

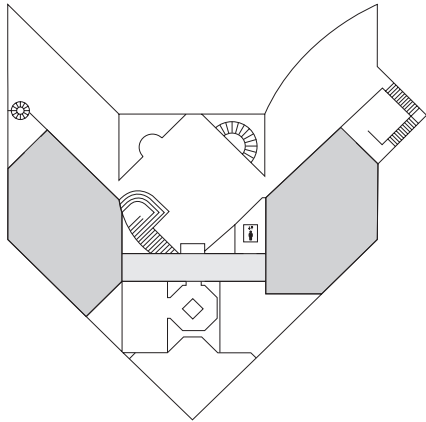
***Cosima von Bonin:
Songs for Gay Dogs***

MUDAM

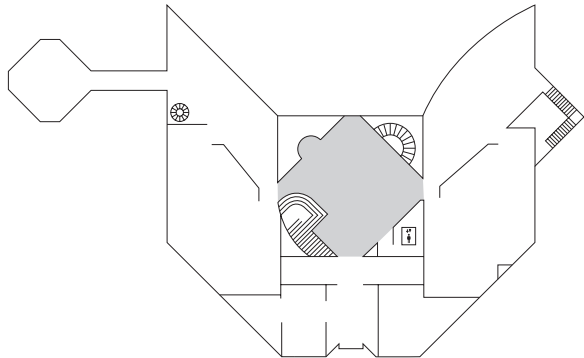
The Contemporary Art Museum of Luxembourg

mudam.com

MUDAM



Level 1
Galleries



Level 0
Grand Hall

Cosima von Bonin: Songs for Gay Dogs

11.10.2024 — 02.03.2025

Curator
Clémentine Proby

Associate curator
Clément Minighetti

Production
David Celli, Paula Fernandes, Jordan Gerber,
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Pedro Serrano, Lourindo Soares

AG



The exhibition

Populated by cartoon and animal characters, *Songs for Gay Dogs* is an extensive monographic exhibition by German artist Cosima von Bonin (1962, Mombasa) that sheds light on the artist's recent creations. The exhibition presents works produced over the past ten years, alongside new commissions and some well-known works. The exhibition is composed of a series of scenes; a playful journey through the motifs that have defined the artist's practice over the last decade.

Cosima von Bonin has established herself as a singular figure in contemporary art by way of infusing sharp and humorous perspectives about our society through a prolific, complex and collaborative body of work. Her textile, sculptural and multimedia installations subvert pop culture icons and luxury industry emblems, staging stuffed animals and everyday objects that uncover the absurdity of power relations and mass consumption. Coming of age in the 1990s in the art scene of Cologne amongst artists such as Martin Kippenberger (1953, Dortmund – 1997, Vienna) and Albert Oehlen (1954, Krefeld, Germany), Cosima von Bonin drew from the irreverent spirit of that time and has established long-lasting artistic collaborations. This period also sparked her interest in experimental electronic music, which manifests itself in the exhibition through soundscapes composed by Moritz von Oswald (1962, Hamburg).

The scenes staged by the artist in Mudam's galleries involve familiar characters pulled from the world of animation, comic strips or simply from under the sea. These characters, who first appeared in her work in the early 2000s, are the artist's entourage – joining the long list of Cosima von Bonin's human and non-human collaborators. Cult figures such as Daffy Duck and Bambi take part in the exhibition, alongside unidentified fish, whales, scallops, rabbits, sharks and pigs. However, not a gay dog in sight.

In *Songs for Gay Dogs* Cosima von Bonin plays with our expectations and enjoys deceiving them. Colourful and seductive, her recent works use and misuse symbols of entertainment and marketing codes that govern our daily lives, inviting us to reflect on the ideologies that underpin them. Comparing museum galleries to the aisles of a supermarket, she fills them to the brim with works that appear to come alive and gain a certain autonomy. Her characters are often caught in action or, on the contrary, completely idle. She gives them anthropomorphic features that make them look strangely familiar, opening the floor to existential questions that remain unanswered. Setting the pace of the exhibition, these scenes are reminiscent of our human interactions, rituals, games and symbols. All are deft metaphors for life in society.

