

LES ABATTOIRS,  
MUSEUM - FRAC OCCITANIE TOULOUSE, PRESENTS:

# Hessie: Survival Art



*Boutons bleus* [Blue Buttons] (No.Inv.031), 1974-75

Blue and grey buttons sewn onto cotton fabric, mounted on a frame - 165 x 295 cm

Photo: Béatrice Hatala © Courtesy of Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre

**29 September → 21 January 2018**

This exhibition is organised in association with **MUSAC** Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León



# Hessie: Survival Art

29 September → 21 January 2018

*"Survival Art – art of each individual and all of us, anonymous Art, art of living and survival beyond the squall, above resignation."*<sup>1</sup> Hessie

**Les Abattoirs are pleased to present a Hessie retrospective in Toulouse, opening on 29 September. A self-taught immigrant, Hessie was one of the rare artists of colour active on the French scene in the 1970s. From the late 1960s, she developed a singular body of work, transforming embroidery and collage into a message for survival and feminism. Like other artists of her generation, she reappropriated this craft, predominantly practised by women, using it to create contemporary expressions with needle and thread. The way in which she used an activity for her own ends that had long been considered archaic and anonymous led to her allegiance with avant-garde and the women's liberation movements. This first major exhibition in a French museum for almost forty years contributes to the rediscovery in recent years of an artist long marginalised within the history of art.**

Hessie's story also resonates as that of a 20th century woman in a globalised world, including with regard to the mystery that she continues to maintain surrounding some of the events of her life. Born in 1936 into a mixed-race family from the Caribbean Islands, Hessie left the island of Cuba on a journey, to America and elsewhere. In 1962, she and the painter Dado, she had met in New York, moved into a windmill once owned by collector Daniel Cordier, in Hérouval, one hour from Paris. In this home, where she still lives today, Hessie Carmen Lydia Djuric quickly set up a studio, which allows her to retreat as though into a creative bubble to weave the framework of domestic temporality. In this "room of her own", to borrow Virginia Woolf's expression, she develops an unclassifiable œuvre, which she pursues to this day. Using humble, domestic (paper, clothing, waste, hair, dust), feminine (fabric, thread, buttons), or children's materials (toys), she gives rise to a rigorous, minimalist, and often abstract plastic language. While escaping established categories, her work remains powerfully contemporary. For art critic Aline Dallier, she thus belongs to the "Nouvelles Pénélopes" (New Penelopes) who make use of feminine language in order to subvert it. As for the series of embroidered or collage works - *Grillages, Végétation, Bâtons pédagogiques, Ecritures, Trous, Déchets* or *Boîtes* - they also bear affinities with contemporary movements such as minimalism, process art, antiform, soft art, but also arte povera and Support/Surface. Moreover, performances and discussions from artists from French art scene, specially women artist took place in her Parisian studio. She herself tried the very new media of video.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Hessie on the occasion of her exhibition at the A.R.C. in 1975, found in the archives of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

# Survival Art: The Exhibition

*"No man's land. The artist declines all responsibility as to their identity, both in terms of their private life and declarations concerning their work."*<sup>2</sup> Hessie

This is what Hessie affirms as a kind of introduction to the exhibition catalogue *Survival Art*, the first monographic exhibition of Hessie, held in February 1975 at the A.R.C. of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. This expression that gives its title to the project of Les Abattoirs, sets the tone for the radicality of the artist's position and approach.

The retrospective held at Les Abattoirs de Toulouse in association with the MUSAC in Léon, Spain, intends to reveal the rich and complex diversity of the world of an artist as fascinating as she is enigmatic. Thanks to a large body of works bringing together the series on fabric and on paper, embroideries and collages, as well as new pieces, the exhibition will present the multiple facets of a singular artist. Thematically organised as an environment, besides artworks, it will include documentary and art films from the period and more recent films, as well as testimonies, in an attempt to penetrate the "Hessie Mystery".

*"Survival Art aims to resist dissolution and loss, thus clearly favours detritus, obsolete objects, everyday materials, the vestiges of a life, or, with the sewing, an action that patches up, nurses, and binds. Survival Art is synonymous with its allies, the feminist liberation movements, or the workshops or meetings of supportive and politically committed women it participates in. This term Survival Art retrospectively takes on a new dimension, with the knowledge that survival is inscribed within the very heart of the fate of the artist's work, which just barely escaped destruction. Following water damage in the Hérouval windmill, a large part of Hessie's œuvre was affected by humidity and mildew, with some works bearing traces of this event despite restoration."* Sonia Recasens and Annabelle Ténèze

Curators:

**Sonia Recasens**, art critic, independent exhibition curator

**Annabelle Ténèze**, heritage curator, Director, les Abattoirs, modern and contemporary art museum, Frac Occitanie Toulouse.

