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C'EST QUI T'IMPORTE
DANS UNE TECHNIQUE
C'EST DE NE PAS
LA MAÎTRISER
JEAN DUBUFFET

It all began, as always, with an anonymous piece of graffiti that **Jacques Villeglé** discovered on February 28th 1969, precisely on the wall of a corridor in the République metro station. This graffiti represented the name of the American president Nixon, who was then visiting Paris, with the three arrows of the former Socialist party for the N, a Cross of Lorraine for the I, a swastika for the X and a Celtic cross inside the circle of the Jeune Nation movement for the O. Jacques Villeglé memorised it, as he memorised all of the unique pieces of writing which he came upon subsequently (cultural, street, and writers' alphabets) and which, combined, became the source material for his constantly evolving socio-political alphabet, the matrix of drawings and writings to come.

"You can make a painting with a page of writing". Jacques Villeglé never forgot this sentence by Picasso which he read aged 21 and which has accompanied him ever since. With the socio-political alphabets, which he has been essentially focused on since 2000, the "father of graffiti artists" transforms writing into images, in his own way. His texts and alphabets are simultaneously graphic, poetic, and visual works. The sequence of signs and symbols is as important as the whole they belong to - a set that speaks to all of the senses, left and right brain included. The reading of the phrases and aphorisms borrowed from others and drawn, transposed and transcribed on paper, canvas, etc, is a kind of sight-reading, decoding, deciphering. Jacques Villeglé, amateur of typography, graphism and cryptography (a term that featured in his agenda, exactly on February 21st 1958), takes pleasure, with the socio-political alphabet, in awakening our gaze. He teaches us again how to see, how to read, how to grasp and consider the sum of urban traces and everyday signs in a new light, restoring their beauty and mystery. "Maybe I would like the graffiti of popular expression, those deviant phenomena that inspire disrespect, to compete with the hegemonic epigraphy of Western culture; for these signs drawn from the triviality of the everyday to be considered as the equals of formal inscriptions [...]", he wrote in 1995 in *Une épigraphie sauvage*.

"To be astonished is a pleasure". This sentence by Edgar Allen Poe, which gave rise to a first large graphic stencil by the artist in the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris in 2009, could summarise by itself his approach and desire towards the reader-spectator. It does not feature in "Alphabet (s)", his eleventh and penultimate exhibition at the Georges-Philippe & Nathalie Vallois gallery (in 1999, which marked the beginning of the collaboration with the artist, a programme of twelve exhibitions was developed, echoing the twelve themes of his catalogue raisonné).

Instead, we can find quotes by Wilde, Corot, Dubuffet, Cioran, Duchamp, Che, Kerouac, or more recently Tesson (Sylvain), written in the "villegléan alphabet" and drawn directly onto the walls of the gallery and surroundings. Or this not accidental phrase by Prévert, taken from the poetry collection *Fatras*: "Beautiful letters are not enough to make a real alphabet". What else do we need? The answer is on the walls.

Barbara Soyler

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05

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10
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