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The Private Art Collector's Foundation in France: Issues and Implications for the Cultural Landscape

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**The Private Art Collector's Foundation in France:
Issues and Implications for the Cultural Landscape**

Milena Berman

MAAB Master's Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have witnessed an explosion in the number of private art spaces worldwide. From Bentonville, Arkansas, to Naoshima, Japan, hundreds of impressive structures built by star architects have been funded by private individuals and corporations to house collections of modern and contemporary art, often in unlikely places. The famously-termed “Bilbao effect”¹ in which a grand museum structure is set up outside of the established art capitals of the world, thus putting the city “on the map” of cultural tourism, has become a widespread trend. The examples vary greatly and range from small private “home museums” made to showcase a personal collection such as the Hoffmann Collection of Erica Hoffmann in Berlin, to sprawling “art campuses” complete with archives, educational programs, curatorial staff and artist-in-residency programs such as the Walton Museum of Walmart’s Walton family. Georgina Adam who has written many articles and a book on this subject, estimates nearly 400 private museums exist worldwide with 70 percent being founded after 2000 and one fifth being founded during the last five years.² Collectors have long since found ways to share their collections with the public, in fact most public institutions of the world are born from a private

¹ This term was coined by writer and broadcaster Jonathan Meades in reference to the opening of the Guggenheim museum architected by Frank Gehry in Bilbao and the subsequent transformation of the city into a destination for culture.

² Georgina Adam, *The Rise and Rise of the Private Art Museum* (London: Lund Humphries in association with Sotheby's Institute of Art, 2021).

collection in one way or another. Historically, private collections were bequeathed to public museums in the wills of their patrons. The phenomenon of today is distinctly different.

While the collector of the 19th and 20th centuries engaged in a traditional model of legacy planning in which they promised their collection to a public institution or arranged for their home and collection to be transformed into a “house museum” following their death, the collector of the 21st century, who most often has an entrepreneurial background, is seeking impact-based giving and wants to be present for their legacy, building and running art projects in their own lifetimes.³ A body of literature has examined certain dimensions of this phenomenon, particularly the motivations for opening private museums. Georgina Walker in the Private Collector’s Museum: Public Good Versus Private Gain, Larry’s List’s Private Art Museum Report, and Georgina Adam’s book The Rise and Rise of the Private Museum are some of the most complete and helpful examples. Other books compile interviews with the private collectors of the world who have opened their collections to the public such as Cristina Bechtler and Dora Imhof’s The Private Museum of the Future in which collectors such as Bernardo Paz, Christian Boros, and Eli Broad describe the motivations behind their projects and the BMW Guide by Independent Collectors in which an independent collectors group presents a list with small summaries of collections worldwide. But the literature is far from complete. Georgina Walker writes “in the literature, there is a surprising lack of critical assessment of the evolution of the private museum in the twenty-first century”⁴ and even less has been said about the effects of

³ Georgina S. Walker, *The Private Collector’s Museum: Public Good versus Private Gain* (Routledge, 2019). As Walker explains in her book, the collector of today has a very different relationship with legacy than did his or her collecting predecessors.

⁴ Georgina Walker, Introduction, *The Private Collector’s Museum*

these private museums on public cultural structures, on the cultural landscape as a whole and on their individual communities on a micro level.

There are a number of motivations that prompt the creation of private museums as this aforementioned list of literature broadly investigates. Overarching findings conclude that the modern collectors wish to share their collection with the public, they want to be present and involved in this process, and often, they strive to transform a place or city with the gift of art. The study by Larry's List found that the majority of private museum founders are motivated to give back to the place in which they live or are closely connected with. 59% of those in the global study had chosen sites in their own place of residence.⁵ Beyond the reputation associated with generous cultural gifts to the public, further motivations have been explored. One must not overlook the practical demands of housing high end art collections. Contemporary art collections have long-since outgrown the walls of their owners, and museums struggle with the constraints of receiving and showing the gifts. Collectors are determined to keep their tremendous collections together and permanently on view, but this is not always possible and often surpasses the museum's financial capacities. Collector Eli Broad dropped his plan to give his collection to a Los Angeles institution when the museums did not agree to all of his exhibition requests⁶ and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has just announced plans to build an entire new wing prompted by the bequeathed collection of Lenard Lauder and a capital gift by Oscar Tsang and Angela Hsu-Tsang needed to house this art.⁷

⁵ Larry's List and Claire Bouchara, *Private Art Museum Report* (Vienna: Modern Arts Publishing, 2016).

⁶ Both Los Angeles institutions for contemporary art - the MOCA and LACMA - were not able to agree to the terms requested by Eli Broad, prompting him to open the private Broad Museum in 2012.

⁷ Met gift Metropolitan museum extension of their modern and contemporary recent announcement inspired by Lenard Lauder gift. Lauder bequeathed his collection, valued at \$1 billion in 2010 bequeathed, a gift which has been delayed as the Met lacked financial capacity to build a wing suitable for the vast collection. It received in 2021 a capital gift of \$125 million, which will

Other benefits to private museum ownership include the collector's overall increased visibility which affords them easy access in the very competitive commercial art market.⁸ Founding a not-for-profit art space may also come with major tax exemptions, particularly in the US and France. Then there is of course the role of vanity and ego in an (often self-entitled) single proprietor private collection. Or in the case of a corporate collection such as the Prada Foundation of Milan or the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris, the role of marketing in associating a brand with high culture. The conclusion in the existing literature appears to be that the greatest motivation for opening a private museum is that of philanthropy, which is the most complex motivation and the most difficult to quantify. Larry's List finds that "the mission of most private museums is not only to be a venue for showing an art collection, but also to demonstrate the philanthropic mission of supporting and enhancing the city's or region's cultural landscape." Georgina Adam says: "variations on the theme of 'giving back to the community' was the reason most cited by the museum founders I met."⁹

Georgina Walker's aforementioned point regarding the lack of critical assessment in literature goes on to say that "little awareness exists of their philanthropic nature, their cultural contributions presently and in the future or the reasons why they have (re)emerged as a major influence on the global museum stage."¹⁰ Walker and others have brought important

provide funding for the new wing and more. For more discussion of this subject see: Caroline Goldstein, "The Met Just Received \$125 Million—the Largest Gift in Its History—to Build Its Long-Awaited Modern Wing Expansion," *Artnet News*, November 30, 2021.

⁸ Georgina Adam cites Belgian collector Walter Vanhaerents in her book, who said that one of his main motivations for creating his private museum was "gaining better access to the works of art he wanted" (Adam 43).

⁹ Georgina Adam, *The Rise and Rise of the Private Art Museum* (London: Lund Humphries in association with Sotheby's Institute of Art, 2021), Introduction.

¹⁰ Georgina Walker introduction

contributions to this last point, but the philanthropic and cultural contributions still present important gaps.

In looking specifically at the private, non-profit art museums of France, this study will investigate the complex impact of their growing presence in the modern French cultural ecosystem and ask whether they are truly gifts to the public, or whether they are what the French call *cadeaux empoisonés*, poisoned gifts. In the context of a country in which public institutions are struggling to keep up, the proliferation of these private spaces and the involvement of their founders raises a number of questions. Are these spaces truly non-profit charitable projects in alignment with their legal status as foundations or are they entrepreneurial projects with vanity-driven agendas detached from the interests of their communities? Is this shift a reflection of a marketization and commercialization of culture? Is more culture always good regardless of where it comes from and how it is presented? And finally, is their power overwhelming the public cultural infrastructure?

When looking at France, all eyes tend to be on the capital, and while this study will reference Paris and its importance at the core of the French cultural body, the focus will be the prevalence of private art foundations within the provinces of France where these entities have a greater impact on the places in which they install themselves. Specifically, this study looks at Arles through the case study of the LUMA Foundation in Chapter 3. The decision to install a multi-million euro project in a small town in Provence will alter the landscape more dramatically than such a project in Paris which is already rich in cultural activity. The methodology for this study was heavily dependent on interviews with locals, reading literature published by the foundations themselves, critical viewpoints by art professionals in so far as journalists, art

historians and cultural commentators, and panel discussions within the intellectual community which sprung up surrounding the openings of these private museums.

We will begin by looking at the terminology and legal statuses of the private non-profit structures in France. Chapter 1 will look at the history of museums in France bringing us to the private museums of the 21st century, and will look at the socio-economic context framing the current moment. Chapter 2 will examine the main players in the landscape of private art foundations specifically in France today. Chapter 3 will take the newly-opened LUMA Foundation of Maja Hoffmann in Arles to look on a micro level at how a massive project such as this is received in a small town in Provence. Chapter 4 will review the issues which have come to the surface in Arles as well as other concerns of the private foundation trend in France. The conclusion will synthesize the positives and the negatives and will offer a prescription for how to further analyze this subject and create data. The foundations are young and data is limited, especially as the pandemic of the last two years has thrown off tourism, in-person programming and visitor numbers. Further study will therefore be needed. This study will provide an overview of the great shift taking place as private art foundations open at an incredible rate and will investigate their philanthropic missions and the effects thereof.

A Few Words on Terminology

Merriam Webster's dictionary defines philanthropy as 1) goodwill to fellow members of the human race, especially: active effort to promote human welfare 2) a. an act or gift done or made for humanitarian purposes b. An organization distributing or supported by funds set aside for humanitarian purposes.

When referring to the spaces created by private entities to exhibit art to the public, terminology is important and complicated, determined mostly by legal statuses. Authors on the subject tend to utilize "private museum," when speaking globally, the term 'museum' adding a very important gravitas, carrying with it a connotation and weight that often the collector does not in fact wish to carry.¹¹ In their surveys, Dora Imhof and Crisitina Bechtler discovered an across-the-board tendency: "Many collectors aim to transcend the concept of the museum as a monolithic building. They consciously avoid the term 'museum.'"

In Italy the private art spaces are generally named "Palazzo" (Palace) such as Pinault's Palazzo Grassi, in Germany they are called "Sammlung" (Collection) such as the Sammlung Boros. In France, the non-profit private collector's museum is most often under the title "Fondation" (Foundation). This is the name and legal structure this study will be looking at. The legal status of a French foundation can take several forms: donor-advised fund, corporate

¹¹ Georgina Adam says the owners of these entities usually call their spaces "anything but 'museums'." 18.

foundation, foundation of public interest, endowment fund or association.¹² All must have a public benefit purpose.

The following are the categories of foundations and their definitions as laid out by the Fondations de France governing body:

Foundations of public interest: Created by natural or legal persons, they are submitted to a complex procedure that involves input from the French Ministry of the Interior as well as the Council of State. They require a minimum capital outlay of 1.5 million euros. In France, foundations attract more favorable tax deductions than those afforded by an association of public interest. In addition to a decrease in income tax equal to 66% of the amount of the donation, donors may also deduct 75% of their donation from their real estate wealth tax, up to a maximum of 50,000 euros and 60% from corporate tax.

