THE SATOSHI MYSTERY
AT THE ORIGIN OF BITCOINS

A 6x10' Documentary Series and a 52'
Documentary Directed by REMI FORTE
Produced by ARTE FRANCE and IKO

arte DISTRIBUTION

03.14.2014

BITCOIN'S FACE

THE MYSTERY MAN BEHIND THE CRYPTO-CURRENCY

PITCH

On January 3, 2009, a man named Satoshi Nakamoto launched Bitcoin, the first reliable decentralized and encrypted computer currency. In 2011, he disappeared off the face of the earth. Since then, Satoshi Nakamoto remains anonymous and his identity is subject to the most crazy theories. All the investigations carried out to reveal his identity remain unsuccessful.

Yet in 10 years the value of Bitcoin has skyrocketed from $0.001 to $20,000 at its peak. The technology behind Bitcoin, the blockchain, has grown phenomenally. Because of its decentralized and encrypted nature, the blockchain makes it possible to exchange value without a trusted third party. In an ultra-connected world where mistrust is the order of the day, the possibility of freeing oneself from intermediaries in a secure manner is a paradigm shift like few others in the functioning of societies. All fields are impacted, from economy to medicine, industry or politics. Thus, blockchain would be as important as the invention of the Internet.

Who is Satoshi Nakamoto? How did his invention become so popular? What do Bitcoin and blockchain tell us about the world we live in?

The Satoshi Mystery is a documentary series that meets the major actors of the world of Bitcoin, blockchain and crypto-currencies, that retraces the hunt for Satoshi Nakamoto and that explores the mysterious history of these technologies: peer-to-peer, mining, cryptography... In six serialized episodes, The Satoshi Mystery offers a story that is as breathtaking as a thriller, in the line of the most recent Anglo-Saxon documentary series.
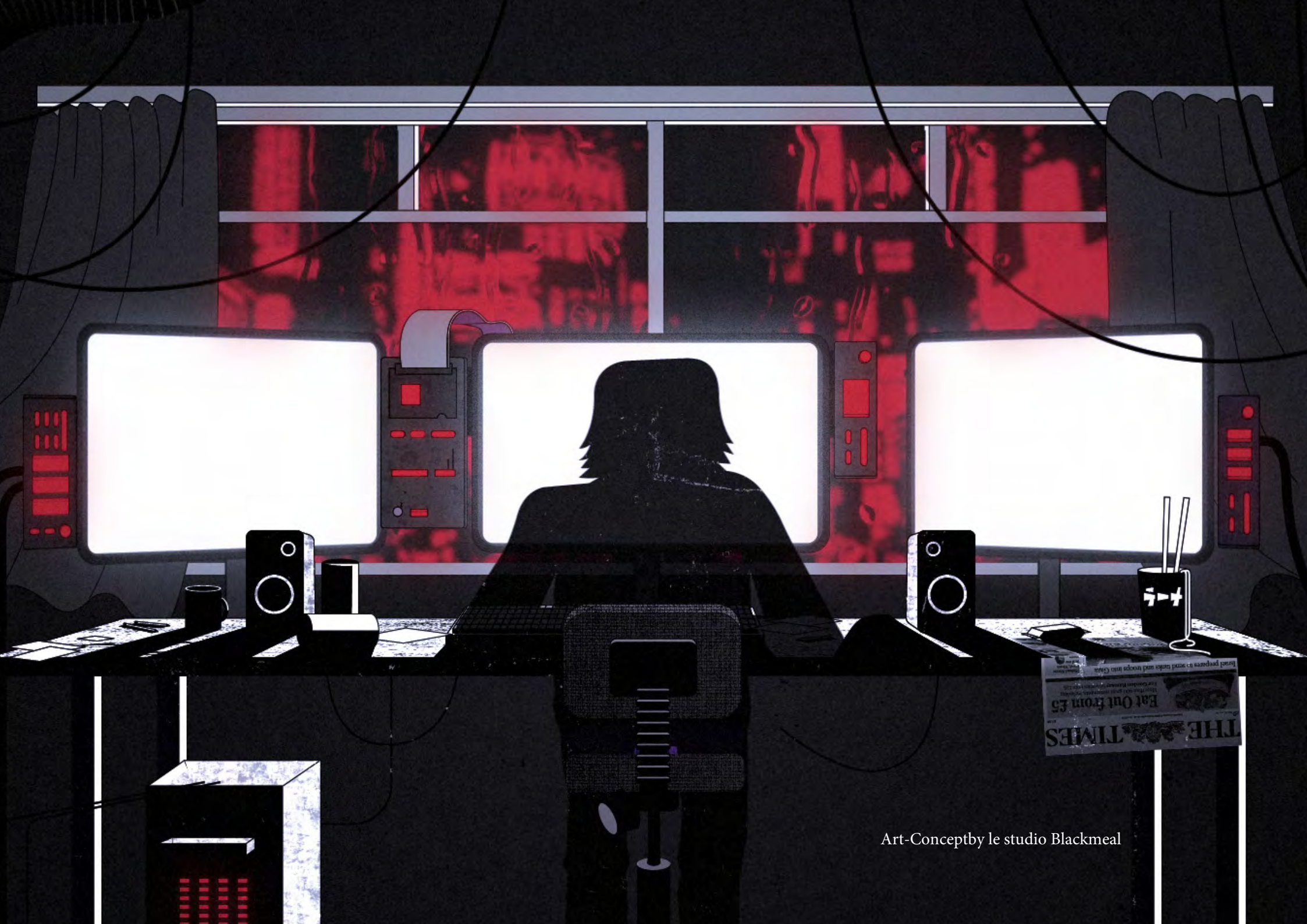
Art-Concept by le studio Blackmeal

