

# INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITY OF DUNKIRK

## MEMORIES OF AN INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT BEFORE REGENERATION

### WHAT IS THE HALLE AP2 ?

The halle AP2, built in 1949 to plans by architect Pierre Lefol, was a welding workshop linked to ACF shipbuilding. AP2 stands for 'Atelier de Préfabrication n°2' (Prefabrication Workshop No. 2), where boat parts were built, assembled, turned and welded until its closure in 1987. It is 35 m high and has a floor area of 70 x 24.5 m. With its huge dimensions, it was nicknamed 'the Cathedral' by the workers. Two overhead travelling cranes, each weighing 15 tonnes, were used to carry heavy materials. Today, this hangar is one of the few remains of the ACF, and the only one left standing! The letters 'ACF' can still be seen on the back of the building.



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### WHAT ARE ACF?

Ateliers et Chantiers de France (The Workshops and Sites of France), or ACF for short, was a shipbuilding company. ACF was founded in Dunkirk on 20 April 1899 by Léon Herbart. The world's largest oil tanker L'Émile Miguet, launched in 1937, and the liner Flandre, launched in 1951, were built here. It also became one of the country's most influential shipbuilding companies and the city's largest employer, with over 3,000 employees. After several attempts at financial rescue through takeovers and mergers, the company finally closed in 1988. The entire industrial estate was then abandoned.



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### DID YOU KNOW ?

The new overhead travelling crane in Hall AP2 will become a work of art in 2019 during the first edition of the Art & Industrie Triennale. It is now known as the Scanner, and every 30 minutes when it is in operation, a sound signal goes off. This is followed by the appearance of a beam of light on the floor of the Hall. The beam moves slowly until it reaches the end of the huge building. This protocol-based work brings together monumental industrial activity and the everyday gestures of a service-sector worker: scanning all kinds of documents to archive them. Through this staging, the artist Delphine Reist takes an affectionate look at the memorial imprint of this site.

### DID YOU KNOW ?

Abandoned industrial areas are known as 'brownfield sites'. Some of them are being rehabilitated to become cultural sites. In Dunkirk, this is also the case for the Halle aux Sucres and Fructôse!



