



NEWSLETTER

348

3 July 2023

ECCOLI



ECO-RESPONSIBILITY: TIME TO MAKE CHOICES

Welcoming the public, the logistics of works and exhibitions, surveying the area... In the face of the climate emergency, Les Rencontres d'Arles is deploying a whole arsenal of eco-responsible measures infused by the thinking of its photographers and teams. Here's an overview.

How can an international festival like Les Rencontres d'Arles reduce its environmental impact? What social role can it play in its local area? How can we defend the way photographers look at global change? The festival did not wait for the scorching summer of 2022 to question its practices and raise awareness of these issues within the photography ecosystem. Eco-design is, so to speak, part of the DNA of this festival, which was designed from the outset to take place outside its walls. Churches, cloisters, industrial wastelands... all places that have to be rethought and adapted for photographic display every year, without altering their heritage identity. The opposite of a white cube.

Olivier Etcheverry, the historic scenographer of the festival's exhibitions, who sadly passed away on 3 March last year, championed the "fairground", sober and thrifty side of the event. By re-using material from previous exhibitions each year, he was constantly reinventing the way in which the works were read and displayed, long before the virtues of eco-design became common knowledge. "Reusing scenographic material is both a constraint and a desire, he confides. Playing with the ephemeral is part of the festival's genetic make-up. This diversity is also what opens up people's curiosity. The important thing is that they look at the images on the show, not necessarily the spaces." It's an approach based on sensitivity and common sense that he has passed on to Amanda Antunes, who is now in charge of the festival's scenography, and to all the production teams [see box p.76].

"The festival is a laboratory that shapes itself according to aesthetic, technical, political and social developments. On the strength of its

experience and aware of the road still to travel, the association deals with ecological and societal issues on a daily basis," says Hubert Védrine, President of Rencontres d'Arles. As a result, in March 2022, Les Rencontres d'Arles joined the Collectif des Festivals Éco-responsables et Solidaires (COFEES) and the Festivals in Motion national project, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions linked to festival transport, with 80% of the carbon impact coming from public and staff travel. This year, the management of Les Rencontres d'Arles has set up a working group to implement practical eco-responsible actions before and during the festival [see p.22].

A festival is a complex machinery where environmental impact lurks in the smallest gaps. The works of art are no exception. Frames, inks, paper, prints, wallpapers... Cécile Nédélec, head of the exhibition production, explains: "For the events we produce, we work closely on these issues upstream with our service providers in Arles and Paris to find out what we can and can't do, or simply to make more eco-responsible choices.

“There are no miracle solutions, but mitigation strategies are possible. Because if we wanted to solve things suddenly, we’d put air conditioning everywhere, full stop.”
— *Valérie Disdier*

We have a very fluid dialogue with them, whether they are photo labs or framing and laminating workshops. For example, Atelier SHL, our service provider in Arles, is very sensitive to these issues. They give us precise information. We know that for a given print run, the paper will be 70% agave fibre and 30% cotton with no optical

additives, that for the wallpaper the ink will be a Greenguard-certified HP latex ink made in France, and that the natural wood for the frame mouldings will be oak sourced from a certified forest in France.” For her, traceability becomes more complex when it comes to inks. “It’s not very well documented, even though

customers are increasingly asking their suppliers for the origin of their products. We’re never safe from greenwashing...”

To manage the large stock of frames, the team has developed an optimised inventory and stock system to make it easier and easier to reuse them. “This is especially true for historical exhibitions, which feature classic vintage prints in relatively standardised formats, she continues. We made the CIRCAD workshop in Paris aware of the need to reuse the frames they had produced from one year to the next for the festival. This approach requires more work on our part, because it often takes longer to reuse them than to place an order. But this year, as we have a lot of archive exhibitions, we’ve decided to focus on that: we’re going to reuse more than 200 frames for the classic photos.”

The question of frames is fundamental, and with good reason: the festival receives between 2,500 and 4,000 works each year. And with them, a mountain of bubble wrap. The aim is zero loss: works that arrive already framed are protected and sent back in their original packaging. “We have a fairly strict policy on repackaging frames,” adds Cécile Nédélec. Our technical teams are aware of this issue. It’s one of the tasks of the surveyors, who created a specific inventory system a few years ago to avoid wasting bubble wrap. We also try to share transport between exhibitions, and we have grouped shuttles that leave Paris to bring the works. We are dependent on volume, but we already have a number of tools at our disposal for rationalising exhibitions, which we use on a daily basis.”

3 questions to... *Cécile Nédélec*

Cécile Nédélec is the Exhibition Production Manager of the Rencontres d’Arles.

How do you define the festival’s eco-responsible specifications or priorities?

