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Centre Pompidou visits

Guided audio tours through the exhibitions and permanent collection.

View of Paris

From the 5th and 6th floor of the Centre Pompidou and its breathtaking view, embark on a humorous and suspenseful investigation of Paris and its monuments. Follow Detective Maxwell and his faithful assistant Marconi and discover the history of famous Parisian places.

Colour code:

In green, the narrating voice (woman's voice)

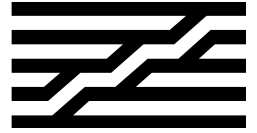
In blue, detective Maxwell's lines

In black, his assistant Marconi's lines

In purple, the musical excerpts

In red, all the other sound indications





Podcast transcription

[jingle of the show] The adventures of Detective Maxwell and his loyal assistant Marconi: The Rooftops of Paris.

Sorry I'm late, boss. There are traffic jams everywhere: rue Beaubourg, rue Rambuteau, rue Saint-Denis.

Next time, take the metro, Marconi. Or do like everybody else does and take one of those thingamajigs with wheels. There are all kinds of vehicles these days.

I'll consider it.

No sense in dawdling, we haven't a minute to lose. Follow me.

Where to, boss?

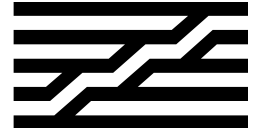
We're going up high. When one is doing detective work, it's important to find a lofty place.

Maybe, but Paris is also known as the domain of subterranean spaces: the catacombs, sewers, crypts, old hideouts. A paradise for evildoers like Two-Face and Moriarty. Or Doctor Mabuse, or the Bank Robbers' Gang, or... [escalator noises]

Okay, the underground does have its charm. But think of the roofs, consider those for a minute.

A minute?

One or a few, it's just a way of speaking. The higher up one goes, the more the beauty of those rooftops enchants the art lover.



That's your artsy side speaking.

As early as 1886, Van Gogh was painting the rooftops of Paris. A little later, around the turn of the century, Robert Delaunay and Nicolas de Staël did too. He came here all the way from Russia to see them.

That reminds me of a film, *Under the Roofs of Paris*.

An old French film from the 1930s, by René Clair. And you know what, there's a rumor going around: they want to include the rooftops of Paris as part of the UNESCO heritage.

Are you sure? Even the TV satellites?

They're mostly disappearing. Soon they'll be gone entirely, except from museums.

Well yes, the rooftops of Paris are picturesque, but aren't they kind of gray?
A bit drab, don't you think?

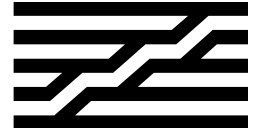
Exactly right, hence the city's charm. Restraint, elegance. We're known the world over for our cold colors.

They're quite repetitive: the same rooftop as far as the eye can see.

Repetition is the source of beauty, Marconi. A polka dot dress with just one polka dot is no good at all.

Yes, I suppose you're right.

Up until the 1840s, the roofs were covered with tile or slate. Then zinc came along, with its inimitable tint.



There's lead, too, isn't there?

Exactly: the union of weighty lead and light zinc. And the beauty of zinc is in its patina, as you find in all the old antique shops. The oxidization of metal in the rain, the art of gray and aged things.

Every single shade of gray.

You can say that again.

Gutters, transoms, thousands of typically Parisian garrets, all to house thousands of artists.

Or to hide evildoers.

Seen from on high, like this, you might think we were looking at a cubist painting. An early Picasso. [birds chirping, pigeons cooing]

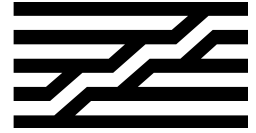
Alright, let's cut it with the art lover's infatuations. We're not here to lose our heads. Did you bring the binoculars?

Yes, boss.

Excellent. Take a look. And if you see any suspicious chimneys or shifty tightrope walkers, you let me know.

Sure thing, boss. [birds chirping, wings flapping]

[jingle of the show] The adventures of Detective Maxwell and his loyal assistant Marconi: Stravinsky Fountain.



You're here early, boss. [birds chirping, brushing sounds]

There's no time like the small hours to conduct an investigation.

The early bird gets the worm.

Right. And now, I've come to take the reins. You've been keeping watch all night long, you deserve a croissant and a break. Here's the croissant...

So, any news? [sounds of crumpled wrapping paper]

Look over there, boss. Down below. [chewing sounds, birds chirping]

It's a square like any other.