# LIFE ON THE CONSTRUCTION SITES

## MEMOIRS OF FORMER WORKERS

### ACF WORKERS

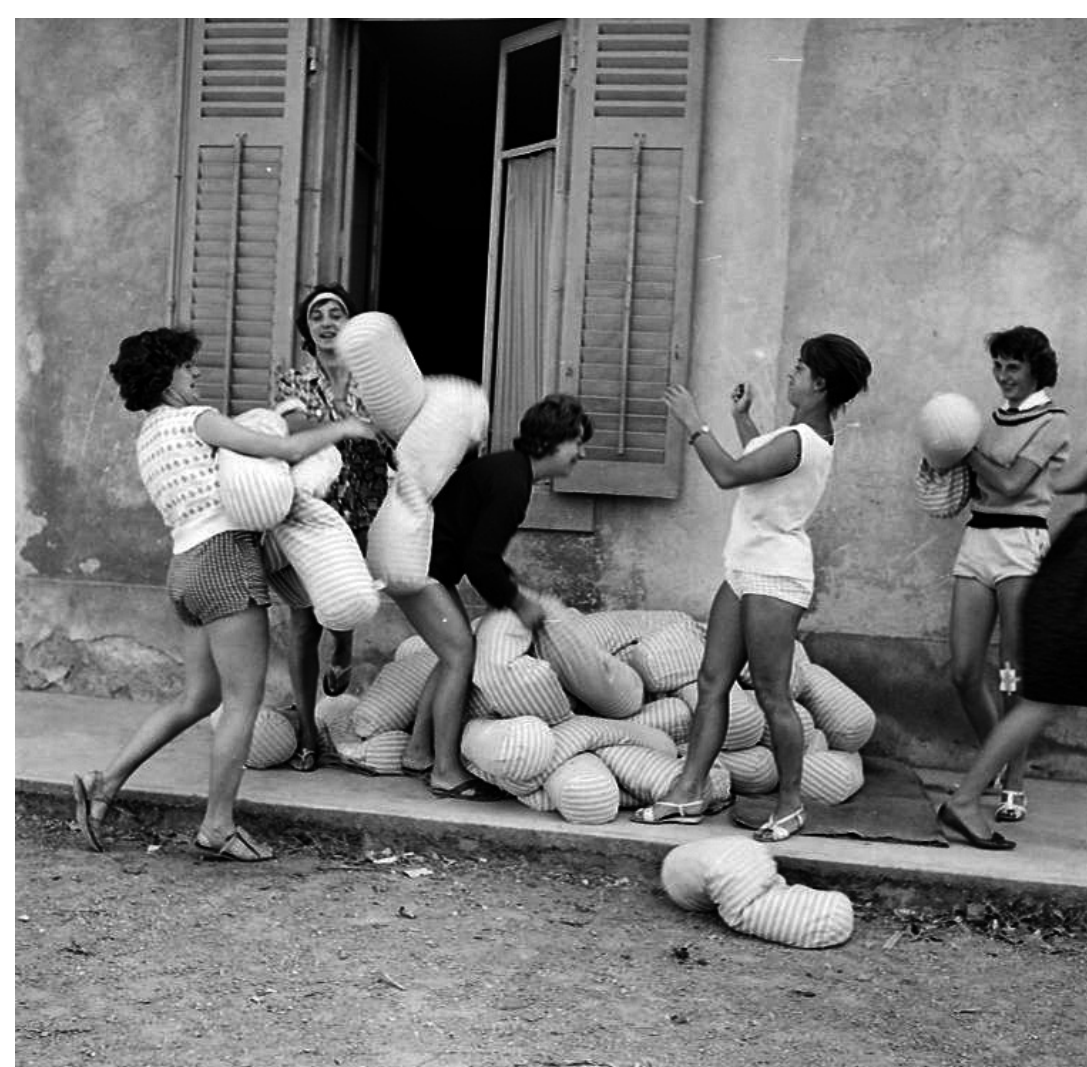


© ACF workers. Photo: José Pietersoone, former employee.

The ACF offered vocational training to young apprentices from the age of 13. The workers were both local and foreign. There were many Algerian, Italian, Eastern European (Russian, Polish) and Chinese workers. Women also had their place. Most were employed in office jobs (switchboard operators, draughtswomen, etc.), but they could also be found on the building sites. For the workers, the ACF was a family affair. Both literally and figuratively. Many young people joined because a relative worked there. And many strong bonds, open camaraderie and mentoring of newcomers ('mousses'(crew) and 'matelots'(sailors)), were formed.



© DR



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Working conditions were difficult. Workers often had very high hourly rates: between 40 and 46 hours a week on average, with increases of up to 70 hours a week with overtime! It was not uncommon for workers to stay on site for an entire weekend. The bad weather outside and the heat of the machinery inside made for a complicated working environment. Not to mention the risks that made the job dangerous: lack of safety, unsuitable equipment, exposure to asbestos, risk of fire and explosion. Sadly, there have been a number of deaths in the ACFs.

