focus on contemporary art.

◇ 2014

The Foundation sets up a Nature department to increase its capacity for action in the management and preservation of natural areas.

◇ 2021

The museum reopens after two years of renovation work, that allow the increase of visitors footfall by converting the attic space into an area for visits.

◇ 2024

Start of construction work on the new Belval center for training, research and artistic creation.

THE FOUNDATION
WAS SUCCESSIVELY CHAIRED BY :

François Sommer (1966-1973)
Jacqueline Sommer (1973-1993)
Christian de Longevialle (1993-2011)
Philippe Dulac (2011-2021)
Henri de Castries (depuis 2021)





5

THE MUSEUM Trail: CELEBRATING CURIOSITY



Like the collections it contains, and in keeping with the path laid out by its founders, the museum trail takes visitors on a journey that is an intense experience of wild beauty and human ingenuity. Here, raw splendour rubs shoulders with the odd and the marvellous, without forgetting a light humorous touch, and without neglecting an in-depth meditation on our relationship with nature.



↑ Stag and Wolf Room, deer teaching cabinet (bronze feet by Saint-Clair Cemin)
© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – David Giancattarina



A gateway to exploration: the Saint-Clair Cemin staircase

The tone is set by the imposing bronze relief designed by the Brazilian Saint-Clair Cemin, who was inspired by his first visit to the Hôtel de Guénégaud when it was being renovated. The majestic, solemn framework it forms, that climbs around the stairwell, like a monolith, reveals many mysterious details, like a copse in which plant and animal species are said to lurk. This massive work, which was conceived as the backbone of the building, responds brilliantly to the rococo and sylvan details of the banisters and the light fittings that were forged by the artist. It's a fine start to the visit itinerary, as it clearly expresses the desire to invite visitors to explore this unique space where, like hunters in a wild forest, they will have to be in their toes with their five senses on the alert.





Under the gaze of Diana

The first room of the museum tour is dominated by one of the most symbolic figures of the hunting world: Diana (Artemis to the Greeks), the goddess of hunting and wildlife. Many ancient myths depict her as a deity who is difficult to approach, a fierce protector of the wilderness, a beautiful woman who shuns the attention of men. She embodies untamed nature and also the art of hunting, in which she excels more than anyone else, thanks to the bow and quiver given to her by Jupiter. She is therefore the ideal divinity to usher you into François and Jacqueline Sommer's passion, and to remind us of the venerable age of this traditional practice, that is inseparable from the history of civilisations and touching upon the universal. The exhibition begins with works inspired by mythology, recalling the attachment of the Greeks and Romans to the art of hunting, such as *Meleager Killing the Boar of Calydon* (1677) by Theodor Boeyermans (1620-1678), which recounts the episode that cost the young prince his life, when he was put to death for offering the noblest part of his prey to the beautiful Atalanta. You are then drawn into a small, dimly lit cabinet. Two superb paintings of *Diana and her nymphs*, by the masters Brueghel de Velours (1568-1625) and Rubens (1577-1640), are set against the striking ceiling, painted by the Antwerp artist Jan Fabre, it represents six owl heads and thick plumage: they stare at the visitor with a gaze that is given a petrifying strangeness by the prosthetic human eyes, in keeping with a quirky museographic intention that questions our own gaze.

← Wild Boar Room

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Sophie Lloyd

✓ *The night of Diana*, Jan Fabre, 2007

© Fondation François Sommer – Sophie Lloyd – ADAGP, Paris, 2024

Track end trace

The museum is a fascinating bestiary, where taxidermized falcons, wild boar and polar bears stand side by side with animals created by Pierre Paul Rubens, Jean-Baptiste Oudry and Jean Siméon Chardin, as well as those by Diego Giacometti, Sophie Calle and Jeff Koons. From room to room, deer, wolves and unicorns are our guides as we explore the relationship between humanity and animals. The stag, the king of the forest and hunted by princes, has pride of place, however dogs are also very much in the spotlight. Faithful hunting companions, such as *Diane and Blonde* (1702), a masterpiece painted by Desportes that ‘portrays’ Louis XIV’s favourite hounds, our canine friends also are depicted as pets: witness this adorable 18th-century kennel hung with velvet and silk, or this *Dog with shoe* (1785) painted by Dominique Doncre (1743-1820), showing an animal bred for the pleasure and amusement of those who frequented the elegant salons of the aristocracy.



← *Dog with a shoe*, Dominique Doncre, 1785

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Sylvie Durand

↓ Dog Room

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Béatrice Hatala – ADAGP, Paris, 2024



As the bird flies

Capturing game with birds of prey may seem less physically demanding than hunting with hounds, it nonetheless requires other talents: observation, cunning, patience, etc. Based on skilful collaboration with falcons, eagles, hawks and other birds of prey, falconry was highly appreciated by the highest society, in the East as in the West. A very fine princely portrait of the young Philippe le Beau (1478-1506), future father of Charles V, wearing the saltire of the Order of the Golden Fleece, gloved and carrying a hunting bird, is a perfect illustration of this art, which was highly prized by the nobility.