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Rémi FORTE

It is often said that Bitcoin is energy intensive, sulphurous and highly volatile. The speculative bubbles that its price has undergone over the years are said to have created or destroyed fortunes. It is called "the currency of criminals and money laundering", it is said that it will destroy the planet, that it is not backed by anything. One wonders, a currency that does not exist, what for?

However, when we stop to think about it, the magnitude of what is being played out is obvious. We are already living with a "currency that does not exist". According to the statistics of the European Central Bank, the coins and banknotes in circulation represent only 10% of the existing euros. The remaining 90% are only computer writings, sequences of 0's and 1's. Whether they are euros, dollars, yuans or bitcoins, the currencies of the modern world are mostly computer data stored on servers. But in this interconnected world where exchanges are accelerating, it is precisely the shared, distributed trust, the basis for transactions between people who do not know each other, that is at stake. And this is exactly what Bitcoin questions, and what differentiates it from official currencies.

Bitcoin as a reflection of the era_

Many economic and state actors have understood this. In 2018, job offers in the blockchain sector blockchain skyrocketed by more than 300%, and, according to a study by the International Data Corporation (IDC), investments related to this field could reach $12 billion in 2022 globally, compared to $1.3 billion in 2018, an increase of nearly 800%. Thousands of companies have already set up a blockchain and/or crypto-currency department, starting with the largest: Facebook Carrefour, IBM, Axa, Oracle, J.P. Morgan... All fields are concerned: banking, real estate, automotive, retail, transport, insurance... States, too, want their "crypto-currency": after Venezuela (Petro), the Marshall Islands (SOV), Iran (PMN), China's CBDC, or even Bruno Le Maire who is planning a "public digital currency" project, it is North Korea's turn to announce its crypto project.

Bitcoin tells us about the power relations of our time: countries fearing for their sovereignty, citizens at war to protect their data, multinationals ready to do anything to grow. Just as it is difficult to remember life without the Internet, it may soon be impossible to remember the world without Bitcoin.

The world of blockchain and crypto-currencies is evolving at such a rapid pace that it is already worth telling the story of how it started. It's a breathtaking story full of mysteries and twists. Thus to tell it, we borrow very naturally the dark thriller codes: mystery, enigmas, tension... We also adopt a serialized form in order to offer the spectator a dive with constantly renewed stakes. We want to keep them on the edge of their seat thanks to the two questions we raise: who is Satoshi Nakamoto and what is this creature he gave birth to? This quest is the central issue of the series, through which the spectator will learn and understand, in a sharp but clear way, the essence of bitcoin and the blockchain.

The Satoshi Mystery is fundamentally an Internet story. Without the Internet, the invention of Bitcoin is not possible.

Narrative principles

The Satoshi Mystery is the story of a revolutionary digital currency told by its creator, Satoshi Nakamoto. To this day, no one knows who Satoshi really is, and the purpose of this documentary series is not to reveal his true identity. We don't have the means to do so, and others have tried before us. Above all, his anonymity interests us much more than his identity. We use it as a narrative engine, because Satoshi's anonymity carries with it many issues related to the history of Bitcoin: privacy, early exchanges, the creation of large fortunes, decentralization and a whole philosophy behind the technology.

We fill the gap of this anonymity with fictional material, characterizing Satoshi to make this blurred and protean figure a narrator able to tell from the inside the real story of a crazy monetary and technological adventure, one of the most important inventions of the last decades. We imagine his choices and doubts throughout Bitcoin's short life. He will even be amused to see so many people trying to discover his identity, as if the hunted were telling his own story. But we are careful not to project onto our fictional narrator any identity elements that might be contradicted if Satoshi's true identity were ever revealed. His invention remains the essence of the story.