The works presented in *Songs for Gay Dogs* build upon a multitude of tensions and paradoxes: the soft and the hard, the funny and the dark, popular culture and art history. While her references are sometimes evident, Cosima von Bonin often only sprinkles clues in the titles or the formal aspect of her artworks. 'Everything is stolen', the artist regularly claims with a smile. She appropriates words, patterns and ideas from a wide range of sources, such as brands, TV shows, cartoons or personalities that compose her cast – from acclaimed artists Mike Kelley (1954, Detroit, Michigan – 2012, Los Angeles, California) and André Cadere (1934, Warsaw – 1978, Paris) to pop music icons Missy Elliott (1971, Portsmouth, Virginia) and Britney Spears (1981, McComb, Mississippi).

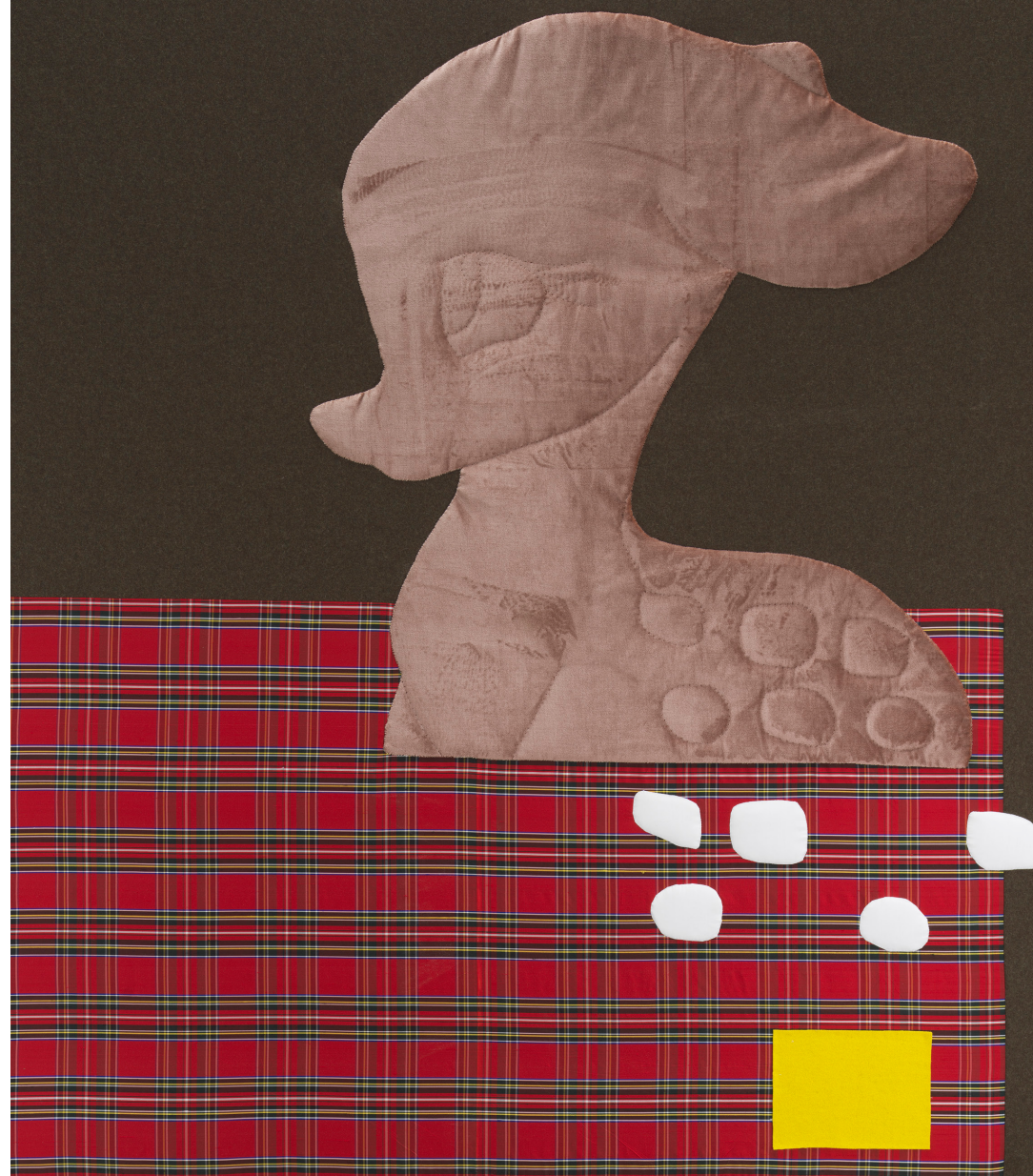
For Mudam's Grand Hall, Cosima von Bonin has conceived a site-specific installation made of giant tables that serve as platforms and shelters for a selection of newly produced and older works. By oversizing an object of our daily life, the artist alters our perception of space, offering different perspectives on I.M. Pei's grandiose architecture as well as on her own practice. This commission is an example of Cosima von Bonin's playful ability to appeal as much to the open-mindedness attributed to children as to the criticality of mature minds.