A little further on, the visitor discovers the bird room. In the centre of the room, is what looks like a car wreck - Vincent Dubourg's *Bird car* - overgrown with vegetation, looking as if it has directly been taken from a coppice, bears witness to one vision of the contemporary forest. All around, display cases of taxidermised birds, in the style of natural history museums, face a tightly-packed display of studies by the Flemish painter Pieter Boel (1622-1674) and the French painter François Desportes. These motionless birds are matched by *The wings of Chinese feathers* by the German artist Rebecca Horn. Near the exit of this room, stands an incongruous guest in this aviary: a polar bear, one of the museum's icons, who stands guard outside the door of the trophy room.



↓ Birds Room
© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature,
Paris – Béatrice Hatala – ADAGP, Paris, 2024

↗ *Portrait of Philippe Le Beau*,
Master of the Legend of St Madeleine, 15th century
© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Sylvie Durand



The hunter's lair

The trophy room is certainly the one that brings us closest to the founders' fascination for distant lands, and particularly for the African continent, with its wildlife and its vast spaces, which reveal humanity's true nature. "*The bush*", wrote Jacqueline and François Sommer in *Le Safari La Gâchette* (1956), "*is a place of truth where you cannot hide anything about yourself...*". In this bright, south-facing room, rows of gleaming weapons, including one of the most precious in the world: the gold, silver and vermeil-encrusted *vénérerie* pommel rifle given by Napoleon I to Count Rapp, stand alongside naturalised animals (elephant, rhinoceros, panther, tiger, etc.), reminiscent of the 19th century, it recalls the 19th century with its colonial trading posts, expeditions to the heart of Africa in search of some mythical game, and private rooms where prosperous hunters took pleasure in reliving their past exploits through the trophies on display. Among these animals, there is an albino boar trophy, an automaton by visual artist Nicolas Darrot, which discreetly follows the visitor with its eyes, arousing a disquieting sensation of role reversal between the viewer and the viewed. The large marouflaged canvas by painter Bernard Lorjou, that was designed for this space back in 1967, adorns the ceiling in bright colours and provides a welcome contrast with the collection.



Everything is a surprise if you keep your eyes open

During the visit, visitors will need to keep their eyes peeled to find dog tracks in the terracotta tiles, to sneak a glimpse of a mouse emerging from a hole that is hidden behind silk curtains, or notice Rodolphe Huguët's fake surveillance cameras and to catch the fox who is asleep on a 17th-century armchair. Don't hesitate to open the drawers of the weapons room to discover weapons, engravings and collections of buttons on the theme of hunting, or to watch Guillaume Dége's animated films, which provide a humorous insight into the handling of these prestigious mechanisms on display in the showcases. Children - and older visitors - are also encouraged to handle the educational cabinets set up throughout the visit, which combine works of art and natural elements (footprints, excrement, natural habitat, etc.), and give real context to the animals that inhabit the museum.



This, Madame, is Le Marais

On the first floor of the Hôtel de Guénégaud, there is a succession of grand salons in the purest 18th-century style, which perfectly recreate the atmosphere of aristocratic residences, with their fine floors, elegant furniture, works of art and master paintings. Chardin, Desportes, Santerre, Huet... the greatest names of the Age of Enlightenment are scattered here and there, on the walls. Amongst the still lifes, portraits and hunting scenes, there is a *Portrait of a Lady in Hunting Costume* (attributed to Robert Gence, 17th-18th c.) of particular note, which compares favourably with the *Portrait of Pierre Simon Mirey as a Hunter* by Louis Tocqué (1696-1772) and the *Portrait of Baron du Pille as a Hunter* by Jean Daret (1614-1668) and Nicasiaus Bernaerts (1620-1678). This exceptional painting, acquired in 2021, is the first known portrait of a hunter in 17th-century France. The eye will also be able to venture high up the silk damask walls to discover four exotic door tops painted by François Desportes for the Château de Bercy, as well as an epic *Cat fights* by Nicasiaus Bernaerts and a mouth-watering *Still-life with game* by Frans Snyders (1759-1657). Temporary exhibitions of contemporary art (Eva Jospin, Sean Landers, Tamara Kostianovsky...) add an unexpected touch to these opulent spaces.



↑ Sitting Room, *Portrait of lady in hunting suit*
(attributed to Robert Gence, 17th-18th century)

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – David Giancattarina



← *Duck with Seville orange*, Jean Siméon Chardin,
circa 1730

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Sylvie Durand

↗ *Still-life*, Frans Snyders,
Flanders, 17th century

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Sylvie Durand

A vast cabinet of curiosities

Throughout the exhibition, the museum pays tribute to the cabinets of curiosities that appeared in Renaissance Europe and multiplied during the Age of Enlightenment, from Prague to Florence and Fontainebleau. It is in this spirit that the rooms bring together unusual objects and works from all periods, such as the unicorn cabinet, that is teeming with objects, including an ostrich egg sublimated by Jean-Michel Othoniel and a stuffed rabbit immersed in formaldehyde by the Austrian collective Gelitin, an intriguing video by Maïder Fortune, a 17th-century Italian powder flask, a naturalised cockerel. These are all under the marvellous protection of a ‘real’ unicorn horn (a narwhal tooth) and the tutelary help of Janine Janet’s *Genie of the forest* (1913-2000).



