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are artists and curators. They teach at the EDHEA in Valais. They co-founded Rosa Brux, a transdisciplinary group based in Geneva which conducts research by federating groups working on such fields as activism, historical memory and law. Rosa Brux has presented exhibitions on Geneva's women's liberation movement (*West Coast Sisters*, CAC – Geneva, 2016), on demonstrations in Geneva (*Essayer encore, rater encore, rater mieux* (*Try again, fail again, fail better*), Swiss cultural center in Paris, 2018) and on the collective memory of foreign workers (*Nous, saisonniers, saisonnières* (*We, seasonal workers*)... le Commun, Geneva, 2019, and NMB Bienne, 2022).

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She recently directed *October Files*, an anthology of critical texts on Kara Walker (MIT Press, 2022).

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In lieu of a biography, the curators chose to publish the text Marys Renné Hertiman dedicated to Chantal Montellier on the website created by the collective of feminist researchers in non-diversity “Les jaseuses” (“Gossipers”). With permission from the author, they left aside those elements of her text that pertained to the history of her own personal relationship with Chantal Montellier. Readers who are interested can discover the integral text on the website.

cars and Big Brother looks like a bald old man whose face we read as sweet because of our cultural conditioning. And if Montellier depicts psychiatric facilities with documentary-like attention to detail, she also presents them as the other side of a world in which the most dangerous lunatics are actually the ones in command and in possession of the nuclear codes, always on the right side of power. As for Montellier's handsome state-sanctioned assassins (a.k.a. police inspectors), their handling of police blunders is pure bureaucratic routine.

Montellier's use of metaphor does not only express a deeper reality: more often than not, it also transcribes actual truths. That is because dystopia is never far from the reality it is allegorically representing, or is even actually re-presenting. In fact sometimes a simple re-description, such as the depiction of France in the days when Charles Pasqua was Minister of the interior in *Les damnés de Nanterre*, is enough to bring out the dystopian colors of the real.

Is it the singularity of her vision that caused a fright? Or is it the montellerian determination to think for herself, through images? Or the deep-rooted belief that comics can do better than merely entertain (even if experimentally), and that good comics have a right to venture into the field of politics?

If the choice of presenting her work in an exhibition format made sense to us, in particular within the context of a contemporary art venue, it is also because Montellier's comics require a high degree of attention to her use of form as the outcome of her critical thinking. Faithful to the “48CC” format, Chantal Montellier is no graphic novelist (although she is also a *novelist*, period), but an artist working with and through the comic strip template. One may fail to understand her work if one is not attentive to her intricate constructions, to her multiple use of rhyme, symmetry, *mise-en-abyme* – in short, if one is not interested in the reflexive side of a work that appeals to its readers/viewers' intelligence rather than to their consumer instincts.

Rosa Brux, Vanina Géré
and Frédéric Wecker – January 2022
Following an invitation by Eric Mangion

Too intelligent, too beautiful, too strong, too much of a commie? Chantal Montellier has often been viewed with a mix of fear and fascination – a fact that has caused her art to be relegated to second place in the history of her critical reception, when it should have garnered full attention. This exhibition aims at focusing on a highly prolific period in Montellier's career, to firmly inscribe it within the history of comics as one of the most politically relevant of its time.

Between 1978 and 1994, from her first pages in Charlie Mensuel, Ah! Nana and Métal hurlant to the publication of the third (and sadly, last) installment of *Julie Bristol's* adventures by Éditions Dargaud, Chantal Montellier created one of the most singular bodies of comics in its consistently critical relation to the world.

When Montellier started publishing, it must have been unthinkable that such a work had been created by a woman. Those who were unable to grasp the full extent of it at the time and those keeping a conspiracy of silence around her work today might very well be the same people. And so, throughout Montellier's entire career, the reception of her work has unfortunately been textbook material for feminist art history.

This exhibition aims at making visible once more a work made invisible through many editorial failures. It also means to contribute to the conservation of Montellier's work, from a resolutely matrimonial perspective.

