PRESS RELEASE

FRIGO GENERATION, 78/90 A RETROSPECTIVE
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Régine Chopinot TARBON, 1983 © FRIGO
FRIGO GENERATION, 78/90

A look back at 10 years of vision and unparalleled energy: in the 1980s FRIGO is one of the most emblematic of Europe’s alternative culture groups (art, free radio, pirate TV, music, performance, graphism, video, installations, network...). And Lyon is the hub of this artistic effervescence.
A look back at 10 years of vision and unparalleled energy: in the 1980s FRIGO is one of the most emblematic of Europe’s alternative culture groups. And Lyon is the hub of this artistic effervescence.

The FRIGO Collective get their name from the cold room of the former Lyon cheese factory that hosted their activities in the 1980s. For 10 years, FRIGO boasted an intense artistic production across all fields: free radio (Bellevue 95.8), music, scenography, graphic design, installation and performance art, exhibitions, photography...

FRIGO exhibited a hundred cubic metres of water at the Centre Pompidou, succeeded in closing the Musée d’Art Moderne (Paris) following a performance, launched a pirate TV station, refashioned TF1’s TV studios, wrote an obituary for the Théâtre National Populaire, rolled a stone weighing five tonnes to India, invited Michael Nyman to perform a private concert on-site; filmed Hermann Nitsch and Paul McCarthy, enjoyed Potlatch in Hamburg, and attended Documenta 8 and Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria. The collective ceased their activity in about 1989, around the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the inauguration of the « Magiciens de la terre » exhibition in Paris.

This fantastic true story can be discovered from the 8 March to the 9 July 2017 at the macLYON.

A laboratory embracing a plurality of forms and disciplines, FRIGO was also at the origin of a very active international network bringing together visual artists, choreographers, poets, actors, writers and musicians, including ORLAN, Régine Chopinot, Benni Efrat, Dieter Appelt, Fabrizio Plessi, Nigel Rolfe, Michael Nyman, Rachid Taha, Eva Ionesco, Dominique Bagouet, Jean-Paul Delore... It today serves as a remarkable audio-visual database or archive, housing a wealth of visual and audio information from this period.
FRIGO is the shared name of a place, a concept and a collective of artists. Created in Lyon in a working-class district of the city, in the early 1980s, the FRIGO galaxy was made up of several interconnecting structures operating in the same place, a disused cheese factory located on the rue Saint Michel à la Guillotière and in the adjacent ‘factory boss’s house’. In the basement, an experimental video gallery, sound studio and rehearsal studio could be found. On the first floor were a secretary’s office, a shared work space and a concert room, and on the upper floor a studio apartment was used to house visiting artists. In the adjacent house, the headquarters of Radio Bellevue 95.8 were located.

The founding group: Gérard Bourgey, Gérard Couty, Alain Garlan, soon joined by Mike Hentz, Charles Picq and then Rotraut Pape, Jacques Bigot, Christian Vanderborght Accompanied yesterday and today by: Thomas Balestrieri, Serge Boissat, Jacques Bigot, Philippe Dibilio, Cécile Dumas, Robert Lapassade, Marc Moget, Michel Piet, Christian Vanderborght, Marie-Christine Vernay, Philippe Vorbueger, Anne We.

FRIGO, a pioneering collective, bringing together individuals from all disciplines: Faits Divers System / production public limited company FRIGO / a place and an artistic laboratory Radio Bellevue / sound sculpture Canal 22 / television Code Public / pop group Europe Copyright / collection network, distribution Ponton / media art FRIGO, international projects: Minus Delta T / performance group Infermental / video magazine EMAN, European Media Art Network / broadcast network / Universcity TV & Piazza Virtuale Van Gogh TV/ interactive television

The FRIGO motto: be creative, active and economically independent!
THE FRIGO CONSTELLATION

FRIGO made use of the talents of hundreds of individuals, amongst them
(R: résidence ; C : collaboration ; D : documentation):

→ Visual artists: ORLAN, Sarkis (D), Tom Marioni (D) Michel Sauer (C), Fabrizio Plessi (C), Klaus Rinke (D), Benni Efraat (C), Christian Vanderborght (R/C)...

→ Choreographers: Régine Chopinot (C), Dominique Bagouet (C), Carolyn Carlson (D), Andy Degroat (D), Jean-Claude Gallotta (D)

→ Performers: Karel Dudesek (C/R), Nigel Rolfe (R/D), Salomé & Castelli (D), Dieter Appelt (R/D), Hermann Nitsch (D), Paul McCarthy (D)...

