

CAC Brétigny

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This Woman Could Sleep  
in Water

Valentine Schlegel  
by Hélène Bertin

30.09—09.12.17

Show opening  
Saturday 30 September, 5 pm

Press File [1–18]



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Cat

🐱👤🗓 le 20 Aout 81  
nuit Solitaire à Terrisol.  
Pour Anne. G. 🐱👤🗓  
Drawing

Valentine Schlegel  
Black pencil on paper, 4 × 3 cm

Postcard  
20.08.1981

Les pyromènes de Valentine Schlegel, by Hélène Bertin	3
Alterism: ouverture, by Céline Poulin	5
Biographies	7
Illustrated texts	8
<i>Valentine Schlegel: je dors, je travaille</i>	11
Events	13
The ABCC of CACB, by Charles Mazé & Coline Sunier	16
Citracit, by Adrien Guillet	17
General information	18

## Les pyromènes de Valentine Schlegel by Hélène Bertin

When I encountered the art of living that Valentine Schlegel developed, I understood it was possible to work differently. When Schlegel arrived in Paris, she found that the city was a grand salon where what she liked to live and experience was excluded. She used art as a tool for transforming interiors through one particular architectural element, i.e., the chimney. In 1960 the television set began its massive invasion of French homes. Going against the current, Schlegel began realizing her chimney pieces, to which she was to devote four decades of her art practice. Through the chimney, she was able to create a contemplative space thanks to light and colors, a magnetic space that draws people to it through heat. Her household sculptures are addictive comfort zones, which she raises to the level of special places of reverie, rest and relaxation, a point where people want to gather.

Inside her plaster sculptures painted white blend in with their surroundings. They seem like simple outgrowths of the walls. And when a fire is stirred up, the white curves give way to flaming images bathed in a red glow.

Taming fire is the gesture the artist has built her practice around. Her fascination with this primordial element first made itself felt in the girl scouts in France, when she discovered several ancient arts in fact. Later she studied a number of techniques and media at the fine-arts school in Montpellier, where she was especially taken with painting. It was this work that initially brought her attention at Avignon's first theater festivals, where she was in charge of painting sets. In 1945 the artist began living between Paris and Sète, for the freedom in terms of behavior and lifestyles and the artistic life of former, and her attachment to her native region and the folklore of the latter. In the south she produced wooden cutlery and leather bags; in the north she made ceramics and chimneys. Her two studios in Sète and Paris allowed her to develop a creative character by shaping and molding interiors. Going up to Paris, she missed the south and developed the basis of her style from her memories of the Mediterranean Sea.

The practical is Valentine Schlegel's familiar field of activity then. Very early on she was surrounded by people practicing manual trades. The artisanal became a sea on which she approached different techniques like saddlery, embroidery, and pottery. This passion for objects in contact with the body, objects of the senses, took aim at her earthy side. As someone who loves life, she has spent her free time gardening, cooking, sailing, and loving. Schlegel developed an independent source of income by becoming in 1958 the first professor of clay modeling at the "Fifteen-and-Under Workshops" at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs while also selling her sculptures to art buyers. The children's workshops enabled her to pass on her work process. Observing natural forms like shells, seaside shingle and pebbles, aloe plants, and bulbs, she extracted from them their movement in order to scatter them throughout her own pieces. One after the other, parents of children attending the workshops, the museum curators, visitors to the museum, and her own friends and family

began commissioning works from her. In each case she would invent singular chimneys for these individuals, paying special attention to each of her eventual clients.

Such independence also allowed her to find satisfaction in her work outside of the art circuit of the day and to remain independent of it. She did take part in several shows, however, but kept a wary distance with respect to exhibition galleries, preferring intimate private spaces. She lives alone, still surrounded by her friends, her sharpeners of form. Valentine Schlegel never sought real recognition from the art milieu but she has been able to remain quite demanding with respect to her forms. The immovable nature of many of her sculptures is also a reason why her work has remained little known.

Today, through this artist's practice, I am looking to point up the importance of other art addresses. If nowadays works of art are almost solely on view within the framework of the art exhibition, they can also be seen at a friend's home, on a belt, or in the course of one's travels.

## Alterism: opening by Céline Poulin

Having discovered Hélène Bertin's work while she was still a student, I have followed the emergence of her research around the figure of Valentine Schlegel, research that has grown in importance year after year to eventually become a true immersion in the work, life story and daily existence of Valentine Schlegel and her friends and family.