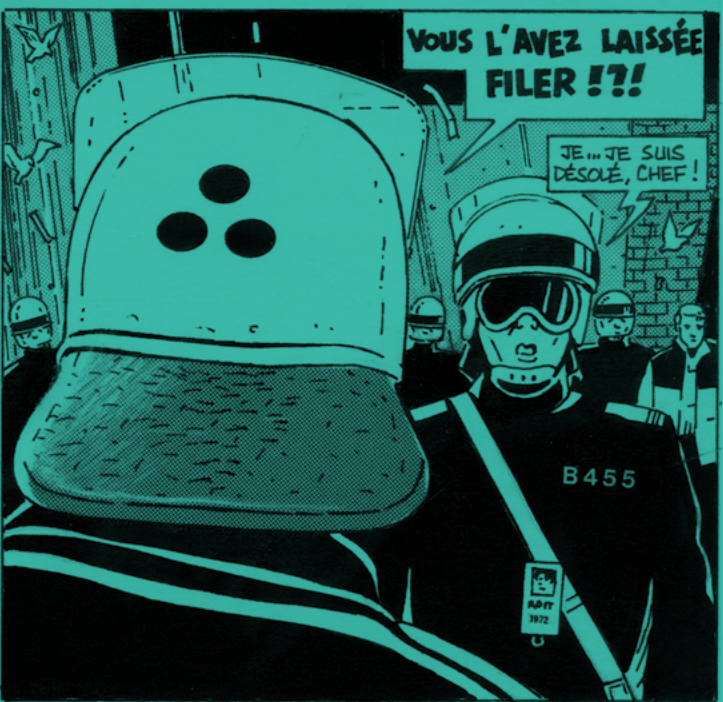
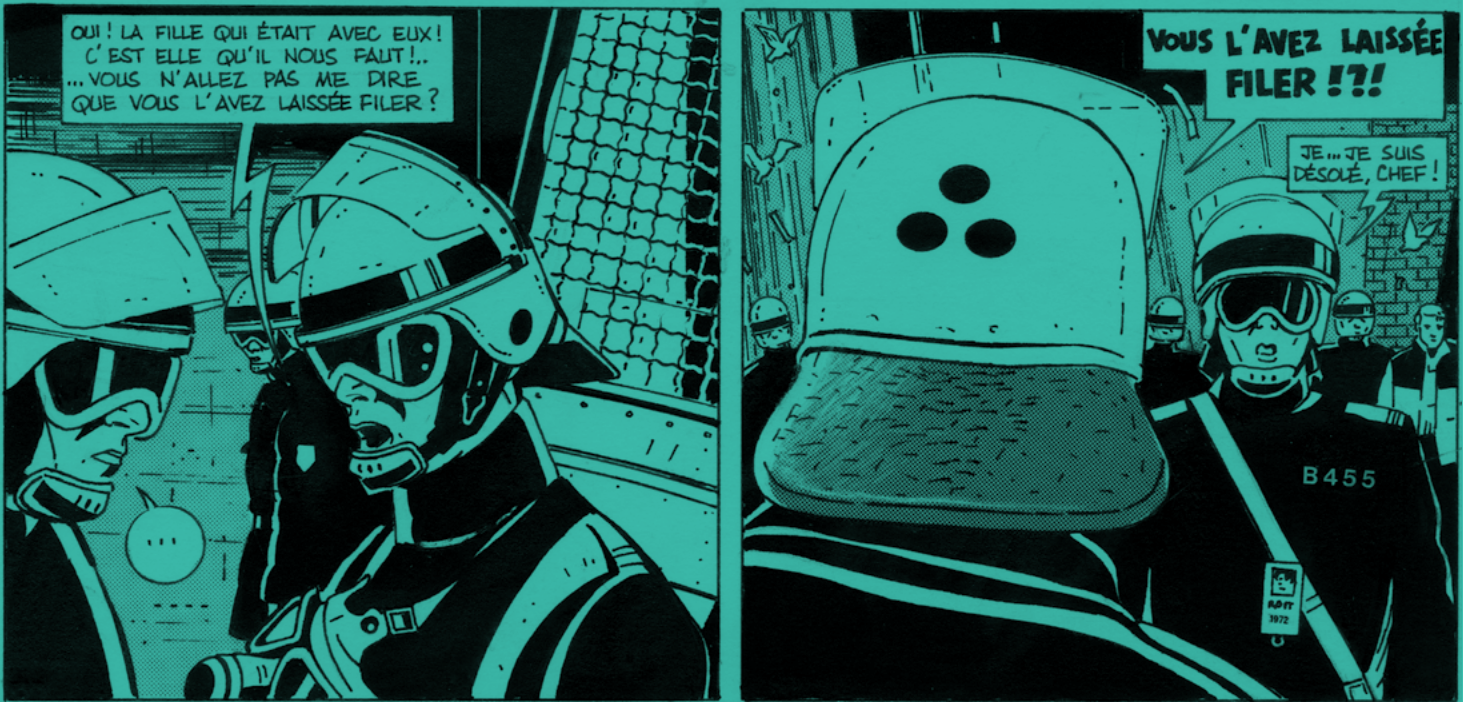
While Montellier was published by the greatest publishers in the history of francophone comics in the 1980s – Les Humanoïdes associés, Futuropolis, Casterman – none of her historical publishers has yet deemed it necessary to republish any of her works. Neither 1996, nor *Shelter*, nor *Wonder City* (the three episodes of her “Social Fiction” trilogy) have been republished by Les Humanoïdes Associés¹. Julie Bristol's three adventures are still waiting to be issued as a single volume, and republications of masterpieces such as *Blues*, *Les rêves du fou*, *Rupture* or *Le sang de la commune* are long overdue.

