

Prix Meret Oppenheim 2016

Interview by Samule Schellenberg, photos by Tabea Feuerstein
©Budesamt für Kultur, Bern, 2016

Adelina von Fürstenberg Schweizer Grand Prix Kunst
Christian Philipp Müller Grand Prix suisse d'art
Martin Steinmann Gran Premio svizzero d'arte
Grond premi svizzer d'art

"The artists are my family"

Samuel Schellenberg in conversation with Adelina von Fürstenberg

A passionate believer that art can transform perceptions, the director of ART for The World has little time for frontiers: she sends her art projects all round the world. From the Geneva offices of her organisation, the founder of the Centre d'art contemporain in Geneva who recently won a Golden Lion for Armenia at the Venice Biennale looks back at some of the key events in her career, and casts a lucid and critical eye over the art world.

Schellenberg You were born in Istanbul. Do you have any memories of the city?

Fürstenberg I spent the first nine years of my life there. I had a delightful childhood on the Bosphorus and the islands in the Sea of Marmara. After that things became more difficult: my father suffered from serious heart problems and we had to move to Milan, where an uncle of mine was a cardiologist. Once my father had recovered we settled in Lugano, where he established the first synthetic textile industry in Ticino. It was there that I completed my secondary education before moving on to the University of Geneva.

Schellenberg Was that your first encounter with Switzerland?

Fürstenberg No, I'd already visited with my parents when I was seven. We went to Graubünden and Ticino but also the Borromean Islands. Since then Lago Maggiore, and especially its islands, has been very important to me: in 2006 and 2007 I completed two lovely open-air projects on the Isola Madre with ART for The World (AFTW). It has a botanical garden where Jannis Kounellis, Bob Wilson and William Kentridge, among others, created sublime installations that confront nature with culture.

Schellenberg What did you want to study after you left school?

Fürstenberg Archaeology. I'd been fascinated by it since my adolescence. I wanted to know about my origins, the origins of the Armenian people (*Adelina von Fürstenberg's maiden name is Cüberyán*). Every Sunday afternoon I studied the Sumerians, the Babylonians and that whole area of the Middle East—I still have many books from that period. Then my passion turned to the rest of the world, including India and the Aztecs. Archaeology allowed me to understand who I was and where I came from. I couldn't find that kind of grounding through the painful history of the Armenian genocide; I had to look to a much older past. Those explorations laid some very fertile groundwork for my future activities in the art world. Over the years I came to understand that before you



can listen to others you have to learn to listen to yourself, even if it's not always easy to do so.

Schellenberg So last year at the 56th Venice Biennale, the Armenian Pavilion that you curated was evoking a past that you'd tried to escape from.

Fürstenberg That project was extremely tough for me. For the first time in my life I had to deal not with a glorious past conveyed via the history of my origins but with real suffering and the reasons for the Armenian diaspora.

Schellenberg Your exhibition talked about identity, but also about adaptation, resilience and reconciliation.

Fürstenberg It was the most difficult exhibition of my life. I had to balance the past, the cultural diversity of the countries the artists came from, the demands of the diaspora and the mother country, the very specific context of a biennial like Venice, and my reputation as an international curator. I think I managed to stage a fine exhibition that was hailed by the press and visitors, and received the Golden Lion for Best National Participation in the Biennale. But I must admit that if at some time in the future I had to do another exhibition with Armenian artists I'd like to do it there, in Armenia, and not necessarily focus on issues of diaspora, memory and identity.

Schellenberg Coming back to archaeology: where did you want to study it?

Fürstenberg In Rome, at the Academy, but my parents didn't agree. Because I was their only daughter they sent me to Geneva, where my aunt Meliné lived with her husband Robert Godel, the linguist. It was an extraordinary family, with intellectuals and poets who were all heavily involved in the social issues of their time. That gave me a different vision of life: one that demanded engagement. I embarked on my archaeology studies but I found it all a bit frustrating, because it seemed to me all I was doing was running through the list of Pharaohs (*laughs*). I wanted to see some action and quickly decided to opt for political science instead.