Corporate foundations: Whatever the status of the company: civil or commercial companies, industrial and commercial public establishments, cooperatives and insurance companies – corporate foundations are legal persons in their own right and they are set up for a minimum period of five years. They are not authorized to receive donations or bequests outside the corporate support provided by the company and its staff. The total monetary value of their work programs over several years must be in excess of 150,000 euros.

Donor-advised funds: operates within a sheltering foundation. The latter undertakes all procedures from creation to the management of accounting, financial and legal matters. The

¹² "Fondation De Toutes Les Causes," Fondation de France, accessed April 10, 2022, <https://www.fondationdefrance.org/fr>.

founder is able to focus fully on the cause and projects they are passionate about, with a high degree of autonomy, while benefiting from the sheltering foundation's image and brand. In France, when a sheltering foundation is recognized as being of public interest, it automatically attributes the right to benefit from tax deductions on both income and real estate wealth tax. In practice: 66% for income tax, 75% for real estate wealth tax and 60% for corporate tax may be deducted by donors liable for these taxes.¹³

There are also associations, another nonprofit structure, which is the model of Phillip Meaille's Chateau de Montsoreau in the Loire Valley. The *Fondations de France* website describes the association structure as "an association of individuals pursuing the same goal, (whereas) foundations are created by an irrevocable funding commitment from their founders. Nonetheless, associations and foundations are closely related: very often, foundations fund initiatives led by associations. In supporting them financially, foundations provide associations the power to act on the ground."¹⁴

The website *Fondations de France* speaks to the motivations of the wealthy entrepreneur of the 21st century:

"Creating a foundation can be a personal endeavor, which expresses the founder's commitment, with an added dimension: philanthropy. It can be prompted by a couple's long-held dream, a family project, or a group of friends might want to create a

¹³ Information for this terminology summary is also taken from the Council on Foundations (Non-Profit Law in France) website: www.cof.org

¹⁴ "Foundations, endowment funds and associations, what's the difference ?" Fondation de France, accessed April 10, 2022, <https://www.fondationdefrance.org/fr>.

foundation. Entrepreneurs and companies – from very small enterprises to major international corporations – can also be founders. They can align their corporate strategy, governance and charitable activities and at the same time, mobilize staff beyond their economic contribution.

All of these potential founders want to have a positive and lasting impact on society.”

CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ART MUSEUMS IN FRANCE

The public museum network in France, directed by the ministry of culture, consists of 1,222 national and territorial museums accredited by the state. These entities adhere to certain guidelines and fall under the appellation of “musée de France.” According to the ministry of culture’s website, 5% of these museums belong to the state, 13% are privately owned and not-for-profit, and about 82% belong to local authorities. The appellation of “musée de France” can be given to museums belonging to the state or to a public authority or a private individual.¹⁵ The term ‘private’ is misleading however as the appellation implies that the collections become inalienable and they are under strict control of the French government. These are not the private entities which this study refers to as the founders of private art foundations do not follow the appellation guidelines. The bulk of the museums accredited by the ministry of culture are in Paris and include institutions such as the Musée de l’Orangerie, Musée d’Orsay, Musée Quai Branley, and the Musée Picasso.

The history of museums as we know them today in France began in the 18th century when the first museums appeared, mostly in Paris but also in other major French cities such as Bordeaux, Caen, Lille, Rennes, Rouen and Toulouse. The purpose for their creation was education, or as a way for the newly-constituted monarchies to ‘civilize and educate people.’¹⁶ In

¹⁵ The law of January 4, 2002 gives the first legal definition of a museum. It increases the protection of collections and affirms their inalienability in the sense that they are of the public domain. It reserves control by the state to only those museums who have asked for and obtained the appellation “musée de France” and promote a mission of advising by the State.

¹⁶ Georgina Walker 6

the context of nationalization of the royal collection, the musée du Louvre was created in 1793 and paved the way for the subsequent creation of national public museums. Those coming after 1799 were founded on “revolutionary seizures or state depots,” according to the ministry of culture. Similar to other European nations and the United States, France was greatly aided in establishing their collections by patrons in the first half of the nineteenth century and most significant cities opened their own museums, a movement which continued throughout the second half of the 19th century.

In her book Public-Private Partnership in the Cultural Sector, Elena Borinn describes the evolution of cultural administration in France’s capital and the provinces. “France’s first minister of culture, André Malraux (1959), had a clear mission statement: ‘heritage protection,’ but also the use of heritage and arts as a vehicle to enrich the nation, to educate its people through the broadest access to cultural resources.”¹⁷ Following his era (1968), there came a movement of decentralization and the creation of regional directorates of cultural affairs (*directions regionales des affaires culturelles*). Cultural awareness increased as did education and art accessibility in the regions. The end of the 20th century saw a growth in the number of public museums and the extensions or renovations of existing ones, and a “growing emphasis on the links between culture and economic development.”¹⁸ This period has been characterized by the rise of cultural industries and the interpretation of culture as a driver for local socio-economic development. In this framework, culture was increasingly recognized as an economic sector, whereby cultural and creative industries, in addition to activities, were supported through public funding. This is an

¹⁷ Elena Borin, *Public-Private Partnership in the Cultural Sector: A Comparative Analysis of European Models* (Bruxelles etc.: PIE Peter Lang, 2017). Page 100.

¹⁸ Borin 100

important shift and one that will be very relevant when we look at the private art museums of France's provinces, and specifically when we consider the case of the city of Arles. Borin points out that in this context, "culture, was indeed, being increasingly related to its territory, as a component of local, economic development, urban regeneration and regional rebranding strategies"¹⁹

France has built its place as an international cultural capital over the last several centuries. A report commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture in 2011 highlights that France is one of the world leaders in the cultural sector (4th in the art market, 3rd in cinema, renowned monuments, and festivals of international reputation).²⁰ The Louvre is the most visited museum in the world with an average 10 million visitors per year²¹. Of the top 10 most visited museums in the world, three are located in Paris.²² However, a major shift is occurring and the public sector is struggling financially, finding itself competing with an ever-growing private sector. This has of course been exacerbated by the pandemic, but began already in the two decades before. A New York Times article from 2014 describes a shift in which "French cultural glory is being privatized."²³ In that year, amidst economic difficulty in the country, two major museums opened within days. With great internal strife, the Picasso museum (state-run) reopened after a renovation of about 63 million dollars. On the other side of town, the Louis Vuitton Foundation opened the private collection of billionaire Bernard Arnault in the Frank

¹⁹ Borin 100

²⁰ Bertrand Pauget, Jean-Michel Tobelem, Jean-Philippe Bootz, *The future of French museums in 2030*,

²¹ Louvre museum website

²² Bertrand Pauget, Jean-Michel Tobelem, Jean-Philippe Bootz, *The future of French museums in 2030*,

²³ Dan Bilefsky and Doreen Carvajal, "A Capital of the Arts Is Forced to Evolve," *The New York Times*, October 27, 2014,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/28/world/europe/a-capital-of-the-arts-is-forced-to-evolve.html>.

Gehry building at a cost of 135 million dollars. Bilefsky and Carvajal describe in their New York Times article a politically and economically struggling France forced to “revisit its caunted model by which the state funds and manages the arts” stating that “the juxtaposition of the two museums made clear the lurking shift being forced on France’s values, with all the attendant controversies.”

Georgina Adam describes this shift: “The colossal increase in wealth this century, and the resulting rise in the price of art, has hobbled publicly funded institutions. (...) And this at a time when state support for museums has been decreasing regularly.”²⁴ She points to the difficulty in staging major exhibitions comparing the Pompidou’s 2.2 million euro acquisition budget of 2020 with the Fondation LVMH’s multi-million euro blockbuster show: Icons of Modern Art from the Schchukin Collection.²⁵

The reduced national spending of the last 20 years has forced major institutions like the Louvre and Musée d’Orsay to turn to public fundraising efforts for restoration projects and small purchases. The Art Newspaper’s Vincent Noce reports that in 2021, the Musée du Louvre welcomed “only 2.8 million visitors, less than 30% of its pre-Covid record levels when it received around ten million.”²⁶ This is the lowest number since before 1986. As the majority of the visitors in the pandemic years were local and hence benefitting mostly from free admission,

²⁴ Adam p 13

²⁵ Maika Pollack Artnet article entitled “An Embarrassment of Riches: ‘The Shchukin Collection’ at Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris Overflows With Modernist Masterpieces, and Offers Dark Parallels to the Plutocratic Present,” opens with: “Icons of Modern Art: The Shchukin Collection,” on view at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris, is not just a show, it’s arguably the most extravagant exhibition on view anywhere today.” The Schchukin Collection is reportedly worth 10 billion euros.

²⁶ Vincent Noce, “French Museums Survived a Drastic Fall in Tourism but May Face Uphill Struggle as State Support Dries Up,” *The Art Newspaper*, March 28, 2022, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/03/28/french-museums-survived-a-drastic-fall-in-tourism-but-may-face-uphill-struggle-as-state-support-dries-up>.

the Louvre's "revenues fell by 80 million euros in 2021 compared with 2019." And this is the state of the most popular museum in the world, so what of the small regional museums? In their article, *The Future of French Museums in 2030* Pauget, Tobelem, and Bootz describe "Smaller museums (which accommodate less than 20,000 visitors a year) are facing economic pressures with a decline in attendance for several consecutive years and the fact that public funding is stagnating or declining; not to mention the impact of the Covid-19 crisis."²⁷

What about the private sector? Historically the wealthy private museum donors and corporate donors step in and greatly complement public funding for culture, but the last decade has seen a decrease in this kind of giving as well, a trend has been amplified by the pandemic²⁸. The problem is not that the wealth is diminished, the situation is quite the contrary. In his book Capitale et Ideologie, Thomas Piketty gives a profound and detailed explanation of the enormous increase in wealth for the very wealthiest and privatization worldwide and in France. The context of massive increases in private wealth over the last 20 years is important to bear in mind when looking at the elaborate projects surrounding the display of sprawling contemporary art collections. In his blog on the website of Le Monde, Piketty summarizes the sharp increase in wealth inequality in France. "Between 1983 and 2015, the average income of the richest 1% has risen by 100% (above inflation) and that of the 0.1% richest by 150%, as compared with barely 25% for the rest of the population (or less than 1% per annum). The richest 1% alone has

²⁷ Bertrand Pauget, Jean-Michel Tobelem, and Jean-Philippe Bootz, "The Future of French Museums in 2030," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 162 (2021): p. 120384, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2020.120384>.