This investigation of one artist by another, this projection of one on the other, was to yield a book, and I invited Hélène to play with the idea of a show. The book and the exhibition then are the two sides of the same medallion, perhaps the same cameo, one long lasting, the other temporary, but both telling us about Valentine and Hélène, their respective work, inseparable from their ways—so like one another—to envision life in its everyday reality.

“Cette femme pourrait dormir dans l'eau” (This Woman Could Sleep in Water) opens the Alterism exhibition cycle that will play out over two seasons at CAC Brétigny.

### Alterism

When Roland Barthes wrote “Martians” for *Mythologies*, he was dumbfounded by the way his era imagined life on Mars. Earthlings appropriated the planet by projecting their own customs and beliefs on it. Basing Martian life on the myth of the identical other, the double, they rejected any questioning of their usual logic via the intrusion of a true alterity.

Identity and otherness, the two notions are inseparable, and the helpless confusion of one seems to correspond to the radicalization of the other. Indeed, encountering otherness means above all questioning one's own identity and thus the appearance of the other in oneself. This is the reason why, as Barthes puts it, otherness is the concept that is the most antithetical to “common sense.” It involves interrogating prerequisites and facile thinking, making a genuine construction of knowledge possible.

Like a guiding light, Barthes's analysis shows us the way to make alterism our way of thinking, following two principles. Knowledge is on the side of the other and alterity is above all in oneself.

Existence cannot be resolved by withdrawing into oneself and finding deep inside an identity that is “already there” and which knowledge simply brings out; rather it takes the Other, looming up unexpectedly. Knowledge of otherness as something that brings about the collapse of the illusory identity in which the subject is confined, and at the same time knowledge of the identity that that otherness presupposes. Such knowledge is knowledge of the world.

Thus, in contrast with “common sense,” alterism favors misunderstanding and the multiplicity of interpretations. It is not that there is no reality or even truth, which for certain people is the same thing (“All that is real is rational,” Hegel states), but because fantasy and fiction are actively involved in and components of the real. The object is just as real as feeling, emotions sparked by the object, or even the perception of the object itself.

Hence the importance of emotions.

Hence the importance of feelings and emotional representations in the construction of knowledge, whether historical or no.

To be the driving force of one’s own history, one’s own narrative, becomes fundamental here. So it is a matter of locating objectivity on the side of the object (Goffman) and expressing the emotional representations of both the object and the person engaged in the search. And thus give voice to the document, the object as lyrical subject.

The 2017-2019 seasons of CAC Brétigny are going to develop all of these aspects of alterism with our program of exhibitions, special events, workshops, and research seminars.

## Biographies

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, the École des beaux arts of Lyon and the École des beaux arts of 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.

## Illustrated texts



Valentine Schlegel, *Chimney*, Arles, 1981. Photo: © H       Bertin.

“My first chimney was built so I had a spot to pose my flower vase. A chimney basically presents the same problem as a flower vase. The latter is built around a void and a chimney is built around a hollow. Once you’ve removed its traditional envelope, you are facing a black hearth, a hollow. What I tried to do around that hollow was to stretch out the walls and make them into shelves on which to set my vases and other objects, or make them into wood chests, or make them into benches. What I love in this technique for extending and energizing walls is its constructed, integrated aspect that forms a whole with the rest of the house, which has an eternal side to it—unless you go at it with a pick, it’s always a faux eternal aspect, the caveman aspect. If I could cut my chimneys and houses from rock, I would do it but I can’t, so I build the other way around as if it were indeed carved out of the block, and I am immensely happy.”

Transcript of an excerpt from a documentary commissioned by French television on the 1962 exhibition “Antagonismes 2: L’Objet”, Mus       des Arts D      ratifs, Paris, during which Valentine Schlegel presented a 1:1 scale version of one of her chimneys.



Collection of knives, Paris, 2017. Photo: © Hélène Bertin.

"I was a ceramist, I am a sculptor, sailor, fisherman, gardener  
The knife – an all-purpose tool – arm  
You have to nail them down if you don't want to lose them  
They become wise fish  
They come via my friends. I've never given coins with holes in them and I have lots of  
friends."