Not exactly. Here, use the binoculars. And if you can, perk up your ears.

I'll do my best.

It's gone on all night: little noises and suspicious movements.

Crikey! You're right, it's undeniable, there's something afoot.

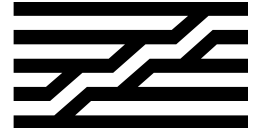
I learned that it's Stravinsky Fountain.

As in Jojo Stravinsky, the strangler of old ladies?

No, as in Igor Stravinsky, the composer.

Oh, right, of course.

The suspicious individuals milling about are sculptures.



They were created by a certain... hold on, let me check my notes... Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle. [sounds of crumpling paper]

I've heard of Nana des Batignolles but not Niki de Saint Phalle.

Jean Tinguely is probably her accomplice, maybe even her lover. He's a foreigner.

Imagine that.

A Swissman.

I see... So, this Jean and Niki, are they a bit like Bonnie and Clyde?

They're artists, actually.

Beware of artists: Caravaggio killed a man with a single sword blow, right in the middle of the street.

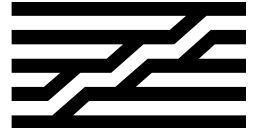
Is he in prison?

It happened in 1600. And Anthony Blunt, the great English art historian, was a Russian spy. Beware.

As to our suspicions, I finished my little investigation. Hold on, let me check my notes... Here it is: in February of 1961, Niki de Saint Phalle fired multiple rounds with a rifle in the impasse Ronsin, towards Montparnasse.

Were there any victims? [birds chirping, pigeons cooing]

None: she was firing at canvases, pieces of plaster, bottles of ink.
To make paintings, you see?



I wonder if she had a license to carry a gun. In any case, it's ancient history now, past the statute of limitations.

Her accomplice Tinguely's specialty on the other hand was mechanic.

Stealing cars?

No, moving sculptures. With wheels, gears, and hand cranks; they're pretty funny-looking contraptions.

Let's be on our guard, all the same.

Looking at the sculptures, I was able to identify a phoenix, an elephant, and a frog.

Keep it up. We'll need to identify all the works before the end of the day.

Are you leaving?

Give me your notes, I'm going to type them up. Meanwhile, keep up the surveillance.

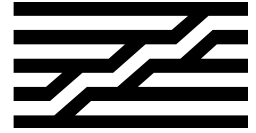
Alright, boss.

And take a second croissant, it's with butter. [sounds of crumpling paper]

[jingle of the show] The adventures of Detective Maxwell and his loyal assistant Marconi: Montparnasse.

You're none too soon, Marconi, I've been waiting for you for over an hour.

Sorry, boss. There was a traffic jam in the rue du Chat-qui-pêche. [traffic noise, sirens]



What were you doing over that way? Anyway, it doesn't matter. The reason I had you climb up to the top story is so that we can have a view overlooking the rooftops. We've got a lot on our plate.

The gang of fake Santa Clauses? The ones that get in through the chimneys?

No, not this time. Take your binoculars and look over in that direction. There's a huge tower.

The Eiffel Tower?

No, less pointy, more square. The Tower of Montparnasse, to the left.

Oh, I see. A sort of monolith. Very square, actually.

Look more closely. There's not only the square in the area, but also domes, rotundas, and cupolas. The Montparnasse district has a certain knack for roundness.

Of course — the brasseries, the sweetness of life. A little peaceful corner.

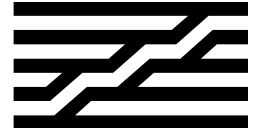
But beware of appearances: Montparnasse has also been a dangerous place. It's not for nothing that there's a cemetery there.

Were there knife fights there?

All kinds of seedy affairs: binges, all-night parties, literary circles, poetry readings.

In this regard, boss, I made a list of suspects who used to frequent the vicinity.

I'm listening.



Let's start with the painters: Foujita, Soutine, Chagall, Modigliani, Brancusi.

I would say Apollinaire too, but his thing was poetry.

What can you gather from such a list?

Notice the nationalities, boss: one Japanese, one Russian, one Belarusian, one Italian, one Romanian, and a quasi-Pole.

That's a pretty cosmopolitan menagerie.

I have another one too, all writers. Joyce, Hemingway, Ezra Pound, Sylvia Beach, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes. Five Americans and one Irishman.