↗ *Genie of the forest*, Janine Janet, 1957
© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Nicolas Mathéus – ADAGP, Paris, 2024
↓ The unicorn (video capture), Maïder Fortuné, 2005
© Maïder Fortuné





On the second floor, the reflective museography designed by the Scénos-Associés agency during the 2019-2021 works is imbued with the spirit of the cabinets of curiosity. One room is thus inspired by Darwin's passion for observing and classifying species, orchids in particular. An anthology of papier-mâché flower models designed by Robert Brendel (1821-1898) for botanical study are displayed here alongside animal skulls and works that are reminiscent of the *mineralia*, *vegetalia* and *animalia*, effectively recreating the atmosphere of a scientist and esthete's cabinet of curiosities. On the ceiling, Hubert Le Gall's *Astrocrokyllus*, a strange stellar crocodile in gilded aluminium, adds a touch of surprise and modernity to this achronic space. The quest of beautiful and odd objects is also clear in Julien Salaud's naturalised chimera *Faisanglier*, Miguel Chevalier's *digital flowers* which face those of Vincent Fournier, Christophe Jacquet dit Toffe's delirious preserves of wild animals and Théo Mercier's boxed worlds are also part of this quest for the beautiful and the bizarre.



↑ Darwin's Cabinet, *Faisanglier*, Julien Salaud, 2015

↗ Darwin's cabinet

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Béatrice Hatala – ADAGP, Paris, 2024

The tick's lair

The tick room, named after the German biologist and philosopher Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944), who was one of the inspirers of the science of ethology and was a great observer of this species of mite, is centred on Johan Creten's astonishing and monumental *Narcissus Saved* (1963), which is made of two massive blocks of enamelled sandstone, and represents the mythical character leaning over his aqua-



tic reflection. The blue wallpaper with floral motifs, produced by Offard's studio in Tours, is in contrast with the contemporary works adorning the walls of this room, including photographs by Karen Knorr, a very tender watercolour by Edi Dubien featuring a young man and a deer, and this funny giant tick, trapped under a magnifying glass, by the Art Orienté Objet collective.





A sylvan haven

The final areas of the exhibition, with their simple wood paneling that is reminiscent of a forest shelter, give us a taste of the rusticity and simplicity of life in the forest experienced by the philosopher, poet and naturalist Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) and the environmentalist Aldo Leopold (1887-1948). The memory of the latter is evoked by the Art Orienté Objet collective with a miniature reproduction of the cabin where he lived in Wisconsin, a model in deliberate sobriety. The porcelain discs created by Jean Girel, depicting nature in all its ideal beauty, are part of a theme centred on the search for harmony with the living world, and a return of humanity to its rightful place in the world. The reflection on the topic continues with *La bibliothèque pour Claude Lévi-Strauss*, by the German artist Markus Hansen, which is covered in rooster feathers, and whose interior is filled with rows of books that are rigorously classified by... colour. This ingenious arrangement is in fact made up of books of all types, in all languages, whose reflection in the mirror symbolises the immeasurable variety of knowledge, and how vain it is to try to categorise the entirety of the known world, a tendency that humanity finds so hard to shake off. The journey ends with a visit to the Sommer hunting lodge in Belval. It is panelled with wooden logs, and has been restored by the American artist Mark Dion, who has brought together military decorations, African objects, souvenir photos of hunting parties or evoking the Sommer family's aeronautical adventure, and more intimate details (champagne flutes, a pack of Craven A cigarettes...) that all together paint a shadow puppet portrait of the founding couple. This ideal, timeless shelter is like a museum, it is halfway between a cabinet of curiosities and a hunting lodge. This final point is an invitation to leave the city behind, take to the forest paths and rediscover our bond with nature.

