

13 MARCH - 26 SEPTEMBER 2021

# VALLEY SITUATIONS

**Léa Bismuth & Nicolas Boulard**



MUSÉE BALZAC  
Château de Saché



« Others have beaten the bushes.  
We have the birds. »\*  
Madame de Montespan earthenware tile  
with proverb on the walls of the  
old library at Château d'Oiron

\*Ancient proverb meaning that someone has  
undertaken work which has benefited somebody else.

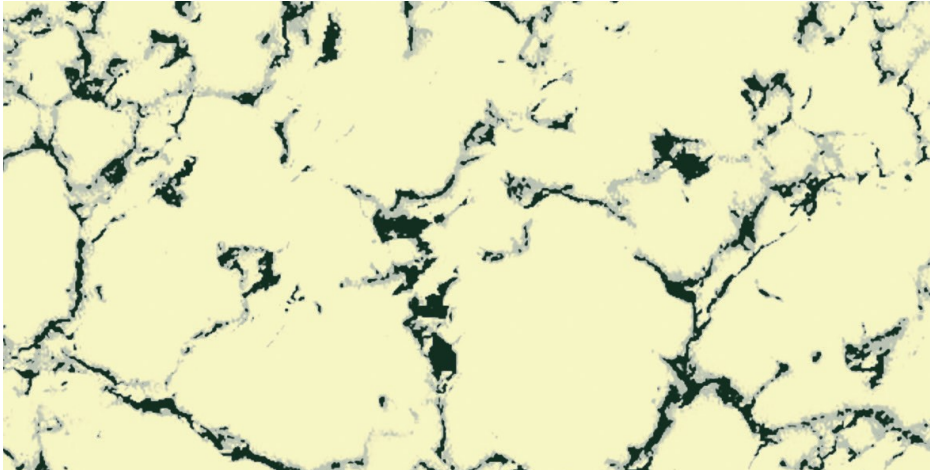


**L**éa Bismuth (writer) and Nicolas Boulard (artist) took up residence at the Balzac Museum - Château de Saché for two months in the autumn of 2019. This time of research, writing and creation marked the origin of this exhibition in two of the museum rooms as well as in the barn. The route consists of three “Situations”, which are all ways of inhabiting this place and the surrounding valleys, in order to give them a new voice.

The two artists asked themselves the following question: what is a scenario in a given place? How can we meet the author of *La Comédie humaine* [*The Human Comedy*] and how does it resonate with our time? Is it possible to read between its lines, or even in its margins? They sought to get the better of these questions while maintaining pressure on them. They also attached great importance to taking the time to live in a place that was previously a writing refuge for Balzac, away from the hustle and bustle of Paris. From the privacy of a writer’s room to the surrounding paths, everything was a matter for reflection.

Attention must be paid to the choice of source texts here. The first exhibition room — **Situation #1** — constitutes the matrix, in a kind of cabinet of curiosities with clues scattered throughout the works. We can no doubt find an unknown or encrypted Balzac: works such as *Sarrasine* and *Séraphîta*, or *Physiologie du mariage* [*The physiology of marriage*]. The exhibition continues in the Métadier room, with **Situation #2**, which is of a more aerial and meteorological nature, open to the sky and the Loire. Finally, in the barn, **Situation #3** will further widen the horizon, with the artists having taken over for a performance with a sonic dimension, the 23km journey that Balzac took on foot from Tours station to Saché when he arrived by train from Paris. This walk was an opportunity to reread the breathtaking essay, *Théorie de la démarche* [*Theory of Walking*], in which the author studies how bodies move as well as the birth of a “new idea”, anticipating a most contemporary conception of the artistic process.

These three *Situations* form one, for an exhibition with chapters just like a book, whose white pages have gradually darkened. With this in mind, you can find the book from this experience in the museum shop



## **SITUATION #1 : S/Z**

### **WELCOME AREA**

The first room presents Situation #1, in an indexed cabinet of curiosities constituting the matrix of this exhibition. Entitled *S/Z*, it is a nod to Roland Barthes' essay which he wrote after reading Balzac's novella, *Sarrasine*. In the great structuralist style, the intention of this 1970 essay is to decode. Drawing on the central theme of the novella, Barthes is interested in the letter Z, at the heart of Balzac's name, which he analyses as the letter of castration. Let us remember, *Sarrasine* falls in love at first sight with Zambinella, who he believes is a woman. Yet he is none other than a eunuch. This disillusioned love is wonderfully staged by Balzac in this short story, which was rather unnerving in those times. The novella *Séraphita*, written by Balzac at the same time, also portrays the androgynous dimension of all love, as the creature Séraphitüs-Séraphita is sometimes male and sometimes female.