We'll check their papers. But, holy mackerel, that's a lot of suspects, how are we going to manage that. We should focus on just one.

I have just what you need: Kiki of Montparnasse.

Her real name was Alice Ernestine Prin.

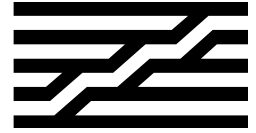
A pseudonym... You always have to watch out for aliases, especially if they're childish. What did she do in Montparnasse, this Kiki?

She inspired artists.

And what else?

She posed for photographers and for painters. Scantly clad, of course.

I brought you a document from 1924, a photograph by Man Ray entitled *Le Violon d'Ingres*, or "The Violon of Ingres". The person in the photo is nude, and she has two openings in her back in the shape of a violon's f-holes.



Let me see... A work of truly terrifying conviction. To commit such a crime, the monster must have used a butcher's knife?

No, Indian ink. It's a doctored photo. The holes were painted on afterwards.

A forgery, I recognized it at once. Take note, you have to be careful of everything, especially of what you see.

Noted, boss.

Now, pass me your binoculars, I forgot mine. And keep your eyes open. Sooner or later something's going to go down. [birds chirping, wings flapping]

[jingle of the show] The adventures of Detective Maxwell and his loyal assistant Marconi: The Eiffel Tower.

Sorry I'm late, boss. I got stuck behind a truck in the rue des Vieilles Étuves.

Are you sure, Marconi? The rue des Vieilles Étuves hasn't existed for years. Not since they built the Centre Pompidou.

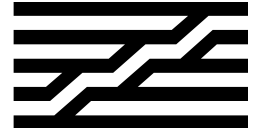
It must have been a different one, then.

No doubt. At any rate, I've had you come in for a delicate mission.

The Radio Tower Conspiracy?

Not exactly. Take your binoculars and look over in that direction. What do you see?

A crane? Oh, you mean the Eiffel Tower. That's far.



Don't take your eyes off it.

There's a lot of people up there.

Your eyes are sharp, all the better. That crowd is a crowd of innocent people. Among the innocent, there's a handful of suspects. And among those suspects, there's a single culprit.

What's the crime?

That remains to be seen.

It has to do with the Eiffel Tower, I imagine? Somebody who knew the tower well was Robert Delaunay. [birds chirping, pigeons cooing]

Who's that? A suspect? A witness?

A painter. During the 1920s, he painted the Eiffel Tower's portrait on many occasions.

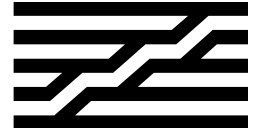
Can we interrogate him?

He died in 1941. But his works endure.

And you think that by looking closely at his works we can find our suspect?
Forget about it, that's a false lead.

But I wonder: what if your suspect was that famous con artist, the man who tried to sell the Eiffel Tower to a few gullible buyers?

It's possible.



The Eiffel Tower, to a buyer, must be worth its weight in gold.

Can you imagine it, in your garden? What prestige.

Prestige, maybe if you don't think twice. When it was built, nearly everyone thought it was hideous. There were insults, letters of protest in the newspapers signed by dozens of artists, writers, and intellectuals. "The Eiffel Tower is the dishonor of Paris", they said.

You would almost think the real culprit was Gustave Eiffel.

In time, the polemics tapered off. That always happens, in Paris.

Apollinaire used to say that the city exhibited the Eiffel Tower in the way one sticks out their tongue to make fun of the world.

No question, there's a little bit of that.

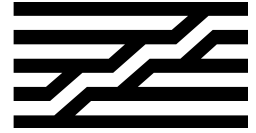
And a French writer named Philippe Soupault used to say that its rays are felt as far away as the Sandwich Islands.

Ah, yes, Soupault: the Surrealist gang... You still don't find that there's anything fishy about that?

No... You know, the Eiffel Tower has inspired a lot of artists: Man Ray, Raoul Dufy, Brassai, Marc Riboud, the photographer. And Chagall.

Right, Chagall: *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, 1938. "The Newlyweds of the Eiffel Tower". We're not getting any younger.

Hey, look, boss, I see somebody.



What do they look like?

Hard to say, he has an enormous pair of binoculars in front of his eyes.
He's observing us closely.

Just another crank. A paranoid. The kind of person who sees suspects everywhere.
[birds chirping, wings flapping]

[jingle of the show] The adventures of Detective Maxwell and his loyal assistant
Marconi: the Louvre.

