

Le 19

Centre régional
d'art contemporain
de Montbéliard

PRESS KIT

Zones de (non)être *A collective exhibition*

27-09-2025 → 04-01-2026



Zones de (non)être, a collective exhibition

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With artworks from Tania Candiani, Nicolas Daubanes et Louisa Yousfi, Domènec, Armand Gatti, Laila Hilda, Adelita Husni-Bey, Laura Molton, Medvedkine Sochaux Group, Maeva Totolehibe, Carole Roussopoulos, Erika Roux, María Ruído, Nil Yalter.

« Each of us shouldered, one by one,
uncontainable weary dreams
we fell silent in orphaned solitudes
surrendered ourselves so that the world
would be a better place. »

Meral Şimşek, « dream and reality »
in *Incir Karasi or Refugee Dreams*, 2022.



Historically, cities were first built as fortified centers that not only offered protection but also clearly marked internal social divisions. In the French context of the 20th century, this logic of separation was transformed into infrastructure: the périphérique (ring road) is one example. It is a belt initially designed to connect the suburbs to the heart of Paris, but which today acts more as a symbolic border, an invisible but powerful line that isolates or brings together populations according to socio-economic, cultural, or geographical criteria. “Today, the suburbs represent the bulk of urbanized territory [...] While the suburbs may have been the seed of this exclusion, they also benefited from it [...], a permissive and economically dynamic place [in] the 19th century [...] a space of conquering modernity¹. ”

This liminal space not only shapes urban geography, but also shapes subjectivities. It encompasses multiple realities and fantasies and must be understood in the “plural.” In contemporary France, the suburbs and outskirts are becoming key places for the affirmation of the “self” for the working classes, particularly among the younger generations of families with a strong history of immigration. These families live in a state of identity suspicion, faced with exclusion from the labor market, low representation in the spheres of political power², and forms of isolation or ghettoization that become an integral part of how they construct and represent themselves. This movement is not limited to France and its industrial history. It concerns the global history of urban planning in Northern countries, which have largely exploited the labor force and resources of Southern countries. This movement is not limited to cities alone. It concerns a societal system that divides the territory and populations into zones and pits the center against the periphery in power relations.

It is therefore worth remembering that the peripheries and suburbs are “places of creation, innovation, and transformation, and they are at the heart of the country’s major societal and cultural developments³.” The exhibition thus aims, without claiming to be exhaustive, to bring together individual stories and collective history, “where tensions, divisions, and relegations shape and accompany political and artistic struggles⁴.”

1- Xavier Malverti, « Les chantiers d’une modernité » in *Banlieues*, les cahiers de la recherche architecturale 38/39, éditions parenthèses, 1996. Translation suggested by the authors.

2- Ahmed Haderbach Bernárdez, *Visualidades, narrativas migratorias, transnacionalidad y género en el arte contemporáneo* (pp. 156–157). in *Libro de actas*. Universitat de València, 2017.

3- Press kit for the exhibition of *Banlieues Chéries* at the National Museum of Immigration History. Excerpt from “Three questions for Susana Gallego Cuesta, Aléteïa, Aka Émilie Garnaud, and Horya Makhoulouf, curators of the exhibition.”

4- *Banlieues Chéries Op. Cit.*

The exhibition *Zones de (non)être* began its reflection on the history of the labor movement, tracing it back to the political struggles of May 1968 in France.

These demands not only called for improvements in the workplace, but also laid the groundwork for a broader critique of forms of exclusion and social domination. Throughout the 1970s, these struggles spread and resonated with other historically marginalized groups, such as women, who began to make their subordinate position visible, even within the labor movements.

Thus, the horizon of social transformation driven by the working class broadened, incorporating feminist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial demands that challenged not only economic exploitation but also structural inequalities in all areas of life. This process shows how the class struggle must be understood as a starting point for the convergence of other struggles, in order to articulate an emancipatory politics. To quote Angela Davis, a leading figure in anti-racist feminism and the fight for social rights in the United States in the 1960s: “The struggles against racism, sexism, and capitalism are inseparable; the emancipation of the working class must be anti-racist and feminist, or it will not be at all⁵.».

In Montbéliard, urban development, the city center, and the suburbs have been structured with, by, and for industry in modern and contemporary times.

It is no coincidence that the exhibition *Zones de (non)être*, is being held in a former workshop of the Peugeot automobile company. However, it is rare to have the opportunity to link the history of a place—now transformed into an art center—so directly to the project it hosts.

