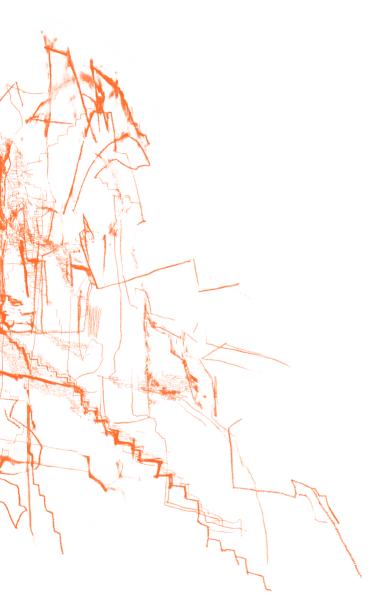
Punascha Parry

Pernod Ricard Fellowship 2017



Villa Vassilieff

La Villa Vassilieff, nouvel établissement culturel de la Ville de Paris, est située au cœur de Montparnasse, sur le site de l'ancien atelier de Marie Vassilieff, qui abrita jusqu'en 2013 le musée du Montparnasse. Elle est gérée par Bétonsalon — Centre d'art et de recherche, qui ouvre son second site d'activités. Conçue comme un lieu de travail et de vie, elle favorise à la fois le mûrissement des idées, les rencontres et le partage des savoirs.

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En association avec Pernod Ricard. son premier mécène, qui crée le Pernod Ricard Fellowship, la Villa Vassilieff accueille et accompagne chaque année quatre artistes, commissaires ou chercheurs internationaux invités en résidence dans l'atelier de la Villa. Conçu comme une plateforme de recherche artistique dédiée à l'expérimentation de modèles non-linéaires de production et de distribution des savoirs entre chercheurs, artistes contemporains, tissu associatif, institutions culturelles et le large public, le Pernod Ricard Fellowship est attribué par un comité artistique international de dix membres.

Le projet de la Villa Vassilieff a été rendu possible grâce au soutien que lui ont apporté des partenaires publics et privés au premier rang desquels la Ville de Paris, la Région Île-de-France ou la Fondation Nationale des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques. Pernod Ricard est son Premier Mécène. Villa Vassilieff, a cultural establishment owned by the City of Paris, is located in the heart of Montparnasse, on the site of Marie Vassilieff's former studio, which until 2013 housed the Musée du Montparnasse. It is run by Bétonsalon — Center for Art and Research, which is thus opening its second site of activities. Villa Vassilieff is conceived as a place where to work and live, where to stimulate the blossoming of ideas, encounters and the sharing of knowledge.

Pernod Ricard, its leading sponsor, has joined forces with Villa Vassilieff to create the Pernod Ricard Fellowshib: a grant aimed at supporting four international artists, curators and researchers in residence every year in the Villa's studio. Conceived as a platform for artistic research dedicated to the experimentation of both non-linear models of creation and knowledge distribution between researchers, contemporary artists, cultural institutions, non-profit organizations and the general public, the Pernod Ricard Fellowship is granted by an international committee consisting of ten members.

The project of Villa Vassilieff was made possible thanks to the support of both public and private partners, notably Ville de Paris, Région Île-de-France and Fondation Nationale des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques. Pernod Ricard is Villa Vassilieff's leading sponsor.

Punascha Parry - titre emprunté à un livre éponyme du peintre Nirode Mazumdar, qu'on pourrait traduire par « une résonance de Paris » - est une exposition concue comme un vovage, dans laquelle archives et images s'assemblent pour former un récit, une mémoire. L'histoire de la colonisation de l'Inde est longue et complexe, les archives éparses et lacunaires ~ notamment en ce qui concerne l'histoire de l'art. Un constat que Samit Das (Pernod Ricard Fellow 2017) fait tout à la fois comme historien et comme artiste, et qui l'amène à proposer une cartographie inédite de l'Inde. L'exposition enquête ainsi sur le vocabulaire visuel de l'art moderne indien, dans une tentative de réévaluation de l'idée de modernisme à travers les vies, travaux et destins d'artistes indiens à Paris. Revisitant des pans ignorés de la vie artistique et intellectuelle parisienne du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, Samit Das mêle ses oeuvres à celles d'artistes indiens avant séjourné ou vécu à Paris, et dont les trajectoires restent ignorées ou méconnues. La plupart des oeuvres n'ont jamais été exposées à Paris; leur monstration est le fruit d'un travail d'enquête mené par Samit Das et Sumesh Sharma (commissaire associé pour la recherche) auprès des témoins de cette époque, de leur famille, leurs amis et compagnons de travail. Ce sont donc des articulations esthétiques mais aussi politiques, intimes, que l'exposition donnera à voir, mettant en perspective la constitution d'un discours sur l'histoire de l'art dans le contexte du nationalisme indien des années de lutte pour l'indépendance.

