

FIGAROplus

Culture



COLLECTION
CLOSE-UP ON EXCEPTIONAL
OBJECTS PAGES 34 AND 35

JEAN NOUVEL
THE ARCHITECT EXPLAINS
THE NEW SHOWCASE HE DESIGNED
PAGE 36



Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Museum

The prodigious donation

The institution inaugurates in its walls a space entirely dedicated to the treasures that were given to him by philanthropist Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière.



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For the love of Art and the Other

MUSEUM A supporter of Jacques Chirac and familiar with the dialogue of cultures, the creator of the Fimalac group had long pondered this donation, for which Jean Nouvel has created a dedicated space.

Three years ago, Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière entrusted 36 African and Oceanic works of art worth 52 million euros to the care of the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac. This is the largest private donation in this field since the post-war period. That is to say the equivalent of forty years of the budget devoted to the acquisitions by the institution.

This exceptional philanthropic gesture (concluded without any tax advantage in return), the former banker who passed through L'Oréal, creator of the financial group Fimalac and currently the twenty-fourth French fortune, had been thinking about it for a long time.

A collector at heart, curious by

nature, he had cultivated relationships with some of the most enlightened connoisseurs in the field of so-called non-Western arts. A world as vast as it is specialized. Thus the late Jacques Kerchache, the gallery owners Hélène Leloup and Alain de Monbrison, the

Hélène Joubert, head of the museum's African heritage unit, and the late great Swiss collector Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller.

This explains the speed and authority of his interventions in bursts on the art market, in the months when the great museum desired by his friend Jacques Chirac, fifth president of the Fifth Republic, was being prepared and opened. This also explains the present collection: statuettes, masks, ritual and ceremonial objects, all of a rare quality and

prestigious pedigree. The donation was completed by the dation of two works.

A very refined taste

The public had already been able to discover most of these pieces on site in the spring of 2016 within an even richer collection, temporarily presented on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the place. This exhibition, called "Eclectic", highlighted a very particular taste in the

It is a commitment strong for the promotion of knowledge and the valorization of traditions extra-european arts

EMMANUEL KASARHÉROU, PRESIDENT OF THE MUSEUM

refined and very free. She evoked the way in which Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière had harmonized at home, in his office or his living room, influences of Western art, ancient or modern (Cycladic idol, statue of Heracles as a child, portrait of the Fayoum, bronzes of Picasso, Lipchitz, paintings of Chagall, Hartung, sheets of Sonia Delaunay, Poliakov, Hantai), with a pile driver of millet dogon, a gardian fang, a mask dan, a maternity sénoufo... Here a ciwarabamana crest radiated near an oil of Nicolas de Staël. There a Soulages was in harmony with the black and white of a Papuan shield.

From now on, the most spacious of the museum's mezzanines will house a gallery bearing his name. The scenography of this space was specially redesigned by Jean Nouvel, the building's architect. Since the donation did not include any modern or contemporary works, this kind of dialogue between Western and distant arts will only be seen from time to time. What

is valued here, in a perennial way, is the delight for itself of the 36 masterpieces given to the State. Space, light, showcases, furniture, materials: everything has been designed to celebrate the plastic, to make the forms and patinas vibrate, to make their fascinating beauty sing.

One half of the mezzanine is dedicated to scientific research, through a series of temporary exhibitions that open up new avenues of study for the research community.

Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière has matched his donation with funding of 200,000 euros a year for five years for work aimed at improving knowledge of the works and the artists who created them. *"This is a strong commitment to the promotion of knowledge and the enhancement of non-European artistic traditions, in perfect coherence with the museum's scientific and cultural mission,"* says Emma-Nuel Kasarhérou, president of the museum. ■ **É. B.-R.**

A contribution to the treasures of the institutio

COLLECTION
This collection of rare and high quality pieces is also an important contribution to the history of modern taste.

ly-Jacques Chirac, is now the definitive setting for the works of art, mainly African, but also Oceanic, donated by the philanthropist.

Let's go in. Here there are fewer rooms, but all of very high quality, and a little more light for a more comfortable visit and a more stimulated attention to detail.

Here are two traditional showcases presenting on one side a set of statues, on the other figurines or particular objects, such as this mangbetu hairpin, a marvel of finesse in ivory, or this olifant of the same material whose tip is sculpted with two crocodiles in half-relief.