We take a different approach depending on whether we’re producing the exhibition or hosting one that’s already been mounted. As part of our production work, we choose a main focus each year, which can vary depending on the project and our workload, because these are very time-consuming processes. For example, last year we put together an exhibition that calculated its footprint from A to Z. This year, we’ve set ourselves the target of reusing and inventorying frames. Our former art administrator, who now works in CSR, has helped us to think up calculation tools and indicators, including for the transport of works, which we have discussed in our working groups. We haven’t put them in place yet, but that will be the next stage.

What are you doing in terms of scenography?

Since 2021, we’ve done a huge amount of work to switch everything over to wood and stop using plasterboard. For economic reasons, the festival has been designed around a system of reuse, with the construction of modular caissons that make up the picture rails. It’s a rationalised, standardised system that we keep from year to year, on which we place the wood, which is also recovered from year to year from our storage at the Étienne paper mills. We set up a system for storing and packaging the assemblies. The big improvement came in autumn 2019 with the creation of a Filemaker database for inventorying the exhibition furniture — not the picture rails — i.e. the display cases, pedestals, benches, etc. We’re lucky enough to have a team of fitters for the picture rails and a carpentry team for the furniture. This is also one of the special features of the Rencontres, as we have the capacity to build things “made to measure”.

How do you work with artists and other cultural organisations?

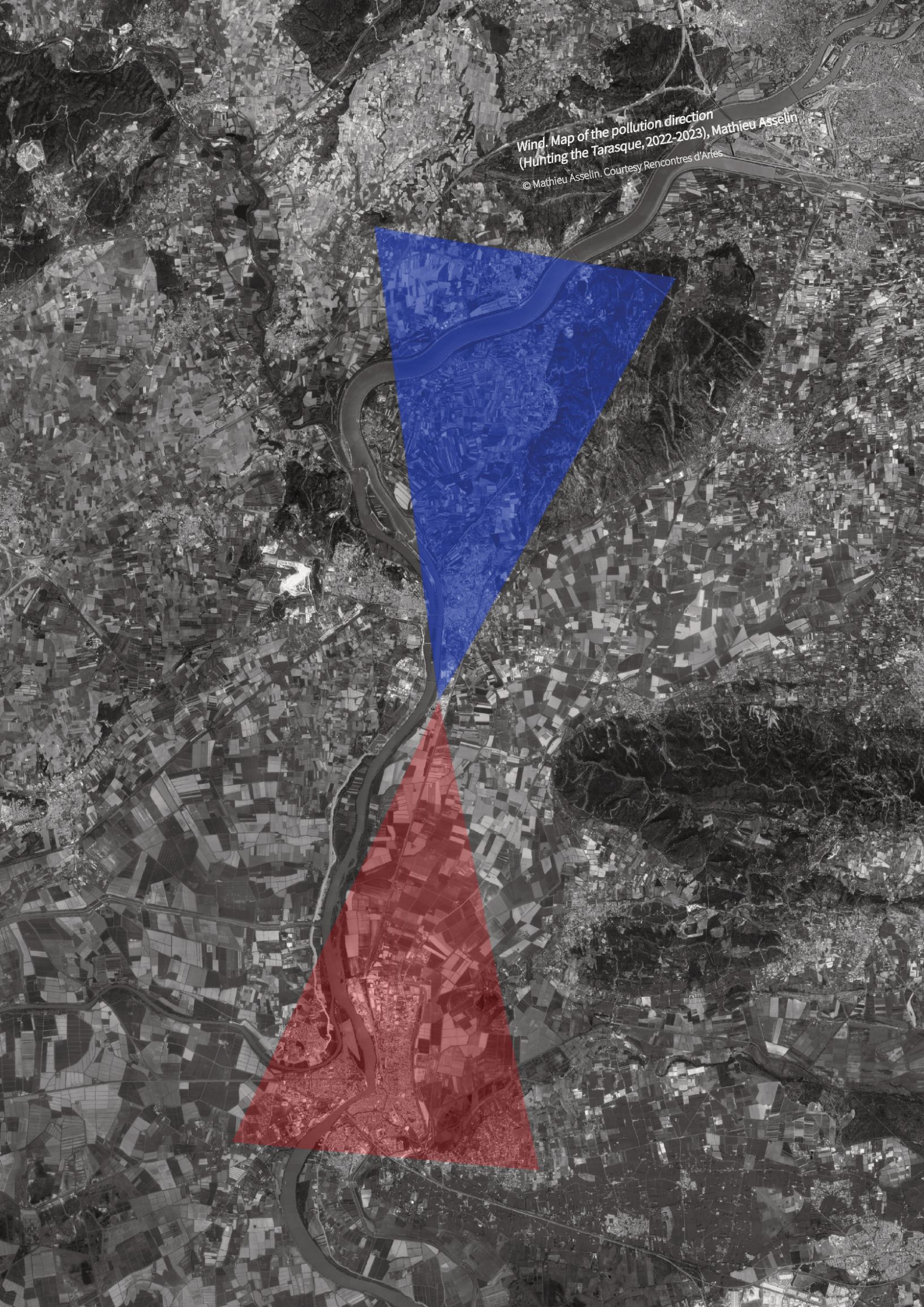
This database is very useful for discussing scenographic proposals with the artists. Each piece of furniture has its own identity card, well packaged, with a photo and an inventory number. We also sometimes make loans to museums, like the Musée de la Camargue, for example. We’re very open to this kind of sharing between cultural players.