Schellenberg Why that field?

Fürstenberg This was the period around May '68 and "imagination in power". Political science had a dimension of openness to the world that allowed me to take an interest in and pursue different areas. But I only got half a degree, because I very quickly made a final choice to dedicate my life to art. Thanks to some friends from university I often went to Amsterdam, where one day I met a curator of the Stedelijk Museum, Marja Bloem, who offered me the chance to do some internships in her museum. A new world opened up to me: I got to know Gilbert & George, Markus Raetz, Claes Oldenburg—extraordinary artists. And I spent

a lot of time exploring and studying lots of catalogues and art books in the museum's well-stocked library.

Schellenberg You were discovering art?

Fürstenberg The year before I started university, when I was still at secondary school, I'd been taken to visit Meret Oppenheim, who lived in an amazing house in Carona, a little village above Lugano. It was thanks to her that I found myself in the Valle Maggia with Harald Szeemann, Ingeborg Lüscher, Dieter Roth—people I'd never heard of. Meret Oppenheim particularly impressed me: for a young woman who was inquisitive and passionate, Meret's aura was truly extraordinary and she was an example to follow.

Schellenberg In Amsterdam, your involvement in art takes on another dimension.

Fürstenberg In the museum library I discovered quite a lot of catalogues of Swiss artists. I became interested in their regional, linguistic and cultural differences. Then I suggested to a girlfriend of mine that she could help me stage a project on those specific features that illuminated the disparities through the eyes of artists. Clutching our dossier, we went to see Pro Helvetia to ask for backing. Luc Boissonnas, who was director at the time, was impressed by our energy and the freshness of the project, and he agreed to support us provided we found some partner institutions. We were only 26 years old and yet there we were asking for 80,000 francs!

The project attracted the interest of the Musée Rath in Geneva, the Kunstmuseum Winterthur and the Villa Malpensata in Lugano. We set up a committee consisting of individuals such as Charles Georg, curator of the prints department of the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva, and Rudolf Koella, director of the Kunstmuseum Winterthur. Then we started going around the studios and were very quickly adopted by the artists. While my friend was working from Ticino, I had a space at the prints department. I learnt all the aspects of the trade on the job, and also how difficult it was to be a young woman in the conservative and misogynistic world of the time. The exhibition was called *Ambiances 74: 28 artistes suisses* and it brought together John M Armleder and the Écart group, Urs Lüthi, Daniel Spoerri, Rolf Iseli, Jean Oth, André Thomkins, Hans Ruedi Giger—he hadn't yet invented the monster in *Alien*—and many others.

Schellenberg There was also Gérard Minkoff, with whom you'd previously been to Documents 5 in Kassel in 1972.

Fürstenberg Yes, we went by car, with some other friends. That was Harald Szeemann's exhibition, which I can still describe to you today almost room by room—that's how impressed I was by what I saw. Edward Kienholz, for example, was incredible, but so were Markus Rietz,

Adolf Wölfli and James Lee Byars. And what can you say about Joseph Beuys and his *Five Internationale Universität*? It was like mana from heaven for me—celestial nourishment feeding my need for knowledge.

After all those encounters with art, I decided to stay in that field and not go back to political science. I went to see Charles Georg and asked him if he could find me an exhibition space. He told me that the only place available was the basement of the Simon I. Patino hall in the Cité universitaire. It was a rather squalorous location under the theatre, where I could have a subsidy of 13,000 francs to work with each year. I agreed there and then. I had a sign reading 'Centre d'art contemporain' put up on the wall of the staircase leading down to the basement—a title that didn't yet exist. So that's how the story was born, with a natural progression of events, meetings and friendships without any strategy—and it continued right throughout the time I directed the Centre. It's important to emphasise that.

Schellenberg Today, looking at the list of artists who passed through your Centre d'art contemporain (CAC), one can't but be impressed. All the greatest figures of those years were in Geneva.