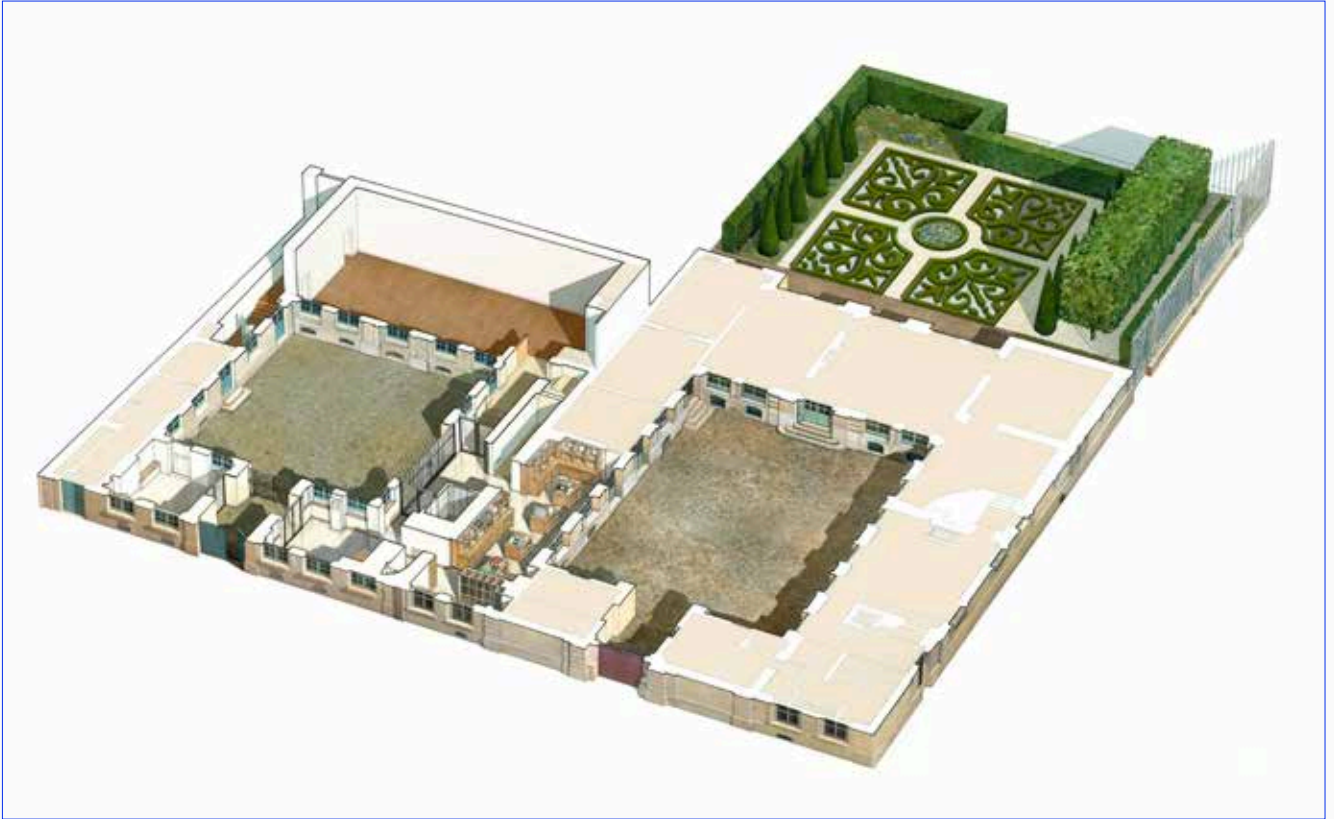


↖ *Forest*, Eva Jospin, 2010

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature,
Paris – Eva Jospin – ADAGP, Paris, 2024

↑ *Sommer Cabin*, Mark Dion, 2006

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Sophie Lloyd



↑ Ground floor

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris — Studio différemment



↑ First floor

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris — Studio différemment



↑ Second floor

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris — Studio différemment



↑ Complete buildings and surrounding area

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris — Studio différemment



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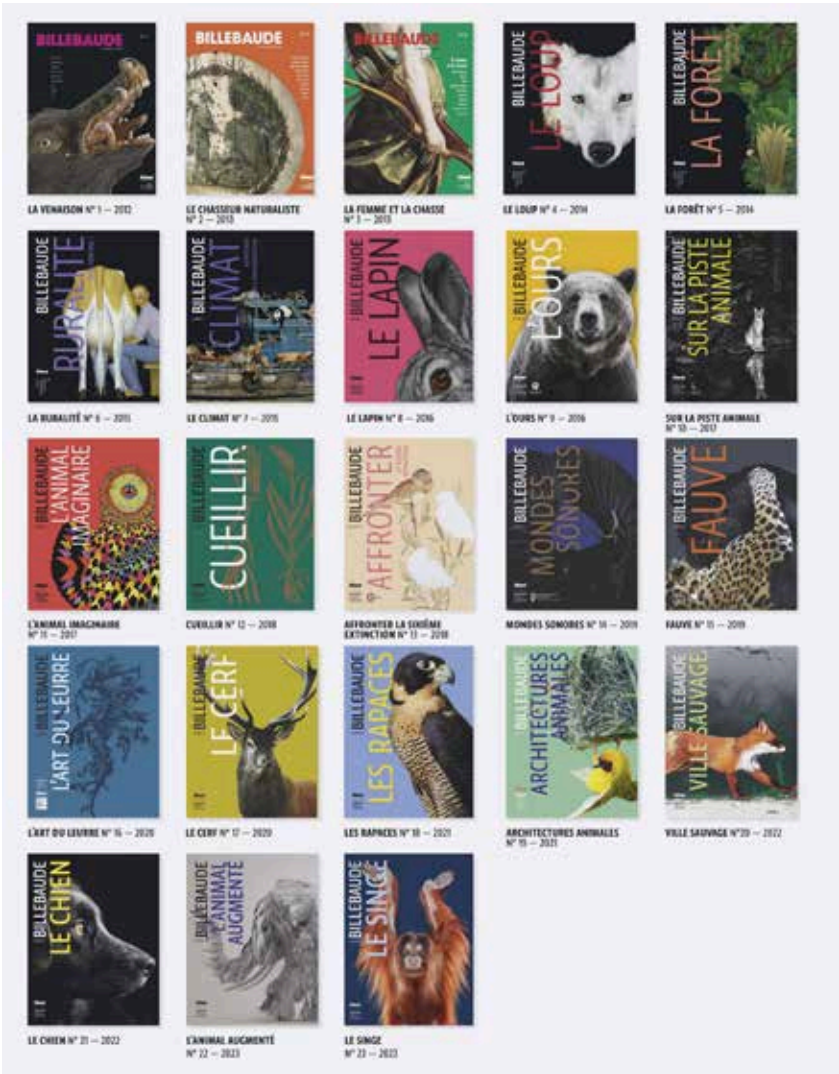
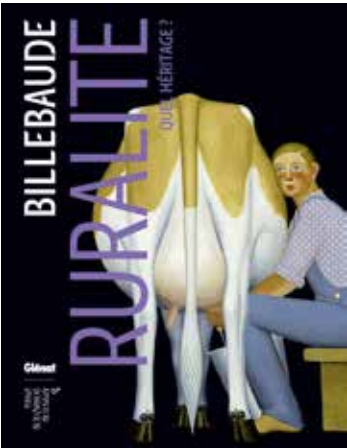
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Art and culture