This double reference inspired the works in this room: wallpaper, objects holding important or even visible trinkets, book quotes, photographs and graphic works. We are also looking at the humorous side of things, playing with the codes of the bourgeois dwelling of this welcome lounge, setting the scene both literally and figuratively. A photographic self-portrait by the artist Pierre Molinier (1900-1976) was a catalyst for work here since the latter is depicted as a transvestite under the name of *Séraphita*.

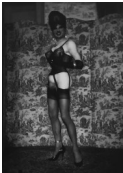
## Léa Bismuth & Nicolas Boulard

### ***Stilton [Penicillium marble]***

Wallpaper, variable dimensions, installation in situ, 2020.

(Illustration opposite - detail)

The motif of this work, *Stilton [Penicillium marble]* — faithful to Nicolas Boulard's general conceptual research on cheese — comes from an image of Stilton, an English cheese whose blue veins are reminiscent of the furrows of a decaying landscape, the twists and turns of a river, or the Venetian marbling technique used in publishing (and for the covers of Balzac's books, which can be seen in Saché in the museum collections). This marbled motif is also a quote that echoes the wallpaper found in the dining room at the Château de Saché. It contains other mysterious origins which need to be deciphered, including an allusion to the Toile de Jouy pattern used in the screen used as a backdrop for Pierre Molinier's self-portrait photo displayed in this room.



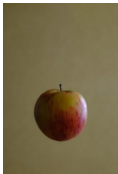
### **Pierre Molinier [1900-1976]**

#### ***Self-portrait in Séraphita***

Photograph, vintage print on paper, 17.8 x 12.6 cm, 1966.

Mr and Mrs Lugosi collection

Pierre Molinier is an uncategorisable artist of the 20th century, best known for this photographic staging and photomontage created in the wake of Surrealism. His work, which was often erotic in nature and sometimes even inflammatory, is mostly made up of self-portraits in which the artist depicts himself in drag, dressed in stockings, masks, corsets, veils and stilettos. His work, which could be described as fetishist, subsequently had a significant influence on Body Art. In this image, Molinier explicitly refers to Balzac's *Séraphita* with the title. A screen can also be spotted in the background of this small vintage print. It is covered with a Toile de Jouy pattern which has been identified by a study: it is *L'Offrande à l'amour [Offering of love]*, a typical pattern of the eighteenth century, which the artists of this exhibition make use of with the *Stilton [Marbre penicillium]* wallpaper displayed here.



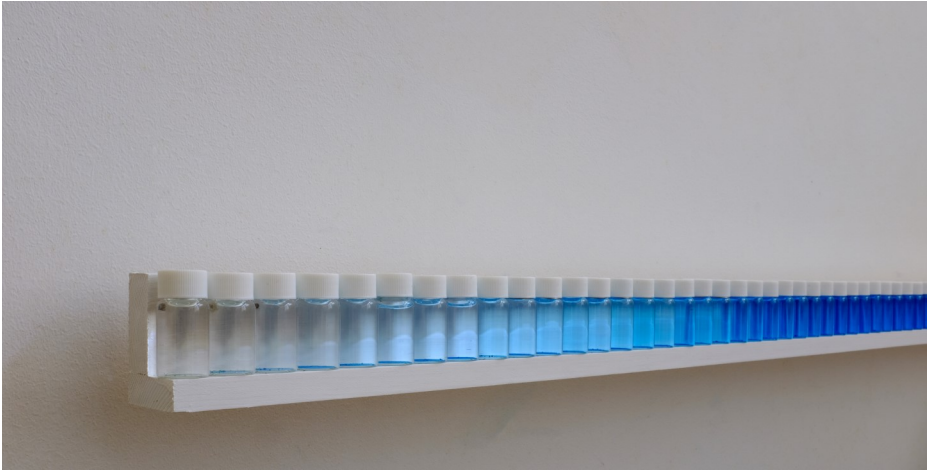
### **Nicolas Boulard**

#### ***The apple falls where it can (a tribute to Erik Dietman)***

Photograph, pigment ink print on paper

77 x 110 cm, 2020

During their residency, the artists frequently came across apple trees: in the grounds of the Château de Saché or in the garden of Maison de Max Ernst and Dorothea Tanning in Huismes. It was also during an excursion to Musée Rabelais - Maison de La Devinière, that they discovered a gem, a phrase which would stay in their minds: "the apple falls where it can". This quote, from December 1993, is by the artist Erik Dietman, and is found in one of the lithographs that he devoted to Rabelais. Dietman explained his refusal of "idiotic illustration" in the handling of his subject, in other words, paying a pure and simple tribute to the great writer. The apple falls where it falls, unpredictable. This photograph of a suspended apple is a possible metaphor for the creative process.