How can you get him to talk concretely? If you're going to gamble, you might as well do it within the rules set by Satoshi. As written in the Bitcoin protocol code, there can be no more than 21 million Bitcoins in circulation. According to calculations, the last satoshi - the smallest unit of Bitcoin currency - will be issued in 2140. We make the following fictional proposal: Satoshi has hidden a system in his code that reveals a series of audio messages the moment the last satoshi is issued. In each episode, a digitized voice will make us hear these messages left by Satoshi Nakamoto in every block.

In this way, we respect his genuine choice not to be identifiable. Nevertheless, we will pay particular attention to the writing of this voice as well as to the effects so that it transmits a real emotion and can carry the different stakes of the story.

The Bitcoin protocol code also mentions that a new block containing new transactions is added to the blockchain about every ten minutes. So we decided to split this series into six ten-minute episodes. So once the last satoshi has been mined, the next six blocks added to the Bitcoin blockchain will contain the Satoshi story. With one block every ten minutes, Satoshi offers us a sixty-minute dive into the complexity of Bitcoin.

Beyond this narrative principle and the voice-over that guides the story, Satoshi's Mystery dives into the heart of what Bitcoin is, by meeting the people who have brought it to life or are still bringing it to life today. The story unfolds through cross interviews, but also through animated sequences and archival footage.

The words of our contributors (developers, entrepreneurs, journalists, actors of the blockchain world...) will allow us to bring a concrete and embodied story around Bitcoin and the issues it raises. The interviews, shot in the characters' workplaces, take us into the story: in a glass conference room, in front of mining machines, next to a computer, our characters tell the story of Satoshi Nakamoto and his creation as they have discovered or experienced it.

Visual approach

A mysterious and paranoid atmosphere hovers over The Satoshi Mystery. It is inspired by the series Mr Robot by Sam Esmail, Utopia by Dennis Kelly, and by the documentary series Wormwood by Errol Morris. We will be inspired by the off-center shots or, on the contrary, the very symmetrical shots of these series to render the feeling of paranoia in which The Satoshi Mystery is immersed, the sensation that something is oppressing the contributor, who is too close to the edge of the frame, or that a secret is weighing on them like a large empty field above them. These people have something sensitive to tell us, like whistleblowers, what they know could put them in danger.

Archival footage will also be used in the narrative: there is a lot of it on the issue, from the first reports on Bitcoin, through the "discoveries" of Dorian Nakamoto or Craig Wright, to the more recent stories on the Bitcoin "bubble", its listing on the Chicago Stock Exchange or its energy intensive nature. They are an effective way to make this world of Bitcoin concrete, tangible, and to move the story forward.

Last but not least, animated sequences in animated illustration and motion design will allow to visualize various elements of the story told.

Animation

Animation has two functions in the series. First, it accompanies the voice-over sequences where the imagination of our narrator, Satoshi Nakamoto, is expressed: his ideas, his memories, his questioning. In this way, we give substance to Satoshi's intellectual and psychological universe, as if he were taking us along with him into the thoughts and dreams that led him to code Bitcoin. These sequences represent the part of fiction, myths and legends that exist about Satoshi Nakamoto, while accentuating the mystery and tension of the story.

Secondly, motion design animation sequences are used as a visual support to explain the blockchain, decentralization, the functioning of mining, the principles of asymmetric cryptography... So many concepts that may seem complex but that animation will allow us to put into images in a simple and didactic way, while remaining in the visual atmosphere of the series.

We call upon the graphic designer Victorien Aubineau from Nantes to create these animated sequences, modern and pure, inspired by cryptography, pirate and cyberpunk (Blade Runner, Tron, Akira...), and contribute to the creation of the mysterious universe of the series. It is this same graphic designer who will elaborate, on the same line, the design of the Satoshi Mystery.

Editing and computer crashes

The editing will be rhythmic, in cut, favoring short shots, in symbiosis with this tense narration. The subject is rich, and the rhythm within each episode will evolve in phases, accelerating little by little up until each revealing, before relaxing a little later with short moments a little less dense, which will allow the spectator to breathe and to integrate what they have just seen.

Visual computer crashes, glitches, will sometimes appear, especially on some striking transitions. They will help to confuse the spectator while reviving their attention. These glitches aim to symbolically instill doubt in the spectator's mind: how much can I trust this lead? Are they trying to manipulate me, to hack what I see and what is told to me?

Music

The electro music of the Satoshi Mystery takes part in the mysterious and paranoid atmosphere of the web-series. Inspired by the French electronic scene (Rone, Superpoze, Dive Inn...) as well as by the artists Vangelis, Kraftwerk or the soundtrack of the series Stranger Things, it is at the same time relaxing and captivating, alternately strange or in tension.

