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Date	October 24 th , 2023	Author	Lee Sharrock
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Fondation Cartier Opens New Jean Nouvel-Designed Space Near Louvre With Exposition Générale

Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain expands to central Paris with a striking new location at 2 Place du Palais-Royal, and reveals inaugural group exhibition Exposition Générale, with highlights from 40 years of the collection.



La Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, 2 place du Palais-Royal, Paris.

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In a week when drama rippled through Paris after the unprecedented Louvre jewel heist (which some are calling "Le vol du siècle"), [Fondation Cartier](#)'s new building—a luminous Jean Nouvel creation at 2 Place du Palais-Royal—quietly stole the city's cultural spotlight.

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As Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain unveils its new Paris home, the bold move marks more than a change of address. The foundation's relocation to 2 Place du Palais-Royal, mere steps from the Louvre, represents a symbolic and architectural shift—from a leafy modernist enclave on Boulevard Raspail to the historical heart of Haussmann's city. Designed by Pritzker-Prize laureate Jean Nouvel, the new premises transform a 19th-century department store—once part of the *Grands Magasins du Louvre*—into a glass-fronted temple to contemporary art and architecture.

This relocation, long in gestation, fulfils a dream of bringing Fondation Cartier's daring programming closer to the gravitational centre of Parisian culture. The inaugural exhibition at Place du Palais-Royal—named *Exposition Générale*—is both a summation and a statement: a vast, kaleidoscopic presentation of nearly 600 works from the foundation's 40-year collection history, re-staged as a dialogue between architecture, art, nature and urbanity.



Junya Ishigami Sydney Cloud Arch, 2015 and Luiz Zerbini Natureza Espiritual da Realidade, 2012 Version 2025. Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain | ... [More](#)
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A luminous conversation between past and present

Nouvel's design, as ever, is a study in precision and paradox. The architect—who also created Fondation Cartier's original glass-and-steel building on Boulevard Raspail in 1994—now turns his gaze toward history. Here, his intervention is subtler yet more radical: a *palimpsest* of the old and new. The façade of the Haussmannian block remains intact, but behind it unfolds a sequence of light-filled volumes, vast windows, and suspended platforms that seem to hover between floors.

The building's five mobile exhibition platforms are its architectural coup. These floating levels—designed in collaboration with the Italian studio Formafantasma—reconfigure the traditional museum hierarchy. Rather than ascending chronologically or thematically, visitors drift laterally and vertically through spaces where drawings, installations, paintings, photography and sculpture intermingle. Nouvel's use of transparency turns the institution outward: the city becomes part of the exhibition, reflected in the panes that frame views of the Palais-Royal gardens and the Louvre beyond.

This radical permeability gives the space a “temple of architecture” quality—though a temple without walls, without solemnity. Light replaces stone; the grid of Paris merges with the geometry of display. As Nouvel has long argued, architecture should provoke “a dialogue with the city, not a withdrawal from it.” Here, that dialogue feels alive.

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The opening exhibition of the new Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain features works by Alessandro Mendini and Bodys Ise ... [More](#)
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A department store of ideas

Exposition Générale revives the building's 19th-century spirit. The title itself nods to the *Expositions Générales* once held in this very place—precursors to the World Fairs that showcased modernity's wonders. Fondation Cartier's curators, Grazia Quaroni and Béatrice Grenier, reinterpret that ethos of discovery for the 21st century. Their exhibition functions like a contemporary *grand magasin* of ideas, where ceramics sit beside photography, indigenous Amazonian art beside Western conceptualism, and textiles converse with video installations.

At the press conference Quaroni described the radical curatorial approach as “democratic”: “Here you see mediums that weren't once regarded as popular—ceramics, cartoons, textiles—displayed together. The collection is alive, shaped by artists and intellectuals.”

Grenier echoes her colleague's enthusiasm for this expanded field. “The scenography explores the volumes of Nouvel's dynamic architecture,” she said. “Inspired by his design, Formafantasma created floating spaces that enable new relationships between works.”

