

# MUDAM

Mudam Collection

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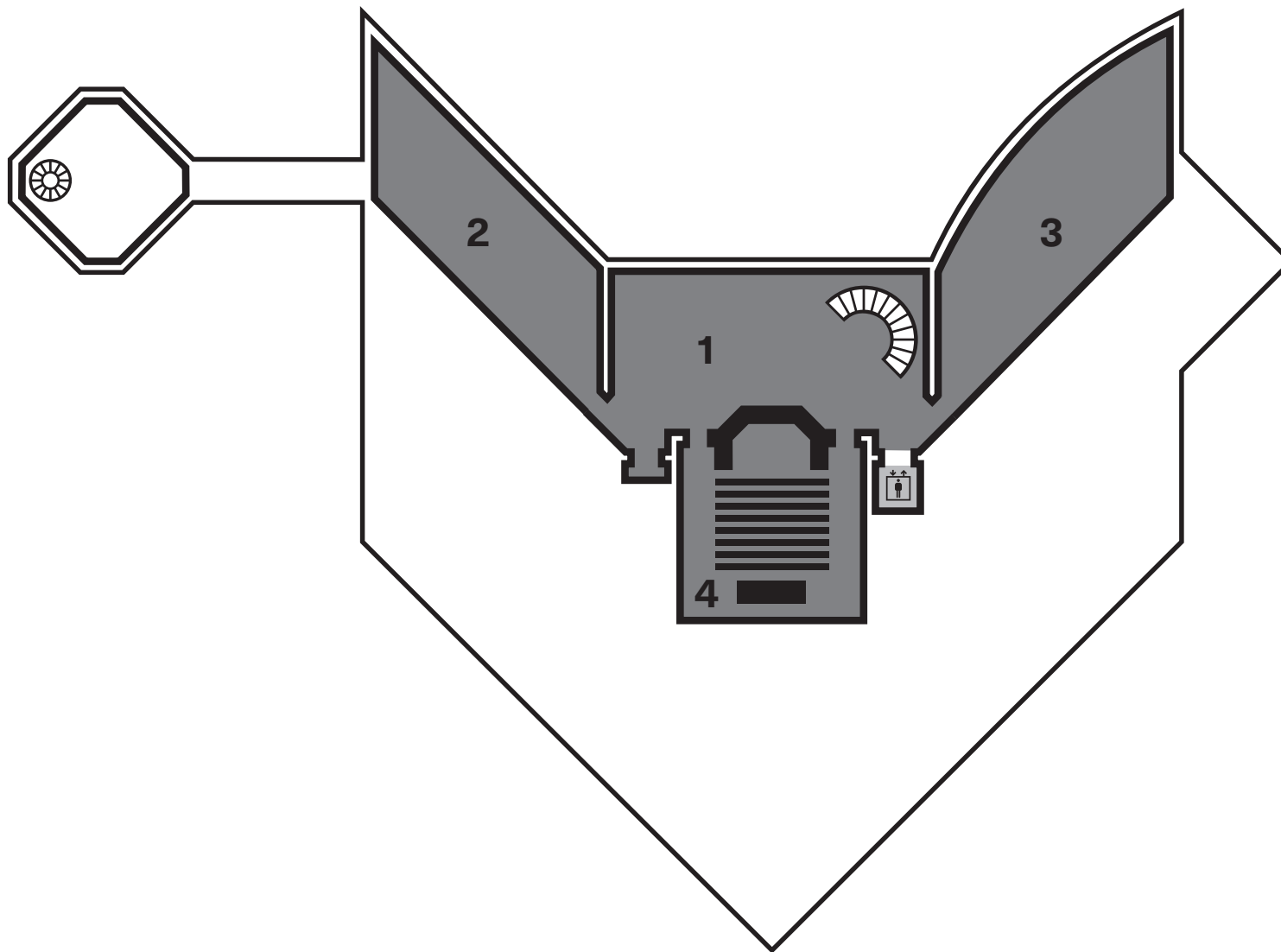


# Deep Deep Down

30.06.2023 — 18.02.2024

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30.06.2023 — 18.02.2024

## Curators

Shirana Shahbazi and Tirdad Zolghadr  
In collaboration with Manuel Krebs  
The exhibition is coordinated by Marie-Noëlle Farcy,  
assisted by Vanessa Lecomte

## Level -1

- 1. Foyer
- 2. East Gallery
- 3. West Gallery
- 4. Auditorium

## The exhibition

Collections are only exhibited to a small extent. Much of the art rarely sees the light of day, if ever. Such catacombs are no catastrophe. For better or for worse, they are the norm. Such is the nature of collections: moments of display are dazzling states of rare exception.

