

# CENTRE INTERMONDES AT LA ROCHELLE

EDOUARD MORNAUD<sup>1</sup>

The Centre Intermondes is the brainchild of the sociologist Jean Duvignaud who visualised it as a centre for the exchange of ideas among creative artists, having as its purpose the stimulation of public debate on issues of creativity and cultural policy. Reviving the ongoing practice of critical questioning is seen as essential to the very existence of democracy.

The city of La Rochelle has made available the premises of the Maison Henri II or the Hôtel Pontard with its superb renaissance façade, and it is thanks to this support that the project saw the light of day in 2004. Thus it has been possible to establish a cooperative structure providing for artists in residence, most of whom are not French, in association with personalities and organisations active in the cultural life of La Rochelle and its region of Poitou-Charentes. Among these there is a number of close and continuing partnerships such as those involving the regional dance centre as well as local film and jazz festivals.<sup>2</sup>

The Centre Intermondes has been officially associated with the Maison des Cultures du Monde since 2006, with the City of La Rochelle, with Cultures France (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs) since 2008, as well as with TV5 Monde. Such links allow the Centre to be part of major national and international events and celebrations, as occurred this year with the ‘Saison de la Turquie en France’ (1 July 2009–31 March 2010) and continuing with ‘Namasté India’ in 2010–2011, for which artists in residence are invited from all disciplines. Recently, an agreement has been signed with the Alliance Française de Bombay with the aim of showing the cultures of India in all their manifestations in 2010–2011. The Centre Intermondes will be responsible on behalf of the City of La Rochelle for the welfare of artists as well as for ensuring that their projects proceed as planned.

Supported by such partnerships, about a hundred artists of different nationalities have been involved. Guy Martinière, President of the Centre Intermondes, writes: ‘International cultural exchanges are the *raison d’être* of the Centre Intermondes. Inviting artists of different nationalities to La Rochelle is one way of ensuring wide acknowledgment and recognition of our harbour city. From the point of view of the artists, whether local or regional, there is the opportunity for experimental work to develop and blossom. Writers, directors,

both in the theatre and in the cinema, visual artists, actors, choreographers have all benefited. They have come from countries near France and, indeed, from other continents. Switzerland, Canada, Lebanon, Senegal, Brazil, Australia, India, China, Gabon, Iraq, Burkina Faso have all been represented here.'

The Centre Intermondes seeks to encourage and develop such exchanges, local, regional and international, with the aim of facilitating contemporary creativity in all forms of artistic expression, and thus to build bridges between cultures to the mutual enrichment of all.

In recent years, the Centre Intermondes has organised projects with links to Australia, such as a series of lectures and writers' workshops involving the writer in residence Daniel Keene, in partnership with the University of La Rochelle. These events have been made possible by collaboration with the La Rochelle professional companies 'Théâtre toujours à l'horizon' and 'Théâtre de l'Utopie' as well as with the La Rochelle visual artist Sylvie Tubiana.

Marie-Jeanne Hoffner, who was in residence at the Alliance Française de Melbourne in 2006 and 2007, has exhibited at the Alliance Française de Melbourne, the Linden Arts Centre, the Centre for Contemporary Photography in Melbourne and at the Faculty of Arts and Design at Monash University, where she has also conducted student workshops. She returned to Australia with the support of the French Embassy in September and October 2009 to exhibit at the Melbourne International Arts Festival. She has chosen this year to share her work at the 'Espace d'Art contemporain de la Ville de La Rochelle' by inviting the artist Stephen Garrett, who is also Professor in the Faculty of Art and Design at Monash University, and with whom she has previously collaborated in Australia, most notably at the Cast Gallery in Tasmania. Following their month of residence at the Centre Intermondes, the two artists exhibited their work from June to October in the 'Espace Art Contemporain', the former Archbishop's Palace in Uzès known as the Hôtel de Crussolle.

From October 2009 to January 2010, the Centre Intermondes was pleased to have in residence the artist Laith McGregor whose work made a significant impression at the time of studio visits by students at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2005. It was for him that the Alliance Française de Melbourne had organised the first personal exhibition in the 'Satire' series. His paintings and drawings enjoy a rapidly growing and well-deserved reputation since he won the Robert Jacks Drawing Prize in 2008. He is also featured in the *Australian Art Collector* for 2009. He exhibited in the same year at

the Queensland Art Gallery, and more recently at the Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art. His work focuses on portraiture in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as revisited in contemporary imagination, and finds an echo in the city of La Rochelle, where not only are there three museums of Art and History, but also an impressive and well-preserved artistic and historical heritage. By reason of its geographical location as a port, La Rochelle was the departure point for numerous naval expeditions as early as the seventeenth century, a fact which helps foster our shared Franco-Australian visions. With this background, on reading of Laith McGregor's work, it seemed natural for us to bring him to La Rochelle and support his project with the further assistance of the Poitou-Charentes Region. Workshops with academics and English language students of the University here have been organised in collaboration with Professor Sue Ryan and have met with great success.

Further projects are being planned following recent visits and study tours by the composer David Chisholm, who returns to residence from April to July 2010, as do the visual artists Valerie Sparks and Caroline Williams-Mora in October and November 2010.<sup>3</sup>

There is no better conclusion to this review than the words of Guy Martinière, historian and honorary Dean of the Faculté des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines, University of La Rochelle, and President of the Centre Intermondes. Professor Martinière sums up our attitudes and objectives in these words, 'At a critical time like this, let us not turn inwards upon ourselves, rather let us open wide the doors to all the horizons of creativity.'

*La Rochelle, France*

### Notes

- 1 Director, Centre Intermondes, La Rochelle, formerly Director, Alliance Française de Melbourne. Translated from the French by Jim Docking.
- 2 The 'Centre Choréographique National of La Rochelle/Région Poitou-Charentes' under the direction of Kader Attou (Compagnie Accorrap), the La Rochelle International Film Festival, the Festival of Television Fiction Films and 'Jazz entre les deux tours'.
- 3 This note was written early in 2010.