

LA CRIÉE  
CENTRE D'ART  
CONTEMPORAIN  
RENNES - F

La Criée centre for contemporary art

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Julien Bismuth

*Sibyl Sybil*

Exhibition from 24 June to 20 August 2017

The curator is Sophie Kaplan.

Works have been produced by La Criée centre for contemporary art.



"Sibyl Sybil" is an exhibition by Julien Bismuth, previously associate artist for the La Criée series *Alors que j'écoutais moi aussi [...] (As I too was listening [...])*, devoted to narrative and its many manifestations. In his practice Bismuth resorts to a wide range of media including performance, sculpture, installation, photography, video, drawing and collage. "It's often the piece, the work, that decides its medium," he says.<sup>1</sup> Text and writing, together with reading in the broadest sense, play a central part in this.

The artist has constructed his exhibition around the emblematic personage of the sibyl (sometimes written *sybil*). The sibyl is a figure from Greek mythology, a prophetess whose predictions were written in an enigmatic, "sibylline" language on oak leaves which were then scattered by the wind. "My relationship with writing," Bismuth has said, "is marked by a kind of passivity or receptivity. Writing involves forms of reading or listening that go beyond the framework of the page. Often when I'm writing I have the feeling of transcribing phrases coming to me from somewhere else, phrases whose origin and content can seem enigmatic or polysemic even to me."<sup>2</sup>

Like a stage director or a scenographer, Bismuth arranges textual, material and performative elements spatially in his works. His underlying principle for this exhibition is that for an action to be eloquent, it must be granted space, surrounded by blankness and even mystery, like an unattributed quotation. As a marginal adjunct to the works on show, he also introduces a subjective writing approach to the labels, in the form of texts that throw deliberately incomplete light on the pieces in question.

"Sibyl Sybil" comprises three groups of works: the first is the video *Sibyl Sybil*, on show in the second room; the second is made up of collections, photographs, a video, objects and traces of actions; and the third is that of the *Letters to the Exhibition*.

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<sup>1</sup> "Julien Bismuth in conversation with Sophie Kaplan", *Mind The Gap* (Altkirch: Crac Alsace, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Julien Bismuth, letter of 5 June 2017.

## *Sibyl Sybil: the video*

Made in 2017, this video is composed of a succession of fragmented shots with a soundtrack of the actress Laure-Lucille Simon reading from "The Sail of Ulysses", one of American poet Wallace Stevens' last works.<sup>3</sup>

"This is a passage that stood out more particularly for me when I read the poem, as often happens when you're reading."<sup>4</sup> The actress reads alternately in French and English:

*What is the form of the sibyl?*

It is the sibyl of the self,  
The self as sibyl, whose diamond,  
Whose chiefest embracing of all wealth  
Is poverty, whose jewel found  
As the exactest central of the earth  
Is need. For this, the sibyl's shape  
Is a blind thing fumbling for its form,  
A form that is lame, a hand, a back,  
A dream too poor, too destitute  
To be remembered, the old shape  
Worn and leaning to nothingness,  
A woman looking down the road,  
A child asleep in its own life.

## *The Actions and Traces group*

Julien Bismuth has opted for presenting three collections of objects he has found, bought or made, often with an element of chance or accident involved.

The first two are *Collections of Stereotypes for Clichés*, comprising a series of front pages from the *San Francisco Chronicle* of 9 August 1974 – the day Richard Nixon resigned – and a group of

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<sup>3</sup> Wallace Steven, *Opus Posthumous: Poems, Plays, Prose* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1957).

<sup>4</sup> Julien Bismuth, letter of 13 June 2017

matrixes of advertisements for films. The stereotype – etymologically "relief type" – was a matrix originally used in printing: a paper pulp mould of a movable type composition that was used for making metal relief printing plates called clichés. As printing techniques evolved, language use evolved with them: the initial meanings of the words were lost and replaced by those we know today.

*The Collection of Bits and Pieces* is just that: unrelated fragments and traces of stories and anecdotal trivia; possible writing surfaces; straw objects made by children of the Pirahã tribe in Amazonia, where Bismuth stayed recently; two silicone noses made for the shooting of *Willy Billy* in 2013; notes on scraps of paper that have accidentally been through the washing machine; a glossary of sound effects for a Japanese cartoon; a prototype system of relief-letter writing for the blind; a mysterious object found on a market, and so on. "These are things I keep in my studio and look at from time to time, and they inspire me implicitly, passively. For me collecting, keeping something, putting together an archive, is a form of doing something. An action that can be interpreted, that has a multiple or ambiguous meaning."<sup>5</sup>

Julien Bismuth is also presenting a mixed group of images referring to, produced by or outlining an action, and with fictional potential.

Some of these images and objects are **traces of past performances**, of individual acts quoted fragmentarily. The photographic series focus in particular on movements involving a fall and/or an interruption. **Jest** was created from a piece of cinema during the preparation and showing of an exhibition in Bremen, in Germany.

*Nilly* is made up of five stills from the filming of the performance *Willy Nilly* in 2016, where you see the immediate aftermath of the explosion of a latex glove filled with pigment. Stuck directly on the wall, the images cut free of the documentation and become autonomous, reproducible works.

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<sup>5</sup> Julien Bismuth, letter of 13 June 2017

The trace of past actions also takes concrete form: *Fold* and *A Dot or a Distraction* bring together various materials suspended in space, while *So I looked at my shoes and changed my mind* invites the gaze downwards towards the floor. The shoes coated with salt crystals hark back to a Bismuth exhibition in Frankfurt: the artist had tried to cover the gallery floor with salt crystals, but finally gave up because the surface was too uneven. So the shoes bearing the trace of the failed venture became the work on show.