One can maximise such states of exception, unearth selected items, bring them to light, curate them as generously as possible. After all, what's commendable about the Mudam Collection is its sheer heterogeneity; as guest curators we had much to choose from.

But what if we rendered more obvious a collection's natural state of being instead? Not to mourn its life in the shadows but to make it tangible, visible, understandable. And sensational. In every sense of the term. What if we worked with the given state of affairs as honestly as possible, offered an homage to the collection as is?

To do so, one would need to prioritise the collection as a vast and silent landscape, over and above the quality of selected work. One would use quantitative criteria instead of thematic or formal ones. One would also embrace the tools at one's disposal – crates, Excel files, JPEGs, backstage devices – as clearly visible parts of the curatorial process.

To be clear: the aim here is not critique. What is more urgent is the attempt to turn the collection into something you can grasp intellectually and physically. To turn this weird, terrific, spectacular, luxurious, intimidating upshot of European Modernity that we call a public collection into something more than an inventory or a press release.

In short, we decided to exhibit as much of the collection as possible.

To be clear, this doesn't mean we had free reign. Resources are obviously limited. And simply cramming the rooms with art is a more biased affair than finding clear parameters, step by step. Which is why we proposed the criteria below:

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1. In the galleries, we retained only one work per artist, the one that appears first in the indexical listing. We then excluded works with specific instructions or unclear documentation.

2. From the remaining items, we began with the smallest, thereby producing a 'Brazil nut effect': smaller elements separate from larger ones to create a new visual arrangement almost of their own accord.

3. The remaining two-dimensional items are displayed in the East Gallery sorted by size. More are displayed in alphabetical order (by artist surname) in the West Gallery. Sculptural work is also displayed in the West Gallery while audiovisual work is projected in the Auditorium (see screening programme for details).

4. As many of the remaining items as possible are exhibited within crates. These are entrusted with an aesthetic function beyond a strictly protective one. In some cases, the crates tell stories of travel, and wear and tear. With their help we created a scenography that serves as a stage for discussion, programming and more.



## Asset Data Intensity: Curating Without Meaning

Suhail Malik

Curating is endemic in affluent consumerism since the mid-2010s. Extending well beyond the conventions of exhibition-making in museums and art institutions, every facet of consumption has become a curatorial target: menus, playlists, wedding paraphernalia, film schedules, cheese, real estate, shoes, tourist itineraries, flower arrangements, social media threads, coffee, talks, perfumes, databanks, food in a shop or on a plate, and, of course, 'experiences'.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps protective of the specific demands of exhibition making, curators in museums and of contemporary art (CA) meet curating's wide-ranging extension with a range of responses, from indifference to exasperation via eye-rolling and anxiety. Yet, curating has been reset by this proliferation, mutating from its received (pre)modern institutional task of preservation of material and semantic scarcity to a 'curating-at-large' tasked with the management of abundance.

Moreover, it is CA curating that provides the paradigm for curatorial ubiquity in affluent consumerism. According to Arthur C. Danto, CA from the 1960s onwards is distinct from Western art history up to that point, since art in CA is identified not by a repertoire of artworks, media, stylisations or manners but instead by a 'transfiguration' in how 'commonplace' objects and experiences are beheld and appreciated.<sup>2</sup> 'Commonplace' is Danto's designation for what is not beheld as art, such as the worlds of use and transaction. It is the interpreting subject that distinguishes CA from the commonplace. The 'distance' from the commonplace and its received meanings taken by that subject consolidates its capacities for meaning-making. In this, CA's

'transfiguration of the commonplace' amplifies the subject of distinction identified by Pierre Bourdieu in the mid-1960s<sup>3</sup>; yet, distinct from the class-based preservation of inherited privileges and powers Bourdieu identifies via hierarchies of taste, the subject validated by CA can in principle be anyone who makes symbolic or affective meanings. Which is anyone at all: it is a democratisation by *generalised distinction*.