²⁸ Museum patrons were greatly motivated in their giving through events such as private museum visits, gala dinners, charity auctions and more. With the events calendar slashed due to the pandemic, many have left the boards according to this article: Roxana Azimi and Sarah Hugounenq, "Le Mécénat Culturel Face à La Crise Du Covid-19," *Le Quotidien D'Art*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.lequotidiendelart.com/articles/18333-le-mécénat-culturel-face-à-la-crise-du-covid-19.html>.

siphoned off 21% of total growth, as compared with 20% for the poorest 50%.²⁹ So private patronage to the public sector has not decreased because of a decrease in wealth, rather private patrons and corporations are choosing to give differently. According to an article in *Marianne* magazine, in 2012 187 million euros from corporations went to private institutions and 173 million euros went to the public. In 2016, 362 million euros went to the private, while only 79 million euros went to the public.³⁰ This shift is motivated by tax exemptions given to private sector support for culture and branding benefits private entities associating with culture, also reflects a changing relationship with the public institution that has been felt internationally.

Commonly referred to as the “Law of Aillagon,” the law 2003-709 of August 1st, 2003 presents a clear motivation for the shift to private patronage and is most relevant to this study. The law, architected by Jean Jacques Aillagon, allows tax deductions of up to 90% for cultural foundations, philanthropists and associations.³¹ These tax measures are some of the most advantageous in Europe. A 2014 article in *The Guardian* cites a study by the *Observatoire de la Fondation de France*, which monitors charitable and philanthropic institutions, finding that “the number soared by more than 60% between 2001 and 2010 as a result of tax breaks introduced in 2003. Companies benefit from a 60% tax deduction on donations up

²⁹ Thomas Piketty, “Thomas Piketty Blog,” *Thomas Piketty Blog* (blog) (Le Monde, April 18, 2017).

³⁰ Emmanuel Lévy, “Dons Des Pinault, Arnault & Cie à Notre-Dame De Paris : Un ‘Patrimoine Washing’ Sur Le Dos De L’Etat ? Dons Des Pinault, Arnault & Cie à Notre-Dame De Paris : Un ‘Patrimoine Washing’ Sur Le Dos De L’Etat ?,” *Marianne*, April 17, 2019.

³¹ According to the website of the Council of Foundations (COF.org): Three legal developments – the January 4, 2002 Act on the Museums of France; the August 1, 2003 Act on Philanthropy, Associations, and Foundations; and the *Conseil d’Etat*’s implementation of standard by-laws for public utility foundations – have all contributed to a more flexible process for creating and administering foundations.

to 0.5% of annual turnover, while individuals can deduct 66% of their donation to a maximum of 20% of their taxable income.”³²

Aillagon was certainly an encouragement in the early 2000s, but within the past five years there has been an even more dramatic uptick in the opening of private foundations. Jean-Michel Tobelem, professor at the Sorbonne in Paris specializing in cultural institution management, says this would have happened anyways as businesspeople and corporations have realized that associating themselves with culture is an incredibly strong marketing and branding tool. In fact, the president of the Cartier Foundation stopped defiscalizing years ago. The benefit of having an art foundation is more important than the tax break.

A final important cause for the shift in attention and financial giving towards the private, is the changing relationship with the public institution. In her book, La Fin des Musées?, Catherine Grenier discusses the humanist model for French museums born from the period of Enlightenment, a model which had great success and managed to reinvent itself after the Revolution and through the creation of the musées nationaux des beaux-arts (national fine art museums), and which now, must reinvent itself again. Grenier looks at the French museum in an international context of cultural change and concludes that the museum will not survive if it does not evolve. Public museum institutions have been under scrutiny in the past 10-20 years for their lack of representation, controversial funding³³, eurocentricity, problematic collection holdings

³² Roxana Azimi, “Why France's Big Brands Love a Foundation,” *The Guardian*, August 5, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/aug/05/france-corporate-sponsorship-foundation-decline>.

³³ Museums have been under scrutiny for their board members’ connections with pharmaceutical companies, oil companies, arms companies, and more.

stemming from colonialism and calls for restitution of these works³⁴. While change appears to be coming, it is slow-moving and wrapped in bureaucratic red tape. Meanwhile, the private foundation is dynamic and can innovate quickly, shifting the dialogue and reflecting diversity and contemporary themes in their collection content and with cutting-edge shows. It is more nimble and is bringing the public into its spaces through new methods and unique formats. An article published in the publication *Capital* says that while there were 2,733 foundations or donation funds set up in 2011, there are close to 4,900 today.³⁵ A *Les Echos* article of March 2018 by Martine Robert begins “Now what is this craze about shared by the collectors of all four corners of our country?”³⁶ She goes on to list the foundations popping up across the country displaying contemporary art in sleek buildings by star architects. The most visible and notable of this “craze” will be reviewed in this upcoming chapter.

³⁴ After years of requests and demands, under President Emmanuel Macron France will be giving back 27 looted objects to the former Kingdom of Benin, now Nigeria. But tens of thousands of objects remain in the collections of France. See more here:
http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf

³⁵ “Arnault, Pinault, Carmignac... Les plus Belles Fondations d’Art De Nos Grands Patrons,” *Capital*, n.d., capital. This figure is drawn from the Observatoire de la Philanthropie - Fondation de France

³⁶ Martine Robert, “La France, Nouvel Eldorado Des Fondations D’art,” *Les Echos*, March 12, 2018. Robert uses the expression “Quel vent de folie” meaning a shared state of craziness

CHAPTER 2

PRIVATE ART FOUNDATIONS IN FRANCE TODAY

The Main Players

While the concept of the private museum is not new, the model has greatly changed. The Musée Jacquemart-André of Paris is credited as being the first private art museum of France. Referred to as the “Frick of Paris,” the museum was created in the private home of Édouard André and Nélie Jacquemart to display their collection of art. Highlights include works by Canaletto, Fragonard, and Tiepolo. The collection is housed in a hotel particulier built in 1869. This is France’s example of the “house museum” model³⁷ one that very clearly reflects the life and collection of the Jacquemart family. It is a capsule and understood by the visitor as a very personal space and collection. The house museum model is no longer, or very rarely, seen today within the private museums of France and is a very relevant departure. In what Georgina Walker refers to as a ‘stand-alone museum,’ such as the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris or the LUMA Foundation of Arles, the atmosphere *feels* public. It may not be obvious to the visitor that this art space is in fact a private collection reflective of a collector’s personal tastes as these spaces have the attributes of a public museum i.e. curators, a gift shop, a café. Georgina Walker says: “There is a steady blurring of the line between what is understood by society at large to be private and what is public. The distinction is not as clear as it was in the past when works entered the public

³⁷ Category referred to by Georgina Walker in her book as she categorizes private art museums historically and today.

realm upon the collector's death."³⁸ This is an important shift as we think of how society engages with culture and I will return to this point in chapter 4.

Leading the worldwide luxury industry and home to two of the world's top billionaire collectors,³⁹ with international galleries opening outposts in great numbers, the art business in France is booming. Since the opening of Bernard Arnault's Louis Vuitton Foundation in 2014, almost 2 billion euros have been injected into the world of private art.⁴⁰ In the last 5 years alone, including 2 years in a worldwide pandemic, we have seen the opening of Lafayette Anticipations in Paris (the art foundation of the department store Galeries Lafayette), the financier Edouard Carmignac's Fondation Carmignac on the island of Porquerolles, François Pinault's private art museum the Bourse de Commerce in Paris, Maja Hoffmann's LUMA Foundation in Arles, and soon Laurent Dumas' project on the Ile Seguin. The Fondation Cartier is also planning a major expansion and new space set to open in 2024.

The center of gravity revolves around Pinault and Arnault, respectively CEOs of Kering and LVMH luxury conglomerates, who have also been engaged in France's biggest contemporary rivalry. François Pinault, who also owns Christie's auction house (purchased in 1998), recently opened his private museum in the center of Paris, the Bourse de Commerce, renovated by Tadao Ando. The Pinault entourage points to the massive tax write-offs of the LVMH foundation⁴¹ and the inversely it is pointed out that Pinault's is not a foundation yet still

³⁸ Walker 7

³⁹ According to Forbes' "Real Time Billionaires List" consulted April 2022: Bernard Arnault and François Pinault are in the top 30 names.

⁴⁰ Martine Robert, "La France, Nouvel Eldorado Des Fondations D'art," *Les Echos*, March 12, 2018.

⁴¹ According to *La Liberation*, the Louis Vuitton Foundation cost an estimated 780 million euros to build and an NGO investigation is under way as to the source of these funds. The foundation will be given to the city of Paris in 2062. As the tax exemptions were 60%, the reality is that the state largely funded the museum.

manages to optimize financially and philanthropically as he created a commercial enterprise to manage his museum, which is put forth as a gift to Paris. Interestingly, Mr. Jean-Jacques Aillagon is the artistic director of Pinault's private museum.

The art foundations act as a form of corporate social responsibility, the act of giving having proven very important to their brands. Not only are the companies seen as giving back to the public, but they are involved with culture, which is key from a public relations perspective. Georgina Adam describes the private museum “also as a way for large companies, notably in the luxury goods sector, to ‘brand’ themselves as not just profit-obsessed corporate behemoths but as progressive, socially committed entities offering something back to the community.” “Philanthrocapitalism,” explains Adam “- when donors apply the business techniques they honed in their professional lives to charitable giving - has made a major impact on how the rich choose to give money, and to what causes.”⁴²

The public is not unaware of these motivations and research conducted for this study confirms that the French remain skeptical. On the opening of Pinault's Bourse de Commerce, Edwin Heathcote of the Financial Times writes:

“Although the reception since opening has been largely positive, there has been a discussion, in true Parisian style, about the nature of the institution, its de facto privatisation and the increasing dominance of big business on the cultural landscape. If there is going to be discourse about wealth and inequality, culture and global capitalism, then the Bourse de Commerce — a palace, a temple of commerce, the former stock

⁴² Adam 11

exchange, a centre of vast colonial exploitation — could well be the ideal place to have it.”⁴³

Outside of the aforementioned Parisian foundations, the art foundations in France take all shapes and forms. From artist-led foundations such as the Venet Foundation in Muy (the Var region of Provence) and the Lee Ufan Foundation soon to open in Arles, to Eduard Carmignac’s Foundation on the Mediterranean island of Poquerolles and the Vasarely Foundation in Aix-en-Provence dedicated to the art of Victor Vasarely these spaces and their collector founders are unique, while also sharing many similarities. They are connected in their individuality reflecting the passions of their founders and in their desire to differentiate themselves from traditional museums. Cristina Bechtler and Dora Imhof who compiled interviews with 24 collectors and owners of private museums for their book The Private Museum of the Future found that while public museums are mainly situated in cities, a “notable number of private initiatives seek a close connection within the natural environment.”⁴⁴ This theme is especially apparent with the private foundations of the provinces of France.

The Fondation Maeght of Saint Paul de Vence is known as the first private foundation for modern art of France. It is a project born out of both tragedy and passion. Collectors Marguerite and Aimé Maeght lost their son Berard to leukemia in 1953 and it was during the period of grieving that they took some time away from their French life to visit the US. There they were inspired by the private museums of the United States such as the Solomon R. Guggenheim

⁴³ Edwin Heathcote, “François Pinault’s Bourse De Commerce Stakes His Claim at the Heart of Paris,” *Financial Times*, December 29, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/72ae1236-63fd-4760-b3a7-a19282f80c81>.

