

POWER OF THE INSTITUTION

Sheyi Bankale in conversation
with Tatyana Franck

Tatyana Franck was inaugurated as director of the Musée de l'Elysée in 2015. She was just thirty, however, she was born into a family devoted to the arts; Henri Cartier-Bresson married Franck's aunt. The Musée de l'Elysée's extensive history of links to local practitioners, and donations by novice photographers has set the pace of the collection. The change of directorship has heralded a shift in direction that includes innovative 3D digitising techniques for conservation. Franck is keen to stamp a contemporary mark upon this historic museum.

Sheyi Bankale: *The Memory of the Future* was your inaugural exhibition at the Musée de l'Elysée?

Tatyana Franck: Yes. The idea was a journey through time. I actually started from the collection. We have a very important collection – one million objects – and this is also one reason why we are moving towards our big project which is – Plateforme10, it's because we don't currently have space to display our collection. We only present temporary exhibitions and so, when I arrived in 2015, I realised that one of the unique areas of our collection is the diversity of photographic processes and techniques. So, the idea was to start from the collection and to find works that would create a dialogue while representing pioneers of the first photographic techniques, for example, daguerreotypes and cyanotypes.

SB: The collection houses works from the 1840s?

TF: Exactly, from 1839 to yesterday. For example, the artist Loris Gréaud came here and used the museum as a camera obscura. We cut out all available light and laid photographic paper for him to capture the soul of the museum. His installation entered the collection.

SB: How would you describe the ethos of the museum?

TF: The museum is one of the oldest photographic museums in Europe. In 1985, Charles-Henri Favrod became the director of the Musée de l'Elysée and turned it into a photographic museum, so last year we celebrated our 30th anniversary. It was a major event, and Lausanne has always been a pioneer in photography. Since the creation of photography in the nineteenth century, many local amateurs were interested in the photographic medium. It is thanks to local amateurs who gave their collections to the state, that we were able to create the photographic museum. It's very interesting because Lausanne is a small town, but it is vivid with creativity, especially in art.

SB: Yes, there appears to be a strong, affluent art community in Lausanne.

TF: It's quite brilliant, you know. We have had significant people, and Charles-Henri Favrod was a journalist who pointed out the fact that photography was a medium in its own right at a time when nobody really believed in photography. The support for photography is very important nowadays through several schools, a lot of talented photographer, publishers, printers are based here.

SB: Of interest, too, is academia in the visual arts. International students gravitate to a number of important



Gregory Collavini,
Mapping Romain Tardy
à la Nuit des images,
2015.

universities and schools of art in Lausanne. So it's quite an important region, as you said, for photography.

TF: Indeed we have a very well – known photography teacher at the university, Olivier Lugon, with whom we've worked on many occasions. Collaborations are quite interesting I think. That's the strength of the city. And looking back at *The Memory of the Future*, the last part presented an innovative 3D scanning collaborative project. Paradoxically, people always view photography as flat, but photography is mainly about objects. For instance, daguerreotypes are objects, they're not flat. And this is what I really wanted to show in the exhibition – the materiality of photography. Thanks to new forms of materialisation we can understand that photography is an object.

SB: Such an interesting point, it reveals photography has come full circle. The digital age has acknowledged this because its images are in 2D form. Photographers and artists have reacted to the digital to rediscover the existence of the materiality of the print, and that echoes the very beginning, as you said; the early

presentation of photography was in a physical form. It is interesting to see now how a number of artists are returning to the physicality of the photographic object.

TF: I think that's really the strength of Lausanne; we have the internationally known school called the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne and it's where many visionary projects originate from. I think it is like the Silicon Valley of Europe. I really wanted to put things to the test, and while the issues for a museum today are 'conserve, preserve and exhibit', it's also necessary to innovate. We have the chance to work with pioneers, and we can test that in our exhibitions.

SB: You welcome experimental risk taking?

TF: Exactly. I'd like to think we welcome pioneers, and I think we have a chance to do that here.

SB: Your vision is quite unique for a museum. Museums are generally stable institutions. They, as you said, 'conserve, preserve and exhibit' but don't necessarily innovate...

TF: We have always innovated and I really wanted to continue that. It is the first time in the museum's history that we present a space dedicated to new technologies. We wanted to test this with the public and see the reaction.

SB: Tell me about the diversity of the collection in terms of international and local artworks?

TF: We have a strong local 'core' to our collection. But since the creation of the museum there have been four directors. We always supported the young generation and that was part of our strategy; to facilitate new works. In that sense, ten years ago the former director, William Ewing, whom you know well, curated that fantastic exhibition called *reGeneration* for the twentieth anniversary of the museum. Contact was made with schools all around the world. They sent the work of their talented students and the museum selected fifty of them who were considered the best, young future photographers. That for us is very important because it gave us an idea of what was going on everywhere, and we supported this by acquiring the works for our collection.

Another very important part is that the museum is well-known for preserving complete archives of photographers. For example, we host the René Burri photographic archives. We host the Charlie Chaplin photography archives, too. We also have Nicolas Bouvier, and that means we don't only have prints but also negatives, letters, correspondence and contact sheets revealing the creative process of the artist.

SB: And what is the field of the collection and exhibition programme?