By the early twenty-first century, however, this distance from the commonplace is not restricted to CA's specific adventure but is a key feature *within* affluent consumerism. Curating-at-large intensifies attention, experience and meaning of particular items (including artworks) over others and, simultaneously, validates the consuming subject through this individuation, enriching and renewing itself according to its specifically personalised – curated – engagement with objects, experiences and symbolic composition in general: the 'assets' of enrichment, as identified by Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre, taking the term 'asset' well beyond its financial reference.<sup>4</sup> Design, style, aesthetics and care are also enriching in this way.

What was once specific to art, and which alone constituted CA in particular, is no longer a characteristic of art *alone* – but only because the commonplace now has the same attributes for which art was once the more or less unique venue. Said otherwise, what *used to be* called art, and what used to be gained from CA, is now available in experiences distinct from institutionally demarcated art, and even without the need for the designation 'art'. Experiences that are each time personal, nonstandardised, irreplaceable, differentiating and authentic. Unique. Uncommon. Everywhere.

Said otherwise, the kind of curating once characteristic of CA, successor

to the historical institutional tenets of museological and archival curation, in turn succeeds CA. Alongside this expansive mutation of curating to enrich affluent subjective experience by generalised distinction, curating has also propagated 'at-large' with the increasing importance of digital platforms in networked societies: in the lexicon of information management, the selection and presentation of very large quantities of data into useable information requires data's 'curation'. Referring to the traditional work of an institutional curator, who 'selects and collects the objects, interprets the pieces, writes the labels, as well as various other responsibilities associated with the management and interpretation of the collection', Jenna Jacobson adapts this received museological model to define the 'information curator'.<sup>5</sup>

However, as Jacobsen also remarks, information curation involves 'something more [than] ... a mere reproduction or transfer of the information'; specifically, user activity continually modifies the data set, its relational structure, and also engagement with the database. It thereby modifies the identity formation of its users: demarcating between these users' 'self-information' and 'other-information' such as personal photographs or commentary introduced by other users as part of their own curatorial identities – for example, sharing a post on your social media feed – Jacobson remarks that 'the divide between self- and other-information is extraneous' for authored selection on user-generated information platforms. This authorship is information curating, a filtering and recombination of abundant information. Such recombination is however not only that of an individual subject selecting what they post and repost on their own feed, but also that of the information network in which that subject curates their identity. The network also updates and recombines data according to the meaningless

operation of automated algorithms. In this, the self-ratification of the information curator on social media platforms is also the ratification of the information nexus.

Information curating makes apparent two characteristics that also apply to the generalised distinction of affluent consumption:

– First, that curating advances its own logic of recombination alongside that which it thereby assembles. Its added signal is but the specific relational term for the particular set of curated elements and the format of their authored selection.

– Second, the curated item has an added significance and effect distinct from that of the cultural, biographical or other provenance in which they are embedded *and* it retains reference outside of the terms and relations proposed by curatorial authorship.

Distinct from extraction or commodification, which anonymise an item's intrinsic significance and thereby supplant its initial meaning and purpose, a curatorial reframing endorses that these items retain their received or previously attributed significances.

Curating-at-large is an added signal to the curated asset.

Exemplified most obviously by the online influencer, these are the basic characteristics of a curating-at-large extended by generalised distinction and information curating combined.

Configured by the operation of information platforms and distinction in the commonplace, curatorial agency is not then primarily that of individual experts trained in maintaining archives, as specialists in care or the epistemological guardians stabilising the institution as

a standard of knowledge. And not even for the 'traditional curation' assumed in these discussions: if, for example, the CA curator is at all attentive to this art's constitutive globality, their knowledge and practice is reliant on online platforms and search engines as a primary tool for curatorial research. CA curating is practically dependent on automated information curating. For the museum curator, the access to scarce objects as well as acquiring knowledge of them so as to select and present a stock of cultural significance requires the networks by which traditional curation and its institutional venues reproduce their authority.