⁴⁴ Cristina Bechtler and Dora Imhof, *The Private Museum of the Future* (Zürich: JRP Ringier Kunstverlag, 2018), 16.

Foundation, the Barnes Collection and the Phillips Collection, and they decided to create their own space to house their collection in the French Riviera. Their intent was to build a space in which they could commune with their artist, writer, and poet friends to share and talk about art. What was originally meant to be an intimate space for the family and their creative circle, resulted in France's first private collection of modern art shared with the public in the form of a non-profit foundation.

At their gallery in Paris (Galerie Maeght), the Maeghts represented Fernand Léger, Joan Miró, Alberto Giacometti, Marc Chagall, Alexander Calder and more. These artists and many others were close friends of the family and were elemental in forming what became the foundation in Saint Paul de Vence, opening in 1964. Adrien Maeght, son of Aimé and Marguerite, describes in an interview with the foundation's director Olivier Kaepelin that his parents had long since toyed with the idea of an artists' village and "Miró was one of those who suggested creating a place for exhibitions, a welcoming space for research open to recognised artists but also younger figures."⁴⁵ The artists surrounding the couple helped them through their grief in encouraging them to create a home for modern art in the south of France. Fernand Léger told Aimé, "if you do that, I'll bring my daubs. I'll even paint the rocks."⁴⁶ Building this place was therapeutic and an act of devotion and love for their son, especially as they found ruins of an old chapel dedicated to Saint Bernard (the name of their son) on the property. Bouquet-Aubertot describes a lively place full of artistic creation and conversation against the beautiful provencal back-drop: "To the busy burr of cicadas, the hill became a hive of activity," she describes events,

⁴⁵ Jérôme Coignard, "Art Changes Our World," *Connaissance Des Arts Special Issue*, 2014.

⁴⁶ Véronique Bouruet-Aubertot, "A Life of Passions," *Connaissance Des Arts* 623 (2014).

dinners, dances, and “a series of cross-disciplinary events which would acquire mythical status over the years.”⁴⁷

The foundation was set up legally as *une fondation reconnue d'utilité publique* which translates to “a foundation of recognized public utility.” This means it is a philanthropic organization which can engage in fundraising, and its mission is to open to the public a piece of heritage in service of a cause of general interest. The foundation was created by an initial bequest by the Maeghts and over time this grew to include the building itself and the collection of over 13,000 works of art, according to the foundation’s website, “as well as initial financial support from the Maeght family for the running of the organisation.”⁴⁸ Funding now comes predominantly from ticket sales as well as revenue brought in from the bookshop, café, private hire and traveling exhibitions.⁴⁹ These revenues are complimented by fundraising activities and various circles of supporters, individuals and companies. The foundation also receives punctual public funding for restoration or educational projects.

The Maeght foundation fits various characteristics outlined in the introduction and overview of the private art foundation landscape. It is a very personal project, it bears the name of the collector family, and similar to its successors, its setting within a natural setting with a sculpture park and surrounding attractive landscape is elemental to the concept. It will also be succeeded by many more foundations set up in this particular part of France, known for its agreeable climate and artistic history, also built by famous architects in an avant garde style, as

⁴⁷ Bouquet-Aubertot 14

⁴⁸ “France's First Independent Art Foundation,” Fondation Maeght, March 28, 2022, <https://www.fondation-maeght.com/>.

⁴⁹ Fondation Maeght website and interview with cultural philanthropy consultant to the foundation, Leslie Ramos

was Sert's. The Maeght Foundation even has a commercial element that is linked to the founder's activity: Maeght had a lithograph studio and lithographs are for sale in the foundation's gift shop. It is in a way, truly the first example of the renditions to come.

Yet, something in the spirit of the foundation feels different and it may be illustrated in a quote by Georges Braques to Adrien Maeght: "Do something here, something that has no speculative purpose, something that allows us, as artists, to exhibit sculpture and painting in the best possible light and spatial conditions. Do it, I'll help you."⁵⁰ The historic artists are present. The BMW Art Guide describes the foundation as centering "centers on works by all these artists and acts as a gift to posterity. With aesthetic inspiration from the likes of Marc Chagall, Joan Miró, and Georges Braque, Spanish architect Josep Lluís Sert constructed a museum of Mediterranean light that attracts roughly 200,000 visitors per year."

So how does this concept of a non-museum space for contemporary art named 'foundation' hold up over time? The foundation's cultural philanthropy advisor Leslie Ramos said the following in an interview for this study about the changes in the foundation's mission over time. She referred to the famous speech given by André Malraux, minister of state for cultural affairs at the inauguration of the foundation on July 28, 1964:

"Madame, Monsieur, you have just tried here, by the fact that you have probably tried to sum up the loves of a lifetime, by the fact that the painters who are here are all to some degree either poets or men who powerfully express the poetry of our times, you have tried to make something that is in no sense a palace, in no sense a decorative set, and, let

⁵⁰ Quote on the Foundation's website

us say this at once because the misunderstanding will grow and embellish, in no sense a museum. This is not a museum,”

- André Malraux Minister of state for cultural affairs at the inauguration of the Fondation Maeght on July 28, 1964.

Ramos explains that “he meant to say this is a place for living art, and that is a concept that has been haunting us, because now the Fondation Maeght in a way *is* a museum. It is preserving art of its time. So this concept of not being a museum has been slightly problematic for us.”⁵¹ If these private foundations become capsules of the collectors and their collection, their missions are forced to change as they *do* become museums. In reality, the intentions shift over time. “It is a completely different time with very different initial intentions. For the Maeght family, this is something they wanted to do for personal reasons to work with their artists, and it became a very popular destination,” says Leslie. This is not the case for the foundations being opened in the 21st century.

A one hour and a half drive from Saint Paul de Vence is the town of Hyeres, from where a ferry can be taken to the Carmignac Foundation on the island of Poquerolles. Edouard Carmignac opened his corporate art foundation in 2018 and joined the discourse among private owners of expansive art collections in his quest to create a non-museum art space. “I hate museums,” he said in an Art Newspaper interview. “I want a living foundation.”⁵² Visitors to the foundation experience the art in a ritualistic way as they are required to remove their shoes and

⁵¹ Berman, Milena, and Leslie Ramos. Personal, January 2022.

⁵² Hannah McGivern, “A Privileged Space, Remote from It All: Fondation Carmignac Opens on Island off the Southern Coast of France,” *The Art Newspaper*, June 1, 2021.

are invited to drink a cold herbal tea before entering the galleries, one of the ways in which Carmignac endeavors to be a non-museum space.

Art critic Eric Dumont describes the opening of this foundation in his review for *Le Bilan* as a story we have become very familiar with: ultra wealthy collector (billionaire) of (what else) contemporary art wishes to share his collection with the public (as he thinks quite highly of it and of himself), and opens a design-savvy non-profit space in a beautiful location. One can hear a sense of irony in his tone. What is unique here? It will be on an island, he says. The content is described by Edouard's son, Charles Carmignac, as "mysterious and inspired by the place."⁵³ The foundation being open for almost 4 years now, the collection's content is known and includes works by the roster of contemporary artists dominating the market today from Andy Warhol to Sigmar Polke, Marlene Dumas to Jean Michel Basquiat.

Philippe Mèaille is a collector with a specific passion and focus: works by the conceptual artist collective Art & Language. After an epiphany moment in which he realized these works demanded to be shared with the public and not kept in his private collection for limited viewing, he decided to open a private museum in the legal form of an association, housed in a 15th century chateau in the Loire Valley. Opened in 2016, the Chateau de Montsoreau - Museum of Contemporary Art - features almost exclusively artworks by Art & Language and works in collaboration with the commune and the state for projects of restoration, education, and conservation. Mèaille is the only collector encountered throughout the research and interviews of

⁵³ Etienne Dumont, "Le Financier Edouard Carmignac Crée Son Musée à Porquerolles," *Le Bilan*, January 19, 2018, https://www.bilan.ch/opinions/etienne-dumont/france_le_financier_edouard_carmignac_cree_son_musee_a_porquerolles.

this study who did not give his name to the non-profit organization and who is comfortable with the descriptive term ‘museum.’⁵⁴

⁵⁴ This point will be returned to later as the definition of ‘museum’ is explored.

CHAPTER 3

ARLES AND THE LUMA FOUNDATION: A CASE STUDY

Into the depths of Provence, surrounded by a unique ecosystem of marshland, is the town of Arles, capital of the Camargue. Known for its rich heritage beginning with the roman Gaulles whose presence remains in the form of the Amphitheater, the Arenas and a dense basin of archeological treasures, Arles has maintained its artistic magnetism attracting artists such as Van Gogh and Picasso in the 19th and 20th centuries, continuing today with a renown school for photography, the famous Les Rencontres d'Arles photography festival begun by photographer Lucien Clergue, and now, the contemporary art center, LUMA Arles. The region is abundant in its dramatic landscapes of salt marshes and pink beaches inhabited by wild horses and flamingos, as well as its culinary traditions and bull-fighting heritage. This is Arles: patrimony of the Camargue, of the French nation, of its people. This chapter will have a close look at this city and will reveal its complex contemporary story and the presence of a distinct theme: private giving and private ownership, dominated by the Hoffmann family, specifically Maja Hoffmann.

In the past 15 years, Arles has undergone significant change. Against the backdrop of gentrification and an economy with a high unemployment rate,⁵⁵ is a layered story of private investment and private foundations. To begin, the following is an overview of the city's institutions and the main patrons and owners thereof. The private Van Gogh Foundation was opened in 1983 as an initiative of Yolande Clergue (wife of renowned photographer Lucien

⁵⁵ Unemployment in Arles was at 12.6% in 2018 (France at an average of 8%)
<https://www.ceicdata.com/en/france/unemployment-by-region-and-zone/unemployment-rate-zone-sa-arles>

Clergue) and Luc Hoffmann. Maja Hoffmann is President of the board, joined by other important art world private enterprise figures such as Yvon Lambert,⁵⁶ but also the Ministry of the Interior or his representative, the Ministry of Culture and Communication or his representative, and the Mayor of Arles.⁵⁷ The Rencontres d'Arles is a photography festival which was started in 1970 by photographer Lucien Clergue. It draws more than 100,000 visitors to the city each year. A non-profit organization, the Rencontres receives its funding from a mix of public and private sources.⁵⁸ Maja Hoffmann is noted on their website as “Suitably Qualified Member of the Board of Directors.”