## **SITUATION #2 : the blue of the sky**

### **MÉTADIER ROOM**

The large Métadier Room at the Château de Saché opens up to the sky of Touraine. This more environmental part consists of a series of colour charts created by Nicolas Boulard as part of his research inspired by minimal art, and in particular by Dan Flavin who used neon tubes to make three-dimensional architectural paintings. This here is a large *Nuancier mélancolique* [*Melancholy colour chart*] created using ink and vinegar, representing sunset or dawn. Nearby, there is a succession of vials of Chinese ink in very low doses gradually dissolving in the water. The process of writing becomes a gradual accumulation as one blackens the blank page, but is also a way of grasping an infinite number of possibilities between transparency, visibility and obscurity. This installation is related to *Le bleu du ciel* [*The blue of the sky*], for which Nicolas Boulard collected autumn rainwater from Touraine. Similarly, we will also find a framed artwork created with water taken from the Loire, at the exact spot where Max Ernst located the meeting of the Indre and the Loire in *Le Jardin de la France* [*The Garden of France*], a well-known painting in the region.

The literary dimension of the exhibition is maintained here with a video with text by Léa Bismuth rounding off this first part of the journey, in a journal with writing that is perpetually imbalanced. Because there is a stubborn question that persists: is writing possible here *after* Balzac?

## Nicolas Boulard

### ***Le bleu du ciel*** [*The blue of the sky*]

Vials, Touraine rainwater, Cyan ink,  
4m80 linear, 2020.

(Illustration opposite - detail)

The colour chart belongs to the conceptual and plastic vocabulary of the artist, a form which he recently used to tackle the wine world with. These include *Nuancier* [*Colour chart*], made from blends of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir (2004), or the *Nuancier finement boisé* [*Finely wooded colour chart*] (2007) which follows a mathematical logic inspired by the Fibonacci sequence. More recently, the *Nuancier du Rhône* [*Rhône colour chart*] (2017) displayed water samples from the river on a route that was parallel to the writing of the book, beginning at an altitude of 3200m on the Rhône glacier of Switzerland and finishing 812km away at Port-Saint-Louis-du-Rhône in Camargue. But here it is the rainwater from the Touraine sky that has been painstakingly collected. Gradually mixed with Cyan printing ink, the blue of the sky is in a constant state of flux, changing from the purity of dawn to the deepest blue that announces the night. The small size of the vials used also makes it a travelling work, which is typical of the residence days.

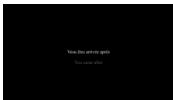


## Léa Bismuth & Nicolas Boulard

### ***L'arbre de Saché*** [*The tree of Saché*] **(tribute to Edward Steichen)**

Digital print, 120 x 176 cm, 2020.

This photograph (also displayed in postcard format) is an invitation to the eye. During their residency, the artists saw a preserved tree that had been struck by lightning in the common grounds near the Maurux lake in Saché: they immediately noticed a similarity in terms of morphology with a photograph by Edward Steichen (*The Open Sky*, 1908). This photograph is actually taken by the photographer of a sculptural monument dedicated to Honoré de Balzac, created by Auguste Rodin (*Monument to Balzac*, 1898). Léa Bismuth and Nicolas Boulard try to insert themselves in this story here, in a conceptual gesture of artistic lineage. They worked on the image in such a way as to regain the point of view and dramatisation of Steichen's pictorialist photograph.



## Léa Bismuth

### ***Il suffirait d'avoir une idée neuve*** ***[Having a new idea would be enough]***

Video with text, no sound, 8 minutes, 2020.

This video with text should be read while listening to a voice speaking softly in the night, to the rhythm of phrasing and breathing. The original text was written in a single breath, just after the residency at Saché: it is like an anxious rush. It begins with these words: *You arrived afterwards / You are sitting down and looking to remember / A castle where nobody lives anymore / Before, a long time ago, a writer stayed there / Does all of this concern you?* This video is also intended to be both a poem and a kind of fable about the desire to write by getting involved in an individual, just before they speak. The writing becomes a grace thwarting the straight line of the text, a silent wait and a bonfire that is still burning brightly.



