



2016

IL CAPITALE CULTURALE

*Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage*

**JOURNAL OF THE SECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism  
University of Macerata

## Il Capitale culturale

*Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage*

Vol. 14, 2016

ISSN 2039-2362 (online)

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Registrazione al Roc n. 735551 del 14/12/2010

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eum edizioni università di macerata, Centro  
direzionale, via Carducci 63/a - 62100  
Macerata  
tel (39) 733 258 6081  
fax (39) 733 258 6086  
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# Musei e mostre tra le due guerre

a cura di Silvia Cecchini e Patrizia Dragoni

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Saggi

# The debate over the creation of a Museum of Modern Art in Paris between the wars and the shaping of an evolutionary narrative for French art

Chara Kolokytha\*

## *Abstract*

The paper comments on the state policies towards modern art throughout the interwar period identifying the private initiatives that sought to precipitate the creation of a museum of contemporary art in Paris. It seeks to discuss the debate over the necessity for the creation of a Museum of Modern Art that was initiated in the Parisian press shortly after the controversial “Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes”, in 1925, and was perpetuated with the re-organisation of the collections of the Louvre, the

\* Chara Kolokytha, Researcher at Northumbria University, Squires Building, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE1 8ST, United Kingdom, e-mail: [charalampia.kolokytha@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:charalampia.kolokytha@northumbria.ac.uk).

This research was supported by Northumbria University. I express my warm thanks to Malcolm Gee and Ysanne Holt for their support and guidance. Special thanks go to Francesco Artuso for his keen contribution to the article and Felipe Ribeiro for re-reading the text. Furthermore I would like to acknowledge with much appreciation the help offered by Christian Derouet and Didier Schulmann. I finally wish to thank the anonymous referees for their valuable remarks and further thoughts to the content of the article.

Luxembourg museum, and the Jeu de Paume in the late 1920s. The official announcement, in 1934, of the creation of a museum of modern art in Paris, in 1937, initiated a new debate that concerned its collections. A series of exhibitions organised on the occasion of the “Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques”, in 1937, served as a model for the shaping of an evolutionary narrative for French art in which modern art that emerged from 1905 to 1925 appeared as the culmination of the French art tradition. However, the influence of foreign artists over French modern art was largely contested, while the discussion initiated by the champions of an international school added a nonconformist nuance to a nationally-oriented dialogue.

L'articolo affronta le politiche statali nei confronti dell'arte moderna nel periodo compreso tra le due guerre, individuando anche le iniziative private che hanno cercato di spingere verso la creazione di un museo di arte contemporanea a Parigi. Esso cerca di ricostruire il dibattito avviato sulla stampa parigina poco dopo la controversa “Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes” del 1925, proseguito con la riorganizzazione delle collezioni del Louvre, del museo del Luxembourg e del Jeu de Paume alla fine degli anni Venti. L'annuncio ufficiale della creazione di un museo d'arte moderna a Parigi, nel 1934, avvia un nuovo dibattito riguardante le sue collezioni e una serie di mostre organizzate in occasione della “Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques”, nel 1937, offre il modello per la formazione di una narrazione evolutiva in cui l'apice dell'arte moderna francese viene individuato nella produzione del primo quarto del secolo. Nonostante l'influenza degli artisti stranieri sia largamente contestata, la discussione avviata dai partigiani di una scuola internazionale aggiunge una sfumatura anticonformista ad un dialogo fino ad allora orientato a livello nazionalista.

Le vrai musée est celui qui contient tout, qui pourra renseigner sur tout lorsque les siècles auront passé. Ce serait là le musée loyal et honnête [...] car il permettrait de choisir, d'approuver ou de nier [...] Ce musée n'existe pas encore.

Le Corbusier 1925, p. 13.

In the summer of 1934, the general commissioner of the 1937 Parisian “Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques” announced the opening of an anonymous competition for architects that concerned the construction of two Museums of Modern Art in Paris, where the collections of the State and those of the Ville de Paris would be displayed<sup>1</sup>. The first proposed to replace the Luxembourg museum presenting works by modern French artists. The museum of the City of Paris would be annexed to the Petit Palais, the Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris<sup>2</sup>. The idea of the creation of a museum for modern art

<sup>1</sup> The competition was open from 15 September to 30 November 1934. See Anon 1934. The project of a new museum was under consideration since 1933 as part of the general plan for the 1937 Paris International Fair. See Lawless 1986, p. 37 and Morel 1996, p. 165. That the project was announced after the 1932 election is arguably telling of the ideological fronts supporting the idea.

<sup>2</sup> Steur 1934, pp. 7-54.

in Paris was not new. It constituted in fact the pivot on which a series of debates took place in the pages of several Parisian journals shortly after the end of the Great War. The echoes of the debate were clearly audible in the conviction that modern art was lacking museum representation in Paris, the capital of modernism, while many foreign capitals greeted with generosity the idea of enriching their public collections with modern French masterpieces. The chapter of Impressionism had closed no longer being classified as living art. The art that succeeded it, namely cubism and fauvism, was about to reach its culmination as a chapter that emerged in reaction to Impressionism. The problem was that Impressionism was late in its passage from the Luxembourg consequently the fortune of the styles succeeding it had to be reconsidered. In addition to the lack of space in Parisian museums, the limited state funding solidified the protestations against the state's negligence of modern and contemporary art<sup>3</sup>. Potential solutions were reduced to either the reorganisation of the Luxembourg, which maintained its connection to the Louvre, or the construction of a new independent museum with private funding. The problem of origin for modern art gave birth to the debate between the *École Française* and the *École de Paris*, though it became eventually evident – as this paper seeks to demonstrate – that any sort of institutionalisation had to be encapsulated in the name of tradition.

The history of the creation, and the eventual function, of the Museum of Modern Art in Paris is long and has to be understood through the wider prism of cultural politics in France which were in principle elitist and conservative seeking to give form to ideas of nation<sup>4</sup>. The present study aims to bring together for the first time a comprehensive bibliography and an essential analysis relating to the pre-history of the creation of the new museums and to open new issues of inquiry for further research in this under-investigated topic of cardinal importance to the institutional history of French modernism. The debate over the creation of a new museum in Paris developed in three subsequent phases: the initiation of the debate in the press in 1925, the re-organisation of the Parisian museums in 1929, and the official announcement of the creation of two new museums in 1932-1934. It is pertinent to note that each one of them coincided with the results of the legislative elections of 1924 (*Cartel des Gauches*), 1928 (Raymond Poincaré's centre-right *Alliance Démocratique*), and 1932 (second *Cartel des Gauches*), but more importantly with the budgetary reforms of the *Réunion des Musées Nationaux* (RMN) that took place before each election and during a period of severe economic instability in three phases: 1923-1926, 1927-1928, and 1929-1931<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Lawless claims that State funding mainly concerned acquisitions of academic art. See Lawless 1986, p. 16. About the *Réunion des Musées Nationaux* (RMN) limited funding for acquisitions destined to the Luxembourg and the unfortunate conditions that the 1923 *taxe de luxe* entailed see Callu 1994, p. 374.

<sup>4</sup> Green 2001, p. 222.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed analysis of these reforms see Callu 1994. The crisis of the Franc should also

## 1. *State policies*

The recognition of the Autumn Salon and that of the Independents as establishments of public benefit, in 1920 and in 1923 respectively, entailed a better acquisition rate by the public sector and may be viewed as a step towards the consecration of contemporary independent art, a consecration associated with state patronage. However, the benefits from this change in status were limited. In fact, Paul Léon (*directeur des Beaux-Arts*), maintained in his interview with Florent Fels for the «Nouvelles Littéraires», in June 1925, that works by Matisse, Picasso, Utrillo and other contemporary artists, were too expensive to be purchased by public funds<sup>6</sup>. Acquiring works through donations, on the other hand, proved somewhat problematic. The troubled history of the Luxembourg museum, the first Museum of Living Artists in Paris, and the controversial fortune of the Caillebotte Bequest are well known and documented<sup>7</sup>. They evoke the scepticism under which Impressionist art was met by the Académie des Beaux-Arts, the positions and ideas of which were embodied in and sustained by the State's acquisition policies<sup>8</sup>. Although later studies, namely by Pierre Vaisse, re-established the history of the Luxembourg museum policies towards Impressionism<sup>9</sup>, it is evident that the Caillebotte Affair became the central argument in the discourse that sought to condemn the state's myopic attitude towards modern art. Vaisse recounts the history from the part of the French institutions which was almost unknown by the time the debate was initiated but this paper namely focuses on views established on the margins of officialdom where independent art developed and flourished, examining how the State's policies were interpreted in the contemporary press, where the debate took place, and the way that these interpretations – these misinterpretations, according to Vaisse, that were perpetuated by the succeeding generation – occupied a central place in the mindset of the period up to the late 1920s. The reasons for sustaining these views were many.