On the first floor, the corridor is filled with rockets of different sizes and colours that resemble giant toys. In the East Gallery, a council involving several fish and sharks in a circle unfolds in a hazy, almost meditative atmosphere. This recent body of work entitled *What if it barks* (2018), exhibited for the first time in Europe, invokes the marine world to question our relationship with the unknown and the human desire for domination. Some of the artist's most iconic works, such as one of her giant bikinis (*Untitled (Bikini Loop #2)*, 1994/2007), are presented alongside. The West Gallery and adjacent Small West Gallery house some of the artist's most recent works, starring famous Disney and Looney Tunes characters. These hide secrets and lies, revealing the dark side of the spectacle society. A series of black velvet panels shows Daffy Duck in various situations, like sequences extracted from an animation film.

The 'CosiKino', a monthly screening programme featuring films chosen by the artist that echo a variety of themes and motifs present in her work, will complement the exhibition. Performances by drag queens Mary Messhausen, proddy produzentin and Buzz will inaugurate the opening of *Songs for Gay Dogs*, as well as a rare and intimate concert by Moritz von Oswald that will take place on 8 December 2024.

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication including images of the works, views of the exhibition at Mudam, newly commissioned texts and a chapter including never-before published material from the artist's archive.

Gaslighting





Soft shells and giant tables

Scallops (Dark Version), Rocking (2014) and *Mae Day VIII (Whale Visconti Shark Version)*, *Mae Day IX* and *Mae Day Petite Version* (all 2024) may have been produced ten years apart, yet they all include sea creatures made of fabric, displayed on swings or on a bench. Instead of an underwater world, two giant tables house them in the Grand Hall of Mudam – which could be compared to a grandiose aquarium. The ocean, representing an underwater world full of mysteries that still mostly resists human aspiration to comprehend and control it, has been a recurring theme in Cosima von Bonin's work since the early 2000s.

While these works look like children's stuffed animals, their anthropomorphic features provide a complexity only accessible to adults. Embodying different moods and emotions, these soft sculptures become an active part of the scene. The scallops seem to observe us sneakily from inside their soft velvet shells, while the whales' half-open eyes, with their long eyelashes, make them look bored, almost blasé. Cosima von Bonin's characters often manifest systemic fatigue, echoing the artist's struggle with performance and productivity. In fact, the title of these new works, variations of *Mae Day*, recalls the distress signal 'Mayday', derived from the French 'm'aider' [help me]. The flask kept on the swing next to one of them suggests that drinking may be the last recourse, in a world crippled by environmental exploitation. The stuffed animals are covered in elegant fabrics – dark velvet, patterned orange or tartan wool – which are carefully sewn by master tailors. The artist has claimed her awareness and acknowledgement of the power imbalance at play in artistic work. If paying close attention, one can observe that the scarves worn by the whales are made of small crab claws, mirroring humans' habit of wearing fur as an affirmation of social status. It reflects the artist's use of the ocean as a metaphor for a society driven by a pervasive longing for domination.



