

ATELIER REFLEXE (1995-2016)

Since 1989, the house/studio of Véronique Bourgoïn and Juli Susin¹ in Montreuil, in the Paris suburbs, has become a venue of activity where a number of collaborative projects have been developed among artist friends hailing from all parts of the world.

The *Atelier Reflexe* which has taken root in this story since 1995, is a teaching project dealing with photographic and artistic subjects. It is perhaps the only independent school founded by artists in France during the 1990's which offered to photographers a program through a program of workshops, expositions, and publications

Founded by Veronique Bourgoïn and Juli Susin, the *Atelier Reflexe* has brought under their leadership - Juli Susin until 2001- about more than 20 projects, from 1995 until 2016.² It has become over time a family of photographers, international artists, and art professionals as well as other contributors and participants, many of whom were, or have become friends, such as Friedl Kubelka, Antoine d'Agata, Morten Andersen, Linda Bilda, Anders Petersen, Adolfo Kaminsky, Nina Korhornen, Boris Mikhailov, les Gelatin, Jochen Lempert, and others.³

Some friends have invested in the project from the beginning, like Jean-Louis Leibovitch⁴ who hosted the *Atelier Reflexe* between 1999 and 2003 a former bathhouse in Montreuil, and who has always assisted with the shooting technique in the studio. In addition, Dirk Bakker⁵, one of the first to defend the artist books using the photography, co-edited and distributed the 18 editions of the *Atelier Reflexe*⁶ and promoted the annual expos. Upon completion of the workshop programs, one edition was released at the end of each year, often in small print, in order to allow the participant to reflect on the series, the story, the artist book itself and to approach the different possibilities of impression, of edition, and of ways of presentation. This edition accompanied an exposition, with a program of meetings and events which involved images, music, performances, and presented a

¹ Veronique Bourgoïn (plastic artist) of Marseille, studied at the Beaux-Arts of Paris where she met Juli Susin (plastic artist) who had left the Soviet Union in the early 1980's. They formed a studio in Montreuil in 1989.

² <http://atelier-reflexe.org/atelier.html>

³ Cf. list of guest professors: <http://atelier-reflexe.org/credits/index.html>

⁴ Jean-Louis Leibovitch is a plastic photographer who lives in Montreuil

⁵ Dirk Bakker was one of the first- since the early 90's- to promote and designate certain photo books as "works of art". He is a book merchant and scouts out photographers who he faithfully supports, he operated an avant garde book store in Paris in the 90's where he regularly organized photography shows like Antoine d'Agata's first exposition in Paris (1996), the first expositions of the Reflex Workshop, which he promoted each year in Arles between 1996 and 2004, and certain activities carried out outside of the Rencontres Photo and of which he co-published all the editions.

⁶ The undertaken workshops and projects led to the creation of 18 publications, most of which were developed by Juli Susin and Veronique Bourgoïn and from 2002 with an artistic director, associate guest teacher. These editions were co-edited by Dirk Bakker and some by Royal Book Lodge and Fotohof. The ensemble of the 18 editions was acquired by institutions like the Kandinsky Library (Beaubourg, Paris).

selection of annual performances in France and abroad.⁷ From 1995 to 2014, the *Atelier Reflexe* was featured during the first week of the photography festival in Arles.

The boundaries between the teaching, production, and daily life were not clearly defined and numerous participants stayed on for several years, some of whom were involved in the production of certain projects, such as Margot Wallard who was Bourgoïn's assistant between 2001 and 2008, and who later, in 2012, founded a photography school with JH Engstrom: the *Atelier Smesby*, located in Montreuil since 2017. Stephanie Gattlen participated in the *Atelier Reflexe* between 1996 and 1997. She was a friend as well as a model/performer for Bourgoïn's film and photography projects since 1995, and was also her assistant between 2008 and 2016.

The guest teachers who were at the same time artists, photographers or art professionals allowed for a diversity in artistic approaches and visions. Many exchanges were regularly organized with European partners such as Friedl Kubelka's Viennese school since 2001, Libuse Jarcovjakova's photography school in Prague in 2002/2003, or Anders Petersen's classes at the University of Goteborg between 2002 and 2004, ISSP in Lettonie in 2010, etc.

Some artists and photographers were involved for several years: Adolfo Kaminsky⁸, photographer, printer of Man Ray subjects, chemist and forger, and participant in the resistance, taught laboratory work from 2001 at the *Atelier Reflexe*. This instruction made possible many prints with a very unique photographic quality; or Antoine d'Agata who has regularly conducted workshops since 1999, even overseeing the direction of the *Atelier Reflexe* for three months in the fall of 2004, after which the teaching curriculum was replaced by a special program of workshops.