Fürstenberg They weren't yet known, but they already had a personality—they were men and women in search of knowledge. They weren't interested in the finished product: what excited them was the work in progress. It's a concept that's fallen out of fashion these days, in a world where art consists of brands and merchandise. Back then when Luciano Fabro came to be the first artist exhibited at Patino, he brought everything in his car and stayed with us, with his little daughter Silvia—she has just organised a major retrospective of the work of her father, who died in 2007, at the Reina Sofía in Madrid. I had a very good relationship with Jean-Luc Daral, the doyen of the École des beaux-arts in Geneva, but also with Chérif Defraoui, the institution's sharpest professor, who taught generations of young artists. We organised a meeting between Luciano and the students. I got on well with quite a few of them, and especially with Chérif and Sylvie Defraoui. So we carried on discussing and meeting for dinner with the artists that I invited.

My husband Egon, who's a photographer, was there too: he documented all those moments, producing a treasure trove of archives that he is still adding to. Look at this book, for example (*she picks up the work by Nicolas Frei, Centre d'art contemporain, Genève, 1974-1984, Centre d'art contemporain, 1984, 215 pp.*), which we published to mark ten years of the CAC: all the photos are by him (turns the pages of the book). Here's a picture of John Cage and the Geneva director Patricia Plattner... And there's the stage director Bob Wilson... This is the Écart group. Joan Jonas, the first video art festival organised by the CAC externally at the MAH, and Trisha Brown, Joseph Kosuth—we plastered the streets of Geneva with his conceptual posters—and the leading artists of the Transavantgarde, like Miene

Paladino. And then there's Wto Accorci, Dan Graham, Daniel Baren, Bathasar Burkhardt, Heimit Federle.

Schellenberg You were only 28 when the institution mounted its first exhibitions. Did your meetings with the artists contribute to your intellectual education?

Fürstenberg All the time I was looking for, hanging around with and exhibiting the artists I wanted to learn, because I was constantly coming up against very acute personalities, such as the conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner, the minimalist Sol LeWitt, the composer Philip Glass, the choreographer Lucinda Childs, and the artists of Arte Povera, Mario and Marisa Merz and Alighiero Boetti. But also René Zaugg and especially Chérif Defraoui, here in Geneva. And not forgetting the 'Ausstellungsmacher' curators like Harald Szeemann, Johannes Gachnang, Jean-Christophe Ammann, Pontus Hulten and so on. In that kind of gathering I was very young: I had intuition, energy and inner passion on my side but I wasn't sufficiently cultivated, I didn't know much about philosophy, sociology or semiology. So I surrounded myself with artists who were also researchers, as well as the philosopher Fulvio Salvadori, the sociologist and architecture historian André Ducret and the historian and Helenist Aleksandra Lukonovich.

And because I was constantly learning with them I was able to organise colloquia with the CAC, such as *Création et Créativité* (1984-1985), for which I invited the semiologist Luis Prieto, the mathematician Douglas Hofstadter, the biologist Henri Atlan and the Helenist Marcel Detienne. I also set up a conference with the great physicist René Thom, the inventor of catastrophe theory. I organised quite a few other colloquia during those years and my excellent working relationship with the culture department of the University of Geneva lasted right through my time as head of the CAC. Later I carried on down the path of colloquia at Magasin in Grenoble, with guests such as the philosophers Jean-François Lyotard and Gianni Vattimo, and the architects Herzog & de Meuron.

Schellenberg How did you go about selecting and inviting the artists? Apart from the Galerie Sonnabend, which was briefly based in Geneva, and the alternative venues such as Gaetan and Écart, there weren't any galleries interested in contemporary art in that part of the world.

