

**Musée de Grenoble**  
**Université Grenoble Alpes - Université Saint-Etienne**

**Dada and surrealist collectionism of « non-Western arts »**  
**Legacy and new perspectives**

24-25-26 October, 2024

The Grenoble Museum can boast of being the first museum in France to have accepted, in the 1920s, a donation of two objects from Africa (a Toma mask in 1923 and a Dan mask in 1929). This was made possible through the efforts of its director, Pierre-André Farcy, also known as Andry-Farcy (1882-1950), and his friendship with the young collector and art dealer Paul Guillaume (1891-1934). Farcy exhibited these two objects alongside works by Louis Marcoussis, Jean Lurçat, and Marie Vassilieff from the early 1930s. Thus, the influence of Paul Guillaume and the avant-garde artists he supported asserted itself for the first time in a French museum, validating a vision that the surrealists were actively practicing in their private apartments at the same time. Nearly a century after this symbolic and pioneering gesture, the University of Grenoble-Alpes and the University of Saint-Étienne organize a major international symposium within the walls of the Grenoble Museum to explore collecting in light of contemporary challenges.

As 2024 marks the centenary of the publication of the Surrealist Manifesto, this symposium is part of various events planned to celebrate the movement's history and assess its legacy. The surrealists, passionate and knowledgeable collectors, were fascinated, much like other early 20th-century avant-garde movements, by "non-Western" arts that occupied a central place in the movement's imagination and in the collections of its members. The integration of Dada into this study is essential, as Surrealism inherited the conceptual shift initiated by Dada, incorporating it in a distinctive manner. Dada, from its inception, showed interest in "non-Western" arts. From the 1917 exhibition "Dada. Cubistes. Art nègre" at the Corray Gallery in Zurich, Dada went beyond a purely formal interest, presenting not only a plastic counterpoint to its formal experiments but also positioning itself as the "negation of the usual European 'meaning' of life." In plastic creations, performative practices, and sound poetry, the otherness perceived by Dada artists in artistic forms from Africa, Oceania, and North America stimulated the destruction of conventional Western models, pushing expressive limits, whether physical or spiritual. Surrealism developed on a similar critical ground, using these objects of otherness as weapons to critique and counter European rationalism. Surrealists systematically referenced these artifacts, utilizing them in collective manifestations.

While the most prominent features of this Dadaist-Surrealist primitivism are well-known today, it is crucial, a century after the birth of Surrealism, to reconsider it based on the objects themselves. This involves studying their circulation and the collecting practices they inspired and nourished. Furthermore, it is essential to reflect on how this collecting within the Dada-Surrealist milieu may have influenced taste, the art market, and, ultimately, museums' collections. The interest of these movements in African, Oceanian, and Native American objects is intrinsically linked to the significant enrichment of Western ethnographic collections during the consolidation of colonial empires. Just as this development profoundly shaped the Dadaist and Surrealist imagination, these poets and artists became market agents, taste influencers, and their gradual integration into the history of art and literature turned their collections into prized pieces for museums or collectors.

These artists emerge as actors in the process that allowed the desires of Guillaume Apollinaire and Félix Fénéon to materialize. Beyond the ethnographic museum, "non-Western" art, these "arts lointains" entered the Louvre and found a dedicated space at the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac.

At a time when ethnographic museums are undergoing a profound and necessary transformation regarding issues of spoliation, restitution, and the study of provenance, this symposium aims to highlight this pendulum movement. Considering decolonial and postcolonial perspectives, it seeks to emphasize with increased precision the contradictions of Dadaist and Surrealist primitivism. These movements advocated these cultures, called for the end of the colonial enterprise, yet simultaneously thrived in that very context. In this environment, these objects, admired, commented on, purchased, and exchanged, encapsulate many contradictions of this avant-garde discourse.

By bringing together international specialists in Dada and Surrealism, as well as specialists in Oceanian, African, and art from the Americas, museum curators, scholars, and anthropologists, these two days aspire to contextualize this particular "primitivism" within the colonial and commercial framework where it emerged, to better determine its origin but also, in a more original way, its impact on the environment that fostered it.

