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# 15 Must-See French Art Foundations

BY **SARAH BELMONT** November 24, 2023 8:49am



Fondation LUMA, Arles, France  
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Around the world, art foundations are formed for a variety of reasons. Beyond the tax advantages that may accrue to an individual, a family, or a corporation may lie a desire to preserve a collection, to promote particular values, or to keep a collector's memory alive. Whatever the reasons, members of the public are the ultimate beneficiaries, as the artworks in private hands become accessible to all.

It stands to reason that France, a country with a deep and rich art history and some of the most dedicated collectors in the world, would also host some of the greatest art foundations. Here, we introduce you to 15 of them.

# Fondation Léa et Napoléon Bullukian, Lyon

Napoléon Bullukian had a remarkable life. He lost both his parents to the Armenian genocide in 1915. Deported, enslaved by a Kurdish tribe, then raised in an orphanage after his escape, he eventually moved to France. There he met and married Léa Vaillat, who shared his passion for art, and launched a construction company in Lyon. After the Second World War he diversified his industrial activities, eventually focusing on plastic. In 1983, a year before his death, he left a bequest to Fondation de France, putting it in charge of creating a private foundation dedicated to medical research, Armenian communities, and young artists.

A year later, the Fondation Léa et Napoléon Bullukian art center was inaugurated in a 645-square-foot space in Lyon showcasing works from Bullukian's collection. Artists of the Lyon school, such as Jean Couty, Jean Fusaro, René Chancrin, and Maurice Montet, are featured, as are works acquired after the collector's death, such as pieces by Jérémy Gobé and Lionel Sabatté. In 2019 the small space was expanded by 4,843 square feet and a spacious private garden was made accessible to the public.

# Fondation CAB, Saint-Paul de Vence

In 2012, Belgian art collector Hubert Bonnet launched Fondation CAB in Brussels to promote minimalist and conceptual art through an active cultural program. Two years ago a sister institution opened its doors in Saint-Paul de Vence in a modernist 1950s building revamped by architect Charles Zana.

The French outpost stands out from the Belgian venue with particularly dynamic exhibitions, an artist-in-residency program, and hospitality spaces. Works by Carl Andre, Richard Serra, and Michelangelo Pistoletto offer an enticing peek into Bonnet's permanent collection. The display extends into the garden, where sculptures by Bernar Venet, Jonathan Monk, and Richard Long can be found; plans call for an expansion of the collection over time. There is also a restaurant with Charlotte Perriand furnishings, four guest rooms, and a small Jean Prouvé-designed house where visitors can stay overnight.

# Fondation Carmignac, Porquerolles

In 2000 the French entrepreneur Édouard Carmignac created his namesake family foundation to steward his collection. Thirteen years later, he acquired the 37-acre Domaine de la Courtade vineyard on the picturesque Mediterranean island of Porquerolles with the intent of turning it into a contemporary art center—the Villa Carmignac.

The island is accessible only by boat from the town of Hyères on the Côte d'Azur. From the boat a road takes visitors up to Villa Carmignac, where landscape architect Louis Benech designed a "non-garden" filled with endemic species of flora and some 20 outdoor art installations. Among them are works by Jaume Plensa, Wang Keping, Ugo Rondinone, Nils Udo, and Miquel Barceló, whose *Alcastre* is an imposing skull-like sculpture that alludes to a mythological creature said to haunt Porquerolles.

The foundation's summer activities, like movie nights and yoga classes, take place by Ed Ruscha's billboard-size painting on metal, *Sea of Desire*. Inside, Janaina Mello Landini's site-specific *Ciclotrama 50 (wind)*, which adorns a staircase to the lower level, leads to *The Imaginary Sea* by Bruce Nauman, a fountain sculpture made of 100 suspended fish.

# Fondation Clément, Le François, Martinique

Fondation Clément was created in 2005 by entrepreneur Bernard Hayot in Le François, Martinique, to promote Caribbean culture and heritage. Its activities are concentrated mainly at Habitation Clément, a rum distillery that is listed as a UNESCO world heritage site.