As for curating-at-large more generally, curatorial agency in these cases is *augmented* – though, as the example of the trained experts in establishing materials and knowledge shows, 'augmentation' here cannot, however, be identified with what the term usually signals, which is the application of the latest technologies to conventional systems. The historically paradigmatic figure of the curator is itself augmented: in its reliance on institutions of maintenance, record-keeping and authority, the traditionalist curator an institutional, categorial and technical composition dedicated to an archive's material and semantic preservation and perpetuation. Augmented.

Certainly, such a past-prevailing curating reinstates not only the content and significance of the objects and knowledge that comprise archives and established collections; it also reinstates the conventional paradigm of a curation devoted primarily to the conservatorship of those archives. But, understood on the basis of the augmentation made explicit in various ways by curating-at-large, that conventional sense of curating is not required but only one mode of selection – one kind of added signal – among others.

For example, and by contrast, a progressive or utopian modernism that stipulates action in the present be directed towards a (better) future distinct from it, takes the 'added signal' of a curatorial intervention to be just more data, more content, mobilised from the historical archive (the past) and currently assemblages (the present) equivocally, reproducing both in an endless yet terminal recombination. This recombination weakens historical or customary disparities: not only is the present but a recombination of the past; the past is equally a variant of the present, as will be the future. The reiteration of historical and current data and assets 'cancels' a future distinct from the past and the present in favour of the present recombinations of an interminable contemporaneity.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, augmentation gives curating-at-large further options: for, even if it reiterates present and past configurations, curating's added signal also demonstrates the only provisional status of the assemblage that curating recomposes. Curating-at-large demonstrated that assemblages are made and remade by the selective recompositions of their components and relations. 'Provisional' here signals the intrinsic mutability of these assemblages, and that their recombination is contingent: an assemblage can always be curated otherwise, and every curatorial selection is specific and partial. From the stance of any particular extant assemblage, the next iterations at any given moment are unknown and unknowable. Unpredictable. Which is to say that curating's added signal cannot be deduced or inferred prior to its instantiation.

Assuming this contingency, as propagator of only provisional and unpredictable assemblages, curating-at-large does not only abet the rehearsal of extant knowledge, information or distinction effected by curating in its traditional or

contemporary mode. More emphatically, it countermands the restorative or protective care that is curation's traditionalism. Curating instead instigates a *speculative* recombination. 'Speculative' in the now-prevalent sense the term has in commerce and risk assessment: that calculations and actions in the present are initiated on the basis of implacably incomplete knowledge and propagate that unpredictability. No image of the future based on the past (for example: custom) or present convictions (for example: equality, liberty, community) is sufficient to curating-at-large in its speculative aspect.

From the historical present, that exposure of the present to the unpredictable future can be apprehended as the retroaction of the unknown future on the present: a risk-exposure to the future. This exposure countermands not only the traditionalist (past-prevailing) and contemporary (present-prevailing) senses of curating-at-large but also the subjectivity that accompanies them; subjects who are, respectively, the subject of authorised meaning and the subject of affluent consumption. The subject of speculative curating is instead one of a future unbound from meaning.

<sup>1</sup> For reflections on the ubiquity of curating see: David Balzer, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else*, Oxford: Polity, 2015; Lou Stoppard, 'Everyone's a Curator Now', *The New York Times*, 3 March 2020.

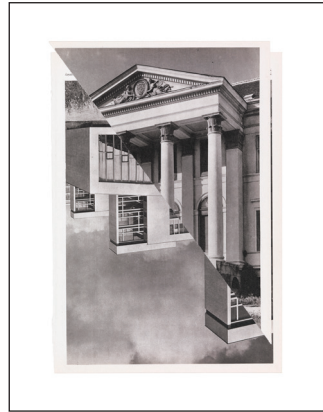
<sup>2</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre, *Enrichment: A Critique of Commodities*, Oxford: Polity, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Jenna Jacobson, 'Information curation', *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 49:1, 2012, pp.1–2.