During the two days, case studies or original research covering the period from the late 1910s to the late 1960s will be presented, addressing European and North American collections. The thematic axes or issues to prioritize include :

- Unpublished studies on particularly significant, qualitative, quantitative, and historical Dada and Surrealist collections to determine their history, specificities, differences, and potential museum destinies. In addition to those of André Breton, Paul Eluard, or Tristan Tzara, studies may also address collections of Paul Chadourne, Victor Brauner, or Roberto Matta. These monographic studies can be complemented by the study of the role of certain mediators, such as Jacques Viot

- What role did Dadaists and Surrealists play in the art market? How did market evolution impact their collections (scarcity or abundance of certain pieces)? How did they transition from mere enthusiastic buyers to shapers of a new market, thus becoming taste influencers? What kind of strategists were they in buying and reselling pieces, speculating on capital gains? This dual role can be addressed regarding objects from North and South America, Mesoamerica, Oceania, and Africa.
- Similarly, how were ethnographic museums (such as the Museum of Ethnography of the Trocadéro) influential in shaping Dada and Surrealist tastes in non-European art? Did these museums provide knowledge or, conversely, act as deterrents in their understanding of objects? This study should be conducted in parallel with the better-known examination of the influence of private collections, especially those of Guillaume Apollinaire or André Level, on future Surrealist collections.
- It is essential to situate this collecting within the colonial context on which it directly depended and benefitted. What colonial networks facilitated the arrival of these objects to artists? Can some contradictions be enlightened if we consider the surrealists' anti-colonial stance?
- What ethnographic knowledge did these artists and poets have access to, and how did it influence their collecting and their relationship to non-European art? How were they influenced by the ethnographic literature of their time (Marcel Mauss, Franz Boas, later Claude Lévi-Strauss) as well as more artistically oriented works (Carl Einstein, Paul Guillaume and Guillaume Apollinaire albums, books by Henri Clouzot and André Level, or Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro's "Primitive Negro Sculpture")? What does André Breton's partition between Africa and Oceania in the early 1930s reveal, considering these sources?
- The antagonism between the museum and private collection raises questions about the presentation and display of these pieces within the private collections of Dadaists and Surrealists, their integration into a broader discourse on human expression, or even a genuine episteme. What does the Dada and Surrealist gaze do to these objects once integrated into the intimate space of the collector?
- What was and still is the impact of these collections on museum collections? Can we, like Gérard Toffin, assert that the surrealist view of objects originated the more artistic than ethnographic approach of the Musée du quai Branly? If Apollinaire called for a division between ethnographic and art museums ("On Museums"), should we conclude that the surrealist impact on the museum is solely a matter of a poetically aesthetic approach? The study of museum acquisitions (pieces from the former collections of Breton, Lebel, Tzara) suggests that surrealist heritage primarily lies in the symbolic inflation their names bring to the pieces. By adopting an inverse perspective, did the museumization of these collections result in a genuine enhancement of these ensembles or rather a denaturalization of the original collections, where non-Western objects engaged in dialogue with other objects and art forms?
- As the search for the provenance of these objects is at the heart of the current missions of museums and the international scientific and political debate, what is the posture of museums regarding objects from historical and prestigious collections like those of Dadaists and Surrealists? What are the methodologies and approaches to trace the

provenance of these objects before their arrival in these collections? In this sense, is it possible to trace the acquisition networks of these collectors?

Presentations will be limited to 30 minutes per participant.

### **Organizing committee :**

**Alice Ensabella**, Université Grenoble-Alpes

**Fabrice Flahutez**, Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne, Institut universitaire de France (IUF)

**Anne Foucault**, Centre Pompidou - Musée national d'art moderne

### **Scientific committee :**

**Sophie Bernard**, Musée de Grenoble

**Maia Nuku**, Metropolitan Museum, New York

**Marie Mauzé**, CNRS, Collège de France

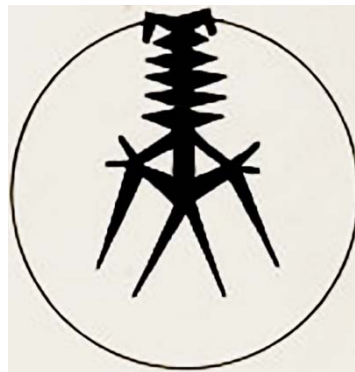
**Magali Mélandri**, Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac

**Philippe Peltier**, Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac

**Joëlle Vaissière**, Musée de Grenoble

**Aurélie Verdier**, Centre Pompidou - Musée national d'art moderne

**Laurick Zerbini**, Université Lumière Lyon II



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**Auditorium, Musée de Grenoble**

5 Place de Lavalette, 38000 Grenoble

Please send an abstract of 500 words + a short bio-bibliography to:

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Before May 1, 2024

Selected participants will be notified by early July 2024.