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La Cité des arts, starring Nicolas Faubert

Mona Varichon

Curated by Cassandra Cassandra

18 DECEMBER, 2022 TO 05 FEBRUARY, 2023

The Cité Internationale des Arts is an artists' residency program founded in 1965 in the center of Paris. Its grounds were once a densely tangled working class neighborhood, declared insalubrious in 1921 following several cholera epidemics. Now, at any given time, three-hundred artists from around the world populate its studios and courtyards.

This is where Mona Varichon, a 2020-2021 resident, met dancer and artist Nicolas Faubert. They exchanged greetings in the corridors, and Nicolas invited her to a late hip-hop training session in one of the Cité's dance studios. She went with her partner, the artist and CUNY Law student Jacob Eisenmann, and they freestyle danced in a cypher surrounded by Nicolas and members of his hip-hop family. From then on, the three of them met daily in their studios to discuss their experiences with art, dance and the outside world, and tried to teach each other what they knew.

The bustling life inside the Cité contrasted with the stillness of the exterior world: due to the pandemic, borders were shut, Parisians were confined after 6pm, and all art and performance spaces were closed. Meanwhile, Nicolas was busy organizing dance workshops, plotting collaborations with numerous residents, and inviting dozens of dancers from the hip-hop community to use the Cité's facilities to gather and train.

Mona filmed daily to capture this period in their lives and in the history of the Cité — this footage became *La Cité des arts*. Currently at five episodes, the series follows them and their friends through the allegorical schema of The School. Referred to as The Teacher, Nicolas explores alternative, intuitive and horizontal ways of learning. His students are encouraged to let go of shame around their bodies moving in space, to trust their senses, and to be highly in tune with music. Humorous, existential and political interludes of dialogue offer context to the tense social climate within which the videos were produced.

La Cité des arts opens with an establishing shot of the Notre-Dame cathedral from the window of Mona's studio, followed by glimpses of a protest against increased police power. The clichés of France are alluded to, but resisted. Instead, a real picture of France is transmitted by giving voice to a succession of characters and events. Borrowing codes and conventions from broadcast television and documentary, the series transforms the lives of its cast into a cinéma-vérité reality show. Mona allows her subject-collaborators to speak and move freely, and even turn the camera on each other. She does not privilege the camera: the action that unfolds is what is important.

For her exhibition, Mona has transformed april april's apartment gallery into a small movie theater, and has invited three artists with strong ties to NYC to show some of their films alongside hers. The guest screening schedule will be announced soon.



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Screenings schedule

Sunday December 18th, 2022 at 2pm, 4pm, and 6pm
Wednesday December 21st, 2022 at 7:30pm
Sunday January 8th, 2023 at 3pm and 4pm
Thursday January 12th, 2023 at 7:30pm
Sunday January 22nd, 2023 at 3pm + guest screening at 4pm
Sunday January 29th, 2023 at 3pm + guest screening at 4pm
Sunday February 5th, 2023 at 3pm + guest screening at 4pm

La Cité des arts, Épisode 1, Roll call, 2021, 04:22 min
La Cité des arts, Épisode 2, Classes, 2021, 09:54 min
La Cité des arts, Épisode 3, The teachers' lounge, 2021, 09:41 min
La Cité des arts, Épisode 4, The corridors, 2021, 07:42 min
La Cité des arts, Épisode 5, Recess, 2021, 13:58 min

Total screening time: 45 min

Episodes 1-4 were made at the invitation of MycoTV with the support of the ICA London in March 2021, and episode 5 was made at the invitation of Alienze with the support of the festival Les Urbaines (Lausanne, Switzerland) in December 2021.

This exhibition was produced with the support of Villa Albertine in partnership with the French Embassy.

Poster design by Molly Dauphin.



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Mona Varichon (b. 1989, Paris, France) is an artist and translator based in Paris. She recently presented performances at the Centre Pompidou (Paris, France) and the Capc musée d'art contemporain (Bordeaux, France), both times in collaboration with Nicolas Faubert. Together, they have led video and dance workshops for youths and adults in various French and European institutions. Mona's films and photographs have been shown at The Vanity Gallery, the Redcat Theatre and the Echo Park Film Center (Los Angeles, CA), The Egyptian Theater (Hollywood, CA), Alienze (Vienna, Austria), the Sifang Art Museum Satellite (Shanghai, China), the National Gallery (Prague, Czech Republic) and on The Renaissance Society's Renaissance TV (Chicago, IL). In January 2023, the artist Laura Owens invited her to be a resident at the Studio of the South in Arles, France. She is currently translating the memoirs of American artists George and Mike Kuchar into French, to be published with her imprint Varichon & Cie.

Nicolas Faubert (b. 1991, Libreville, Gabon) is a performer, artist and educator trained in classical dance, hip-hop, New Jack Swing, New School, popping, house, locking and breakdance. Faubert has recently performed at the Centre Pompidou, the Théâtre du Châtelet and Balice Hertling (Paris, France), the French Pavilion and the Diaspora Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (Venice, Italy) and the Musée Olympique (Lausanne, Switzerland). Aside from collaborating on projects with artists such as Laure Prouvost, Gabriel Moraes Aquino and Agata Ingarden, he is a community organizer for the non-profit Heart Street in Normandy, and leads freedom through movement workshops at the National Institute for the Blind in Paris.

Cassandra Cassandra was founded in 2019 as a not-for-profit gallery in Toronto with a focus on creating dialogue between Canadian and international artists. After organizing exhibitions and publishing an artists' book, it is now operating as a roaming curatorial platform and is based in Saint-Ouen-sur-Seine, France.