Retrospectively, Montellier's consistently critical approach appears as one of the rare counter-balances to the opportunistic shifts occurring in the edition of comics, which bear witness to the replacement of the blend of eroticism and science fiction characterizing Métal hurlant by the discreet charms of the *petite bourgeoisie* in the pages of (À suivre). Looking back at a time when the medium was beginning to disseminate beyond the children's sections in kiosks and bookstores, Montellier's production imposed itself as one of the most authentically adult-oriented among European auteur comics.

In Montellier's work, the critique of political economy is enriched by a critique of society of control, a critique of consumer society, a critique of patriarchy, and a condemnation of state violence.

Opposing the chill of reality to regressive escapism and deleterious forms of nostalgia, Chantal Montellier's work, through both its realistic and dystopian aspects, abounds in images that only the moderate will find extreme.

In Montellier's world, Paris is haunted by murdered Communards; shopping malls are operated as the laboratories of indoor social experimenting; men are depicted as crocodiles; eugenism is computer-assisted; stuffed corpses are used to sell second-hand



¹ This text was published in Jan. 2022. As of now, a new version of “Social Fiction”, revised by Montellier, is to be published by Humanoïdes Associés.

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Who's afraid of Chantal Montellier?

Curators
Rosa Brux, Vanina Géré
Frédéric Wecker
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2 The subheads correspond to the titles of some of her works.

3 Department for the unrest and propaganda of the Soviet Union Communist Party. Concerning this, see Romain Ducoulombier, “L’agit-prop communiste. La propagande et son efficacité”, ANR PAPRIK@2F, May 28 2014, [on line: <http://anr.paprika.hypotheses.org/21781>].

4 Chantal Montellier, *La Reconstitution*, book 1, Mouthiers-sur-Boëme, Actes Sud – l’An 2, 2014, p. 9. Unless otherwise specified, all quotes are from this book.

