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Last Call for Summer: reporting from Marseille’s Systema and Art-o-rama

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Collectors Josée and Marc Gensollen, artist Pierre Joseph, and Oliver Noble and Agnese Oliveri of Goliarda gallery at their opening. All photos: the author.

THE LAST WEEKEND OF AUGUST in Marseille always feels like the most welcome and sought-after of times before the drudgery of office life rears its head. The sprawling city’s already buzzing energy hits peak voltage as it plays host for a few days to its annual art fair, Art-o-rama, as well as the more recent (and hipper) newcomer, Systema, a festival with a killer performance program. Alongside these headliners are the numerous side exhibitions, many of them running for just a few days and taking place in artist studios and private apartments. If you add to this mix the scorching summer heat and the chaotic nature of Marseille, then it should come as no surprise that as much time, if not more, is spent discussing which beach to go to, or which new bar is *the* place to hang out, as talking about the actual art. This is, after all, the last true holiday weekend.

The evening of Thursday, August 27, was not for the faint of heart, as there was a plethora of gallery and project space openings across the city (at Sissi Club, Artemis Fontana, SPF50, and Spiaggia Libera, to name a few). To make schedules even tighter, Art-o-rama’s VIP dinner was held that same night, meaning that I could give only the briefest of hugs and kisses to curators such as Cédric Fauq and Joël Riff before they flitted away to be wined and dined. I was left to stoically co-man the door at Giselle’s Books, guiding visitors through an exhibition of homoerotic drawings and illustrations by Japanese artist Sadao Hasegawa. (Full disclaimer: As the organizer of this

show, I respected my duties and did not run away to any concurrent openings.) Later, those who did not yet want to call it a night congregated at the nearby Grand Bar du Chapitre, where I spotted curator Marie-Ann Yemsi, artist Basile Ghosn, and César Kaci and Elise Fourché—the latter two are codirectors of the Montreuil-based Galerie Pony (whose solo presentation by Solveig Burkhard at Art-o-rama, an installation reconstructing a kid's ruined bedroom, complete with personal objects scattered around and photographs taken in Chernobyl and Fukushima in lieu of children's posters, felt like the blasted insides of my head).



Curator Joël Riff and artist Flora Moscovici leafing through a 1980s gay porn mag at Giselle's Books.

Friday, with an apocalyptic hangover in tow, I managed a quick tour of Art-o-rama before settling down at Systema, which, on its fifth anniversary, did not fail to deliver despite having lost access to some of the more grandiose rooms of the historic Palais Carli used during previous editions. Situated in this sprawling building filled with multiple corridors, hidden corners, and wooden paneling, usually home to Marseille's Music Conservatory, Systema describes itself as "a consortium of independent structures that convenes annually in Marseille." Steered by a curatorial committee composed of local curators and artists Lucas Jacques-Witz, Ryder Morey-Weale, and Won Jin Choi, each year's edition invites local and international nonprofit, artist-run spaces and collaborative projects to propose artworks that are then brought together into a collective exhibition.



Choreographer and dancer Bryana Fritz with artist and co-founder of Giselle's Books and Systema Ryder Morey-Weale.

This year, it was the video works that stole my heart: from Harmony Holiday's *Abide with Me* (2024), an alternative biography of Thelonious Monk narrated by Fred Moten, to *Kevin and Cedar* (2004), an archival video portrait of San Francisco poets Kevin Killian and Cedar Sigo, shot by Cecilia Dougherty and invited by local initiative Tseon Tseon, to *MIX 2026* (2026), proposed by Berlin-based artist and DJ Nico Kleist (aka Courtesy) via her Against Interpretation Club platform; Kleist and Richard Sides's collaborative work was the best riff on the home-movie music video genre I've seen in a while, an unabashed celebration, nearly twenty minutes long, of their friends dancing like nobody's watching. The piece had me begging the artists to make a second version and include me in it. Speaking of music, Systema's afterparty began with live sets by London electronic outfit Tracey and Brussels-based duo Lipstick Music and then morphed into a Boiler Room–style mass of sweaty limbs once DJ Vodka (aka Sides) and Only Fire began their respective sets.

