

DOMAINE DU MUY

PARC DE SCULPTURES CONTEMPORAINES
CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE PARK

FORBES LIFE

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Y-JEAN MUN DELSALLE



Nestled in the Var on the French Riviera, Le Muy is fast becoming a hub for private contemporary art initiatives, with famed French sculptor Bernar Venet having opened his foundation there last year and the Villa Navarra (the gallery and private residence of art collector and dealer Enrico Navarra) seeing the light of day back in 2008. It's little wonder then that veteran sculpture dealer Jean-Gabriel Mitterrand, founder of [Galerie Mitterrand](#) in Paris in 1988 and known his work with mid-century masters such as Niki de Saint Phalle and the Lalannes, chose this Provençal landscape for his 10-hectare outdoor park to showcase monumental sculptures by both emerging and established modern and contemporary artists – some specially commissioned – amidst a picturesque setting of cork oaks and pine trees on hilly terrain that he has labeled the [Domaine du Muy](#), located a half hour's drive from the celebrity haunt of Saint-Tropez and two hours from Aix-en-Provence. In an area already frequented by many collectors, it's likely to attract a well-heeled clientele with its concept of placing sculpture against a natural backdrop, thereby attesting to the 75-year-old gallerist's decades-long dedication to the relationship between art and space.



Deep Violet by Mark Handforth, 2014, installation view at the Domaine du Muy in 2015 (Photo J.C. Lett / Courtesy of Domaine du Muy)

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Launched last July, the sculpture park is a 20-year-old dream come true for the nephew of former French President François Mitterrand, who visited possible sites in Le Muy upon the urging of his friends Venet and Navarra. His move is actually part of a trend in the Parisian gallery world where dealers have had to step up their game to remain visible and build up their reputations, with blue-chip galleries opening massive outposts on the fringes of the capital, like the Gagosian in Le Bourget or Thaddaeus Ropac in Pantin. For a medium-size gallery such as Mitterrand's, instead of displaying huge artworks in a suburban space, he opted for a small town in the southern French countryside near the sea, buying the land for a very good price. Open by invitation only like a private members' club, the sculpture park will balance new and historic works: some pieces are by artists from Galerie Mitterrand, others special creations by artists or their estates, and the rest loans from other galleries. The idea is that it will be a place for the best artists to exhibit amongst their peers of the same caliber. Showing only in top-notch venues around the world, they want to be well treated and be part of a rigorous artistic program that will attract a great number of important visitors, including collectors, curators and museum directors.



Cloud Cities / Air-Port-City 9 Modules Metal by Tomás Saraceno, 2010-2011, aluminum, mirror glass, steel, dibond, iron and steel rope (Photo courtesy of Domaine du Muy)

Over 30 sculptures will be presented here from May to October every year, with a regularly-evolving program of temporary and permanent works. Curated by Simon Lamunière in collaboration with Mitterrand's son, Edward, the 38-piece inaugural exhibition aims to create a dialogue between untamed nature and art, where some of the works blend into the landscape, while others form eye-catching juxtapositions. Forget manicured lawns and flowerbeds, here nature is left to run wild and the sculptures look as if they've fallen out of the sky, giving the impression that the park is a planet with relics from another universe. Take for example Xavier Veilhan's *Le Gisant*, *Yuri Gagarine* showing Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin lying on his back in a posture echoing mediaeval funerary sculptures, as if he'd just plummeted from space. "We don't pretend to put the works in a very sophisticated space," notes Mitterrand. "We want them to be totally part of the landscape. It's a natural way of putting them together. We're not doing perspectives and beautiful rows of flowers to showcase the sculptures. It's a balance between nature and order. Everything must look very simple and natural because we want to create a relationship between the work and nature and between the artist and nature. The protection and organization of nature thanks to a piece of art is a very interesting relationship we can have and develop in the future."



Narcissus Garden by Yayoi Kusama, 1966-2012, variable dimensions, 1,600 stainless steel spheres (Photo courtesy of

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Greeting visitors at the park's entrance, Yayoi Kusama's *Narcissus Garden* featuring 1,600 stainless steel mirrored spheres floating in a pond create a shape that continuously forms and deforms according to the water's movements. Then heading into the woods, a most unexpected spectacle awaits viewers as they embark on a two-kilometer-long walking trail, populated by François-Xavier Lalanne's humorous *Poisson Paysage* bronze of an oversized fish framing the countryside like a window onto the world, Carsten Höller's interactive *Black Clown Carousel* all-black merry-go-round in steel, synthetic leather, fiberglass and light bulbs that visitors can actually ride, and trees that appear to be crying in Rob Wynne's surrealist and poetic *Teardrops* made from bronze. Art and architecture unite in Tomás Saraceno's *Cloud Cities* representing a futuristic floating city formed out of a constellation of interconnected cell-like structures that encourage the viewer to enter and look around, or Antony Gormley's *Knot II* composed of multiple blocks stacked up and supported in an unbalanced position, suggesting the tensions inherent to urban environments.