Rockets

Rockets grow like mushrooms in Cosima von Bonin's oeuvre. Soft or hard, laying down or standing up, they are red, pink, purple, sometimes patterned. Despite representing a deadly weapon, a symbol of war and aggression, their bright and glossy colours make them look rather harmless. *Miss Riley* – the title of the rocket lying on one of the tables in the Grand Hall, pointing at visitors as they enter the museum – refers to a character in Homer Hickam's autobiography and the film that resulted from it, *October Sky* (1999). Miss Riley was a young American chemistry teacher who, during the Cold War, pushed the young boy from a modest background to study and team up with some classmates to build rockets, later leading him to take on high responsibilities in the US military and at NASA. The massive, impotent missile that bears her name seems to question the 'American dream' success story. The titles of the smaller rockets on the first floor are all variations of *Loser*, giving another hint of the artist's critical view of the ideals of militarisation and domination that have prevailed in Western history and which have traditionally resulted in the erection of sculptures and statues celebrating the men and objects that have sustained those endeavours.

Streetlights and smoke signs

Streetlights and smoke signs – sometimes combined – are spread across the exhibition. These pieces are older and iconic works in Cosima von Bonin's oeuvre. The streetlights are a nod to a renowned series of sculptures that Martin Kippenberger started in 1988 with a work entitled *Laterne an Betrunkene* [street light for drunks]. Distorted as if seen through the eyes of a drunk, it deliberately failed to represent a common urban object. Cosima von Bonin pays homage to a poetic vision of the world that may be considered deviant. The recurrence of her smoke signs (*Smoke (white)*, 2008; *Smoke (black)*, 2008) testifies to a similar endeavour: a provocative celebration, if not an incentive to question and perhaps even transgress social rules. However, as is often the case with Cosima von Bonin's work, what appears funny at first sight hides a dark underbelly. The title of the gigantic, wonky streetlight, *Le perdant radical* [the radical loser], for instance, refers to a concept theorised by German author Hans Magnus Enzensberger in his analysis of loner terrorist attacks in relation to the toxic values traditionally associated with masculinity.

Do Nothing Club

The installation *Do Nothing Club* (2010–21) is made of hundreds of books dear to the artist gathered in messy piles on a wheeled platform. They are surrounded by Cosima von Bonin's signature soft fences, this time wrapped in black velvet fabric. A metal sign stating 'Privato' overhangs the installation, warning visitors that its content should remain private. The artist uses a deceptive method, confronting us with paradoxical signs. On the one hand, her favourite books are here displayed in the public space of the museum, inciting curiosity and inviting visitors to look and delve into her influences, like a key to her mind, her practice and their enigmas; but on the other hand, she seems to intend to protect its access. The title of the work, *Do Nothing Club*, is a nod to idleness, a recurring theme in Cosima von Bonin's practice, who claims to be a dilettante.

What if it barks

The series *What if it barks* (2018) comprises an ensemble of sculptures representing sharks and fish wearing costumes and accessories. They are made out of commercial objects from the world of hospitality, such as seafood restaurants' signs, dustbins or menu holders. These have been customised with various objects: a missile wrapped in black-and-white chequered cloth is gripped in a shark's jaw, while a white bass guitar, an apron, belts and chains adorn a mackerel musician. They are joined by a whale made of fabric which seems to be trying to climb on a chair, on top of a small rhino designed in the 1960s by the famous German therapeutic toymaker Renate Müller. All of them are gathered around a gigantic metal can that states 'Authority Purée' – Authority being the name of an actual brand of pet food. White smoke rises from its open lid, creating a hazy atmosphere. The marine animals are presented in a circle, as if taking part in a spiritual ceremony whose guru would be this authoritative can of pet food. Or is it rather a moment of organisation, the start of a parade for which everyone has dressed to impress? These motifs form part of a wider theme that Cosima von Bonin has variously drawn on for many years: the world of sea creatures, which are often presented like colourful children's toys that become enigmatic anthropomorphic metaphors.