Fürstenberg As you say, there weren't many galleries, but at least they weren't just boutiques or multinationals like a number of them are today. The gallery owners were often patrons of art: they beloved in their artists and supported them financially. As for collectors, there were very few who followed the avant-garde art of the time, but those that did loved the artists and understood their work; they included André L'Hullier in Geneva, Giuseppe Panza di Biumo in Milan and Herman Daled in Belgium. Finally, the museum directors weren't massively pompous like

some of them are today, now that they're obliged to spend all their time on public relations: they were very close to their artists and listened to them. Whenever there was an exhibition everyone invited everyone else, be it to take tea at the Écart gallery with John M Armleder, or for Sundays at the Defraouis, with the students. We often went to Bern for vernissages at the Kunsthalle and to see Paul and Erna Jullis or Eika Spoori, but also to Zurich for Szeeman's big exhibitions at the Kunsthous—his unforgettable *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk* made a big impression on me. We also went to galleries such as the Annemarie Yerna, or visited Jacqueline Burkhardt and Bice Curiger, who also came to see us.

Schellenberg So at that time, folk from Geneva would happily cross the linguistic divide?

Fürstenberg Yes, the relationship between Geneva and German-speaking Switzerland was much closer and more informal than it is today. We often visited the studios of artists such as Martin Disler, a very great sculptor who died young and is shamefully ignored by the art market. The Kunstmesse in Basel was also a gathering not to be missed, where you could see some very strong performances—I still remember seeing Gina Pane in around 1975—and meet lots of artists. In the 1970s, they still had control over their works and could influence the gallery owners. Even Leo Castelli in New York wouldn't take an important decision without asking the advice of Rauschenberg and his other artists. In those days, collectors were highly cultured people, and that is why they were interested in this type of art.

Schellenberg You are very critical of the modern-day art world.

Fürstenberg At the point where personal interests replaced fellowship, everything changed. No-one listens to intellectuals or poets any more, criticism has become a crime, the curators who are successful are now mostly bureaucrats and facilitators, when they're not devoting all their energies to cultivating their networks. Now it is the collectors and financial backers who impose their choices, and gallery owners are only interested in doing business or being the CEOs of multinationals. That's why many artists now produce merchandise rather than works of art, as the majority of art schools teach them. In this mixed-up society it's become very hard to navigate and continue to move forward. Especially now that those who used to be around me and helped me start out have passed away or retired, or live far off.

Schellenberg In 1981, you invited the star Andy Warhol to Geneva, with the *Beuys by Warhol* exhibition.

Fürstenberg Yes I knew him well—whenever I saw him in New York we'd swap society gossip, he loved that! Andy Warhol was the first to play a major role in

democratising art, by appealing to a section of the American population that was undoubtedly rich but had no great art knowledge. (*Adelina von Fürstenberg begins to leaf through the catalogue of the exhibition Warhol-Beuys. Omaggio a Lucio Amelio, organised in 2007-2008 at the Fondazione Antonio Mazzotta in Milan. There are photos taken by her husband at the vernissage of the exhibition Beuys by Warhol at the Lucio Amelio gallery in Naples in 1990, with Warhol, Amelio, Beuys, Adelina herself and others.*) I'll never forget the day after the vernissage of that exhibition in Naples. Following a wild night at the City Hall Café, Warhol was making a portrait of some rich Neapolitans while we went with Beuys and a small group to visit the Grotto of the Sibyl at Cumae, near Naples. In a way, the attitudes of Warhol and Beuys symbolised the differences between old Europe and the United States in those years.

Schellenberg Over the years, have you refused to exhibit certain artists?

Fürstenberg Yes, two or three—for example I said no to Julian Schnabel. With hindsight, I may have been wrong.

Schellenberg And did any artists say no to you?

Fürstenberg I have very good relationships with the artists, there's no reason for them to refuse—it's only the public commissions and the sponsors that sometimes say no to me (laughs). The artists are my family, there's an immediate and reciprocal understanding. They are the ones who've enabled me to work all these years, they've never stopped supporting me. When I've exhibited in challenging places, such as the Ben Youssef Madrasa in Marrakesh, it's always been thanks to artists—in that case it was Farid Bokhais. And it was Fabiana de Barros who opened the door for me to Brazil, where I've worked often, while Stefano Boccasini got me into NABA, the Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti in Milan, and Peter Nagy introduced me to Indian artists.

