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FRED FOREST

12 JULY - 28 AUGUST 2017

FRED FOREST

[#ExpoFredForest](#)

Centre **40**
Pompidou

FRED FOREST

12 JULY – 28 AUGUST 2017

17 July 2017



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Fred Forest
*Un M2 installé dans la campagne géorgienne
près de Tbilissi grâce à la complicité
de Ferdinand Corte en mémoire de cet artiste
et de cet être extraordinaire qu'il a été pour moi*
© Fred Forest

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PRESS RELEASE

FRED FOREST

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FORUM, LEVEL -1

This exhibition takes “media-man” Fred Forest’s notion of “territory” as a guiding theme to survey the fifty-year career of this pioneer of a participatory, sociological art. It opens with *Territoire du m² artistique*, a work created in 1977, the year of the Centre Pompidou’s foundation, before going on to explore the development of Forest’s work from the early “screen-paintings” and “blanks to be filled” to his critical media performances.

The territories Forest engages with are many, from the filled space of painting and the media to the voids he sets about creating, from the flow of the media to the bounded institution, from local scale to planetary utopia, from the land at Anserville - his property and work of art - to territories virtual or invisible. The exhibition seeks to bring out the tensions that inhabit the work and draw attention to Forest’s project as an artist, often eclipsed by his media activism.

The exhibition in Forum -1 presents his most famous interventions (*Space médias*, *La maison de vos rêves*, *Le blanc envahit la ville*) and other works less well known (*La famille vidéo*, *New Media N°1...*) through televisual, photographic and written materials for the most part hitherto unpublished, and includes a reactivation of *La Bourse de l’imaginaire*, first realised in the Centre Pompidou in 1982. It also traces Forest’s ambivalent relationship to art institutions, the Centre among them.

To find out more, check the Centre Pompidou’s Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts.

AN INTRODUCTION BY CURATOR ALICIA KNOCK

Fred Forest has spent his life taking on non-artistic roles – “media-man”, sociologist, journalist, trader in the imagination, Robin Hood of the art institutions, “technological painter” – making him a paradoxical artist, to say the least. Without ignoring these shifting roles, which involved him naturally enough in the media and their technological development, the exhibition seeks to retrace Forest’s career in terms of the imaginary – both individual and collective – that informs his work. Championed by Pierre Restany for the sociological aspect of his art, but also as artist of the void, Forest was first a painter. Influenced by Surrealism, his artistic beginnings in Algeria left him with a marked interest in automatic visions and the settled conviction that art, even if anchored in the social, had above all to liberate dreams and imagination.

Throughout his career, he has sought to highlight the plastic aspect of everyday social phenomena. Working first as a newspaper cartoonist, he developed an early iconography of media in the epic of the television-man, with the TV screen as the new “origin of the world”. His drawings of that time led directly to the creation of the *Tableaux-écrans* or “screen-paintings” of 1969, his first interactive paintings, which would quickly become properly televisual. These works already develop a play of solid and void, of full and empty, with areas of dense “unconscious imagery” on the one hand and blanks or empty areas onto which slides are projected on the other.

The screen paintings, combining drawn and mechanically reproduced images, were directly followed by the experiments with blanks in newspapers (*Spaces médias*, 1972) and then television and radio. Forest’s work can thus be seen as part of the conceptual emancipation from the pictorial that so marked the late 1960s, privileging the “open work”, a notion the artist pushed even further. In his voids or blanks, the work is not just unfinished, but not yet even begun, the creative act being left entirely to the reader, viewer or passer-by. The *Spaces médias* also represent a reconnection to the tradition of the monochrome, a tribute to the researches of Mondrian and Klein, given a literal reinterpretation in two later works for TV/ video (*Le bleu à la télévision, hommage électronique à Yves Klein*, 1984 ; *Hommage à Mondrian*, 1989). The *Territoire du m²* that stands at the centre of the exhibition furthermore takes up the idea of the grid crucial to Mondrian’s geometric abstraction. The m² is both political and artistic in function : a revolutionary standard “for all men and all ages”, it is also the artist’s unit of creation, from TV screen to the metre-square blank canvas.