On the main square of town is the historic hotel, Nord Pinus: an institution if not a historical monument which welcomed guests such as Jean Cocteau, F Scott Fitzgerald, Yves Montand, André Bourvil, Luis Mariano and more. It was purchased by Maja Hoffmann in 2018. Hotel Le Cloitre, a remodeled ancient cloister, as well as the newer, Jorge Prado-designed hotel L'Arlatan, are both Maja Hoffmann properties. Looking beyond the walls of Arles, to the swampy marshlands of the Camargue where rice is grown and salt is harvested, a wilderness is preserved here thanks to conservation efforts including those of the World Wildlife Fund and the Tour de Valat,⁵⁹ both supported by the Hoffmann family, the latter being the project of Maja Hoffmann's father, Luc. Nestled between the tall reeds and tangled tamarisk trees of the Camargue marshes is La Chassagnette, a gastronomic ode to the heritage of the region and a

⁵⁶ Collector and gallerist Yvon Lambert donated his personal collection of contemporary art to the city of Avignon which became a museum called the Lambert Collection. This will be developed upon in the next chapter.

⁵⁷ Fondation Van Gogh website <https://www.fondation-vincentvangogh-arles.org/en/>

⁵⁸The Rencontres d'Arles is a non-profit organisation whose budget consists of 32 % public funding, with 16 % coming from private partners and 52 % from receipts (principally ticket sales and derivatives). Les Rencontres website <https://www.rencontres-arles.com>

⁵⁹ Tour de Valat was created by Luc Hoffmann in 1954 as a biological research center promoting the conservation of the Mediterranean wetlands. <https://tourduvalat.org>

culinary destination in itself. This farm-to-table restaurant (now Michelin-starred) was bought in 2006 by Maja Hoffmann with chef Armand Arnal.

The ancient roman city Arles is a beautifully-preserved UNESCO heritage site with strict restrictions on preservation and the height of buildings in the center. Just across the street from the roman walls, Maja Hoffmann has erected the 10-story, 56 meter-high tower of the LUMA Foundation, the core space of her interdisciplinary cultural campus. This project took over 14 years to complete, opening its doors in the summer of 2021. The structure was built on a 27-acre industrial wasteland previously belonging to SNCF (the French train organization) and includes the Tower built by star architect Frank Gehry,⁶⁰ the Park des Ateliers built by Selldorf Architects, and the Park designed by Bas Smets. This foundation built in a town of 50,000, cost a reported 150 million euros to build,⁶¹ and has been met by voracious criticism from some and glowing praise from others.

The Hoffmann family fortune comes from F. Hoffmann-La Roche AG, commonly known as Roche, the second biggest pharmaceutical company in the world. The family has a long tradition of patronage, collecting, and exhibiting their collections to the public. Emanuel Hoffman opened the Schaulager in Basel in 1980. His niece (Maja's sister) Vera Hoffmann was quoted saying "I was raised with the idea that money gives more responsibilities than rights,"⁶² a notion which perhaps explains why each of Luc Hoffmann's children has at least one foundation.

⁶⁰ Frank Gehry also built the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris and the Guggenheim in Bilbao, from which we have the famous term "Bilbao Effect."

⁶¹ Anna Sansom, "Inside Luma Arles, the Van Gogh-Inspired Arts Tower That Took Mega-Collector Maja Hoffmann (and Frank Gehry) Over a Decade to Build," *Artnet News*, June 28, 2021, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/luma-arles-opening-1984134>.

Other sources estimate much higher. The Voisins Vigilants of Arles suggest more than 500 million euros in their text *Manger Luma*

⁶² Quoted to the Swiss journal, *Le Temps* in March 2015

Maja is a citizen of Switzerland and opened her first non-profit LUMA Foundation in Zurich in 2004. She splits her time between several homes - a villa on the Caribbean island of Mustique, a chalet in Gstaad, a house in Zurich, a loft in New York, a home in London, a home in Arles, and a chateau in the countryside of Camargue. She is a member of the following boards: the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, the Tate Gallery, Bard College, the Africa Center, the Swiss Institute, the Serpentine Galleries, the Palais de Tokyo, and the Venice Biennale.

To Artnet News, Hoffmann described her vision for LUMA as “an interdisciplinary campus that combines art projects, human rights initiatives, and ecological research.”⁶³ She hired Frank Gehry as her architect, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Tom Eccles as co-artistic directors, and worked with Beatrix Ruf and artists Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno as advisors. The various spaces of the LUMA Foundation in Arles include artworks by the most renown and sought-after artists of the 21st century: Tracy Emin, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Etel Adnan, John Akomfrah, Pierre Huyghe and more. Specific works recall some of the art world’s most famous museums, as described by Anna Sansom in an Artnet News article: “Carsten Höller, who’s work here is a smaller iteration of his installation for Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall, (...) Olafur Eliasson’s *Take your time*, a circular ceiling mirror turning on an axis, (...) recalls how the Icelandic-Danish artist created a permanent kaleidoscopic grotto for the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris, also designed by Gehry. (...) In the main gallery’s group show is Urs Fischer’s melting candle sculpture *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, another edition of which is in the Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection in Paris, which was inaugurated (also in 2021).”⁶⁴ These similarities call to mind the blurring of the lines between public and private institutions as recalled earlier by Georgina

⁶³ Sansom, 2

⁶⁴ Sansom, 2

Walker, as well as perhaps a feeling of déjà-vu among the private collections of billionaires, a concept that will be developed upon in chapter 4.

The LUMA foundation itself is free and open to the public, its mission is to produce, support, and fund artistic projects that aim to deepen the understanding of issues related to the environment, human rights, education, and culture.⁶⁵ But when the major patron owns four hotels and five restaurants directly and indirectly connected to her non-profit foundation (on- and off-campus), can the project truly be seen as not-for-profit? Some Arlesians interviewed for this study questioned how the entry to the LUMA Foundation could possibly remain free. The answer lies in the “archipelago” (the term used by Hoffmann to describe her various projects in Arles). The LUMA Foundation campus itself hosts two restaurants and one luxury design hotel. The remaining restaurants and hotels form Maja’s company “Les Maisons d’Arles.” Before the “transformation” period of the last 15 years, a visitor to Arles may have come to visit for a day. A local interviewed for this study describes a day-tour, with no overnight stay (tourists would stay overnight in Avignon rather than Arles). Now, if one wants to visit the antiquity of Arles, the sites of Van Gogh, and the contemporary art spaces, an overnight stay is required. And where to stay? In one of Maja Hoffmann’s hotels of course.

The French, Swiss and International media have covered the journey from conception to opening of the LUMA Foundation with both applause and critique. Art critic Etienne Dumont said in Swiss journal *Le Bilan* that Maja Hoffmann is playing Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s *The Visit* (of the old Lady) in real life in Arles, “even if for the moment she has not yet demanded

⁶⁵ LUMA website <https://www.luma.org/fr/arles.html>

anyone's head."⁶⁶ He describes a patron who intends to create a 5-star version of Arles: gentrified, aseptic, and of course, elitist. A 2019 *Les Jours* article by Nicolas Cori is entitled "Her investments in culture make Maja Hoffmann the true boss of the camargue capital, eclipsing the politicians." Former communist mayor of Arles, Hervé Schiavetti was loyal to the patron, and was known to sing her praises. Interviews with locals in Arles suggested that he did not have a choice. This seems to be a theme when it comes to the relationship between the public sector and the private (e.g. Maja Hoffmann) in Arles. Dumont says "100 or 150 million euros do not fall from the sky every day, especially in a city whose economy is struggling." The answer seems to be: accept it with gratitude.

The building itself has been criticized by journalists and critics as "perplexed," "a carcass." Delphine Manjard, librarian and owner of a specialized photography bookstore in the center of Arles says in an interview that after 14 years of hype, the people of Arles could "only be disappointed."⁶⁷ She describes an institution full of contradictions and a complete disconnect between what is happening "up in the tower" of LUMA and the local community. Frank Gehry described wanting "to evoke the local, from Van Gogh's 'Starry Night' to the soaring rock clusters you find in the region. Its central drum echoes the plan of the Roman amphitheater."⁶⁸ But it does not appear that this connection resonates with the locals. On the contrary, Manjard describes LUMA as a "very authoritative and imposing gesture, an aesthetic of dispute and dissatisfaction. The tower is round but flat on the other side. It is mate, brilliant, opaque, transparent, too small

⁶⁶ An ultra wealthy older woman comes back to her former hometown with a bargain: she wants the townspeople to kill the man who got her pregnant, then left her. In exchange, she will provide money to revitalize the decrepit town. The townspeople eventually agree.

⁶⁷ Interview with Delphine Manjard by the author. Personal, February 2022.

⁶⁸ Frank Gehry quote, Luma website.

but too big, too high but not high enough. Full of energies that were not made to live together. The extremely brutal architecture says ‘*Je vous emmerde*, it’s my money, I do what I want, this is my collection and if you do not understand it, that’s not my problem.’”

Art and architecture critic Christophe Catsaros describes a lack of clarity in the architecture that is mirrored in the LUMA project as a whole. He asks “should one consider this new foundation a public affair as projected by the public officials along with the hopes given to the local community, or should we perceive it as a strictly private affair?”⁶⁹ Catsaros concludes that neither the fundamental choices at the origin of the project nor the way in which it has positioned itself in relation to what already existed in Arles attest to a common strategy between the public municipality and Maja Hoffmann. LUMA is completely private. It is, he points out, after all named after Maja Hoffman’s children Lucas and Marina. While its size and breadth may not align with that of a personal project, it is exactly that.

Beyond the external architecture, is the question of content. When one enters, there is no reception, no signage, no information. Manjard says: “How outrageous to open a space where there is no ‘welcome,’ nowhere to say hello. How should we imagine a place to welcome the public where there is no welcome? The visitor is completely lost, they do not know where to go, as if in a Russian stacking doll.” And the art? Manjard continues, “Who is she addressing? If I feel lost and unwelcome (as an art historian and owner of a specialised photography bookshop), who will feel welcome? Maybe not even one percent of the population.” The librarian addresses the contradictions of the collection: political works such as Diane Arbus’ *Mavericks* have no place here, she says. “We are not in a garage exhibiting protesting underground artists. We are in

⁶⁹ Christophe Catsaros, “Le Temps,” *Le Temps* (blog), November 16, 2021, <https://blogs.letemps.ch/christophe-catsaros/2021/11/16/a-arles-leffet-luma/>.

an institution built by the likes of Monstanto, Bayer, Roche who is showing works by social activist artists protesting capitalism. “Mon sang!” she says, “Mais qui y croit?!” (“Who believes this?!”). Anne Clergue, a prominent local gallerist and daughter of Lucien Clergue, one of the city’s most important cultural leaders, gave a more positive review in an interview for this study concluding that more culture is always good. She did, however, validate Manjard’s propos regarding accessibility. What is going on ‘up in the tower’ she said, is truly mysterious.