In 1923, the donation of the modern collection (Cézanne, Matisse, Rouault, Signac, Derain, etc.) of the French socialist politician and art collector Marcel Sembat, by his wife the artist Georgette Agutte, to the Grenoble museum added new perspectives to the controversy over the institutionalisation of modern art. The collection was allegedly first offered to the Luxembourg museum, which

be considered, as well as the general distrust over the ineffectual policies of Edouard Herriot and the eventual stabilisation achieved by Poincaré. See Debeir 1980 and Callu 1994, p. 313. About the Bureau des Musées Nationaux and the 1937 budget report see Genet-Delacroix 1992, pp. 221, 421-424.

<sup>6</sup> Fels 1925, p. 4. See also Morel 1996, pp. 30-31.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Laurent 1982, pp. 84-99; Lorente 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Waldemar George reported in 1927: «The Luxembourg has been for so many years not only confined to the expression of academic taste, but also a weapon in the hands of the members of the Institute». See George 1927a, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Berhaut 1983, pp. 209-239; Vaisse 1983, pp. 201-208 and Vaisse 2014.



only accepted a part of the works, leading the family of the deceased collector to donate the entire collection to the provincial museum of Grenoble<sup>10</sup>. Its director, Pierre Andry-Farcy, opened two new rooms in September 1924 displaying works of modern art, most of which reached the museum through donations by artists, dealers and collectors<sup>11</sup>. The museum ended up having the richest collection of contemporary art with which no other museum in Paris, or more generally in France, was able to compete. Though his policies were greeted with praise by the French press, some members of the advisory board of the museum reportedly opposed the idea of the enrichment of the museum collections with modern works of art referring, in its procès-verbal, to the new room as *Le Rigolarium*, or *La Salle des Horreurs*<sup>12</sup>.

The controversial history of the Cézanne Monument gives further evidence of the anti-modernist rhetoric of the years succeeding the Great War demonstrating the ineffectual character of initiatives administered independently from the state. It concerns the long adventure of a sculpted work to find its place in the Tuileries garden, where works of past centuries were primarily on display. The interesting part of the affair resides in the fact that it concerns a monument in memory of the pioneer of modern art, Paul Cézanne, commissioned from Aristide Maillol, a modernist sculptor who mastered a style of classical output, or at least this is how his art was referred to in the modernist circles<sup>13</sup>. The monument was the artist's first public commission to be placed in Aix-en-Provence, Cézanne's birthplace. The affair dates back to 1906, when shortly after Cézanne's death, a *Comité du Monument Cézanne* was founded which named Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir *presidents d'honneur*<sup>14</sup>. The war interrupted the work for the monument which was finally completed by Maillol

<sup>10</sup> George 1927b, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Nouvelles salles au musée de Grenoble* 1934, pp. 441-442.

<sup>12</sup> *Musées de Province* 1925, pp. 543-544. The response of the advisory board to the commentary published in «Le Bulletin de la Vie Artistique» was published in the same journal about a month later. See *Musée de Grenoble* 1926, pp. 12-13.

<sup>13</sup> The aspect of classicism in the modernist context is multifaceted and largely dependant on the persuasion of each commentator. The return to classicism idea that flourished at the beginning of the century has been widely identified as part of the *Call to Order* concept. Nonetheless even this concept is subject to reconsiderations. See Lantenois 1995, pp. 40-53. It is true however that critics belonging to conservative milieux and those advocating avant-garde ideas agreed that Maillol's art was classic in its conception without these references being reduced to the influence of the Greek classic antiquity and the French neo-classical tradition. It was classic in its embodiment of universal/catholic ideas corresponding to the orderly humanism of the French tradition.

<sup>14</sup> Frantz Jourdain was named president of the committee (he was also the president of the Salon d'Automne). Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Edward Vuillard, and Octave Mirbeau formed the monument's executive commission, while the list of the committee members included the names of several renowned Parisian dealers, critics, collectors and museum directors such as Ambroise Vollard, Louis Vauxcelles, Léonce Bénédict, Félix Fénéon, Arsène Alexandre, Georges, Paul and Joseph Durand-Ruel, Paul Gallimard and others. Part of the expenses for the monument was covered by an auction held in collaboration with the Bernheim-jeune galleries at the Hotel Drouot the previous year that raised 10,703 francs. See *Le Monument Cézanne* 1908, p. 1.

in 1924. The final work which represented a classicizing reclining nude woman holding an olive branch, was refused by the city of Aix-en-Provence in 1925<sup>15</sup>. In due course, it was replaced by a marble fountain designed by Georges Rouault, the cost of which was entirely covered by the art dealer Ambroise Vollard.

The work by Maillol, now belonging to the City of Paris, proposed to be located by 1927 in the garden of Tuileries, close to the Orangerie. «L'Art Vivant» published in February 1926 a torso by Maillol on its first page accompanied by an article that identified the sculptor as the «incarnation vivante et authentique du génie français»<sup>16</sup>, while the commentator Waldemar George compared the Cézanne Monument to the *Diane Couchée* by the French Renaissance artist Jean Goujon, usually referred to as the French Phidias<sup>17</sup>. The adventure of Maillol's sculpture eventually turned into an affair of continuous disgrace due to its perpetual and ill-sorted relocation within the garden. In 1928, the critic Christian Zervos expressed publicly his disappointment in the pages of «Cahiers d'Art» asking its readers to protest against the peregrinations of Maillol's sculptures, referring to the *Monument à Cézanne* and the artist's composition *La Pensée*, both passed to the jurisdiction of the Ville de Paris and placed in the Tuileries garden which displayed notably sculpture from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>18</sup>. Maillol's interview the same year with Tériade in the pages of the wide circulation Parisian daily «L'Intransigeant» brought out publicly the artist's disappointment over the unfortunate reception of his work in France. The artist underlined that his sculptures featured prominently in public collections abroad, namely in Germany and the United States<sup>19</sup>.

The re-organisation of the public collections and the making of space for modern art to fit in the evolutionary narrative shaped for French art was commonplace in the modernist discourse of the 1920s. However, this necessitated not only a change in attitude towards modern art in general, but also its understanding and positive reception by the wider public. Both issues were mainly dependant on private initiatives such as the projection of modern art in gallery shows and the publication of books that advanced public understanding. In 1925, the Luxembourg museum was in search of a new director after the death, the same year, of Léonce Bénédite, a key figure in the Caillebotte Affair who served in this post from 1892 to 1925. The opening of this particular position was crucial to the imperative need, as documented in the contemporary press, for the re-organisation and the policy change of the museum for the benefit of contemporary art. The candidates for the position were Charles Masson, assistant curator to Bénédite since 1901, the director of the Museum of Compiègne, Edouard Sarradin, Andry-Farcy, and the art

<sup>15</sup> Actually the reasons for this refusal remain unknown.

<sup>16</sup> George 1925, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> Zervos 1928, p. 360.

<sup>19</sup> Tériade 1928, p. 5.

critics André Salmon, well known for his 1920 book *L'Art Vivant*<sup>20</sup>, and Louis Vauxcelles, an established critic and an adept of modern art whose positions on French art were clearly formulated in 1922 in the volume *Histoire générale de l'Art Français de la Révolution à nos jours*<sup>21</sup>. The name of Louis Hautcoeur, conservator at the Louvre, also figured in the list, but in fact he took the position a few years later becoming the last director of the Luxembourg museum. A significant number of artists, including Monet, Bourdelle, Despiou, Valloton, Valadon, Lurçat, Marcoussis, Vlaminck, Maillol, Utrillo and many others, sent the same year an open letter to the *Ministre de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts* demanding the appointment of Vauxcelles as the new museum director, widely known as a cubist adversary<sup>22</sup>. However it was Masson who was eventually named director, turning the Luxembourg into the “Museum of the Impressionists”. Its collection of works by foreign artists was sent to the *Jeu de Paume des Tuileries* – renamed in 1932 *Musée des Écoles Étrangères* – earlier in 1922 while Bénédite was still in office<sup>23</sup>. The development arguably motivated Paul Signac's 1924 regulation at the *Salon des Indépendants* which concerned the grouping of artists by nationalities an issue that provoked mixed reactions in the press but raised controversy among artists due to its nationalist connotations. Signac's anarchist persuasion is well-known and it is true that he returned to the grouping by alphabetical order the next year however similar positions that favoured the display of national development in the arts were widespread throughout the period in question, namely in the museum projects proposed by Wildenstein and Ottmann as we shall see later.