La photo du téléspectateur,
vidéo performance réalisée
par Fred Forest dans le cadre
de l'émission Vidéographie
sur la Radio Télévision Belge
le 13 novembre 1976.
Une photo Noir et Blanc,
tirage argentique sur papier,
18 x 12,5 cm
© Fred Forest
© Adagg, Paris 2017

The “open work” the artist aspires to can exist at any scale and in varying degrees of materiality, from object to idea. But beyond the work itself, Forest has been concerned above all with its regimes of visibility (*Vieira da Silva dans un coffre-fort*, 1975; “Le m² invisible”...). From the start, the institutional context has been crucial to his work, which has included the organisation of parallel events (*Biennale de l’an 2000*, Kassel Documenta) and legal processes turned works of art (*L’Œuvre perdue*) that interrogate museums’ ambiguous relationship to the often dematerialised contemporary work of art. What one sees in Forest is an ambition to start off from the socio-cultural basis of a phenomenon in order to “convert” it into art. Just as the institutional context can prevail over the art object, even superseding it, the collective space prevails over the resolutely individual space of the artist. While a post office employee, Forest dreamed of creating an artistic experience that would resemble in some sense the luminous dance of the TV screens all turned on for the evening news, like a carefully choreographed social ritual. Much of the artist’s photographic and televisual archive thus derives from a series of sociological investigations of urban life. Ever since his *Portraits de famille* (1967), which offered a survey of family life in l’Hay-les-roses in the late 1960s, the accumulation of everyday images – far from being models even in their anonymity, as in Boltanski (*Images-modèles*, 1975) – has in each case painted a portrait of a neighbourhood, a social group, or an occupation.

Fred Forest’s production is always paradoxical: social and symbolical, broadcast and silent, local and global. His voids do not just prompt communication but create interstitial spaces open to the imagination, like his first drawings scribbled in the empty spaces of another medium of communication, the telephone jacks at the post office. An agitator, a man of dialogue and discord, always the infiltrator, he highlights the social force of the media but equally imposes halts on them, moments of “no signal” that turn that forceful flow against itself in making it the vehicle of a discontinuity, a loss, an un-informing that make dreaming possible. Rooted in contemporary sociology, Forest’s project is at the same time creative, halting the flow of the media long enough to make a moment of art or poetry possible. Long enough, for example, to go to the Russian far north and revolutionise science by showing that the Arctic Circle isn’t a circle but a “one metre by one metre” square (1989). Fred Forest’s territory is furthermore plural, combining realist documentary and utopian space: neighbourhood studies alongside major expeditions, political territories (São Paulo, Bulgaria, Slovenia, etc.) conjoined with properly fictional spaces.



300 cm² de “Space-media”, insert dans la Tribune de Lausanne du Dimanche 19 novembre 1972. sur papier, 18 x 12,5 cm © Fred Forest © Adagp, Paris 2017

3. TERRITORIES LOCAL AND PLANETARY

Forest's work is as interested in the tiniest of territories ("200 cm² of white") as in continuous, unbounded space. The neighbourhood actions (*Action sociologique à Brooklyn*) and regular engagements with the "street" (*Rue Guénégaud 1973, New Media N°1, Malmö, 1975*) may be understood as sociological portraits.

At the same time, global interventions have proliferated, political and utopian in aim. Such paradoxes of scale are found too in Forest's media actions, which embrace both broadcasting (*Apprenez à regarder votre TV avec votre radio, 1984*) and written communication (mail art) in a fluid discourse that established him as a pioneer of sociological and communications art.



Rituels télématiques pour nuits blanches, action-voyage au Cercle arctique (U.R.S.S) du 4 au 26 août 1989. Une photo couleur sur papier, 14,2 x 9,5 cm
© Fred Forest
© Adagp, Paris 2017

4. INSTITUTIONAL TERRITORY

Since the early 1970s, Fred Forest has intervened in institutions – officially or unofficially, but always critically. Whether in *Biennale de l'an 2000* (São Paulo, 1975), or his infiltration of the Kassel Documenta in 1987, or his letter-writing campaigns and legal proceedings against the Lausanne Museum and later the Centre Pompidou, he has conducted a fierce and persistent struggle with the institutions, raising questions about their relationship to the art market or the place of the immaterial in the museum.