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The results are exhilarating. In the bright, cathedral-like ground floor, monumental sculptures dominate the eye: Alessandro Mendini's miniature mosaic cathedral housing a golden deity; Agnès Varda's whimsical cat perched on top of a tree trunk *Nini on her tree* (2019); Bodys Isek Kingelez's *Projet pour le Kinshasa du troisième millénaire* (1987), a colourful sprawling cityscape that reimagines the African metropolis as an urban utopia; *OMG!*, a tall bright neon collaboration between Alessandro Mendini and Peter Halley; and a spindly tree sprouting from stilts that reach toward the glass skylights towards the autumnal leaves of the trees outside. These pieces, radiant and absurd in equal measure, serve as guardians of the exhibition's central idea—art as a living organism that bridges nature and artifice.

Descending to the subterranean galleries, the mood darkens. Here, video installations by Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R) and James Coleman unfold like nocturnal dramas. Coleman's *Boxing Match* flickers with the ghostly violence of 1920s Chicago, while DS+R's complex 360 degree video projection blurs the boundary between economics, data and digital art installation. The interplay between light and shadow, transparency and opacity, makes clear how architecture itself becomes a participant in the exhibition. Light plays a big part in the dramatic tension of the space, and James Turrell's light installation offers a womb-like, pink-hued escape from the darkness of the basement galleries.



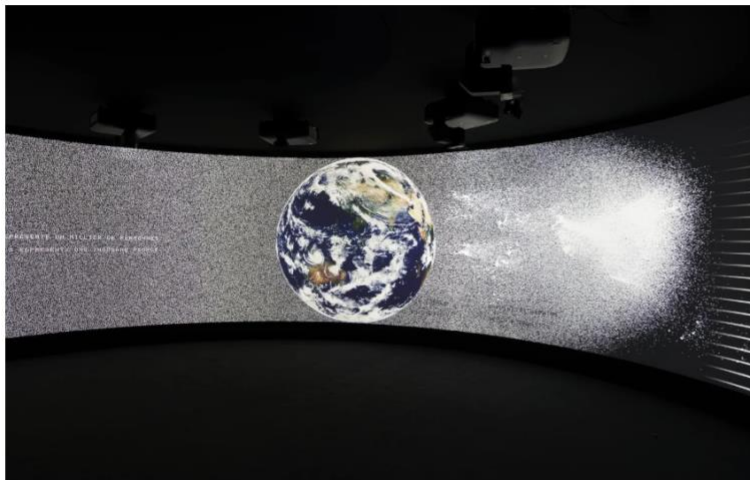
James Coleman *Box (ahhareturnabout)*, 1977. Exhibition view. Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, 2025.

PHOTO © MARC DOMAGE.

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Elizabeth Diller of American interdisciplinary design studio Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R) explained to me at the press preview how the installation *Exit* (which featured in the 1992 exhibition *Machines d'Architecture*) has been updated for the 2025 exhibition at the new Fondation Cartier:

“This is data driven with design. This was shown at COP21 and there were comments from some of the policy makers that they had never seen so much data in one place before. The economic, the environment and the political are together here, so you start to see things you hadn’t noticed before. There’s a part about human made disasters or impact of storms and climate change, and you see global North and global South compared and notice an equation between climate change and economics. You start to see correlations that weren’t there in front of your eyes before.”



Exit 2025, Diller Scofidio + Renfro.. Vue d'exposition. Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, 2025.

PHOTO © MARC DOMAGE

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Curating a living world

The exhibition is structured around four recurring themes—architecture, the living world, techniques and materials, and the relationship between art and science—but these categories often dissolve into one another. Works by Bill Viola, Damien Hirst, Patti Smith, Cai Guo-Qiang, Bodys Isek Kingelez, and Matthew Barney punctuate the show, yet no single artist dominates. The emphasis is on constellations of artists rather than canons.



View from platform 4. Christian Boltanski_Absalon. Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, 2025.

PHOTO © MARC DOMAGE

Unexpected pairings abound: Guillermo Kuitca's reinterpretation of William Eggleston's *Kyoto* series hangs opposite Eggleston's prints; Christian Boltanski's fragile *Les Éphémères* installation of fluttering mayflies is adjacent to Huang Yong Ping's monumental *Devons-nous encore construire une grande cathédrale?* A striking stone and hair sculpture by David Hammons is displayed near a glass window overlooking the Louvre, and a vast golden toned wall hanging by nonagenarian Colombian fiber artist dominates one wall of the central galleries, with a huge Damien Hirst cherry blossom painting on the other side.