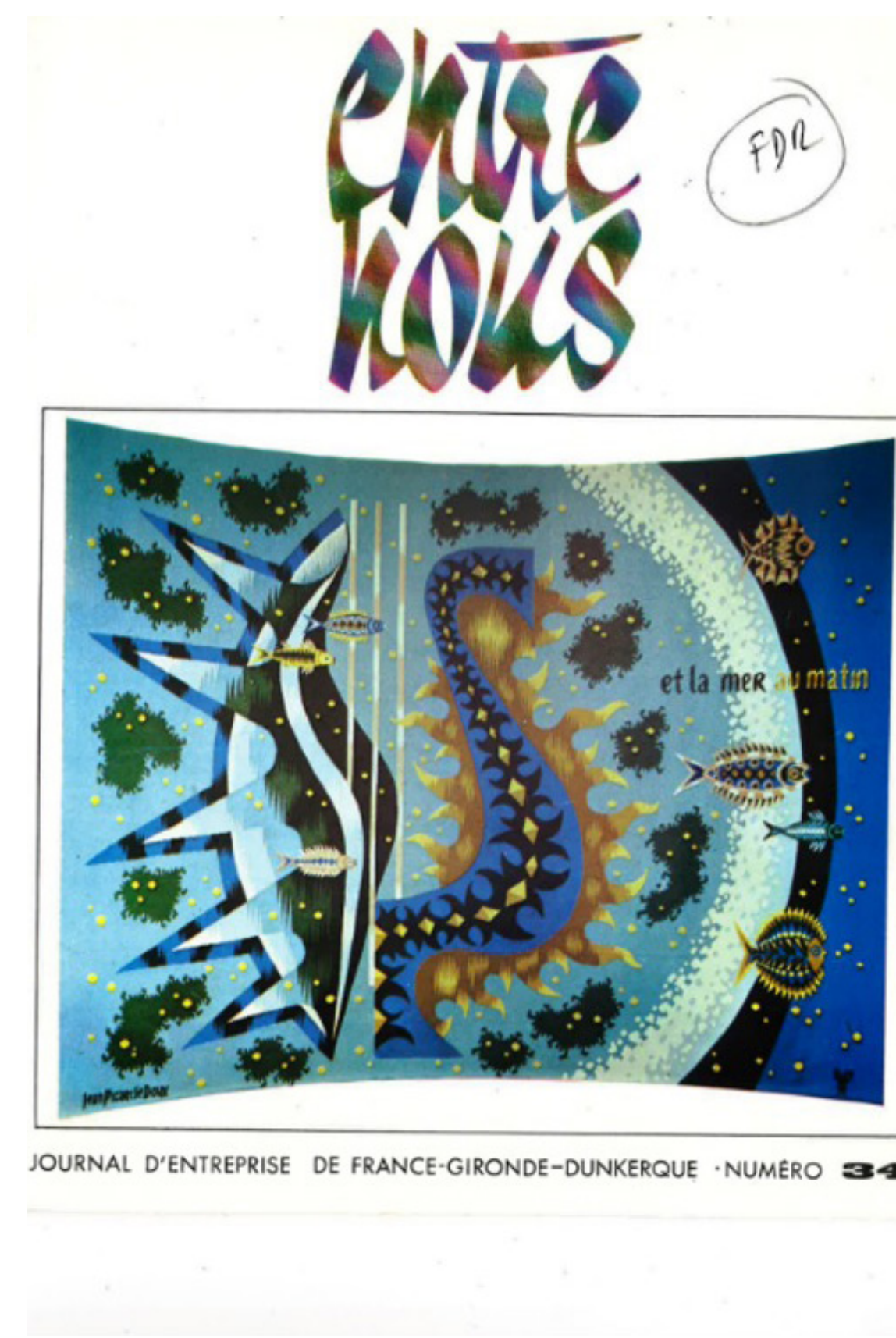
Despite all this, the family atmosphere and solidarity among the workers made everyday life a little easier. The works council played an important role in the life of the sites, organising outings and events of all kinds. The same was true of the company newspaper *entre nous*, published between 1957 and 1981. There were also a number of ACF festivities that contributed to the liveliness of Dunkirk. In particular, boat launches were exceptional events that brought together employees and local residents.

### DID YOU KNOW ?

The colour of worksite helmets has changed! ACF mechanics, electricians and carpenters wear blue helmets. For workers in the workshops, it's important to be seen, so the helmet is yellow. White for managers and visitors...



Flooding of a ship, Dunkirk



Page of the newspaper « entre nous »



# THE FRAC GRAND LARGE

## SHOWCASING CONTEMPORARY ART IN DUNKIRK AND THE HAUTS-DE-FRANCE REGION

### WHAT IS A FRAC ?

The Fonds régionaux d'art contemporain (Regional contemporary art funds)(FRACs) are institutions whose mission is to build up public collections of contemporary art in the regions, disseminate them to the general public and devise ways of raising awareness of contemporary art. Created in 1982 on the basis of a partnership between the State and the Regions, the FRACs have been supporting contemporary artists for over 40 years, as part of an artistic and cultural project developed on a regional, national and international scale.