Schellenberg In those same years, you also contributed to the development of art in public spaces, with the exhibition *Promenades*, for example.

Fürstenberg Yes, that was in 1985 in the Parc Lullin on the shores of Lake Geneva. The exhibition was inspired by Rousseau and Kant, with works by Mario and Marisa Merz, Rebecca Horn, Alighiero Boetti, Gilberto Zorio, Anne and Patrick Poirier, Giuseppe Penone, Maria Nordman, Markus Rietz, Anne Sauson-Hall, the Defraouis, etc. To this day, I still have a special affection for Meret Oppenheim's work. She had found a water channel and decided to set up her exhibit there. She slightly widened the channel to make a little stream, planted bamboo and then floated a raft on it adorned with a metal frog. It was a work of unbelievable poetry, a real masterpiece. It was also one of the very last she produced: Meret died a few months later.

Schellenberg You also helped convince public and private sponsors to give permanent works to Geneva.

Fürstenberg Yes, for example two sculptures by Michelangelo Pistoletto, one in the Botanical Garden—the *Portatore di zucche*, which was bought by the City in 1985—and the other at the Cité universitaire, where you can see *Crononoute*, a gift from the collector and patron Jean Siatovaris. There's also the video installation by Nan June Paik which was exhibited at the UN as part of *Dialogues de pair* and then donated to Geneva by a bank to be placed at the Bâtiment des forces armées. And in 2000 I myself donated to the Institute of Architecture the prototype of the famous cardboard cabin for evacuees from the Kobe earthquake created by the Japanese architect Shigeno Ban and exhibited at the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees as part of our project *Art et réalités sociales*. Unfortunately no-one knows what happened to that cabin.

Schellenberg The CAC moved around quite a bit in the fifteen years you were its director, from the Patino hall to the UN via rue d'Italie, the former Palais des Expositions and the Palais Wilson. Then the City found it a permanent home in 1989, in the former SIP, the Société genevoise d'instruments de physique.

Fürstenberg Yes, and as soon as we had the SIP and my baby was safe and sound, I wanted to leave and started looking for jobs elsewhere.

Schellenberg So as soon as your situation is settled, you up and leave?

Fürstenberg It's weird, isn't it? (laughs) When circumstances made it possible to give the CAC some stability, I left it for other adventures. I don't like to take possession of the same place for too long, it's not constructive. Unless my sense of responsibility obliges me to, as is the case now with ART for The World, which is still too fragile even though it's been around for twenty years. At the time I applied to the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, the Santa Monica Museum in California, and Magasin in Grenoble, and it was the third of those that took me: a 3,000-m² art centre with a school for culture mediators and curators. It was a 'Kunsthalle' with much bigger spaces than those in the various locations of the CAC in Geneva.

I was able to mount very large solo exhibitions there with Wto Accorci, Iyo Kabakov, Matt Mullican, Anish Kapoor, Sylvie and Chérif Defraoui, and architects such as Herzog & de Meuron. It was at Magasin that I started to invite other cultures and develop an interest in non-European artists, the first being Chen Zhen. That followed on from *Magicisme de la Terre* (1989) at the Centre Pompidou, by Jean-Hubert Martin, an exhibition that was very important to me.

Fürstenberg What are your memories of the École du Magasin?

Fürstenberg We had some amazing times there. I trained students as I had trained myself when I was director of the CAC, with seminars in the company of artists, philosophers, architects, scientists and art critics. Today, the majority of the alumni who attended the school while I was director are in important posts—directors of museums, art centres, galleries and so on. Later on, ART for The World benefited from that network, with former pupils who helped me when I was organising exhibitions in the places where they worked, from Florence to Thessaloniki via Marseille. In 1993, when the students and I were involved in organising the 45th Venice Biennale, the jury bestowed a special award on the École du Magasin.

