

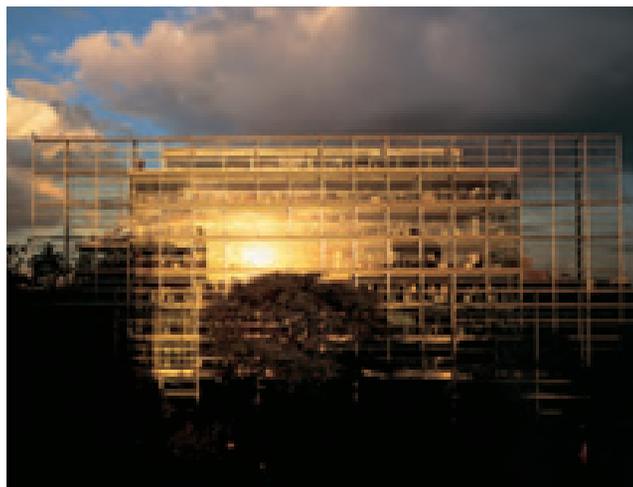
the Cartier Scene

If there is one luxury business to have out-performed the watch industry, it would have to be contemporary art. And, as QP discover, the crossover between the two is becoming increasingly important.

David Stone

Fondation Cartier Pour L'Art Contemporain, 261, boulevard Raspail in Paris.

Fondation Cartier director Hervé Chandès.



Contemporary art can be a recalcitrant and unruly force, difficult to predict and even more so to govern. Integrity in the art world often relies on the assumption that an artist remains disinterested and resistant to outside commercial influence. And because of this, artists have long experienced an unusual and sometimes problematic relationship with those who choose to stand as patrons.

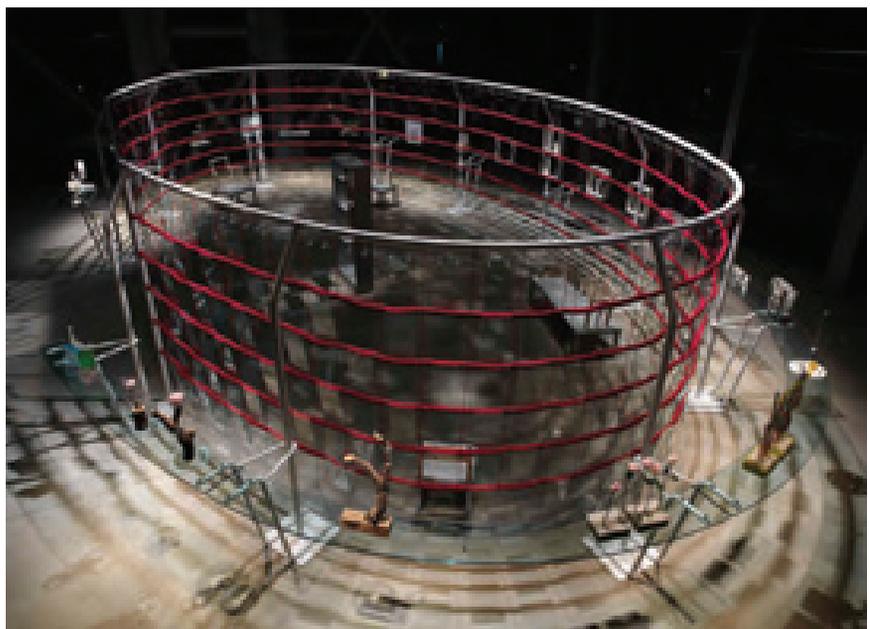
When the financier of an art project is a business the question of motive is never far away; is this a genuine show of creative support or just a particularly glossy self-styling campaign? While it is easy for some to look with cynicism at the majority of corporate art sponsorship, the luxury goods sector, with its legitimate claims to strong and expressive designs, is quite a separate case. And one that is rapidly gaining ground.

Combined interests

Last September Vacheron Constantin exhibited works by the Silvana Solivella under the title *Le Temps Miroitant*; Jaeger-LeCoultre have promised three temporary photography exhibitions a year at their Heritage Gallery; while Louis Vuitton have incorporated the bright playful motifs of Japanese artist, Takashi Murakami, into the designs of their boutiques. Such association no doubt work well for both parties - the artist receives commissions, the brand raises its profile as a creatively minded and on the pulse organisation.

Taking the approach a step further, Montblanc have channeled most of their sponsorship interests toward the arts. Through the Young Artists World Patronage programme, the Swiss group offers up their 330 plus international boutiques as platforms for young artists to exhibit their work. Of course this is a valuable opportunity for an artist to gain exposure, but Montblanc maintain a measure of control - each contestant piece has to be an interpretation of the brand's star logo. Elsewhere there is the Montblanc de la Culture Arts Patronage Award, an

Open Enclosures by Andrea Branzi, 2008.



enterprise that supports and pays homage to significant modern-day patrons.

