

ARTS

'You're looking at art, but you're touching design'

Collector Hubert Bonnet's CAB foundation allows visitors to get up close and personal. By Caroline Roux

Last month, on the afternoon of his 52nd birthday, Hubert Bonnet was still reorganising the book shop at his new art foundation, CAB, in the south of France. For the Belgian art collector and businessman, no detail is too small, and the ratio of books to celadon-glazed ceramics – created for the foundation by Lovebuch in Paris – had to be recalibrated according to his exacting eye.

This new outpost of CAB in the Provençal village of Saint-Paul-de-Vence is a little sibling to the original HQ in Brussels, which he opened in 2012. That renovated 1950s industrial building has a fully glazed roof and is shaped like a letter A, "and we just put the letters C and B around it," says Bonnet, when I ask him what CAB means. "It's just a collection of letters."

If that seems a light-hearted explanation, the foundation is a serious concern. Bonnet is drawn to collecting and showing 20th-century conceptual and minimalist art – "for its purity, its precision, its democratisation of materials, its interaction with space". For nearly 10 years he has also invited young artists of the same inclination to fulfil residences and show new work in Brussels (which he sometimes goes on to collect, too).

While Saint-Paul will function similarly, it is also a place to bring minimalist art and 20th-century design together. Bonnet's own collection of furniture by Pierre Jeanneret, Jean Prouvé and others is here for all to enjoy. "You're looking at art, but you're touching design," he says when we meet on the balmy terrace of the foundation's restaurant, with rustic pine tables by Charlotte Perriand, designed in the 1950s for a French skiing station.

"You're literally talking across the table, like we are now, enjoying real, historic design in a personal way," he says.



Bonnet made his first art acquisition in 1990, aged 30, at the Fiac art fair in Paris. It was a steel wall stack by Donald Judd, made in 1965. "I wanted an early work," he says, "and this piece was so clearly explaining volume and form." It is now in Saint-Paul, in the building's left-hand gallery, which is currently hung with work from Bonnet's own collection. Another early acquisition – a grungy, greyish diptych by Robert Mangold of two triangles – hangs nearby, and the 13 copper rectangles that make up Carl Andre's "Thirteen Copper Rectangles" are installed on the floor.

While Bonnet declares himself delighted to have reunited so many works from his collection (others include Lawrence Weiner and Daniel Buren, selected by the Belgian curator Joost Declercq), he also confesses that he'd had a troubled conversation about it all with his life coach. "I thought, is

Bringing CAB to the south of France (above) meant Hubert Bonnet (above right) could reunite his collection

Antonia Lippert

this an ego trip, showing things off to people?" The life coach told him it was about achievement.

In the right-hand gallery is a temporary exhibition of work brought together by French art critic (and LeWitt expert) Beatrice Gross. While a black trompe-l'œil line by François

'It is such a pleasure to show young artists who are reinterpreting minimalist and conceptual practice'

Morellet creeps around a window, a new series of geometric steel grids by Spaniard Daniel Steegmann Mangrané commands the centre of the space. A recent acquisition by Béatrice Balcon shows artists' materials captured in delicate blown-glass tubes. "It is such a pleasure to show young artists who are reinterpreting minimalist and conceptual practice," says Gross. "They are taking the mother language from their predecessors and having a dialogue with them across time."

The family business was the lucrative steel industry, and Bonnet's parents had no interest in art. Since 1999, however, Bonnet has diverted his own business activity into the area of luxury residential renovations and seems to be as compelled by houses as by art and design. When his mother died in 1997, Bonnet built himself a new home in Verbier, Switzerland (as they'd agreed he would). He has restored a 1932 villa on Lake Geneva, called Les Ailes by its original owner, who had a winged angel installed on his hillside terrace. Bonnet tells me that not long ago he snapped up "one of the nicest houses" in the seaside

resort of Knokke on the Belgian coast (a 1927 modernist villa). He also has places in Panarea, the Italian island – he likes to sail – and London.

