

Louise Hervé & Chloé Maillet — *The Iguana*

Foreword

"Time passes so slowly for me I think I shall last forever."

Crédac's regular visitors will recall Louise Hervé & Chloé Maillet from *L'Homme de Vitruve* (Vitruvian Man), the 2012 group show that also included the work of this artist duo. It was our first time working with the two and they exhibited a selection of objects that had once belonged to Maurice Thorez (leader of the French Communist Party from 1930 to 1964 and member of France's National Assembly from Ivry). The collection is normally conserved in Ivry's Municipal Archives. The man who entitled his autobiography *Fils du Peuple* (Son of the People) and claimed that the book was a tool for emancipation became the starting point of both a science fiction story, *L'un de nous doit disparaître* (One of Us Must Disappear) and a performance piece, which was produced by Crédac for the occasion.

Our interest in their work has not waned since and we have closely followed the direction their research has taken. The current invitation is premised on putting together an anthology-like exhibition to underscore the breadth and depth of the two artists' creative process. Hervé and Maillet are presenting part of their latest undertaking while also revisiting a selection of their earlier pieces, which they have reconceived in new displays to show them in a different light. The duo wanted to articulate the show in two acts, *La Salle sans nom* (The Nameless Gallery) and *Rien n'est dit* (Nothing Is Said), comprising a retrospective program of medium-length films (part of *Crédakino*) and performances, which are scheduled for the exhibition's entire run.

L'Iguane (The Iguana) is the display of a method. Is it because one of the artists is a graduate of the art school of Cergy and the other holds a doctorate in historical anthropology from EHESS that they go about imagining their work in a singular way? They explore episodes taken from

history such as Pythagorean instruction, the holidays and fraternal songs of the Saint-Simonians, or the practice of jiu-jitsu by suffragettes, drawing from them points for thinking about the engines of social revolution and the ways knowledge is transmitted. These elements lend themselves well to being reenacted or reconstructed, and the artists combine them with fictional and historical narratives. Throughout there appears as well a genealogy of their own practice, along with a questioning of the present age.

The overall design of the display they have created recalls their "reasonable interest in the diorama" and illusionistic devices that are animated by projected and synchronized images. The display elements they deploy suggest both the theater, in a concept in which actor and viewer share the same space, and mystery, through references to magic and esoteric initiations. And yet the two artists also leave the back of the décor on view for all to see and reserve certain concealed zones that open onto the landscape.

In a museum-like space, Louise Hervé & Chloé Maillet feature an imaginary collection of works that run from the early 20th century to today, which Fleury-Joseph Crépin, Madge Gill, Alexandro Garcia, and Augustin Lesage supposedly created under the influence of spirits and extraterrestrial entities that they maintained had lavished visions and technical advice on them. Hervé and Maillet also tried their hand at the same experience, producing facsimiles while guided by the kindly "spirits" of their entourage. This is in fact their latest project, developed in Northern France and Belgium. They have created links between Fourierist architecture, the spiritualist's art, and a strange encounter with an iguana, the reptile that gives its name – an enigmatic title to say the least – to both the show and a film now being shot, an initial three-minute excerpt of which is included in the exhibition.

An open window in the space affords us a glimpse of an unnamed room, a parallel

area whose hidden door can only be entered by the public during performances. Isn't this also a kind of staging that blurs the borders between the space of the illusion and what lies behind the scenes, scientific reconstruction and entertainment, knowledge and the marvelous?

For several years now Louise Hervé & Chloé Maillet have been conjuring up the iguana, whose relationship to time differs from ours. Through its eyes, retrospection can be anchored in the present as much as it can constitute a view that looks to the future. This antediluvian animal, almost stonelike with its usually slight, practically imperceptible movements, mirrors the artists' interest in the living as a vestige of a time that is not altogether past.

« In a café near the port of Dunkirk lives an iguana. We met it a few years ago.. We were staying in the youth hostel between the beach and the port, which was then hosting the annual illusion congress; dozens of magicians were rehearsing their acts, sporting amulets around their necks. We were the only people incapable of doing magic tricks. That evening we were eating at the café with a sailor. The iguana stared at us for a long time. It moved only a little, so precisely and slowly that our human gestures appeared disordered. The iguana moves in another dimension, we thought, where time is slowed down and perceptions are modified. Perhaps it is always living in the future. »

Claire Le Restif et Sébastien Martins
Curators of the show

Louise Hervé & Chloé Maillet are represented by Marcelle Alix gallery, Paris.