The François Sommer Foundation and the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature were not imagined by their visionary creators as self-sufficient entities; on the contrary, from the outset they were designed to be open to all, rooted in the thinking of their time. This vocation to promote a whole range of resolutely contemporary values is reflected in the large number of events that are held, attracting a wide range of audiences. In addition to the two temporary exhibitions held each year, this intense cultural programme is punctuated by a number of not-to-be-missed events, such as the François Sommer literary prize, awarded since 1980, and the *Lire la Nature* fair, which since 2017 has brought together authors, researchers, artists and the general public. The museum's famous bookshop is always up to date with the latest publications, and is open to the public free of charge. It also takes part in the museum's evening programme, hosting meetings and book signings. Throughout the year, themed tours of the collections, writing workshops, screenings, nocturnes and 'cartes blanches' offer the curious a constantly changing artistic scene.

The museum also takes part in international cultural initiatives such as European Crafts Day, European Heritage Days and European Museum Night. Always keen to bring together different disciplines and points of view, the Foundation has created the *Rencontres sauvages* podcast, each episode of which features an account by a scientist, writer, artist or philosopher of a face-to-face encounter with a wild animal. These capsules explore the emotions generated by these confrontations with bestial otherness, as well as the transformative dimension of these unique moments. (➡ [available on the web site of the museum](#) and on Apple, Dezeer et Soptify).



↑ Billebaude magazine
© Fondation François Sommer





Re-thinking our relationship with nature

However, this dynamic cultural offering does not sum up the Foundation's great ambitions alone. The Foundation is fully involved in the most topical debates: thinking about the proper role of human beings in nature, promoting the protection of biodiversity, and encouraging dialogue between disciplines through a cross-disciplinary approach. This is why it organises the "Rencontres Homme-Nature", or more occasional lecture series, which regularly bring together experts, writers, artists and scientists to contribute to the debate on these fundamental issues. Festive events are also an opportunity to bring together a wide range of audiences, such as the Fête de l'Ours (Bear Festival), inspired by traditional Pyrenean celebrations listed as UNESCO intangible cultural heritage since 2023, with performances, concerts and DJ sets in a joyously amazing atmosphere. Last but not least, the beautiful biannual magazine *Billebaude*, published since 2012, combines a passion for living things with an aesthetic approach that is always interdisciplinary, at the crossroads of science, the arts and ecology. These many initiatives work together to perpetuate the visionary sensibility and thinking of François and Jacqueline Sommer, two personalities who were decidedly ahead of their time.

Nature education

Nature education is at the heart of the museum's educational activities. Through workshops and tours specially designed for schoolchildren of all ages, as well as families, the museum offers a unique educational experience, enabling young people to discover flora and fauna through the medium of art. This pedagogical approach is an extension of the Sommer family's commitment to educating future generations about the preservation of the wild world. It is also a valuable opportunity to reconnect with nature through culture.



The temporary exhibitions

The museum offers two or three exhibitions a year, exploring the place of nature in the many facets of ancient and contemporary art. Following in the footsteps of the museum's founders, François and Jacqueline Sommer, these events aim to promote a creative and harmonious dialogue between humanity and nature. Through the use of media as varied as cardboard, ceramics, photography and painting, the museum celebrates the diversity and richness of contemporary artistic expression, both in the temporary exhibition room and throughout the museum, where the works of guest artists interact with the museum's collections. Examples include exhibitions by Gilles Aillaud and Tania Mouraud in 2009, Lin Utzon and Abraham Poincheval in 2014, Walton Ford in 2016, Sophie Calle in 2018, Théo Mercier in 2019, Eva Jospin in 2021, street artists in 2022, Carolein Smit in 2022, Sean Landers in 2023, and Tamara Kostianovsky in 2024.

↗ Exhibition « Every stone should cry » – Théo Mercier, 2019

© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Erwan Fichou – ADAGP, Paris, 2024