These are two industries that, despite differing massively in content, sit together particularly well, but it was not until Cartier began to focus on Contemporary art during the 1980s that the potential between the two really began to be explored. And since opening their own independently run institution, Cartier have been championing the arts with an unassuming, philanthropic dedication that has turned the notion of corporate sponsorship on its head.

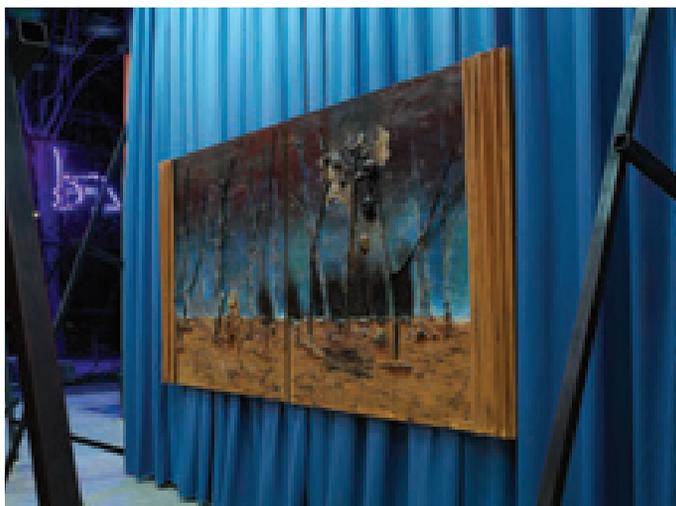
In the early days

Fondation Cartier Pour l'Art Contemporain stands tall on the world stage. It began in 1984, the brainchild of the then President of Cartier International, Alain Dominique Perrin and has since become massively influential. Today the Paris based foundation stages five shows a year, as well as a host of other events, ranging from workshops to concerts. The exhibitions have toured internationally and even some of the world's major art institutes have adopted strategies developed by the Fondation. After quickly outgrowing the framework of traditional patronage, Fondation Cartier has developed its own methods and gone on to earn respect from all sides of this notoriously hard to please industry.

From the very beginning Cartier's position had been made explicitly clear. The brand acts as a silent patron and, besides having their name in the title, this is where the influence ends. Fondation Cartier's Director, Hervé Chandès, is quite unequivocal on this point: "There is a wall between what the brand Cartier are doing and what we are doing. We are in different fields. Art is art and Cartier have their own story". This decision has helped removed any confusion as to the position and relationship Cartier and Fondation have with one another, and adhering to this separation has allowed Perrin, Chandès and the team to move and grow among the art world with a freedom rarely afforded to a commercial heavyweight.



The Air is on Fire by David Lynch, 2007.



Inside the glasshouse

Fondation Cartier Pour L'Art Contemporain has its home in a building designed by the French architect, Jean Nouvel. It is easily worth a visit to boulevard Raspail just to catch a glimpse of the architecture. It hides amid its fortress of tall leafy trees until you are almost on it and then what you assumed to be a quirky patch of inner city woodland reveals itself as a magnificent glass palace. It even seems to float among the vegetation, with its use of stilts, transparent material and the abundance of plants and trees, both inside and out.

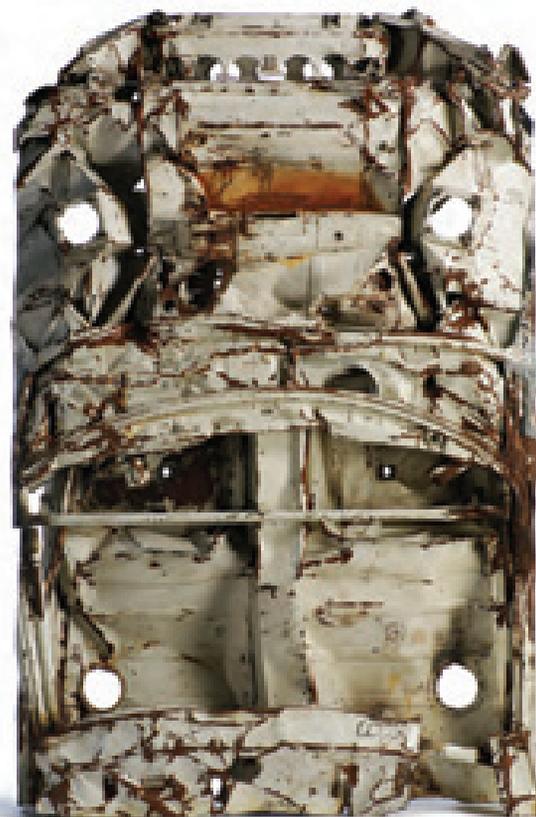
The upper levels belong to some of Cartier's administrative offices, but for the ground floor and basement area it's all about the art. At the time of my visit the Italian designer Andrea Branzi had filled entrance space with his Open Enclosures, a group of works that flitted somewhere between sculpture and architecture. The show included a selection of freestanding constructions, all glass, wire, branches and plants. They are fragile and delicate hybrid constructions that create a rewarding dialogue with Nouvel's building. The space is open, light and airy, Branzi's work is similarly translucent and weightless.