<sup>6</sup> A claim reiterated by many including: François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experience of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015; Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *After The Future*, Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2011; Mark Fisher, *The Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, Alresford: Zero Books, 2014; Fredric Jameson, 'The Aesthetics of Singularity', *New Left Review* 92, March–April 2015.



## The curators

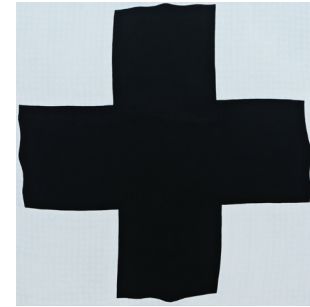
**Shirana Shahbazi** first studied photography at the Fachhochschule, Dortmund before joining the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst in Zürich. Her work has been the subject of monographic exhibitions in numerous institutions, notably Kunsthau Hamburg (2018); Istituto Svizzero, Milan (2018); Museum Fotogalleriet, Oslo (2017); KINDL, Berlin (2017), and Kunsthalle Bern (2014). In 2005, she participated in the 51st Venice Biennale. Her work is part of the collections of Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Guggenheim Museum, New York; MoMA, New York, and Migros Museum, Zürich, among others. In 2019, Shahbazi was awarded the Meret Oppenheim Prize.

**Tirdad Zolghadr** is a curator and writer. He teaches at the Graduate School, Universität der Künste Berlin. His writing includes fiction as well as publications based on extensive curatorial research, such as *REALTY: Beyond the Traditional Blueprints of Art & Gentrification* (Hatje Cantz, 2022). Recent curatorial work includes an associate curatorship at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2017–20), but also biennals, as well as long-term collective initiatives.

Etel Adnan, Helena Almeida, Ernesto Ballesteros, Valérie Belin, Cecilia Bengolea, Orit Ben-Shitrit, Laurianne Bixhain, Katinka Bock, Robert Breer, Hussein Chalayan, Nicolas Chardon, Chto Delat/What is to be done?, Mark Dean, Wim Delvoye, Helmut Dorner, Roland Fischer, Charles Fréger, Katrin Freisager, Bernard Frize, GCC, Franz Gertsch, Beatrice Gibson, Geert Goiris, Philipp Goldbach, Nan Goldin, Marie-Ange Guilleminot, Andreas Gursky, Edi Hila, Germaine Hoffmann, Dom Sylvester Houédard, Pieter Hugo, Fabrice Hyber, Sanja Iveković, Sven Johné, Suki Seokyeong Kang, Annette Kelm, Jutta Koether, Eva Kot'átková, Gonzalo Lebrija, Mark Lewis, Richard Long, Rosa Loy, Markus Lüpertz, Filip Markiewicz, Isabelle Marmann, Valérie Mréjen, Ciprian Mureşan, John Murphy, Godwin Champs Namuyimba, Yves Netzhammer, Lucia Nimcová, Manuel Ocampo, Damir Očko, Albert Oehlen, Taiyo Onorato & Nico Krebs, Yazid Oulab, Trevor Paglen, Shana and Robert ParkeHarrison, Martin Parr, Philippe Parreno, João Penalva, Frédéric Prat, Antoine Prum, Fiona Rae, Pasha Rafiy, Neo Rauch, Man Ray, François Roche / R&Sie(n), Thomas Ruff, Bojan Šarčević, Camille Sauthier, Denis Savary, Lasse Schmidt Hansen, Jean-Louis Schuller, Wael Shawky, Cindy Sherman, Monika Sosnowska, Edward Steichen, John Stezaker, Kathia St. Hilaire, Thomas Struth, Joël Tettamanti, Wolfgang Tillmans, Laure Tixier, Patrick Tosani, Janaina Tschäpe, Su-Mei Tse, Kyoichi Tsuzuki, Cy Twombly, Didier Vermeiren, Judith Walgenbach, John Wood and Paul Harrison, Raphaël Zarka, Rémy Zaugg, David Zink Yi

