

BANCS D'UTOPIE

WE SIT TOGETHER

FRANCIS CAPE



Utopian Benches, American communities, Arcadia University
Art Gallery, Pennsylvania, 2011.



Utopian Benches, European communities, Fonds régional d'art contemporain de Franche-Comté, Besançon (France), 2015.

The exhibition “Utopian Benches/We sit together – Francis Cape” is organized by the Syndicat mixte du Familistère Godin with support from the Département de l’Aisne and the town of Guise. The Utopia programme for promoting the Familistère at Guise is led by the Syndicat mixte du Familistère Godin with the support of the Département de l’Aisne and the town of Guise. It is funded by the Département de l’Aisne with support from the region Nord-Pas-de-Calais – Picardie, the State (Ministry of Culture and Communication, Regional Prefecture Nord-Pas-de-Calais – Picardie) and the European Union.

Courtesy of the artist and Murray Guy, New York.
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This booklet accompanies the exhibition “Utopian Benches/We sit together – Francis Cape,” presented in the central pavilion of the Familistère at Guise, from 28 April to 18 September 2016.

The exhibition brings together, for the first time, twenty benches recreated by Francis Cape from original benches from American and European utopian communities.

The eight American benches were researched and made by the artist in 2011 – 2014.

The twelve European benches were co-produced by the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, the Fonds régional d’art contemporain de Franche-Comté in Besançon, the Familistère at Guise and Francis Cape. They were documented and drawn in 2014 – 2015 under the direction of the artist by the Masters students in exhibition design of the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Lyon as part of a workshop delivered by Olivier Vadrot. These benches were made by the workshops of La Fabrique at Francheville with the collaboration of the students.

Francis Cape is the author of texts that describe the American communities.

The Masters students in exhibition design of the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Lyon, Olivier Vadrot and Frédéric k. Panni are the authors of texts that describe the European communities. Peter B. Thomas and Anne-Sophie Dautigny have translated these texts into English.

The curating of the exhibition and editing of the booklet were undertaken by Frédéric k. Panni.

UTOPIAN BENCHES

FRANCIS CAPE

Twenty wooden benches are gathered in a space. It is the sculpture 'Utopian Benches'. The work opposes individualism with communalism. It celebrates values other than the individualist materialism of the mainstream. A bench is a seat that we share; it is also non-hierarchical, we sit at the same level. The benches presented here are recreations of benches used by American and European communities. During the exhibition, the benches will be used to hold meetings and public conversations on topics related to the work.

'Utopian Benches' was first shown in the United States, where it focused on the nineteenth century American intentional communities, particularly those with a craft tradition. I made twenty benches for the first exhibition in 2011, then a few more in the following years. The benches are made from measured drawings taken from the original benches. Each bench is thus a remake of a bench that was used, or is currently used, by a communal society.

For the European 'Bancs d'Utopie', created in 2015, I collaborated with architect Olivier Vadrot and students of the Master in exhibition design of the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Lyon.

They conducted research on European utopian communities, went to meet them, took measurements of their benches and participated in the remaking of the benches at a professional carpentry workshop near Lyon. Since almost all nineteenth century collectives in Europe emigrated to the United States founding the legacy I had explored there, those represented here are on the whole twentieth

century or contemporary, with the notable exceptions of the Fourierist Familistère de Guise, and Robert Owen's New Lanark. 'Bancs d'Utopie' celebrates, not historical, but active contemporary explorations of alternative values and ways of living.

In tune with this living tradition, the benches are used to propose a site of meeting, discussion and social idealism embodied by the form itself. This will include the programming of meetings open to the general public. Each of these gatherings will be focused around a different topic pertinent to the project, and moderated by a proponent or proponents in the given field. Conversation leaders will sit on the benches in among the other participants. The benches themselves will be arranged longitudinally in the room (facing each other as opposed to hierarchically facing a dais or altar at one end).

