

Contemporary artist collective Poush takes over Château La Coste

Members of Poush have created 160 works, set in and around the grounds of Château La Coste – the art, architecture and wine estate in Provence

Florian Monfrini wordlessly takes white stones from a pile, places them into two wicker buckets attached to a wooden dowel, then hauls them up a gravel path to another spot, where he'll use them to build a '*petite architecture*'. A few days from now, he will move them again.

Visitors to Château La Coste in the south of France, might come to see monumental outdoor works by Damien Hirst and Louise Bourgeois, to eat at a Michelin-starred restaurant, to taste wines in a Jean Nouvel-designed cellar. An itinerant work by a local artist carrying stones on his back is not typically part of the programme. But now, two worlds collide, as artists from the Poush art centre in the northern suburbs of Paris temporarily occupy the Provençal wine estate and its 500 acres of pathways, grapevines, oak and olive trees, and architectural jewels.



Work by Edgar Sarin, la Méditerranée collective
(Image credit: Simon Jung)

Poush was created in 2020 as a place to support contemporary creation. It currently comprises 270 artists from around the world, who pay a minimal rate to rent individual ateliers in a 22,000 sq m former perfume factory. The support also involves organising exhibitions in diverse places.

The current show at Château La Coste is called 'Par Quatre Chemins' – a nod to the name of Poush's closest metro stop in Aubervilliers, Paris, but also a French expression that means wandering rather than getting straight to the point. Poush's director, Yvannoé Kruger, says, 'The artists were able to come and spend some time here [at Château La Coste], to get to know the locals, the quarries, the gardeners, to take the pulse of this landscape, to feel their way around and find the best way to insert themselves.'

The show features 35 artists (most from Poush, though some, like Monfrini, were invited for the event), representing 14 nationalities. One hundred and sixty of their works are scattered around the property and inside the various pavilions. They play off the site's nature, geography, architecture, regional customs and history. Co-commisaire Margaux Knight says, 'The work is very diverse, a counterweight to the big solo shows we're used to seeing here.'

Most were created or revisited for this exhibition, around a dozen of them in situ. For example, Henri Frachon's Sea of holes consists of circular cavities dug out of the ground, each one containing a natural element from the domain (for example, a portion of a tree trunk), anchored in the soil to resist any wild boar that might wander by.

At the entrance, in the shade of architect Tadao Ando's façade, stands Pauline Guerrier's The Guardians, three totems she first made in Bénin, covered in cotton fabric dyed with local pigments, inspired by the Zangbeto traditional guardians of the night. 'Here,' says Guerrier, 'they become the guardians of this domain and the exhibition,' keeping any evil spirits away.

Next to a Truism Bench by Jenny Holzer (a permanent installation), Sabine Mirlesse has hung a bell within a small grove of trees, its long clapper resting on a water-filled indent in the ground. Mirlesse originally created this piece elsewhere in the south of France, where she learned that residents resented 'helicopter artists' who come down from Paris to create works with no link to local culture. So she asked village elders about their stories, and was taken to a spring where a church bell was hidden, a practice used to protect them from being melted into munitions.

Château La Coste also features buildings by world-renowned architects. One is Oscar Niemeyer's curved auditorium (his final design to be realised), where several Poush artists are showing works. A fellow Brazilian, Marlon de Azambuja, took a book of photographs of gas tanks by the German duo Berne and Hilla Becher and carefully covered the images with reflective black marker. 'At the beginning of modernism in Brazil, you have this idea of "eating" European influence and transforming it into your identity,' the artist explains. 'For me, it's important that a Brazilian hand reconstructed this patrimony, this very precise German photography.'

La Méditerranée, a trio that describes itself as an 'exhibition-oriented research group', has taken over Richard Rogers' spectacular cantilevered gallery (also this architect's last building) with a collection of works that respond to the idea of empty space. At one end, an imposing oak sculpture by **Edgar Sarin** soaks in a prime view of the landscape from what Sarin calls Rogers' 'corridor on the void'.