A group calling themselves *Les Voisins Vigilants* (The Vigilant Neighbors), published a book entitled *Manger LUMA*,⁷⁰ in which they give a sarcastic and harsh critique of Hoffmann’s project in Arles. In their introduction they ironically welcome the reader to Arles, a city “rehabilitated by the generous patron Maja Hoffmann, with the assistance of the Hoffmann-La Roche laboratories, (...) in which the foundation redesigns the frontiers of humanity: their feet in the water, but their head in the clouds.” They sign off as the citizens of the “fondation Lucas-Marina Hoffmann,” insinuating that Arles has become synonymous with the family foundation. In a satirical tone, the text goes on to describe a city that was waiting to be saved by the LUMA Foundation, the thousands of jobs it would bring and the honor it would be to work cleaning windows or guarding the shiny building in the night, the heights of the building allowing for its staff to watch as the beautiful landscape of the camargue drowned around them.⁷¹ The essays describe a completely disconnected entity which has taken the place left open by the failing public service programs, the theater, the museums, and municipal groups. Like the librarian and a local artist interviewed for this study, this group “would sincerely like to be able

⁷⁰ *Les Voisins Vigilants, Manger Luma* (Arles: Independently Published, 2021). This book can be found in independent bookshops in Arles, for a “suggested donation” of 5 euros.

⁷¹ The Camargue is under serious threat in the face of a water crisis.

to like LUMA and its projects.”⁷² Everything from the interdisciplinary research to the experimentation and observation, working with environmentally-sound materials, in theory, resonates with them. But the analysis of the foundation’s publications and the reality of the institution, they say, simply does not allow for them to remain positive.

The past several years have put a magnifying glass on cultural institutions and their sources of funding. While the Hoffmann family is a historic supporter of associations such as the World Wildlife Fund, Les Voisins Vigilants point out that Roche was responsible for the Seveso tragedy in which a small village was contaminated by a cloud of herbicide from their factory, poisoning and killing tens of thousands of animals. In 2001 the company was fined a record 462 million euros by the European Commission for illicit deals in the vitamin industry. Critics say the LUMA Foundation is engaging in green- and art-washing. Sustainability is a major focus for the foundation and is a focus in their publications and public talks. The foundation speaks of “imagining a future for a bioregion,” “ecological transitions” and “interdependence,” words, according to their critics, that are no more than just that. According to Les Voisins Vigilants, the consumption of energy to build the campus, including multiple changes to the project and materials brought in from far away places, was enormous.

A look at the Frequently Asked Questions on the website of LUMA Arles makes it clear that the foundation was on the defensive before even opening its doors. FAQs include “How high is The Tower, and why?” to which it justifies its height for the sake of the sweeping views and answers: “Seen from outside the town, the building is comparable in height to the buildings in the old centre, the highest of which is the bell tower of the Cordeliers Convent, now

⁷² Voisins Vigilants, 13.

Saint-Charles High School (57 metres, while the tower is 56). Other questions include “Did you build a foundation to avoid paying taxes?” and “Rumor has it, Maja Hoffmann buys everything in Arles. Is this true?” and “Why is a cultural foundation buying hotels and restaurants?” The list goes on this way, each question answered with an (often convoluted) justification and insistence on LUMA’s presence being a purely benevolent one. When asked how this project would change the face of Arles, LUMA replies:

“The building and operation of the site create jobs, which is one of the reasons for the drop in unemployment in Arles⁷³ in recent years. The renovated workshops, and soon The Tower, offer new cultural facilities of a size and quality that places Arles at the level of world cultural capitals. Thanks to these spaces, the programming of exhibitions and events throughout the year will boost the town’s cultural offer outside the summer season.”

The website also explains the foundation’s structure and answers possible questions about tax exemptions and where taxes are paid. The site states that the Swiss LUMA Foundation was created in 2004 and in 2013 it created and financed the LUMA Arles Endowment Fund to direct the project in Arles. This is the non-profit structure of endowment fund described by the Council on Foundations:

An endowment fund is a not-for-profit legal entity that receives and manages assets and rights of any kind that are contributed to it freely and irrevocably. The endowment fund directly pursues a mission of general interest, or finance structures that have missions of

⁷³ Unemployment is at 16% in and 23% is below the poverty line, compared to 14% in Paris, according to Pierre Grennet’s Mediapart blog article of July 2021.

general interest, and it can have a fixed or indefinite term. (...) There are no standard models of by-laws to be complied with and no imposed governance. Founders can be one or more private individuals or legal entities.

(...) Endowment funds benefit from the attractive tax regime applicable to public utility foundations, apart from the 2007 Law on Work, Employment and Purchasing Power or “TEPA Law” provisions.

As of June 30, 2020, 3,060 endowment funds had been set up in France in a variety of sectors.

What is puzzling about the LUMA Foundation’s non profit structure is that the website says it “is the parent company of both LUMA Arles and the structures that run the various Arlesian activities taking place within what Maja Hoffmann describes as an ‘archipelago.’” These “various activities,” are commercial endeavors (hotels and restaurants), so the non-profit and the for-profit are very much entangled.

The Foundation is a gift to the public in the sense that it is free for them⁷⁴, but is it a gift that was needed or even desired as its legal structure implies? Newspapers abound with titles like “Maja Hoffmann transforms Arles” “Maja Hoffmann wants to metamorph Arles” “Rich Patron Remodels the City of Arles.” But did Arles *want* to be remodeled or transformed? “She was to ‘awaken’ Arles, as if it were fast asleep,” says Demont in *Le Bilan*, going on to say, as do many other journalists and critics, that Maja Hoffmann positioned the LUMA Foundation as a

⁷⁴ For the time being, there is no entry fee to visit the LUMA Foundation, however this is expected to change in the future.

charitable gift to a struggling Arles.⁷⁵ Yet her project is inextricably linked to gentrification, rising prices of real estate, and increasing local taxes, as pointed out by interviewees in Arles, Les Voisins Vigilants, and numerous journalists. Parisians and an international wealthy class are buying up real estate and locals of the Camargue are quickly being bought out. When asked about the imposing LUMA Tower in an interview, and whether it was built with an intention to make a mark on art history, Hoffmann says: “It is not for me. The cascade of metal attracts the light. It is a lighthouse. I am not a megalomaniac. I do this for Arles.”⁷⁶

In the introduction a definition of philanthropy was identified as ‘goodwill to fellow members of the human race, especially: active effort to promote human welfare or an act or gift done or made for humanitarian purposes.’ With the word “humanitarian” in mind, what *would* constitute a needed philanthropic project in Arles? Françoise Lacroix, wife of famous arlesian designer Christian Lacroix, said in an interview with Vanity Fair: “Maja would have done better building a hospital like the Rothschilds.”⁷⁷ The gift of art is certainly profound and one cannot argue that cultural philanthropy efforts is innoble. Arlesians interviewed for this study evoked the need to invest in culture specifically in the local education systems. LUMA has and will certainly invite schoolchildren to come to the foundation to learn, but as pointed out in Manger Luma, had even a portion of the enormous funds used to build this structure been donated to the schools directly, or a municipal organization, the educational programs could have been

⁷⁵ Etienne Dumont, “ARLES/La Mécène Maja Hoffmann Est-Elle Devenue Vraiment Omnipotente?,” *Le Bilan*, July 28, 2016, https://www.bilan.ch/opinions/etienne-dumont/arles_la_mecene_maja_hoffmann_est_elle_devenue_vraiment_omnipotente_.

⁷⁶ Aurélie Raya, “Maja Hoffmann Metamorphose Arles,” *Paris Match*, June 19, 2021, <https://www.parismatch.com/Culture/Art/Maja-Hoffmann-metamorphose-Arles-1743427>.

⁷⁷ “Des ‘Châteaux’ En Camargue ,” *Vanity Fair* , August 7, 2019, <https://www.vanityfair.fr/pouvoir/business/story/la-milliardaire-et-le-communiste-episode-3-des-chateaux-en-camargue/10169>.

strengthened from the inside. Why should a private billionaire take on this role? The public officials and school teachers know best what is needed and could implement programs directly, but often lack the funding to do so. A private institution inviting school groups to come learn about the art market, rather than investing in the schools themselves, according to Les Voisins Vigilants, is out of touch with the humanitarian needs of Arles.

Is increased tourism a positive side effect for Arles? Perhaps. But Arles cannot be compared to Bilbao in the sense that it was not culturally lacking before the arrival of the LUMA tower. Local gallerist Anne Clergue says the “Bilbao Effect” does not apply to Arles, which was already established as a culturally important place. She says that the foundation is an *addition* to the landscape rich in history and art. David Grzb, local elected official is quoted saying: “The attractiveness of the city existed before Maja Hoffmann. It is her who is profiting from Arles and not the opposite. She must not think she is in a conquered land.”⁷⁸ Every Arlesian consulted or interviewed for this study agrees that the city has changed in the last 15 years. But whether it was Maja Hoffmann’s doing or whether she joined an already trending movement, is unclear.

The private sector presence in Arles is not limited to the Hoffmanns, though it was perhaps the Hoffmanns who formed a welcoming bridge. François Pinault’s company, Kering, is one of the major supporters of Les Rencontres d’Arles. Bernard Arnault’s LVMH is present too. City guides of Arles published by the luxury company were dispersed throughout the city during the summer of LUMA’s opening. In the books, references between properties connected with the Hoffmanns lend to a certain feeling of déjà-vu. When one spends time in Arles, a feeling of curation by these cultural and financial superpowers feels evident.

⁷⁸ Vanity Fair, author not noted, 2

The Hoffmanns' love for this region is undeniable. Their desire to give, to preserve, and to promote, cannot be mistaken for ingenuine. The often harsh critiques of their monopolizing projects however, are valid. The size of these projects is enormous and represents that of city planning and of undertakings that should go through channels of political engagement rather than capital power.⁷⁹ Important issues arise when a single private entity or family (or in this case, a single person) dominates to such an extent as Maja Hoffmann in Arles. When asked whether she was a “cultural militant,” Hoffmann replied “Je suis engagée” (I am committed).⁸⁰ She describes her meditation practice, envisioning the world that she wants to live in, and her drive to create it. It is *her* project. While cultural discourse in 2022 is focused on inclusion polyphonism,⁸¹ a dominance such as this is indeed out of touch and problematic. Gallerist Anne Clergue said in an interview that more culture is always a good thing and that LUMA is a positive addition to the cultural cast of Arles.⁸² When asked however whether she thought the project was truly conceived as a gift for the people of Arles, she answered “no.” This is the overarching reception to the LUMA Foundation in Arles, which beckons the question: does its legal status match the project, given the definitions discussed in the previous chapter and introduction? A collector may build a museum in a place that they love because they wish to do so, and in doing so fulfill an entrepreneurial drive and desire to have the public see what they are most proud of: their intelligent, impressive, and expensive collection. This does not necessarily mean that it responds

⁷⁹ Various local publications in Arles including L'Arlesienne and Manger LUMA express outrage at this approach Maja Hoffmann has taken to alter the city. Clearly acting with a power exceeding that of the city's, Hoffmann has engaged herself as if she were an elected official. However, as pointed out by Les Voisins Vigilants: she was not elected.

