

## Houellebecq lights up Paris with photography show—and a smoking room

### Controversial author caters for fellow smokers in Palais de Tokyo show

The controversial French novelist Michel Houellebecq will be giving smokers a break in Paris next week; his new exhibition of photographs at the Palais de Tokyo (Rester Vivant, 23 June-11 September) includes a room for nicotine lovers. "It's just me having a fraternal thought for my fellow addicts," Houellebecq tells us.

The award-winning author says the show feels like "a return to poetry". He says: "I've organised the rooms so that they follow one another, like a book-length collection in which the poems produce a narrative by being placed in a certain order, even if it remains far vaguer than in a novel." Various aspects of French culture

and architecture are depicted in Houellebecq's images. One work, *France #014* (1994), shows the word "Europe" carved in concrete. Asked about the UK's referendum on whether to remain in the European Union, which takes place on the day his show opens, Houellebecq says: "The French are as torn as the English."

Other works depict life in Paris, "the France I have most experience of", Houellebecq says. "I've generally



Writer's show stubs out smoking ban

lived in the suburbs. They aren't rural areas, more like peri-urban zones—in other words, where people now vote Front National," he writes in the exhibition's catalogue.

Houellebecq's health has come under the spotlight in *Manifesta 11*, in Zurich (until 18 September). As part of the biennial, the surgeon Henry Perschak gave Houellebecq a check-up, and visitors can see the results. Gareth Harris