Exhibition catalogue, "Ils collectionnent" Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 1974.



Valentine Schlegel, *Les trois ours*, 1955, FNAC 1021, Centre national des arts plastiques. Photo: © Agnès Varda.

“I didn’t like contemporary pottery. The finest pots were painted in pictures, by Braque, for instance, with a novel freedom. I thought it was up to sculptors to invent pots and I asked myself, How would a sculptor fashion a pot? A pot is designed to hold flowers. Without flowers, it’s nothing. To have a life of its own, it must also be a sculpture.”

Interview with Yvonne Brunhammer in the catalogue of the exhibition “Valentine Schlegel, Cheminées/Sculptures à vivre, 1964-1975”, 1975, Paris, La Demeure (editor).

*Valentine Schlegel: je dors, je travaille*

Joint publication of &lt;o&gt; future &lt;o&gt; and CAC Brétigny



*Valentine Schlegel: je dors, je travaille*, book cover, <o> future <o>. Design: Charles Mazé & Coline Sunier.

The exhibition catalogue *Je dors, je travaille* (I’m Sleeping, I’m Working) is jointly published by <o> future <o> and CAC Brétigny. This “bio-monograph” includes new iconography and archival material. Biographical notes written by Hélène Bertin punctuate the book and provide readers with a clearer picture of both Schlegel and her approach.

The catalogue’s published form was designed in close collaboration with <o> future <o>, a publishing house that brings together the critics and art historians François Aubart, Jérôme Dupeyrat, and Camille Pageard, along with the graphic designers Charles Mazé & Coline Sunier.

Thanks to an extensive iconography of some 300 select images (150 archival images and 150 photographs of Hélène Bertin), this unique monograph catalogues all of the chimneys that Valentine Schlegel has produced (some one hundred between 1959 and 2002). The other facets of the artist’s work are also examined in order to grasp her practice as a

whole, which is closely linked to the way she has chosen to live her life, where questions of independence and friendship are fundamental.

On the door of Valentine Schlegel's studio in Sète hangs a reversible two-sided sign: "I'm sleeping" and "I'm working". These two "activities", which summarize both Schlegel's life and work, shouldn't be viewed as opposites but as being inseparable from one another. Indeed, they serve as a structure for the publication. Besides the chronology that runs throughout the book, covering fifty years of artistic activities, the iconography makes Schlegel's personal and professional lifestyle choices visually spring out through a "je dors/ je travaille" page structure.

A timetable retraces the evolution of her body of work. Each page of the book then can be viewed as a day, where making a wooden kitchen utensil for mixing jam, having a nap in a specially designed sleeping compartment, creating a plaster chimney for a collector's house or whistle in the shape of a siren as a gift for a friend are tokens of a total daily art-making practice, devoid of any hierarchical order yet corresponding to a sure logic, that of creating one's own living conditions.

*Valentine Schlegel: je dors, je travaille*

Editorial conception: Hélène Bertin, Charles Mazé & Coline Sunier, <o> future <o>

Texts: Hélène Bertin

Graphic design: Charles Mazé & Coline Sunier

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35€

## Special events and debates

Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 September 2017

3 pm

“Objets Cueillis” (Hand-picked Objects), as part of the “Butterfly” Weekend of Théâtre Brétigny

“Objets Cueillis” is a sun-print workshop. Using plants picked by the children themselves in the field adjoining the art center, the young participants will dream up compositions that we will print on paper covered with a photosensitive liquid.

For further information: [www.theatrebretigny.com](http://www.theatrebretigny.com)

Saturday 30 September 2017

5 pm—9 pm

Show opening (5 pm), Provençal *tielles* and music (from 7 pm on)

Opening day will be celebrated with *tielles*, a traditional dish from the Provençal town of Sète. When they put out to sea fishermen of the area would take with them this pie made of squid and octopus. The food will be prepared by Hélène Bertin and her friends, while César Chevalier will put together the playlist of traditional Provençal music.

*Sète is Valentine Schlegel home town; she spent her school holidays there when she wasn't teaching how to model clay at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. She hasn't lost her regional accent, regularly attends the town's traditional joutes (boat contests), dines with her friends who still practice dragnet fishing, produces practical everyday objects using common materials, and sports the clothes typically worn by sailors from the region.*

Free Paris-Brétigny shuttle is available by request at [reservation@cacbretigny.com](mailto:reservation@cacbretigny.com).