The Luxembourg museum had always served as an appendix of the Louvre. It was in fact a *musée de passage* where works by living artists were conserved before their eventual transfer – about a decade after their death and through a strict filtering process – to the Louvre, the role and function of which was largely contested by the modernist milieu notably in terms of its questionable contribution to artistic education. The Louvre appeared to the champions of modernism as the temple of a sterile and much-despised academicism, the aesthetic of which was perpetuated by the *École des Beaux-Arts* and was deemed perilous to artistic evolution. Although its architecture was conceived «as a

<sup>20</sup> Salmon 1920.

<sup>21</sup> Vauxcelles 1922.

<sup>22</sup> Maldidier 1925, p. 2. See also Green 1987, p. 131.

<sup>23</sup> Lorente 2013, pp. 127-128. The appointment of Masson was negatively received due to his old age. In his conclusion to the survey of *L'Art Vivant*, Charensol noted: «On chercha à persuader les pouvoirs publics qu'il fallait designer pour ce poste un homme libéral averti des diverses tendances du mouvement pictural moderne, et assez énergique pour transformer complètement le Luxembourg. On sait que cette campagne de presse n'a pas eu le résultat qu'on en avait espéré, et le Ministre (de l'Instruction Publique et des beaux-arts, Anatole de Monzie) a fini par élire un honorable fonctionnaire (Charles Masson) qui ne paraît guère capable de réaliser les formidables réformes qu'on attend de lui». Morel 1996, pp. 155-156.

symbol of the triumph of French artists over Italian artists»<sup>24</sup>, its collections sanctioned the reverse, reviving a long nationalist-traditionalist narrative that questioned the identity and the origins of gothic art as well as its allegedly inferior role in the shaping of the Renaissance tradition<sup>25</sup>. The Pont-Aven and Barbizon Schools of painting were viewed as the first national revolutionary efforts to reject Rome and the Italian landscape, glorified by Nicolas Poussin and the Academy, by finding its French equivalent on the outskirts of Paris or elsewhere in France and its colonies. This was made evident in the 1925 thematic retrospective “Le Paysage Français de Poussin à Corot” at the Petit Palais. Moreover, on the occasion of Gauguin’s admittance to the Louvre in 1927, Fels described him as the other Poussin for whom Tahiti replaced Rome<sup>26</sup>, adjusting modern art to the national-traditionalist narrative that was pivotal to those who sought its institutionalisation. Nevertheless, there were also those who advocated the international character of modern abstract art which was akin – they thought – to the “universal entity” of primitive artefacts, deprived of ethnic connotations. The pioneer role that the Louvre could play for them was introduced in the discussion over the transfer of the collections of primitive art from the poorly-funded Trocadero to the splendid Louvre – a discussion opened by the «Bulletin de la Vie Artistique» in 1920, underlining the contribution of primitive art as source and origin for both the plastic and the applied/decorative arts<sup>27</sup>.

The survey published by Amédée Ozenfant and Le Corbusier in the purist magazine «L’Esprit Nouveau» in 1920, using Cézanne’s anecdote, now turned into the question *Faut-il brûler le Louvre?*, was symptomatic of the modernist urge for innovation<sup>28</sup>. Judging from the responses, nonetheless, a certain role was reserved for the Louvre by the modernist advocates, which was the comparison measure between the old and the new; a position that Le Corbusier partially embraced in his definition of the “real museum” in his 1926 book *L’art décoratif d’aujourd’hui*<sup>29</sup>. Of course, Le Corbusier was seeking to shape the foundations of a universal culture suggesting that utility objects, artefacts and artworks should all be put on display in a “real museum” in order not only to give a full impression of the transition from the old to the new, but also to contrast their functionalism – a key term in the purist theoretical writings. His positions were epitomised in the purist *L’Esprit Nouveau pavilion* at the 1925 Paris “Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes”, a show that not only sharpened international competition in design and the

<sup>24</sup> Lorente 2013, p. 23 (note 5).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Passini 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Fels 1927, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Enquête sur les arts lointains*, «Le Bulletin de la Vie Artistique», 15 November 1920, pp. 662-669.

<sup>28</sup> *Faut-il brûler le Louvre?* 1921a, pp. 1-8; *Faut-il brûler le Louvre?* 1921b, pp. 960-962.

<sup>29</sup> Le Corbusier 1926.

debate between decorative arts and industry, but also cast light on the poorly received contemporary art by the event officials, namely cubism or more precisely the mechanist aesthetic of Léger and Delaunay.

## 2. *The debate*

The debate over the creation of a Museum of Modern Art in Paris went public the same year on the occasion of the International show and the smaller retrospective “Cinquante Ans de Peinture Française: 1875-1925” at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (Pavillon Marsan). The interesting point with the latter exhibition is that it was held at a Museum, as Gustave Kahn pointed out, and consequently would serve as a lesson to the “young” by displaying the evolution of the contemporary aesthetic. Any absence or misinterpretation, Kahn argued, risks giving the wrong picture<sup>30</sup>. The show, however, was generally criticised for being insufficient to provide a thorough presentation of the evolution of French art despite the apologizing note published in the catalogue claiming that this was due to lack of space in the museum<sup>31</sup>, a prevailing vindication that had realistic basis but instigated the arguments over the necessity of creating new spaces for art. Apart from a single work by Picasso, the École de Paris had no place in this history of French art. The short commentary of the French art critic André Warnod, in the Parisian daily «Comoedia» under the title *Pour un Musée d’Art Moderne à Paris*<sup>32</sup> underlined the necessity of projecting modern art to the international audience of the 1925. Fair since what was thought of as the evolution of French art, displayed in French museums, appeared to have stopped in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However this projection apart from inadequate was also transient, since the works would return to the private collections they belonged to after the end of the show<sup>33</sup>. Given the unwillingness of the State to proceed to acquisitions of modern art, Warnod addressed an open call to the newly founded *Société des Amateurs d’art et Collectionneurs* to uphold his idea<sup>34</sup>. The response was imminent with the founder of the society, a dentist of Russian origin, collector and art patron, Daniel Tzanck, sending an open letter

<sup>30</sup> Kahn 1925, p. 495.

<sup>31</sup> *Cinquante Ans de Peinture Française*, 1925, pp. 3-4.

<sup>32</sup> Warnod 1925, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> With the exception of a single work by Jaulmes belonging to the State (*La Tapisserie*, no. 112 of the catalogue.) Commenting on the show at the Pavillon de Marsan, Salmon wrote in *L’Art Vivant*: «Mais c’est pour combien de journées? Tout ici est prêt. Tout en échappe à l’Etat comme à la Ville dans le moment qu’une si admirable constitution marquée si clairement tout ce qui manqué au Louvre et tout ce qui devrait être le Luxembourg». Salmon 1925, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Warnod 1925, p. 4. See also Morel 1996, pp. 23-25.

to «Comoedia» the following month announcing the creation of a museum of modern art with private funding – a project that never came to fruition<sup>35</sup>.

Tzanck's project also featured as an alternative solution in the dialogue opened by the art magazine, «L'Art Vivant», in the form of a survey that was launched the same year. The survey is perhaps the most striking manifestation pointing to the imperative need for the creation of a new museum in Paris, or the re-organisation of the Luxembourg which maintained its dedication to academic art. The questionnaire addressed to sixty-three art professionals (artists, dealers, critics, collectors, museum directors, authors, editors etc.) included two major questions. The first was about their thoughts on the creation of a new French museum of modern art. The second was to name ten living artists, who should be the first to enter the museum. The interesting point with the survey is that it was launched slightly before the appointment of Masson as the new director of the Luxembourg, including answers given by the four candidates<sup>36</sup> for the post. Salmon was sympathetic to the idea of the creation of a new museum but agreed with the other candidates that the re-organisation of the Luxembourg would suffice. As Georges Charensol noticed in the conclusions that he draw from the survey, opinions would be different if the appointment of the elderly Masson had been made known earlier<sup>37</sup>. However, many were those who regarded with scepticism the idea of creating a “private” museum of contemporary art conjoining its function with the prosperity of certain art dealers and their protégés. In fact, the same magazine launched another survey two years later, in August 1927, whose central theme was the role of commerce in the development of art and the separation of art and state, issues of cardinal importance to the status of fine arts in France<sup>38</sup>. The sad history of the Luxembourg, wrote in 1926 André Dezarrois, adjunct conservator of the Luxembourg, «est la plus complète condamnation des ministres successifs et des hauts fonctionnaires des Beaux-arts dont pas un seul n'a su réaliser le Musée National d'art moderne que le pays doit à ses artistes vivants et à sa capitale»<sup>39</sup>, while expressing his confidence in Masson. Besides, it was Masson who confided him the post of the conservator of the Musée des Écoles Étrangères.