UNITED STATES

THE SHAKERS

HARMONY SOCIETY

**SOCIETY OF TRUE
INSPIRATION, AMANA**

TWIN OAKS

CAMP HILL VILLAGE

KIMBERTON HILLS

EUROPE

NEW LANARK

LE FAMILISTÈRE DE GUISE

MONTE VERITÀ

HAZORE'A

FINDHORN

ARDELAINÉ

LE BÉAL

LA FERME DU COLLET

UTOPIAGGIA

TORRI SUPERIORE

HOFKOLLEKTIV WIESERHOISL

I

**COMMUNAL SOCIETIES
REPRESENTED BY BENCHES**

THE SHAKERS

UNITED STATES: 1774 TO PRESENT

HISTORY

The community of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, or the Shakers, began in 1747, when a group broke from the Quakers. Members looked to women as leaders. Ann Lee soon assumed leadership and began to preach that marriage and sexual intercourse were sinful, and called on her followers to confess their sins, give up all their worldly goods, and embrace celibacy. The Shakers were not welcome in England because their services were so noisy and their beliefs were considered unusual. Ann Lee was imprisoned several times. Many Shakers believed, on her release from prison in 1770, that Christ had returned to earth in her form. By 1774 she and eight followers had emigrated to New York, eventually settling on land owned by one of the Shakers. Over the next century they built over twenty settlements and attracted more than 20,000 converts.

COMMUNAL LIFE

The Shakers are renowned for their simple lives and products, for their celibacy, and for their early practice of equality of the sexes. Mother Ann Lee taught: "Put your hands to work and your hearts to God."

A Shaker village was divided into groups or "families", with each family occupying a large house. Each family was designed to be self-supporting with its own farm and businesses. The leading group in each village was the Church Family; the village was governed by a team of two men and two women, elders and eldersses



Meeting House, Mount Lebanon.

respectively. Men and women lived together as brothers and sisters. Houses were divided by gender with separate staircases and doors. They sat on opposite sides of the room during worship, at meals, and during “union meetings.” Work areas were similarly segregated.

Shakers lived in a form of religious communism. Written covenants were developed in 1790 – those who signed had to confess their sins, consecrate their property and labor to the society, and maintain celibacy. If they were married before they joined, their marriages essentially ended upon joining. Since Shakers did not practice procreation, children joined through indenture, adoption, or conversion. When they turned 21, children were free to leave or stay with the community; many left, unwilling to remain celibate.

The Shaker religion valued men and women equally. It was a hierarchical church with men and women sharing authority on each level. They viewed God as both male and female. Worshiping in white unadorned meetinghouses, they marched, sang, danced, and sometimes turned, twitched, jerked, or shouted.

Their dedication to hard work and perfection has resulted in a unique style of architecture, furniture and handcraft styles. They believed that making something well was itself an act of prayer. “Do your work as though you had a thousand years to live and as if you were to die tomorrow.” Their industry and search for efficiency resulted in many inventions, including, for woodworkers, the circular saw. They also wrote their own music: songs and dances that were used in worship.

In 1932 the members of the community voted to abandon the communal system and became a profit-sharing corporation. Many had come to see the communal way of life as a barrier to achieving individual goals. Rather than leaving or watching their children go, they changed. Today the Amana Society has nearly 900 members.

TWIN OAKS

UNITED STATES, VIRGINIA: 1967 TO PRESENT

HISTORY

Twin Oaks was founded following a conference in Michigan in 1966 that was held to promote the idea of starting a community based on B. F. Skinner's novel *Walden Two*. The novel describes a utopian community where members share work and income, have plenty of leisure time, and use behavioral modification training to lessen individual negative emotions and behavior. Twin Oaks began with eight members on a farm purchased by one member.

COMMUNAL LIFE

— I came up the dirt drive past a large field of – was it beans? – to the home-built hammock workshop, and next to it, the small original farmhouse. Labeled piles of recycled materials stood about. Other workshops, homes and the dining hall scattered along the field's edge and into the woods. The place was unkempt but purposive. A woman working in the office in the farmhouse took to me to find Purl who had volunteered to show me around. He worked as a forestry manager, harvesting from their woodland to supply frames for the

Hammock Workshop, Twin Oaks.