Good morning, boss, I came as fast as I could. I got caught in a traffic jam
in the impasse Popincourt. [traffic noise]

How in the world? Nevermind, we haven't any time to lose, Marconi.
Do you know why I had you come up to the roof?

The Gang of Tightrope Walkers?

No, that case is closed. Take your binoculars and look over there. What do you see?

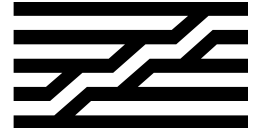
Rooftops, polluted air.

Look more closely.

The Louvre?

Exactly. [sounds of the city]

The Louvre is a respectable monument, nothing suspicious about it.



Do you think?

Some minor depravities around the time of Catherine de Medicis, maybe, back in the 16th century. Poison, incest, sorcery. A bygone era.

I'd really like to believe you. After the Revolution, they took out the nobles who were inside and replaced them with works of art. A job well done.

There's another thing too, I remember now: somebody stole the Mona Lisa.

Are you kidding? I wasn't aware of this.

That case is closed, too. Somebody stole it in 1911, and it was found in 1913.

You're scaring me. Are we sure that it's the real one, at least?

No doubt: there's an enormous reinforced glass window over it.

Well, there's no question of that.

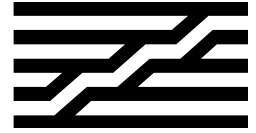
I wanted to talk to you about the Mona Lisa, as it so happens.

I'm listening, boss.

We're investigating a case of vandalism. Someone drew a mustache and a goatee on the portrait on the Mona Lisa's face. It happened in broad daylight. Right under the guards' noses, if I dare say. The suspect is a male, around thirty years old, with sharp features and a large forehead.

Oh, I know. His name is on the tip of my tongue.

You're getting ahead of yourself.



Don't you want to check the files of the National Police?

Dussel, something like that... Marchand... Duchamp! Marcel Duchamp.

That does ring a bell.

No need to worry: it's not a case of vandalism, but of an artwork rather. If my memory is right, the suspect added in a beard and a mustache using a pencil on a photograph. He signed his name and now you can see it at the Centre Pompidou. Everything's on the up and up.

Oh, good, another closed case then.

That's the third, and we're not out of work yet.

We'll carry on with our surveillance, one can never be too sure.

I've heard that a lot of modern artists are infiltrating the Louvre to copy the works of old masters. Counterfeiting is a crime, though.

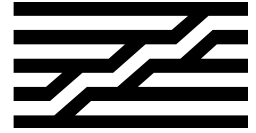
Do the forgers get in through the roof, you think?

They get in everywhere. Take Picasso, for example. He spent his time copying classical masterpieces. Vélasquez, Ingres, Poussin, to name just a few. Only later was he copied by everyone else.

There's some justice in that, though.

That's why we're here... Now, keep your eyes peeled.

Sure thing, boss. [birds chirping, wings flapping]



[jingle of the show] The adventures of Detective Maxwell and his loyal assistant Marconi: Les Halles.

Ah, Marconi, you're here. I've been waiting for you.

Sorry I'm late, boss. I confused the rue des Artistes with the rue des Innocents.

They're the exact opposite of each other, artists and innocents.

Let's get going, we've haven't a minute to lose, our case calls.

What case? Hunting down the members of the Zinc Gang?

We'll take care of that later. For now, we've got to keep our eyes peeled.

There's all kinds of suspicious things going on over there.

Over where?

Right in front of you. Look through your binoculars and tell me what you see.

Zinc rooftops. Thousands of rooftops. Some pigeons, of the same color.

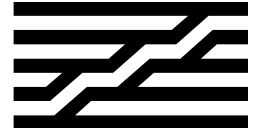
Look more closely, you'll see Les Halles.

I've spotted them. There's some suspicious activities going on there, you think?

Near the Halles there's the rue de la Petite Truanderie — the Little Swindle — and the rue de la Grande Truanderie — the Big Swindle. I'm not even making this up.

It must be a sign.

And at one time, it seems, there used to be a restaurant there called The Rendez-vous



of Innocents.

Sounds pretty harmless.

Don't be naive, it was a ruse, no doubt. A lair for gangsters.

Come on, what could happen at the Halles? It was a marketplace, in former days. Vegetables, fruits, cheeses, nothing too risqué. Except for eggs, perhaps.