And everywhere else, elegantly arranged on their base of appropriate height and color, so-called "aura" display cases around which one can turn (see page 36). They fit every shape of the **objet** they contain as if by magic. The variety, the plastic creativity of the civilizations of our world, thus magnified, do not cease to amaze - to dazzle - throughout this free course.

This one doesn't suffer from any crowding nor does it generate any monotony. Here a room all in dark woodwork evoking a library, where one can sit at leisure in

C and this collection, I

I have always felt that I was simply the custodian of it, thinking that it should be shared by the greatest number of people. A simple photo and this sentence inscribed on an ebony partition welcomes the public to the new Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière space. Thus, the western mezzanine, the main one of the three that overlook the plateau of the permanent collections at the Musée du quai Bran-

ÉRIC BIÉTRY-RIVIERRE

Beautiful as a Madonna

This young woman sitting on a stool, nursing two babies while she carries on her head, arms stretched out, her bowl of abundance, was born before 1952 in the north of the Ivory Coast, among the Senufo. It is not known who carved it in its single piece of wood inlaid with fine metal elements. Its hieratic nature, her scarifications, her earrings and the fact that she still keeps in her its black patina the traces of a coating with shea butter, white clay

endeared him to the great Swiss collector Josef Mueller in the West. ■

Austral Islands chief's stool

In 1789, the bosun of the *Bounty* passed through the Australs archipelago (the southernmost part of what is now French Polynesia) while the mutineers were looking for an island to take refuge. In his diary, he describes the furniture of the local houses. Mats, baskets, pretty containers and "stools for beating pudding with a pestle". The pudding in question turned out to be tuberous

of taro paste for to cooking. And the stool, carved by a virtuoso in the only piece of a tree, and then carefully polished, was probably originally the one of a cacique. This type of furniture also mentioned in Tahiti is among the most successful and most complex in the Polynesian area. The wider the elegantly curved seat, the more important the figure. ■

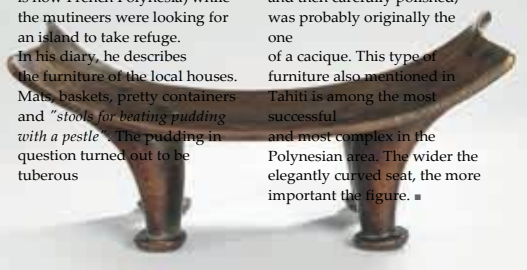
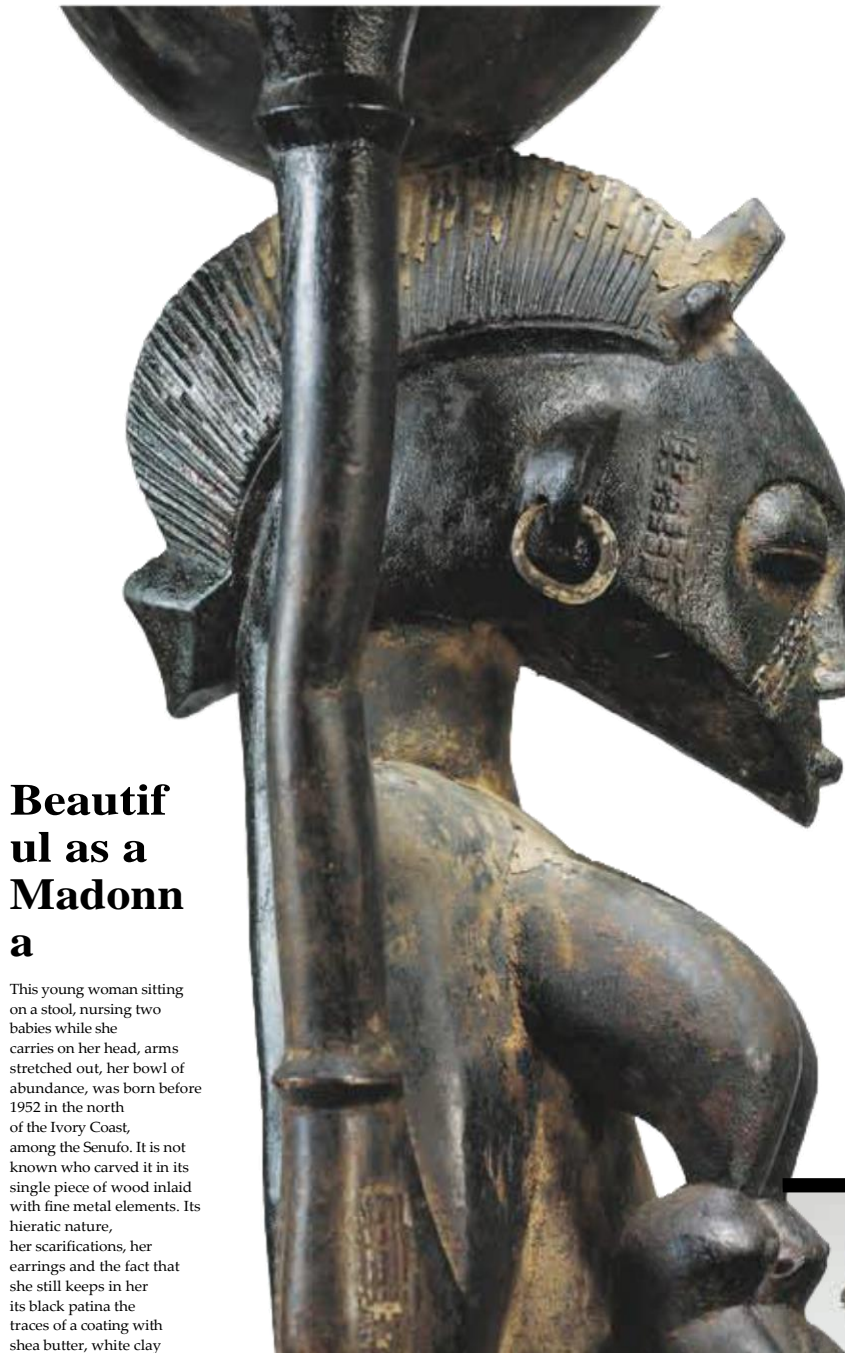
Bassa Princess