The discussion over the necessity for a new museum in Paris was revived again in 1929 with the inauguration of the Museum of Modern Art in New

<sup>35</sup> Lorente 2013, p. 127 and Morel 1996, pp. 26-29.

<sup>36</sup> Edouard Sarradin was not listed among those who took the survey.

<sup>37</sup> Morel 1996, p. 158.

<sup>38</sup> *Une Grande Enquête de L'Art Vivant* 1927. See also Lawless 1986, p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> Dezarrois 1926, pp. 109-110. Dezarrois acknowledged the difficult role that Masson undertook to satisfy both the demands of the Academy and those of living artists, while he also recounted in details the significant work of Bénédite in establishing the collections of the Luxembourg and the Musée des Écoles Étrangères. It is interesting that Dezarrois, a museum conservator, addressed his polemic to State officials and not to museum professionals, differentiating the positions of the two. The same distinction becomes evident in the study of the history of the Réunion des Musées Nationaux by Callu, 1994.

York which was not in reality the first museum of contemporary art in the United States. Albert Gallatin had established his Gallery of Living Art since 1927 at the New York University. The collection was strictly reduced to works by living artists – the richest cubist collection overseas – and could well serve as a model for the content of the independent museum that a part of the Parisian art world sought for<sup>40</sup>. In fact the *Association des Amis des Artistes Vivants*, founded on July 7<sup>th</sup> 1928, named Charles Pacquement (president de la *Société des Amis du Luxembourg*) president with Gallatin serving as vice-president of the association<sup>41</sup>. The example of the Gallatin collection was perhaps the most transparent demonstration of the drastic effect of private initiatives. In the French context, the same year marked a shift in focus on the re-organisation of the collections of both the Louvre and the Luxembourg museums. The project was in issue since 1927, when works by Gauguin, Seurat, and Rousseau, entered the Louvre. The entire Impressionist collection of the Luxembourg was subsequently transferred to the Louvre resuscitating the debate over its replacement with works that would eventually sanction the former as a veritable Museum of Living Art. The project resulted in a «modification [...] la plus profonde qui y ait été apportée depuis 1818»<sup>42</sup>, the catalogue-guide of the museum informed its readers in 1929. However Maurice Raynal, a cubist champion, wrote the same year in the wide circulation daily «L'Intransigeant»: «L'avenir se souviendra qu'en 1929 au moment où l'Impressionnisme entrait

<sup>40</sup> Stavitsky 2003, pp. 105-110. Stavitsky 1993, pp. 47-63. Lorente 2013, pp. 141-155.

<sup>41</sup> *L'Association des amis des artistes vivants* 1928, p. 2. The Association played a significant role to enriching the collections of the Luxembourg. However the character of the works donated was significantly distant from that of the Gallatin collection with the Association conforming to the plan of the Luxembourg to establish connections between Impressionism and the succeeding generations. Its first donation included works by Marcel Falter (*L'Ecuyère*), Kees von Dongen (*La Danseuse*), Pierre Laprade (*La Pièce d'eau*), André Derain (*La Forêt*), and Armand Guillaumin (*Le Moulin des Bouchardonnes*). The 1929 donation included 2 works by André Dignimont (*Nu assis de dos, Nu debout de dos*) and von Dongen (*Danseuse Espagnole, Fellahines*) and single works by Laprade (*Quimperlé*), Maurice-Louis Savin (*La Route*), Jean Fautrier (*Le Christ en Croix*), Matisse (*Nature Morte au buffet vert*), Jean Souverbie (*Femme assise au bord de la mer*), Labasque (*Rue de Village*). In 1930 the donation included the following works by Dufy (*Le Paddock à Dauville*), André Lhote (*Etude pour une Léda*), Luc Albert Moreau (*La Défaite*), Jean-Louis Boussingault (*Portait de femme*). See the *Catalogue-Guide* 1929.

<sup>42</sup> Ivi, p. 9; Marguillier 1933, pp. 448-450. The catalogue solidified the Luxembourg's connection to the Louvre keeping a few works that connected Impressionism with the art that succeeded it. It maintained: «tout en envoyant au Louvre le gros de l'œuvre des impressionnistes et de leurs contemporains, on s'est attaché à garder au Luxembourg un certain nombre de tableaux-témoins, afin de ne pas rompre la chaîne qui unit les peintres d'aujourd'hui à leurs aînés respectifs et de rendre, au contraire, sensible comment les uns précèdent des autres», *Catalogue-Guide* 1929, p. 10. The collections included works by the contemporary artists that most of the responses to the 1925 survey of *L'Art Vivant* proposed, namely Bonnard, Matisse, Dufy, Rousseau, Friesz, Rouault, Derain, Segonzac, Braque etc. It is true that a new independent museum would furnish the occasion to the artists of the School of Paris to be represented. The dominant list of the ten artists to enter first the museum according to the responses to the survey included Matisse, Maillol, Derain, Segonzac, Picasso, Utrillo, Rouault, Bonnard, Braque, Vlaminck. See Morel 1996, p. 159.

au Louvre, le cubisme était inconnu en ce musée du Luxembourg qui avait d'ailleurs tout fait pour évincer l'Impressionnisme»<sup>43</sup>. The critic underlined that in the case of the Luxembourg the official initiative could not subsist without support from the private sector, maintaining that the museum has to solicit the help of collectors and artists.

Anti-modernist rhetoric reigned supreme in the 1929 manifesto of the reactionary Association of French Art Critics, presided by the renowned *arrière-gardiste* Camille Mauclair, condemning the speculation of the avant-garde and the «introduction de pochades insignifiants dans les musées voués à l'éclectisme passif»<sup>44</sup>. Well known for his anti-Semitic views, his xenophobic narrative, and his critique against Parisian art dealers, Mauclair maintained in his book on the Luxembourg museum in 1927 that the veritable mission of a museum of living art is not only to publicly present the progressive national production, but also to offer a comparison with the foreign schools, expressing perhaps his disapproval of the transfer of works by foreign artists to the Jeu de Paume<sup>45</sup>. Mauclair pointed on any occasion an accusing finger at the modernist *overproduction* and the radical increase of artworks in French museums sustaining the claim of lack of space notably at the expense of contemporary art.<sup>46</sup> These reactionary milieux would certainly be the first to condemn, with varying degrees of severity, any museum initiative supported by art dealers. The series of articles signed by the vice president of the association of critics of French art, Maurice Feuillet under the title *L'Art Français en Peril*, published in the late 1920s in the conservative paper «Le Gaulois Artistique»<sup>47</sup>, offer an account of this polemic. Nonetheless, the involvement of collectors and art dealers in the project of a museum of contemporary art was deemed by tacit consent imperative.

In 1929, the Parisian art dealer Paul Guillaume presented his private art collection at the Bernheim Jeune gallery for the benefit of the *Société des Amis du Luxembourg*, on the occasion of the museum's refurbishment.<sup>48</sup> The dealer largely appreciated the content and structure of the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia which became a central topic of discussion in his magazine «Les Arts à Paris». Guillaume announced in «Cahiers d'Art» the eventual installation of his collection in a private museum<sup>49</sup>. The magazine had presented earlier a part of his collection in its supplement «Feuilles Volantes»<sup>50</sup>, which also

<sup>43</sup> Raynal 1929, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Manifeste de l'Association des Critiques d'Art Français* 1929, p. 279.

<sup>45</sup> Mauclair 1927, p. 121.

<sup>46</sup> Alary 1995, p. 237.

<sup>47</sup> Feuillet 1929.

<sup>48</sup> The catalogue of the exhibition was published by Guillaume with texts by Waldemar George. See George 1929.

<sup>49</sup> *Collection Paul Guillaume* 1929, p. XVII.

<sup>50</sup> *Tériade* 1927, pp. 1-3. The supplement reflects Zervos' interest in reporting on exhibitions of contemporary Parisian art around the world and in the public presentation of private collections



featured in the pages of «L'Art Vivant» a few years later<sup>51</sup>. The project was nonetheless interrupted by the dealer's death in 1934<sup>52</sup>. The homage paid to Guillaume by the Grenoble museum in 1935 is potentially inscribed in Andry-Farcy's effective policies in enriching his museum collections. However, the Guillaume collection consisting of works dating from 1860 to 1930 juxtaposed with primitive African art became eventually part of the Orangerie Museum many decades later. The interest in mingling modern art with primitive artefacts is symptomatic of the attention paid to the re-organisation of the Louvre by the avant-garde publication «Cahiers d'Art». It indicates Zervos' increasing interest in the museum's educational function, notably through its archaeological collections of primitive art, a key-source for the modern abstract artists that he fervently supported. «Cahiers d'Art» reported systematically on the acquisitions of primitive art by the Louvre<sup>53</sup>. Zervos published the same year his interview with Henry Verne, France's director of National Museums since 1925<sup>54</sup>, offering a thorough account of the plan for the "new Louvre" and its new museographical study based on the so-called "*double répartition des œuvres d'art*", while he criticised the limited funding offered by the state in reference to expenses for similar purposes covered by Germany, Belgium, Britain, and Spain<sup>55</sup>.