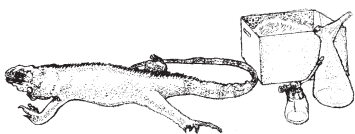
Room 1 *The Iguana*

This show within the show is made up of borrowed works, artifacts created by the artists as imitations “under the influence of,” and an excerpt of their new film called *L'Iguane* (The Iguana).

The project became something essential for the artists over a series of encounters and experiments that seemed unusual to them in altogether ordinary situations in Northern France and Belgium. That is, during a visit to the Laeken Familistère, a utopian collective dwelling dating back to the 1880s, for a performance among the collections of outsider art of the LaM in Villeneuve-d'Ascq; during a meeting at Brussels' Surnateum; and during a stay in Dunkirk, at one point standing before an iguana that was patiently observing the harbor from the front window of a café. Through these moments the artists “experienced an immersion in fiction.”

Running through the works of the collection brought together here is a message of improving the world, even of resolving conflict. The notion of the author, the creator, is fairly hard to define and willfully confused. The duo play out in this way the “influenced” creativity experienced by spiritualist mediums. Like the male and female artists featured in the show, Hervé and Mailliet draw and paint reproductions while making plain that they are doing them under the direction of enlightened spirits – the very ones that saw themselves, not as the creators behind the work, but as simple messengers.

With pieces notably produced by workers who were active in spiritualist circles of the mining region around Lille in the early 20th century, Hervé and Mailliet assert the links that were once rather tenuous between spiritualism and social utopias. The origins of many of these works go back to the plot of science fiction stories in hypothetical worlds populating the solar system.



Room 2 *Spectacles without an object*

Conceived as an alternative history of the performance, *Spectacles without an Object* focuses on different moments where performance and utopia come together, when the only possible spectacle is that in which each person is what she or he is. That is, there are no actors, no viewers, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau fervently called for when he publicly denounced the theater in his famous letter to D'Alembert (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Letter to M. d'Alembert on Spectacles*, 1758).

The project explores several episodes of this genealogy of the 18th and 19th centuries, i.e., the spectacle holidays celebrating the heroes and ideals of the French Revolution mounted by the painter Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825); the sect of the Méditateurs (also known as the Barbus, or Bearded Ones, and the Primitives), founded by a group of dissident students from David's studio who radicalized a neoclassical perspective on the revival of Antiquity in both their painting and their lifestyle; and everyday industrialist spectacles of the progressive Saint-Simonian community founded in Ménilmontant in 1830. These historical movements extolling the values of renewal found their fulfillment in that era of public performances, whether they were matter-of-fact or celebratory.

Similar to the methodology tried and tested during earlier projects, *Spectacles sans objet* is a film built around a series of performances and reenactments done in several places that are connected with the history of these utopian, revolutionary, or marginal communities. The film draws on both research begun at the Enfantin Collection of the Bibliothèque de l'Arse-nal in Paris, and location scouting carried out at famous sites of Fourierism, from the Ménage sociétaire of Condé-sur-Vesgre to the Familistère of Guise.

This composite story is presented as a synchronized piece that borrows from the tools and processes of proto-cinema. The installation shows an original version of the project on a scale that is commensurate with the site. The soundtrack is provided by the vocal group Camera Sei, which performs Saint-Simonian songs composed by Félicien David, one of the thinker's disciples, who set some of the key episodes of their public life to music.

Room 3 *Pythagoras & the monsters*

In this gallery, Louise Hervé & Chloé Mailliet propose a trip back in time, starting with the golden age of the Italian sword-and-sandal movies of the 1950s-1970s and going back to the origins of esotericism in ancient Greece. Taking off from his mythology, the two artists explore the many facets of the life of Pythagoras (6th century BCE).