The Saint-Paul space was built in the 1950s, in a modernist style, as an art gallery for the dealer Alexandre de la Salle. It is almost opposite the Maeght Foundation – the first private foundation in France, which is celebrated for its plentiful Miró, Calder and Giacometti – and just a short climb from La Colombe d'Or restaurant where Léger and Picasso traded paintings. Since the early 20th century, the region has been a magnet for artists, including Matisse who came in 1917. The Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence that he designed, studded with his blue, yellow and green stained windows, is a few kilometres away.

But these places are now about history. CAB seems to have swung into town, with its delightful outdoor restaurant (run by the former executive chef

of London's La Petite Maison), just in time to give Saint-Paul a sharp breath of fresh air.

In keeping with Bonnet's mantra about combining art and design, there are even rooms to stay in – clever reworkings of old office spaces by the French designer Charles Zana, who is fashionable in these parts – where artworks by young practitioners are mingled with storied mid-century furniture. For those after the full immersion of a seamless modernist bubble, one of Prouvé's 6m by 6m demountable houses – designed to alleviate housing shortages in postwar France, and now desired by art collectors the world over – is available. Bonnet slept there the other night, in a metal bed designed by Perriand for one of her student accommodation projects. A dream, for the collector and connoisseur.

fondationcab.com



Guests can sleep in one of Jean Prouvé's 'demountable houses' – Antonia Lippert

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A publication from the Financial Times

A gripping investigation into QAnon

PODCASTS

Fiona Sturges



In *Finding Q*, British journalist Nicky Woolf sits in a car outside a California apartment block hoping to glimpse a man he suspects of having orchestrated an online uprising, one that has spilled over into real life. Woolf is nervous – rightly, as it turns out. On approaching his quarry, he is told: "If you do this again, you will meet my friends."

Finding Q is a gripping new podcast from Audible about the extremist conspiracy theories disseminated online in the US. QAnon disciples believe in a "deep state" cabal of media moguls, celebrities and high-profile Democrats who allegedly engage in devil worship, child trafficking and cannibalism. The source of this misinformation is said to be a single person who posts cryptic clues and prophecies, known as "Q drops", on the internet forum 8kun (formerly known as 8chan).

This is the kind of story that is ready-made for audio, tapping into the medium's biggest obsessions: cults, conspiracy theories and the dark underbelly of the internet. While most podcasts about cults tell historical tales, *Finding Q* centres on an ongoing political and social movement that has inched its way dangerously into the mainstream. Of these arrested in connection with the riots on Washington's Capitol Hill in

January, dozens were clothing with QAnon references.

There's something of the gonzo about Woolf, who bows blithely into perilous situations where others might keep their distance. Along with staking out the alleged architect of QAnon, he visits a diner to hang out with some of Georgia's armed militia who identify closely with the movement (they are actually very friendly). While quarantining in Mexico, he dispatches a fellow reporter to a QAnon conference in Texas. There attendees are asked to ensure that the person standing next to them isn't from the media.

Even with his edgy antics, Woolf treats his subject with the utmost seriousness. The movement's beliefs may seem laughable, but its impact is not. The most affecting episode features the PR executive and "Q casualty" Melissa Rein Lively who, having found

kinship on QAnon sites, had a meltdown in a retail store where she tore down racks of masks. Lively filmed the episode, which culminated in her arrest and hospitalisation, and streamed it on Instagram where it went viral. It's with great sadness that she reveals that QAnon "destroyed me. [It] completely collapsed my world view and landed me in a psychiatric evaluation facility... It was rock bottom."

NPR's *Throughline* also has a terrific episode on conspiracy theories and how they have played a crucial part in shaping politics and culture for centuries. Among the case studies is Sam Adams, a cousin of the second US president, John Adams, who spread bogus stories to promote the cause of revolution, including one about a British government plan to enslave American colonists. All of these make Adams an early pioneer of fake news.



Left: Jake Angeli was among the QAnon supporters who raided the Capitol building in January 2021
Oliver Tounis/Rediff/Getty Images