

Christian Langlois-Meurinne

What an honour it is to chair the third edition of the Jean-François Prat Prize. A prize that carries one man's name and his deep-rooted passion for the arts, a prize that defends painting and supports the avant-garde.

This honour falls to the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Society of Friends of which I have been the president for one year and to which Jean-François was continually a generous contributor. How could one not remember his exceptional intelligence? How could one forget his sparkling vivacity? Jean-François had that exuberant spirit which charms you, dazzles you, literally. He had the elegance of those who reflect on and imagine the world, the future. Art honed the sharpness of his vision. His curiosity spanned, without obstacle, cinema, baroque music as well as an aesthetic and political battle like that of Pierre Boulez. And collecting art revealed, I believe, his insatiable appetite for learning. Learning to feel, learning to understand his era and the transformations that it brings.

While writing these lines, I was picturing Jean-François' regard, his eye as a collector who tirelessly searches for beauty, revelations, ideas. Emotion is about knowledge and instinct, nature or nurture. I was imagining the dazzling speed of his reasoning which must have, of course, guided his choices. From Joaquín Torres-García, or Lucio Fontana, Jean Dubuffet and John Baldessari to Matthew Day Jackson or Erwin Olaf. A collection is always both a collection of stories and a personal monograph. Jean-François and Marie-Aline Prat's collection is an intellectual adventure guided by high standards, audacity and an unfailing fidelity to the artists. This brings to my mind Martin Barré, a major figure in abstraction who was for a long time underestimated, and the consistent fervour with which Jean-François defended his work.

Jean-François advanced fearlessly, brushing aside conformism and censure. He thought of artists as trailblazers, pioneers and lived next to, right next to, the works of art. Everywhere, in his flat, in his office, his collection surrounded him. And I am certain that he must have travelled afar while contemplating the works.

This year, the selection of the three artists shortlisted for the Jean-François Prat Prize is international, just like the outlook the French law firm Bredin Prat has on the world. Rezi Van Lankveld (Netherlands), Zander Blom (South Africa) and Stelios Faitakis (Greece) present works of great depth through the ideas they carry and which are fascinating in their realisation. And confirm the extreme vigour of contemporary painting.

What a fantastic idea this prize is! Whole-hearted thanks and gratitude must be extended to Jean-François Prat's partners and family.

Christian Langlois-Meurinne is President of Ancelle & associés SAS, managing partner of IDI and President of the Society of friends of Musée d'art Moderne de la ville de Paris. Graduated from Ecole Polytechnique & Harvard business school, he has thirty years experience in investment industry through IDI which he bought in 1987. Previously, he was executive director in charge of chemical and textile industries at the Government Department of Industry from 1979 to 1982.