ARDELAINE

FRANCE, ARDÈCHE: 1972 TO PRESENT

HISTORY

In 1972, Gérard and Béatrice Barras decided to revive an old woolen mill located in Saint-Pierreville, Ardèche. The workshops had closed in 1960 due to the devaluation of wool in favor of synthetics. With them, an entire local economy was gone. Ardèche farmers threw out the wool from their sheep because they could not sell it. The region emptied. Gérard and Béatrice, already engaged in rebuilding a hamlet in southern Ardèche, wanted to save this piece of abandoned heritage, revive the region's wool industry and create a cooperative.

They bought the ruins of the Saint-Pierreville mill in 1975. It needed several years for them to gather together a motivated and supportive team, rehabilitate buildings and learn the wool trade. They didn't want to take on debt and chose to raise the funds needed for the project only by the fruit of their labour. They each performed several and diverse jobs, they made savings and pooled their resources to cope with common expenses (housing, food, clothing, transport ...) and to finance the work. The team was

The village of Saint-Pierreville with, bottom right, the Ardelaine cooperative.



supported by many volunteers. The statutes of workers' production cooperative (SCOP) Ardelaine were adopted by sixteen people in 1982.

COMMUNAL LIFE

To be consistent with its objectives of solidarity, local development and respect for the environment, the cooperative took a comprehensive approach to the whole chain; from sheep-shearing to marketing the finished product. The team formed a network of rearers from areas committed to the quality of their wool. They managed the technical and ecological aspects of the whole production chain, and turned to direct sales to individuals on site, at shows or by mail. In 1982, the cooperative made bedding - mattresses, duvets and pillows. In 1986 Ardelaine launched a range of clothing made in a workshop that the cooperative established in Valence (Drôme). Ardelaine then sought to diversify its activities by promoting local development: today the cooperative includes a wool museum, a shop, a café and bookshop, a restaurant leased to another cooperative and a cannery also leasing to different users. Fifty people work on the cooperative's site. Ardelaine is also active in the local economy and helps to revitalize the area by maintaining traditional skills. Its founders say Ardelaine is an "area cooperative".

The cooperative does not form properly a community but is the centre of a network of solidarity in the area. Its internal organization remains dynamic. The cooperative society is administered by a board of twelve members. In 2014, Ardelaine had 47 employees, including 37 cooperative members. Each has one main, and several related, activities. This versatility, useful for productivity, allows everyone to be fully involved in the affairs of the cooperative and offers a real variety of work. Ardelaine continues its policy of equal pay (at minimum wage), regardless of seniority or responsibility: "A person is a person", explained Béatrice Barras in 2014. "We all need to eat, sleep, be warm in the winter. We all have the same standard of living. With equal pay, we don't judge ourselves by money, and it removes a tremendous amount of tension between people." However, this issue was recently discussed at a general meeting.

**THE FAMILISTÈRE AT LAEKEN
MILIEU LIBRE DE VAUX
L'ESSAI D'AIGLEMONT
L'EXPÉRIENCE
VEGAN COLONY OF BASCON**

**II
COMMUNAL SOCIETIES
LOCAL TO THIS SITE (WITHIN 150 KM
OF THE FAMILISTÈRE AT GUISE)**

THE FAMILISTÈRE AT LAEKEN

Belgium, Brussels: 1888 – 1968

The Familistère at Laeken in Brussels is a dependency of the Familistère at Guise. A factory was established beside the Willebroek canal by Jean-Baptiste André Godin in 1858; a pavilion of 72 housing units (about 300 inhabitants) was built near the workshops in 1888, then a nursery and schools, modelled on the pavilions of the ‘Social Palace’ at Guise. The Familistère employed 773 people in Brussels in 1930. The Familistère at Laeken functioned like the Familistère at Guise under the Cooperative Association of Capital and Labour, dissolved in 1968.