By Saturday I had only partially recovered. Nonetheless, artist Samuel Haitz convinced me that going to the beach was a necessity and not a luxury, so I did just that before continuing my art tour. I attended a packed opening to celebrate Costanza Candeloro's show at the gallery Eyleen, a new addition to Marseille's art scene, and a most welcome blast from the past courtesy of Pierre Joseph, who was showing a small ensemble of some of his most famous 1990s works at the recently opened apartment gallery Goliarda. As I observed Joseph's living sculpture *Le Toréador (Personnage à réactiver)* (1994)—here incarnated by one of the gallerists' friends dressed in a bullfighter's costume and lying on the floor as if dead from a mortal wound—alongside Marseille-based collectors Josée and Marc Gensollen, I only wished that I could lie down and play dead too.

Anya Harrison is a curator and writer based in Montpellier, France (and more often than not, Paris). She is curator at MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain.



Artist Gaby Sahhar and Dusan Kacan outside of Palais Carli.



Artists Aksels Bruk, Luca Büchler, and curator Inga Charlotte Thiele at the Systema opening.



Artists David Richter and Olga Hohmann in the courtyard of Palais Carli during Systema.



Artists Louise Sartor and Matthieu Palud at Giselle's Books' Sadao Hasegawa opening.



Artists Samuel Haitz and Nico Kleist on Giselle's Books' roof terrace.



César Kaci and Elise Fourché of Galerie Pony inside their Art-o-rama booth.



Co-founder of Giselle's Books and Systema Lucas Jacques-Witz with artist Philipp Farra.



Curators Cédric Fauq, Georgia René-Worms, and Arthur Fouray at the Giselle's Books opening.



The author and Only Fire at the end of his DJ set at the Systema afterparty.



Artists Sean Crossley, Justin Fitzpatrick, Nils Alix-Tabeling, and Henry Andersen at the Systema afterparty.



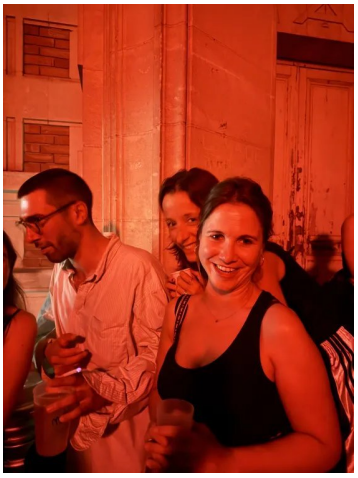
Director of CRAC Occitanie Marie Cozette and director of CRAC Alsace Elsa Vettier at the Systema afterparty.



Poet Bradley King, artists Aurélien Potier and Celia Hay at the Systema afterparty.



Artist Richard Sides with friends (Ehsan Morshed, Karl Ryan, Liliana Mohacsi, Dara Jochum and Lukas Zerrahn) after his DJ set at Systema.



Matthieu Palud, director of 3bisf, Marie de Gaulejac, and curator Margaux Bonopera at Systema.



Only Fire and Lucas Jacques-Witz of Giselle's Books and Systema.



Gallerists Leonardo Caldonazzo, Sophie Tappeiner and Ludovica Baldrighi at their joint booth at Art-o-rama.



Magdalena Mitterhofer performing at Systema.



Olga Hohmann during her Saturday evening performance at Systema.



Curator Clara Chavan, artists Luna Mahoux, Mina Squalli-Houssaini, and curator Camille Zaerpour at Costanza Candeloro's opening at Eyleen.



Hugo Baud and book dealer Rémi Brandon (aka Soccochico) at Eyleen.



A packed opening at Eyleen for Costanza Candeloro.

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