

Orient Express Endowment Fund presents *Wagon-bar. A short history of railway dining*

An exhibition co-produced with the Rencontres de la photographie d'Arles

Espace Croisière

July 1 - September 29, 2024

Curator: Arthur Mettetal



Following the success of the *Orient-Express et cie* exhibition, presented in 2021 in Arles and in 2023 at the Villa Médicis, the Orient Express Endowment Fund and The Rencontres d'Arles are renewing their collaboration by co-producing the exhibition *Wagon-bar. A short history of railway dining* at the Croisière area as part of the festival. The photographs and archives on view reveal the history of railway catering in France from the late 19th century to the present day. A history of innovation and techniques, design and culture!

The history of rail catering began with station buffets, however, meals were served on board trains as early as the 1860s in the United States, before gradually spreading throughout the world. In Europe, the Compagnie internationale des wagons-lits was a pioneer in the field. Its dining cars and their representation embody a central figure in the imagery and imagination associated with railroads. Combined with the *arts de la table*, refined service and interior decoration, food formed the cornerstone of railway luxury whose golden age occurred between the two world wars. The 1950s saw the emergence of new formulae and many innovations that challenged the traditional approach to on-board catering: buffet cars, trolley services and meal-trays responded to changes in passengers' eating habits. The 1970s marked a significant break, with the disappearance of in-train catering derived from the airline model and the modernity it enshrined. In more ways than one, eating on board a train represents a revolution in motion!

The photographs and archives in the exhibition come from the collections of the former Compagnie internationale des wagons-lits and the SNCF Group's Service Archives Documentation. Halfway between industrial and advertising photography, the primary function of these images is to embody modernity by showcasing endless novelty. Of course, the companies show us what they want us to see: a fabricated reality of an ideal, uncluttered railway world. However, they also reveal a history of innovation and work, as well as a history of aesthetics, culture and design. More than mere reflections of successive innovations, these photographs document their epoch. Moreover, they shape the different eras as much as they bear witness to them.

The exhibition catalog, written by the curator Arthur Mettetal, will be published by Textuel.



### Captions

1. Service on board a Capitole train dining car, 1966
2. Breakfast trays served on board Corail trains, 1986
3. Trays and accessories used by CIWL on TGV trains, circa 1980
4. "Sandwich 260" offered on TGV trains, 1981
5. Breakfast on board the Mistral train, 1972
6. Special menu offered on board TGV trains during the Albertville Olympic Games, 1992



## Arthur Mettetal, curator of the exhibition

Born in 1985 in Besançon (France), Arthur Mettetal lives and works in Ivry-sur-Seine (France). He is a railroad historian and specialist in railway and industrial heritage. For many years, he has been interested in the material and immaterial traces of industry, invoking the photographic medium in each of his projects. He also specializes in the management of archives and corporate collections. After working on the workers' memory of the Métaleurop factory in 2011, he is now exploring the role of factory chimneys as "social and workers' verticalities" in Northern France. Co-curator of several exhibitions (Usine des mémoires, Signal industriel, Orient-Express & Cie), he is currently general delegate of the Orient Express endowment fund.

## The Orient Express Endowment Fund

The Orient Express Endowment Fund was created by the Orient Express company and the SNCF group in 2018 with the aim of conserving, assembling, celebrating and transmitting the legacy and culture attached to the famed train and to the Compagnie internationale des wagons-lits (International Sleeping Car Company). The fund oversees the corporate archives of the former company, as well as a rich collection of historical artifacts. This collection encompasses remarkable pieces, and is part of a constantly-evolving and dynamic heritage. It is enriched by contributions from contemporary artists, particularly in the fields of documentary and art photography.

Driven by a passion to share and promote this exceptional heritage, the Orient Express Endowment Fund intends to become a leading player in cultural sponsorship both in France and internationally.

### Partners

Exhibition co-produced between the Rencontres d'Arles and the Orient Express Endowment Fund  
With support of Newrest Wagons-Lits  
With the collaboration of SNCF Group

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