from the eponymous book by painter Nirode Mazumdar, which could be translated as « a resonance of Paris » ~ is an exhibition conceived as a journey, in which archives and images come together to form a narrative, a bossible memory. The history of the colonization of India is long and complex, the archives scattered and incomplete ~ especially regarding art history. An observation that Samit Das (2017 Pernod Ricard Fellow) makes as an historian and an artist, leading him to propose an original mapping of India. The exhibition examines the visual vocabulary of Indian modern art in an attempt to re-evaluate the idea of modernism through the lives, works and destinies of Indian artists in Paris. Samit Das, revisiting some ignored sections of the artistic and intellectual life of Paris in the twentieth century, combines his works with those of Indian artists who have staved or lived in Paris and whose trajectories remain ignored or unknown. Most of the exhibited works have never been shown in Paris; their display is the result of an investigation conducted by Samit Das and Sumesh Sharma (associate research curator) with witnesses of that time, but also their families, friends and fellow artists. It is therefore aesthetic but also political and intimate articulations that the exhibition will show, putting into perspective the constitution of a discourse on the history of art in the context of contemporary Indian nationalism of the years of struggle for independence.

Punascha Parry ~ a title borrowed

**Punascha Parry** 

Modernism in India: Art and its time during Post-Second World War

**Punascha Parry** 

Modernism in India: Art and its time during Post-Second World War

Modernism in India: Art and its time during Post-Second World War By Samit Das In a country as complex and vast as India, notions of culture and history can be difficult

to grasp. Few historical accounts exist or have been preserved in regional languages, and a visual journey across the country remains open to interpretation. India was and, despite the age of globalisation, remains a unique treasure trove of creativity, expressed in its many and diverse cultures, languages and religions. Some see it as a vast living museum where traditions are preserved yet evolve, while for others it remains the land of exoticism and mysticism par excellence.

In India, creativity finds innumerable forms of expression. The elite may call them "art" but often, for those creating them, they are an expression of their lives. Whether we agree or disagree with a religious belief, it involves activities that can also be seen as a form of art. Given these diverse perspectives, what is Modernism in Indian art? How do we grasp the subtleties of the new visual perspectives that Indian artists bring to their age-old myths and traditions, or their manner of embracing new visions and techniques, to combine them with the influence of their specific Indian culture? This exhibition, titled Punascha Parry ("Resonance of Parry", phonetic spelling of "Paris"), is an attempt to explore and revisit the idea of so-called "Indian Modern art", and the very idea of Modernism in India. The title is borrowed from artist Nirode Mazumdar's eponymous book, a memoir from his years in Paris published in 1983, which became very influential in India but was not translated into French or English until now.

What is considered modern Indian art has existed in India since the early 20th century and first appeared in Bengal with painter Abanindranath Tagore, but it has never been clearly elucidated or understood. In a move away from the academic genres previously promoted in India, a new style of imagery emerged in what was known as the Bengal school of art. However, because of Abanindranth's involvement in the Swadeshi movement<sup>1</sup> this school was largely misunderstood and reduced to its nationalistic aspects. In reality, the Bengal school represented a reformation process that focused on every aspect of art, visual culture and education. It was neither a narrow expression of nationalism, but a modernist approach that promoted other genres of new Indian art, combining both religious and secular elements.

