

# DOMAINE DU MUY

PARC DE SCULPTURES CONTEMPORAINES  
CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE PARK

# AD

**AD - MIDDLE EAST**

JUNE-JULY 2019

IAIN ACKERMAN



*China Daily - Top 10 Profiles of the Urban Male, by Wang Du, 2007, sits at the entrance to Mitterrand family's summer house at Domaine du Muy.*

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# ROOM TO GROW

GIANT APPLES, MARBLE TEDDY  
BEARS, OP ART BILLBOARDS...  
JUST NORTH OF SAINT-TROPEZ,  
A DYNASTY OF ART ENTHUSIASTS  
HAS SURROUNDED ITS SILVER-  
PAINTED SUMMER HOUSE WITH  
AN ARRAY OF SURPRISING  
CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURES

WORDS IAIN ACKERMAN PHOTOGRAPHY JEAN-CHRISTOPHE LETT



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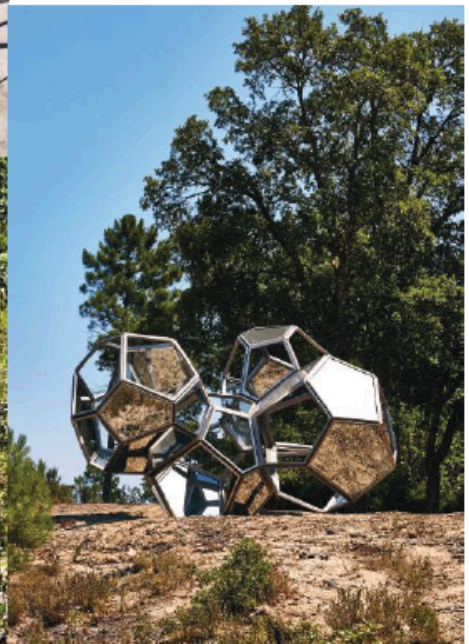


is nicer to visit now because there are more joys than problems," says Edward Mitterrand with a laugh. The art consultant is talking all things Domaine du Muy, the contemporary sculpture park that he has been developing with his father in southern France for the past five years.

"We've more or less finished structuring it now," he continues. "We've been limited in terms of the amounts that we can spend and that helped in a way, because I think what people like about the park is the very close and unstructured relationship with nature. We just built a very small path, the most simple possible – no lights, no information panels, just steps made from wood – which also made it difficult because you have to give the impression that the sculptures sort of fell from the sky and landed in the right spot."

The end result is 25 acres of untamed landscape just north of St Tropez. The hills, valleys and pools of this cork oak-covered land have been slowly transformed into an outdoor venue dedicated to monumental sculpture, with 40 artworks by the likes of Claire

From top: The large covered terrace; Air-Port-City / Cloud Cities 4 Modules, by Tomás Saraciano, 2010; Success Failure (Blue), by Gianni Moti, 2014; Opposite page: 129 square and their demonstration, by Claudia Comte, 2015.



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Clockwise from left:  
Vélo Girouette, by  
Roman Signer, 2015;  
the sitting room of the  
summer house,  
decorated by India  
Mahdavi; Narcissus  
Garden, Yayoi  
Kusama, 1966-2011;  
Jean-Gabriel and  
Edward Mitterrand  
with a sculpture by  
Tomás Saraceno;  
Dynamo, by Atelier  
Van Lierhout 2010;  
The house also has a  
ground-floor gallery  
space. Opposite page:  
Chromosaturation for  
a public garden, by  
Carlos Cruz-Díaz  
1965-2012.



"YOU HAVE TO  
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SCULPTURES  
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Fontaine, Yayoi Kusama, Francisco Sobrino and Jean-François Fourtou placed amidst the park's native pines.

"It's been a huge amount of work," admits Mitterrand, who heads up the Geneva-based contemporary art consultancy Mitterrand+Cramer. "It's been years of leaving lots of other things on the side to do it, but I was just obsessed with the fact that I wanted this project to work out. So it's wonderful that we've come this far."