Those fruits and vegetables inspired a whole class of painters. And painters are perverts, as everybody knows. Take Soutine for instance; he used to visit the slaughterhouses to find cow carcasses to serve as his models.

But that was at la Villette, whereas this is the Halles.

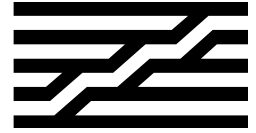
I was summarizing. In 1906, František Kupka painted a cabbage. In 1913, Raoul Dufy painted a basket of pears. In 1933, Man Ray photographed a cabbage, just one, but sliced in two. In 1938, André Steiner took a photo of some tomatoes and onions. That same year Marcel Gromaire drew some squashes. Ten years later, Chagall painted his *Still life with a basket of fruit*. And it wasn't so long ago, a certain Denis Brihat photographed an eggplant.

I had no idea it was possible to be so passionate about vegetables.

As usual, I am not making this up: you can check for yourself, all these works of art are kept at the Centre Pompidou. [birds chirping, pigeons cooing]

The artists used to go and visit the Halles, to execute their paintings?

No doubt. Excepting Gordon Matta-Clark, the photographer. He was interested in the neighborhood for its buildings. He got a kick out of piercing holes in them,



go figure why. [voices and market sounds]

For reasons of beauty, perhaps. But tell me, boss, a painting of tomatoes isn't against the laws, is it?

Not that I'm aware of.

So what are we looking for, exactly? Turnip dealers? Impostor priests hiding out in the Church of Saint-Eustache?

You don't seem too convinced. I inspected that cathedral, by professional obligation. And indeed, I did find some graffiti. By a certain Keith Haring, a pop-art painter.

It just goes to show, we have to be ready for anything.

Anything, Marconi, anything. Stay on your guard. [birds chirping, wings flapping]

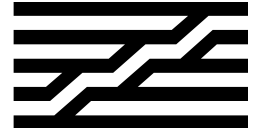
[jingle of the show] The adventures of Detective Maxwell and his loyal assistant Marconi: La Défense.

Good morning boss, sorry I'm late. There was a traffic jam at the corner of the rue Croulebarbe and the rue Brisemiche. [birds chirping, city sounds]

Are you sure those two streets intersect? Nevermind, what does it matter, we're not here to talk about urbanism. I'm in the middle of a difficult investigation, and I need your sharp eyesight, Marconi.

However I can help.

In short: we found a fingerprint at the scene of the crime. A thumbprint, to be precise.



A pretty rare occurrence.

A fingerprint isn't much to go on.

Except that this one measures four meters long. So, logically, we have to find a thumb twelve meters tall.

Well, you won't find that on every street corner.

Not even on the corner of the rue Croulebarbe. Take your binoculars and have a look.

In which direction?

Straight ahead, due west. What do you see?

A bunch of skyscrapers. I think I can see the Empire State Building.
That can't be New York already, can it?

Not that far, it's just La Défense, rather.

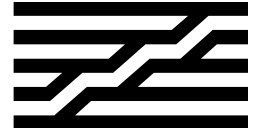
That's what I thought, too.

According to my information, the thumb is somewhere in that neighborhood.

The business district... Banks, businesses, entrepreneurs, exchanges of every sort.
The ideal setting for a detective film.

But we're not at the cinema, though. What do you see there?

A triumphal arch, sort of cube-shaped.



The Great Arch, designed by the Danish architect Johan Otto von Spreckelsen, with Paul Andreu and Peter Rice. What else?

A triangular tower, beveled and seemingly split in two.

The Granite Tower, by Christian de Portzamparc. Still no suspicious thumb?

No, just another skyscraper... And another there, even taller.

Yeah, there are dozens of them, we're not going to rave over every one. Nothing else?

I see something like a giant spider, made of iron. Pretty fishy, isn't it?

Nothing more normal than that, it's the *Red Spider* by Calder, the sculptor. He's known for his monumental sculptures in that vein. And also for his mobiles, nothing too dangerous.

I see something else: two tall individuals, red, yellow, and blue. They look like papier-mâché.

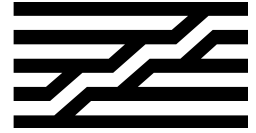
Rather like polyester resin. Those are the Two Fantastical Characters. A sculpture by Miró. Yet another work of art. [birds chirping, pigeons cooing, city sounds]

Are there a lot, like that?