While in the West Modernism generally describes an urban tradition and a search for a new visual culture, largely influenced by the Industrial Revolution and the social changes taking place at the time, Modernism in India cannot be so closely related to the metropolis, cities and urbanisation. In the Western world, modern urbanization occurred very differently from the way it did in India and the Indian concept of the urban does not correspond to the notions it is associated with in the West. The history of urbanism and architecture in India, from the Indus valley civilization (3300 -1300 BCE) to the successive kingdoms and their royal patronage onward, is deeply interconnected with that of visual arts -a large number of architectural references are depicted in art forms over the ages. In the late nineteenth century, the Kalighat Pata paintings<sup>2</sup> became a source that recorded clear evidence of urban art in India. They were mostly made by Muslim artists, who did not all belong to the higher casts, although they depicted Hindu mythological stories as well as social incidents.

I believe that a consideration of Modernism in India involves thinking in terms of time and periods. This notion is not the same as the derivative term modernism in world art, as it is envisaged in the West. If we were to try to see it in this light, it would not do justice to art in India. India is a land of many layers of communities and States, castes and religious beliefs. Every genre of visual art consciously or unconsciously includes all these factors and an appreciation of the evolution of Indian art needs to take the specific context into account while moving away from categorizations of art into high and low. Dalit<sup>3</sup> and lower casts are also important to include within the idea of Modernism in India. The history and course of Indian art are complex subjects and art in India should not be approached from a hierarchical perspective.

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Modernism in India: Art and its time during Post-Second World War

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The development of imagery is intertwined with oral history, mythology, legends and archaeological excavation including in its most ephemeral forms, and any attempt to understand the evolution of art in India requires an encompassing approach to the country's living traditions.

We must also, of course, mention the great contribution made by the Indian Theosophists to the idea of Modernism in India after the Second World War. Personalities like <u>Aurobindo</u>, <u>Jiddu Krishnamurti</u>, <u>Ramana Maharshi</u> and <u>Annie Besant</u> had a huge influence on the artists of their time. Printmaker and sculptor <u>Krishna Reddy</u> was deeply marked by Krishnamurti's philosophy and his art would be incomplete if we were not to quote this thinker. Krishnamurti said that "*in nothingness, there is everything, energy. The ending is a beginning*", and all Reddy's prints involving viscosity are clear reminders of these words.

After independence, Indian artists started looking towards the West, and Paris of the 1950's was naturally considered one of the most attractive cultural capitals of the time. Punascha Parry looks at a few of the little known Indian artists who studied and worked in Paris during the 1950's and until the 1970's. They came to Paris for a variety of reasons, some to explore their own forms of expression through the vibrant art world of the West, others benefitting from French government scholarships, but all of them remained deeply rooted in their own culture. They were not seeking to make a mark as Indian artists creating Indian art but wanted to take India to the wider world. For the most part, they do not seem to have managed to gain access to major exhibitions in the right contexts or to have been recognized while they were there. Their artistic journeys were not simple and demanded a great deal of inner strength to live and create in a world so different from their own. Their journey was one of transcending borders and recreating links with the essence of the human culture that Rabindranath Tagore expressed so aptly in the following words:

"When we talk of such a fact as Indian Art, it indicates some truth based upon the Indian tradition and temperament. At the same time we must know that there is no such thing as absolute caste restriction of human cultures; they, human cultures... ever have the power to combine and produce new variations, and such combinations have been going on for ages, proving the truth of the deep unity of human psychology. It is admitted that in Indian art the Persian element found no obstacles, and there are signs of various other alien influences. China and Japan have no hesitation in acknowledging their debt to India in their artistic and spiritual growth of life. Fortunately for our civilisations, all such intermingling happened when professional art critics were not rampant and artists were not constantly nudged by the warning elbow of classifiers in their choice of inspiration. Our artists were never tiresomely reminded of the obvious fact that they were Indian; and in consequence they had the freedom to be naturally Indian in spite of all the borrowings that they indulged in<sup>4</sup>."