In 2016 architects Reichen and Robert and Associates were hired to turn an old vat room into a 6,500-square-foot exhibition area equally divided into three galleries, all devoted to contemporary art. There is also a library that holds numerous books on the history of the Caribbean. As for the 39.5-acre sculpture park that encircles the property, it features works by renowned contemporary artists including Angela Bulloch, Dale Chihuly, Jeppe Hein, and Bernar Venet.

The foundation extends its expertise and patronage to two other Creole estates, both rehabilitated in the 2000s and also UNESCO-listed—Habitation La Sucrierie and Habitation Pécoul. They can be visited only in September on local heritage day.

# Fondation Hartung Bergman, Antibes

In 1929 Hans Hartung, a French–German pioneer of the Lyrical Abstraction movement, and Anna-Eva Bergman, a Norwegian illustrator and abstract painter, met in the Montparnasse district in Paris. They tied the knot, moved to Minorca in the 1930s, divorced in 1937, remarried 15 years later, and settled in the 1960s in a villa they built on five acres in the hills of Antibes. This is where the activities of their namesake foundation, created in 1994 to keep their memory alive, now take place. The property was revamped and opened to the public in May 2022.

There is an earthy vibe to this site. If Hartung is officially responsible for its architecture and design, it's not impossible that he drew inspiration from the sketches his wife had made 30 years earlier in Minorca. That the rooms do not communicate is an invitation to stay connected with nature: You have to go outside before you can come back in. Selections from the permanent collection (comprising some 16,000 original paintings and drawings) and temporary displays occupy Hartung's and Bergman's former studios. Hartung's workplace was left almost intact, with his homemade wheelchair prominently placed.

Between the upper and lower spaces of the villa, respectively reserved for private and public pursuits, stand about 200 olive trees. Near the bookstore is the Chez Marcelle food stall, named after the couple's cook, who has been working on site since 1973. Her Pissaladière, an onion pie typical of the Provence region, is to die for. Seven rooms have been remodeled to welcome researchers on the grounds.

# Fondation LUMA, Arles

Located in the south of France, LUMA Arles is a 2013 extension of the foundation created in 2004 by art collector Maja Hoffmann in Zurich to support the visual arts, photography, publishing, documentaries, and multimedia. It is housed in a 183-foot-tall building designed by Pritzker winning architect Frank Gehry, set within the 450,000-square-foot Park des Ateliers designed by renowned landscape designer Bas Smets. The site also includes a former boiler-making factory renovated by Moatti & Rivère Architects and a former mechanical workshop and storage facility revamped by Selldorf Architects, all of which has been repurposed into brand-new exhibition spaces.

The Parc des Ateliers is filled with art installations, such as *OooOoO* by Korean artist Koo Jeong, a vast skate park that glows a phosphorescent green at night. A little farther along are Liam Gillick's *Orientation Platforms*, metal sculptures that invite contemplation as well as discussion at the junction of art and design; Franz West's all-pink twisting-and-turning sculpture *Krauses Gekröse*, which had never been assembled completely before its installation in Arles; and *MEMORY, 2021* by Kerstin Brätsch. This poetic mosaic, featuring characters from the German artist's canvases, covers the entire floor of Café du Parc, which is the perfect spot for a lunch break.

# Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul de Vence

The foundation created by publishers and art dealers Marguerite and Aimé Maeght is said to have been the first devoted to modern and contemporary art in France. Fondation Maeght, inaugurated in 1964 by then minister of culture Andre Malraux, was designed by Spanish architect Josep Lluís Sert. The 9,000-square-foot building is home to the Maeghts' collection of 13,000 artworks, including 2,000 works by Joan Miró (the largest collection in France). Outside, there are site-specific installations by Georges Braque, Pierre Tal-Coat, Marc Chagall, Pol Bury, and Raoul Ubac and a courtyard filled with works by Alberto Giacometti.

A 5,381-square-foot expansion is currently underway, directed by the Paris-based firm Silvio d'Ascia Architecture. Completion of the project should coincide with the foundation's 60-year anniversary, to be celebrated in the summer of 2024 with an exhibition devoted to Henri Matisse and Pierre Bonnard.



## Fondation d'Entreprise Martell, Cognac



Fondation d'Entreprise Martell, Cognac, France

Photo : Fondation d'Entreprise Martell.