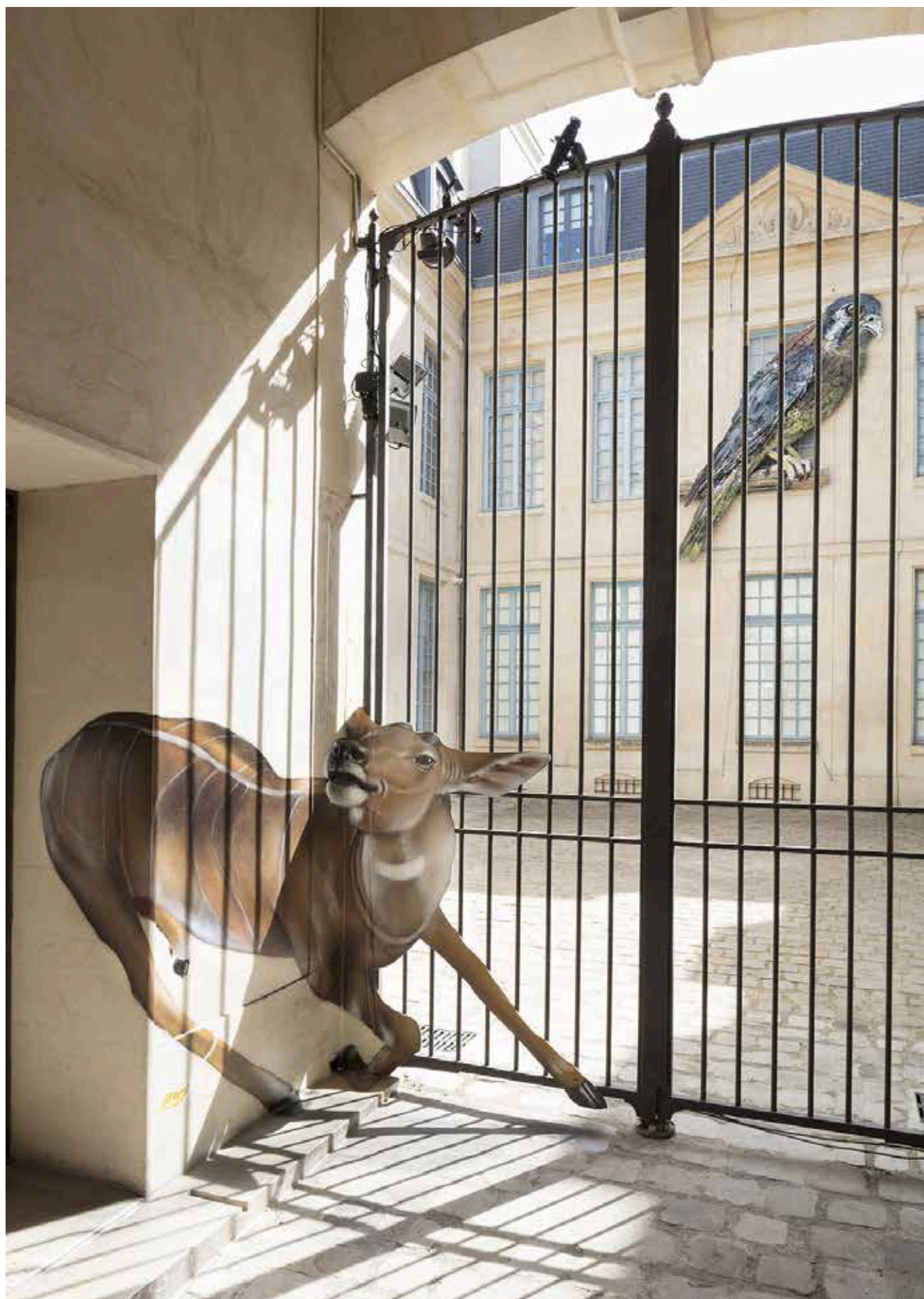
↑ Exhibition « La chair du monde » – Tamara Kostianovsky, 2024 © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Théo Pitout





↑ Exhibition « La valise d'Orphée » – Damien Deroubaix, 2021

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↑ Exhibition « Incursions sauvages » – Ruben Carrasco, Nadège Dauvergne, Andrea Ravo Mattoni, Jussi TwoSeven, Scaf, WAR!, 2022,
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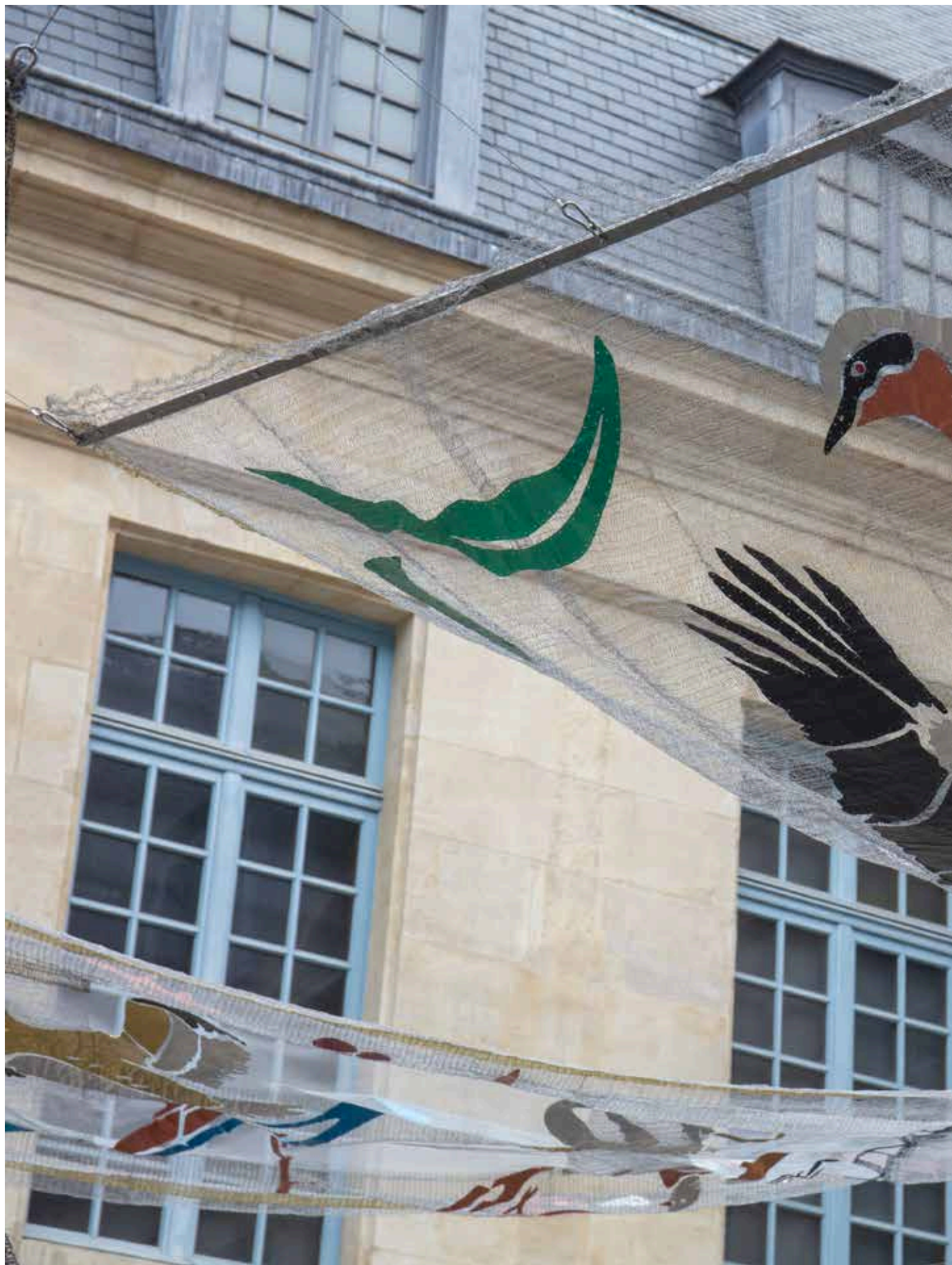
↑ Exhibition « Galleria » – Eva Jospin, 2021 © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – David Giancatarina – ADAGP, Paris, 2024