TF: My wish is to present the diversity of photography, so this is why I began, in January 2016, by paying tribute to one of the best street photographers, Werner Bischof. Celebrating his hundredth anniversary, we launched our

collection of photography catalogues in collaboration with the publisher Noir sur Blanc. We collaborated with a Swiss-German designer and the objective was to have one version in English, French and German...

SB: How would you react if I say Röstigraben?

TF: That is very Swiss! [Laughter]

SB: Yes.

TF: This is where we have two very important photography museums: the Fotomuseum Winterthur and the Musée de l'Elysée. As I mentioned, we organised an event to celebrate our hundredth anniversary of Werner Bischof who was from Zürich. In partnership with the Fotomuseum Winterthur, we organised a full day of colloquiums and conversations. Next year, we will collaborate on an exhibition celebrating the hundredth anniversary of Switzerland Tourism with the Fotomuseum Winterthur, where we have invited five artists – Mexican, Chinese, American, German and British – to 'scope' a new vision of Switzerland. So to come back to the programme, the idea is to present thematic exhibitions, and to really show the diversity of photography.

SB: I'm keen to understand the audiences here at the museum. Are they active, in relation to the exhibitions, or quite passive in terms of accepting what's being shown and the prescribed educational programme?

TF: There exists a 'core' visitor. For each exhibition we set our goals in terms of visitors. For Werner Bischof, our objective was to have more Swiss-German visitors. They represented 25% of our overall audience, which was above our target. For *The Memory of the Future* the aim was to reach an international art-related audience, so in terms of region it is both local and international. We really have a lot of people coming from abroad.

SB: How are you preparing for Plateforme10, the new purpose-built museum? You're using new technology to enhance the visitors' experience, I imagine?

TF: Yes, so it will be completely different, as you said, because we will double our exhibition space, we will double our conservation storage. What we are building is not only three museums in the new space, it's really a new area in town. There are twenty-two thousand square metres that will encompass the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-arts (mcb-a), the Musée de design et d'arts appliqués contemporains (mudac) and the Musée de l'Elysée. In addition, we will have curators and artists residencies, a major documentation centre, restaurants and more. The Musée de l'Elysée today is an eighteenth-century house that has been turned into a museum. It will be completely different. We are building a museum from scratch. Within our 1600 square metres exhibition space,

have a 3D project which was presented in the exhibition I curated this summer. Thus, many ways to show photography using digital technologies.

SB: Tell me about the future? This new museum . . . well, actually, you said it's more than just a new-build. You are part of creating a new social district – dynamic – it's a new cultural landmark in Lausanne. What has been the reaction from the general public? How do you envision embracing them, inviting them into the space?

TF: We have a major challenge to take the audience – who is devoted to our current building – along with us, and to convince them to move with us through this journey. That's something we've been working on. People are very much attached to the house and its lakeview. But, we have our limits here. The walls cannot be stretched.

What we're building is unique in Europe. We have three major

“ We have a major challenge to take the audience – who is devoted to our current building – along with us, and to convince them to move with us through this journey ”

we will have flexible walls, which is something we need to be able to present large format photography. And the idea is to have three sections: one for temporary exhibitions, one for permanent display, and a new media room. Of course, we will use technology. We will be able to present our collection in a digital way and we have launched two pioneer projects already. One is the digitisation of the photography book collection. We have a scanner that can digitalise 1500 pages an hour. So, the idea is to scan all the books we have and to be able to present them in the museum as well as making them accessible online. For instance, you will be able to zoom in to see all the detail of the books, because books have recently become works of art. Secondly, we

institutions that can work together and that are very complementary. We will be able to produce thematic exhibitions together, which is quite rare. The location behind the train station is valuable, too. As it will be completely rebuilt within five years, it will become one of the major hubs in Switzerland, able to accommodate fifty million visitors each year.

SB: An international profile?

TF: I think it's a fantastic opportunity to do what we could not before, and to put the museum on another level. Not only the museum, as you said, but a new area, entirely. It's very exciting.

In Conversation

Tatyana Franck is the Director of the Musée de l'Elysée since March 1st 2015. Between 2007 and 2015, she was the Director of the Claude Picasso Archives in Geneva, which houses Pablo Picasso's works as well as major photographic collections including the David Douglas Duncan collection. Franck is involved in the cultural policies of several renowned institutions, and holds various honorary posts in Switzerland.

Sheyi Bankale is the Curator of *Next Level Projects* and Editor of *Next Level* magazine. He has acted as judge and nominator for *The Art Foundation*, *Google Photography Prize*, *Photography Festival BMW Prize*, *The Pix Pictet* and *Next Level Awards*, and as an expert at many international portfolio reviews such as *Houston Fotofest*, *Les Rencontres D'Arles*, *Finnish Museum of Photography* and *Scotiabank CONTACT*. He has lectured on 'Photography as Contemporary Art' at Sotheby's Institute of Art; University of Westminster; City University, London; University for the Creative Arts and Centre of Contemporary Art, Lagos. Bankale was the 2015 Curator for the prestigious *Photo 50* exhibition at the *London Art Fair*, the curator for the European City of Culture 2011 and renowned for his curatorial work as Guest Curator for Saatchi Art's Special Guest Curator Programme.