Schellenberg In 1994 you returned to Geneva for the 50th birthday of the United Nations.

Fürstenberg Yes, the UN had invited tenders for an exhibition to mark fifty years since its creation. I submitted a proposal along with Magasin and we won, but the contract stipulated that the project would not go ahead unless I was the curator. In the end it became a joint French-Swiss undertaking. *Dialogues de pair*, with around sixty artists including Alfredo Jaar, Chen Zhen, Nari Ward, Daniel Buren, Tetsuji Kawai and Miguel Angel Rios. The exhibition was hung inside and outside the Palais des Nations.

Schellenberg It's during *Dialogues de pair* that you launch ART for The World, an NGO associated with the UN.

Fürstenberg While I was staging that exhibition, I realised that I didn't want to go back to an institution. I wanted to create a museum without a fixed location, which would move from one country and physical space to another depending on the projects it was staging. And after I'd accumulated all that knowledge through contact with artists and researchers, the next logical step was to go in the direction of human rights and ask what art can bring to the world.

Schellenberg How did you convince the UN to support ART for The World?

Fürstenberg I didn't need to persuade them because the senior officials of the UN whom I was working with on *Dialogues de pair* were very interested in this project. Immediately after that experience, I was invited to curate the 50th anniversary exhibition of the WHO, *The Edge of Awareness*, which toured the world—Geneva, New York, São Paulo, New Delhi and Milan. Through that project, AFTW developed and found itself a strong platform.

Schellenberg How would you describe ART for The World?

Fürstenberg It's an institution that straddles two centuries and two millennia, a global project created with artists and collaborators out of the need

to highlight art as a tool for raising awareness. AFTW is inspired by Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which states in particular that "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts". Since 1995, around topics of particular relevance to human rights, sustainable development or the South, we have organised dozens of exhibitions, colloquia, conferences, concerts, films and workshops in Geneva, Lugano, Milan, Marseille, Marrakesh, São Paulo, New Delhi, Tepotzotlán (Mexico), and elsewhere.

Schellenberg One project that's especially close to your heart is *Playgrounds and Toys*.

Fürstenberg In 1999 I worked with Philip Johnson, an architect who was very dear to me. He was 93 and was developing a project called the Children's Museum in Guadalajara, Mexico, with scale models of museums designed for children. He wanted to exhibit his creations at the Venice Art Biennale, the first by Harald Szeemann. We talked a lot and I decided I wanted to do something for children, with the idea of asking artists and architects to design playgrounds. The exhibition was realised under the auspices of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees to mark its fiftieth birthday, with financial support coming entirely from Switzerland, and it was in two parts: the playground models—there are now more than eighty—and ones made later in India, Great Britain, Greece, Armenia and Tasmania, designed by artists and architects such as Fabrice Gygi, Fabiana de Barros, Andreas Angelidakis and Stefano Boccasini. It's a project that will never end: as soon as we have a bit of money, we create a new playground. *Playgrounds and Toys* is a very happy project, you can see that at the vernissages: they are filled with children playing who don't need a glass of champagne to entertain themselves (laughs). They are very moving experiences.

However, the models were due to be shown at the UN General Assembly in New York in 2001, with official Swiss support from various quarters. It was shaping up to be a great event, not least for Switzerland, which wasn't yet a full member of the United Nations. Unfortunately the vernissage was scheduled for a few days after September 11. Everything was cancelled and the models were stuck in the UN building for months.

Schellenberg AFTW has also collaborated with many international institutions.

Fürstenberg Yes, including P.S.1 in New York, SECC in São Paulo, the Hangar Bicocca in Milan and MUCEM in Marseille, but also the biennials in Venice and Thessaloniki: AFTW has attracted many visitors to themed exhibitions such as *The Overstuffed Body* (2001), *Femmes!* (2006-2007), *Urban Manners* (2008-2010), *The Mediterranean Approach* (2011-2013), *Food* (2012-2015) and *Art FArique* (2014-2015). In Switzerland we've worked with the Museo Cantonale d'Arte in

Lugano, the Musée Ariana and the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva, among others. And since 2007, AFTW has been organising a short film and video production programme, with the collaboration of artists and directors such as Pjotrli Risi, Pablo Trapero, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Jafar Panahi and Höseyin Karabey. In all, since 1995, more than 400 artists, designers, architects, directors and musicians have contributed to the creations of ART for The World.