Not as many as in a museum of modern art, but nevertheless, a certain number.

Oh, there it is, I see it now: an enormous finger. You were right, boss.

That's him alright — or I mean, that's it: the *Thumb*. A work by the sculptor César, in bronze, twelve meters high. No time to lose, go take his fingerprints.



But, for that I'll need a gigantic inkpad.

Act discreetly, alright? I don't want any trouble over civil liberties.

Meanwhile, I'm going to stay here and keep watch.

Alright, boss. [birds chirping, wings flapping]

[jingle of the show] The adventures of Detective Maxwell and his loyal assistant Marconi: Le Marais.

You're none too early, Marconi.

Sorry I'm late, boss. The rue des Grands Moulins is under construction, I had to take the rue des Petites Écuries. [birds chirping, city sounds]

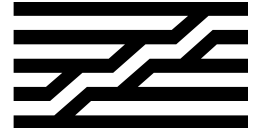
I sometimes wonder what map of Paris you use. But we have more urgent business to attend to. We've got a case on our hands.

The affair of the Transom Window Thieves? I'd guess that, seeing as we have a view over the rooftops.

Look over that way, to the south, southeast. The Marais. The City Hall Bazaar, a century old and still standing.

The round cupola with a flag at the top?

That's the one. Indeed, I suspect there's some rather shady deals going on between the Bazaar, the neighborhood art galleries, and the National Museum of Modern Art, the Centre Pompidou.



You've always been suspicious.

It's my job to be suspicious.

What's it a question of this time, stolen goods? Money laundering?

A different kind of commerce. The first to strike was a certain Duchamp, Marcel, born July 28, 1887 at Blainville-Crevon, Lower Seine department. In 1914, he bought a bottle rack at the Bazaar, then he signed it.

Nothing too sordid.

Not yet. But that bottle rack became a work of art, just like that, in just an instant's time. It's worth millions now.

A good turnover.

Later, Duchamp struck again with a bicycle wheel, then a urinal.

It's a kind of addiction: once you start...

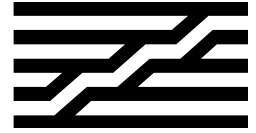
Moreover, others have imitated him. It was the beginning of modern-modern art.

Isn't that called contemporary art, no?

Seemingly. But in fact, to each artist their style, and not all artists went out and bought bottle racks.

In this regard, I drew up a list of art galleries in the neighborhood.

There were an awful lot of them... The Yvon Lambert Gallery, which is exhibiting works by Lawrence Weiner and Sol LeWitt. The Marian Goodman Gallery, exhibiting



Annette Messenger and Christian Boltanski. The Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery, which is showing works by Anselm Kiefer. Then there's the Perrotin Gallery too, where works by Sophie Calle, Xavier Veilhan and a certain Damien Hirst have been shown.

I know about that last one. He was involved in the dreadful matter of a diamond-encrusted skull.

Precisely. But the skull was a platinum copy, not a real one.

I much prefer that. Are the diamonds authentic, at least?

I think so, given the price of the skull. In your opinion, is there a tie between the Bazaar, the galleries, and the Museum of Modern Art?

Who knows. When you think of the fortune that a simple bottle rack can generate...

There's a lot of poor artists too, aren't there? That balances things out.

No doubt. While I was looking into the matter of the bottle rack, I found out that the one on display at the Centre Pompidou is in fact a copy. Made by the artist.

But if it was made by the artist, is it real?

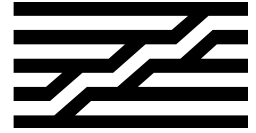
It's very hard to separate the true from the false, that's exactly the problem.

And the real bottle rack, then, where is it now?

Someone may have taken it back to the Bazaar.

It might be worth going to have a look around.

Okay, boss, I'll see to it. [birds chirping, wings flapping]



[jingle of the show] The adventures of Detective Maxwell and his loyal assistant Marconi: Montmartre.

You wanted to see me, boss?

Yes, Marconi, two heads are better than one when it comes to a strange case like this. You're completely soaked, is it raining?

I had to go through the sewers, there was a hideous traffic jam in the rue de Rivoli.

You made the right choice. Alright, we're here to reexamine an old case. The theft of the Mona Lisa from the Louvre, in August of 1911. It turns out that the suspects all lived in the same neighborhood. Take out your binoculars and look over there. What do you see?