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### THE FRAC GRAND LARGE

Formerly known as the Frac Nord-Pas de Calais, the Frac first set up in Lille in 1983. It moved to Dunkirk in 1996, to the former Rosendaël hospital, before relocating to the Grand Largee district. The building as we know it came into being in 2013, thanks to architects Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal. There are more than 2,000 works in its reserves, and its speciality is a collection of design objects. To create a twin structure to Halle AP2, similar in size but different in materials. That's what the architects Lacaton & Vassal have done!



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By keeping Halle AP2 intact, the architects have preserved the heritage of Dunkirk's working-class past. The creation of a new space next to the old one provides a visible link between past and present, just as the Belvedere (5th floor) provides a link between the industrial site and the seaside resort of Dunkirk. Like Halle AP2, the Frac is built on concrete foundations. But compared with its neighbour, it is made mainly of plastic, polycarbonate (walls) and EFTE (air cushions). This choice of materials is more economical, provides more natural light and retains heat better. The rear half of the Frac does not let any light through: the reserves. Another special feature of the construction of the Frac Grand Large is its structure. The walls in the exhibition spaces do not reach the ceiling. All the weight of the building is therefore distributed over the concrete columns and beams. These removable walls can, if desired, be removed or added to in order to modify the scenography.

### DID YOU KNOW ?

Lacaton & Vassal's project was a complete mismatch: it didn't meet all the requirements for refurbishing Halle AP2. But their original project charmed the juries! They even won a major international architecture prize: the Pritzker Prize in 2021.

### WHAT IS A SCENOGRAPHY?

Scenography is the art and technique of arranging an exhibition space. We use the term 'stage' as in the theatre, because it is mainly used in that context. Depending on the scenography, one or more works can take on a whole new meaning, whether deliberately or not.



# DUNKIRK'S CULTURAL REVIVAL

## AN INDUSTRIAL ESTATE TRANSFORMED INTO A CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

### CONVERSION OF THE INDUSTRIAL ZONE

The Dunkirk industrial-port wasteland covers the entire area of the former shipyards. It includes the Grand Large district and the current marina. Since 1989-1990, the Grand Large and Halle AP2 have been part of a redevelopment project called 'Neptune'. The aim was to breathe new life into an area that was both abandoned and isolated. How will this be achieved? By reusing it and linking it to the city and the beach.



© Régis Baudy

In 1991, Halle AP2 was approached to house the Frac. It was not until 2008 that the architectural competition was launched by the CUD (Dunkirk Urban Community). A call for projects was then launched, with the aim of enhancing the value of AP2 while preserving its volume.

- 85 proposals in 2008
- 5 projects selected in 2009
- Architects Lacaton and Vassal selected in 2009
- Inauguration of the Frac Grand Large in 2013

Today, the Grand Large serves as a contemporary art centre, a residential area and a future marina is planned for the Pointe des Alliés (2030).



© Maxime Dufour

### THE FOOTBRIDGE

Its construction was a tool for accessibility, renewal and embellishment of the Grand Large district. Designed by architect Brigit de Kosmi and inaugurated in 2015, this footbridge for pedestrians and cyclists is 294 m long and 4.06 m wide. It is a concrete expression of the Neptune project's aim to break the isolation of the former industrial estate by linking it to the sea wall. It is also an extension of the Frac. The footbridge provides direct access from the interior street on the 1st floor, and is reminiscent of the shapes of shipyard cranes and boat masts.



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### WHAT IS A ART CONTEMPORARY CENTRE ?

A centre is a nucleus, an area that concentrates several structures with a similar activity. In Dunkirk, the art contemporary centre is located in the Grand Large district and brings together the Frac (Regional contemporary art funds) and the LAAC (Place for Contemporary Art and Action).

### DID YOU KNOW ?

Originally, this footbridge was to have extended into the interior street of the Frac and continued all the way to the marina. This would have linked the town and the beach in a straight line!