↑ Exhibition « Beau doublé, Monsieur le marquis! » – Sophie Calle et son invitée Serena Carone, 2017
© Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Béatrice Hatala – ADAGP, Paris, 2024





↑ Exhibition « Moi Balbuzard Migrant » – Maria Loizidou, 2023 © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – David Bordes





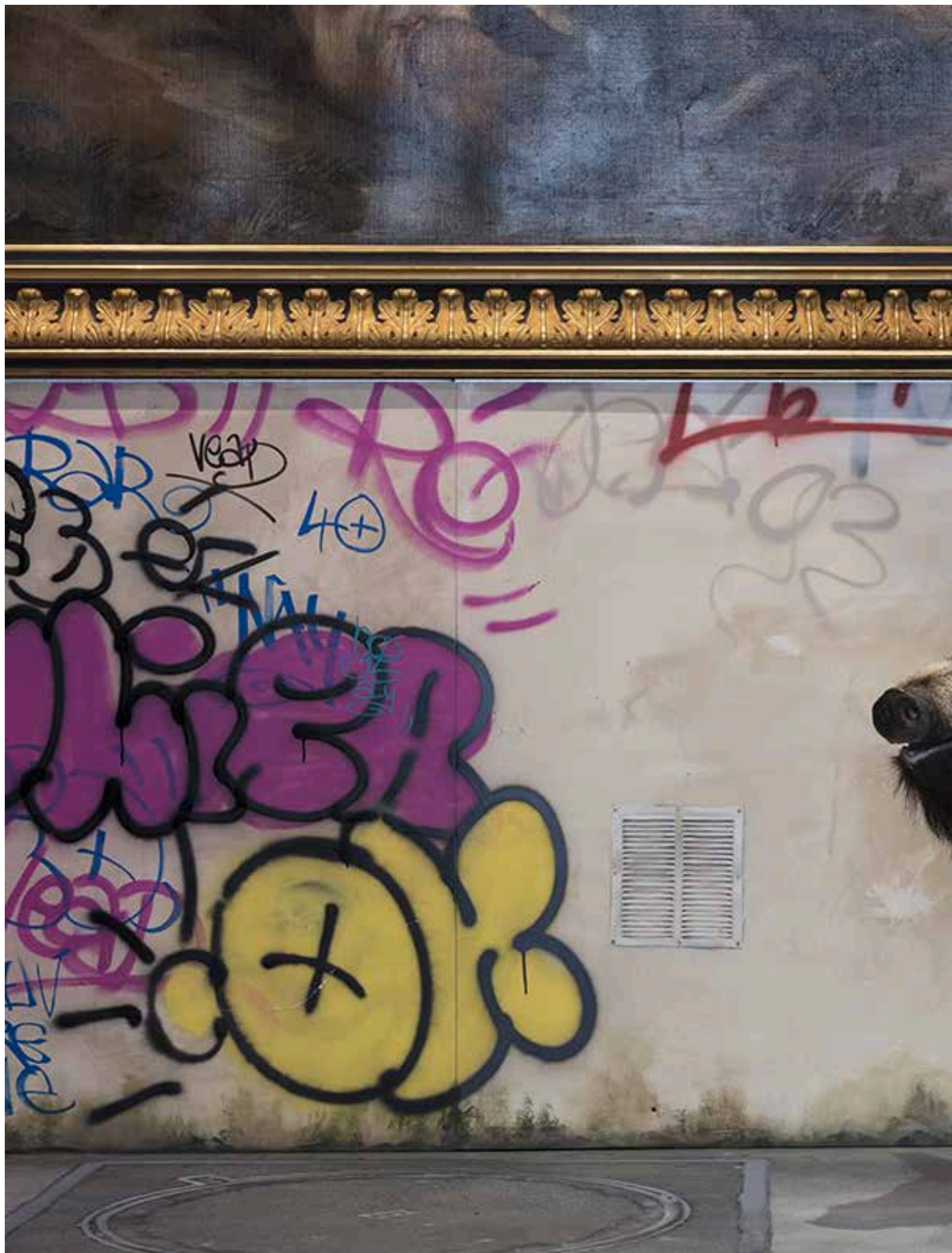
↑ Exhibition « Animal Kingdom » – Sean Landers, 2023 © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – David Giancatarina





