
Anne-Lise Quesnel
Translator: Charlotte Gould

Electronic version
URL: http://critiquedart.revues.org/5707
DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.5707
ISBN: 2265-9404
ISSN: 2265-9404

Electronic reference
URL : http://critiquedart.revues.org/5707 ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.5707

This text was automatically generated on 1 octobre 2016.

Archives de la critique d’art

Anne-Lise Quesnel
Translation: Charlotte Gould

EDITOR’S NOTE
Traduit du français par Charlotte Gould

1 Pieces of writing, photographs, publications, videos and audio recordings to do with the work of Jacques Villeglé are among the many collections held at the Archives de la critique d’art. These documents, all produced at key moments of the artist’s career, are testimonies to the many different ways his work was received between 1959, when he first presented his ripped posters in an institutional exhibition, and the beginning of the 2000s, when he decided to stop gathering the medium and when the Georges-Philippe & Nathalie Vallois gallery launched a major retrospective of this colossal body of work.

2 First of all, two registration forms for the 1959 and 1961 editions of the Biennale de Paris are evidence that Jacques Villeglé actually took part in the event, the brainchild of André Malraux who had only just been appointed at the head of the newly-minted Ministry of Cultural Affairs. In 1959, the ripped posters antagonised the jury made up of artists under 35 as well as of a handful of older artists, namely Bernard Lorjou and his group who signed the manifesto Des hommes témoins : de la Nausée à la Colère (October 3, 1959), a retrograde commotion which pointed to how remarkable appropriation was on the art scene of the time. Alain Jouffroy calls J. Villeglé a “fore-seer” in his eponymous book of 1974, in which he devises a new critical approach for “this mental revolution, that of the gaze, that of the imagination.” A. Jouffroy’s archives, held in Rennes, comprise documents ascertaining that an exchange took place with J. Villeglé in the 1980s, when A. Jouffroy was commissioned to interview artists for a survey about the current situation of the avant-garde, which was published in Le Monde diplomatique. Furthermore, two
recorded conversations conducted by Catherine Francblin between February and March 2001 give an insight into the preparation of the catalogue for the exhibition dedicated to the artist and entitled *Images : affiches lacérées 1958-1991*, which took place at the Vallois gallery that same year. The catalogue is the second instalment in the major collaboration undertaken by the gallery in order to seriously enhance the value of the ripped posters, within a larger series of events based on the different themes of J. Villeglé’s *catalogue raisonné*.³


Unsurprisingly, among the collections available at the Archives de la critique d’art, Pierre Restany’s provides the most extensive documentation on J. Villeglé. Indeed, from 1960 (the year New Realism was founded) onwards, P. Restany filled a file entitled “affichistes”⁶ which he kept adding to his whole life. While art historians, and rightly so, have remembered both the unifying role played by the critic and the importance of his theoretical writings as well as the effective way he promoted the movement at home and abroad, it seems however that this major figure contributed to painting a one-sided story of J. Villeglé’s career, by minimizing both some of his collaborations, especially with François Dufrêne, and the crucial impact some events had which took place before the group was founded.
By comparing P. Restany’s archives with the artist’s personal archives – which can be accessed at his Parisian office-cum-studio – one can notice this disaffection, which Villeglé had already made explicit himself. The international symposium *Le Demi-siècle de Pierre Restany* organized in 2006 at the Institut national d’histoire de l’art, suggested new readings of, and approaches to the art critic’s activity. It inaugurated its revision and allowed J. Villeglé to give his own point of view. In conversation with Odile Féligne in 2010, J. Villeglé was level-headed when rectifying a few points concerning this major critic whom he had known for years. More recently, an interview with Henry Périer printed in the Marseilles Museum of contemporary art catalogue, *Jacques Villeglé*, has served the same purpose.

Did Pierre Restany willingly keep Jacques Villeglé in the margins in order to give more visibility to Raymond Hains? Did he knowingly overlook his first attempts at theorising his own reasoning? The perusal of the three telephone conversations conducted by P. Restany with each one of the *affichistes* (J. Villeglé, R. Hains and F. Dufrêne) on December 16, 1961, tends to prove that the critic was fully aware of the existence of the text “Des Réalités collectives” published in the ultra-letterist review *grâmmes* in 1958 and that he knew what his motives were. “Des Réalités collectives” is indeed a “clarification,” to quote J. Villeglé. He provided the critic with arguments at the very moment when he discovered the ripped posters during the 1957 exhibition *Loi du 29 juillet 1881* at the Colette Allendy gallery. “Des Réalités collectives” refutes the affiliation of these unstuck posters (*décollages*) with the spirit of cubist collages, which P. Restany elaborates upon in his article “Collages”* published in 1957 in the review *Cimaise.*

© all rights reserved

En octobre 1957, au sujet de l’exposition de affiches lacustres dans Gallerie Allemand, nous avons rencontré Raymond Hainé et Jacques de la Villeglé au Festival de peinture qui regrettait la reproduction de l'objet.

Schématiquement, disent les livres de Hainé et de Schérer, les œuvres de reproduction de notre quinzième siècle, lâche le touche à la main. L'innovation du cinéma et de la photographie a transformé en moyen d'expression judicieux s'imposer en même temps un nouveau contexte, dont fait partie intégrante les affiches lacustres.

