

# 19

From 02/04 to 27/08/2023

Centre régional  
d'art contemporain  
de Montbéliard



**The Outsiders, La ville en jeux.**

**Jean-Jacques Mathieu's Archives, Adventure  
Playground of the Résidences in Belfort (1975-  
1985).**

TWO SANDBOX#1 EXPOSITIONS AT 19, CRAC

## Adventure Playground of the Résidence in Belfort

Jean-Jacques Mathieu's Archives (1975-1985)

From 3rd of June to 27th of August 2023, opening on Friday 2nd of June at 6:30 pm.

*« Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else..<sup>1</sup> »*

During the summer months, 19, Crac offers to transform itself partially into a playground for the artists and the public by means of «sandbox» works to be activated. The term evokes both the container of sand for children and a type of video game. Sandbox games are essentially characterised by the absence of imposed objectives. They are designed in a non-linear way to stimulate the curiosity and creativity of the players in a given universe. In the same way, the “sandbox” exhibitions are open to appropriation within the art centre. They are built from invitations to visual artists, but also to architects and town planners.

*Sandbox#1* was commissioned to The Outsiders, a collective of architects, cooks, artists, and educators from Utrecht (the Netherlands). They call themselves a “union” whose mission is to implement several services to people, to the environment and to the society in general. By creating alternative meeting situations in the public space, The Outsiders meet the residents, often through the prism of play. Their aim is to include them in a process of co-thinking that generates forms of public art or architecture, whether perennial or ephemeral.

As much attached to the process as to the final product, the collective is keen to share its method of «unlearning»<sup>2</sup> which is essential for connecting people to their territory and remembering that «A neighbourhood is not only an association of buildings but also a network of social relationships, an environment where the feelings and the sympathy can flourish»<sup>3</sup>. Mapping workshops, walks, meetings, and debates are all tools that the collective deploys to create common creative situations.

It also defends an artistic approach that is part of a long-term process and that relies on sustainable and local means of production,

1- Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 1972.

2- “Learning is often progress-oriented, institutionally driven, and focused on the accumulation of knowledge, skills and behaviour. In contrast, unlearning is directed towards embodied forms of knowledge and the (un)-conscious operation of ways of thinking and doing. Unlearning denotes an active critical investigation of normative structures and practices in order to become aware and get rid of taken-for-granted «truths» of theory and practice.” *Unlearning Exercises*, Art Organizations as Sites for Unlearning, directed by Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, Valiz, Amsterdam, 2018.

3- Lewis Mumford, *The Urban Prospect*, 1968. In this passage, Lewis Mumford refers to a lecture at Harvard by Jane Jacobs, author, human rights activist and philosopher of architecture and urbanism.



anticipating the subsequent uses and reuses of the creations. The Outsiders have created playgrounds, bus shelters, community gardens, squares and even rehabilitated a farm. During their experiments, they have also gathered an intangible heritage which is then disseminated in the form of educational workshops or a travelling museum.

The Outsiders belong to a certain family of creators who «want to take care of rather than reshape the city [...] and consider that the habitability of their neighbourhoods is linked to a local ecology, a sensory urbanism, the welcoming of nature, a respect for the chronotopia, and to the experiments of a participatory democracy...<sup>4</sup>. Here, identities are not fixed, each contributor is a necessary piece in the composition of the final puzzle. Its form does not aim for the spectacular but is a testimony of the singularity of its assembly of subjectivities, usually invisible<sup>5</sup>.

The invitation by 19, Crac to The Outsiders is a twofold proposal. Firstly, the exhibition is an opportunity to present a retrospective of their artistic projects. For the first time, it brings together plastic works related to productions in the public space in Utrecht, Maastricht, and Rio de Janeiro. Photographs, videos, drawings, sketches, publications, and objects reflect their emancipatory practices. Participatory projects such as Erfgoed – Center for Ecological (UN)learning; de Rijzende Glij- baan; de Halte; The Travelling Farm Museum of Forgotten Skills; Vinexmarkt; Sistema Lento; Burenmarkt; Muziekplein or Sjellik and Mooswief are in consequence documented.

Furthermore, in Montbéliard, The Outsiders has chosen to put the “city into play” [translation of the title of the exhibition *La Ville en jeux*] and to bring it into the art centre. Based on the commonalities between the distant geographies they have explored – such as post-industrial and post-colonial issues or areas of friction between rural and urban life – the collective walked through the city last March. The residents-ambassadors and participants of this urban walk, formed a spontaneous assembly that revealed some of the invisible cities that make up Montbéliard, through personal anecdotes or references to the more distant history of the «enclave <sup>6</sup>».