Other pieces reference **recent actions** carried out by the artist during the mounting of the exhibition: a trace of makeup on a glass plate (*Everything has a face and every face has a thing*), the imprint of the tip of his nose on the wall (*Trap*), an action involving two bottles made of sugar (*Jests*), and others.

Lastly there are objects whose **activation potential** calls for a precise, subtle action. *A Thought*, for example, is a white stick that has to be turned on its axis every day, so that it moves along the walls of the room throughout the exhibition "like an idea that keeps turning and moving as you reconsider it."<sup>6</sup>

*Caspar* belongs to the series of silkscreen patterns the artist began in 2016: works comprising the screen itself and the printed outcome, feasible on any kind of surface and reproducible as often as desired. Silkscreened onto wallpaper, the pattern created for La Criée is based on a drawing of a dream image, scribbled down in the dark in the dead of night.

### ***Letters to the Exhibition***

Julien Bismuth offers his creative process in epistolary form in his series of *Letters to the Exhibition*. Ten letters are planned, written first from Rennes, then from Europe and finally from Brazil in August. The first three will be written in public, in the exhibition space. Addressed to an actual or a virtual audience, these improvised missives terminate when the paper or computer page is full. The results are then printed and posted at La Criée.

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<sup>6</sup> Julien Bismuth, letter of 13 June 2017.

"This exhibition is structured around the trace. The trace is a partial or fragmentary materialisation of an idea or an action. The trace is a clue that calls for a deciphering, and around the trace a thought takes shape like a fruit around its stone. Writing can be considered the trace of an activity and its evolution. The same is true of performance, which represents an important part of my work; with regard to performance, the trace concept seems to me richer and more eloquent than the endless fluctuation between presence and absence, experience and documentation, that surrounds this practice."<sup>7</sup>

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Julien Bismuth was born in 1973 in Paris, he lives and works at New York.

Julien had three solo shows in 2016: one in his Paris gallery, one at Lira in Rome, and the third at the Guggenheim in New York.

He also participated in group exhibitions at the 21er Haus in Vienna; the Villa Medici in Rome; and at Le Plateau Frac Île-de-France in Paris.

In 2017, he show *Streams* at Simone Subal gallery in New York.

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[www.julienbismuth.com](http://www.julienbismuth.com)

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<sup>7</sup> Julien Bismuth, letter of 19 June 2017

# Your visit to the exhibition

## Individual visitors

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La Criée is free and open to all. The liaison team is there to answer your questions and provide any guidance you need. Check out the documentation space – "Les Sources" – for a selection of books relating to the exhibition.

## Families

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Don't forget to join in the game based on the exhibition. Available on request from the liaison personnel.

## Groups

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### Guided tours

Tuesday – Friday: 10 am – 12 noon, 2 – 7 pm.

Each tour is designed in advance with the group organisers and can be adapted to meet specific needs.

Duration : 1 hour. The tours are free, but must be booked in advance.

### Accessibility

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### Spoken and tactile guide for the sight-impaired

Friday 30 June 2017 at 5:30 pm  
Duration: 90 mins. Free, but book in advance on 02 23 62 25 10

## Young people

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### > Visites mini-pousses (Tours for the Tinies)

(crèches and the very young)

Tuesday – Friday, 9:30 – 12 noon.

Duration: 45 mins

### > Visites pêle-mêle (Kids Kaleidoscope Tours)

(kindergartens and primary schools)

A playful, educational tour of the artworks

Tuesday – Friday, 9:30 – 12 noon.

Duration: 1 hour

### > Visites mille-feuilles (Layer Cake Tours)

(secondary schools)

Tuesday – Friday, 9:30 – 12 noon, 2 – 6 pm.

Duration: 1 hour

### > Visites à modeler (Hands-on Tours)

(children and teenagers)

Guided tour + experimental workshop

Wednesday afternoons and during school holidays

Tuesday – Friday, 9:30 – 12 noon.

Duration: 2 hours

### Advance preparation and follow-up :

check out the teaching resources, books and alphabetical guide to the exhibition on the La Criée visitor services blog:

[www.correspondances-lacrie.fr](http://www.correspondances-lacrie.fr)  
(section Ressources/Sibyl Sybil)

# Save the Date

**At the opening:** at 6:30 pm **Julien Bismuth** writes the first of his *Letters to the Exhibition*: a performance lasting thirty minutes.

**Saturday 24 June at 3 pm:** meet the artist for a **discussion** of the exhibition.

**Wednesday 28 June at 1 pm and Thursday 29 June at 6 pm:** Julien Bismuth writes two more *Letters to the Exhibition*.

**Saturday 1 July at 3 pm:** a "sideways" tour of the exhibition with linguist Griselda Drouet.

**Tuesday 11 July at 6 pm:** **Launch of the first two numbers of the Fanzine *Apocryphe***, edited by **Pierre Galopin** and **Johanna Rocard** and backed by La Collective.

## Visitor information

The exhibition is open Tuesday – Friday, 12 noon – 7 pm. Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays: 2 – 7 pm.

All events are free and accessible for all.

Group tours, whether private or guided, must be booked in advance (Tuesday – Friday)

### Visitor services

Carole Brulard

T. 02 23 62 25 11/c.brulard@ville-rennes.fr

Amandine Braud

T. 02 23 62 25 12/a.braud@ville-rennes.fr

### Follow La Criée on the Internet and the social networks

La Criée website: [www.criee.org](http://www.criee.org)

Visitor services blog: [www.correspondances-lacriee.fr](http://www.correspondances-lacriee.fr)

Facebook: La Criée centre d'art contemporain