The exhibition also takes a critical look at areas of exclusion or relegation of minority groups or those made invisible by structures created by patriarchy, capitalism, and colonization. In dialogue with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s question, “Can the subaltern speak?”, *Zones de (non)être* questions the possibility of representing the emancipation of these groups without it being co-opted by hegemonic discourses.

In this 1985 essay, Spivak discusses people outside the dominant system of representation, including migrant women, refugees, and women living in the world’s poorest countries. Spivak warns that even if subordinates can speak, their voices are systematically silenced or interpreted through foreign codes, as if they had never existed⁶, as if they could never escape the “zone of non-being⁷.”



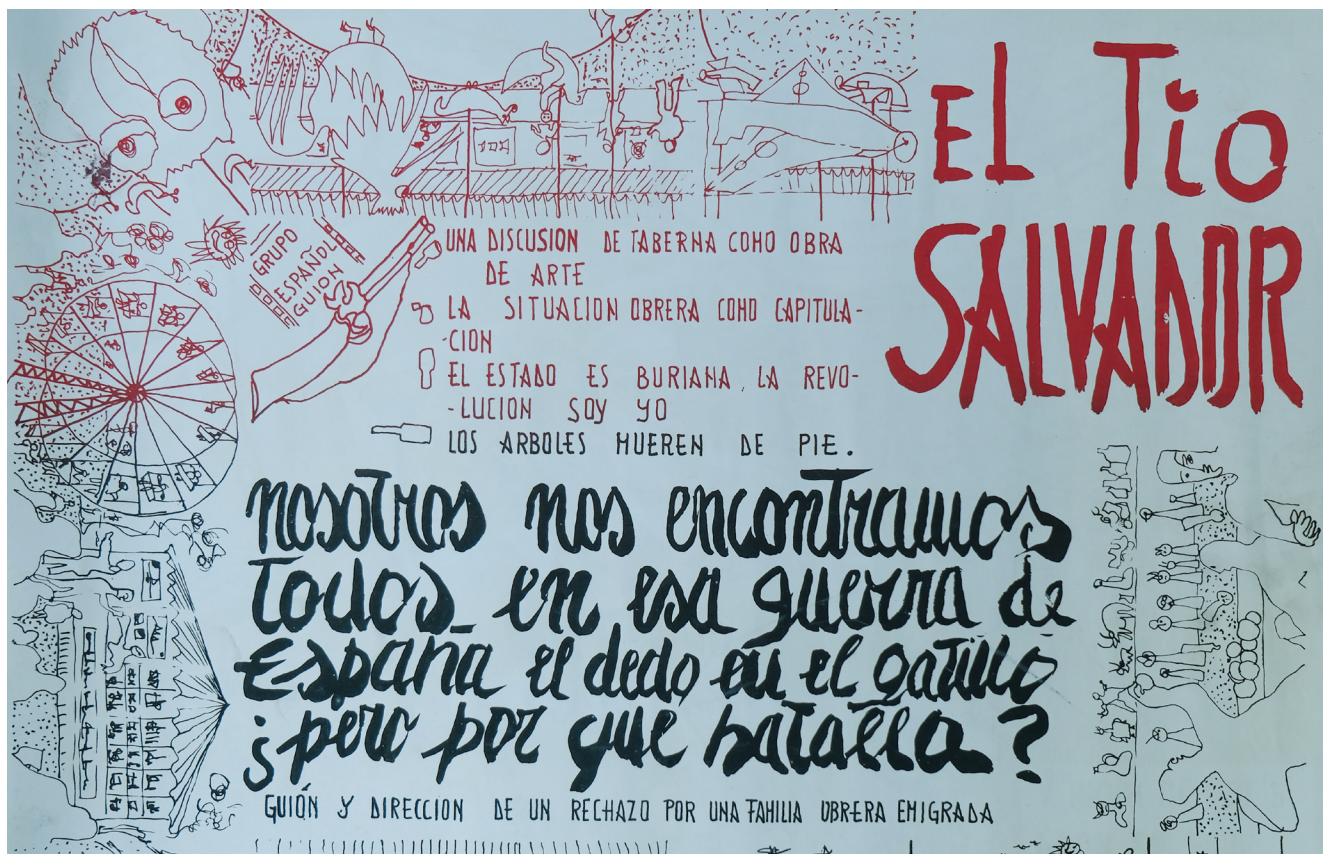
Remonter les rivières, 2023 © Laura Molton
60 min installation-movie, FRAC Occitanie Montpellier collection.