Some of the artists I had the opportunity to study as part of my research with the Pernod Ricard Fellowship are featured in this show. They include Krishna Reddy, Nirode Mazumdar, Akbar Padamsee, M.F. Husain, Zarina Hashmi, Lila Lakshmanan, Francis Newton Souza and Jean Bhowanagary. All of them lived and worked for prolonged periods in Paris at some point in their careers. In addition, none of them wanted to be portrayed as Indian artists although they were all influenced by various elements of their Indian roots. For Nirode Mazumdar, it was the essence of spiritualism; for Krishna Reddy, the Theosophists; secularism in Husain's case: or Islamic scripts and the concept of home for Zarina Hashmi, Zarina's childhood home in Aligarh and the garden her mother had created there became the starting point of her journey through a series of drawings and graphic works. The artists who appear in this exhibition studied a variety of subjects and were trained in different areas, but there is a point where they all converge on the same platform. Padamsee, M.F. Husain and F. N. Souza were looking for inner beauty and strength, not only seeking to create external patterns or forms. and one can perceive a certain grotesque beauty in their works. Theirs was a process of building up layers, where artworks never remained solely on the surface of the canvas but drew the viewer in to explore the depths of life. A conversation with

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Lila Lakshmanan, who played an important role as a film editor in Paris, and Jean Bhownagary's films reveal the idea of India in those days and the importance of looking back and accepting the idea of social responsibility. In Jean Bhowanagary's work, we find the idea of post-independence Indian culture and ambition, while <u>Akbar Padamsee</u> explores the deep psychology of middle-class expression. During these early days of independence, they were also involved in a continual search for their own identity amidst the far-reaching changes taking place at home. Paris, stimulating and provocative, was the power capital of the art world at that time, but this very intensity gave rise to its own challenges in the search for a new imagery to make their own.

Through their works and their experiences in Paris, the exhibition explores the concept of Modernity in Indian art, taking the form of a single long thread, as a journey through archives and visuals. Our reading of these artists will suggest a different approach to the art that emerged in the transformational days of nationalism, India's independence and the early post-independence period. Conceived as both an artistic and art historical project, *Punascha Parry* also includes my own work, which I consider an integral part of my process of research, as it has been inspired by these artists' journeys, allowing me to extend further thought through my own visual vocabulary. The exhibition thus embraces a subjective perspective, with the desire to share a wider view of a journey that unfolds through my work and that of the artists presented in the show.

This journey of Modernism in Indian art, and particularly in this group of artists may best be expressed by Annie Besant<sup>5</sup>, in this quote where she speaks "(...) not as an Artist but as a student of what may be called the Philosophy of Beauty, its nature, its derivation from the Supreme Self, its expression in beautiful things, its relation to Humanity in its evolution, its influence on National and Individual evolution, the Ideal of all Art, not only of its partial realisation in the Fine Arts. The Shilpa (Art...) also paid attention to (the arts) which concerned the crafts of the working craftsman, as well as to those which dealt with the major Arts, Music, Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, wherein great achievements meant exceptional genius in the Artist, the Priest of the Beautiful."

I believe a consideration of Modernism in India should pay particular attention to the Ancient approach to beauty, and the contrast between the Ancient and the Modern, so clearly expressed by Annie Besant in her text *Indian Ideals*:

"Is Beauty a mere matter of convention, whether modern, each embodying the method of the Age to which it belongs: The Ancient way of Knowing, the Knowledge of THAT by whom all things are known, the descending from the Universal to the particulars, from the Idea to the forms; the Modern Way of Knowing, the study of the particulars by the process of observation, classification, induction, hypothesis, verification by experiment, and finally the assertion of a law."



1 The Swadeshi movement, part of the Indian independence movement and the developing Indian nationalism, was an economic strategy aimed at removing the British Empire from power and improving economic conditions in India by following the principles of swadeshi and which had some success. Strategies of the Swadeshi movement involved boycotting British products and the revival of domestic products and production processes. Source : Wikipedia (N.E.)

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2 Kalighat painting or Kalighat Pat originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, in the vicinity of Kalighat Kali Temple, Kalighat, Kolkata, India, and from being items of souvenir taken by the visitors to the Kali temple, the paintings over a period of time developed as a distinct school of Indian painting. From the depiction of Hindu gods, god, and other mythological characters, the Kalighat paintings developed to reflect a variety of themes. Source: Wikipedia (N.E.)

