



The Trinkhall Museum's Scientific And Cultural Project

Carl Havelange

Succeeding the MADmusée, the Trinkhall Museum opened its doors on June 18, 2020. It houses a globally unparalleled collection of works of art produced in a workshop context by artists with mental disabilities, cognitive impairment or severe psycho-social fragility. The Trinkhall collection, which continues to grow, boasts over three thousand pieces (paintings, drawings, engravings and sculptures) from all over the world and patiently collected for around forty years under the banner of Créahm, the MADmusée and, today, the Trinkhall Museum.

The heritage interest of the collection is exceptional. Firstly by the now fully recognized richness, diversity and quality of the works preserved there. And then, by the testimony it offers, in its unique place, to a removed poetry, margins or borders which, for more than a century, have very profoundly set artistic creation in motion. Finally, by all the links being established between art and society, which it makes visible and intelligible. The Trinkhall's scientific and cultural project, completely re-designed during the founding years prior to the opening of the new museum (2017-2020), is based on these three axes which, together, engage our policy of preservation, growth, dissemination, research and mediation.

In a nutshell, for us, it was first a matter of freeing the collection from set categories that limited its perception and, as we became aware, hindered its implementation. At the forefront of these categories, the notion of outsider art, favored by the former management of the MADmusée, confined the collection to a sort of artistic ghetto which no longer did it justice. On the contrary, it reduced it to agreed and supported aesthetic forms, from the point of view of their reception, sometimes by an artificial imagination of freedom and spontaneity; sometimes by the principles (essentialism and individualism) which secretly govern the theoretical construction of the notion of outsider art and its various avatars.



We had to take the lead: emancipate the collection from agreed categories and, thus, honor its extraordinary richness and diversity, subsequently renouncing any form of aesthetic assignment, which is more or less reductive and stigmatizing. The Trinkhall Museum is not a museum of art brut, unconventional art, outsider art or alternative art. It is a museum of contemporary art, in the very open sense of the word, which refers to the need to address today's important questions. The collection it houses is comprised of pieces of art created in workshops by vulnerable people, generally with mental disabilities. These are contextual characteristics, certainly decisive for the implementation of our project, but which, a priori, say nothing about the nature or aesthetics of the works that we preserve, celebrate, study, circulate. The works held in the Trinkhall collection are works of art in their own right, without any restriction of form, genre, fashion, style or, of course, quality. This is why we intend to give them strength and existence in the world of art and culture. As for the contextual data which, despite the suspension of categories, allows the restriction of the collection – the workshop, on the one hand; fragility, on the other – they also constitute the strong points of our scientific and cultural project. What underpins the pieces being created in a workshop – our in-depth knowledge of them, the very close links that we maintain with the workshops from where they emanate – allows us to study them in all the richness and complexity of the devices which made their creation possible. The workshop is, in our eyes, the privileged laboratory which allows us to explore, in all its procedural dimensions, what we call the artistic condition, in the same way as we speak of the human condition. Finally, the mental or cognitive fragility of the artists in the collection, as we will come to understand, is in no way synonymous with weakness or mediocrity but, on the contrary, with stren-



gth of expression, which never ceases to dazzle us and set us in motion. Thus, if we had to briefly summarize our museum project and collection, it would be in these terms: the defense and intelligence of the expressive power of fragile worlds which, now more than ever, we feel is extremely topical.

Reasoned arguments discarding set categories; the attention paid to creative processes, in particular, through the workshop; putting into perspective the notion of fragility, in all its complexity: these are the points of reference of the Trinkhall Museum's policy, which is summarized by the notion of "situated arts," in no way designating a new aesthetic category, but referring to a working method, the kind of attention that we afford the works housed in the Museum. This policy allows us to mobilize the collection in an entirely new way and, at the same time, place its perception and study within the general framework of an art history and museology both thought out and experienced as an anthropology. Somehow, we have stopped just looking at the collection through the eyes of the art world in order to look at the art world – and (why not?) the world in general – through the eyes of the collection. We are now working, not on, but with the collection. It is our "Amazonian village." It authorizes and obliges us – the place from where we leave and to where we constantly return – to "address today's important questions" from a perspective that is inseparably artistic, cultural, societal and, ultimately, in the most general sense of the term, political. The research we carry out, our conservation and growth policy, our exhibitions, our publications, our mediation and communication instruments, the events we organize, our study days, conferences and symposia, the partnerships we develop, all contribute to the achievement of this same scientific and cultural project.