Pick-up at 5.45 pm at 104 avenue de France, 75013 Paris (the Bibliothèque François Mitterrand metro stop).

Saturday 28 October 2017

2.30 pm

Lecture-chestnuts

We will first have a look at one of Valentine Schlegel's chimneys in a private house, then gather chestnuts at Gif-sur-Yvette. We will return to roast the chestnuts in the Valentine Schlegel chimney at CAC Brétigny while listening to Marie-Laure Lapeyrère's lecture on François Mathey, *L'art vivant au musée, François Mathey (conservateur) invente le musée d'art contemporain*.

*François Mathey (1917-1993), the head curator of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs hired Valentine Schlegel as a professor of modeling in clay and other materials for the decorative arts museum's "Fifteen-and-Under Workshops", and over the years invited the artist to show in four exhibitions ("Antagonismes 2 : L'Objet", 1962; "Ils collectionnent", 1974; "Artiste, Artisan", 1977; and "Les métiers d'art", 1980). He also allowed Schlegel to accept a number of commissions for liturgical furnishing by various places of worship.*

3 pm: shuttle leaves from Paris\*

3.15 pm: shuttle leaves from Brétigny\*

18h: lecture by Marie-Laure Lapeyrière

\*Free shuttle is available by request at [reservation@cacbretigny.com](mailto:reservation@cacbretigny.com), within the limits of available seats.

Saturday 2 December 2017

7 pm

Lecture & clay-pot dinner

The design specialist Pierre Doze will give a lecture entitled *L'errata ajouté à l'histoire des arts par Pierre Staudenmeyer (galeriste)*, which will be followed by a clay-pot dinner with steamed dishes. A menu of red cabbage, goulash, and candied apple and pear will be served.

*The gallerist Pierre Staudenmeyer (1953-2007) was the cofounder of both the Néotù Gallery and galerie mouvements modernes, and the author of La céramique française des années 50 (2004), a work which features the vases Valentine Schlegel produced using the coiling technique. Staudenmeyer exhibited these bulbous sculptures at his gallery in 2005 before all the artist's large ceramics produced between 1954 and 1959 were dispersed.*

Reservations are a must for the dinner and seating is limited: [reservation@cacbretigny.com](mailto:reservation@cacbretigny.com)

Saturday 9 December 2017

3.30 pm

Lecture-tea

On the final day of the show we will have the chance to listen to the collector Pascal Marziano speak about the history of his collection of ceramics while we enjoy herbal teas brewed from plants picked in Provence.

*Pascal Marziano began assembling his collection of ceramics from the postwar boom years in 2005. He started by selling his stamp collection and changed the object of his obsession. Today he possesses one of the great collections of ceramics with every purchase a story in itself, like the salad bowl by Valentine Schlegel or one of Elisabeth Joulia's pieces. These two artists were friends and showed their work in 1955 at Galerie La Roue as part of the*

*exhibition “Abstraction et Poteries usuelles” (Abstraction and Everyday Pottery). It was in this show that Valentine Schlegel first exhibited her large vases.*

The “Taxitram” shuttle route: Monnaie de Paris—CAC Brétigny—Immanence.  
For further information and reservations: [taxitram@tram-idf.fr](mailto:taxitram@tram-idf.fr) / 01 53 34 64 43

Wednesdays (04.10—06.12.17)  
2.30-3.30 pm and 4.30-5.30 pm  
“*Les guetteurs*”, artmaking workshops

Children are invited to imagine a useful clay object based on objects picked up around the art center.











The found objects usually range from pebbles and chestnut burrs to plane tree bark and fig leaves. Then, on the long table at the art center they will create practical objects like ceramic candlesticks or plates.

For further information and reservations: [reservation@cacbretigny.com](mailto:reservation@cacbretigny.com) / 01 60 85 20 76 or 01 60 85 20 78

## The ABCC of CACB

by Charles Mazé & Coline Sunier

In a text Valentine Schlegel wrote for a movie's scenario which aimed to present her work, she draws a list of various actions, without any hierarchy: "I pound the clay / I pose the plaster / I dig into the wall / I dig into the earth / I nail down leather / I cut wood / I row / I throw a clay pot / I make jams / I sculpt wood / I row / I put on my clodhoppers / I twist a rope barefoot . the beach / I plant something / I cut back the trees / I peel something / I pick up everything (on the beach) / I embroider."