While everyone knows the ancient Greek's famous theorem in geometry, his personal traits, written down a number of centuries after his death by the philosopher Iamblichus (250-330) in his *Life of Pythagoras*, are more obscure and play a part in the construction of a historical and mythological continuity running from Orpheus through Pythagoras to Plato. These stories, still popular and widely known into the 17th century, are revived here as a peplum movie that holds its own and then some with respect to the popular Italian movie character Maciste. The poster for the movie *Pythagoras and the Monsters* openly references Maciste, who appeared on screen for the first time in the 1914 film *Cabiria*. This Roman bodyguard, who was not limited to any one time or place, appeared in a whole series of movies glorifying him and highlighting his athletic abilities. Like Pythagoras, he, too, descended to hell to do battle with monsters and is credited with the most tremendous exploits. The flexibility of the character allowed Maciste to spring up in many situations and potentially fight for any and all causes.

The two parts of the film, shot in Super 8 and screening one after the other, summon the visitor to follow the adventures of the man who, possessed of a golden thigh, was twice champion of the ancient Olympic Games. While the philosophy of Pythagoras is rarely on view, his adventures are largely present here, appearing again and again in scenes that mix the fantastic and the extraordinary.

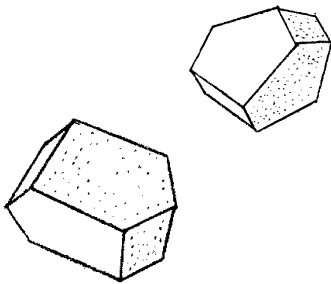
In the Pythagorean sect, the curtain symbolizes the passage from ignorance to knowledge. As candidates for initiation, the exoterics were auditors who remained in front of the curtain. The esoterics were the initiated; figuring among the knowledgeable they listened to Pythagoras from behind the curtain, admitted to see the great thinker after having observed silence for five years.

The Unnamed Room

Dear visitors, this room is opened solely during performances, whose schedule is indicated below. Objects that may give rise to a performance are stored there.

Associated with an undefined time and place, the performances of Louise Hervé & Chloé Maillet, which they delegate to others on occasion, have been rewritten and are being performed in a venue that is devoted to the exhibition called *L'Iguane*.

The room owes its name to the University of Leeds and a room called *the Unnamed Room*, which was the starting point for a 2017 performance evoking the long history of feminism, Saint-Simonians, the socialist and theosophist Annie Besant, and the martial arts practices of British suffragettes. It also echoes a visit the artists made to Sir John Soane's Museum in London, where a guard, at his discretion, can give access to part of the collection that is ordinarily invisible to the public.



Acte^I Thie Iguana : *The Unnamed Room*

**- from 21 January
to 18 february -**

— **Performances** —

The Woman Engineer Who Tried to Transport Stones, 2014-2018

Performance conceived for
le Grand Café - St-Nagaire -
Centre d'art contemporain ;
concrete blocks, wooden logs.

Every day from Tuesday to Sunday

In 1979, a team of prehistorians tried to recreate how the megaliths forming the Bougon tumulus (5th millennium BCE) were transported. The team of 200 persons was able to move the stone a few meters only. But they have an unforgettable memory of the party the effort inspired.

Le Phalanstère de Mars, 2015-2018

Performance conceived for LaM
Lille Métropole Musée d'art moderne,
d'art contemporain et d'art brut,
Villeneuve d'Ascq.

Every Saturday at 3pm and 5pm

Does Uranus harbor a utopian, egalitarian society? That is what a medium suggests to a group of late-19th-century revolutionaries during the Spiritism craze. Spirits travel from one planet to the next perfecting themselves until they form harmonious communities. Certain artists, painters and mediums said they could communicate with these outer worlds and brought back from their spiritual trips fantastic descriptions, Martian landscapes, extraterrestrial languages, and protective paintings.

The Unnamed Room, 2017-2018

Performance conceived for Pavilion and
Université of Leeds, UK ;
ground sheet.

Saturday 17 February at 4pm

In the 1830s, Saint-Simonians prophesized equality between men and women. At the turn of the 20th century, Edith Garrud, a ju-jitsu master in London, suggested overcoming time through flexi-

bility while waiting for that equality to arrive, "*Let's use knowledge or if not, ju-jitsu.*"

Larry, 2015-2018

Performance ; imitation of a
saint-simonian vest. Private collection.