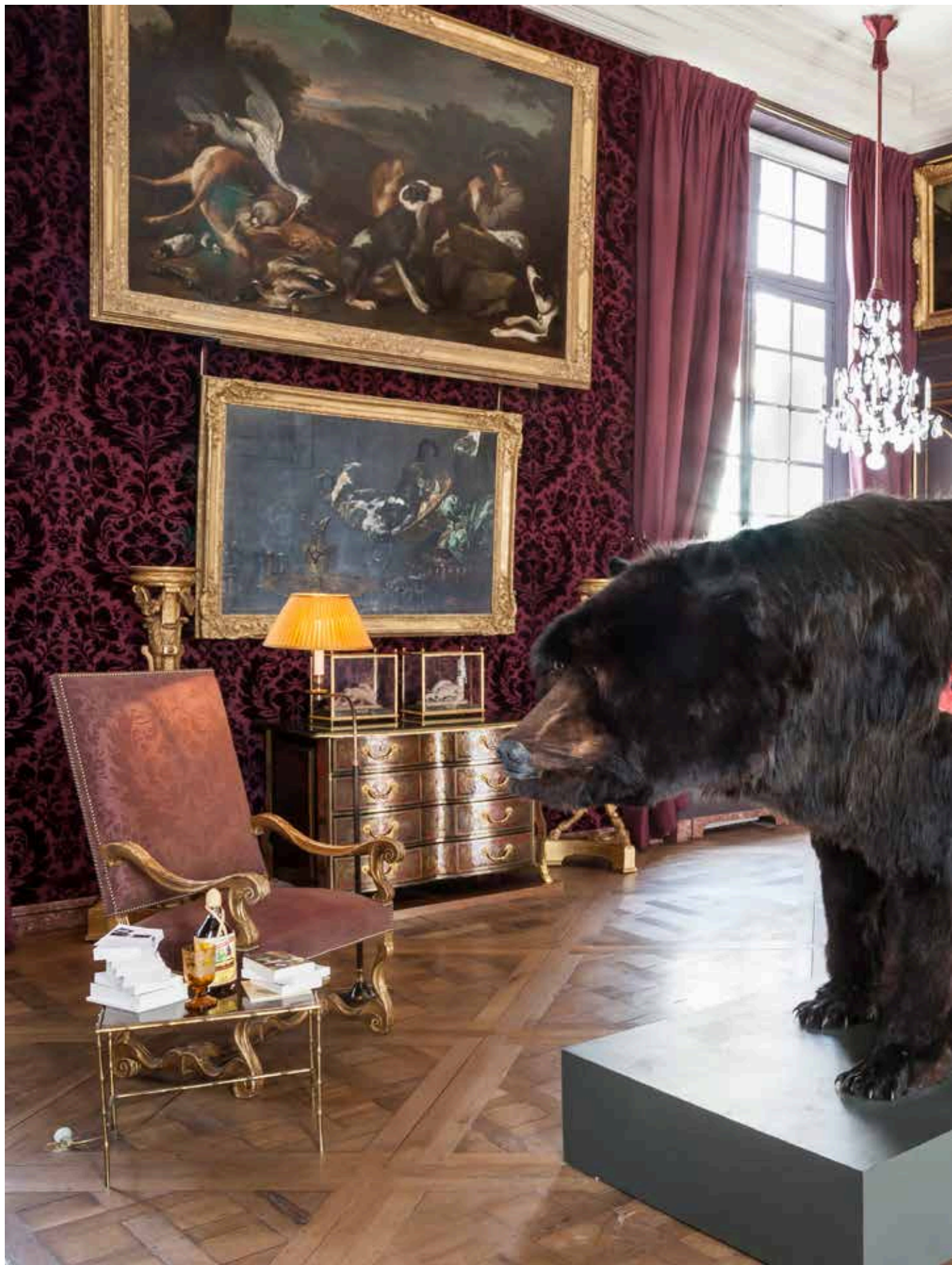
↑ Exhibition « La chair du monde » – Tamara Kostianovsky, 2024 © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Théo Pitout





↑ Exhibition « Incursions sauvages » – Ruben Carrasco, Nadège Dauvergne, Andrea Ravo Mattoni, Jussi TwoSeven, Scaf, WAR!, 2022,
 © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – David Bordes





† Performance by Abraham Poincheval, 2014 © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – Sophie Lloyd – ADAGP, Paris, 2024





↑ Exhibition « Galleria » – Eva Jospin, 2021 © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – David Giancatarina – ADAGP, Paris, 2024



↑ Exhibition « Animal Kingdom » – Sean Landers, 2023 © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – David Giancatarina



↑ Exhibition « Dents ! Crocs ! Griffes ! » – Carolein Smit, 2021 © Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris – David Giancattarina – ADAGP, Paris, 2024

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