

# Présence Panchounette

## «CHIC, CHOC, SUPER, SENSASS<sup>1</sup> !»

September 3rd – October 8th 2016

Opening on Saturday, September 3rd from 11 am to 9 pm

Semiose Gallery is delighted to present its third souvenir-exhibition dedicated to Présence Panchounette.

The Présence Panchounette<sup>2</sup> group, originating from the Bordeaux area of France and active between 1969 and 1990, was a multi-faceted and flexible collective. Their manifesto, published in 1969 under the name of Internationale Panchounette, announced an imperious desire to tear down everything, but with style and grandiloquence. “What is Internationale Panchounette?” the manifesto declares “if not the bane of dilettantism, the flowering of vulgarity, a ramshackle baroque, a fluorescent razor, a distinguished denial, an underground provocation? Bloating idleness.”

Post-Situationists or rather “Neo-Platonist Situationists” as the collective described themselves, Présence Panchounette were expert in the use of play on words and outrageous declarations, railing against the certainties of bourgeois taste through irreverent leaflets and letters and off-the-wall interventions. Woe betide those who tried to categorize or tie them down. The members of Présence Panchounette hammered home their “Molotov” dialectic, perfectly in sync with the spirit of the times: when they posed for a group photograph in front of a Conforama<sup>3</sup> sign in 1972, they knew precisely where they were placing themselves – at the heart of a consumer society that was soon to become all-powerful.

Essentially self-taught, they infiltrated the world of art, which proffered both an open door to their activities and acted as a vast reservoir of clichés and aesthetic conventions for them to play with. With their pronounced taste for patterns, popular culture, the vernacular and tackiness, they used the absurd to condemn the culturally accepted references of the period and particularly those espoused by 1970s Minimalism and Conceptual Art.

They still however ran the risk of “faire de la prose sans le savoir”<sup>4</sup> and in their turn becoming a somewhat suspect avant-garde. By a strange quirk of fate – or more likely the propensity for imitation within the worlds of art and fashion – Présence Panchounette were caught up by different movements rooted in the 1980s such as appropriation, the use of everyday objects in sculpture, Neo-conceptual Art and parody. “To sum up: during the 70s, we made pastiches of what was going to happen in the 80s<sup>5</sup>” the collective sometimes considered as future avant-garde stated, going as far as to claim to be at the origin of certain works by Tony Cragg or Bertrand Lavier. Their complicated stance of complete refusal – of any compromise, of jumping the bandwagon, of official acceptance or approval – finally resulted in the breakup of the group in 1990, a conservative measure taken to preserve their probity intact.

After an earlier souvenir-exhibition at the gallery featuring the photography of Présence Panchounette (“PPP”, 2014), the collection brought together this time can be seen as a tribute, occasionally acidic in nature, to certain historic figures from the world of art. For Présence Panchounette, the idea was never simply one of “pinching the bums” of the cited artists but of finding inspiration in recognised oeuvres, particularly where it was possible to divert their meaning or purpose, through plagiarism, pastiche or misappropriation.

1. Chic, shocking, super, sensational” – Adjectives inscribed along the edges of invitations to the 4th Biennale des Arts Panchounettes, Studio F4, Bordeaux, France, 1972.

2. Feminine compound noun in French made up of “Présence” (presence), which replaced “Internationale” considered too Situationist by the collective, and “Panchounette”, with the suffix pan preceding chounette : a somewhat vulgar diminutive for female genitalia and thus giving “the whole little pussy”

3. Conforama – a low cost furniture chain store.

4. Expression from Molière’s Bourgeois Gentilhomme, meaning to succeed without knowing why.

5. “Pastiches / Paris” (1982), reproduced in Présence Panchounette Oeuvres Choises, Vol.1, Centre Régional d’Art Midi-Pyrénées / Musée des Beaux-Arts de Calais, 1987, pp. 50-51.