The value judgments and the comparison of French museum policies with regards to contemporary art with those of other European countries established the central argumentation of the aforementioned debate. Evoking, however, the examples of the Soviet or the German museums could not but reinforce reactionary – notably right-wing – rhetoric, in which the art of the School of Paris was identified with leftist ideologies, with Mauclair referring to it as *communisme pictural*<sup>56</sup>. Zervos launched his own survey in 1929 that cast light on the prestige of modern French art in Germany, publishing the responses of the editor, Alexander Koch, and the director of the Museum of Mannheim, Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, both of whom expressed their admiration for French living art identifying a prominent place for it in German museums<sup>57</sup>. Zervos' interview with Verne spawned international interest. In 1930, he received two letters from the Austrian art historian Frantz Ottmann who contemplated the

in France and abroad, namely in Germany.

<sup>51</sup> Pierhal 1932, pp. 134-135.

<sup>52</sup> For further discussion over Guillaume's project and his official connections see Georget 2000, p. 60.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Rivière 1926, p. 268; Rivière 1927, p. 65; Michon 1929, pp. 251-256; Charbonneaux 1929, pp. 299-302; Duthuit 1930, p. 111.

<sup>54</sup> The connection of Verne's appointment to the post with the victory of the radicals in 1924 might be a hypothesis considering his subsequent collaboration with the radical-socialist Georges Huisman which is arguably indicative of his ideological position-taking.

<sup>55</sup> Zervos 1929, pp. 402-407 and Verne 1930, pp. 5-13.

<sup>56</sup> Mauclair 1929, p. 38.

<sup>57</sup> *Enquête sur la Peinture Française en Allemagne* 1929, pp. 51-52.

project of a national museum including the French collection of the Louvre and underlined the role played by architects in furnishing sketches that would mobilise public interest into the project<sup>58</sup>. Zervos published in response a short text titled *Pour la Creation à Paris d'un Musée des Artistes Vivants*<sup>59</sup>. Unlike the survey launched earlier by «L'Art Vivant», he proposed the creation of a museum with no regards to tradition, ethnicity, or style. He envisaged a museum that sought to present current artistic production in France and abroad with no linkages to other French museums and their contemplation of the past. Zervos adopted a pragmatist rhetoric addressing his polemic to the French state, which was unwilling to buy works by contemporary artists when their prices were low, complaining later that they were too expensive to buy. In the meantime foreign museums were enriching their public collections with French masterpieces purchased at low prices due to better timing. Zervos inquires

Va-t-on renouveler avec l'art contemporain l'erreur qu'on a commise avec la peinture impressionniste? Pendant que les peintres impressionnistes subissaient les railleries et les sarcasmes des critiques, des officiels et de la foule, Hugo von Tschudi en Allemagne, réunissait leurs plus belles toiles pour la Galerie Nationale de Berlin [...] Ce n'est pas à Paris qu'on peut étudier l'œuvre de Seurat [...] de Corot, de Courbet, des Impressionnistes, de Cézanne, de Renoir, de Gauguin, de Van Gogh et du douanier Rousseau. [...] Leurs œuvres essentielles, celles qui ont exercé une influence féconde et contribué au développement de la peinture moderne, c'est à Londres, à Edinbourg, à Glasgow, en Allemagne, en Tchécoslovaquie, aux Etats-Unis qu'il faut aller pour les voir; partout, sauf en France<sup>60</sup>.

France had its own museum of foreign art. The Musée des Écoles Étrangères Contemporaines – Jeu de Paume – constituted a section of the Luxembourg museum where the collection of works by foreign schools, organised and enriched by Bénédite, had been transferred since 1922<sup>61</sup>. The museum eventually gained its autonomy and its own conservator, André Dezarrois, being considered – the same as the Luxembourg – a *lieu de filtrage* for works of art destined for the Louvre<sup>62</sup>. The project of the re-organisation of the museum started in 1929 including the reconstruction of its interior and the renovation of its building. The Jeu de Paume re-opened in December 1932, presenting a collection of modern art that rendered it «mieux que l'embryon et mieux que l'esquisse d'un Musée de l'École de Paris (1905-1930)»<sup>63</sup>, as Paul Fierens eloquently remarked in 1933. The ground floor hosted a part of the ancient collection of foreign works grouped by nationalities that belonged to the Luxembourg, with its first floor

<sup>58</sup> Frantz Ottmann (Vienna), *letters to Christian Zervos*, 15 May 1930 and 26 May 1930, *Fonds Cahiers d'Art*, CAPROV 2, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

<sup>59</sup> Zervos 1930.

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, p. 338.

<sup>61</sup> For the re-opening of the museum in 1927, the role played by Dezarrois, and the reception of the collections by the public see Rey 1927, pp. 107-109.

<sup>62</sup> Lejeaux 1933, pp. 221-227.

<sup>63</sup> Lejeaux 1933, pp. 221-227.

presenting international contemporary art including a room displaying works by Picasso, Gris, Pascin, Modigliani, Kisling and the major representatives of the international School of Paris<sup>64</sup>. The edifice of the Jeu de Paume, «dépouillé de toute ornementation parasite»<sup>65</sup>, was in keeping with the anti-decorative movement in architecture as epitomised in the writings of the purists and the champions of abstraction, appealing as a potential condign refuge for their creations<sup>66</sup>. Indeed, the museum may be viewed as the incarnation of ideas sustained by the internationalist milieu to which Zervos belonged, playing a complementary role to the one that the Luxembourg undertook as a museum of French living art. The two museums shape in reality the prehistory of the state's Musée National d'Art Moderne, inaugurated in 1947, which eventually reconciled the École Française with the École de Paris.

### 3. *Le Siècle des Musées*

The twentieth century merited the title “*le siècle des musées*”, the editors of the «Cahiers de la République des Lettres, des Sciences et des Arts» predicated in 1931. The magazine introduced its own survey run by Wildenstein on the theme *Museums*, which was at the centre of interest of Parisian artistic circles throughout the 1930s, when museum education became the hallmark of the French socialist cultural agenda<sup>67</sup>. The named survey constituted a copious and forthright report of the state of museum practices in France and abroad with its content being commented and reproduced in many contemporary journals<sup>68</sup>. This was indeed the most systematic report published throughout these years proposing a methodical study for the re-organisation of public collections. Wildenstein envisaged «*un grand Musée de l'Art Français*»<sup>69</sup> established on a *fonds commun* corresponding to the taste of French collectors and displaying the evolution of the École Française. He suggested three divisions each one presented in details: *musée des chefs-d'oeuvre*, *musée d'étude*, *musée du gout français*<sup>70</sup>. The museum would not reduce its collections to modern art but would display the evolution of French art throughout the centuries. The positions of Adolphe Basler, a Polish-French dealer, critic and collector, partially evoke those published

<sup>64</sup> *La Nouvelle Présentation du Musée du Jeu de Paume* 1933, p. 137.

<sup>65</sup> Fierens 1933.

<sup>66</sup> Cret 1934, pp. 7-16.

<sup>67</sup> Kolokytha 2013, pp. 184-215.

<sup>68</sup> Cfr. Tisserand 1931, pp. 158-170.

<sup>69</sup> Wildenstein 1931, p. 296. Wildenstein was a passionate collector of medieval manuscripts, a gallery owner, surrealist patron and editor of the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and *Beaux-Arts*, while he also supported the publication of *Documents* and the *Cahiers de la République*.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*.

by Zervos the previous year. Basler's aesthetic views were clearly voiced in his two volumes titled *La Peinture Indépendante en France* published in 1929<sup>71</sup>. The dealer, however, was largely preoccupied in the survey with the direction *per se* of the new museum insisting that it is pointless to appoint a single public officer to administer such an institution, but a collective organ, an organisation that would represent all the Salon societies and the syndicates of dealers, critics, collectors etc. He sought an unbiased organism capable of supporting every laudable effort in contemporary art production, regardless of its provenance (Institute, Independents, art dealers etc.)<sup>72</sup>, something that a private museum functioning under the aegis of certain 'patrons' would fail to realize.