4- Thierry Paquot, Postface « une militante de la cause urbaine » in *Déclin et survie des grandes villes américaines* de Jane Jacobs, Éditions Parenthèses, 2012. The English version is suggested by the translator of the press release.

5- The Outsiders were associated with the research of Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons in Utrecht around the book *The Grand Domestic Revolution – A History of Feminist Designs For American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* by Dolores Hayden (published in 1982 by MIT Press). It is an investigation about the struggle of feminists in the United States against the isolation of women in private interiors and confined to domestic life. It identifies their strategies for making «invisible work» visible, such as housework and childcare, through the creation of community services (cooperatives, daycare centres, collective kitchens) in public spaces. For The Outsiders, the ability to make the invisible visible, i.e. to bring private uses into the space of public exchange, makes it possible to redesign the entire structure of the city.

6- Reference to the title of Jean-Paul Goux's book about Montbéliard, *Mémoires de l'enclave*, collection Babel, Actes Sud, 2003.

Based on these exchanges, The Outsiders have chosen to draw on the history of human settlement in the area and one of its most monumental traces, the ancient theatre of Mandeure<sup>7</sup>. The result is a new production, conceived as a public space within the art centre and by derivation questioning its place in the city and its own dimension as a public place. In the form of mobile bleachers, the architecture–furniture reminds us that “in its primitive phases, social life is largely spent in play. It is a temporary truce from the usual human activities, taking place in entertainment, according to freely agreed rules and in a fixed and determined form<sup>8</sup>». The agora thus created arouses the desire to meet as a group, to exchange and to generate a common situation. Its combined modules form «a variable architecture – a ‘demo architecture’ [...] an architecture in which to try out different spaces, or to produce a variety of Ecclesia<sup>9</sup>». The mobile and modular dimension of the work allows for different uses: multiplying the points of view, sitting, standing, pushing, pulling, climbing, listening, watching... investing other places beyond the walls of the institution. It offers the possibility of co-designing as many assemblages, arrangements, and games as there are actors and non-actors<sup>10</sup> within the art centre. As a demonstration space, the work also hosts artefacts, documents, and images, thus constituting the moving space of monstration of the shared experience in Montbéliard and reaffirming 19, Crac as a space of agency<sup>11</sup>.

The Outsiders’ exhibition *La ville en jeux* thus brings together the dynamics at work today in the practices of a New Genre Public Art<sup>12</sup> which carry within them “an ambition to transform reality, which, however modest, insists on the need to move from the symbolic to forms of action<sup>13</sup>».

7- Classified as a historical monument in 1964, the ancient theatre of Mandeure (Epomanduodurum, a Gallo-Roman city whose name comes from the Celtic goddess of horses, Epona) is considered today as one of the largest known ancient theatre in Gaul.

8- Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A study of the play element in culture*, 1938.

9- Andreas Angelidakis, «Experiments – Demos» in *What Makes an Assembly? Stories, experiments, and inquiries*, edited by Anne Davidian and Laurent Jeanpierre, Evens Foundation & Sternberg Press, 2022.

10- Reference to Augusto Boal and his book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. First French edition 1997 by La Découverte.

11- “I use the term “space for agency” to discuss these physical spaces in which a group or an entity (e.g., the State) either tolerates or had granted a certain amount of freedom to another group (e.g., the public) – and in which activities empowering that group are practiced – as the materialized version of a “political space””. Charlotte Malterre-Barthes in conversation with Markus Miessen and Anne Davidian in “New Sites for Assembly” from *What Makes an Assembly?* Op. Cit. 2022

12- In her collective work, *Mapping the Terrain – New Genre Public Art* (Bay Press, 1995), Suzanne Lacy aims to compile critical texts, reflections, and research on the developments of a certain public art since the 1970s, which at the time did not have its own definition. “If new genre public artists are envisioning a new form of society—a shared project with others who are not artists, working in different manners and places—then the artwork must be seen with respect to that vision and assessed in part by its relationship to the collective social proposition to which it subscribes. That is, art becomes one’s statement of values as well as a reflection of a mode of seeing”.

13- « Edito » from *microsilons* in *Master TRANS – Pratiques artistiques socialement engagées, expériences en commun 2021-2022*. *Penser avec*, Bienne, Editions HEAD Genève, 2023. The English version is suggested by the translator of the press release.

This vision of the city was undoubtedly shared by the initiators **of the Adventure playground of the Résidences district in Belfort**, active between 1975 and 1985. This other form of putting the city in play, which proposes social and creative experiments, is presented in resonance with The Outsiders' exhibition.