In conjunction with the "Cette femme pourrait dormir dans l'eau" show, the collection of character-signs LARA\* has grown to include elements from Valentine Schlegel's varied output. The set of character-signs describe, as Valentine Schlegel does in the excerpt quoted above, the different activities she might engage in over the course of a day, e.g. sleeping, with a self-portrait as a sleeping figure , or a dozing cat ; eating, with a series of cutlery and kitchen utensils ; collecting, with a series of knives , which she had an amazing number of; working, with some of the chimneys  and vases  she created; picking, with a slip-coated earthenware piece by Andrée Vilar depicting a hand holding a flower ; giving, with multiple objects like siren-shaped whistles , greeting cards , and embroidered ships , which she produced for her friends and family.

Coline Sunier & Charles Mazé are Swiss and French graphic and type designers, they have been living and working in Brussels since 2009. They were fellows at the French Academy in Rome—Villa Medici in 2014–2015, and are now graphic designers in residency at CAC Brétigny, in the southern suburbs of Paris.

\*As part of their residency, Coline Sunier & Charles Mazé create an alphabet based on a collection of letters, signs, and symbols from a variety of contexts and time frames involving both CAC Brétigny and the larger territory covered by the art center, as well as artists invited to exhibit their work. This corpus is now embodied in a new typography called LARA. LARA has been activated on each communication supports, which are considered publication and dissemination points for the collection. The alphabet is online at [www.cacbretigny.com/en/lara](http://www.cacbretigny.com/en/lara).

## Citracit

by Adrien Guillet

In partnership with Théâtre Brétigny

Running parallel with “Cette femme pourrait dormir dans l’eau” and in a coproduction with Théâtre Brétigny, Adrien Guillet is showing work on the patio and in the hall of the theater. From 22 September to 13 December, he will present *Citracit*, his response to the theme chosen by Théâtre Brétigny for the first part of the season, “L’Effet Papillon” (Butterfly Effect).

Citracit (Compagnie transafricaine Citroën) is the name of a travel agency launched by the French automobile maker Citroën that was supposed to link Paris and Timbuktu but never saw the light of day. Considerable effort was later made to wipe out every trace of the project.

Fascinated by the avant-garde publicity strategies of André Citroën and the aura of mystery that surrounds the failure of this tourist venture, the artist Adrien Guillet offers us a bit of alternate history in the form of a shop selling souvenir gifts, [www.citracit.fr](http://www.citracit.fr). This shop brings together a collection of objects (ceramic sculptures, wooden masks, collages, clothing and accessories) that would have been sold in the boutiques and stores in the hotels run by this tour operator.

A graduate of HEAD in Geneva with a master’s degree in Contemporary Art Practices, Adrien Guillet has recently shown his work in the exhibitions “Emporium of Benevolent Data” (Corner College, Zurich) and “L’agence de Voyage Citracit” (Indice 50, Paris). His experiments have taken a theoretical and visual turn via painting, sculpture, publishing, and installation work. He draws on a number of areas simultaneously, semiology, philosophy, marketing, and economics to shed light on the almost cultural relationship we have with form.

For further information about Théâtre Brétigny’s programme: [www.theatre-bretigny.fr](http://www.theatre-bretigny.fr)

## General information

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Free admission.

Open from Tuesday to Saturday, 2 pm–6 pm, and the last Sunday of the exhibition.

Closed on 1 November.

Late openings during evening performances at Théâtre Brétigny.

By RER C from Paris (30 minutes):

Every 15 minutes, trains BALI, DEBA, DEBO, to Dourdan and Saint-Martin d'Étampes, the Brétigny stop.

From Brétigny station, follow the direction of Espace Jules Verne, take boulevard de la République, continue on Pl. Chevrier, take slightly to the right on rue Danielle Casanova, and at the rotary take the first exit to rue Henri Douard.

By car:

From Paris: A6 toward Lyon, exit Viry-Châtillon, Fleury-Mérogis, then Brétigny Centre.

From Evry: Francilienne toward Versailles, exit 39B, toward Brétigny.

From Versailles: Francilienne toward Evry, exit Brétigny centre.

For car-sharing, join the group "BLABLACAC(B)" on Facebook.

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