Art-Concept by Victorien Aubineau
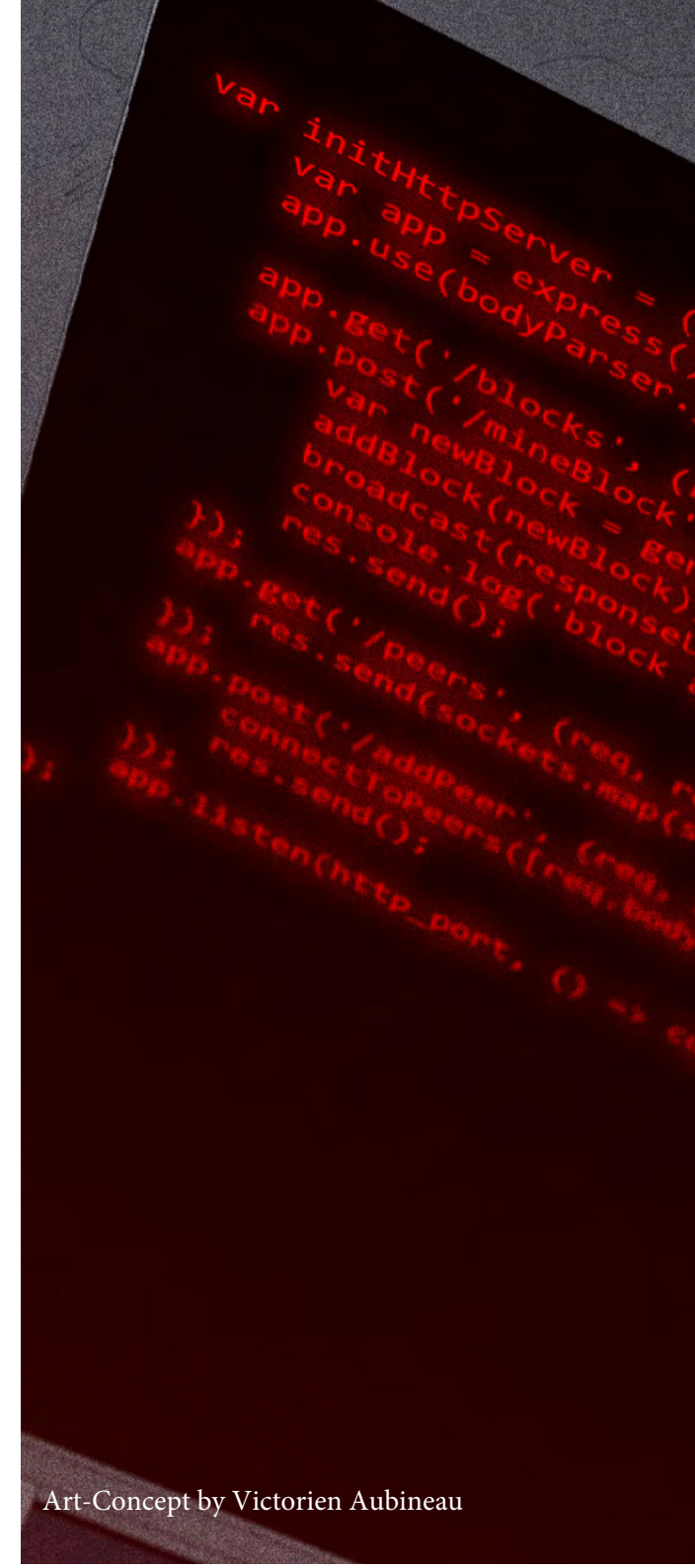
arte
DISTRIBUTION
the ultimate reference for factual documentaries

FLORENCE SALA
*Head of
International Distribution
& Marketing*
f-sala@artefrance.fr

ALEC HERRMANN
*Head of
Catalog and Video
Acquisitions (DVD/VOD)*
a-herrmann@artefrance.fr

AUDREY KAMGA
Sales Manager
a-kamga@artefrance.fr
Canada, USA, South America,
Australia, New Zealand,
MENA Region

ISABELLE MONTEIL
Sales Manager
i-monteil@artefrance.fr
UK, Ireland, Italy, Spain,
Portugal, Asia
language versions

SOPHIE SOGHOMONIAN
Sales Manager
s-soghomonian@artefrance.fr
Eastern Europe, Russia, Africa
Israel, Greece
worldwide inflight

FRANKA SCHWABE
Sales Manager
f-schwabe@artefrance.fr
Germany, Austria, Switzerland,
Belgium, France, Netherlands
Scandinavia, Iceland