« The Adventure playground is a space: delimited, freely accessible, open to all, transformable, enriched with various materials, where tools are offered, where one can make a fire, where one can make noise, do nothing, take risks<sup>14</sup> ». For a decade, young people from Belfort had access to an area of one hectare within the new Residences district, after fifteen years of construction (1958–1973) due to the post-war housing crisis. Actual city with 13,000 inhabitants, the district had to be structured in terms of popular education, entrusted to the Centre départemental d'action culturelle. Drawing on the experience of the adventure playgrounds then being developed in the Paris suburbs and in the Netherlands, the Belfort's one was set up on a patch of grass made hard and dry by construction machinery. But the creativity of the project leader, Jean-Jacques Mathieu, (whose photographic archives are presented in 19, Crac), together with the energy of his partners and the children, transformed the place into a convivial space for intense experimentation: «we chat, we knit, we tinker, we exchange, we weave, we cook, we barter»<sup>15</sup> . In the light of these slides and other documents joyfully collected by Jean-Jacques Mathieu, the city is once again revealed as a laboratory of experiments, made up of improvisations, composite communities, a web of social relations and affects that influence its uses. It reflects both the failures and the successes of our attempts to live together and constitutes a fertile and ideal playground for the exploration of collective creative dynamics.

So, all poetic hypotheses are permitted. «Why not transform useless streets into playgrounds?<sup>16</sup> », the art centre into an amphitheatre, the city into a sandbox?

Adeline Lépine

14- The ten commandments of the Adventure playground are quoted in the leaflet published on the occasion of a series of events organized by Oïkos Jacques-Brel neighbourhood house and the City of Belfort in January 2020.

15- Op. Cit.

16- Louis Kahn and Oscar Stonorov, Why City Planning is Your Responsibility, New York: Revere Copper and Brass, 1943.





Curator of the exhibitions: Adeline Lépine

**The Outsiders** is a Dutch collective founded by Txell Blanco and Asia Komarova. The project at 19, Crac also brings together Merel Zwarts and Leonardo Siqueira within the collective.

**The archives of the Résidences adventure playground** had been produced and collected by Jean-Jacques Mathieu, who ran the playground from 1975 to 1985.

*The exhibition La Ville en jeux is based on collaborations with the Municipal Archives of the City of Montbéliard, the Jardins Familiaux du Mont Bart of the City of Montbéliard, the Festival des Mômes, the Centre Social La Lizaine of Béthoncourt, the Coteau-Jouvent school in Montbéliard, the Casco Art Institute in Utrecht (the Netherlands), as well as the Damassine du Pays d'Agglomération de Montbéliard in Vandoncourt as part of the agglomeration project «les Couleurs de l'agglomération».*

*The exhibition of the archives of the Résidences adventure ground in Belfort was made possible by the generous loan of part of Jean-Jacques Mathieu's collection by Mrs Mathieu-Droz and the City of Belfort. Special thanks are due to Myriam Huré who produced the souvenir leaflet of the adventure playground presented in the exhibition.*



(2)

(2) The Outsiders, Travelling Farm Museum of Forgotten Skills, 2019-2023. Mobile museum in 2020.  
©The Outsiders.

(1 et 3) Adventure Playground of the Résidences in Belfort, 1975-1985. © Jean-Jacques Mathieu's archives

(3)





(4)



(5)

(4) The Outsiders, Models for Muziekplein, 2016-2020. ©The Outsiders

(5) The Outsiders, Travelling Farm Museum of Forgotten Skills - Meadow Birds' walk, 2022. ©Merel Zwarts

(6) Adventure Playground of the Résidences in Belfort, 1975-1985. © Jean-Jacques Mathieu's archives



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# Press Trip

During your visit, we invite you to discover the exhibitions presented in the different art centres of the region. A press trip can be organised between several exhibitions on request

## L'Espace Multimédia Gantner à Bourogne

[www.espacemultimediantner.cg90.net](http://www.espacemultimediantner.cg90.net)

## La Kunsthalle à Mulhouse

[www.kunsthallemlhouse.com](http://www.kunsthallemlhouse.com)

## Le Crac Alsace à Altkirch

<https://www.cracalsace.com/fr>

**Le 19, CRAC**  
Centre régional  
d'art contemporain de Montbéliard

19, avenue des Alliés  
25200 Montbéliard  
Tel : 03 81 94 43 58  
[www.le19crac.com](http://www.le19crac.com)

## CONTACT

Hana Jamaï, chargée  
de communication :  
[communication@le19crac.com](mailto:communication@le19crac.com)

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