This rare statuette covered with scarifications evokes the Bassa (Liberia) initiation rites that make the girl to the status of adult. Her hairstyle is made of real braids in vegetable fibers. We also notice white pearl earrings in her ears and in her legs, brass rings as well as "socks" painted with kaolin, symbol of purity. Above all, girdling the hips, a thread of red glass beads carries, at the level of the pubis, pendants also bleached with kaolin. Everything leads us to believe that this ornament refers to the dreaded ordeal of

Geometry fertile

What a fine example of geometric stylization this piece is, typical of the statuary of the Oubangui region (today the border between the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo)! This monument of wood with a shiny patina, of gbayaya style, from which

clitoridectomy, genital mutilation supposed to guarantee fertility and sexual behavior for Bassa women. and moral compliance. ■



pierces a
mother-of-
pearl look,
has a twin. It
is kept in the
Natural
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Museum of La
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some brothers
and sisters
exist in
German
collections,
including the
museums of
Berlin and
Frankfurt.
Male gbya
representations
are the most
numerous.
Sometimes the
sculptor
created
couples or
even triads.
All these
sculptures
were probably
used during
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rituals. These
spirits were
also
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village, its
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and their crops.
But when
necessary, the
Gbaya knew
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made their
blacksmiths
even more
famous than
their carvers.
We have
could see this
recently when
visiting
"Striking Iron,
the Art of
African
Blacksmiths" at
the Quai
Branly-Jacques
Chirac
Museum. ■

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thick armchairs in order to revel in only two pieces. There is an audacity and a touch of humor when one discovers, on a sort of transparent diving board, considering the 3,500 works exhibited below on the 5,300 m² of cubic showcases, niches and aisles, a male gbayá statue (Oubangui from Central Africa). It seems to be meditating on what so many riches tell us. Imi-tons her.

But first, let us listen to Yves Le Fur, the learned and sensitive director of heritage and collections since the creation of the Quai Branly: "The 36 works in the donation are of great interest to the history of non-Western art. The 36 works in the donation are of great interest to the history of non-Western art, and include sculptures from regions hitherto little represented within these walls. And he invites us to approach such a gbayá piece from the north of the Oubangui River (Central African Republic) or an arrow holder, a badge of prestige and power, attributed to the "Master Warua" active between the end of the 18th and the 19th century (Democratic Republic of Congo).