Daffy Duck

Created in 1937, Daffy Duck is one of the most famous Looney Tunes characters. He is depicted as a rather 'despicable' character (although this is Daffy's own catchphrase), defined by his unmistakable lisp, as well as his greedy, neurotic and cowardly yet combative traits. He grew to become Bugs Bunny's rival, opposing to the rabbit's cool attitude his desperate hunt for fame. The anthropomorphic black duck has become a recurring figure in Cosima von Bonin's work, to the point of creating a 'Daffy formula' stating that 'to be a Daffy, a character must first and foremost be like Daffy. Not only must they be congenitally selfish, devious, grandiose and craven, but all these characteristics must be magnified to grotesque proportions due to the pointed cruelty of the universe.'

The sculpture *Church of Daffy* (2023) presents the famous duck as a life-size grey statue made of epoxy resin, with raised arms and a loincloth. Cosima von Bonin depicts Daffy as a Messiah whose unlimited hubris has led to preach his nebulous ideas, despite their doomed tendency to fail. According to film critic Steven Jay Schneider, Daffy 'expresses all of the things we're afraid to express'. The character embodies some of the ideas that drive the artist's practice: the shameless revelation of human imperfections as well as a tireless (yet bitter) endeavour to overcome failure.

Open Your Shirt Please

Several installations and five textile panels form the recent series *Open Your Shirt Please* (2019). The panels depict different stages of Daffy Duck desperately trying to fight against the black canvas that seems to be about to swallow him. On one of them, he tries to push 'The End' away; on another, he has disappeared, and darkness seems to have successfully taken over. These works, humorous at first, could allude to the fear of death and the battle against depression. They embody the paradox that characterises Cosima von Bonin's work: existential questions that lie dormant under an apparent lightness. Depression taking the shape of exhaustion in reaction to a society that demands constant performance and optimisation, is a recurrent theme in the artist's practice. In contrast to Daffy's combativeness, the pink pigs resting motionless, eyes closed, piled up in their cement mixer cage, or facing down on the floor, seem to have surrendered. Despite being soft, cute and wearing tiny sparkly backpacks, they are surrounded by fetish accessories such as handcuffs and plastic weapons. The artist confronts symbols of youth and innocence with objects that represent some kind of violence. The use of stuffed animals, especially in bulks, is reminiscent of works by Mike Kelley, one of Cosima von Bonin's favourite artists. But while Kelley typically used handmade, worn-out plush toys, Cosima von Bonin's look brand-new. They are standardised and mass-produced, showing that even childhood has long been commodified – the Looney Tunes characters are just another example. The cement mixer sculptures, made of colourful wire mesh or wrapped in a crochet cover, explore similar contrasts, evoking the harshness of an extractive industry with materials and colours that are associated with softness and femininity.





The artist

Cosima von Bonin (1962, Mombasa, Kenya) lives and works in Cologne. Her work has been the subject of major exhibitions at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2024); Magasin III Jaffa, Tel Aviv (2019); CCS Bard, Annandale-on-Hudson (2018); Oakville Galleries, Ontario (2017); SculptureCenter, New York (2016); mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna (2014); Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis (2011); Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2011); Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva (2011); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2007); Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (2004); Kunstverein Hamburg (2001) and Museum Fridericianum, Kassel (1994) among others. She participated in the 59th Biennale di Venezia (2022); Skulptur Projekte Münster (2017); Glasgow International (2016) and documenta, Kassel (2007 and 1982). Her work is held in numerous public collections including Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Cosi Kino

Projections
Mudam Auditorium

The 'CosiKino' is a monthly screening programme, featuring films chosen by Cosima von Bonin that echo a diversity of themes and motifs present in her work.

27.10.2024 | 15:00 – 17:00

Philly Awards Ball (2008) by André, 16 min
Little Darlings (1980) by Ron Maxwell, 96 min

24.11.2024 | 15:00 – 17:00

The Vampire (1945) by Jean Painlevé, 9 min
Will-o'-the-Wisp (Fogo-Fátuo) (2022) by João Pedro Rodrigues, 67 min

29.12.2024 | 15:00 – 17:00

The Cameraman's revenge (1912) by Ladislav Starevich, 12 min
Atlantide (2021) by Yuri Ancarani, 100 min

26.01.2025 | 15:00 – 17:00

L'hippocampe (1934) by Jean Painlevé, 14 min
O FANTASMA (2000) by João Pedro Rodrigues, 87 min