**3** Dalit, meaning «oppressed» in Sanskrit and «broken/scattered» in Hindi, is a term for the members of lower indigenous aboriginal communities in India which have been converted from a tribe to a caste by Sanskritisation. The term is mostly used for the ones that have been subjected to untouchability. Dalits were excluded from the four-fold varna system of Hinduism and thought of themselves as forming a fifth varna, describing themselves as Panchama. Dalits now profess various religious beliefs, including Buddhism, Christianity and Sikhism. Source: Wikipedia (N.E.)

4 in "Art and Tradition", in The Visva-Bharati Quarterly, May-July 1935. A revised form of The Meaning of Art, a lecture delivered at Dacca University in 1926.

5 Annie Besant, born Wood (1 October 1847 – 20 September 1933) was a British socialist, theosophist, women's rights activist, writer and orator and supporter of Irish and Indian self-rule. Source : Wikipedia (N.E.)

La version française de ce texte est disponible sur le site internet de la Villa Vassilieff : *www.villavassilieff.net* 

The French translation of this essay is available to read on Villa Vassilieff's website : www.villavassilieff.net

Samit Das (1970, Jamshedpur, Inde) a étudié les beaux-arts à Santiniketan, Kala Bhavan, Inde avant d'intégrer un post diplôme au Camberwell College of Arts à Londres grâce à une bourse du British Council. Sa pratique artistique comprend la peinture, la photographie, les arts interactifs et la création d'environnements multi-sensoriels à travers des installations artistiques et architecturales. Il porte un intérêt particulier aux archives et à la documentation, en lien avec sa recherche d'un nouveau vocabulaire visuel.

Le travail de Samit Das a été présenté dans de nombreuses expositions monographiques et collectives en Inde et à l'étranger, notamment aux Etats-Unis, en France et au Royaume-Uni. Il a notamment pris part à la biennale de Dakar, Sénégal. Il a bénéficié plus récemment d'expositions monographiques à TARO et Clark House Initiative à Mumbai et à Gallery Espace à New Delhi. Il a documenté la maison Tagore à Calcutta (1999-2001). Le fruit de ses recherches sur l'architecture de Santiniketan, débutées lors de son master, a été publié dans Architecture of Santiniketan : Tagore's concepts of space (Niogy Books, Delhi). Il a été commissaire de plusieurs expositions historiques comme The Idea of space and Rabindranath Tagore, Resonance of Swami Vivekananda et Art of Nandalal Bose, avec le soutien du Ministère de la Culture indien. Son édition d'artiste, Hotel New Bengal, a été publiée en 2009 (Onestar Press, France).

En 2011, il a bénéficié d'une bourse *BRIC* pour visiter l'Italie, et en 2016 d'une bourse de recherche *ProHelvetia* New Delhi pour effectuer des recherches à la bibliothèque Sitterwerk en Suisse. Il est le lauréat du *Pernod Ricard Fellowship* 2017 pour une recherche sur les liens entre peintres modernes indiens et Paris. Samit Das (1970, Jamshedpur, India) studied fine arts at the Santiniketan Kala Bhavan before attending a post Experience program at Camberwell College of Arts in London through a British Council Scholarship. As an artist, he specializes in painting, photography, interactive art-works, artists' books as well as in creating multi-sensory environments through art and archi-tectural installations. He also has a deep interest in archiving and documentation, in search of a new visual vocabulary through images and text.

Biography

Samit Das has held several solo shows as well as group shows in India and abroad, including the United States, France and the United Kingdom. He was notably part of the Dakar Biennale, Senegal. His most recent solo shows include exhibitions with TARO and Clark House Initiative in Mumbai and Gallery Espace in New Delhi. He has documented the Tagore house Museum in Kolkata (1999~2001). Samit Das started his research on Santiniketan Architecture during his MFA studies, which resulted in a book titled Architecture of Santiniketan : Tagore's concepts of space (Nivogy Books, Delhi). He has curated several history-based exhibitions like The Idea of space and Rabindranath Tagore, Resonance of Swami Vivekananda, and Art of Nandalal Bose, with support by the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India. His artist's book, Hotel New Bengal, was released in 2009 (Onestar Press, France).

