

Hacer el punto en los 500 diablos

Set the point at the 500 devils

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In the Aquitaine region, in the southwest of France, a group of artists from different disciplines, motivated by a reactive impulse in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that has been raging since the beginning of 2020, have launched a collective project called *Aux 500 diables* (At the 500 devils)². Out of a first historical confinement at the beginning of spring and perplexed by the idea of spending an uncertain summer due to sanitary restrictions, they launched an invitation to imagine "adventurous, light, convivial and responsible" artistic proposals. These actions were to be carried out preferably outside (with the sanitary protocols) or virtually and with the existing economic resources

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² The expression 'to be at the 500 devils' means to be far away, lost in the middle of nowhere, far from civilization.

(without subsidies of any kind) to make their presence visible as artists, share a moment with others, and, even more, to exist.



Figure 1. Marc Ardi, Tout va très bien. Aux500diabes, Bordeaux, 2020

The call was enthusiastically received by the artists³. The proposals were coming in. The public had to go to the banks of a river for an unprecedented performance. They could access a special card reading, participate in a treasure hunt game, sign up for the creation of participatory works with free protocols, spend a day gardening with an artist, make the packaging of undesirable sculptures... the list was long. All the proposals had a free spirit, simplicity in management and execution, and were presented to the public as "utopias of proximity" (Bourriaud 2007, p. 8).

³ Christophe Doucet, Marianne Vieulès, Joël Hubaut, Marc Ardi, Agnès Aubague, Gérard Gergerès, Suzanne Husky, Aurore Claverie, Simon Rayssac, Karinka Szabo-Detchart, Jean-Martial Estève, Fanny Garcia & Jack Usine, Pascal Leroy, Mael Le Mée, Thomas Lanfranchi, Benjamin Bondonneau, Alexis Choplain, Lydie Palaric, Sophie Poirier & Olivier Crouzel, Anne-Laure Boyer, Philippe Poupet, Jean-Paul Thibeau, Véronique Lamare, Priscille Claude, Steph Goodger, Anne Moirier, Agnès Torres, Rustha Luna Pozzi Escot, Pascal Daudon, Céline Domengie, Lou-Andréa Lassalle, Pierre Andrieux, Carole Lataste, Steph Goodger, Anne Moirier, Johann Bernard.



Figure 2. Agnès Torres, The garden of Agnès. Aux500diabables, Bordeaux, 2020

In a few weeks, about 40 proposals were launched on the website (<https://aux500diabables.com>) throughout the French south-west region and, from Peru, meetings were held, new networks were created and bonds of friendship were established. As the first days of autumn arrived, after a fleeting European summer, the health crisis gained ground and most of the artists returned to their workshops and concerns. At the close of the event, permission was obtained to use the information panels in the stations of the tram network in the city of Bordeaux and to put up 40 posters created by the participating artists, which were visible until the last month of the 2020 summer season. It was like a device that went into a restful sleep and was awakened, pandemic or not, for new adventures.



Figure 3. Jack Chinaski, poster by Rustha Luna Pozzi Escot at the Barrière Saint-Genès station, Bordeaux, 2020.

Set the point

I responded from Peru to the call made by my fellow artists. In almost any place in the world, proposing action in a synchronous virtual format could not have been imagined before, but given the new normality that arose due to the pandemic, it made sense. The project Faire le Point or Set the Point ⁴was born out of a desire to continue experimenting

⁴ The French expression has its origin in the marine sector. In maritime navigation is to determine by observations and calculations the geographical position of a ship at sea. By extension, in a figurative sense, to make a point is to take stock of a situation by analyzing it point by point. This expression is common in the information sector: to make the point of a piece of information is to make the synthesis at a given moment, to know with precision a given situation. Source: <https://www.linternaute.fr/dictionnaire/fr/definition/faire-le-point/> (the translation is mine).

and proposing new collaborative workspaces. Inspired by the French expression, I allude to the world of textiles, where getting together to sew, embroider or knit the stitch is one of the main protagonists in most textile creations; it's all a matter of stitches. They were free weekly meetings to exchange and share knowledge and textile problems. With a sustained weekly rhythm, we had five sessions in which the "points" touched upon were developed and increased as the group was being formed. Thus, we embarked on a narrative journey through the path of textile making thanks to our allied tools: Internet, Zoom, Drive, Google. People from distant parts of the world joined these encounters: Lima, Santiago, New York, London, Paris, Bordeaux, Aubusson, and La Rochelle. Like a "patchwork", we developed five premises throughout the sessions: repairing, weaving, sewing as drawing, embroidery as writing, and set the point, which guided us to create a "blanket" of knowledge in which each contribution, each reflection had an important place.

Although the encounters were virtual, the actual form of the textile encounters was undefined. A hybrid format was proposed between a workshop, a conversation, a discussion, a discovery of an artist, a style, and a technique. From the beginning, the intention was to create and share a space where making would be the excuse to exchange ideas on themes linked to the textile universe. But it wasn't like that. Although in each of the encounters, the opportunity arose spontaneously to show (physically) some previously made pieces or some object or garment concerning the central theme of that day. Verbal exchange was prioritized throughout the sessions.



Figure 4. Rustha Luna Pozzi Escot, Set the point, 2020

One of the reflections I could highlight from this experience is that in virtuality, the shared space in which relationships are created becomes a space of "showing" rather than of production itself. We are stripped of common sensory perceptions, such as touch. We cannot touch, feel, identify the matter of the other person's object. We observe that triangulation, listening-talking, doing (knitting, embroidery), and seeing what is being done and the screen is almost impossible. When in-person, it is normal. These spaces of physical encounter linked to textiles go back millennia, and reproducing them online becomes a challenge. An example that worked was the performative action In-Memory⁵, an experience in which several people gathered in a synchronous online space (Facebook live) to embroider, in silence, commemorating those who disappeared due to the pandemic. The artist and president of the Cultural Association Centro Selva Arte y Cultura of Pucallpa (<http://www.centroselva.com>), Diana Riesco-Lind, made the proposal. Keeping the sound off eliminated one of the channels of communication and the silent action was strengthened thanks to the concentration of its participants.

⁵ Participants logged on for one hour on Saturdays in June and July 2020.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaDD29i1dH8&t=424s>

Knitting became a rich space for exchanging knowledge based on the experience and knowledge of the textile universe of its participants, who reinvented new forms of socialization imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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