

Press release

Exhibition

ORIENT-EXPRESS & Co
Itinerary of a Modern Myth
From March 17 to May 21, 2023

Curators: Eva Gravayat, Arthur Mettetal

Exhibition co-produced by the Orient-Express Endowment Fund and the Rencontres d'Arles



The French Academy in Rome - Villa Medici is pleased to present the **ORIENT-EXPRESS & Co. Itinerary of a Modern Myth exhibition**, which spans nearly a century of history and passion for a legendary train.

A mechanical object turned cultural icon, the Orient-Express has been the source of a multitude of stories and representations based on facts, both real and invented. However, before becoming a literary and cinematographic object, the Orient-Express is first and foremost the train of a railway company: the **Compagnie internationale des wagons-lits** (CIWL). In operation between 1883 and 1977 and linking Paris to Constantinople, later Istanbul, it was the first in a series of international luxury trains. Its creation was a

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diplomatic and economic exploit at a time when railroads were used as tools to demonstrate the political power of empires and states.

The works and photographs displayed in the *Orient-Express & Co. Itinerary of a Modern Myth* exhibition come from the archives of the former *Compagnie internationale des wagons-lits*. Photographic prints, but also plans, maps, technical drawings and advertisements from that period, the exhibition brings together more than 200 exhibits that place the Orient-Express in its broader historical context. While most of the photographs are anonymous, there are others signed by famous studios such as Paul Nadar, Albert Chevojon or Sébah & Joaillier. Beyond the myth, the exhibition reveals all the engineering of a luxury train that was made possible by an impressive network of workshops and services (launderers, cabinetmakers, boilermakers, etc.).

One train can hide another

Along with the Orient-Express, the Rome-Express is one of the most prestigious large trains of the *Compagnie des wagons-lits*. Put into service in December 1883, it travels the 1446 kilometres between Paris and Rome, first along the French Riviera, then the Italian Riviera du Ponant and du Levant. Presented today at Villa Medici, archives and photographs bear witness to this Franco-Italian railway adventure.

The exhibition also presents a new work by the French photographer **Sarah Moon**, produced as part of a grant from the Orient-Express Endowment Fund. The artist has travelled on the railroad tracks of the Orient-Express on several occasions, following its routes, both real and imaginary.

The exhibition explores the train as a place of all possibilities, somewhere between history and fiction. **Mathias Enard**, a writer who won the Prix Goncourt in 2015 for his book *Boussole* (Actes Sud) and a former fellow of Villa Medici in 2005-2006, has taken up the myth to take visitors on a sound docu-drama specially produced for the exhibition, in partnership with *France Culture*. The author, whose work constantly delves into the meeting points between East and West, offers a new tale told along the line of the Rome-Express: each episode can be listened to as you walk from room to room to discover the myth, or replayed on the *France Culture* website and app.

This exhibition features documents from the Orient-Express Endowment Fund, the Pierre de Gigord Paris Collection, the SNCF Fund, SARDO, the Centre National des Archives Historiques, the French Ministry of Culture, Médiathèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine and the Fondazione FS Italiane.

THE CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by the publication *Orient-Express & Co. Unseen Photographic Archives of a Mythical Train*, published by Éditions Textuel. The publication offers a glimpse into the largely unpublished photographic archives of the industrial epic of the Orient-Express. The book will be available for sale at Villa Medici. Buy online: https://www.editionstextuel.com/livre/orient-express_co

THE PODCAST

Listen to Mathias Enard podcast on France Culture: <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/serie-orientexpress-reve-deurope>

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION: ASSOCIATED PROGRAMMING

As an extension of the exhibition, a series of events invites various authors and artists to explore the theme of travel, including a special concert by the French electronic music group *Acid Arab* on 5 May on Villa Medici's Piazzale.

YOUNG VISITORS

Themed tours and workshops will be offered during the exhibition for families and school groups.

All practical information concerning the exhibition visits and the associated programme will be available shortly on Villa Medici website: <https://www.villamedici.it/en/>.

IMAGERY

[ROYALTY-FREE IMAGES FOR DOWNLOAD AT THIS LINK](#)

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THE CURATORS

Eva Gravayat © Xavier Antoinet



Eva Gravayat

Born in Paris in 1985, lives in Berlin since 2012. Eva Gravayat holds a degree in Exhibition Science and Techniques from Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne University and is a cultural project manager. She has overseen the organisation of numerous exhibitions and photography festivals in France and Germany (*Rencontres d'Arles, Fotobookfestival Kassel...*) and regularly takes part in portfolio readings, judging panels and round tables. Between 2014 and 2018 she worked on the conservation and distribution of the Hein Gorny Estate with the Collection Regard. In 2017, she co-founded thephotoexhibitionarchive.com, a collection of exhibition images for students, artists and curators.

Arthur Mettetal © Xavier Antoinet



Arthur Mettetal

Born in 1985 in Besançon, France, he lives and works in Ivry-sur-Seine, France. Arthur Mettetal is an historian who specialises in the history and heritage of luxury goods and transport. He wrote his thesis on the Orient-Express at the Centre de Recherches Historiques of the EHESS. His work focuses on the material and immaterial traces of industries and companies and makes extensive use of the photographic, archival or contemporary medium. Curator of several documentary exhibitions, he is currently the general delegate of the Orient-Express Endowment Fund.



Founded in 1666 by Louis XIV, the **French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici** is a French establishment located, since 1803, in the Villa Medici, a 16th-century villa surrounded by a seventeen-acre park, on Mount Pincio, in the heart of Rome. A national public institution under the authority of the Ministry of Culture, the French Academy in Rome – Villa

Medici fulfils three complementary missions: to welcome high-level artists, creators and art historians in residence for one-year stays or shorter; to set up a cultural and artistic programme that includes all fields of the arts and

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creation and is aimed at a broad audience; to conserve, restore, study, and make its architectural and landscape heritage, as well as its art collections, known to the public.

The French Academy in Rome - Villa Medici is directed by [Sam Stourdzé](#).

The Orient Express Endowment Fund

The Orient Express Endowment Fund was created in 2016 on the initiative of the SNCF and the Orient Express company with the aim of preserving, collecting, promoting and passing on the heritage and culture associated with the famous train and its history. It is the repository of the company archives of the former *Compagnie internationale des wagons-lits* as well as a rich collection of historical objects. This collection, made up of remarkable pieces, is part of a constantly evolving heritage dynamic, enriched by contributions from contemporary artists, particularly in the field of documentary and artistic photography. The SNCF is committed to preserving, transmitting and promoting the heritage of the railways and has a long history with the Orient-Express. Since the line was created in 1883, it has used the lines of the various European railway networks, particularly those of the Compagnie des chemins de fer de l'Est. From 1938 onwards, the newly created SNCF took over from the private companies to ensure the traction of the famous train.

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The exhibition is co-produced by:


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ACADÉMIE DE FRANCE
À ROME


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The French Academy in Rome - Villa Medici would like to thank the sponsors and partners who support its artistic programming and in particular this exhibition:

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