At the heart of this section is the space devoted to *La Bourse de l'imaginaire*, installed in the same space in 1982, dedicated to the production of imaginary "news items" and their ranking on a market, a subversive treatment of both art and market in the service of shared utopias.



Biennale de l'An 2000, événement critique socio-culturel, musée d'art contemporain de Sao Paulo en marge de la 13^{ème} Biennale de Sao Paulo, (Brésil), 1975, extrait de journal *la Folha de Sao Paulo*, 21 août 1975.
© Fred Forest
© Adagp, Paris 2017

5. M²

Fred Forest reactivates his *Territoire du m²* forty years after its creation in 1977. Conceived as a gesture of resistance to the art market, which he already understood as a vehicle of speculation, the “m²” was first a protocol and then a real place. Instantiated in participatory performances in Lausanne, Basel and Koblenz in the 1970s, and then later in São Paulo, it would find a more permanent location at Anserville, at the property purchased by the artist, which since 1980 has served as his “museum of the m²”. At the frontier between art and market, the m² is a conceptual tool to effect a shift from painting to immateriality, which in time has taken on a number of forms: the non-artistic m², the virtual or invisible m² (in online virtual world *Second Life*).



Territoire du Mètre carré
(Anserville),
œuvre-dispositif-jeu
de communication
et de simulation,
projet évolutif depuis
les années 1980.
Une photo couleur
sur papier de la propriété
Le Territoire du M²,
13 x 9 cm
© Fred Forest
© Adagp, Paris 2017

DISCUSSION : 12 JULY 2017

WEDNESDAY 12 JULY, 7PM, STUDIO 13/16, LEVEL -1

A discussion between exhibition curator Alicia Knock, curator in the Contemporary and Emerging Art Department of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, and **Michael Leruth**, an American academic researching in French culture and society, with a particular focus on national celebrations, political culture and national identity, the history of ideas and intellectuals, and contemporary art. He is the author of *Fred Forest's Utopia: Media Art and Activism*, to be published by MIT Press in September.

INTERVIEW WITH FRED FOREST

FROM CODE COULEUR 28, THE CENTRE POMPIDOU'S PROGRAMME/MAGAZINE F
OR MAY-AUGUST 2017, PP. 46-47

Alicia Knock - What is the *Territoire du m²*, created in 1977, whose 40th anniversary we are celebrating alongside the Centre Pompidou's?

Fred Forest - The *Territoire* is a symbolic space divided into square metres, its "standard metre". Each square metre is a space of expression offered to individuals to be used for the spoken word, music, drawing or critique. It's a space to be filled in like the blank spaces in newspapers (*Space-medias*) that I did for the first time in *Le Monde* in 1972, and which were in a way the same thing in square centimetres, readers being invited to fill in *150 cm² of newsprint*. For me, these blanks evoked memories of censorship – when an article was forbidden, the journalists would leave the space blank – but they were also intended to create a space onto which one could project one's own content in a world saturated with information.

AK - Can you tell us about the context in which *Space-medias* appeared?

FF - In those days I was looking for a way in which a painting could change and develop and not be frozen into a cultural object. *Le Monde* and the press in general percolated through an indeterminate space, a circulation that couldn't be visualised, part poetic, part abstract. I wanted to give expression to this blank, a first effort at "showing the void", a question I went on to tackle in many different ways.

AK - The *Territoire* is thus a space both real and imaginary, local and planetary?

FF - Exactly. I first conceived of the *Territoire* in imagining a *Territoire du m²* in Switzerland, intended as a critical action against speculation, in both property and art. I then looked for an actual physical location, which led to the business with the land at Anserville, 50 km from Paris that became my museum of the square metre. But the *Territoire* has both a material and a conceptual aspect; it is a place and a non-place, a space both local and global. It's conceived in such a way that it can be configured at different scales: it can be traced on a table, but I like to say that it can also follow the continental drift and become planetary. The *Territoire* is an island in the ocean of communication, of the world. The different messages find material expression on site, and their juxtaposition gives rise to a kind of giant model. These messages can be different in kind: urbanistic, political, semantic, olfactory or auditory... The *Territoire* gives free rein to all the projections of the imagination, it's a laboratory of ideas. As my friend Pierre Restany used to say, "the *Territoire du m²* is an opening onto the unexpected, the spontaneous, onto the poetry of interdependent creatures, put simply, the life of human beings."

