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SPACE AND TIME FOLD

Last fall, Detroit Salon, a new city-wide arts initiative, flew 26 Detroit and Metro Detroit-based artists to France for Paris Art Week 2025. They were part of a cohort of 31 artists and 5 fashion designers whose work was selected for exhibition in three prestigious Parisian venues: the Hôtel de Talleyrand (October 21-23), the Grand Palais (October 24-26), and the Palais de Tokyo (October 18-November 9).

On October 23rd, I arrived at Paris Charles de Gaulle airport and took a taxi to my studio-apartment in the 20th arrondissement (my home since the mid-aughts) to drop off my dog and bags. Then, I rushed across the city to the Hôtel de Talleyrand to attend an artist-led panel on Detroit and African Art moderated by Detroit curator, activist, and artist, Ashara Ekundayo.

In less than 24 hours, I'd flown from Detroit to Paris only to hop on a train and head back to Detroit, figuratively speaking, of course. But still, time and space had folded: Detroit and its artists were only a few *métro* stops away thanks to the Detroit Salon team and their incredible work.



Lisa Waud's *TREAD/TENDER* at the Palais de Tokyo. Image by Roopa Chauhan.



Julie Egan. Image by Chris Saunders.



DJ Jeff Mills at the Salonnière private dinner event at the US Ambassador's residence during Art Basel Paris 2024. Image by Berat Nalci.

A BIT OF CONTEXT

Julie Egan, a Detroit native, is the founder and CEO of Salonnière, a Detroit-based non-profit with a mission “to connect underrepresented voices to the global art world”.¹ She launched Detroit Salon to raise the profile of Detroit’s art and culture through local and international events in places as far-flung as France, England, Switzerland, Morocco, and China.

With global partners Art Basel and 1-54, and local partners such as Visit Detroit and TechTown, the project already has strong support from Detroit-based artists and the international art community, and is well-poised to continue its success.

Detroit Salon pre-launched in October 2024 at the US Embassy in Paris where an elegant but very hip reception (Jeff Mills deejayed!) and dinner were held to honor Detroit’s creatives from textile artist Carole Harris to painter Mario Moore.

In her speech, the then US Ambassador to France and Monaco Denise Campbell Bauer recognized the city’s iconic status as both an industrial and artistic hub in three words, “Detroit is America”. A powerful statement that recasts Detroit as central to the country’s past, present, and future, with artists worthy of a spot on the world’s stage.



Guests, Salonnière staff, and art patrons at the Salonnière private dinner event at the US Ambassador's residence during Art Basel Paris 2024. Ambassador Denise Campbell Bauer is in the center. Image by Berat Nalc.

DETROIT MEETS PARIS

Fast forward to fall 2025 when the artists and their artwork arrived in Paris. Julie Egan and her team at Detroit Salon had managed to secure the resources, drum up the political will, and hone their logistical prowess to pull off a remarkable feat: build a bridge from Detroit to Paris through art.

The program was rich and varied. Three exhibitions, thoughtfully curated by Juana Williams, took place. Eight art talks were held on a broad range of topics from philanthropy in Detroit to Michigan's world class museums. In the evening, imaginative dinners and soulful parties showcased multimedia artist KESSWA's musical talents.



DJ KESSWA at the Palais de Tokyo Exhibition Opening. Image by BreAnn White.

Detroit Public Schools All City Marching Band performed at the US Embassy, Le Palais de Tokyo, and La Fondation des Etats-Unis. Equally impressive was the events' coverage in local media including the magazine *Beaux Arts*, the radio station France Culture, and on the Paris metro's digital advertising displays.



Beaux Arts Magazine. Image by Roopa Chauhan.

AN UNCANNY CULTURAL RENDEZ-VOUS

The publicity worked. People turned up in droves: 73,000 visitors came to the Detroit Salon's non-commercial space at Art Basel Paris to experience *Domestic Dialogues: The Art of Living in Detroit*. At the Palais de Tokyo, daily visitors averaged 500 during the week and 1,000 over weekends to see *A Blueprint of Resonance: Building Detroit's Artistic Future*.

Both exhibitions took museum-goers on a wild ride. Showcasing a full range of Detroit's artistic talent from Tylonn J. Sawyer's sparkling *Black Man on Horse: Bayard* to Kesswa's watery and sensual video art piece, *Co-Alchemy*, they shook the senses awake. It was exciting to see artists such as Olayami Dabls, Mario Moore, Scott Hocking, and Tiff Massey, whose work I'd first experienced in Detroit, in Paris. It was also strange, in the sense of the strangely familiar or uncanny, to find pieces from home in my adopted home. This cultural rendez-vous raised a host of unexpected questions about belonging, place, roots, and identity.

Taken out of their Detroit context, some pieces resonated differently, which begged the question: how much of art's meaning is tied to where it is made? And also, what could a Parisian audience, who may have never been to Detroit, see in these same pieces?



Entrance to *Domestic Dialogues: The Art of Living in Detroit* at the Grand Palais. Image by Chris Saunders.

THE MOTOR CITY THROUGH PARISIAN EYES

At the Palais de Tokyo, Avi Dounia Mahjoubi, the exhibit tour guide for *A Blueprint of Resonance: Building Detroit's Artistic Future*, provided some insights. She had never been to Detroit, but was briefed by Detroit Salon curator Juana Williams on the pieces, the artists, and Detroit's art scene. Instinctively, Mahjoubi associates Detroit with industry and techno, which she found echoes of in Tiff Massey's *Facet*, Maya Davis' *An Expression in Scorched Earth: I Didn't Ask to be Invasive*, and Graem Whyte's *The Proto Embryo*.

