



Virginie Sommet

To be where she is not supposed to be

Virginie Sommet arrived in her Chinatown studio; among her sculptures, collages, installations and paintings, just after lunch. It is a moment when people suddenly feel tired, but she was in great shape.

The heels of her black boots made a terrible din on the quiet white wooden floor. She spoke loudly even if I was very close to her. Every three sentences, Virginie changed the tone of her voice, from a low to a high pitch, sometimes even deeping into a husky voice.

She could have been a comedian, she decided to be a fine artist.

On the twenty-two year old black thin polo-neck jumper, which she had underneath her

short black polyester dress, Virginie wore a pipe cover from a sink as a necklace. She made it herself, along with two bombastic rings made from parts of old computers. If she

never has any kind of print fabrics on her, not even a bit on her undergarments, it is because she always wears a mass of accessories, « *with dots or flowers, my look would*

*be too messy*». On this very day, she did not put on her wonder woman metal belt, the one that gives her strength, nor her asian chopsticks, which usually hold her very long dark hair into a perfect bun.

As usual, she had stuck on one of her six hundred shiny bindis on her forehead «*not to*

*have the same face every day*». She had also dropped thousands of pieces of glitter around her green wide eyes. To complete her unique look, she had tied a big red flower

to the left side of her head. «*My style, as my work, consists in making the balls-up of brains. I love when people get muddled up.*»

Virginie Sommet is purebred French, «*it's kind of boring*». She is totally pleased when people do not guess where she is from. And they never do, so she is pleased all the time.

«*I hate obviousness. I found it great not to look like where I come from. I got to my path.*»

It is true that Virginie does not have the look of Lisieux, a small town in Basse-Normandy

west of France, where she was born. «*I come from a peculiar ghetto, the preppy ghetto.*»

She insisted on showing me pictures of her parents' house. As she remembered her kilt,

her wool tights, her velvet hairband that used to hurt her a lot, and the bow, which was so

big that it went over her ears, she burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, as often happens.

Virginie escaped her parents' house at the age of nineteen, without telling anybody, and

left only a letter in the living room. On the 20th of October, in 1987, she took the train at 12:10pm in Lisieux and arrived in Paris at 2pm. «*I was born*». She started as an encyclopedia vendor, and then a dance teacher, but she wanted to live in Tokyo. «*I belong to another time. I should live in 2050. I would love to go riding dressed as Barbarella, all-metal.*»

She did not get a visa for Japan but for New York where she has lived since 1998. New-

York enabled her to fulfill half of the dream, Virginie is not yet Barbarella but she does go

riding on her bicycle with her metal belt. Her black rusty bike, a second-hand from 1945,

is the same one she got twenty-two years ago, and she applies this philosophy to her clothes as well «*new clothes have no soul*». The route from Harlem to Chinatown takes

her only forty minutes, faster than the subway -even if she holds an umbrella in the rain,

drinks coffee in the morning or sends text messages to her friends «*my bike is my office*».

Recently, Virginie installed a small camera on a pair of empty glasses frames. She films

every journey and broadcasts it on a projector with house music playing in the background.

Virginie Sommet pays close attention to the urban environment, it is her raw material.

«I do not decide materials as much as other artists. I create pieces from what is available in

*the society of consumption*». She spoke to me in french all along, but this time, using certain words in english «*Sorry, I cannot remember the words in french*».

Her work is based on decontextualisation. It consists of coming across objects, every day

life stuff, that shock her, make her laugh or catch her attention. She buys the object, thinks

about it, examines it. «*It is a research before getting aesthetic*». When the idea blooms into a message, she rushes out to the shop and buys the object in bulk. Of all her works,

«*one of the most powerful*» according to her, is an installation that will soon be exhibited

in Miami *Art Fountain*. It is not made up of found objects. Body flush is an installation that

presents pieces of Virginie's left overs after a colonic.

How did she clean the inside ? A colonic doctor flushed thirty-five gallons of water inside

Virginie's body through the rectum. «*The most scary moments of life are stuck inside the*

*intestine. I wanted to get rid of bad memories and fears. I needed detox.*» She collected

two buckets of waste which she brought home by bike. She dried them «*from the impression of bottle-green fossils, it went to the impression of big brown tadpoles*» and assembled them in little colored plastic boxes of different sizes, the boxes that are used

by drug dealers to sell their stuff. Some are arranged inside a Louis XIV gold frame representing her family, others stand outside the frame «*my old me on my way to my*

*new me*».

Caroline Conte