The dispute over the poor representation of modern art in French museums reposed on two prevalent facts: the Caillebotte affair that became – unfairly according to Vaisse – the opprobrious symbol of the Establishment prejudice against Impressionism, and the widespread dissemination of French art abroad which raised issues of cultural decay. Given both realities went hand in hand with state policies, to which the polemic of the press was primarily addressed, it is interesting to observe that all these versatile efforts were substantially evasive, calling out the private sector for action in order to mobilise the state. In 1931, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, willing to facilitate the project of the creation of an independent museum published the architectural sketches for a Musée d'Art Vivant in Zervos' magazine «Cahiers d'Art»<sup>73</sup>, following Ottmann's earlier advice. The project required the minimum possible funding from the "patron" who would undertake its realisation, as mentioned in the editorial note<sup>74</sup>. Although the museum in question proposed to be a private institution that would function independently from the state, three years later and while the project was left unaccomplished, the two architects participated, albeit unsuccessfully, in the state competition for the creation of the museum of modern art in Paris. The museum proposed to open a few years later on the occasion of the 1937 World's Fair in Paris. The winning project for the new museum was that of the academic architects André Aubert, Marcel

<sup>71</sup> Basler, *Kunstler* 1929 and Basler 1929.

<sup>72</sup> Basler 1931, pp. 306-311.

<sup>73</sup> «Ce musée qui se proposerait de sauvegarder une part importante de la création artistique actuelle, réunirait les œuvres peintes et sculptées, des meilleurs parmi les artistes vivants et tous ceux dont l'œuvre commence à s'affirmer. On trouverait aussi dans ce musée les œuvres des artistes les mieux doués de la jeune génération, quelles que soient leurs tendances, pourvu seulement qu'elles témoignent d'un talent personnel et d'un effort vigoureux et de haute tenue. On y admettrait en outre les œuvres, de tous les artistes vivants à Paris et formés à Paris indépendamment de leur nationalité. Des salles seraient en plus réservées aux peintres et sculpteurs vivant à l'étranger et dont les recherches complètent celles des artistes qui travaillent chez nous.» Introduction to Le Corbusier and Jeanneret's project. *Pour la Création à Paris d'un Musée des Artistes Vivants* 1931, p. 5. Le Corbusier sent Zervos a second project for a *Musée d'Art Contemporain à Croissance Illimitée* in 1940. The letter by Le Corbusier to Zervos is published in Derouet 2011, pp. 95-98.

<sup>74</sup> *Pour la création à Paris d'un Musée des Artistes Vivants* 1931, pp. 5-9.

Dastugue, Jean-Clause Dondel, and Paul Viard, provoking discontent among the champions of the Modern Movement.

Following the much anticipated concrete announcement of the creation of two public museums for contemporary art in 1934<sup>75</sup>, the interest shifted to their collections. The word “contemporary” naturally encapsulated modern art production from 1905 onwards, perhaps concluding to the years around the eventual inauguration of the museum. This periodisation affirms itself in the volume *Histoire de l'Art Contemporain: La Peinture*, published in 1935 by René Huyghe, assistant curator of the Louvre, and Germain Bazin<sup>76</sup>. The book covers the entire spectrum of modern art with the comprehensive presentation of thirty years of artistic production starting from 1905 including a detailed presentation of foreign schools and an appraisal of the role played by the independent Salons. The publication date of the volume and its illustrative preface signed by the radical-socialist politician and *sous-secrétaire d'état aux Beaux-Arts*, Jean Mistler, leave little doubt as to its connection with the creation of the new museum. The volume, as we see it today, appears as an introduction to contemporary art for the general art-loving public, including short contributions by some of the most outstanding contemporary art critics and historians, while it substantially unveils the state's policy change towards modern art. Mistler underlined the necessity of knowing one's present since it is the only path to shape the future. He maintained that the work of modern artists does not differ significantly from that of their ancestors; the modes of production have changed. These positions may be viewed as a delicate response to the attitudes of the reactionary milieu for which the *overproduction* of contemporary artists was deemed perilous. He explained that

[L']artiste d'aujourd'hui ne produit pas plus que celui d'hier et s'il en donne l'illusion, c'est qu'il produit autrement. L'œuvre, pour l'artiste d'hier, était une réalisation extérieure à lui-même, à laquelle il travaillait lentement et progressivement, comme l'architecte à l'édifice; ses esquisses, ses pochades, étaient autant d'exercices par lesquels sa main s'appropriait à se rendre digne de son plan. L'artiste d'aujourd'hui s'intéresse moins à son œuvre; il lui demande de saisir et de fixer un des reflets de sa personnalité; elle n'est plus qu'un moyen d'expression<sup>77</sup>.

An international conference held in Madrid, in 1934, had museography as its central theme, introducing the term to the international public for the first time as a technique<sup>78</sup>. The new methods in museography introduced to French

<sup>75</sup> Relative announcements appeared in the press since 1932 but the architectural competition was the first confirmation of the realisation of the project this is why it is referred to here as the official announcement.

<sup>76</sup> Extracts from the book have been published earlier in «L'amour de l'art».

<sup>77</sup> Mistler in Huyghe, Bazin 1935, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Poncet 2008. See also *Muséographie* 1934.

museums by Salomon Reinach<sup>79</sup> offered new perspectives to the prospect of the new museum for contemporary art touching upon issues of selection of works for display. The method, called *la double repartition des oeuvres d'art* or *le double parcours*, first applied to the Alte Pinakothek in Munich (established in 1836), literally proposed the integration of two museums with different objectives in one: *Le Musée des Chefs-d'Œuvre* for the general public and *Le Musée d'Etude* for scholars. The idea found many supporters among those who thought that modern art should follow the path of eclecticism in order to be presented as part of the chain of evolution of French art, maintaining that the only way to introduce it to the general audience was by underlining its continuities with the art of the past. The eclecticism in the presentation of this scheme was deemed inescapable. The named method, however, could apply with difficulty to modern art, the exponents of which cast doubt upon the very notion of the masterpiece. In 1935, Tériade, former collaborator of Zervos representing now a conservative force in the direction of the surrealist-inclined «Minotaure» magazine, published a short note that served as publicity for the first tome of the voluminous richly illustrated album *Les Trésors de la Peinture Française* edited by Albert Skira. He remarked

En abordant enfin la peinture moderne, l'on constate non seulement la disparition de toute préoccupation du chef-d'œuvre, mais une réaction violente contre son caractère même. Pourtant, en réfléchissant bien, quelques œuvres surgissent de la masse anonyme et monotone des séries, des œuvres nées en général entre 1905 et 1920. Et qui sait si l'avenir ne choisira pas justement parmi ces dernières, les œuvres représentatives de notre temps<sup>80</sup>.

Skira's album stood for a compendium of French art, the epitome of eclecticism in the presentation of the masterpieces of French painting from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards. It established a virtual scheme that could possibly furnish a model for a *Musée de l'École Française*, somehow resembling to the one that Georges Wildenstein, director of the «Gazette des Beaux-Arts», envisaged a couple of years earlier<sup>81</sup>. To the champions of the idea, including Tériade and Raynal, contemporary art was typified in the works produced between 1905 and 1920, meaning the period that gave birth to and sanctioned both cubism and fauvism. The project of a French museum, nonetheless, was hardly identified with the one that Zervos presented earlier in «Cahiers d'Art», but has some similarities to the ideas put forth in the survey of «L'Art Vivant». The survey was sensibly ambiguous notably in pointing out whether the nomination of artists it was seeking for concerned exclusively those of French nationality or not, an ambiguity that makes itself evident in the responses. The eclectic scheme

<sup>79</sup> Hilaire, d'Espezet 1931, p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Tériade 1935, p. 60.

<sup>81</sup> Wildenstein 1931, pp. 292-305.

in Skira's volume could well have served as a component for museum education with equal regard to artistic formation. Tériade underlined in his text that

«[L]a réhabilitation de l'idée de chef-d'œuvre donnera un sang neuf à la peinture. Elle en a bien besoin [...] Il nous faudra de nouveau choisir, ne plus accepter sans distinction toute la production d'un artiste, établir une hiérarchie parmi ses œuvres<sup>82</sup>.

The scheme was in stark contrast with the one proposed by Zervos, which advocated the establishment of a venue where all schools, all nationalities and all styles would be represented serving as a record to keep track of the continuous evolution of the modernist spirit. The project contradicted in reality the traditional role of the museum as a "temple of the past" – a cemetery according to the Futurists – a role that the *avant-garde* explicitly rejected.