We Exhale (detail, 2022-2023), Tanja Engelberts

© Tanja Engelberts. Courtesy Rencontres d'Arles

Wind. Map of the pollution direction
(Hunting the Tarasque, 2022-2023), Mathieu Asselin
© Mathieu Asselin. Courtesy, Rencontres d'Arles



The region is extremely rich, attracting a wide range of photographers to explore its ecosystem. It's a point of convergence: we're questioning Arles, its history, the festival and its commitment to society, artistic proposals, anthropocene, climate change — environmental concerns are very present in young photography. — *Christoph Wiesner*

Field survey

To think about the overall eco-responsibility of a festival like Les Rencontres d'Arles, which welcomes more than 120,000 visitors a year, you need to take a certain height of vision. Rooted in a territory that is fragile from both an ecological and a social point of view, the festival cannot simply be a "laboratory" detached from its contextual realities. This is why Rencontres d'Arles has joined forces with the Cité Anthropocène in Lyon to carry out a transdisciplinary study of the Arles area in February 2023. Scientists, researchers, architects and artists looked at the ecosystem of the Rhône delta with, in mind, the idea of making new recommendations for summer habitability for Ground Control, a former railway site and familiar exhibition venue for the Rencontres d'Arles. The site, which had to close last year for a fortnight due to the intense heatwave, is this summer hosting the exhibitions "Grey sun" by Éric Tabuchi and Nelly Monnier [see p.32] and "Special attention" with Jingyu Cao, Raphaël Lods and Iris Millot.

Sentinel territory and mitigation strategies

Ground Control serves as a test area for implementing the solutions devised as a result of the survey. "We put together a heterogeneous group of around fifteen people from very different disciplines — urban geography, biodiversity, agro-ecology, microbiology, etc. — because when we talk about climate change, we need to reorientate the way we do science and the way we see the world, using a variety of approaches," explains Valérie Disdier, Chair of the Cité Anthropocène. For a fortnight,

the team carried out a field study in Camargue, meeting local players from users to firefighters, including elected representatives, ENSP students and festival employees. The Rhone delta is a sentinel area, a fragile territory where the acceleration of change is felt even more than elsewhere. "We started from the basic assumption that the heatwave summer of 2022 was not a one-off episode. The second assumption was to come up with recommendations that were not based on hypertechnology, but rather on a form of frugality — for example, what solutions could be found to avoid air conditioning? For example, an already built-up site like Ground Control has its advantages and disadvantages. How can we make the most of it?"

If we were to take this line of reasoning a step further,

the recommendations could be extended to the opening hours of exhibitions or the working conditions of reception staff, with, in time, the very temporality of the festival being called into question, which would have a domino effect on the entire local economy. A scenario that is not on the agenda, but which inevitably raises the question of the medium — or long-term viability of major cultural and tourist events in high-risk areas. "The myth of summer as we've known it since the 1950s is not working. Arles is almost a seaside town from an economic point of view, notes Valérie Disdier. Environmental awareness is undeniable, including among elected representatives. But, as is the case everywhere, you often have to hit the economic wall to get people to react. Let's not forget that simple, sustainable solutions already exist."

A look at the impact of the Anthropocene

At Monoprix, the "Here near" exhibition presents three projects dealing with the nuisances that threaten the ecological balance of Arles and the surrounding area. Mathieu Asselin, Tanja Engelberts and Sheng-Wen Lo have been carrying out field research since 2022. Industry, transport, animal life, water distribution networks... the Anthropocene is having a major impact on natural ecosystems. "In the context in which we live today, it is essential to look around us, to observe our place in the environment and in space, our relationships with human and non-human living things. And to realise the extent to which all these elements and beings are interconnected," says Dutch curator Daria Tuminas. "In this exhibition, I'm looking to create connections between spaces. It's not just about Arles, but also Camargue, Switzerland, where the Rhône comes from, Indonesia, where the Tarascon paper mill is based, and so on. Everything is interconnected. This interconnection between all forms of life and all regions is one of the keys."

"Here near"

Until 24 September
 Monoprix. Place Lamartine. Arles
www.rencontres-arles.com





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