Knot II by Antony Gormley, 2010, gray cast iron (Photo courtesy of Domaine du Muy)

"What I'm doing with this park is also in reaction to the transformation of the art world because now power is concentrated in big galleries with the most famous artists, like the Gagosian that makes \$1 billion every year or the Zwirner that makes \$500 million," Mitterrand explains. "We are among the 10 best galleries in France, but we are a midrange gallery, so I thought the only way was to find another idea. I cannot buy a huge building in Paris and I thought that a park was the key because through it, I can open all doors. I can invite the world's best artists – who are not represented by my gallery – to participate with one or two sculptures. They're totally seduced by the idea of doing something for a park. And the outdoor sculpture market is now experiencing a big boom, as many companies want to build their images through art. I'm not only building the park for my own pleasure, but as a way to give more power to a midsized gallery. I have to give more visibility to my gallery and have a place to show important works by the best artists. This will change the dimension and reputation of my gallery because suddenly I have the best artists for specific projects, and every year I'll add new site-specific commissions by one or two artists."

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French gallerist Jean-Gabriel Mitterrand (Photo courtesy of Domaine du Muy)

A house with contemporary classic interiors designed by India Mahdavi and gardens by landscape architect Louis Benech will complete the sculpture park in 2016. As for what the future holds, Mitterrand is leveraging his 27-year expertise in sculpture and his experience in organizing major sculpture exhibitions internationally to ensure the Domaine du Muy is a success. If all goes to plan, he's betting on building up a name for himself as a specialist in creating sculpture parks. For example, a major real estate company in Shanghai looking to construct a large sculpture park in Pudong that will mix Chinese and Western art has turned to him to help it craft a sculpture program with a landscape architect that will best express an artist's work set within nature. Edward is looking to offer their services to other places too, including to Dubai. Mitterrand concludes, "The idea is to help cities and companies build sculpture parks in order to be a kind of reference for the next new projects around the world."



Poisson Paysage by François-Xavier Lalanne, 2007, bronze (Photo courtesy of Domaine du Muy)

5 Must-See Sculptures

1. *Fontaine aux Nanas* by Niki de Saint Phalle – In painted polyester, this bright-colored, joyful and playful fountain sculpture depicts four Nanas – the artist's signature female figures – frolicking in a bath in a powerful display of uninhibited femininity and sexuality, their rounded mouths and breasts spouting jets of water.

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Fontaine aux Nanas by Niki de Saint Phalle, 1974-1991, painted polyester and electrical system (Photo courtesy of Domaine du Muy)

1. **Deep Violet** by Mark Handforth – Using an approach based on Ready Made, Minimal Art, and Pop Art to confront imagery that often stems from urban settings, the shiny painted aluminum star – referencing an American cultural icon – looks like a giant Christmas tree ornament that has just crashed to earth with its one twisted point.

2. **Dream Stone** by Sui Jianguo – A pebble found at the 2010 Shanghai World Expo construction site was digitally scanned, modeled and enlarged thousands of times to produce this set of assembled laser-cut steel plaques, with its overlapping layers forming a honeycomb structure that hints at the harmony between nature and the modern world.



Dream Stone by Sui Jianguo, 2010, installation view at the Domaine du Muy in 2015 (Photo J.C. Lett / Courtesy of Domaine du Muy)

4. **RockStone 198** by Arik Levy – Straddling art and design, Levy's version of a boulder showcases smooth and precise mirror-polished stainless steel surfaces crafted using highly-innovative production techniques, which not only reflect our immediate surroundings, but also create optical illusions that bend our perception of them.



RockStone 198 by Arik Levy, 2015, installation view at the Domaine du Muy in 2015 (Photo J.C. Lett / Courtesy of Domaine du Muy)

5. **Mini Brothers (Oak)** by Vidya Gastaldon – Like mysterious creatures staring at us in the forest, this emotive site-specific work sees many pairs of cartoonish eyes made from oak and acrylic varnish mounted onto trees, which are thereby transformed into characters straight from the fairy tales of our childhood.

The Domaine du Muy's inaugural exhibition is now on until October 2015 at the Domaine des Charles, 83490 Le Muy, France. Visits are reserved for

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