→ Poets of sound and light: Jacques Bigot, Olivier Colace, André Serré, Marc Moget, Laurent Fachard, J B. Piazzano...

→ Actors: Nada Strancar, Christine Gagnieux, Jean-Paul Delore, Eva Ionesco...

→ Writers & contributors: Marie-Christine Vernay, Eugène Durif, Alain Pacadis, Jean-François Bizot, Philippe Dibilio, Bernard Pellosse, Elisabeth D, Elisabeth Hetelaine, Alain Maneval...

→ Photographers & video makers: Rotraut Pape, Gabór Bódý, Christoph Dreher, M. Raskin Stichting Ens, Patrick Pierrot, Jean-Claude Chuzeville, Mike Hentz, Philippe Girard, Gérard Cauty...

→ Curators: Madeleine Sarazin, Liliane Martínez, Marie-Claude Jeune, Michèle Bargues, Dany Bloch, Hubert Besacier, Jean de Breyn, Lara Vincy...

→ Composers & musicians: Gilles Grand/Canope, Louis Chretiennot, Rachid Taha, Marie Girard, Michael Nyman, Stephan Eicher, Lapassenkoff, Electric Callas, Moscwitch, Code Public, Frank Köllges, Inka Gecco, Petra Illyes, Holger Hiller, Diana Mavroleon...

→ Artisans of reality and emotion: Margalit Licht, René Sanglard, Philippe Girard, Christian Moralès, Bernadette Bonnet, Anne We, Françoise Cauty...

FRIGO was invited in emblematic art spaces:

→ Museums and art centres: Centre Pompidou, ELAC - Espace Lyonnais d’art Contemporain, ARC Paris, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

→ Movie Festivals: Berlin, Locarno...

→ Biennials and art fairs: documenta Kassel 1987, Venise, Paris, Ars electronica Linz 1986, 89, 90

→ Theatres: TNP Villeurbanne, Kampnagel Hamburg, TJA, Théâtre de Gennevilliers, Théâtre Mogador Paris, Comédie Saint-Etienn...

→ Art schools: Gratz, Düsseldorf, Berlin, Wien, New Dehli, Nice, Nancy, Hamburg...

→ Televisions, Radios: FR3, TF1, TLM-télé Lyon Métropole, ARTE, Radio Bellevue, IRS Kassel, Radio X Francfort, Radio 100 Berlin, Radio Students Solvénie, Musikbox ORF, Radio Rabotnik Amsterdam, Radio Nova, Europe 1...

→ EMAN Video Workshops: European Media Art Network®, an independent international network promoting the screening of art videos, bringing together 8 different European structures (Montevideo à Amsterdam, Beursschouwburg à Bruxelles, London Video Art, Softvideo à Rome, Videographia à Barcelone, K Video Csoport Budapest and Infermental Berlin)

'At the beginning of the 1980s, the FRIGO group boasted an intense artistic and conceptual production, bringing together artists from all nationalities.

In the wake of the ‘Glorious’ thirty-year period that followed the Second World War in France and after the utopia of ’68 and the hedonism of the hippy era, the members of the FRIGO Collective, inspired by the rigorous methodology of Marxist thought and the intoxicating promise of Libertarianism, put their cultural and political ambitions to work in an attempt to undermine the values of the established order. Over a period of ten or so years, Gérard Bourgey, Gérard Couty and Alain Garlan, joined by Charles Picq, Mike Hentz and Rotraut Pape, established an independent arts space in Lyon that would become a basecamp for a large collective of European artists, committed to contemporary creation, informed by a radical disregard for convention, and with a heightened sense of art’s social responsibility and role.

The heir of several artistic movements that broke away from both the art market and what was considered to be ‘official art’, FRIGO advocated an aesthetic of existence, an alternative based upon the individual and collective practice of creation, which joyfully and freely (in both meanings of the word) combined the public and private spheres.

To establish itself as an actor in the elaboration of a new social sculpture, FRIGO did not sell its work on the art market, the institutional market, or for charity. The means of production offered to the group by the art centres that welcomed them were entirely devoted to the fabrication of the artworks and their various actions. In order to live and finance their research and production, the members of FRIGO provided their own source of income, selling services to real businesses at lucrative prices.