## The artists





## Programme

30.06.2023 | 11h00 – 13h00

### **Deeper Down**

Conversation with Shirana Shahbazi,  
Tirdad Zolghadr, Manuel Krebs,  
Suhail Malik, Bassam El Baroni

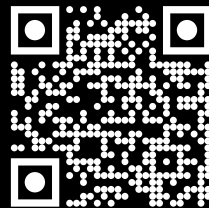
30.06.2023 | 14h00 – 15h30

### **The Effect of the *Paranuss-Effekt* – Man Ray**

With Emmanuelle de L'Ecotais and  
Tirdad Zolghadr

Pascal Aubert, Sarah Beaumont,  
Sandra Biwer, Geoffroy Braibant,  
David Celli, Michelle Cotton, Diane  
Durinck, Zuzana Fabianova, Clarisse  
Fahrtmann, Marie-Noëlle Farcy, Sylvie  
Fasbinder, Laurence Le Gal, Christophe  
Gallois, Marion Garczynski, Martine Glod,  
Richard Goedert, Thierry Gratien, Christine  
Henry, Juliette Hesse, Camille d'Huart,  
Julie Jephos, Germain Kerschen, Clara  
Kremer, Deborah Lambolez, Vanessa  
Lecomte, Carine Lilliu, Filipa Lima, Ioanna  
Madenoglu, Frédéric Maraud, Tawfik  
Matine El Din, Tess Mazuet, António  
Mendes, Max Mertens, Laura Mescolini,  
Mélanie Meyer, Clément Minighetti,  
Barbara Neiseler, Carlotta Pierleoni,  
Markus Pilgram, Tomé Pinto, Inès  
Planchenault, Clémentine Proby, Boris  
Reiland, Susana Rodrigues, Alexandre  
Sequeira, Elodie Simonian, Lourindo  
Soares, Bettina Steinbrügge, Cathy Thill,  
Aurélien Thomas, Joel Valabrega, Sam  
Wirtz and Ana Wiscour.

**Mudam Team**



Full programme on  
[mudam.com](https://mudam.com)

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**#openmuseum #deepdeepdown**  
**#mudamcollection**

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Pages 5–6, from left to right:  
Trevor Paglen, *PARCAE Constellation in Draco*  
(*Naval Ocean Surveillance System; USA 160*), 2008  
Collection Mudam Luxembourg | Acquisition 2011  
© Trevor Paglen

Thomas Ruff, *Maison N°10 I*, 1988  
Collection Mudam Luxembourg | Acquisition 1996 – Apport FOCUNA  
© Photo : Galerie Chantal Crousel

Wolfgang Tillmans, *Rachel Auburn and son*, 1995  
Collection Mudam Luxembourg | Acquisition 2000  
Courtesy Galerie Buchholz

Pages 11–12, from left to right:  
Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #120*, 1983  
Collection Mudam Luxembourg | Acquisition 1996 – Apport FOCUNA  
© Photo : Christof Weber

Edward Steichen, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 1929/1990  
Collection Mudam Luxembourg | Donation American Friends of  
Mudam, Collection Raymond J. Learsy  
© Photo : Rémi Villaggi / Mudam Luxembourg

John Stezaker, *The Bridge (from the Castles Series) XL*, 2008  
Collection Mudam Luxembourg | Acquisition 2011  
© Photo : Alex Delfanne, London

Pages 15–16, from left to right:  
Neo Rauch, *Stoff*, 1998  
Collection Mudam Luxembourg | Donation 2022 – Donation American  
Friends of Mudam, Collection Raymond J. Learsy  
© Photo : Rémi Villaggi / Mudam Luxembourg

Frédéric Prat, *Vert*, 2007  
Collection Mudam Luxembourg | Acquisition 2007  
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Nicolas Chardon, *Croix noire*, 2007  
Collection Mudam Luxembourg | Acquisition 2008  
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## Acknowledgements

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PwC, Atoz, AXA Group, Société Générale,  
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and American Friends of Mudam.

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