"The collection also interests the history and the reception of these arts by the succession of their prestigious collectors," he adds. And to designate, for example, a Dan mask, formerly property of the art dealer

historical Paul Guillaume. Some other works belonged to artists or collectors, all of whom were pioneers in the history of the taste for African and Oceanian art.

The space that the patron wanted is finally characterized as a place of knowledge as well as delight. For, if one wishes to better penetrate the beauty of the works, it is easy to learn more by consulting the maps and contextual information accessible via QR codes that link to extensive documentary resources. Texts explain the use of a particular mask or instrument, informing of its provenance when known, as well as its historical background. The floor is also given to people from the diaspora or not, concerned or specialists. In these interviews, they react to the works with their own sensitivity.

Further on, the south wing of the mezzanine is dedicated to temporary exhibitions. The Fondation Dapper, whose mission is to make African and diasporic art better known, will soon be showing some works by the Cameroonian artist Barthélémy Toguo. They will be presented in resonance with pieces of ancient African art. ■



Head of Library

The famous art dealer Paul Guillaume, whose collection of modern art is housed in the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris, owned this Dan ritual mask (Ivory Coast). It even appeared in his living room above the books of the library of his private hotel of 20, avenue de Messine, near paintings by Derain, Soutine and Modigliani... This shows the consideration that this great promoter of African arts had for him. The eyes of this realistic face were formerly widened to fit to a new wearer. On the cheeks, oblique scarifications can pass for wrinkles, rare representations of age. The fine nose is busted; the open mouth, well drawn. The only ear, the one on the left, is original. Acquired by an artist at the after-death sale of Paul Guillaume's African collection, the piece had been deposited and neglected in an attic from 1934 to 1965, after having been shown at the Museum of Decorative Arts in 1923, in London in 1933 and at MoMA of New York in 1935. ■

Icon of the African arts

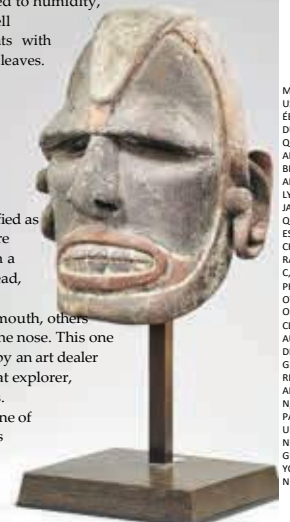
Hieratic expression and sitting position... The body? Black and shiny. Powerful thighs, bulging calves, an abdomen in "barrel" with a cylindrical navel. The arms are brought back in front of the plexus, with hands that support a cup. The face? A bulging forehead surmounting a grainy look of coffee and a sulky pout. It is flanked by small, prominent ears and adorned with a central crested headdress which, on the reverse side, protects the nape of the neck like a helmet... This statue, a reliquary guardian in the pure Fang Betsi/Mekè style from Gabon, was particularly influential in the "black arts" of the 1920s. It was part of the Georges de Miré (1890-1965) collection, dispersed in 1931. A set that included, in addition to this figurine, several other pieces that became iconic of African arts at the time of their presentation in large international exhibitions. At that time of the sale, Georges-Henri Rivière, then deputy director of the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro, regretted that his museum "was not yet rich enough to offer itself this magnificent collection (combining) in the field of primitive art, as much beauty worthy of so much science.



The Rain Summoner

"For sure you are a great god! (...) You scare people, you amaze them". In this poem that he composed in 1948, André Breton ~~at~~ one of these very expressive and polychrome statues called "uli" that come from New Ireland. This head covered with an expensive and cracked black patina also comes from there. Precisely from the Tabar Islands of the Bismarck Archipelago. Traditionally, it was that of a mannequin made of vegetable fibers. This character appeared, with his hairstyle crested, his eyes very deep set, his massive nose, his open mouth and his large teeth during the "marada", a magical ceremony to call for rain. Ethnologists specializing in New Ireland have established that, in the past, during the ritual, this being was surrounded by

of songs and associated with human skulls as well as elements related to humidity, such as the shell water or plants with thick and fatty leaves. It would not remain in the world more than about fifteen of these pieces, abusively therefore qualified as masks. Some are decorated with a carved pig's head, which is as held in the mouth, others with a ring in the nose. This one was collected by an art dealer who was a great explorer, Pierre Langlois. It was during one of his expeditions in Oceania, in 1970. ■



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36 MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY-JACQUES CHIRAC

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MUSEOGRAPHY

The star architect, who designed the entire Quai Branly, also piloted the transformation of the west mezzanine.