23.02.2025 | 15:00 – 17:00

La Ricotta (1963) by Pier Paolo Pasolini, 40 min
The Judson Church Horse Dance: Selections from Day is Done and The Offer (Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #33) (2011) by Mike Kelley, 70 min



Moritz von Oswald Presents: Silencio

Concert

08.12.2024 | 15:00

Mudam Auditorium

Public Programme

Performance

thunk piece: 80% twins

10.10.2024 | 19:30 – 20:30
12.10.2024 | 22:00 – 23:00

Curator tour

06.11.2024 | 18:00 – 19:00 | FR
29.01.2025 | 18:00 – 19:00 | EN
With Clémentine Proby

Lunchtime at Mudam

25.10.2024 | 12:30 – 13:30
27.12.2024 | 12:30 – 13:30

Concert

Moritz von Oswald Presents: Silencio

08.12.2024 | 15:00

Cozy Season: Cosima von Bonin

13.10.2024 | 14:00 – 17:00
Mudam session

18.10.2024 | 14:00 – 17:00
In collaboration with Creamisu

24.10.2024 | 14:00 – 17:00
In collaboration with La Ligue Luxembourgeoise
d'Hygiène Mentale

23.11.2024 | 14:00 – 17:00
In collaboration with La Fondation Lëtzebuerger
Blannevereenegung

Workshop Mudamini

La fabrique des accessoires pop

17.10.2024 | 14:30 – 16:30
6 – 12 years

Mudam Akademie

Pop culture et subversion. Des créations
qui font grincer des dents

22.01.2025 | 18:00 – 19:00 | LU
22.01.2025 | 19:30 – 20:30 | FR

Credits

Cover

Cosima von Bonin, *Duck. Black. Ill tempered. Analogue. Knows Nothing. Friend*, 2019
Courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York

Images

Cosima von Bonin, *How To Decorate Without Going Broke 2*, 2024
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Neu, Berlin | Photo: Stefan Korte

Cosima von Bonin, *Gaslighting*, 2023
Courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York

View of the exhibition *Cosima von Bonin: Songs for Gay Dogs*,
11.10.2024 – 02.03.2025, Mudam Luxembourg
Photo: Mareike Tocha © Mudam Luxembourg

View of the exhibition *Cosima von Bonin: Songs for Gay Dogs*,
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Photo: Mareike Tocha © Mudam Luxembourg

Cosima von Bonin, *Do Nothing Club*, 2021
Courtesy of the artist and Gaga Mexico City, Guadalajara, Los Angeles

Cosima von Bonin, *WHAT IF IT BARKS 4 (Black Ukulele Version)*, 2018
Courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York

View of the exhibition *Cosima von Bonin: Songs for Gay Dogs*,
11.10.2024 – 02.03.2025, Mudam Luxembourg
Photo: Mareike Tocha © Mudam Luxembourg

Cosima von Bonin, *Hetero*, 2020 (detail)
Courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York

View of the exhibition *Cosima von Bonin: Songs for Gay Dogs*,
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Photo: Mareike Tocha © Mudam Luxembourg

Cosima von Bonin, *Daffy 2*, 2023
Courtesy of the artist and Petzel Gallery, New York

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Acknowledgements

Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean thanks the Ministry of Culture, members of the Cercle des collectionneurs, all the donors and sponsors and particularly

The Leir Foundation, M. and Mme Norbert Becker-Dennewald, Cargolux, Luxembourg High Security Hub, Allen & Overy, Banque Degroof Petercam, Clearstream, JTI

as well as

Uniqlo, Arendt & Medernach, Baloise Holding SA, Banque de Luxembourg, PwC Luxembourg, The Loo & Lou Foundation, Atoz, Bank Pictet & Cie (Europe) AG, succursale de Luxembourg, Bank of America, CA Indosuez Wealth (Europe), Elvinger, Hoss & Prussen, Société Générale, Soludec, Spuerkeess, Bonn & Schmitt, Dussmann Services, Indigo Park Services, Les Amis des Musées d'Art et d'Histoire Luxembourg and American Friends of Mudam.

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