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01. *Le Blanc envahit la ville*, action urbaine en marge de la 12^{ème} Biennale de Sao Paulo, 1973.
 Une photo Noir et Blanc, tirage argentique sur papier, 18 x 12 cm
 © Fred Forest
 © Adagp, Paris 2017
 Document déposé à l'Ina (fonds Fred Forest)



02. *Biennale de l'An 2000*, événement critique socio-culturel, musée d'art contemporain de Sao Paulo en marge de la 13^{ème} Biennale de Sao Paulo, (Brésil), 1975.
 Une photographie Noir et Blanc d'une installation proposé par le groupe d'artistes participants et Fred Forest.
 © Fred Forest
 © Adagp, Paris 2017
 Document déposé à l'Ina (fonds Fred Forest)



03. *La photo du téléspectateur*, vidéo performance réalisée par Fred Forest dans le cadre de l'émission Vidéographie sur la Radio Télévision Belge le 13 novembre 1976.
 Une photo Noir et Blanc, tirage argentique sur papier, 18 x 12,5 cm
 © Fred Forest
 © Adagp, Paris 2017



04. *La famille vidéo*, installation vidéo dans un appartement de Cologne, 1976.
 Une photo Noir et Blanc, 18 x 12,5 cm
 © Fred Forest
 © Adagp, Paris 2017



05. *La maison de vos rêves*,
Space-media dans la Tribune de Lausanne
du 5 novembre 1978,
exposition des réponses
au Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne
du 27 novembre au 10 décembre 1978.
© Fred Forest
© Adagp, Paris 2017



06. *Un M² installé dans la campagne géorgienne
près de Tbilissi grâce à la complicité
de Ferdinand Corte en mémoire de cet artiste
et de cet être extraordinaire qu'il a été pour moi*
© Fred Forest
© Adagp, Paris 2017



07. *Le Territoire du M²*, Fred Forest
dans sa propriété avec le mètre étalon.
Une photo Noir et Blanc, tirage argentique
sur papier, 12 x 9 cm
© Fred Forest
© Adagp, Paris 2017



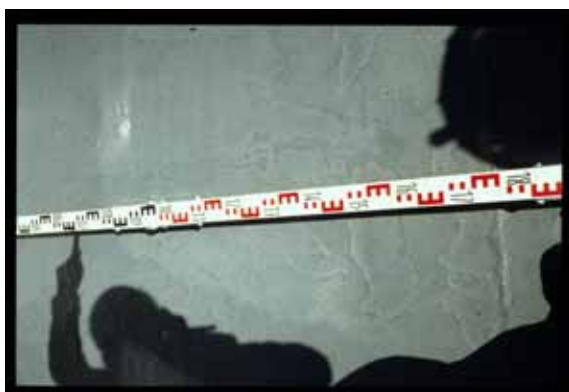
08. *Correspondance envoyée à Fred Forest,
président du Territoire,*
œuvre de mail art.
Une enveloppe, 14 x 9 cm
© Fred Forest
© Adagp, Paris 2017
Document déposé à l'Ina
(fonds Fred Forest)



09. *Le Territoire du M²*,
œuvre-dispositif évolutif, présentation
du *Territoire du M²* à la foire de Bâle off
à l'invitation d'Ingo Kummel, 1979.
Une photo Noir et Blanc, tirage argentique
sur papier, 12 x 9 cm
© Fred Forest
© Adagp, Paris 2017



10. *Le bleu électronique : Hommage à Yves Klein*,
performance et installation multimédia,
musée de Benevento (Italie), mars-avril 1984.
Une photo numérisée retouchée.
© Fred Forest
© Adagp, Paris 2017



11. *Rituels télématiques pour nuits blanches*,
action-voyage au Cercle arctique (U.R.S.S)
du 4 au 26 août 1989.
Une photo couleur sur papier, 9,5 x 14,2 cm
© Fred Forest
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12. *Rituels télématiques pour nuits blanches*,
action-voyage au Cercle arctique (U.R.S.S)
du 4 au 26 août 1989. Une photo couleur sur
papier, 14,2 x 9,5 cm
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PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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