A laboratory of a wide variety of artistic forms of expression, FRIGO was a witness to technological progress, such as the move away from print publishing and film photography to digital virtuality and then global digitization. Its members made use of the small format tools of the digital revolution in order to create a new, transdisciplinary, collective, protean, multimedia art. They explored the possibilities offered by video for art, reports, features, installations, scenography, magazines, films, books and even objets d’art. First as pirates for Media Mystik, then as free entrepreneurs, they took over the free spaces offered by the radio and television waves. Urban alchemists, they combined old-school theatre with choreographic innovation, punk revolt, art history, the audacity of pop and rock music.... They experimented with unusual assemblages, bringing together old-school techniques, ancient dogma, modern social and political thought, and the chaos of contemporary progress.

Modern moralists, the future-looking artists of FRIGO elaborated in their actions a new emotional logic stripped of the intellectual conventions of the time, suffused with romantic illusions, Bolshevik sectarianism, consumerism, dogmatism, ready-made thinking, copyrighted and intellectual merchandising.

In order to achieve this, theirs was a collective, non-profit making art, both generous and provocative, based on the sharing of values, concepts, projects and means, without tags or individual signatures. Generously supported by the institutional network of museums and galleries, the members of FRIGO never acted alone, but in groups of variable geometries, maverick commandos conscious of forging the future with determination, celerity, lightness, energy, irreverence and joy.'
Since 2015, the economic model invented in the 1980s by FRIGO has adapted to contemporary realities.

**In 2013**, the Institut National de l’Audiovisuel (INA) digitized the hundreds of hours of video and sound constituting the archives of FRIGO and Radio Bellevue, providing an important panorama of the artistic underground of the 1980s.

**In 2014**, the founders of the Collective, in both Lyon and Berlin, called upon new generations of artists to get involved. Several events saw the light, including ‘FRIGO Reset’, part of which took place at the macLYON on the 10 September.

**In 2015**, Radio Bellevue became RBW (Radio Bellevue Web) and successfully launched a crowdfunding campaign on Kiss Kiss Bank Bank.

**In 2016**, FRIGO consolidated its economic model through the establishment of Faits Divers System* as a cooperative. It also broadened the circle of its members and partners, and the frigobellevue association was officially recognized as a ‘public interest association’.

**In 2017**, an exhibition devoted to FRIGO can be seen at the macLYON from 8 March to the 9 July, retracing the history of the Collective in the light of some of its more recent creations.

**Radio Bellevue Web (RBW)** is FRIGO’s ‘sound sculpture’ piece, a transmedia system bringing together programmes, live broadcasts, playlists, features, news reports, the Facebook page, Sound cloud, partner cultural websites, YouTube and Vimeo posts, as well as the blog Délibéré.fr.

**Faits Divers System (FDS)** is the operating company for the FRIGO Collective. It functions as a cooperative (LLC), and oversees the development and implementation of the Collective’s actions and projects within the available budget.
Summer 1978: Bourgey and Couty rent a cheese factory and house, in La Guillotière, a working-class district of Lyon. Faits Divers System (Ltd.) is founded, followed by the FRIGO Association.

November 1978: Cult French pop group, Electric Callas, (with Marie Girard on drums), rehearses in the basement of the FRIGO premises. They are the first of many bands to rehearse here.

The TNP (theatre) provides Faits Divers System with work and is one of its first clients in 1978. The company is responsible for producing the TNP’s posters and programmes. FRIGO develops the TNP’s new visual identity, evolving away from black and white to the use of four or five different colours.

22 April 1980. Dieter Appelt (RFA) performs *L’homme en blanc* and *La cuve à eau*, at FRIGO. Performance installation and video. Meeting with and arrival of Charles Picq, video maker.
October 1980
27 to the 31 October 1980, *Avis de Décès* by Heiner Müller (GDR), directed by FRIGO (Bourgey, Couty, Garlan, Hentz). A TNP, FNAC Alpha co-production. Supported by the Ville de Lyon. The play is performed at FRIGO, coproduced by the TNP. Metallic walkways are attached at a height to the walls, allowing approximately fifty spectators to overlook the performance, which takes place on the floor below.