The Sacred Heart Basilica?

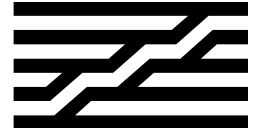
Montmartre. That's the neighborhood: a sketchy neighborhood, you can take my word for it. The rue Rochechouart, for example, is where Landru, the serial killer of old ladies, was living in 1919. He would marry them just to murder them. I say that just to give you an idea of what we're up against.

That sends shivers up my spine.

When the Mona Lisa was stolen, the police arrested a certain Apollinaire, a poet and friend to artists and the Bohemian milieu. Picasso was suspected too, as his accomplice. In the end, though, they were released.

But isn't that all a little dubious? [birds chirping, pigeons cooing, city sounds]

You can say that again. Did you draw up the list of notable inhabitants of the



neighborhood, as we talked about?

Yes, I have it right here. Quite a motley crew: the two suspects, Picasso and Apollinaire. But also Picabia, Derain, Juan Gris, Vlaminck, Matisse, Suzanne Valadon and her son Utrillo. I included Amélie Poulain just to be sure, although she's not really part of the same circle.

No, let's leave her aside.

There's Henri Rousseau too, known as the Douanier Rousseau.

Finally, a representative of order in this world of hoodlums.

A certain number of them used to frequent the Bateau Lavoir, a dingy and unheated sort of structure.

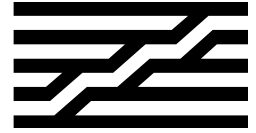
Lack of heat is no justification for criminality, even in winter.

That's right.

All kinds of rumors are going around about Montmartre. They say that a painter killed himself over a lost love. Another used to hang his baby out the window just so that it could get some sunlight. Fake lotteries were organized; bottles of milk were stolen; opium and ether could be bought in the street.

I've heard a sordid story about a counterfeit painting done by a donkey, later sold for a fortune.

The Boronali scandal, yes, I'm aware of that one. A kind of hoax, which is why we need to double down on our surveillance.



Viewed from afar, like this, Montmartre seems very calm.

Beware of appearances. Remember Magritte: a very respectable artist. Nevertheless, during the war, he earned his living painting fake Picassos.

Which just goes to show...

Some years later, this same Magritte painted a pipe, and just below it, he wrote: "This is not a pipe".

If it's not a pipe, what is it then?

It's a mystery.

Oh boy, let's keep our eyes open. [birds chirping, wings flapping]

[jingle of the show] The adventures of Detective Maxwell and his loyal assistant Marconi: Brancusi's Studio.

Ah, you're here, boss. You're none too soon.

You're frozen, Marconi.

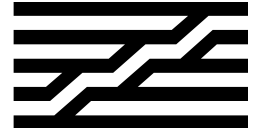
Up on the seventh floor, the view is very beautiful, but the night is cold.

I'm going to bring you a blanket, or a Scottish tartan.

Is the surveillance yielding any results?

Pretty scant, at present. Not much happens in the plaza after a certain hour.

Aside from the pigeons. [birds chirping, city sounds]



I had asked you to focus your attention on Brancusi's studio.

Very calm there too, nothing to declare.

Be on your guard all the same: eventually, something will happen.

You have some suspicions?

My instincts rarely deceive me. And when they do, it's never their fault.

I've looked into that studio: it's the exact reproduction of the studio of Constantin Brancusi, a Romanian citizen, born in 1876, deceased in 1957, with his papers in order. I went in there to have a look, and I counted 137 sculptures, 87 bases, 41 drawings, and over 1600 photographic plates.

That must have taken a long time to tally.

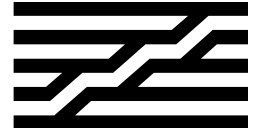
A matter of professional conscience. But the most amazing part of it is that it's free to visit. Don't you find that a little fishy?

A little. Say, I also conducted a little investigation, you'll be glad to hear. I found out that when Brancusi would sell a work of art, he would replace it with a plaster copy. To fill in the gap.

A counterfeit, then?

In a way. But, actually, no, not really, seeing as he's still the creator. Not everything's made of plaster there, there are also works in bronze, marble, wood, and limestone. And even the plaster ones are very beautiful, very white and clean. I verified.

Bravo, Marconi, you're making some progress.