In contrast the basement was given over to the sketches, photographs and general paraphernalia of the eternally hip, Patti Smith. For a performer best known for her musical and lyrical talents, Land 250 reveals a different side of Smith that is not wide known. The exhibition was an organised explosion of the American singer's personal reflections (scraps of paper scribbled with poetry, grainy photos of people and places that have influenced her, as well as memorabilia collected throughout her life) with the effect that it served both as a serious art display and as a revealing psychological study.

A mixed and intriguing pair of exhibitions and two that illustrates well one of the Foundations key interests. Hervé Chandès approaches the challenge of a new



César (1921-1998) and Compressions, a series began in 1960.



Expansion, 1970.

exhibition with a unique flexibility, “we want to discover new and different perspectives of the artists, we discuss ideas and set up a dialogue” and each show is the culmination of these collaborations. The Fondation and the artists embark on voyages of discovery, journeys that conclude with the exhibition. The outcome can be anything from a fashion parade made from bread, a colossal wave breaking on a tiled wall or even a room teeming with thousands of real butterflies.

Changing shapes

During its quarter of a century, the institute has evolved into a highly active and creative arts think tank. On one side it acts as a launch pad for new and little known talent; already it has introduced a long list of now famous artists onto the world stage. It also then draws in some of the biggest and brightest names in the artistic firmament; last year the film director David Lynch revealed his hidden talent for painting; while previous shows have included the conceptual artist Dennis Oppenheim, fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier and photographer Nobuyoshi Araki. Hervé Chandlès told me with undisguised excitement that next will be a retrospective of one of France’s most highly celebrated sculptors, the late César. Perhaps best known for his dominating and monumental work with industrial material, César was also very instrumental in the setting up of Fondation Cartier, alongside Alain Dominique Perrin back in 1984.

But while the institute remains determinedly blind to its benefactor’s presence, this is not to say Cartier does not benefit from a rewarding glow of parental pride. The Fondation allows Cartier to connect with living artists, with designers and architects, to become synonymous with all that is new, cutting edge - a tribute that no amount of eloquently written press releases could bestow on a luxury brand. As mentioned above “Cartier have their own story”, it’s a long and prestigious story, but one



Land 250 by Patti Smith, 2008.



essentially rooted in the past. The Fondation, however, helps furnish Cartier with a different, forward thinking perspective, it acts as an expression for Cartier to show they are more than a purveyor of hallowed traditions.

Common ground

Cartier's role in the development of contemporary art is unrivalled within the luxury goods sector, but crossover is becoming increasingly prevalent as more brands see the potential in supporting the arts.

It would be quite wrong to suggest a shared creative impulse draws the two industries together and similarly craftsmanship and aesthetics has little or nothing to do with it. But in a rather general way the sponsoring of the arts seems a deal more fitting for brands like Cartier or Montblanc, than, say, motorsports timekeeping or the Olympic Games. To buy a watch from a high-end brand is to buy into an idea of luxury, of exclusivity and taste. True, owning a Cartier is a clear symbol of wealth, but there is more to it than that. The owner has something rarefied, something with genuine intrinsic value. A work of art operates on the same level. They share an element of luxury and an importance that elevates them beyond the mundane or the purely functional.

Explaining the impulse to build a collection, be it in art, watches or anything else for that matter, is a difficult question to answer fully and no doubt specific reasons will change from person to person. But put very simply it seems to stem from a love of interesting objects and ideas, and it is this that attracts the luxury goods industry to the arts. And for added assurance that there is something inherent in both, take a look at the auction houses at the moment. While most sectors are struggling to escape the panic and dire warnings of economic crisis, it is art and watches that are grabbing the headlines with record sales. ☺



Pain Couture by Jean Paul Gaultier, 2004.



J'en rêve, 2005.



Fondation Cartier Garden.