

CAC Brétigny

Playworlds, 2018-2022

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Press release [1–4]

Contemporary Art Center  
of National Interest  
Cœur d'Essonne Agglomération  
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Switchers  
Curator:  
Thomas Conchou

Opening  
Saturday October 1st,  
2:30-6:30 p.m.

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Free shuttle Paris-Brétigny  
available for the opening.  
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*Acorn*, a filmed play by Switchers, 40 min, video, 2021. Courtesy of the artists.

## “Playworlds, 2018-2022” Switchers

A survey of film, theatre, art and pedagogical projects.

Curator: Thomas Conchou

Works by Emanuel Almborg, Ksenia Pedan, Jamie Baker, Merlyn Hawthorne, Ellis Holt, Ruth Oshunkoya, Prince Owusu, Caitlin Williams, Mary Yekini in collaboration with: Buck Blake, Valentina Coley, Rhos Lapworth, Doridan Nahoum Bavangila, Priscila Siboko Bohe, Brandon Thorne, Liam Tooze, Edmund Wozencraft; from Paris/Brétigny: Agathe Barre, Sara Bouazzaoui, Loïc Hornecker, Yasmine Kicha, Shveta Lebonheur and Arsène Roy; from William Tyndale School, London: Eloise Alexander, Alfie Brennan, Sara Checchi, Gabi Constantine, Davide Diana, Julia Galassini, Theo Grinberg, Valentina Hernandez-Leonor.

The exhibition “Playworlds, 2018-2022” presents a series of works drawn from Switchers, a collaborative framework that combines visual arts, theatre, video and pedagogy, developed through worldbuilding and play. Switchers comprises an evolving network of artists, performers and young people from Hackney, London and Mid Powys, Wales. The group addresses social struggles, ownership, racism, issues faced by young people, using collective imagination to connect city and country. Switchers was first initiated by artist Emanuel Almborg as a youth theatre exchange in 2018 and has since developed into a series of extended and shifting artistic collaborations, generating new projects and works.

“Playworlds, 2018-2022” presents two new videos—one directed by Jamie Baker and produced by Almanac, London/Turin, another by Prince Owusu with young amateur artists from Brétigny, produced by CAC Brétigny—alongside collectively authored *Acorn* (2021) and Almborg’s *The Nth Degree* (2018). These films are installed within a scenographic installation created by the artist Ksenia Pedan, who previously produced set design for *Acorn*. The exhibition will also travel to Almanac Inn’s spaces in Turin in 2023.

*The Nth Degree* (2018) documents the initial youth theatre experiment that brought together young people from London and Wales. Convening to create theatre, the participants studied two historic moments: the peasant “Rebecca Riots” against land enclosure in 1840s in Wales and the 2011 London riots. The resulting film tackles issues of political violence and the distribution of wealth, reflecting on differences in class, race and access to property.

*Acorn* (2021) is a filmed play, devised by the same young people who took part in *The Nth Degree*. This project marked a shift in the group: the participants became Switchers, a collective in its own right. *Acorn*’s script was developed using a method inspired by the

“playworld” pedagogy of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, driven by improvisation and emotional experience. The film’s world and characters are borrowed from the novel *Parable of the Talents* by African American writer Octavia Butler set in a dystopian near future. *Acorn* recounts the experience of a small, rural community trying to survive by imagining new forms of collectivity in a world stricken by authoritarian rule and ecological crisis. The film is presented within Pedan’s installation, reminiscent of Acorn’s collective farm.

*Remnants*, directed by Jamie Baker, who first joined Switchers as an actor in *The Nth Degree* and *Acorn*, departs from the latter’s storyline in a collaboration with school children from London. In a future United Kingdom, several children develop a gift for “hyper-empathy” and can communicate emotions speechlessly through telepathy and movement. The film will present the hyper-empathetic choreographies and dance devised by Baker and the project’s participants.

Finally, as part of “Playworlds, 2018-2022”, Prince Owusu from Switchers, an actor in *The Nth Degree* and *Acorn*, will work with Sara Bouazzaoui, Loïc Hornecker, Yasmine Kicha and Shveta Lebonheur, students from Brétigny, to produce action-theatre workshops that will culminate in a new film. Participants of the workshops will be invited to reappropriate a monologue that Owusu performs in *The Nth Degree* describing the lived experience of a peasant in an oppressive feudal system.

The long duration of the Switchers project has enabled roles to change and progress. Through a shared learning experience, Almborg, the initiator, has moved from the role of artist to facilitator, with several of the young people that joined as actors now directing works.

Endowed with critical education tools and co-creation techniques, Switchers experiments with new ways of articulating the political questions of its members, addressing the need to produce futures that do not merely reproduce the present.

Switchers is a theatre/film group composed of a network of artists, performers and young people from Hackney, London and Mid Powys, Wales, initiated as a youth theatre exchange in 2018 by artist Emanuel Almborg. It seeks to link city and countryside through issues that young people face. It has since developed into an extended and shifting collaborative framework for artistic production based on *playworlds*. A *playworld* is a creative pedagogy that combines drama, narrative and play, based on a shared world of collectively created fiction. A world and characters are drawn from an existing source, such as a book or newspaper article. In this framework, groups and individuals can create and experiment with artistic production through a common space of imagination.

Thomas Conchou is a curator, co-founder of the curatorial collective Le Syndicat Magnifique (with Anna Frera, Victorine Grataloup and Carin Klonowski), member of the Curatorial Hotline collective and an art facilitator approved by the Fondation de France for the implementation of the New Patrons program. In 2020, he was a curator in residency at the art center Maison Populaire (Montreuil, France), an association for popular education and amateur practice, where he led a two-year cycle of exhibitions and events on queer artistic practices and relationships. In 2021, he was commissioner for the AWARE prize where he presented the work of Gaëlle Choisne, who won. In 2022, he joined the jury of the Utopi-e prize for queer artists, the selection committee of the Salon de Montrouge, and he is the guest curator for the first edition of The Koooples Art Prize. He is the recipient of the Textwork writing grant from the Pernod

Ricard Corporate Foundation, and curates exhibitions for the Sissi Club (Marseille, France) and the CAC Brétigny (Brétigny, France). He is appointed as the new director of the CAC de La Ferme du Buisson in July 2022.

The exhibition “Playworlds, 2018-2022” is supported by the Swedish Institute and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee. The work *Remnants* was produced in partnership with Almanac Projects (London) and Almanac Inn (Turin) with the support of Arts Council England, Fondazione CRT and Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo. The CAC Brétigny is a cultural establishment of Cœur d’Essonne Agglomération. Labeled as a Contemporary Art Center of National Interest, it benefits from the support of the Ministère de la Culture—DRAC Île-de-France, Région Île-de-France and Conseil départemental de l’Essonne, with the complicity of the Brétigny-sur-Orge’s municipality. CAC Brétigny is a member of TRAM and d.c.a.