And I learned something else too: this Brancusi had some run-ins with the law.

See, I told you so: my instincts knew. [birds chirping, pigeons cooing]

There was a big court case, in 1927: Constantin Brancusi against the United States of America.

Wow, he wasn't afraid of anything.

The case got quite a lot of coverage at the time. The litigation had to do with an object going through customs. The question was whether it was a work of modern art or a simple piece of polished metal. Shiny, elegant, tapered, and bronze.

I see. The two categories are at once very different but very similar.

In the end, the judges decided that it was a work of art.

I wonder what their criteria were.

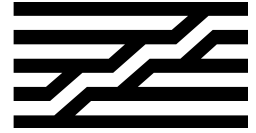
To make a long story short, they found that it was beautiful and totally useless.

I couldn't have put it better myself.

The judge even declared that a work didn't have to be beautiful in order to officially be a work of art.

That's not going to simplify any controversies.

No. As to controversies, boss: I've been up all night observing the pigeons, I could use a break.



But of course, Marconi, I'll go get you some coffee.

Don't go anywhere, I'll be right back. [birds chirping, wings flapping]

[jingle of the show] The adventures of Detective Maxwell and his loyal assistant Marconi: The Centre Pompidou.

Tell me, boss, where are we, exactly?

Where do you think?

We're pretty high up, it's windy, we have a view overlooking the rooftops...

The Eiffel Tower?

A good detective has to exercise his powers of deduction.

When you're at the Eiffel Tower, you don't see the Eiffel Tower.

But we can see the Eiffel Tower over there, so...

We are not on the Eiffel Tower.

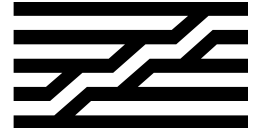
Right. Now, when you're up on the roof at the Centre Pompidou, you don't see the Centre Pompidou. Now, since we don't see the Centre Pompidou...

Oh, I get it. Then this is it, the Centre Pompidou? This big building.

Exactly. With the piazza, down below, Brancusi's studio, and IRCAM, the Institute of Research and Acoustico-Musical Coordination.

Pompidou, that rings a bell for me.

You didn't know him, but he was President of the Republic.



People used to make fun of him a lot back then, because of his eyebrows.
Having big eyebrows didn't stop him from being interested in contemporary art.

Apparently not!

Accordingly, at the end of the 1960s, a decision was made to build a museum
of modern art.

But tell me, those gigantic pipes, those air vents...
They look pretty weird, seeing them for the first time.

I remember the reactions when this building was finally complete. People called it all
kinds of names: Notre-Dame-of-the-Pipes, the Gas Factory, King Kong Cathedral.

People weren't kind back then.

Well, when Parisians saw the Eiffel Tower for the first time, they weren't
very nice either.

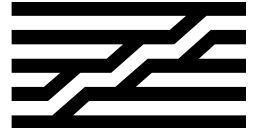
Notre-Dame-of-the-Pipes, [chuckling] that's pretty good.

When it's a matter of making fun of architecture, critics always find good names:
the Pickle, the Cheese Grater, the Wedge of Brie.

It's a kind of poetry. Rather irksome to the architects though.

They've gotten used to it. Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, the designers of the
Centre Pompidou, had to put up with it from the unseasoned and the inexperienced
alike. And yet, when you look carefully, it's rather elegant.

Yes, in a sense, there's a lot of audacity there.



The idea was to take everything that's usually hidden on the interior and put it on the outside: the pipes and conduits, all the plumbing. With color coding to keep everything straight: yellow for electricity, green for water.

Quite practical, when you have to call the plumber.

On the other hand, can you imagine how much space that frees up inside?
Thousands of square meters.

One hundred thousand artworks, some of them big as locomotives. 3,335,509 visitors.
It's no mean feat to manage all that.

Where did you get those numbers?

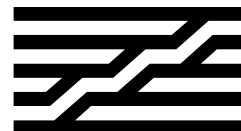
I conducted a little investigation of my own.

Oh, did you? At any rate, with one hundred thousand works, it would really be amazing if we couldn't find at least one to our liking.

We should go and see for ourselves.

By golly, you're right. We haven't a minute to lose, Marconi, let's go back down.
Are you coming?

Gladly, boss. [birds chirping, wings flapping]



Credits

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Practical information

www.centrepompidou.fr/en

www.centrepompidou.fr/en/visit/accessibility