If you happen to visit Martell's legendary cognac cellars in Gâtébourse in southwestern France, you can't miss Fondation d'Entreprise Martell. The 6,000-square foot former bottling plant, crowned with a giant swift (which has been the brand's emblem for three centuries), was renovated by French architectural practice Brochet Lajus Pueyo in 2017. Ever since, visitors have had the opportunity to experience contemporary art in this unusual setting.

The entry hall is shaped like the hull of a ship, a reference to the vessels that used to transport barrels of Cognac overseas. On the first floor is an 885-square-foot exhibition space. The second level consists of wood, ceramics, glass, paper, and fabric workshops run by artists and artisans. The third floor is reserved for commissioned digital and multisensory experiences, and the fourth level hosts receptions and private events.

The current exhibition, "Almanach," on view through December 2023, gives body to the foundation's first five-year research program, which charged designers with investigating local materials and exploring "new ways for building a resilient and equitable future."

## Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris

Welcome aboard the Pernod Ricard Express. In 2021 the wine and spirits giant moved into a new global headquarters—a 195,000-square-foot building known as “The Island” next to the Gare Saint-Lazare in Paris. Occupying most of the building’s ground floor is the Fondation Pernod Ricard, which hosts artistic events open to the public free of charge. Facilities include exhibition galleries, a 130-seat auditorium, a café, a library, and a bookshop.

The entrance wall is covered with a multicolored checkered work by Mathieu Mercier, while in the adjacent rooms the exhibition “Do You Believe in Ghosts,” featuring the six winners of the 24th Prix Pernod Ricard, is on view through October 28. A monumental painting by Salvador Dalí, *La Pêche au Thon* (Fishing Tuna), hangs in the lobby of the main building.

## Fondation François Schneider, Wattwiller



Fondation François Schneider, Wattwiller, France

Photo : Fondation François Schneider.

Created in 2000, Fondation François Schneider is the only foundation entirely devoted to water in France. Everything revolves around this theme, from its support of contemporary artists working on the subject of water to its artist-in-residency program (for art students from schools along the Rhine River) to its traveling exhibitions and publications.

In 2013 a disused bottling plant on the site of former thermal springs in Wattwiller, a city in northeastern France, was restored and expanded by architect Daniel Villotte into a four-story, 35,520-square-foot art center and exhibition space with an auditorium, a cafeteria, and a bookstore. An adjoining sculpture garden contains water-themed works by Niki de Saint Phalle, Pol Bury, Sylvie de Meurville, and others. The center's program includes three yearly exhibitions—a themed presentation, a show devoted to one contemporary artist, and a group show.

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## Lee Ufan Arles



Lee Ufan Arles, France

Photo : Lee Ufan Arles.

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Lee Ufan Arles is an extension of the New York-based Lee Ufan Foundation. It opened its doors last spring in the heart of the city after the internationally known Korean artist created an endowment fund with the support of some of his friends, including Michel Enrici, the former director of Fondation Maeght. The project is nestled in a 16th-century private mansion that was once the home of a long line of antiques dealers. The building has been retrofitted by Pritzker Prize winner Tadao Ando, Lee's favorite architect, who is also responsible for the Lee Ufan Museum on the Japanese island of Naoshima and the Space Lee Ufan at the Busan Museum of Art in South Korea.

The four-story manse consists of nearly 25 rooms. The lower level, which is accessible only by appointment, is home to three site-specific creations. On the first floor are two pieces from Lee's "Relatum" series (*Relatum 1969/2022* and *Relatum—Gravité*). Between these works stands a Roman bust discovered during an early stage of construction. The second-floor display is arranged chronologically, going from Lee's 1970s series "From Line," with stripes painted in one gesture until the exhaustion of paint, to the 2000s "Dialogues" series, the latest pieces of which include wavy lines that convey deeper vibrations. The top floor, a multipurpose space for meetings, conferences, receptions, and concerts where original moldings and chimneys have been preserved, was inaugurated this year with a temporary exhibition. Lee has said that he would like to include works from his personal collection in the permanent display.

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## Fondation Vasarely, Aix-en-Provence

"The location of this center has had me preoccupied for over 20 years," said Victor Vasarely before having his foundation built in Jas-de-Bouffan (a neighborhood of Aix-en-Provence), where the family of his idol, Paul Cezanne, once lived. "I chose Aix-en-Provence . . . because of its rich past, its artistic and architectural activities, its renowned festival, its exceptional highway network and, lastly, because of my admiration for Cezanne."

