

***BAD TIMING*, THÉO MERCIER  
EXHIBITION****10 JUNE – 25 SEPTEMBER 2023****9 – 10 SEPTEMBER performances**

A former fellow of the Villa Medici in 2013-2014, the artist and director Théo Mercier returns ten years later to the walls of this place that marked a decisive turning point in his artistic career to present *BAD TIMING*. This solo exhibition unfolds on the scale of architecture, in the interior and exterior spaces of the Villa Medici from 10 June 2023, and during a performative highlight that will take place in September 2023.

From the outset, the exhibition scenario proposed by Théo Mercier seems to be settled. A rain of cars crashed in the air on the Piazzale of the Villa Medici. Facing the ground and wings open, these birds with their injured bodies let out the last breaths of a musical radio that is difficult to hear, while the nooks of the exterior façade impassively reflect the dull and hollow heat of the sky that has become threatening. Further on, a series of sculptures of chairs modelled in bronze melting in the sun can be seen here and there in the building. Abandoned, deformed, crushed or torn between the weight of a heavy stone and the suction of a helium balloon stretched towards the zenith, these sculptures actually indicate the path of an enigma that will find its outcome in the interior spaces of the Villa Medici. Sheltered from the melancholy of the sky, it is in the exhibition rooms that lead to the ancient cistern that Théo Mercier stages the underground resolution of this dystopian situation, inspired by the ancient tradition of the Palaces of Memory. The sculptures he invites to this space of paradoxical memory are hybrid installations made of user appliances and amputated marble sculptures, from the collections of the Villa Medici. Bound by different shibari techniques, this new series of borrowed sculptures express the artist's sadism and enjoyment of dealing with the flamboyant residues of the past and the post-industrial residues of contemporary chaos.

Drawing on his recent experiments around the living landscape and performance, Théo Mercier conceived this solo exhibition at the Villa Medici in the manner of a scenario of anticipation, flirting with the museum thriller and the wasteological memory. The invitation becomes for him a grey area of narrative and plastic experimentation in which he intends to bring together his two artistic practices, those of sculptor and director. By forcing the gates of time, museums and Rome's open-air dumps, *BAD TIMING* works to break into the museum's present to propose a set of hybrid, humorous and

# VILLA MÉDICIS

subversive hypotheses, made up of poetic crashes and dysfunctional collisions of materials, techniques, objects, stories, time and exogenous environments. For it is perhaps in the blind spots of the exhibition that another question as contemporary as it is ancient emerges along the way, that of knowing with what imaginary of power our epochs govern and how to manage to detect their strings?

On 9 & 10 September, the exhibition scenario will come to life with a performative proposal created especially for the Villa Medici, and bringing together young artists from the experimental and musical scene, in partnership with the Short Theater in Rome and with the support of Hermès. Also as part of Short Theatre, Théo Mercier will present his show *Radio Vinci Park* with François Chaignaud on 16 & 17 September.



Théo Mercier was born in Paris in 1984 and lives between Paris and Marseille. Claiming formal freedom, Théo Mercier strives to deconstruct the mechanisms of history, objects and representations in which he goes back to harmonious contradictions. An explorer, collector and artist in turn, he carries out a reflection that is located at the intersection between anthropology, geopolitics and tourism. The result is a sprawling body of work populated by dystopian myths and iconoclastic sculptures in which past, present and future, life and death, artisanal and industrial, secular and sacred, real and fiction, clash in an orderly cacophony.

A former fellow of the Villa Medici and nominated for the Marcel Duchamp Prize in 2014, Théo Mercier has had solo exhibitions at the Conciergerie de Paris, the Luma Westbau Foundation (Zurich), the Lambert Collection (Avignon), the Museo El Eco (Mexico City), the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature [Museum of Hunting and Nature] (Paris), the [mac] Musée d'art contemporain (Marseille), le Lieu Unique (Nantes) and the Tri Postal (Lille). Moving from a practice of the "white cube" to that of the "black box", Théo Mercier directed *Du futur faisons table rase* (2014), *Radio Vinci Park* (co-written with François Chaignaud, 2016), *La Fille du collectionneur* (2017), *Affordable Solution for Better Living* (co-written with Steven Michel, 2018) for which they received the Silver Lion of the 2019 Venice Biennale, *BIG SISTERS* (co-written with Steven Michel, 2020) and *OUTREMONDE*, a series of "living landscapes" around the theme of childhood and the imagination of sand, created between 2021-2022. His performances have been shown at Nanterre-Amandiers, the Festival d'Automne, the Ménagerie de verre, the Centre Pompidou (Paris), and the Festival d'Avignon, among others. Representing the French Pavilion at the Prague Quadrennial 2023 with his collaborator Céline Peychet, he is currently preparing a new choreographic creation around waste, entitled *Skinless*, whose creation is scheduled for the spring of 2024.

Learn more at: [villamedici.it](http://villamedici.it)

## ICONOGRAPHY

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**Page 4:** Nuit des Cabanes 2022 at Villa Medici © M3 Studio

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**Page 39:** Image of the exhibition *Histoires de pierres* © Stéphane Thidet, Sans titre (Je crois qu'il y avait une maison, il me semble y avoir vécu), 2010

## ABOUT THE FRENCH ACADEMY IN ROME – VILLA MEDICI

Founded in 1666 by Louis XIV, the French Academy in Rome - Villa Medici is a French institution that has been housed since 1803 at the Villa Médicis, a 16<sup>th</sup> century villa surrounded by a seven-hectare park and located 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 today fulfils three complementary missions: to welcome high-level artists, creators and art historians in residence for long stays of one year or shorter periods; to set up a cultural and artistic programme that integrates all the fields of the arts and creation and that is aimed at a wide audience; to conserve, restore, study and make known to the public its built and landscape heritage as well as its collections.

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

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