-On a red tarp, lies a quartered body. The limbs are attached to the gallery overlooking and surrounding the floor space below. This is where the spectators stand. While they enter the space, a voice distorted by a poor-quality microphone tells of a woman’s suicide, a man’s murder: *Avis de décès,* by Heiner Müller, in short, terse sentences. The quartered body throws off its ties, revealing a brown-haired man, fierce looking, who does not talk. Another man, who resembles the first, speaks. He repeats the horrible sentences in a terse fashion. They pull up the red tarp, the ground is black between the chalky walls. In the light and shadows of hell, they confront the violence of banal objects diverted from their natural function: a table on wheels, operating table, white baubles that bounce off the floor, large dustbins, blocks of ice hammered at with pickaxes, black soil, a burial ground. The men have mud on their faces. The silent man hurls his body with all his might against the wall. A female voice counts out numbers in Russian.

This type of play owes much to performance and devotes a large portion of itself to chance, playing on the codes that threaten to become conventions, the savagery of a harsh Surrealism, the brutality of the sounds that pierce the silence, the fascinating repetitive effects. We are enthralled by the lyrical beauty of the images in sharp contrast to the brutality of the words, within the drabness of the space. A white truck, loaded with poetry, remains motionless, at the threshold of life.' Colette Godard - LE MONDE - 3 December 1980.

Due to its success, additional performances of *Avis de décès* are held from the 4 to the 15 November, and from the 5 to the 10 December 1980.

6 July 1981, under the impetus of Jean-Claude Chuzeville, Radio BELLEVUE, FRIGO’s ‘free, rock and cultural’ pirate radio station is aired, attracting up to 20,000 listeners. Radio Bellevue can be considered as FRIGO’s ‘sound sculpture’.
For a time, Lyon becomes the rock capital of France, with concerts taking place all over the city, fusing the visual arts and music.
December 1981
On the 8 December, a presentation-event showcasing the Bangkok Festival 82 project by Minus Delta T (Mike Hentz, USA, Bernard Müller, Austria, Gérard Couty, France, Karel Dudesek, Czechoslovakia) is held at FRIGO. This is the beginning of the stone's voyage (the stone comes from a quarry in Stonehenge). Weighing 5 tons, it is transported by truck from England to Asia. A book is published to commemorate its adventures and marks the beginning of a ‘cultural exchange’, between Archive Europe and Archive Asia, etc.

Pope Jean-Paul II blesses the stone!

15 October 1982. opening of the FRIGO video gallery, with a selection of videos by Dany Bloch. Every evening, two hours of videos are broadcast (for free) on a big screen.
11 January to 12 February 1983, *TABONA* at FRIGO. A ‘tabona’ is a large apparatus in which water is boiled for laundry. As part of the Labours ‘workshop’, the dance piece *Orages baroques* is created, featuring Régine Chopinot and Laurent Flachard and is performed at *FRIGO*.

11 to 30 April 1983, installation by Benni Efrat (American artist in residence), *I heard the underground calling my name, A.D.2050*, at FRIGO. Many artists return to work at FRIGO, a sign of the creativity fostered by the collective spirit.

October 1983, FRIGO films Paul McCarthy’s memorable performance piece, *King of France*. 
14 December 1983 to 9 January 1984. FRIGO (Bourgey, Couty, Garlan, Hentz) exhibits the video installation *EAU* at the Centre George Pompidou, Beaubourg. A swimming pool of 100 m², reflecting 25 monitors, broadcasting 5 coordinating programmes of 20 minutes.

'The piece is the size of a boxing ring, it is covered with a black, shiny surface, like stagnant water at the bottom of a cave. A red barrier, bordered by a green platband, surrounds this rectangle. Approximately twenty TV sets (yes, I know they’re called monitors) are arranged inside the ring, in all directions, on their own or in groups of four, showing the same image, hanging in the air or enclosed in a metal grid. Firstly, as happens in stores selling televisions, the viewer is fascinated by the multiplication of the same image, and the correlation of images and sounds from the different programmes, which here have been carefully composed by FRIGO. Then, when the viewer has slowly walked around the ring, and is exhausted by the attractions of the multiple imagery, he can then watch each film separately, and appreciate its editing, rhythm and subject. The wonderful film on water reveals a rather miraculous affinity between the theme and the medium of the video image. Another very skilled video on dance masterfully combines classical dance shots, with advertisements for Evian water and shots of spinning dervishes. A third film, close to the spirit of a “performance video” plays with the image of the body, the crushing of flesh against window panes. With the two others, FRIGO *Faits divers*, with the volubility of good hawkers, offloads the rest of its merchandise...’