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<sup>2</sup> *Survival Art: Hessie*, A.R.C.2., Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 12 February-16 March 1975

Press kit with visuals available for download on [www.lesabattoirs.org](http://www.lesabattoirs.org), section: Press, password: press.

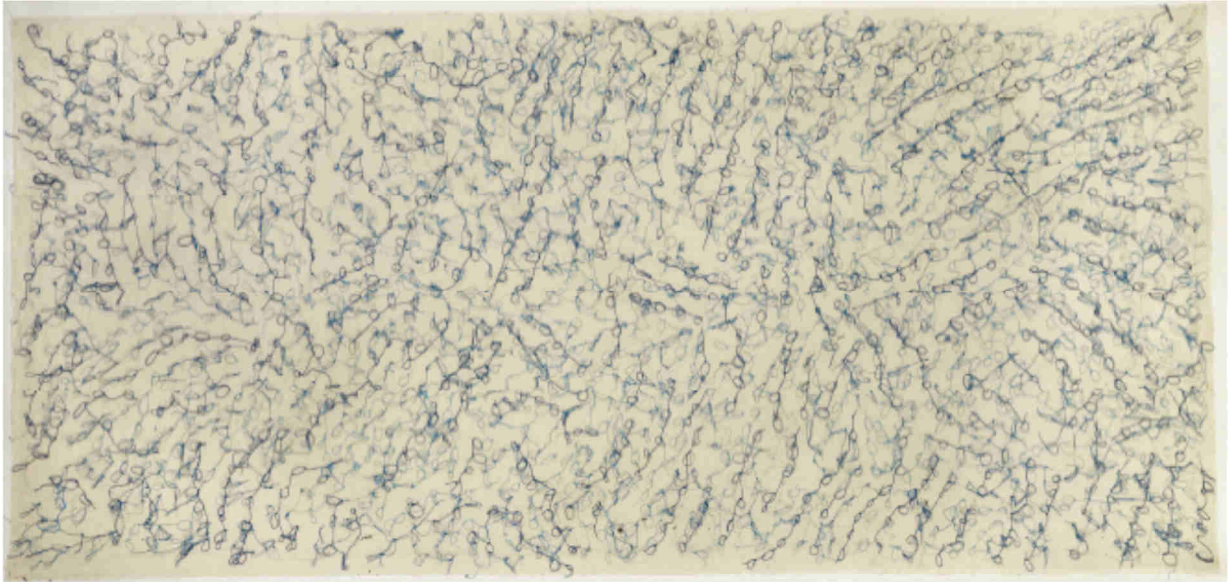
# Artist's Biography

Born in 1936 in the Caribbean Islands, Hessie travelled alone from the late 1950s to Europe, Canada, and the United States, particularly New York, where she worked as a copyist before meeting the Yugoslavian-born artist Dado (1933-2010). In 1962, she left for Hérouval, where they hosted artists, curators, and collectors in a windmill that had belonged to art collector and dealer Daniel Cordier, and that Dado was endlessly decorating. A key participant in the arts scene of the 1970s, she regularly held exhibitions in France and abroad, in galleries such as Yvon Lambert Iris Clert, or Beaudoin Lebon. In 1975, Suzanne Pagé organised her first solo exhibition at the A.R.C. under the title *Survival Art*. In 1976, Hessie participated in the collective exhibition *Combative Acts, Profiles and Voices* organised by Aline Dallier at the A.I.R. Gallery of New York, with Françoise Janicot, Milvia Maglione, and Nil Yalter, among others. Her work was also shown at the Konsthall in Lund, Sweden, which dedicated a monographic exhibition to her in 1978.

Heavily involved in feminist movements, she actively participated in the meetings of the Women's Liberation Movement, even hosting events and exhibitions in her second studio located in the 13<sup>th</sup> arrondissement in Paris, with artists such as Dorothee Selz and Lea Lublin.