The Quai Branly Museum was inaugurated in 2006, at the initiative of the

In 2016, Jean Nouvel signed his masterpiece on the banks of the Seine, along with the Fondation Cartier, the Arab World Institute and the Philharmonie. From the outset, for this showcase of "non-Western arts" built at the foot of the Eiffel Tower, the architect wanted to distance himself from the classic museum rooms in favor of more personal or monumental spaces. The environment is that of a large garden protected by a glass fence and lit by a field of vertical neon lights. It is punctuated by pilings painted as self-supporting works, curves or multicolored boxes suspended, like a port through which pass all the treasures of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. A vegetal wall evokes a jungle, multiple screens allow a subtle play of light and shadow. Inside, leading to the main plateau, a large alley winds its way, then, on this level, a pathway is lined with leather rocks providing alcoves where to sit and get information. It separates vast areas punctuated by display cases, monumental works left in the open air and small chapels.

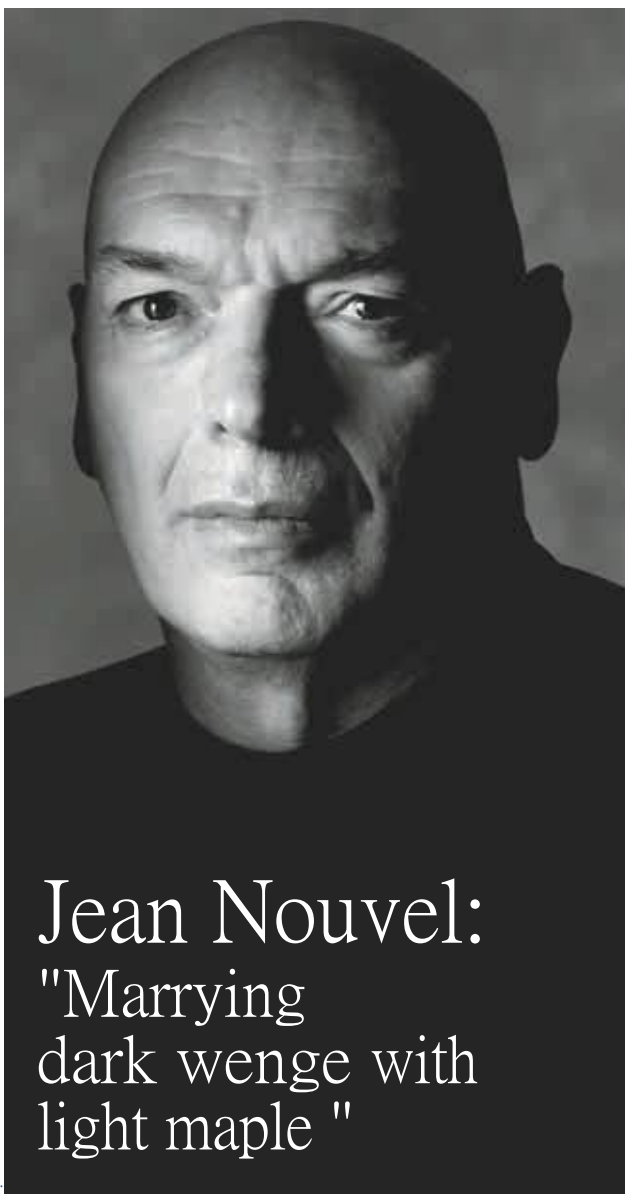
All these bold moves give the place its unique personality. The same is true for the west mezzanine, where, in full agreement with the donor and

In the same way, Nouvel has developed an intimate and privileged approach to the collection, in a refined scenography with magnificent transparency effects that allow the viewer complete freedom. The lighting, always subdued to accentuate the mysterious aspect of the pieces and arouse curiosity, is simply a little brighter than on the permanent collection stage, for added comfort.

LE FIGARO. - What does the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in your work?

What memories do you have of its conception?

