

September 28 2023

- 2pm–6pm
Performances
- 6pm–3am
Opening and concerts

Every day of the exhibition

- 3 pm

Meeting around the exhibitions

Students on a mediation course at Villa Arson will create guided tours of the exhibitions, sometimes with performances, evoking their personal interests in relation to the artistic issues of the program.
Free admission.
No reservation needed.

Exhibitions opened every day
(except on Tuesdays) from 2 to 6 pm.

Villa Arson is a public institution of the ministry of Culture and a legal member of Université Côte d’Azur. It is supported by the City of Nice, the Alpes-Maritimes Department, the Region Sud Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur. Villa Arson is a network member of École(s) du Sud, BOTOX(S), Plein Sud, d.c.a, ANdEA and ELIA Art Schools.



Following the now yearly tradition, the Villa Arson is presenting an exhibition of its previous class of graduates. As well as establishing an educational and artistic continuity, it aims at providing these young artists with professional conditions as they organize together what is certainly their first show outside the school.

The exhibition *What Obligates Us* is complemented by two texts. The first was written by curator Sophie Lapalu, the second by Oxanna Bertrand, one of the artists from the graduating class of 22: “it’s a reinterpretation of Sophie’s theoretical analysis, seen through our concrete experience as former students and future artists. For this text I based myself on conversations I had with people from my class. Which is why I use the word ‘we’, because I tried to write a text that reflects our collective views as closely as possible.”

- Alysse
Léna Aboukrat
Fabien Adel
Alessandra Allioli
Hugo Andrade
Alexandre Ansel
César Audebert
Suska Bastian
Oxanna Bertrand
& Andréa Jankovic
Fabienne Bois
Annika Boll
Léa Bouton
Léonore Chastagner
Tom Clop
Théophile Dcx
Kévin Delpech
Nicole Demichelis
Agathe Groleau
Malo Huguet
Constantin lalovenko
Sarah Illouz
& Marius Escande
Pavlos Ioannides
Emika Lannelongue
Ibrahim Meïté Sikely
Daniel Miron
Samuel Nguyen
Thomas Parigi
Aurore Party
Bernie Poikane
Nicolas Pussey
Lassana Sarre
Sébastien Staels
Juliette Trucchia

Curator
Sophie Lapalu

29.09.23-
28.01.24

What obligates us

Curator
Sophie Lapalu

to prevent us from trying, and if our attempts do not come to a successful conclusion, at least we hope to bring to the fore our ways of thinking, of living and evolving at the heart of a world we are striving to reconstruct.

Oxanna Bertrand

The Villa Arson has been an incubator for our respective artistic practices, a place where they were able to emerge, to confront and influence each other, to blossom and assert themselves. We form a single generation of artists coming from a single institution; we are linked to one another by a collective apprenticeship. Our works are deeply interdependent in spite of the variety of themes, the uniqueness of our gazes, the multiple issues approached. For instance we have the following in common: the Internet, pop-culture, manga and anime series, science fiction and television. These visual universes have influenced our generation, and we quote them more easily than we do official culture. By surreptitiously introducing such “popular” references inside the white cube, we are deconstructing the traditional hierarchy between art forms validated by our cultural institutions, and what is considered to be an inferior form of art because it pertains to entertainment.

Our years at the Villa Arson were branded by the emergence of major political, economical, environmental, social and sanitary crises. Most of us experienced such a difficult context as a system of impediments – the isolation due to the pandemic, the increasing inequality, deeply influenced our individual paths. Yet we strove to appropriate the problems induced by the crises to turn them into a motor for creation; artistic expression became a privileged space of freedom in which we were able to continue asking questions and expressing them. We used the act of creation as a way of stepping aside and observing society and the events that were shaping it, of developing an alternate vision, both critical and bearing hope and renewal. And even though we were sometimes beginning to lose hope, we gave birth to humorous forms and laughed in the absence of solutions, strove to offer sensitive and poetic spaces where feeling preceded thought, to represent what motivated our love and our dreams, and to resist in this way the surrounding atmosphere of despair for which the total absurdity of our neocolonial and capitalist world is largely responsible.