In a 2005 interview with Dirk Bakker and Véronique Bourgoïn, Antoine d'Agata commented on the experimental nature of the *Atelier Reflexe*, noting that it seemed to free the "continuous tension between concepts and the authenticity of the experience". In another interview Anders Petersen remarked, "the fantastic atmosphere of fix, developer, bichromate, and creativity...this reminds me of the school of Christer Stromholm".⁹

⁷ The broadcast locations could be off space locations like Studio 14 and Confluences in Paris, or the bookstore Au fil du temps and Point de vue, travelling gallery at Arles, but also well known galleries, institutions and festivals like Marion Meyer, Paris 1999; Fotohof, Salzburg, 2003 and 2007: International Photography Festival of Lodz, 2007; Instants Chavirés, Montreuil, 2007; Maison Populaire, Montreuil, 2007 and 2014; Photo Biennale Thessalonique, 2008; Centro Andaluz de la Fotografia, Almeria, 2008; New York Photo Festival, 2008, 2009, 2010; Caochangdi Photospring, Beijing, 2010; Tutun Deposu ek bina, Istanbul, 2011; Nederlands Foto Museum Rotterdam, 2013; Centre d'art ContemporainTignous (Le 116), Montreuil, Montreuil, 2014. Dirk Bakker Books was the first to put the completed *Atelier Reflexe* on display in Paris in *A la Librairie* (1995-1998), then as part of Paris Photo and Rencontres Photo of Arles until 2014

⁸ Adolfo Kaminsky, a life of forgery, biography of Sarah Kaminsky, appeared in 2009 in the Calmann-Levy editions.

⁹ Interview with Antoine d'Agata and Anders Peterson, by Dirk Bakker and Veronique Bourgoïn in Marseille and Stockholm in 2005. The interview was part of a series made in 2005 with the key players of the Reflex Workshop intended to be published by Patrick Le Bescont within the overall history of the Reflex Workshop. Veronique Bourgoïn had intended to close the Reflex Workshop but ended up continuing it in the form of a traveling workshop until the end of 2016, delaying the plan for publication.

If the beginnings of the *Atelier Reflexe* attest to the photographic, esthetic, and experimental influence of its founders Bourgoïn and Susin, over time the workshop programs began to match the themes and concepts proposed by the guest teachers as well as those covered by Bourgoïn in her personal artistic approach which she desired to expand to a collective reflection, such as, for example, in the projects: *Magic Trick (2010)* in line with the polaroid project *Ship High in Transit (2008)*¹⁰, or *EU Women (2007-2011)*, which reconciled her concerns about the image of women and women's roles, or even the project *True or False?* which questions the making, the exchange and the future of art in the face of the emergence of new interfaces of communication.

For nine years, the *Atelier Reflexe* has functioned in perfect autonomy. It is only since 2003 that *The Reflex Workshop* has received its first financial support with an artistic project of co-operations supported by the European Commission Ex-In (private space- public space) and then in 2006-2007 with the project *EU Women*¹¹, and in 2009-2013 with the project *True or False?*¹².

The Atelier Reflexe closed its activity in 2016 with a master class with the American director Abel Ferrera for the project *Addiction à l'oeuvre*¹³ in partnership with a Marseillaise association *Dfilms*, the Beaux-arts school of Paris, and several cultural entities, at the same time local (Montreuil), regional, and national.

A core group of participants have followed the projects for several years and many have since published books, presented their work, achieved recognition in France or abroad, like, for example, Margot Wallard, Annegien van Doorn, Mathieu Saura - aka Vincent Moon, Suzanna Pozzoli, Josquin Gouilly-Frossard, Michael Eveno aka - Grems Super Micro, Michaël Duperrin, Sophie Carlier, Silva Bingaz, Julian Baron, Milou Abel, or many others...

Today an important ensemble of prints, books, documents, objects, notes- collected over these 20 years- still attest to that experience, and reflect an artistic engagement and visions pertaining to a period of technological revolution, of transition from an analogical world to new ways of digital expression. This archive constitutes a unique background which traces this free and autonomous project, from a school started by artists, with all the collaborations of contributors and participants.

Traduction French to English: Gina Guidarelli

¹⁰ This project was carried out as part of a grant awarded to 10 international photographers, including Boris Mikhaïlov, by Impossible Project (Vienna, Austria) in 2008 in order to support Polaroid under the threat of closing.

¹¹ EU Women is the second cooperative project led by the Reflex Workshop supported by the European Commission <http://www.bourgoïn.name/expos/euwomen.html>

¹² <http://vraioufaux.name/>

¹³ <https://addiction-project.com/>