5 Concerning the history of the magazine Ah! Nana, see: Talet, Virginie, “Le magazine Ah! Nana: une épopée féministe dans un monde d’hommes?” Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés, 24 | 2006, [on line: <http://journals.openedition.org/clio/4562>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/clio.4562>; Delaborde, Blanche, “ah! nana: les femmes humanoïdes”, Neuvième art 2.0, [on line: <https://www.citebd.org/neuvieme-art/ah-nana-les-femmes-humanoides> and Servin, Lucie, “Ah! Nana, l’histoire d’une censure” (“Ah! Nana, the story of a censorship”), Association Artémisia, [on line: <https://associationartemisias.wordpress.com/2012/03/08/ah-nana-lhistoire-dune-censure/>].

6 Many of her archives have been lost when moving or as a consequence of sales and sometimes loans.

7 During one of our conversations, she told me that this aggressive behavior came from a reflex of self-defense which she had developed as a consequence of situations where she had been scared or had felt endangered.

Journey to the end of the crisis

Chantal Montellier’s relation to comics is ambivalent and reflects her experience within the industry. She has published about 20 comic books, most of which had a strong influence on the history of European comics, but her stances and a somewhat aggressive attitude⁷[vi] resulted in many detractors: “I played with being a comics creator, but the figures of Soutine, Francis Bacon and a few others haunted me. My true family was the great victims of art, and not the makers of comic books.”

Some professional players of the book world told me the main problem they had with her was that, because she considered herself to be ostracized, she resisted stances that were different from her own (whether political or aesthetic), and also that she had an impulsive character which sometimes led her to abruptly abandon an event. Having myself witnessed some of these situations, having even suffered from them, my understanding is that her violent reactions come from a lack of recognition (both institutional and emotional). However, this constantly levied criticism is typical of the gendered structure of patriarchal societies, which deprecates violence in women or in people who identify with this term, whereas it is approved of in men, to whom one attributes adjectives reflecting power and authority. But Montellier’s situation is more complex than just her tense relations within an industry where everyone knows everyone [...]

Marys Renné Hertiman, “Chantal Montellier, explorer l’Enfer en tous sens” (“Chantal Montellier, exploring all aspects of Hell”), published on April 7, 2021 in *Les Jaseuses*, <https://lesjaseuses.hypotheses.org/2564/>

sleeve for the 1974 album *It’s Only Rock ‘n Roll* by The Rolling Stones. This was their only joint production.

Woman with wolves in the snake pit

The watershed moment in Chantal Montellier’s career as a comics creator was her participation in the magazine Ah! Nana. Her collaboration there started in 1976 when she met Anne Delobel (who was colorist and letterist for *Adèle Blanc-Sec* up until 1978). It was Delobel, then working as a secretary for Humanoïdes associés, who “hired” her for this new comics project. The idea was to participate in a magazine created entirely by women, called Ah! Nana⁵, whose editor in chief was Janic Guillerez (also known as Janick Dionnet). This iconic magazine, with a backdrop of feminist protest, featured dissenting works (articles and comics) by Nicole Claveloux, Trina Robbins, Cécilia Capuana, Aline Issermann, Paula Jacques, Liz Bijl, Victoria Thérame, Florence Cestac, Sotha, Keleck, among others. For Ah! Nana Montellier notably created the comic *Andy Gang*, a reference to an anti-gang brigade, whose hero was inspired by Roger Marchaudon, a brigadier “infamous for his both frequent and unpunished blunders”. The contents of Ah! Nana, which dealt with subject matters such as pedophilia, incest, sexual liberation and non-heteronormative relations, were associated with pornography and so were censored, and the magazine was prohibited from publishing in mainstream spaces. This censorship put an end to the magazine – which did not stop Chantal Montellier, who had already started publishing her comics in *Métal Hurlant*. These first experiences were followed by other regular collaborations with Charlie Mensuel and (À suivre), where she notably created her series *Julie Bristol* and *Psikopat*.

“In spite of my nostalgia for Art with a capital A, I continued my work creating comics ...”