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Huang Yong Ping, Devons-nous encore construire une grande cathedrale at Fondation Cartier
PHOTO © MARC DOMAGE

Cai Quo-Qiang's gunpowder work *The Earth Has its Black Hole Too: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 16*(1993) is juxtaposed with Mario Merz's *Tartaruga* (1975) and Panamarenko's *Panama, Spitzbergen, Nova Zemblaya* (1996) in another unusual and exciting curatorial moment.



The view inside the new Fondation Cartier, with Cai Guo-Qiang's *The Vague Border at the Edge of Time / Space Project* (1991) at front center.
© CYRIL MARCILHACY

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Photography is celebrated here, and Malick Sibidé's joyful photographs of youthful moments in Mali have their own display, while the spectral photography of Francesca Woodman converses with Latin American photographer *Graciela Iturbide's* monochrome images of birds as symbols of freedom and mortality.

Highlights of the *Being Nature* section include works by Claudia Andujar and the Yanomami community that reference Indigenous land, Bernie Krause and Soundwalk Collective's site-specific soundscape that creates a sensory experience of the natural world, and the piece de resistance is Solange Pessoa's mesmerising *Miracéus* (2003-4) installation made of thousands of feathers and suspended from the ceiling.



Lee Sharrock at Fondation Cartier with Solange Pessoa's *Miracéus*.
LEE SHARROCK

These curatorial decisions dissolve outdated hierarchies—between cultures, between mediums, between disciplines. Fondation Cartier's collection, built through decades of cross-cultural collaborations, feels here like a manifesto for plurality.

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“This is not about an exhibition program and then an acquisition program,” explains director general Chris Dercon, who joined the foundation in 2022 and had followed its development since the 1980s. “The collection is tied into the exhibition program. After 40 years you can detect certain very strong line, like *films rouges*. There are four chapters in the collection; urbanity and the city, both by designers and architects; then there is the whole theatre of nature, with excursions in faraway countries; and the third chapter is all about making things. I hate the word Kunsthandwerk (arts and crafts), but it’s all about making things, textiles like Olga de Amaral; and the fourth is *films rouges*, which is the stronghold of the exhibition program and the collection, which is creating dialogues between artists, and also dialogues between artists, thinkers, philosophers and architects. So because you know that this is what the exhibition is about, then you become very much aware that the collection makes sense.”



David Hammons facing the Louvre. Exhibition view. Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, 2025.

PHOTO © MARC DOMAGE.

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The architecture as a machine for viewing

Dercon describes the new building as “a machine for viewing”, and the phrase fits. From the glass façade that reveals artworks to passers-by to the mezzanine walkways that offer multiple sightlines, the experience of movement becomes integral to perception. My reaction to the exhibition experience evoked Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*: the visitor, suspended on platforms, becomes both observer and participant in a choreography of looking.

This dynamism is amplified by Formafantasma’s scenography, which blends research-driven design with emotional sensitivity. The duo’s use of translucent materials, shifting light, and subtle colour gradations creates a sense of continuity across the three levels. Rather than dividing art into static rooms, they allow it to breathe, to speak across boundaries. Their subtle and thoughtful use of colour and lighting means that the scenography creates a 360 overview of the exhibition by choosing tones that highlight or complement the artworks and lure the viewer in.

Simone Farresin of Formafantasma explained to me at the press preview: “A challenge of the building is that there isn’t a clear route (thought the exhibition spaces). So lighting has this role in the scenography that will help people to locate themselves within the building. We had the idea of placing various monumental works and using these totemic light elements to guide visitors through the space. The building is so open—the building itself is on display—and we thought we would embrace that.”

The architecture and scenography create a theatrical ambience, and Fondation Cartier achieves what few museums manage: a genuine integration of space, light, and thought. Nouvel’s earlier Fondation Cartier at Raspail was revolutionary for its transparency; this one is radical in its re-contextualization, proving that a historic Parisian shell can host the most progressive ideas about art display.