⁸⁰ Raya 1

⁸¹ A concept which will be further dissected in the conclusion

⁸² Interview with the author

to or even interacts with the public need in a genuine way, which is the understood “humanitarian” role of philanthropic foundations.

CHAPTER 4: CONCERNS AND IMPLICATIONS

A look at the case study of the LUMA Foundation as an example of the trend of private non-profit art foundations brings up various concerns. The nature of the project as a philanthropic entity in service of the public, the dominance of the private individual overriding or overwhelming the public cultural infrastructure, and the role (or exclusion) of the local community are all problematic. But there are more issues to be aware of when examining the trend of private art foundations in France and indeed, globally. This chapter will look at the questions of longevity, access, the marketization of art, and the blurring of the line between public and private.

In his essay *Indiana Jones and the Ruins of the Private Museum*, art historian, curator and museum director Chris Dercon imagines an explorer on a quest who comes to find the ruins of a privately owned star-architected museum of contemporary art that has been taken over by vegetation in a remote destination in Costa Rica. He describes fragments of works of art decaying in the jungle - Jeff Koons, Andres Serrano, John Currin, Takashi Murakami. Dercon uses this fantasized tale to imagine how someday we might look back at this trend of the 21st century. “No matter how responsible a private collector is, the fact that this is a private setup with no long-term financial guarantee, let alone a consistent policy, means that this is a purely temporary state of affairs.” Eventually, he states, “most private museums cannot survive without state intervention.”⁸³ Endowments run out and the next generations are not always interested in

⁸³ Cristina Bechtler and Dora Imhof, *The Private Museum of the Future* (Zürich: JRP Ringier Kunstverlag, 2018), 189.

taking on their parents' or grandparents' projects. In many instances, the state has had to take over financial obligations as is particularly the case in Germany.⁸⁴

Georgina Walker and Georgina Adam both express concern on the subject of longevity in their books as have gallerists and cultural philanthropy advisors interviewed for this study. In the context of the mega collectors' private museums, cultural philanthropy advisor Leslie Ramos comments: "What I would really hate to see is projects that start with dubious funding and then end up becoming a burden to governments, the state, or to the taxpayer." Walker and Adam both give numerous examples of private museums worldwide that have closed due to lack of long-term vision and/or funding breakdowns.⁸⁵

Perhaps a private collectors' foundation *should* be ephemeral and understood as a sort of "pop up" from its conception. When asked whether one might consider the private art museum to be inherently ephemeral, Philippe Mèaille, collector and owner of the Château de Montsoreau museum of contemporary art, says this is humbling and an important element to consider when comparing private museums with public institutions.⁸⁶ If, as this study and others find to be true, the private collector is most interested in sharing their collections through entrepreneurial endeavors, carving themselves a space in the cultural landscape of their own time, why must these spaces live on? Once their time (and interest or financial viability) runs out, if collections are deemed interesting enough by public institutions, they can be absorbed and viewed there. Chris Dercon says in his essay: "if an art collection is not of a high quality, then it should not be

⁸⁴ These examples are discussed in depth in Georgina Walker's book.

⁸⁵ Georgina Adam gives many examples in the following article: Georgina Adam, "Les Musées Privés Meurent Aussi," *Le Quotidien de l'Art* (*Le Quotidien de l'Art*, November 9, 2019), <https://www.lequotidiendelart.com/articles/16436-les-mus%C3%A9es-priv%C3%A9s-meurent-aussi.html>.

⁸⁶ Interview with the author.

preserved.” The truth is, some collections will and should disintegrate. The history of curating demonstrates that they can be brought back together and displayed for the public when the quality of the collection is exceptional. Others may have had their moment, served their philanthropic and entrepreneurial quest to “share art with the public,” and that will be enough. There is however the issue of the very expensive buildings created to house the collection being left behind and the burden these structures may leave on the taxpayer and municipalities.

Whether the foundation’s museum structures are built to be ephemeral, their collections donated, and the buildings repurposed by the city, or whether they are donated in their entirety to the public, it is of utmost importance that a plan be put in place. When asked what Maja Hoffmann’s plan was for the LUMA Foundation, an Arles gallerist replies: “I’m sure that Maja has a plan for the longevity of her project. But I don’t know what it is. I know that her children are not very interested in the foundation in Arles. I’m sure she has a plan, but honestly, I don’t know what it is. I do think this is a worry for the city.”⁸⁷

One alternative may be a mix of public and private as is the case with the Collection Lambert in Avignon. Gallerist Yvon Lambert gave his collection to the city of Avignon and is able to enjoy a museum bearing his name created in his own lifetime, in a city with which he is deeply connected. He did so without ever starting his own private art foundation. On July 15, 2012, the day of his donation to the city of Avignon and the French state, he said “I wanted to expose it all so that this memory of myself, my personal collection, becomes public, accessible for all.”⁸⁸ As part of the agreement, the city of Avignon agreed to expose the exhibition in its

⁸⁷ Anonymous for the purpose of this quote

⁸⁸ Forum d’Avignon website. Article: “Collection Lambert: Private Money, Public Heritage” Translated from French.

entirety in a single historic building with an extension into a neighboring historic building. This solution should, in theory, suit the collector of the 21st century, but it is missing one important element and that is the entrepreneurial drive of heading a museum project. While Yvon Lambert is certainly involved and signed a very attractive deal in that his collection remains together and on display (stipulations which not every city will be able to agree to), many of the mega collectors of today want to actively head their museum project, being involved in every decision. They want to act as CEOs, Directors, *and* curators.

Another concern is the question of access. Who is being referred to when the collector sites wanting to share their collection with “the public” as the main motivation. Edouard Carmignac opened his foundation (*dotation publique*) on an island off the coast of the south of France in 2018 as he felt this was a “privileged space.”⁸⁹ Tour guide Jean François Huttin is based in Hyeres, the town from which the boats depart for the island. When asked what he thought of the foundation, he said that he had tried to visit twice and was not yet successful. “They want to select their visitors at a certain level,” he said, going on to describe a place of luxury opened for the elite, which is not his regular clientele. He guessed the foundation was orienting itself towards sales, imagining a close connection with the art market. “It is disconnected, an extreme niche. It is not for the public. We have the feeling it is not for us,” he says. Huttin went on to describe a new municipal museum in Hyeres, recently opened and “very accessible at 4 euros, easy opening hours, and a great collection.” Another guide based in nearby Monaco who, on the contrary, *is* focused on luxury cultural tourism, also said in an interview for this study that he had never been to the Carmignac Foundation. Those identified in the context of

⁸⁹ Hannah McGivern, “A Privileged Space, Remote from It All: Fondation Carmignac Opens on Island off the Southern Coast of France,” *The Art Newspaper*, June 1, 2021.

this study as having visited the foundation, were all international art collectors and art professionals. While a project like the Fondation Carmignac may present some positive outcomes for locals in increasing international tourism to Poquerolles, it does not appear to integrate or contribute to the local ecosystem in a way one might imagine a non-profit foundation to do.

The marketization of art advanced by private art museums, in whatever legal format they take, is another concern. Poet and art writer Annie Le Brun in her book *Ce qui n'a pas de prix* describes the current era as “a marketization of everything” and warns of the dangers of new markets “inseparable from an unprecedented collusion of finance, contemporary art, and the industries of luxury.”⁹⁰ Indeed, the wealthiest entrepreneur class (often connected with the luxury sector in France’s case) opening private art museums and foundations are actively engaged in the speculative art market and informed thereby in their collecting. They attend the same fairs, work sometimes with the same art advisors, and their collections are reflective of this. Both the Pinault Collection housed in the Bourse de Commerce in Paris and the LUMA Foundation of Arles exhibit the same piece by artist Urs Fischer in their main galleries.

Chris Dercon writes: “Leading architects are currently designing eccentric private museums in far-flung locations across the globe. Yet often these private collections look much the same. With some exceptions, today’s private museums for contemporary art are clones. Their contents are interchangeable, with the same artists and distinctly undifferentiated works.” He describes the private museum as a virtual space “belonging first and foremost to the world of the media, the glossy magazines, and design culture.”⁹¹ It is true that the glowing reviews of these

⁹⁰ Annie Le Brun, *Ce Qui N'a Pas De Prix: Beauté, Laideur Et Politique* (Paris: Pluriel, 2021), Preface.

⁹¹ Bechtold and Inhof 189

spaces appear in so-called “glossy magazines” such as travel and design publications *Departures*, *Wallpaper*, *Forbes’ How to Spend It*, and others, while the critical reviews looking at content appear in periodicals covering art, society and culture such as *Le Monde*, *Art Newspaper*, and the *Quotidien d’Art*. The exorbitant value of these collections and the buildings created to house them are joined by boutique hotels, shops, and museum restaurants all in line with a vision of luxury and lifestyle of the ultra-wealthy. In his critique of the LUMA Foundation in *Le Bilan*, Christophe Catsaros says that even if Maja is not benefiting from the “scandalous” tax exemptions exploited by the likes of LVMH in Paris, she is a definite vector of the financialization of art.⁹²

In the collectively written book *L’art et l’argent* edited by philosopher Jean-Pierre Cometti and poet Natahlie Quintane (second edition 2021), various academics and artists discuss their views on the marketization or financialization of art. On this subject, Jean-Pierre Cometti says: “Neoliberal economies have integrated art into the mechanisms of the market as a factor of investment, of speculation and of exchange, at different levels and in different ways,” adding that the collusion between the private world and art is a masquerade and cannot be taken seriously. The book refers to this trend as art that is consumed the way luxury is consumed, claiming that the same methods of presentation are used in the private museum as in the private boutique. The context of exploding prices of art and market speculation cannot be disregarded when assessing the collections of today. Dercon asserts that while the private is dominated by the market, the public is “the art historical as well as the social pharmakon (...). In its structural internal plurality,

⁹² Christophe Catsaros, “Le Temps,” *Le Temps* (blog), November 16, 2021, <https://blogs.letemps.ch/christophe-catsaros/2021/11/16/a-arles-leffet-luma/>.

the modern public museum engenders an expanded cultural representation that is much more than the possibilities of economics.”⁹³

In the context of an ever-growing wealth gap in which the billionaire class is opening impressive and often powerful institutions of culture, while the public cultural sector struggles for funding, there is reason for concern. Should we accept these private collectors and corporations as the curators of the contemporary canon of art history or are they moreover reflections of the market and incarnations of the dramatic economic disparities of the 21st century? Neither is entirely true and not all private museums are part of the problem. The next concern that may help to alleviate the tension here.