The imposing black and white building, finished in 1976, consists of 16 hexagonal modules—the hexagon a nod to the rough shape of France, which the Hungarian artist, leader of the Op Art movement, adopted as his new home in 1930. According to Vasarely's vision, this 54,000-square-foot "lumino-kinetic sculpture" seals the merger of architecture and fine art. On the ground floor, seven 36-foot-high hexagonal chambers are dedicated to 42 monumental artworks by the artist, one for each wall. The tapestries especially hit their mark. The upper floor is reserved for offices and temporary exhibitions.

## Venet Foundation, Le Muy



Venet Foundation, Le Muy, France

Photo : WireImage via Getty Images.

Le Muy is a city situated in the Var department in the south of France. This is where French mixed-media artist Bernar Venet bought a 10-acre estate that included an 18th-century mill and factory where he could live, work, and steward his personal collection of minimalist and conceptual art. This 10-acre estate, which Venet has described as a “self-portrait in disguise” and a “total artwork where old, industrial, and contemporary architectures meet,” has been opening its doors every summer since 2014 as the Venet Foundation (the name and administrative structure is American because Venet lived for more than 50 years in the United States).

Visitors come primarily for the sculpture park, dotted with installations by Larry Bell, Donald Judd, Richard Long, Tony Cragg, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Richard Deacon, and Anish Kapoor, among others. The centerpiece of this outdoor display may be James Turrell’s *Skyspace*, a chapel erected in 2014 to house works by Frank Stella. The art gallery is meant for temporary exhibitions, which have shown the work of Jean Tinguely, Fred Sandback, Yves Klein, Claude Viallat, and Enrico Navarra. Next year, a 3D avatar of Venet will be present to answer questions from the public.

# Fondation Villa Datris, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue

Danièle Kapel-Marcovici and architect Tristan Fourtine were in love—with each other, with the south of France, and with sculpture in every shape and form. Both wanted to share their passion for art with as many people as possible through pedagogical and mostly fun exhibitions. In 2010 they visited a 5,381-square-foot 19th-century mansion with a pink facade in the center of L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, a town in the Vaucluse region, and could picture their dream actually coming true.

Two years later, Villa Datris (“Datris” being a combination of “Danielle” and “Tristan”) opened as a private art center, committed to reshuffling its display yearly based on a theme. “Movement and Light #2,” for example, has been on view since April (through October) with works by Miguel Chevalier, Julio Le Parc, Jean-Michel Othoniel, Jean Tinguely, Chul-Hyun Ahn, and others, their names lengthening the list of 800 or so artists who have been featured there since the opening. The current show, occupying four floors, is a mixture of loans and pieces from Marcovici’s personal collection.

## Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris

Created in 2012 by Bernard Arnault, CEO of the LVMH group, as a way to support art, culture, and heritage, Fondation Louis Vuitton materialized two years later in the middle of Bois de Boulogne, near the Jardin d’Acclimatation. With its 12 glass “sails” and 19,000 panels of fiber-reinforced concrete, this Frank Gehry creation stands like a majestic ship at the edge of its reflecting pool (though some compare it to a cloud, others to an iceberg or a beetle).

Under this imposing glass shell lie 11 galleries, including one with a 55-foot ceiling, considered a tribute to Le Corbusier’s chapel in Ronchamp. Fondation Louis Vuitton is home to an impressive collection of contemporary art that dialogues with the architecture as well as with ambitious exhibitions devoted to major figures of art history, such as Russian collectors Sergei Shchukin and Mikhaïl and Ivan Morozov, as well as artists like Egon Schiele, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Simon Hantäi, Cindy Sherman, and soon Mark Rothko.

Isa Genzken’s 32-foot stainless steel rose in the entrance hall will leave you in awe, as will Olafur Eliasson’s *Inside the Horizon*, a luminous installation based on LED lights and glass panels, and Ellsworth Kelly’s *Colored Panels (Red, Yellow, Blue, Green, Violet)*, spread across the auditorium. Though a little far from the center of Paris, the site won’t disappoint.

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