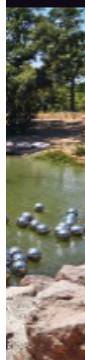
Much of the inspiration for Domaine du Muy came from Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Pantin and the warehouse-like space of Gagosian Le Bourget, both of which were opened in the northern suburbs of Paris in 2012. "It gave him the envy, the will to do something, but he didn't want to do it in the outskirts of Paris, he wanted to link it to nature," says Mitterrand of his father, the Parisian gallerist Jean-Gabriel Mitterrand and a nephew of the former president of France, François Mitterrand.

Compared with other destinations such as the Venet Foundation in Le Muy and Château la Coste in Le Puy-Sainte-Réparate, Domaine du Muy is a fairly rugged affair, and even the Mitterrands' summer house is relatively modest compared to the grand villas that dot the surrounding hillsides. The faux Provençal house has been restructured and painted silver (to help it blend into the

countryside) by the designer India Mahdavi who decorated the interior in her signature upbeat style. Outside, landscape designer Louis Benech has encouraged the surrounding forest to encroach on the grounds of the property, which has a gallery on its lower level.

"What I need to work on now is the park itself," says Mitterrand. "We've been working a lot on the infrastructure, on finishing the house, on how we attract people. Now that's almost done I can work more calmly on maybe not having 40 sculptures, but perhaps half that number. I don't want the park to be convincing because of the number of works. I want it to be convincing because of the quality of the works. Also, each time you take away a piece you need to replace it and that means you're hurting the nature around it. If you want it to look magical it only works once nature has grown around the piece. If you see the traces of the machinery that brought it there, then the magic is completely broken."

A large part of Mitterrand's mission has been to create what he has previously described as a conversation between art and nature. That has meant establishing what works and what doesn't, and what is best suited to a wild, untamed landscape. "It's been a surprise to me," he admits. "Originally I thought that I needed to have very structural work, very



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architectural work that would be able to hold itself in the middle of nature, which is quite raw and wild and large. And it was a mistake because it only works when the artworks are huge. If they're not huge, if they are architectural and urban, they disappear in nature. Whereas these aesthetics immediately work well because they confront nature. They stand out in nature."

He cites the example of Peter Regli's marble teddy bear, which is less than a metre tall and yet manages to challenge our preconceptions of what a teddy bear is. Rather than being viewed as soft and cuddly, Regli's teddy bear is cold, immobile and imposing; almost frightening in fact. Seeing such a sculpture in nature is therefore not only peculiar, but also hugely effective.

Conversely, geometric structural pieces are crushed by nature if they are too small. Conrad Shawcross' Lattice III only worked within Domaine du Muy because it was on a large enough scale. That scale enabled it to become bigger than nature. "That was something I learned and that I try and correct now," says Mitterrand. "You also need works that are fun, that are joyful, that you can play with, like

Carsten Höller's carousel or the Wang Du elephant pushing the car. I have to look at works that maybe I would not advise to buy for a collection. It's a separate job. I have to take into account what works in nature, at what scale it works, and what is fun to discover when you walk around. It's not only about finding what is the perfect sculpture for the perfect collection."

Although the pieces are for sale and the park is open by appointment to the public from May until October, Mitterrand doesn't want the work to come and go. It's too complicated, too costly, and potentially self-defeating. He'd rather they were fixed for as long as possible and the park used to illustrate the Mitterrands' expertise in monumental sculpture. In fact, that's the business model: to act as a showcase for their expertise, not as an outdoor gallery, and to build on that expertise globally.

"This is now the time to benefit from the hard work," says Mitterrand, "not only by being able to stop for five minutes and stay in the sun because we've earned it, but to really use this showcase now that it's finally presentable." □  
[domainedumuy.com](http://domainedumuy.com)



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