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This Woman Could Sleep
in Water

Valentine Schlegel
by Hélène Bertin

30.09—09.12.17

Opening
Saturday 30 September at 5pm

Press release [1-2]



U+1F634-000
Sleeping Face

🐶🌍🗑️ le 20 Aout 81
nuit Solitaire à Terrisol.
Pour Anne. G. 🐶🗑️🗑️
Drawing

Valentine Schlegel
Black pencil on paper, 6 x 5 cm

Postcard
20.08.1981

The show “This Woman Could Sleep in Water” (*Cette femme pourrait dormir dans l’eau*) is the work of the artist Hélène Bertin. It springs from her research into the art of living and the art practice of Valentine Schlegel, which Bertin carried out with the earlier artist’s family and friends, students, and collectors. One of Schlegel’s fishermen friends, sizing up her ability to nap in almost any conceivable space unperturbed, came out with this expression from the coastal town of Sète to describe her serene attitude.

Born in 1925, Valentine Schlegel developed her constantly changing daily art practice between Paris and Sète. Like a Swiss Army knife, she eventually mastered several techniques, producing everyday objects with sculptural shapes that include wooden flatware, ceramic vases, leather bags, and plaster fireplaces. Designed without any inherent hierarchy, and often in collaboration with the artist’s friends, this body of work is made up of objects in a range of sizes and uses, from the fantastic to the quotidian. Schlegel also created many architectural elements in plaster intended for home interiors. Because of their immovable nature, these sculptures for everyday life are also the reason why Schlegel’s work has remained little known. If she did not address only the world of art exhibitions through her work, she was nevertheless part of historic events at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs at a time when the Pompidou Center did not exist.

Today, through Schlegel’s practice, Hélène Bertin seeks to highlight other addresses of art. The accompanying catalogue (edited by <o> future <o>) is a “monographic biography” devoted to Valentine Schlegel. The exhibition itself has been conceived in two parts. The first, the visual one, showcases a selection of the artist’s works. The second is “active” and punctuates the show with a series of participatory events, including a chestnut harvest, a Romertopf clay pot dinner, debates around the hearth featured in the show, and workshops for children, inspired by the teaching methods the artist developed in a series of “Workshops for Young People under 15” at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs.

Valentine Schlegel was born in 1925 in Sète. She studied at the fine arts school in Montpellier, where she began developing her long interest in the medium of drawing. She worked for the first Avignon festivals as an assistant costume designer, prop specialist, and eventually chief stage manager. In 1945 she went up to Paris and discovered ceramics with Frédérique Bourguet and later with her sister Andrée Vilar. In the early 1950s she struck out on her own and dreamed up a historic series of ceramics using the coil technique. Starting in 1960 she extended her passion for earthenware and the art of firing to include the design and construction of plaster chimneys, which she would pursue until the 2000s. Her work in the decorative arts exudes her native Mediterranean landscapes. In her spare time she has also experimented with the vernacular materials of Sète, i.e., wood and leather, which she worked on with her friends. Along with her output in the visual arts, she founded the clay modeling department for the “Workshops for Young People under 15” of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs of Paris, where she taught from 1958 to 1987. Through her invented teaching methods, she met three of her future assistants and exhibited several times at the museum.

Hélène Bertin was born in 1989 in the Luberon. She slowly and surely crossed France, studying the applied arts at secondary school in Lyon and subsequently at two fine arts schools, ENSBA Lyon and ENSAPC Paris-Cergy. At the end of her studies she settled between Paris and her native town of Cucuron. She has evolved an art practice that mixes the work of the artist, the curator, and the historian. When she is active as a sculptor, her objects have an everyday character that disappears within the space of the white cube. They must be experienced in the intimacy of the private sphere, such as the space of the studio, the home, or outdoors. Bertin has also been active in the art collective Plafond, with which she has shared moments of working together and exhibitions. With the installation of her studio in Cucuron, the “culinary workshop” is one of these areas of collective experimentation in which she and other artists come together around meals they create, eat, and digest together. Fully committed to her village, the artist recently organized her first group show in a natural wine vineyard. Bertin has been carrying out research for several years now on Valentine Schlegel, who, as a guide, introduced the younger artist to her free and original art practice.

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