Every Sunday at 3 and 5pm

In the early 1830s Saint-Simonians decided to change the world through performance while waiting for the revolution to occur on earth. They envisioned major engineering works in humanity's future.

— **Films** —
screened in *Crédakino*

A Waterway, 2014

23 min.

Certain sea creatures like the lobster may be immortal. In the future will humans be able to transform themselves rather than grow old? Hypotheses: off a seaside resort amateur archeologists dive to old shipwrecks and attempt to preserve their underwater discoveries from the ravages of time. In a more or less similar coastal city, a health-care institute offers their clients the chance to take advantage of the benefits of the sea to rejuvenate their aging bodies, while at the old bathhouse a mysterious group of retirees form a club whose main objective is to achieve eternal life.

An Important project, 2009

38 min.

In an unspecified future, the ChoSE corporation has specialized in implanting virtual memories in the human cortex. The demand for memories focuses mostly on sports, which have become the main – maybe the only – sphere of interest. M. Caille, one of their clients, insists on going to the Moon, a tourist destination that is quite disreputable ever since the Lunar Tennis Club set itself up as an autocratic autonomous territory. Both the employees of ChoSE and the inhabitants of the Moon wield disinformation, brain surgery and rumors of epidemics in the service of the bitter competition between the directors of the various sports clubs.

Acte II

The Iguana : Nothing is Said

- From 20 February
to 25 March -

— Performances —

The Woman Engineer Who Tried to Transport Stones, 2014-2018

Every day from Tuesday to Sunday

The Answer, 2015-2018

Performance conceived for
Whitechapel Gallery, London ;
interpreter's wand

Every Saturday at 3pm and 5pm
(except 24 March)

Like art history in the first decades of the 21st century, sci-fi movies have dramatized the sensory link that is maintained with certain works of art. If it is the same emotion that both drives humanity to admire images as to destroy them, one can find keys that explain certain scandals of the past and point forward to our lives in the future.

Nihil dictum quin prius dictum (Nothing Has Been Said That Has Not Been Said Before), 2013-2018

Performance conceived for the group
show *Le Tamis et le Sable* at Maison
Populaire, Montreuil ; marble shards.

Saturday 24 March at 4pm

Perhaps the mosaic was created from the debris left after the construction of the building's walls. When construction was over, small pieces of stone and marble were picked up from the ground; they became the material for a magnificent new decor.

One of Us Must Disappear, 2012-2018

Performance conceived for the group
show *L'Homme de Vitruve* at Crédac ;
objects from Thorez-Vermeersch
collection / Municipal Archives of Ivry.
Every Sunday at 3 and 5pm

In a film from 1937, we see Maurice Thorez through his window overlooking the city of Ivry. His bestseller titled *Fils du peuple* is lying on the table. We know that glass flows but we don't see it because that takes a long time, as long as the universe lasts. The city, too, flows and its apparent disorder is the condition of its transparency.

Metal paperweights.

Gift from J. Holtzer cells. Firminy section.
Fils du peuple (1949) of Maurice Thorez. Illustrations executed by the donor Charles Rouquet, Section Cahors.

— Films —

screened in *Crédakino*

A Reconstruction and an Underground Area, 2011 19 min.

In the underground reserves of a museum, two women speakers on a break excitedly talk about the inventiveness of archeological museography. An archeologist on a dig somewhere, standing before the trenches and the idle excavators, describes artifacts, using these simple objects to imagine an entire civilization rising from the ground up. Much further on a young woman confined in an underground area of some sort gives free rein to her terror-stricken fantasies. The limit between what belongs to the past and to the future is beginning to fade away.

What we know..., 2007 44 min.

In an undetermined future the family of Jakub Schorman is peacefully living in an apartment-bunker that is supplied from a distance by various sprawling companies. The family fears an invasion by extraterrestrials.

Interpreters of the performances:
Louise Hervé & Chloé Maillet,
Guilhem Chabas, Grégoire Meschia,
David Perreard, Julija Steponaityte

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