Jean NOUVEL. - The miracle of a dream come true. A museum where works and objects of civilizations are revealed, some of them ancestral and endangered. This is thanks to the will of Jacques Chirac, a president who was passionate about all cultures and who conceived them to be of equal value. These objects are now presented in lights, colors and rhythms that belong to them, and in a space that overlooks a dedicated garden. A plant composition that Gilles Clément has interpreted masterfully. The Quai Branly is also a museum built with artists. Those, for example, who came specially from Australia to Paris to create ceilings and terraces on a grand scale. If all this exists



Jean Nouvel: "Marrying dark wenge with light maple"

I also owe it to the sensitivity of Stéphane Martin, who immediately felt and understood the importance of architecture for such a cultural program. He was unfailingly supportive. His successor at the head of the museum, Emmanuel Kasarhérou, is, on this point, made of the same stuff. He has already proved it to us at the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center in Nouméa...

What were your recommendations for the Marc Ladreit de Lacharrière space?

This space is becoming a permanent gallery of the museum. The collection it receives is both impressive and moving. It is a deepening, an enrichment of the museum's collections and also of its architecture. It is located on the mezzanine, in the immense space that houses most of the collections from different continents. It is clearly marked by the presence of a statue located in the air, above the entrance staircase of the space. This space benefits from a view of Paris and the southern light characterized by a play of moiré, evoking the vibrancy of the shadows under the trees and the territories that are often those of these works.

How did you choose the materials and define the light?

The materials are mainly wood and glass. Wenge is a dark brown African wood. It was often used for artwork and architecture. This wenge contrasts with another very light species, maple. This double choice harmonizes the scenography. The floors, pedestals and seats alternate the two species to create a composition with a strong identity.

INTERVIEW BY ÉRIC BIÉTRY-RIVIERRE

A revolution in the art of exhibiting



They have been nicknamed "auras", like the luminous atmospheric emanations which, in mythology, envelop certain beings, signalling their supernatural and sacred character. Seeming to stand out like bubbles on their solid base covered with wood and a metal frame, these protective elements are completely different from what we are used to seeing in museums. The surface of these protective elements follows the specific shape of each object, thus emphasizing their own plasticity and increasing their power of presence. This is in keeping with the norms of the museum.

and safety measures. A world first in the art of exhibiting. Jean Nouvel entrusted the design of these custom-made showcases to the outstanding Milanese craftsmen of Goppion Technology. They were manufactured by Clem, a specialized Belgian company based in Cour- traï, which was responsible for this genuine technical feat. In recent months, Goppion Technology has been responsible for the new display case for the Virgin's veil in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Chartres, for the nine glass cases that house the most valuable samurai swords in the collections of

The National Museum of Tokyo, the Museum of the Work of the Cathedral of Pisa and the Vatican Ethnological Museum. Even the display case for the spacesuit of the first man to walk on the moon at the Washington Air and Space Museum is his work. On the Quai Branly, Goppion Technology has already worked on the monumental display case in the east silo, a modular device that extends vertically over several floors and houses the musical instrument collection. As for Clem, who thermoformed and polished the

The windows called "auras": a technical feat achieved by excellent Milanese craftsmen. "I didn't want them to read as a simple protection, but rather as a case," says Jean Nouvel, who imagined them.

The company is not only a manufacturer of glass windows, but also of windshields for speedboats and yachts, chandeliers, lights and other large-scale lighting panels. In addition to display cases, the company manufactures windcreens for speedboats and yachts made of polycarbonate, chandeliers, lights and other large-scale lighting panels, and even giant magnifying glasses. But let us return to the auras. "In my opinion, such showcases mark a new age of museography, which makes room for the work in all its physical and spiritual dimensions, in contrast to certain mirages of the all-numerical," summarizes

Emmanuel Kasarhérou, president of the museum.

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"Of course, the objects and works had to be protected. I didn't want the showcases to read as mere protection, but rather as a case," adds Jean Nouvel. These masterpieces radiate, attract with a real magnetism. They ~~ins~~ They exude. It is a real haze that floats ~~and~~ them. An aura of mystery. The idea is that the window seems immaterial. That it captures only a few subtle reflections of the ambient light and rare glints. I also conceive it as a discreet tribute from architecture to high art." ■

É. B.-R.