5- Angela Davis, *Femmes, race et classe*, éditions des Femmes, 1983.

6- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the subaltern speak?* in C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 66-111). University of Illinois Press, 1988.

7- In 1952, in the introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon defined the expression “Zone of Non-Being,” which gives the exhibition its title: «There is a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily barren and arid region, an essentially bare ramp, from which an authentic emergence can arise. In most cases, Black people do not have the benefit of making this descent into the true Underworld.» For Fanon, capitalism is not just an economic issue. It is also a racial project. This racism is a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority, situated on the line separating the human from the non-human. Those above this line are socially recognized as possessors living in the realm of being. Below, the non-possessors remain in the realm of non-being. La Découverte editions. Translation suggested by the authors.





Armand Gatti, poster for «L'oncle Salvador», 1976 © 50 min movie, La parole errante.

This observation is shared by Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pialoux in the conclusion of their book *Retour sur la condition ouvrière - Enquête aux usines Peugeot de Sochaux-Montbéliard* [Return to the Working Class Condition: Investigation at the Peugeot Factories in Sochaux-Montbéliard], reissued in 2011. They write: “The paradox of the current situation ultimately stems from the fact that the working-class issue is, in reality, more relevant than ever, yet it is obscured, even denied, in the political arena. As the ‘crisis’ has deepened and unemployment has risen, new divisions in society have emerged. This is particularly the case with categorizations in terms of opposition between ‘included’ and ‘excluded’ (or in/out) and between French citizens and immigrants, which have gradually covered up the labor issue and ultimately dissolved it⁸.”

Thus, the works brought together here share a situated sensibility, which sometimes takes the form of ethnographic research, sometimes that of testimony. All of them question, within our contemporary society, who can produce knowledge and who has the right to express themselves, and they allow themselves “to ask the question, which is more relevant than ever, of the legitimacy of the voices of the ‘dominated’, of the need to make their voices heard and to listen to them attentively, of their right to impose their words [...] it also means granting them the right to speak their own language.” This stance is therefore “eminently political insofar as [it] helps to bring about a discourse or social experiences that are usually [...] a priori disqualified⁹.”

8- La Découverte edition. Translation suggested by the authors.

9- This quote and the one before: Stéphane Beaud et Michel Pialoux, Op. Cit., 2011.

Furthermore, the essential challenges of preserving these memories today also bring together all the works and practices within *Zones de (non)être*. Personal experiences can once again be embodied, transmitted, shared, and then felt by those who receive them. However, these phenomena of translation must remain conscious of the political difficulties they entail so as not to fuel a tendency toward “pedagogical and disciplinary appropriation¹⁰” but rather to reveal how transposing speech into another form must “highlight the non-convergence of discourses, so that we can see, through the very ruptures in the narrative, the violence that underpins an episteme¹¹.”

The exhibition *Zones de (non) être* deliberately raises more questions than it answers: **what continuities exist between the labor struggles of the past and current forms of social and professional precariousness?** How does the discourse on progress conceal the structural tensions that continue to reproduce inequalities and forms of alienation? What role(s) do collective resistance and mutualist dynamics play today in the face of an increasingly dematerialized and globalized capitalism? What continuity(ies) exist between the colonial gaze and the current management of life (and death) at our borders? How can the activation of memories in the present encourage us to converge our personal struggles toward a collective revolution?

Violeta Janeiro Alfageme & Adeline Lépine
Curators of the exhibition

This press kit serves as an introduction to a more in-depth text written by the curators of the exhibition. The full text is available in the exhibition booklet, accessible on our website: le19crac.com.

¹⁰– Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, « In Other Words », in *Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

¹¹– Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek Philippe Sabot (trad.), *Après l'émancipation : Trois voix pour penser la gauche*, Paris Seuil, 2027.



Medvedkine Group, Sochaux, 11 juin 1968, 1969 © Bruno Muel slon-iskra



Les fantômes ont soif, 2024 © Maeva Totolehibe

Press trip

During your visit, we invite you to discover the exhibitions presented in the region's art centers. A press tour can be organized across several exhibitions upon request.

Kunsthalle in Mulhouse

www.kunsthallemulhouse.com

Le Crac Alsace in Altkirch

<https://www.cracalsace.com/fr>

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