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Communiqué

Call for support: Contemporary Art Center of Brétigny-sur-Orge To Lose State-Funded Status

Background

The Contemporary Art Center of Brétigny-sur-Orge (CAC Brétigny) is the only visual arts institution under contract with the French Ministry of Culture in the French department of Essonne and more broadly in the southeast of the Île-de-France (Paris region).

Since its creation, CAC Brétigny has been led by two high-profile directors: Xavier Franceschi (1991-2002), now Director of FRAC Île-de-France (Regional Fund for Contemporary Art), followed by Pierre Bal-Blanc (2003-2014), who was recently nominated as one of the associate curators of the next edition of the Documenta international art exhibition in Germany. From its creation, the art center has benefitted from the support of the local council (Conseil Général) of Essonne as a local center of excellence, and from the Île-de-France region for the totality of its action in favor of the visual arts.

From 1976, the city of Brétigny-sur-Orge developed its visual arts policy at the Centre Gérard Philipe, which was then consolidated by its relocation at the Espace Jules Verne in 1988. In 2004, this multi-disciplinary venue hosting the CAC Brétigny together with the Théâtre Brétigny and a multimedia library was placed under the authority of the Agglomération (urban community) of the Val d'Orge. The aim for this action was to foster the art center's development and to secure the sustainability of its activities aimed at promoting contemporary creation.

After this transfer from the city to the urban community, the center's local action developed to reach a population of 120,000, while its attendance grew steadily (it doubled in size between 2003 and 2013) together with the diversity of its audience. The art center plays a major role in the region's visual arts policy. It organizes growing numbers of actions that benefit both artists and audiences with poor access to culture, in every city of the urban community and throughout the south of the Île-de-France region. The CAC Brétigny also plays an educational role, in close collaboration with the national Department of Education and the local education authority of Versailles.

The art center and its audience benefit from a collection that has been built up over the past 30 years, including the city of Brétigny's art collection as well as public commissions created

especially for the venue in the frame of the “Phalanstere Project”. This unique heritage contributes to the center’s local, national and international reputation.

An alarming situation

Using as a pretext the departure of the center’s current director from his post as of January 2015, the urban community’s cultural team proposed a reorganization of the Espace Jules Verne. This could include merging its different services to form a multi-disciplinary venue under a single management, led by the Théâtre Brétigny. This decision would lead to the CAC Brétigny losing its contracted status as of the 1st January 2015.

This decision is incompatible with the requirement for a publicly funded art center under contract with the French Ministry of Culture to have an independent management and artistic team. This would therefore mean the end of the State’s partnership with the CAC Brétigny. This decision goes against the procedure laid down in the convention signed by the Prefect, and in the article 1.4 of the national circular of the 9th March 2011 on the contracting of contemporary arts centers. The breaking of a contract can only happen after an inspection report has been produced by the French Ministry of Culture, and after the center’s activity report has been discussed by public representatives with the art center’s director, in the presence of the d.c.a / French association for the development of centres d’art.

The sharing of resources between the theatre and the art center can be useful. However a venue-wide merger should not take place if it means that, for cost-savings reasons, one of the two founding organization’s contracted status is put at risk. In this particular context, we are concerned that the decision to let go of the art center’s contracted status means that its activity will be absorbed by the theatre: this decision would be damaging for the cultural sector in its entirety, as it would create an opposition between the visual arts and the performing arts, when both disciplines have proven their ability to work together.

A unilateral administrative decision with serious consequences

- The art center’s four permanent posts (three of which do not have civil servant status) will be lost after the 30th November 2014. This will cause considerable damage for the team in place, and will contribute to the reduction of the number of qualified positions available nationally in the visual arts sector within contracted contemporary art centers.
- The continuity of services delivered by visual arts professionals will be interrupted for the foreseeable future as of the 30th March 2015, with the expiry of the contract for the center’s last fixed-term member of staff.
- The center’s public service mission in terms of actions targeted at local audiences, of art works conservation, and of access to the resources for artists and professionals will be interrupted until a potential common management plan is implemented by the urban community, which should take place at the earliest in September 2015.

The cancellation of the center’s contracted status will also put an end to its action within networks of visual arts professionals such as d.c.a / French association for the development of centres d’art, Tram, Contemporary art network Paris / Ile-de-France region, or Cluster (European network of visual art structures located in residential areas peripheral to large cities). This will be highly damageable for the reputations of the venue, of the city of Brétigny and of the urban community of Val d’Orge, as well as for the projects that have been developed in the last twenty years. Finally, this brutal decision will take effect in the middle of a school year, jeopardizing the link formed by the art center over the years with primary, secondary and tertiary students.

Working together to secure the future of the CAC Brétigny

The CAC Brétigny's partner professional networks – d.c.a / French association for the development of centres d'art, Tram, Contemporary art network Paris / Ile-de-France region and CIPAC / The French federation of contemporary art professionals - reasserted their commitment to the mission that the art center has been pursuing for years. The CAC Brétigny is an iconic venue in the French and Paris art world. Thanks to its reputed actions in support of the art and audiences carried out locally, nationally and internationally, the center has become a flagship for the region's dynamism. It plays a structuring role and as such should be proudly supported, along with other public partners, by the urban community of Val d'Orge.

It is therefore essential that standard procedures are followed and that the project's evolution is managed in accordance with **the legal contractual frameworks** agreed with the French Ministry of Culture. **The preservation of the center's artistic and educational missions as part of the art center's transitional programming, the renewal of existing staff's contracts and the nomination of an interim Director form an essential basis for the launch of a new consultation process.**

d.c.a and Tram, together with the CIPAC Federation, urge the French Ministry of Culture to give this issue the utmost attention, so that a constructive debate can be initiated with all the stakeholders committed to securing the future of the CAC Brétigny.

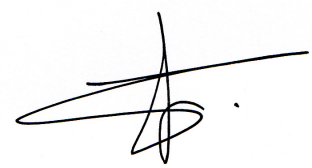
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