Schellenberg The underlying idea of AFTW is that art can be a force for change. Do you believe that?

Fürstenberg In the days of the conceptual artists, it was thought that art could change the world. What's certain is that it is an important factor in raising awareness. Through the works of artists, an audience can open its mind to new ways of seeing things. It's also the effect created by this work of Gianni Matti, who approaches things in roundabout ways. (*Adelina points to the photo on the wall behind her, which shows a woman in Tehran revealing her face and a text bearing the words "Gianni Matti Assistant" right under the nose of a policeman standing directly behind her.*)

Schellenberg Do you have the impression that you've changed some artists' perspectives, for example by encouraging collaborations or taking them to the other side of the world?

Fürstenberg Yes, we work in a way that stimulates them, that's undoubtedly true. There are also networks that are created, with artists sometimes returning to the places where they were exhibited. And as most times we are producing new works, it's an opportunity. Being present during the creation of the pieces, incidentally, is very important to me, and has been since the time of the conceptual artists, who came up with the idea for a work but delegated the task of actually making it to others.

Schellenberg Given the topics it is interested in, could it be said that AFTW allows the works it exhibits to make a statement?

Fürstenberg While art isn't always intrinsically the bearer of messages, it is still a means of expression that is sometimes more effective than words because it can cut across things. The medium is the message, as the philosopher Marshall McLuhan used to say. That's how I've managed to work with artists on vital issues, as in the exhibition *Food* (2012-2015). The fact of showing their works in a hanging organised by ART for The World, with an approach that hinges on human rights, will inevitably influence the way the public views those works.

Schellenberg In Switzerland people associate you with the Centre d'art contemporain and much less with ART for The World, although AFTW has been up

and running for more than twenty years whereas you directed Gene 'Kunsthalle' for fifteen. How do you explain that?

Fürstenberg For many in Switzerland I'm a myth to be wrapped in cellophane because of my years at the CAC, and those same people—my colleagues—don't necessarily recognise ART for The World, because the organisation's aim is not just to promote such and such a visual artist. It's a different approach that I find entirely satisfying. In AFTW's projects I've found what I was always looking for. I have too much respect for art to divide it up into fragments: what I love most is its universal language that is accessible to every

Schellenberg Looking back at your journey, it seems as though you never really had a career plan. You seem to be a long way from today's curators a number of whom think only about climbing steps on the ladder.

Fürstenberg I don't even know what it means to have a career plan. Art is my life. But if I've been able to keep going professionally all these years, it's thanks to the work I've done with the help of everyone who has supported me in one way or another. Then again, despite never having wanted to mix profit with my artistic work, and having often supported artists myself, I find myself more and more having to solicit funding for my projects. So I have to fill out more and more forms to apply for grants for AFTW's projects without knowing for sure whether they will be supported: each of AFTW's initiatives is difficult so there is never any guarantee of backing. At those times I always think of Jean-Luc Godard who, I've heard, also has to jump through such hoops to finance his films. If someone in his lofty position need to do that, I can do it too (laughs). Have you ever had to fill in forms to ask for funding?

Schellenberg No, I don't think so.

Fürstenberg You're lucky! I always wonder who creates them: they're not produced hoc, they take no account of the specific characteristics of art. Plus, if you don't keep your wits about you when you are completing them you can even lose your artistic thread altogether and go off in a completely different direction. In any event, art, life and precarity are very closely linked. Fortunately, resilience is there to remind us that I go on, that creativity is its true driver, and that the wheel always turns for those who are genuinely determined. Any other questions?