Chantal Montellier is not merely a creator of comics, she is also a painter and a novelist. Her house is inhabited not just by herself, her husband, her cats, and her snail farm, but also by an impressive number of her works (as well as by her current projects, finished and unfinished), all of which is just a small part of her production⁹). Her comic book portfolio notably includes the albums 1996, *Blues*, *Odile et les crocodiles* (*Odile and the Crocodiles*), *Les damnés de Nanterre* (*The Damned of Nanterre*), *Tchernobyl mon amour* (*Tchernobyl My Love*), *Le Procès* (*The Trial*) (based on Kafka’s novel), *L’Inscription* (*The Inscription*) and *La reconstitution* (*The Reconstitution*). These works, peopled with strong characters (notably female), reveal a highly critical vision of society, while their realistic drawings and varying atmospheres (from anthropology to dystopia) tend to unsettle the reader. This form of discursive rebellion is specific to Chantal Montellier (one might even refer to a Montellieran style) and goes beyond aesthetics to reach the level of a form of political action.

started a brief career as an assistant teacher of artistic drawing in high school (from 1969 to 1973). Not feeling at home there, she resigned in order to devote herself fully to her artistic and political production.

Under pressure

Her career as an editorial cartoonist and comics creator was launched at the beginning of the 1970s. Her artistic, political and professional project was to “render the invisible visible, nothing short of that”. Her first cartoons were published in 1972 in the magazine *Combat syndicaliste* published by the Confédération Nationale du Travail (CNT).

“When I published my first cartoon on the Nuevo Diestro, I was unaware that in doing so I was becoming a pioneer in the field, which until then had always been entirely dedicated to men”.

She worked for a variety of newspapers and magazines: Politis, L’Humanité, L’Unité, La Nouvelle Critique, Maintenant, Le Monde, L’Autre Journal, Marianne, France nouvelle and Révolution. For several years she has been contributing regularly to Paul Jorion’s book, with deliberately dissenting illustrations. The book *Sous pression* (*Under Pressure*) (Pop’com/Graphein, 2001) is a collection of her editorial cartoons from 1971 to 2001.

Slavery is freedom

In 1972, Chantal Montellier exhibited her paintings at the Salon de la Jeune Peinture at the Grand Palais. This large exhibition featured only two women, herself and Claire Bonnafé. Male centered environments being the norm, such a situation was no change from the other fields she contributed to, notably the field of comics.

Among her first comics, *Consultations gynécologiques au lendemain de la loi Veil* (*Gynecological appointments the day after the Veil law was voted*) was published in L’Unité, a leftist weekly magazine, whose editor in chief at the time was Nicole Chaillot, and whose director was Claude Estier. This graphic reportage, published on February 28, 1975, dealing with the non-application of the Veil law in French hospitals, had been refused by her main employer, the weekly L’Humanité Dimanche, where Montellier had initiated herself as illustrator for the articles of journalist Marie-Louise Courdec. After being censored, she aimed at awakening awareness:

“My goal was not to caricature outrageously, or to ridicule my models, but rather to illustrate relations of class, of exploitation, of domination, and their consequences”.

Shortly after, she became more and more involved in creating comics, and it was by offering her book *Jean*, with a scenario by Alain Scoff, to the magazine Charlie Mensuel (whose editor in chief at the time was Wolinski) that she began her career as a comic book artist (as a *bédéaste*, as she called herself). This collaboration allowed her to integrate the network of comics creators. In fact it was Wolinski who referred her to Guy Peellaert to replace his assistant, illustrator Liz Bijl. As assistant to Guy Peellaert, Montellier participated in the creation of the record

and martyrs that peopled the hagiographies presented in her religious training classes. It was also at this time that she discovered the work of Suzanne Valadon, who utterly fascinated her:

“Thanks to ‘crazy Suzanne’, my taste for drawing intensified and became more than just an inconsequential game. It became a passion, a vocation. If this girl who was a “nobody” could become a great artist, an exceptional woman, why couldn’t I?”

Her fascination for subjects dealing with people who suffered, with the struggle for justice and passion, seems to foreshadow what later constructed her artistic work. So we can understand why as a teenager she admired tormented figures.