The Villa Arson is an institution. We are at once products of this institution and producers of it. Our experience at the Villa Arson reflects this duality: we have absorbed the norms and ways of thinking represented by the institution where we began our artistic development; we met with its dysfunctions and confronted its organs of power in an attempt to make it evolve in what seemed to us the best direction. We were shaped by the Villa Arson; we attempted as much as possible to shape *our* Villa Arson, by calling into question its mode of functioning and by fighting the systemic modes of oppression it reproduced. Today we are emancipating ourselves from it; the world of art which we now belong to, carries the same anomalies in our eyes, the same injustice, the same oppressive mechanisms as the institution which prepared us to enter it. We are both the products of the art world and the organs that make it up: it is up to us to make it evolve.

Can one be critical of an institutional system if one is oneself the product of this system? We think that this is possible; it is what we have attempted to do here. Can art change the world? Concerning this we express our doubts; however there is nothing

beginning to glimpse it makes inventing ways of living and producing together unavoidable, and forcibly demands that we take good care of the home which is receiving us.

Thus the exhibition aims to be an exercise in “ecologization” (Bruno Latour), taking associations into account, and mixing together that which was not *a priori*. For each work connections to that of another artist have been showcased, in an attempt to create porosity and positive contamination. Because it is held in an art school, *What Obligates Us* also addresses future graduates; a space is dedicated to the consultation of editions, dissertations, books, specialized films. Some of the works have escaped from the walls of the art center; opening day welcomes a program of performances and concerts, while gardens or patio also house some of the works. The exhibition is also organized according to the affinities between the issues broached. Firstly, it interrogates the future: how can it be thought out, sketched out? Whether dystopian or utopian, projections are necessary, and never unequivocally. Secondly, it offers a retrospective gaze: some of the works are critical of an economy which was built from the neocolonial model of an “affluent society”, unequal, while other works play with the codes of ultra consumerism. Lastly, what are the possible alternatives? How can we invent commons, and imagine collectives in order to work together? As we walk through the exhibition the answers are never fixed, and attempts sometimes fail, but every artist has sketched chains of cooperation in an art world in full transformation, lighting a bonfire on the ruins of the old world.

Sophie Lapalu

Because of the crisis we are facing, we find ourselves obligated. We are forced to urgently question capitalism and its consequences. As artists and actors of the art world, we are forced to declare an emergency on our lifestyle and on the way we produce ecocidal works of art, to question the systemic violence staged by our institutions, to reflect upon our privileges, upon our responsibilities and our interdependence. We are obligated by a future which is getting nearer, by a time which is hurtling forward.

The Villa Arson’s 2022 graduates, whose works are shown here, have this in common: they depend on each other, on the school’s ecosystem, on the art world in which they will act within a globalized economy which we all have to face. In 1988 Howard Becker noted that artists are an integral part of a chain of cooperation; a painter depends on those who make canvas and paint, on art critics, on the market and on museums. The American sociologist went even further by maintaining that the artist’s link with this chain of cooperation has an impact on the type of works he or she will produce. “We can see how, in fact, it is not unreasonable to say that it is the art world, rather than the individual artist, which makes the work.”¹ But when the art world must be reformed, can the art works precede it in its transformation? How can one escape its determination? And can the chain of cooperation referred to Becker become enlarged? I would like to think of the food that we ingest, the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, the books that we read, as human / non-human collaborations. What then would our responsibility be, in a chain of associations including both the materials used to fabricate the work of art and the mineral salts needed by our organism in order to produce it?

It is crucial, I find, that young graduates should be confronted with this question. *What Obligates Us* is a way of facing the art world to come; an opportunity to reflect on how we would like to see it evolve. This also requires retrospective attention: the artists whose works are featured here completed their third year of studies during the Covid-19 pandemic. At the age of 20, they found themselves isolated in tiny student apartments, or back in their childhood bedrooms. Those who were not prevented by too great a psychological or social precariousness, conceived projects through 3D images, wrote on the corner of the kitchen table, sketched the opening of their window, found ways of creating without access to their studio, and without means of production. The following year was defined by curfews, references to war, masks and safety precautions. How can one continue to work when priorities are turned upside down? Can producing works of art continue to be meaningful? When I came to the Villa Arson in March 2023 to examine the exhibition spaces, students were fighting against the reform of the retirement system, but also – in a rather rare show of solidarity between schools – against another virus that has been latent for years: the disengagement of government from public services, gravely endangering the very existence of art schools. The offices of the administration were occupied by mattresses, mixing desks and signs: “the Villa Arson is our home” reads one of them. Making a home of one’s school seems to me a generous program. The future as we are

¹ Howard Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982, p. 194