



FONDATION
GANDUR
POUR L'ART



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Photographer: André Morin

Jacques Villeglé (Quimper, France, 1926)

Rue au Maire

February 1960

Torn posters mounted on canvas

Signed "villeglé" in the lower right section; with title and dimensions "rue au Maire / 252 x 213.5" on the back of the canvas

252.7 x 212.8 cm

FGA-BA-VILLE-0004

Provenance

Alan Koppel Gallery, Chicago

Galerie Georges-Philippe Vallois, Paris, 2020

Exhibitions

Salon des Comparaisons, Paris, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 12 March – 3 April 1960

L'Affiche lacérée, Villeglé, Morlaix, Musée des Jacobins, 6 April – 4 May 1978

La Libération de la peinture, 1945-1962, Caen, Mémorial de Caen, 14 July 2020 – 31 January 2021

Bibliography

Comparaisons, exhibition catalogue [Paris, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 12 March – 3 April 1960], Paris, Salon des Comparaisons, 1960, listed p. 100, repr. b/w p. [55] (detail, under the title "Torn posters")

La Libération de la peinture, 1945-1962, [Caen, Mémorial de Caen, 14 July 2020 – 31 January 2021], Caen, Mémorial de Caen, 2020, cited p. 31, 38 and 136, listed p. 168 and col. repr. p. 32, 147, 161



With the inauguration at the Mémorial de Caen of the exhibition called *The Liberation of Painting, 1945-1962*, curated by the Fondation, it is interesting to shine a light on the work of Jacques Villeglé, particularly his torn posters. One of them, recently acquired, features in the last section of the exhibition, which focuses on showing how the Second World War profoundly changed the course of art. By questioning the foundations of traditional painting, the artists of the time sought to make a *tabula rasa* of the past and use new ways of expressing themselves.

Produced in February 1960 while the Algerian War continued to sour the French political climate, *Rue au Maire* by Jacques Villeglé implicitly evokes the situation of a colony in the process of acquiring its independence, and a seemingly interminable war. The peace agreement concluded in Europe in 1945 after the surrender of Hitler's Germany was short-lived: conflict after conflict broke out, some of which would last well into the following decades. While the Korean (1950-1953) and Vietnam (1955-1975) Wars had a limited impact in Europe, it was essentially the war in Indochina (1946-1954) and that in Algeria (1954-1962) which marked the collective consciousness and divided French society. Therefore, in this context, the torn posters around which Jacques Villeglé had built his work since February 1949 often take on a political connotation.¹

A friend of Raymond Hains, whom he met at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Rennes in January 1945,² the pair experimented together on different techniques, ranging from photography to film. It was with Hains that in 1949 he began to take an interest in posters and together they produced several works. Even if they later followed different paths, they remained close and their research often intertwined. It is not surprising therefore that they both turned their attention to the Algerian War. A short time before Villeglé, Hains executed *Paix en Algérie*³ in 1956 and other works with pacifist connotations like *La Colombe de la paix* three years later (FGA-BA-HAINS-0004). Hains had photographed the ruins of Saint-Malo and Dinard in 1944. Between these two works, the pair presented their first exhibition of torn posters in 1957 at the Galerie Colette Allendy in Paris, where they had made the acquaintance of François Dufrêne three years previously. These various encounters often blossomed into veritable friendships and Jacques Marie-Bertrand Mahé de la Villeglé, to use his full name, created *La Baleine blanche* with the latter in 1958 (FGA-BA-DUFRE-0002). All three were founding members of the New Realists group in October 1960 alongside Arman, Yves Klein and Jean Tinguely, assembled together around the critic Pierre Restany.⁴ The concept of "ripping posters" gained recognition in the manifesto signed in Milan on 16 April, which intended to

¹ Indeed, this is one of the categories used to classify the artist's work in his catalogue raisonné, which consists of thirteen sections. See Villeglé, *Sans lettre, sans figure, Catalogue thématique des affiches lacérées*, Neuchâtel, Ides et Calendes, 2004, p. 7.

² Durozoi, Gérard, *Jacques Villeglé, œuvres, écrits, entretiens*, Paris, Hazan, 2008, p. 14.

³ Reproduced in Enwezor, Okwui, Siegel, Katy, Wilmes, Ulrich (ed.), *Postwar. Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945-1965*, exhibition catalogue [Munich, Haus der Kunst, 14.10.2016 – 26.03.2017], London, Prestel, 2016, p. [678].