It is of utmost importance that the public be able to differentiate the private from the state-run art institution. It is not always clear when visiting these private spaces that they are in fact based on the tastes and ideas of private individuals. The Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris and the case study of LUMA shows that not only do some appear to be public in their physical presence, but they may also act in ways one might expect from a public institution. Their financial power allows them to make decisions almost unanimously and create disproportionate impact in the cultural sphere. Perhaps rather than the “Bilbao Effect,” we will refer to a “LUMA effect,” as critic Christophe Catsaros does, looking at France specifically. “The prestigious projects come one after the next, short circuiting the intrinsic connection that exists in France between the state and its cultural policy. It is a bit as if, not daring to question a respected doctrine, the state strives to slowly substitute an alternative model: a reform which does not call itself as such.” He speaks of a new doctrine in which the private overtakes the public and states:

⁹³ Dercon 190

“Culture should have a pedagogic and federal role for its society, with the state being its principal pourvoyeur.”⁹⁴ Is it important that the differentiation between the public and the private remain clear for the viewer and that the private respects its place as *a* perspective, a personal project, a snapshots of a collection and a collector, rather than overtaking the whole ecosystem.

Finally, there is the concern that private patronage is leaving the public institution in favor of the private. Cultural philanthropy advisor Leslie Ramos comments that those opening their own museums “are donors to existing museums. We cannot forget that museums rely on philanthropy from these mega collectors building these spaces. What is going to happen if existing museums no longer receive this support if all of this money is geared to their own projects? The same is true for donating works of art, museums will not be able to continue with the tradition of collecting.” According to an article by Roxana Azimi in the *Quotidien d’Art*, the Society of Friends of the Musée d’Orsay lost about 200 members out of 700 during the pandemic. The Society of Friends of the Musée National d’Art Moderne lost about one fifth of its members.⁹⁵ These figures are from 2021 and certainly since 2022, membership is rising as in-person gatherings are again taking place. Still, competition with the private sector is worrisome.

⁹⁴ Catsaros 2

⁹⁵ Quotidien d’Art: Les musées se battent pour garder leurs amis, June 24, 2021

CONCLUSION

PRIVATE DOMINANCE IN THE CULTURAL SPHERE:

Finding its Place

While this study has presented many concerns and criticisms of the private art foundations in its overview of the French cultural landscape in the 21st century, it would be false to say that these foundations are problematic as a whole. Diversity in culture is elemental to a rich artistic environment and France continues to become more interesting and varied with these new projects. As a professional working in cultural travel, these so-called “art destinations,” are essential to my work. Particularly the further-flung art spaces facilitate movement around the country of France for cultural tourists who may otherwise not have explored further than Paris. The foundations described in this study, and others, create footholds allowing me to delve deeper into the cultural story of France for my clients, visiting the Loire Valley, the Maritime Alps, the Camargue, Bordeaux, and more. There is inspiration to be found in private art spaces that offer varied approaches to engaging with contemporary art whether in the Bois de Boulogne at the Louis Vuitton Foundation, barefoot on the island of Poquerolles, in the town of Arles adjacent to roman ruins, or in a Loire Valley chateau surrounded by vineyards. In France, the private sector can dynamize and spread out cultural content, bringing access, tourism and the cultural diversity along with them. It is important to identify these positive effects as well as to critically assess the changes occurring on a grand scale as the influence of the private sector increases. This has been

especially of interest to me as I endeavor to tell a story of the histories of art, patronage, and collecting in France through cultural tourism.

This study produced qualitative data by conducting interviews, listening to and reading varied voices of the cultural sector and their response to the trend of private art foundations. The next necessary step to answer the questions asked here will be to collect quantitative data and to conduct many more interviews in places where private foundations have been set up. It will be important to ask individuals, especially in the provinces of France (where the effects can be more easily felt), whether they engage with the private art foundations as philanthropic projects, whether they understand them to be public or private, and what they experienced when they visited, if they did. It is not necessarily the number of visitors that will reveal most because *consumption* of art will not be the most telling measurement. The starchitect buildings and glamorous “lifestyle” element to these spaces may attract many visitors, so it will be exit interviews focusing on content and the learning process taking place when visiting the galleries as well as interviews with local municipal representatives regarding collaboration that will count the most.

In examining the rise of the private art foundation in France, we have also looked at the struggle of the public art museum. Public institutions must continue to be supported and we (the state, the people, and the patrons) must help them survive. As discussed in chapter 2, in order to survive, they must become more agile, nimble, dynamic. As a curator of cultural travel, I see the seductive nature of the ‘destination’ art experience. The sense of place and the entanglement with nature is very attractive and something not generally found within public institutions.

Dominique De Menil wanted to build her private art space in Houston, Texas as an anti-museum.

She was after a “sense of enchantment.”⁹⁶ Describing the Fondation Maeght, yet another space built on the idea of *not* being a museum, journalist Jean-François Lasnier describes a revival of “the mythical Arcadia, that ideal land where men live in peace and harmony with nature”⁹⁷ The rise of the private art museum represents an increased appreciation by the public for experiential engagement with art - on islands, in gardens, on vineyards, in sculpture parks - and perhaps public institutions should provide this type of engagement as well. Why can a museum not provide a sense of enchantment? Why can it not weave in nature as do so many of these private art foundations especially in the South of France?

In the introduction to this text I asked whether we should be concerned with the idea that the private is overpowering the public. The previous chapters highlight issues that are indeed worrisome. There are important implications to consider when private foundations created and funded by corporations and the ultra-wealthy build powerful cultural spaces and put on exhibitions of far greater amplitude and reach than what public museums can do. There are complications both ideological and logistical that arise from the private foundations, but the trend is here to stay and will continue to increase in scope. So how can the positive and negative effects be reconciled? How can the landscape incorporate these projects in a healthy and democratic way? How can these private collections be integrated, understood, and shared with the public without overwhelming it? The answers lie in clarity, collaboration, and an expanded definition of “museum.”

This study has found that denominations and mission statements are important. As the cultural landscape becomes increasingly diverse in its procurers and guardians of culture - artists,

⁹⁶ Dominique de Menil

⁹⁷ The Foundation, dedicated to artists (Maeght magazine) Jean Francois Lasnier

corporations, and private collectors, foundations, endowments, associations and more, clarity is needed. Institutions must declare clear missions in alignment with their names and legal structures. If non-profit foundations, endowments, and associations are to serve the public good, then they must be held to this. If philanthropy is the main motivation as most studies find, then the private institutions must engage in humanitarian efforts with true impact, completely removing their commercial interests. Those establishments that are not engaged in this way, should exist as commercial enterprises or extensions thereof (especially in the luxury sector), and not presented as wholly humanitarian projects. Entrepreneurial art endeavors and the private collections of banks and luxury corporations have their place in the cultural cast of characters, however they need not be labeled as “foundations,” even if they engage in some philanthropic projects. This is, rather, an element of their corporate social responsibility.

In addition to clarity and collaboration, the changes of the 21st century require an expanded understanding of what a space for exhibiting art is. The cultural community has been calling for change in public museums, and a broadening of our understanding of the museum space - both public and private - would be beneficial for both. The private collector endeavors to open an art space that is *not* a “museum,” yet their spaces are understood as such. Perhaps the issue is not the word “museum,” but rather its definition which desperately needs to evolve. The International Council of Museums’ proposed a new definition of the museum in 2019. The following definition was rejected by the French chapter of the organization.

Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and

challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.

Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.

This is the current definition:

“A museum is a non-profit, permanent⁹⁸ institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”⁹⁹

Phillipe Mèaille, the collector behind the private museum and non-profit association Château de Montsoreau Museum of Contemporary art in the Loire Valley, is very enthusiastic about this expanded definition and sees its adoption as one of the solutions to the issues brought forth in this text. Mèaille is the only collector encountered in the frame of this study who is happy to name his art space a “museum,” as he feels that his project is in alignment with what a

⁹⁸ The word “permanent” is particularly problematic for private art museums as discussed in chapter 4.

⁹⁹ ICOM

museum can and *should* be.¹⁰⁰ When asked about the other private art museums such as those of Hoffmann, Arnault, and Carmignac, he said: “We are different and all the better for it!” A museum can be many things and the diversity of voices whether private, public, artist-run, collector-run, or otherwise, is a richness. He agrees that clarity is key for the public as they engage with these spaces.

The definition proposed by ICOM is dynamic and reflective of the trajectory of culture: where we are today and what we need from our museums. “They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities.” If this definition is adopted, borders formed around institutions may dissolve and an integration between public, private and local communities may be more fluid. The Château de Monsoreau’s website mentions being part of a “network” of other national and international museum institutions as well as local entities. When asked what the term ‘network’ refers to, Philippe Mèaille speaks of being generally linked in an ecosystem of contemporary art. These ‘networks’ and ‘links’ are key to building polyphonic places of community in which the public feels involved, seen, and welcome.

The art world is often accused of being elitist, inaccessible and for the ultra-wealthy, and the private art foundations which act as “islands” for the privileged, international art-buying class perpetrate this idea. If a private foundation truly wishes to give back to the public in sharing their art, they must engage with them and disengage from their ego. Private-public partnerships, respect for and collaboration with the public purveyors of culture, long-term planning with the municipality, investing in the community, and educational programming are key elements to a

¹⁰⁰ Interview with the author

positive engagement by a private art foundation. These exuberant passion projects significantly alter a landscape and must be held accountable as they step out of the bounds of their personal home collections and into the realm of the public.

Damien Hirst once said "Buy art, build a museum, put your name on it, let people in for free. That's as close as you can get to immortality." If this is the goal of private art collectors creating their own museums, then they should not be considered philanthropic projects. Some may argue that they can be both: acts of self-promotion and acts of philanthropy. Maja Hoffmann is quoted saying to *Paris Match* "Do you know very rich people? Some are happy and some clearly less so. I want to build, act."¹⁰¹ So, are we to understand that the LUMA Foundation is a sort of entrepreneurial cultural philanthropy therapy? If the underlying desire is self-serving rather than responding to a humanitarian concern and overpowers the public infrastructure, this is problematic. Georgina Walker says "within this context the terms philanthropy, public access, and museum can be used to evoke a perception of civic duty, a democratic zeal and sense of cultural authority."¹⁰² She finds that these words can be used loosely, or opportunistically, and do not always demonstrate understanding for the expertise required to run a museum properly. Cultural advisor Andras Szántó warns: "Instead of being seen as a manifestation of the positive and progressive energies of civil society, private museums risk becoming emblems of inequity and billionaires run amok."¹⁰³ In assessing the players in the private cultural sphere, this study

¹⁰¹ Aurélie Raya, "Maja Hoffmann Metamorphose Arles," *Paris Match*, June 19, 2021, <https://www.parismatch.com/Culture/Art/Maja-Hoffmann-metamorphose-Arles-1743427>.

¹⁰² Georgina S. Walker, *The Private Collector's Museum: Public Good versus Private Gain* (Routledge, 2019), Introduction.

¹⁰³ Andras Szántó in Georgina Adam, *The Rise and Rise of the Private Art Museum* (London: Lund Humphries in association with Sotheby's Institute of Art, 2021), 14.

has shown that we must think deeply of the meaning of these spaces and the words we use to define them.

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