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Simone Farresin of Formafantasma, Fondation Cartier 2025.
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From Boulevard Raspail to the Palais-Royal

For those who knew the foundation's previous home, the contrast is striking. On Boulevard Raspail, visitors watched seasons shift through the veil of glass and trees. At Place du Palais-Royal, that dialogue with nature is amplified: the reflections of plane trees and passing pedestrians merge with the luminous surfaces of Olga de Amaral's golden textile works or the leafy forms in Luiz Zerbini's *Spiritual Nature of Reality*, a veritable highlight of the show. Zerbini's installation was first featured in the 2019 Fondation Cartier exhibition *Nous les Arbres*, and his work explores themes of Brazilian culture, the natural world and urban landscapes. Positioned near a window that frames the Louvre opposite, Luiz's installation—a tree rising from a museum-like display of carefully chosen plants, leaves and natural detritus collected by the artist—reaches towards the glass windows looking out onto the street. His work is woven with ecological and metaphysical threads. At the centre of the installation is a giant Bodhi tree, a sacred fig tree (*Ficus religiosa*) of the same species that Buddha sat under when he attained enlightenment.

The result recalls London's botanical masterpiece, Kew Gardens, in miniature: a greenhouse for ideas, where the botanical and the conceptual intertwine. Luiz himself notes his fascination with the famous gardens, where plants from Amazonia and Europe meet. "I love that place. I've been there many times and have a special relationship with it. There are some plants we have in Amazonia, in Brazil, that I saw for the first time in Kew Gardens. I have this dream to one day do something in collaboration with Kew."

In a clever curatorial coup, Zerbini's installation is situated close to Bernie Krause and Soundwalk Collective's sound piece *Night wouldn't be night without the cricket*, which elevates the experience further.

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Luiz Zerbini
© LEE SHARROCK

A radical rethinking of the museum

If the Louvre across the street represents the artistic canon—chronological, national, monumental—Fondation Cartier’s new home offers its foil: fluid, global, anti-hierarchical. It rejects the linear march of art history in favour of a spiral of connections. The exhibition invites visitors not to revere but to question, to cross-reference, to look again.

The building’s very transparency embodies this ethos of openness. Art is visible from the street; daylight filters through galleries without intimidation. The museum becomes less a sanctum than a civic arena.

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Yet beneath the humour lies a serious proposition: that contemporary art can be both intellectually demanding and publicly accessible. Fondation Cartier's move to the Palais-Royal proves that radical ideas can thrive in the city's historic core without losing their edge.



Outside view from rue de Rivoli. Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, 2025.

PHOTO © MARC DOMAGE

A new Parisian landmark

By the time *Exposition Générale* closes in August 2026, the building will have hosted tens of thousands of visitors, and most likely will have redefined what a private foundation can be. Nouvel's architecture, Quaroni and Grenier's curatorship, Formafantasma's scenography and Dercon's vision converge to produce more than a museum, rather an instrument for seeing, feeling, and thinking anew.

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In a city dense with monuments to the past, Fondation Cartier's new home stands as a monument to the future—transparent, inclusive, and endlessly alive. If the Louvre guards the treasures of civilization, then across the square, Jean Nouvel's luminous creation invites us to reconsider what civilization might yet become. In Walter Benjamin's unfinished work *The Arcades Project*, which he began in the 1920s, he described the shopping arcades of 19th Century Paris as a "world in miniature", a kind of self-contained, artificial world that reflected and promoted the new logic of the commodity. This vital new exhibition at Fondation Cartier could be viewed as a world in miniature. As Dercon succinctly says "Architecture is the discipline of constraints", and it's clear that Nouvel's new building will facilitate cultural and social exchanges, turning Paris into a cosmopolitan ecosystem of art.

Exposition Générale runs at Fondation Cartier, 2 Place du Palais-Royal, Paris from 25 October 2025 to August 2026. To celebrate the reopening in a new location, visitors can see the exhibition free of charge during the weekend of 25th and 26th October.

Find more information [here](#).