Le paquet de grâmmes, le ticket d'entrée n'intéresse rien d'autre qu'un élément de peinture comme le sol de la galaxie Gentia Bourgeois ; il fait que la vision du spectateur soit formalisée par un plan de réalisation et que le lecteur obtienne son signification fonctionnelle primitive.
J. Villeglé definitely acknowledges the three interviews conducted by P. Restany who, in 1961, approached each member of New Realism with the aim of preparing a monograph on the movement. "Les Nouveaux Réalistes : un manifeste de la nouvelle peinture" was eventually published in 1968 by Planète editions. The fifth chapter of the book, entitled "L’invention de la palissade" is entirely dedicated to the affichistes. It consists of an introduction and a sub-part which define the poster as a basic element of urban reality. A section titled "Raymond Hains et Jacques Mahé de la Villeglé" introduces "L’Invention de la palissade – L’Envers du problème : Dufrêne", then “Rotella et l’affiche romaine”. Over thirty pages, P. Restany assesses the phenomenon of ripped posters, presents their singularity, lists the peculiarities of each author, and puts their collaborations into perspective. The three biographies of the French affichistes written in 1961 all have similar contents and feed P. Restany’s text. They enumerate the major pieces, the first exhibitions and important events in chronological order. They make an inventory of publications and give the timeline of when they became acquainted with one another. By bringing together these different elements, we have the demonstration that Restany had access to as much information on J. Villeglé’s career as on that of his fellow affichistes. However, the synthesis published by Planète editions does not do justice to this. J. Villeglé’s work appears very much in the background with only a few lines devoted to it on pages 67 and 68.
Biography of Jacques Villeglé

Manuscript from the collection of archives of Pierre Restany, Archives de la critique d’art

Biography of Raymond Hains

Manuscript from the collection of archives of Pierre Restany, Archives de la critique d’art
Biography of François Dufrêne

Manuscript from the collection of archives of Pierre Restany, Archives de la critique d’art

Biography of François Dufrêne

Manuscript from the collection of archives of Pierre Restany, Archives de la critique d’art
How might this obvious imbalance be explained? P. Restany appears to bear a grudge against J. Villeglé for trying to initiate a dialogue by publishing a reaction to his 1957 article. Indeed, the critic never mentioned J. Villeglé’s attempts at theorisation, all but ignoring “Des Réalités collectives”, but also the exhibition Lacéré anonyme (1959). With the tag “lacéré anonyme,” J. Villeglé creates something of a collective unconscious, the true author of the pieces, at work on the posters long before they are appropriated. The removal eventually acts as a revelation. By marginalising these two fundamental events in J. Villeglé’s creative career, one leaves aside the strong links he created with F. Dufrène, the dialogue between the two being often disposed of in favour of the exclusive pair R. Hains / J. Villeglé. It is precisely alongside Le Tombeau de Pierre Larousse (1958), F. Dufrène’s influential work, that “Des Réalités collectives” finds its place. F. Dufrène was also the one, let’s not forget, who accommodated the exhibition Lacéré anonyme in his studio. Immersed for many years in the poetic and lettrist milieu, reading anthologies and attending recitals, J Villeglé, along with F. Dufrène, was influenced by the people he socialized with in developing the theme of La Lettre lacérée, which we could see as a symbolical way of transcribing the rhythm-cry. J. Villeglé collaborated directly with F. Dufrène by co-authoring La Baleine blanche (ripped poster on plywood, February 1958) to which the biographies written by Restany allude. Lastly, it was through F. Dufrène that J. Villeglé appropriated Carrefour Sèvres-Montparnasse, juillet 1961, one of his most significant early paintings, bought by the National Museum of Modern Art (Centre Pompidou) in 2002. During preparations for the second Biennale des Jeunes de Paris, F. Dufrène noticed a large palisade which had just been dismantled. He immediately warned his friend J. Villeglé who arrived to find a huge roll of posters on the pavement. Straight away, he took them to the exhibition room and submitted them as in situ works. By reassessing J. Villeglé’s position on the art scene of the 1950s and 1960s, and by going beyond the duality R. Hains / J. Villeglé, one can undoubtedly approach their practice in a renewed, broader way.

NOTES
1. The first in this series of exhibitions organized in collaboration with the Vallois gallery in Paris was entitled Jacques Villeglé : Mots – Affiches lacérées 1949-1996
2. Marcel Despard, Yvonne Mottet, Bernard Lys and Claude Makovski. First handed out on leaflets during the first Biennale des Jeunes de Paris, the manifesto was also printed in Le Journal de l’amateur d’art of December 10, 1959.
4. Ibid., p. 12
5. Jacques Villeglé has classified all of his ripped posters in a thematic catalogue raisonné, several volumes of which have been published by Marvel and Ides & Calendes editions.
6. The “Affichistes” file contains information – notes, interviews, exhibition catalogues, invitation cards, press releases, etc. – about the three French poster affichistes. The earliest sources go back to March 1960 and were probably put together when organizing the seminal
exhibition *Les Nouveaux Réalistes* at the Apollinaire gallery in Milan. Mimmo Rotella had not yet rallied the group; the fact that he joined New Realism only later in part explains why a separate file is specifically dedicated to him.

7. Published in *Luna Park*, n°6, Spring 2011, pp. 56-75


9. In conversation with the author (interview conducted in September 2012 at the artist’s studio in preparation for this article)


11. The rhythm-cry was invented by F. Dufrêne. It is a form of sound poetry created directly for the tape recorder, and which cannot be transcribed in writing on paper.