## **SITUATION #3 : Théorie de la démarche [Theory of Walking]**

GRANGE

This third Situation of the exhibition (which concludes the journey) is actually the result of an inaugural act by Léa Bismuth and Nicolas Boulard when they arrived in Touraine in autumn 2019. Drawing on the life of Balzac, who was a habitual walker, they decided, for a physical performance, to repeat the 23km journey from Tours station to Château de Saché which the writer completed on foot. During this event, in the form of a nearly five-hour soundtrack, the two protagonists talk, comment on the spaces they pass through and discuss art and literature while being spontaneous. They take notes in the margins of the text and the side paths of the landscape, from the city centre to the outskirts, through roads and paths. Spectators can lend an attentive ear to this experience by sitting here on a garden bench from the grounds of the Château de Saché.

During the walk, the two artists are armed with a book by Balzac: *Théorie de la démarche* [*Theory of Walking*]. In this short, breathtaking and complex book, documenting the aesthetics of Walter Benjamin's stroll or the theory of the 'situationist drift', Balzac studies the way in which bodies can move, and the associated variation of physical attitudes.



The artists also defined a sort of manifesto concerning all artistic processes: how are ideas born? Where do they come from? How can they be portrayed in the form of an artwork? Balzac's answer is clear: you have to know how to change direction or "virvouche" [an old French word meaning to come and go, get up, sit down, to move around with no purpose], "grace abhors straight lines", everything is played out in the margins and in the opening of nuances. *Gait* is something that must constantly be reinvented to acquire uniqueness and avoid becoming mechanical.

The video installation *Horizont* displayed in the barn reflects the landscape passed through during the performance and replicates the changing skies — from one end of the day to the other, from one end of the night to the other, as is said at the end of the audio recording. Any artistic thought in the process becomes a journey, a scenario with a thinking and moving body, as well as temporal and spatial travelling.

## **Léa Bismuth & Nicolas Boulard**

### ***There are no lost steps***

Performance, sound installation, Saché garden bench,  
2019-2020.

During this walk, the dialogue was unscripted. The sound of footsteps is sometimes masked by the urban environment of Tours, or by cars travelling at full speed along the highway. Occasionally there are lulls: roads become paths and speech can become more free, as the footsteps slow. Please remember that the sound is rudimentary, live, and cannot be edited, and nothing has been masked.

#### **Details of the performance**

##### Space information:

23,8 km

32 096 steps

Active walking time: 4h51

##### Weather information:

Walk took place on 19 November 2019

Clear skies, varying shades

Temperature: between 1°C and 9°C

##### Time information:

Departure: Tours Station 10:20am

Arrival: Château de Saché woods 3:49pm

##### Technical information:

11 audio recording tracks

Sound recording: Nicolas Boulard

##### Conceptual information:

Commentary on *Théorie de la démarche* [*Theory of Walking*]

by Honoré de Balzac

Open dialogue and voices: Léa Bismuth and Nicolas Boulard

#### **Picture :**

Nicolas Boulard,  
*There are no lost steps*  
(detail),  
photograph of the  
Touraine sky during  
the performance,  
2019.



## Léa Bismuth

is an author, art critic and curator. Her work involves exploring, through writing, the areas of potential actions between literary narrative and exhibition space. She is a specialist in the ideas of Georges Bataille, to whom she dedicated the series of exhibitions entitled *La Traversée des Inquiétudes* [*Transcending Worries*] (Labanque, Béthune, from 2016 to 2019) and a book, *La Besogne des Images* [*Images Hard at Work*] (Éditions Filigranes, 2019). She is currently working on an essay on the creative process in literature.



## Nicolas Boulard

is graduated from the Higher School of Decorative Arts in Strasbourg in 2002. He creates unruly artistic work at the crossroads of practices: from minimal and conceptual art to gastronomy and viticulture. His reversals have led him to plant a mobile vineyard, to copy a Romanée Conti cuvée, and to develop the evolutionary work of Specific Cheeses. He points to societal data such as the definition of a territory and its boundaries, which now leads him to create a permanent installation on the island of Hokkaido in Japan. His work has benefited from personal exhibitions (La Halle des Bouchers Art Centre, Frac Aquitaine, Frac Champagne-Ardenne, etc.) and is kept in several public collections. He has penned books that accompany his artistic endeavours: *Rhône* (2017), *Journal de la route des vins d'Alsace* [*Alsace wine journey diary*] (2004).

13 March - 26 September 2021

# VALLEY SITUATIONS

**Léa Bismuth & Nicolas Boulard**

Artistic curator: Anne-Laure Chamboissier

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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**Château de Saché**

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## PRICES

€6 / discounted price €5

Access to barn is free.



## PUBLICATION

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**MUSÉE BALZAC**  
Château de Saché





**TOURAINES**  
LE DÉPARTEMENT