“Miserable Soutine covered with wounds, scandalous Valadon, these were my idols when I was 14 or 15, along with Christ, at a time when other teenagers had eyes only for pop stars: Sylvie, Eddy, Johnny, Sheila... “Salut les copains”. I’m not proud about this, I’m just surprised.”

From 1962 to 1967 she trained at the Beaux-Arts in Saint-Étienne, the leading fine arts school in France at the time. It was there that she came in contact with the work of Mireille Porte (ORLAN), although she was impressed by her as a person rather than as an artist: “rather beautiful, ignoring everyone, including the bourgeois [...] Mireille meant to be unapproachable”. Montellier had rather distant relations with her classmates and teachers (among whom was Madame Claveloux, the mother of illustrator Nicole Claveloux). She concentrated more on her training and trying to ride through her complicated family context.

An express history

In 1967, after receiving her degree from a higher school of art, she hitchhiked to the south of France where she discovered her talent for street drawing with chalk, something which “came right after beatniks and long before taggers and hip-hop graffiti artists; the latter explore ‘the visual field of urban verticality’ instead”. This experience heralded the beginning of her artistic insurrection, which went counter to her extremely classical training at the Beaux-Arts. Shortly after, swept away by the feverish wave of May 1968, Chantal Montellier discovered new meaning to her life through political action:

“I was (finally!) born to politics, I discovered words and concepts: capitalism, social classes, class consciousness, production forces, relations of production, exploitation of man by man, capital gain, alienation... [...] I also discovered new names, unknown until then: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky... Communists became my new heroes. Saviors!”

Among her artistic experiments is a brief passage in the world of theater. She played in two shows directed by Alain Françon in 1971, *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett (where she interpreted Nell), and *The Fire Raisers* by Max Frisch (where she interpreted a maid). In parallel to her artistic work, Chantal Montellier

“Chantal Montellier, Exploring all aspects of Hell”

Marys Renné Hertiman

[...] this text strives to present the portrait of a deep and complex artist as respectfully as possible. I will be careful to use her own words in telling her story, not as a ventriloquist but in acceptance of my position as a highly subjective observer. An artist with multiple facets, Chantal Montellier belongs to the history of comics as the first female political editorial cartoonist and as one of the pioneers of French comics. But that is not all she is. So here is her portrait:

the miracle of the salamander²

“Up until 1968, when someone asked me what I wanted to be later on, I answered perfectly seriously: an accursed painter! After 68, I saw myself more in agitprop³ [...]. I didn’t have a precise notion of the ideas I wanted to spread through illustration, but I knew what revolted me. [...] Editorial cartoons and comics [...] seemed the best means for carrying out MY revolution. Women were scandalously absent from these fields, and this was all the more reason to enter them”⁴.

Born in the Loire on August 1, 1947 around eight in the morning, Chantal Montellier grew up in a family with local bourgeois origins on one side and working class origins on the other. She had difficult relations with her family, which informed her “rage” against the bourgeois class. She was haunted by her relationship with her father up until his death: “today, in front of his corpse, I can finally speak and say anything, without him being able to shut me up, and perhaps from where he lies, he hears me at last? AT LAST!”. Her relationship with her mother was equally fragile, but according to her psychoanalyst, her mother nonetheless seems to have been the person who traumatized her the least. The extremely difficult context of her childhood greatly influenced her work. But as I want to present her as an artist, aside from any sociological determinism, I will not insist on the difficult events of her private or family life. However Montellier completely accepts the biographical aspect of many of her works, so I will let you examine it in any way you wish.

One can trace the emergence of a vocation to her childhood: “I think I learned how to draw by copying the figurines printed on the packages of dressmaking patterns, those models made of thick paper from which one cuts out an article of clothing”.

But the legend claims that as early as eight years old she began trading her very realistic drawings for candy. A practice she continued up until she became a professional, exchanging her work for money (which is what one does when engaging in any type of paid work). Before that, as a student, she traded erotic drawings for essays... In secondary school she discovered a passion for the saints