The effervescence of this period abated in the 1980s and Hessie gradually faded from the public eye. Thanks to Daniel Cordier's donation, two of Hessie's works have now entered the collections of the Musée National d'Art Moderne - Centre Georges Pompidou. Now entrusted to Les Abattoirs - Frac Occitanie Toulouse, these artworks are regularly exhibited there and were presented at the exhibition *Elles@centrepompidou* in 2009, thus initiating the rediscovery of a marginalised artist. In 2016, her work was exhibited at La Verrière, Fondation Hermès, in Brussels (curator: Guillaume Désanges). She is represented by the Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre, in Paris.

# Hessie: Survival Art



Hessie, *Untitled*, 1978, embroidery with blue thread on fabric, 77 x 159 cm,  
donation Daniel Cordier to the Mnam in 1989, on permanent loan at Les Abattoirs  
© Hessie; copyr. photo. © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. RMN-GP

*Points cousus* [Sewn Dots] (No.Inv.055), 1973-76  
Embroidery in fuchsia and red thread on cotton fabric.  
109 x 86 cm.

Photo: Béatrice Hatala  
© Courtesy of Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre





*Boîtes* [Boxes] (No.Inv.189), 1975

Wooden box with movable plexiglas lid, containing pieces of fabric, feathers, artificial flowers, etc.  
25.7 x 38.5 x 5.4 cm © Courtesy of Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre



*Dado's Underwear* (No.Inv.103), 1970

Collage of a pair of white cotton underwear covered in paint stains, on white paper.  
65 x 60 cm.  
© Courtesy of Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre



LES ABATTOIRS, MUSEE-FRAC OCCITANIE TOULOUSE,  
ALSO PRESENTS:

UNTIL 26 NOVEMBER 2017

## Suspended Animation

À CORPS PERDU DANS L'ESPACE NUMERIQUE

in association with the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington

With: Ed Atkins, Antoine Catala, Ian Cheng, Kate Cooper, Josh Kline,  
Helen Marten, Agnieszka Polska, Jon Rafman, Avery Singer.

UNTIL 14 JANUARY 2018

## Marguerite Humeau: ECHO



EXPOSITION 24/06 → 26/11/17

# Suspended Animation

À corps perdu dans l'espace numérique

Egalement à l'affiche  
Jusqu'au 03 septembre

Peindre comme je bouge  
Daniel Spoerri  
les dadas des deux Daniel

*And this whole thing a concession, really.*

**les Abattoirs**  
Musée - FRAC Occitanie Toulouse

Exposition organisée par le Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, avec la collaboration des  
Abattoirs - Frac Occitanie Toulouse.

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# les Abattoirs

Musée - FRAC Occitanie Toulouse



View of the courtyard of Les Abattoirs. On the wall, artwork (neon) by Joël Andrianomearisoa, 2017 © J. Andrianomearisoa ; photo. S. Leonard.

## ABOUT LES ABATTOIRS-FRAC OCCITANIE TOULOUSE

At once the civic Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of the City of Toulouse and the Regional Contemporary Art Collection (FRAC), Les Abattoirs play a central role in the promotion, dissemination, and heritage conservation of contemporary creation. Former abattoirs converted into a new museum facility inaugurated in June 2000, the building is a vast space with permanent and temporary exhibition rooms, as well as spaces for artistic experimentation, a media library, studios, and a bookshop.

The excellent reputation of Les Abattoirs is due to its high quality programming, to ongoing exchanges with the most prominent national and international museums, and to the presence of major modern and contemporary artists within its own collection. Beyond its museographic, documentary, educational, and cultural missions in Toulouse and in the Occitanie / Pyrénées - Méditerranée region, Les Abattoirs is constantly confronting and extending audiences' knowledge of the art of our times.

Since September 2016, Les Abattoirs-Frac Occitanie Toulouse has been directed by Annabelle Ténèze.





# Practical Information

## **les Abattoirs**

Musée - FRAC Occitanie Toulouse

76 Allées Charles-de-Fitte  
31300 Toulouse  
[www.lesabattoirs.org](http://www.lesabattoirs.org)

### **Contact and Access:**

33 (0) 5 62 48 58 00 (administrative reception)  
or 33 (0) 5 34 51 10 60 (voice server)  
Metro: "Saint-Cyprien République" stop – Line A  
Bus: n°31 and 45, "Les Abattoirs" stop  
3 reserved disabled parking spaces Rue Charles Malpel

### **Museum Opening Hours:**

Open from Wednesday to Sunday from noon to 6 pm.  
Late-night opening on Thursdays, until 8 pm (except during school holidays).

### **Prices:**

Full price: 7  
Concession price: 4

### **Contact details:**

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