Alain Neddam - December 1983
2 February 1984. FRIGO creates a scandal with its video performance *Good bye Mister Clean!* at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, where they are invited as part of the ELECTRA Performance. The museum closes in fear of attracting large crowds from the ‘banlieues’ (suburbs) (Alain Maneval, Hentz, Bourgey, Kögges, Benassy, Pionchon, Lapassade, Boissat, Vanderborgh, Bigot, Garlan, Bonnet, Colace, Sanglard, Picq).

*Short circuit at Electra: The cause of this cancellation—the first since 1972—is the performance of the previous evening, labelled violent and aggressive to the public by Museum management. The performance featured a cushion fight and the destruction of a bicycle using an electric grinder... The official reasons given by the director of the Museum, Bernadette Contensous, form a somewhat curious explanation: “This performance didn’t respect the safety regulations and furthermore, it was a violent show that was likely to attract a public of thugs, and gangs from the suburbs”.*

Dominique Guillerm - LE MATIN DE PARIS, 7 February 1984

5, 6, 7 April 1985

The Biennale de Paris at the Grande Halle de la Villette. Performance show *BABEL* presented. A simulacrum in the form of an opera, using video images on a variety of monitors and a big screen. The video serves as the motor of the performance, punctuating the action like a drum machine: ‘VIDEO-TRACK’ 5 (Hentz, Couty, Bourgey, Köögges, Vanderborgh, Bigot, Garlan, Bonnet, Colace, Girard, Sanglard, Stuckowsky, Gecco, Ilyes, Eric Hobijn, Boissat, Moget, Paola Tacci, Danièle Signer, Verwoort. Opening: M. Raskin Stichting Ens, Pape, Hirschbiegel, Fiege, Coerper, Schirmer)
9 to 12 October 1986. FRIGO (Bourgey, Girard, Pape and Couty) organize and produce ARARAT EXPRESS 2034 by Benni Efrat (USA), a video caravan of 7 horses, carrying on their backs 2 video monitors, broadcasting 5 video programmes (Pape and Couty) on the migratory movement of animals and men, as part of the Octobre des Arts event in Lyon.

June 1987 documenta 8 Kassel, Minus Delta T, Frigo, Ponton and his Media-bus Everyone gathers for 3 months of performance-actions-radio pieces at the “New York” as part of the ‘documenta-FETE PERMANENTE’ event.

July 1989 FRIGO-Code Public is invited to the DANAE event (Diffusion Attitudes nouvelles Art Espace) at Pouilly, Valdampierre. FRIGO offers their interpretation of ‘Lady MacBeth’ and creates the installation, ‘LA FORET’, a forest of 36 trees that is built in one week. 4 video-programmes accompany this workshop (Couty, Vanderborght, Philos Girard, Bourgey and Pape).
The macLYON, alone among French museums, continues its exploration of places in the world with a relatively unknown art scene, or one rarely featured in exhibitions. Our latest exhibition is *Los Angeles, A Fiction*. 34 artists / 84 writers, all living in the global city.

Los Angeles is famous for its glamorous lifestyle, its fabulous climate, the film industry, the film stars, and all those beaches. The entertainment industry, the landscape and the imagery have turned Los Angeles into a myth. To the point where it is almost impossible to distinguish fact from fiction, the light from the shade. And yet, the literary and art scenes, for all their extraordinary creativity, remain curiously unknown.

For this exhibition, the macLYON has assembled an international team of three curators (Thierry Raspail, Lyon; Gunnar B. Kvaran, Oslo; Nicolas Garait-Leavenworth, Lyon/London) and three advisers (Hans Ulrich Obrist, London; Ali Subotnick, Los Angeles; Alex Israel, Los Angeles).

From 8 March to 9 July 2017, the exhibition *Los Angeles, A Fiction* is presenting the work of 34 artists of different generations, and 84 writers, all of whom, in their separate ways, have been involved in constructing and deconstructing the profile of the city, in making and unmaking the myth.
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Bus C1, Gare Part-Dieu/Cuire  
Bus C4, Jean Macé/Cité internationale  
Bus C5, Cordeliers/Rillieux Vancia  
→ By bike  
Several vélo’v stations around the Museum  
Cycle lane from the Rhône's banks to the museum.

View of the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon  
Photo: Blaise Adilon