#### 4. 1937: *Evolutionary narratives*

The 1937 Paris "Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques"<sup>83</sup> gives a transparent demonstration of the potentials that these two conflicting attitudes had for realisation in respect to the form that the new museum in Paris should take. The Palais des Musées d'Art Moderne – Palais de Tokio was constructed between the quai de Tokio and the Président Wilson avenue, in front of the Galliera museum, and was inaugurated in 1937 proposing to become the new museum of living art that Paris lacked<sup>84</sup>. The eastern wing of the Palais hosted the pavilion of the Ville de Paris presenting through paintings, panels and drawings forsaken aspects of the French capital. The western wing opened with the temporary retrospective "Chefs d'oeuvre de l'Art Français" displaying more than one thousand works by French artists. The show may be viewed as a traditionalist *coup d'envoi* to its eventual inauguration as the State museum of French living art presenting four centuries of French painting from Jean Fouquet to Gustave Courbet. The annexation of Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin to the show served, albeit promiscuously, as a linchpin between this and another retrospective exposition held at the same time at the Petit Palais titled "Les Maîtres de l'Art Indépendant 1895-1937"<sup>85</sup>. The overwhelming majority of the artists represented in the latter show were French (102 out of 118)<sup>86</sup>, with the exception of Picasso, Gris, Chagall, Modigliani, Soutine,

<sup>82</sup> Tériade 1935, p. 60.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Wilson 1981, pp. 42-52; Welser 1981, pp. 56-58; Kangaslahti 2006, pp. 275-288.

<sup>84</sup> Dezarrois 1937, pp. 54-56.

<sup>85</sup> About the exhibition see Contensou 1987, pp. 11-18.

<sup>86</sup> Herbert identifies, however, the show as a demonstration of «great pride in the diversity of foreign origins of its participants». Herbert 1998, p. 108.

Pascin, Kisling, Zadkine, Ernst, De Chirico, Severini, Van Dongen, Gargallo, Manolo, Mateo Hernandez and Orloff. The choice of works for display offers a lucid account of the content and the character that the new museum sought to adopt. A third retrospective at the Bibliothèque Nationale complemented the traditionalist evolutionary narrative for French art connecting the three shows with a chronological sequence and presenting a series of French medieval illuminated manuscripts from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Perspicuously inscribed to the national evolutionary scheme, the splendid show at the Petit Palais had to confront what constituted its opponent narrative, the exhibition “Origines et développement de l’art international indépendant” at the Jeu de Paume, now called Musée des Écoles Étrangères, which included works dating from Cézanne to non-representational art. The French participation was reduced to works that explained the sources by which foreign artists drew influence, including namely French cubist and fauvist representatives<sup>87</sup>. Its organising committee (Braque, Jean Cassou, Marie Cuttoli, André Dezarrois, Paul Eluard, Henri Laugier, Léger, Louis Marcoussis, Matisse, Picasso, Raynal, Georges-Henri Rivière, Zervos) traced the origins of cubism and surrealism<sup>88</sup> in primitive (African and Polynesian) sculptures and artefacts with Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh playing a pioneer role in setting the foundations of modern art which was presented here as a total break with tradition. Zervos’ book *Histoire de l’Art Contemporain*, in preparation during the exhibition and eventually published in 1938, was in keeping with the named narrative explaining that he intended to include in this volume «seuls les artistes qui ont apporté un maillon à la chaîne commence par l’homme préhistorique et continue par l’homme primitif suprême qui apparaît par intervalles pour glorifier l’esprit de l’homme»<sup>89</sup>. The scheme introduced at the Jeu de Paume was, in fact, a less schematic version of the renowned evolutionary diagram that featured on the cover of the catalogue of the show *Cubism and Abstract Art*, organised a year earlier by Alfred Barr at the newly founded Museum of Modern Art in New York<sup>90</sup>. Zervos was acknowledged in the catalogue as a contributor to the show, and was asked by Barr to include his loan – two works by Gonzales and Hélicon<sup>91</sup> – in the travelling exhibition to the «leading cities in the United States» that will increase the appreciation for abstract art<sup>92</sup>. Nevertheless

<sup>87</sup> Introduction to the exhibition catalogue *Origines et Développement de l’Art International Indépendant* 1937, n. p.

<sup>88</sup> Surrealism was poorly represented in the show provoking reactions from the part of Breton and his friends. See *André Breton: La Beauté Convulsive* 1991, p. 236.

<sup>89</sup> Zervos 1938, p. 24.

<sup>90</sup> Platt 1988, pp. 284-295.

<sup>91</sup> Alfred H. Barr Jr., letter to Christian Zervos, 17 January 1936. Fonds Cahiers d’Art, CAPROV 6, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

<sup>92</sup> Barr wrote: «I wish to thank you on behalf of our Trustees for your generous loans to the exhibition of Cubism and Abstract Art. The interest in the exhibition is already widespread. In the two weeks since the opening, over eleven thousand people have visited the museum. We have



Zervos eventually criticised Barr's diagram<sup>93</sup>. The critic maintained in the book that it was not his intention to create a *Somme de Systèmes*, underlining that it is impossible for art to be confined in a definitive circle and that

[A] plus forte raison est-il impossible de le diviser, pour paraître intelligent, en catégories, de le classer, pour paraître scientifique, par systèmes, de le résumer, pour paraître profond, en quelques pensées<sup>94</sup>.

Zervos' criticism was clearly addressed to the 1936 MoMA catalogue with the content of his book on the history of contemporary art ending up being a eulogy to cubism and Picasso. This partiality became an issue of resentfulness, notably on the part of Kandinsky who wrote to Josef Albers that «Picasso était et restait le commencement, la suite et l'avenir de cet art moderne [...] Etrange manière d'écrire l'histoire de l'art. Ici, les gens sont révoltés par le livre de Zervos. Certains refusent même de le vendre»<sup>95</sup>. Though he previously upheld ideas favourably-inclined to the construction of a centre – rather than a museum – for contemporary art, Zervos excluded from the book the young generation of artists. He explained in fact that their styles were still in the making with their contribution and influence being unable to resume in standard formulas, or in other words in museum's narrative-based content. Similar positions were found in his earlier contribution to the volume *L'Histoire de l'Art Contemporain: La Peinture*<sup>96</sup>. In his discussion of the latest aspect of non-representational art, Zervos underlined that any critique of the works by the young generation is impossible. The entire text concerned all in all seven artists with diverse styles, unable to configure a tendency of uniform standards<sup>97</sup>. It appears that the prospect of a new museum progressively defined the manners of judgment with regards to its content. In fact, Zervos had announced earlier, in 1934, the publication of two volumes – following the example of Skira – titled *Cent Ans de Peinture Française – De Corot à nos jours*<sup>98</sup>, which proposed to be an illustrated history of French painting, but the project did not come to fruition<sup>99</sup>.

received letters from several museums requesting that the exhibition be shown in their cities after the New York showing [...] a tour of this exhibition to the leading cities in the United States would substantially increase the knowledge and appreciation of the American public for abstract art. Few cities outside of New York have seen any important exhibition of this nature and there is naturally a great demand for a comprehensive exhibition illustrating the historical development of cubism and abstract art [...] The tour will be planned for one year, ending May 1937». Alfred Barr, *letter to Christian Zervos*, 19 March 1936, *Fonds Cahiers d'Art*, CAPROV 6, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

<sup>93</sup> Barr Jr. 1936, p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> Zervos 1938, p. 24.

<sup>95</sup> Vassili Kandinsky, *Letter to Josef Albers* cited in Derouet 2006, p. 86.

<sup>96</sup> Zervos 1930.

<sup>97</sup> Zervos 1935, pp. 363-364.

<sup>98</sup> Zervos 1938.