⁴ Restany, Pierre, *Les Nouveaux Réalistes, Un manifeste de la nouvelle peinture*, [Paris], Éditions Planète, 1968, p. 204-205.



go beyond “easel painting” that “had had its day” and according to that same manifesto, was “currently experiencing the last moments, albeit occasionally sublime, of a long monopoly.”⁵ Since the late 1940s, Villeglé had worked tirelessly on posters, which became the primary material of his creative gesture. Considered a poor material, paper was in fact, a still rare commodity in France in the immediate post-war period. Between shortages and rationing, “paper [was] lacking” even if “advertising [was] king. The advertising poster, which benefits from the most expensive paper, illuminate[d] the sad and darkened facades of cities.”⁶

Whether advertising or political, posters were omnipresent during the thirty-year post-war boom in France and adorned not only the urban landscape but also the countryside. Posters were everywhere and provided Villeglé with a plentiful supply of material that he appropriated. For him, the torn poster, which was as much the fruit of chance as it was of spontaneity, was a work in itself. The paper torn from walls and advertising panels was generally used without alterations. It was torn and then brought back to the studio and mounted onto a support without any modification to the material. “Although he refute[d] any conscious composition”, Villeglé “admit[ted] having sometimes given ‘some help to the tearing’.”⁷ While he sought to efface himself as much as possible and believed that the work could be the result of an “anonymous plastic gesture”,⁸ in 1959, he conceptualized this way of thinking and doing under the title “Anonymous Ripper”: “I keep my distance from the act of painting and pasting, and take the non-premeditation for an inexhaustible source of art, an art worthy of museums. I consider as positive the result obtained by any passer-by who rips posters, without there being any aesthetic intention on their part; but I hold the choice in great esteem.”⁹

Just like Jean Dubuffet and the other artists who rethought painting after the end of the Second World War by erasing the past and using new materials and creating their own tools, Villeglé succeeded in finding another way of representing the world, replacing the traditional canvas with materials from everyday life. He had no hesitations about making use of poor materials and left an important place to chance, as seen in the work *Fils d'acier - Chaussée des Corsaires*, his very first sculpture made from steel wire found amongst the ruins of Saint-Malo in 1947.¹⁰ The questioning of the very foundations of painting was therefore at work. Painting no longer had to confront the real world because the latter was intrinsically part of the work through the materials used, like the posters torn from walls by Villeglé (FGA-BA-VILLE-0001), Hains, Dufrene (FGA-BA-DUFRE-0001) and Mimmo Rotella in Italy (FGA-BA-ROTEL-0002). Hains and Rotella went even further by not only using advertisements but also their supports: Hains used sheet metal (FGA-BA-HAINS-0001) and Rotella the wall on which the posters were glued (FGA -BA-ROTEL-0003). The urban reality was now very much part of these artworks, as was the political, social and economic context.

If the principle was roughly the same as that which presided over the realization of *Chaussée des Corsaires* in 1947, composed of materials found amidst the ruins and which for a long time, was the artist's only sculpture, the posters used here were primarily torn from the

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁶ Felgine, Odile, *Jacques Villeglé*, Neuchâtel, Ides et Calendes, 2001, p. 63.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁹ Villeglé, Jacques, *Le lacéré anonyme*, [Dijon], Les presses du réel, 2008, p. 7.

¹⁰ Reproduced in *Jacques Villeglé*, Paris, Flammarion, 2007, p. 135.



streets of Paris. *Rue au Maire* takes its title from the site where Villeglé removed the posters that constitute his work. Impressive in size (252.7 x 212.8 cm) and consisting of two panels, it was so large that only one of these could be photographed during the Salon des Comparaisons held at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris in March-April 1960. We can see the remains of an advert calling for a rally in support of "a French Algeria". Mounted on canvas, these torn posters remind us that the fate of Algeria was also being decided upon in France. A year before the publication of Henri Alleg's book, *La Question*,¹¹ denouncing the torture put in place by the French army and the dirty war it waged in Algeria, Villeglé did not shy away from shining a light on the unease permeating French society and the conflict between two irreconcilable camps. The ripped poster, however spontaneous and the fruit of chance, implicitly evokes French mentalities and political and social struggles, from decolonization to the struggle of women for the right to abortion.

Jacques Villeglé's works bear witness to the crisis of representation that raged after the war, affecting artists seeking, whether consciously or unconsciously, to represent the reality of their time without necessarily having recourse to painting and figuration. In the words of Pierre Restany: "The war had traumatized us, we considered abstract art the beginning of an escape from seeking not to represent the world."¹² Non-painting therefore became painting, as Camille Bryen recalled, and the torn poster was elevated to the rank of a work of art. Appropriation therefore became a central notion in the artist's work, whose raw material had nevertheless become scarce in recent years.

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¹¹ Alleg, Henri, *La Question*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1961.

¹² Felgine, *op. cit.*, p. 76.