MILIEU LIBRE DE VAUX

France, Aisne: 1903 – 1907

In France, around 1900, anarchists argued in favour of a practical experiment in capitalist society to demonstrate that the free communism was the key to individual happiness. They wanted to act modestly but effectively because they knew that social revolution was not imminent. A society was formed in Paris in 1902 to create a “free society” area. The project appealed to Alphonse Boutin, a former worker turned farmer near Château-Thierry (Aisne), who sold the society two houses in the hamlet of Vaux and gave them two hectares of land. The colony was formed in February 1903 as a cooperative society under the name ‘Le Milieu libre’. The company was to pay two francs a week to members of the colony and provide for their livelihoods. The first settlers arrived the following March. The tailor Georges Butaud and his wife Sophia Zaïkowska were the main organizers. The farm could not meet all the needs of the settlers. Several workshops were set up by workers of the colony. In July 1903, Butaud was accused of authoritarianism by the owner Boutin who changed his mind and withdrew his support. Other departures followed. At the end of 1903, of the 20 settlers, there remained only 10. In April 1904, after a new accusation of authoritarianism, Butaud left Vaux, in the company of Sophia Zaïkowska, before being recalled in early 1905 by a new generation of members. The situation of the colony did not improve. The first ‘Milieu libre’ was dissolved in 1907.

L'ESSAI D'AIGLEMONT

France, Ardennes: 1903 – 1909

The libertarian colony of Aiglemont, dubbed 'L'Essai' ('The Trial'), was founded by Fortuné Henry after the period of anarchist attacks in 1892 – 1894. Émile Henry, brother of Fortuné, was guillotined in 1894 for attacks. Fortuné Henry spent thirteen years in prison. Renouncing the defense of violence in the anarchist cause, he withdrew alone to the Ardennes, in woods near the village of Aiglemont: "Here we will free men and we will help to determine from the starting point of future societies", he said. A small group of anarchists joined him, including André Mounier, an agricultural engineer. They managed to develop a farm and built a more comfortable home. The colony never exceeded 20 people, including passing guests. In 1906, settlers installed a printing press and embarked on the publication of brochures and a newspaper, *Le Cubilot*, which was dedicated to revolutionary syndicalism and anti-militarist action. The ban of the newspaper in 1908 hastened the demise of the community, already weakened by tensions between its members.

L'EXPÉRIENCE

Belgium, Brussels: 1905 – 1908

The libertarian communist colony of Stockel-Bois (Brussels) was born from the structuring of the Belgian anarchist movement after the general strike of 1902. Just as for the French "Milieu libre", the intention was to let it be known that the ideal of anarchist life could be realized immediately. The colony of Stockel was given its statutes in October 1905: no private property, labour was voluntary and unpaid, living requirements provided freely, the notion of 'family', equality of women and men, free love without any imposed debauchery. From April 1905, the settlers rent a small farm in the hamlet of Stockel. The colony, called L'Expérience ('The Experience'), had five members, but was already crowded. In October 1906, the anarchists, about a dozen by now, rented a big house in Boitsfort, the owner of which was sympathetic to their ideas. The settlers were all vegetarian, but meals were reduced to the essential. They lived by their



Conversation on Utopian benches, Murray Guy Gallery, New York, 2013.

The twenty benches gathered together in this exhibition represent the communal societies described in the first part of the booklet. Eight benches were made from poplar between 2011 and 2014 after the benches of the American communities. Twelve benches were made in 2015 in chestnut from the benches of the European communities.

ANNEX
THE BENCHES



1. Shakers:
Sabbathday Lake (school).
H. 41 x L. 119 x W. 23 cm.

2. Shakers: Mount Lebanon
(meetinghouse).
H. 41 x L. 214 x W. 23 cm.



3. Shakers: South Union.
H. 42 x L. 137 x W. 23 cm.

4. Harmony Society,
Economy (Feast Hall).
H. 48 x L. 208 x W. 26 cm.



5. Society of True Inspiration,
Amana (Amana Heritage Museum no. 1).
H. 43 x L. 244 x W. 31 cm.



6. Society of
True Inspiration, Amana
(Amana Heritage Museum no. 2).
H. 43 x L. 335 x W. 29 cm.

7. Twin Oaks (dining room).
H. 44,5 x L. 137 x W. 28,5 cm.



8. Village Camphill,
Kimberton Hills.
H. 46 x L. 183,5 x W. 36,5 cm.

9. New Lanark (school).
H. 43 x L. 349 x W. 18,5 cm.



10. Le Familistère de Guise
(theatre).
H. 44 x L. 249 x W. 30 cm.