<sup>99</sup> Derouet 2006, p. 73. Zervos published instead in 1938 the book *Histoire de l'Art Contemporain de Cézanne à nos jours*. The shift of the point of departure from Corot to Cézanne

Zervos' interest was not reduced to classifications of modern art. The monographic exhibition dedicated to the work of Van Gogh at the Palais de Tokio, earlier in 1937, became an object of praise and criticism. Although it was generally considered as exemplary in terms of applied museography<sup>100</sup>, the Greek-born editor and critic found in it the pretext to address a rather biased critique to both the conservators and the architects of the new buildings. He underlined the problem of lighting comparing it with the effective methods used by his collaborator in the Cahiers d'Art and M.A.I. galleries, Alvar Aalto, at the Viipuri library in Finland<sup>101</sup>. Zervos was largely preoccupied with the aspect of functionalism in modern architecture while he fervently supported the representatives of the Modern Movement since its beginnings, a fact that is evident in the entire corpus of books and articles published by «Cahiers d'Art» and in his early collaboration with the publisher Albert Morancé and the Romanian architect Jean Badovici. His critique of the architecture of the new museum at the quai de Tokio is consequently symptomatic of his rejection of both academicism and ornamentation<sup>102</sup>. Although Zervos refrained from mentioning the architectural plans unsuccessfully submitted to the competition by Le Corbusier and Jeanneret, or the preliminary sketches for an independent museum published earlier in his magazine, he remarked

J'aurais beaucoup aimé vous parler des tableaux de l'artiste qui a tant fait pour l'art de nos jours [...] mais cela m'est impossible par la faute des architectes et de tous les responsables de l'aménagement des salles de cette exposition. De l'architecture du nouveau Musée je ne dirai rien, car la laideur des formes et la pauvreté du plan dépassent le pire que nous ayons eu en architecture. Mais je dirai combien je suis étonné que les conservateurs qui ont la charge des œuvres d'art du Musée n'aient pas forcé l'architecte à étudier un éclairage convenable...<sup>103</sup>.

The plans for the inauguration of the museum in 1937 were postponed. That the contribution of dealers and collectors was imperative constituted an idea sustained by many. Georges Besson maintained that this contribution could either take the form of donations or of long-term loans, as was the case with the museums of Winterthur, Rotterdam, Zurich and New York<sup>104</sup>. The small exhibition "Musée d'Art Vivant" at the Maison de la Culture (29, rue d'Anjou),

is telling, for the position-taking of the book was friendly inclined to abstraction the same as the 1937 show at the Jeu de Paume accomplishing Zervos' desire to disconnect modern art from the French tradition identifying it as the distant heir of primitive expression.

<sup>100</sup> *Une Exposition Modèle* 1937, p. 8.

<sup>101</sup> Derouet 2011, p. 83.

<sup>102</sup> These aspects dominated the new buildings at the quai de Tokio. For a detailed presentation of the projects see Steur 1934, pp. 7-54.

<sup>103</sup> Zervos 1937, pp. 98-99.

<sup>104</sup> Since its re-opening, the Luxemburg collections included donations by the Association des Amis des Artistes Vivants and long-term loans by dealers, collectors and the artists themselves. See *Catalogue-Guide* 1929.

run by the French Communist Party, tested the potential for realisation of such ideas. The project, organised by the art dealers Marie Cuttoli and Jeanne Bucher, was administered by a committee acting on behalf of the Société des Amis d'Art Vivant, whose initiative was:

1. de réunir des œuvres significatives d'artistes contemporains grâce à leurs dons et à ceux de leurs collectionneurs et marchands; 2. de léguer plus tard à nos musées nationaux les œuvres du Musée d'Art Vivant dignes de leurs collections<sup>105</sup>.

The works grouped for the show were literally loans from the collections of Cuttoli, Etienne Bignou, Jean Dalsace, Felix Feneon, Henri Laugier, André Lefevre and the viscountess Charles de Noailles, displayed on the third floor of the Maison de la Culture from October to December 1937. The project aimed at accelerating the procedure for the creation of a museum of living art and was based on the idea of long-term loans from private collections, a convenient solution that could well apply to the Luxembourg, as Georges Besson pointed out, adding that the named exhibition furnished some elements of a future room at the Louvre, around 1960<sup>106</sup>.

Although there is little evidence about the terms and conditions of the bequest, presumably the works would be offered to the state for an extended loan period, which in its turn would make a choice for its public collections. The Musée des Écoles Étrangères had already adopted a similar policy including among its exhibits about twenty works borrowed from private collections<sup>107</sup>. The interesting point with the manifestation is that it gives a lucid impression of the extent to which Parisian dealers and artists could contribute to the creation of a modern museum. The collection of works was, as expected, fragmentary, presenting a few post-impressionist landscapes by Signac, early works by Bonnard and Matisse, a tapestry by Rouault, cubist works by Picasso, Braque, Gris and Léger. Goery, Lurçat and Gromaire offered three paintings as protégés of the Maison de la Culture. The section of sculpture included works by Arp, Chauvin, Giacometti, Laurens, and Lipchitz<sup>108</sup>. The project, however, subsided the following year and was eventually aborted with the outbreak of the war.

The private initiatives inscribed in the above dialogue were not reduced to exhibitions but were extended to publishing projects, which were largely encouraged by the developments in mechanical reproduction. Most projects notably concerned the creation of virtual museums in the form of what André Malraux later described as the *Musée Imaginaire*<sup>109</sup>. «Verve» magazine constitutes an illustrious example. It published its inaugural issue in December

<sup>105</sup> Besson 1937a, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> Besson 1937c, p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> The loans included namely five works by Modigliani, two by van Dongen, three by Picasso, two by Foujita, and four by Pascin. See Lawless 1986, p. 31.

<sup>108</sup> Besson 1937b, p. 6.

<sup>109</sup> Malraux 1947.

1937 including early passages from Malraux's *Psychologie de l'Art*<sup>110</sup>, published by Skira, and the text by Raynal *Épître de l'Art français de ses origines à nos jours*<sup>111</sup>, which presented the evolution of French art since the prehistoric times with certain emphasis on the Middle-Ages. Raynal identified in the system of –isms a revival of the medieval artisanal tradition and the system of guilds<sup>112</sup>. The magazine, launched by Tériade with the funding of David Smart and the American corporation Esquire-Coronet Inc., proposed to be a sumptuous richly illustrated publication including original artworks in the form of colour lithographs. Without its costly essence and quality of reproductions, *Verve* could stand for a popularised digest of French art from the medieval times to the modern era, reflecting to a great extent its editor's positions in respect to the evolution of French art. The project was largely preoccupied with the facsimile reproduction of a series of medieval manuscripts and was in tune with the Popular Front cultural agenda which sought to advance public education by introducing to the wider public a panorama of French art on the occasion of the 1937 international show<sup>113</sup>. A closer look into the magazine's content offers an enlightening account of the continuities of French art throughout the centuries that could justify in the eyes of the reader the imperative need for modern art to be institutionalised, with the production of the generation 1905-1925 presented here as the crowning achievement of what was conceived as national heritage. The high quality reproduction, on the other hand, of a series of French masterpieces together with illuminated miniatures from the specialised collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale accomplished the dual role shaped for the museum by the *double répartition* practice in modern museography.

## 5. Conclusion

The war interrupted the opening of the Musée National d'Art Moderne which was eventually inaugurated in 1947, integrating the collections of both the Luxembourg museum and the Musée des Écoles Étrangères in an effort to reconcile the École Française and the École de Paris<sup>114</sup>. The appointment of radical socialist agents and sympathisers in leading cultural posts (Mistler, Dezarrois,

<sup>110</sup> Malraux 1949.

<sup>111</sup> Raynal 1937.

<sup>112</sup> Ivi, pp. 107-108.

<sup>113</sup> Kolokytha 2013, pp. 184-215.

<sup>114</sup> The collections of the Luxembourg museum were subsequently transferred to the quai de Tokio and eventually to Beaubourg forming the permanent collection of the Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou in 1977. Lawless noted: «A la fermeture de l'exposition, les collections du Luxembourg sont transférées au Palais de Tokio mais les événements internationaux incitent à les mettre à l'abri, en partie en province, en partie en réserve». See Lawless 1986, p. 37.

Verne) contributed to a certain extent to the transformation of museum policies in France between the wars culminating with the socialist cultural agenda of the Popular Front. The Luxemburg maintained however a more conservative headship. The attitude towards avant-garde art changed decisively in the post war years with the appointment of the leftist ideologue Jean Cassou as chief curator of the national museum offering new perspectives to its acquisition policies for contemporary art. The necessity of connecting contemporary and past artistic production was vital to the creation of a new museum in Paris, the collections of which proposed to be linked to those of the other national museums, establishing a scheme that sanctioned the evolutionary narrative for French art. This reality makes itself evident in the book *L'École de Paris au Musée National d'Art Moderne* published in 1961 by Bernard Dorival<sup>115</sup>, who served as its conservator from 1941 to 1968. The publication reflects views previously expressed namely by Tériade, Raynal, Skira and to a lesser extent Zervos, notably in its attempt to sanction the international *École de Paris* by recognising in it the last of the three times «in the course of a long history» that «France, and particularly Paris, has experienced a supreme flowering of art»<sup>116</sup>, highlighting the concept of internationalism that was inherent in French artistic production since the Middle-Ages.

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<sup>115</sup> Dorival 1961.

<sup>116</sup> Dorival 1962, pp. 7-19.

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