But the rusted steel of Massey's *Facet* best represented her idea of Detroit which was not as readily recognizable in the other artwork. For Mahjoubi, and perhaps many others who have never set foot in the Motor City, the materials connected to the building of its factories, and the rise of the industrial aesthetic characterize the city more than stories about its people.

Mahjoubi relished the opportunity to learn more about pieces like Mario Moore's *Blues Man: Allie at Home* because they helped her delve deeper into "the history of Detroit and the United States, and, in particular, the role Detroit played as the last stop on the Underground Railroad".² She was then able to share the history and context informing each work of art for the show's many visitors, shortening the distance between Paris and Detroit through every conversation.



Maya Davis' *An Expression in Scorched Earth: I Didn't Ask to be Invasive* at the Palais de Tokyo. Image by Chris Saunders.



Graem Whyte's *The Proto Embryo*, at the Palais de Tokyo. Image by Roopa Chauhan.



Mario Moore's *Blues Man: Allie at Home* at the Palais de Tokyo. Image by Roopa Chauhan.



Tylon J. Sawyer's *Black Man on a Horse* at the Palais de Tokyo. Image by Chris Saunders.



Tiff Massey's *Facet* at the Palais de Tokyo. Image by Chris Saunders.

DETROIT AS A DESTINATION

Meanwhile at the Grand Palais, another Detroit story unfolded. Within the heart of Paris Art Basel, a major destination for the world's top art galleries and art collectors, Detroit Salon created a welcoming, non-commercial space that felt like someone's living room. It was carefully staged with a beautiful and comfy couch courtesy of Knoll, a furniture company whose design roots trace all the way back to Cranbrook Academy of Art's Mid-Century Modern pioneers, and an elegant but functional side table by Andre Sandifer, a contemporary Detroit-based designer.

In tandem with the paintings and sculptures, Scott Hocking's *Citadel*, Kylie Lockwook's *Left foot poised between movement and repose*, and Katie Mongoven's *Vintage Handmade Liling China Blue & White Miniature Vase 020325 (Ghost)* sat on the buffet table below Hubert Massey's *Cityscape*. The exhibition showcased Detroit's raw and refined talent, demonstrating that the city is a destination where savvy collectors can find innovative, world class art that would look wonderful in any stylish home. Indeed, Detroit ought to be known for its cultural output as much as it is known for its automobile production.



Detroit Salon's living room at *Domestic Dialogues: The Art of Living in Detroit*. Image by Chris Saunders.



Buffet table at *Domestic Dialogues: The Art of Living in Detroit*. Image by Chris Saunders

WHEN ART TRAVELS

Taking Detroit art and artists abroad broadens their horizons while also drumming up interest in Detroit as a destination for cultural tourism. For students in the marching band, this trip to Paris was their first time outside the United States. One student said the experience gave him “a new perspective on the world”³ and an opportunity to play the music he loves in front of new audiences. Travelling at any age feeds the imagination.

But what happens to the art when it travels and is no longer in the place where it was made—the place that made it possible? To what extent can art be taken out of context? Which brings us back to questions of belonging, place, roots, and identity. These kinds of questions prompt debates on repatriating art stolen from the global south, but also raise awareness of how we perceive works of art that travel for museum exhibitions, art fairs, gallery showings, etc.

When artwork travels the meaning ascribed to it shifts. In no piece was this more evident than in *King Beads* by Olayami Dabls. It was wonderful to see Dabls’ work at the Hôtel Talleyrand for the exhibition, *Stitched into History: The Legacy of Detroit’s Avenue of Fashion*, but it was also strange to see it cut off from the world he has built at the African Bead Museum and the adjacent sculpture park where his creations have a theatrical dimension and the pieces are in conversation with each other.



Detroit Public Schools All City Marching Band members: Jackson Hanks (left) and Rudolph Patrick (right). Image by Roopa Chauhan.



King Beads by Olayami Dabls at the Hôtel de Talleryand. Image by Roopa Chauhan.

Did visitors understand that *King Beads* is so much more than a decorative mirror? According to Dabls, the beads are centuries-old and the mirror, a staple item in his work, is a portal to the past and a gateway to the future “because you can see what is behind us”.⁴

According to art historian, Lauren Jimerson, “in *King Beads*, Dabls stages a double displacement, as African trade beads travel first into Detroit’s diasporic storytelling space and then into Paris’ global exhibition circuit, revealing how cultural objects continuously remake their meaning through movement rather than origin”.⁵

When asked how he felt about being one of the featured artists representing Detroit during Paris Art Week 2025, Dabls said, “I’m not an artist. I’m a storyteller”. His goal is to “raise attention to the people of Detroit”—to connect them to a place and to their ancestors. “Art is not for leisure”, he also said. It is for “communicating about the space where it is made”, creating community and a sense of belonging.⁶ That can happen at home, in Detroit, or abroad, in Paris. The point is to not lose sight of what makes where you’re from so special.

When pressed on this issue, leadership at Detroit Salon affirmed their commitment to remain true to their Detroit roots as they continue to support artists here and abroad.



Dabls Mbad African Bead Museum’s sculpture park. Image by Roopa Chauhan.



The Eiffel Tower on the walk home from the Palais de Tokyo. Image by Roopa Chauhan

1. Salonnière. “Connecting Underrepresented Voices to the Global Art World.” Accessed January 21, 2026. <https://www.salonniere.co/>.

2. Avi Dounia Mahjoubi, interview by author, November 6, 2025.

3. Jackson Hanks and Rudolph Patrick, Detroit Public Schools All City Marching Band students, interview by author, October 25, 2025.

4. “Who Is Dabls?” Dabls Mbad African Bead Museum. Accessed January 21, 2026. <https://www.mbad.org/best-friends>.

5. Olayami Dabls, phone interview by author, November 18, 2025.

6. Lauren Jimerson, WhatsApp message to author, January 10, 2026.