In 2011 he has received the BRIC scholarship to visit Italy and in 2016 he was awarded a Research scholarship from ProHelvetia New Delhi to visit the Sitterwerk library and archive in Switzerland. He was awarded the 2017 Pernod Ricard Fellowship to work on modern Indian painters with a connection to Paris. Remerciements

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Samit Das tient à remercier / would

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Le Pernod Ricard Fellowship vise à interroger notre relation à l'histoire et au patrimoine en lien avec des problématiques sociétales contemporaines, offrant des chemins de traverses et d'enquêtes pour inventer de nouveaux récits sur notre monde globalisé. Le Pernod Ricard Fellowship est conçu comme une plateforme de recherche artistique dédiée à l'expérimentation de modèles non-linéaires de production et de distribution des savoirs entre chercheurs, artistes contemporains, tissu associatif, institutions culturelles et le large public.

Sélectionnés par un comité artistique international de 10 membres, les 4 Pernod Ricard Fellows, issus du monde entier, sont invités en résidence pendant trois mois dans l'atelier spécialement conçu à leur intention au sein de la Villa Vassilieff. Une occasion unique pour ces artistes et chercheurs d'enrichir leur vision, de mener un travail personnel ou tout autre projet. Héritiers de l'esprit cosmopolite et convivial de l'ancien atelier, les Fellows bénéficient d'un accompagnement sur mesure fait de rencontres particulières avec des chercheurs et des professionnels de l'art, de l'accès à un riche réseau d'institutions en France et à l'étranger, telles que le Centre Pompidou (partenaire privilégié de longue date de Pernod Ricard) et de Bétonsalon ~ Centre d'art et de recherche) ou encore la Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, partie prenante du projet. Les Pernod Ricard Fellows profitent aussi des nombreux programmes de recherche développés par la Villa Vassilieff en collaboration avec des musées, des archives publiques et privées, des universités ou encore des écoles d'art, l'accent étant mis sur des ressources rarement explorées. Enfin, les Fellows sont invités à participer au programme vivant d'événements se déroulant au sein de la Villa Vassilieff. où se réinventent constamment les modalités de travail, d'échanges et de production.

En 2017, les Pernod Ricard Fellows sont Mercedes Azpilicueta (Argentine), Samit Das (Inde), Ndidi Dike (Nigéria) et Koki Tanaka (Japon).

Fellowship

Pernod Ricard, Villa Vassilieff's leading sponsor, has joined forces with Villa Vassilieff to create the Pernod Ricard Fellowship: a grant aimed at supporting four international artists, curators and researchers in residence every year.

The Pernod Ricard Fellowship is conceived as a platform for artistic research dedicated to the experimentation of both non-linear models of creation and knowledge distribution between researchers, contemporary artists, cultural institutions, non-profit organizations and the general public.

Selected by an international committee consisting of ten members, the four Pernod *Ricard Fellows are invited to spend three* months in residency within a refurbished historical studio at the Villa Vassilieff. It is a unique opportunity for these artists and researchers to enhance their vision and to focus on their own work or any other projects. Reflecting the cosmopolitan identity and convivial atmosphere of the former studio of Marie Vassilieff, the Fellows will enjoy bespoke support from researchers and art professio~ nals, along with access to a rich network of institutions in France and abroad, such as the Centre Pompidou (a longstanding partner of Pernod Ricard and Bétonsalon – Center for Art and Research) and the Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, a partner in the project. The Pernod Ricard Fellows will also benefit from numerous research programs focusing on unexplored resources, developed by Villa Vassilieff in collaboration with museums, public and private archives, as well as universities and art schools. Lastly, the Fellows will enjoy a dynamic events programme at Villa Vassilieff, offering various options for conducting new investigations and collecting multiple narratives of our globalized world. In 2017. Pernod Ricard Fellows are Mercedes Azpilicueta (Argentina), Samit Das (India), Ndidi Dike (Nigeria) and Koki Tanaka (Japan).

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- La Villa Vassilieff est soutenue par des partenaires publics et privés, au premier rang desquels / receives support from public and private partners first and foremost from la Ville de Paris, la Région Île-de-France et / and Pernod Ricard, son premier mécène / its leading sponsor. Elle développe aussi des partenariats avec / it has also developed partnerships with la Fondation Nationale des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques, le Collège d'études mondiales de la Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme, le Goethe Institut ou encore / as well as la Cité Internationale des arts.

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## Bétonsalon ~ Villa Vassilieff

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