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04/03/2012

**Virginie Sommet: "My accomplishment: That I made it out of my Ghetto".**



***Virginie Sommet is a work of Art by herself. This passionate woman escaped the BCBG "Ghetto" (Preppy Ghetto) where she grew up to be able to truly exist. Originally from Normandy, graced with multiple talents, Ms Sommet chose art to express her quest of a different society. Utopia is good. Interview.***

**Where does your engagement come from? Your desire to be Elsewhere ?**

I think that my engagement is coming from the fact I am coming from a ghetto, the one of the Catholic practitioners and bourgeoisie. In my child's bedroom it was 31 Fahrenheit. I was not allowed to watch TV. So when I escaped to Paris at 19 years old it was a shock. I realized that life did not have to be "navy blue" and "bottle green" ("Brook Brothers/Wasp/Preppy's style") as I knew it until then. Lisieux , was populated by Caucasians only. There was no other ethnic group. I was feeling closed in.

# Postcolonialism



**When we look at you work we feel your love for multiculturalism. Your desire to introduce another aspect of society.**

**Can you explain?**

I only write about minorities: transsexual , prostitute, homosexual...

It is my main interest .I have been traumatized by being confine in a social box so I long to discover diversity around me. The majority of the population think that they are always right. What is interesting to me is their opposite in number. The problem in the USA is that minorities are not well considered because the majority think that they are not educated enough.

**Is it simple to be a woman artist?**

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Nobody realized that it was a women group show. Everybody only talked about the work...

Translation ***Fred-Alex Ferly***

Virginie Sommet's website: [www.virgiesommet.com](http://www.virgiesommet.com)

Le site de [Virginie](#)

\* Source : [Gurerilla Girls](#)

On her piece [Hair](#)

**Vous aimerez peut-être:**



When Dwight does the show in Paris (Thanks @DwightHoward,



To end up the day with something sweet... Fistful Of Tears ...



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From: "Virginie Sommet" <virginie@virginiesommet.com>  
Subject: Interview about my work in English and French on the Gladysdit Blog  
Date: March 1, 2012 5:51:05 PM EST  
To: <frank@augustfifth.com>



BLOG Address: <http://gladysdit.typepad.com/>



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**Le blog de Gladys s'intéresse aux personnes engagées, aux personnes qui ont des histoires à raconter, aux passionnés.**

"Je crois en l'homme et au changement et je suis persuadée qu'en agissant ensemble on peut faire changer les choses.

Toutes les personnes auxquelles je parle, partage cela."

**Gladys Diandoki**

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Suis Gladys : <http://twitter.com/gladysdit>

Blog : [www.gladysdit.com](http://www.gladysdit.com)

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12/01/2012

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Virginie Sommet : "Ma victoire : être sortie de mon ghetto"



*Virginie Sommet est une œuvre à elle seule. Cette passionnée a fuit le ghetto des BCBG dans lequel elle a grandi afin d'exister. Normande pure souche, aux talents multiples, Mademoiselle Sommet a choisi l'art pour exprimer sa quête d'une autre société. L'utopie a bon goût. Entretien.*

**D'où te vient ton engagement, ton envie d'ailleurs?**

Je pense que mon engagement vient du fait que je sois issue d'un ghetto, celui des catholiques pratiquants et bourgeois. Dans ma chambre d'enfant, il faisait 0°. Je n'avais pas le droit de regarder la télé. Alors une fois à Paris pour étudier, ce fut un choc. J'ai réalisé que la vie n'était pas bleu marine et vert bouteille comme celle que j'avais connue jusque-là. A Lisieux, on vivait entre blancs, il n'y avait pas d'autres ethnies. Je me sentais confinée.

**On peut donc dire que Paris t'a ouvert les portes du monde ?**

A Paris, j'ai trouvé la vie hallucinante. Comme j'aime apprendre, je me suis laissée emporter par la ville et ses quartiers asiatiques, africains... Puis, je me suis documentée. Je me suis imprégnée de Paris, avant de découvrir New York. En arrivant à Big Apple, j'ai adopté cet univers cosmopolite. Je suis un caméléon. J'adore être là où je ne suis pas sensée être ! New York m'a déconstruit, alors j'ai voulu

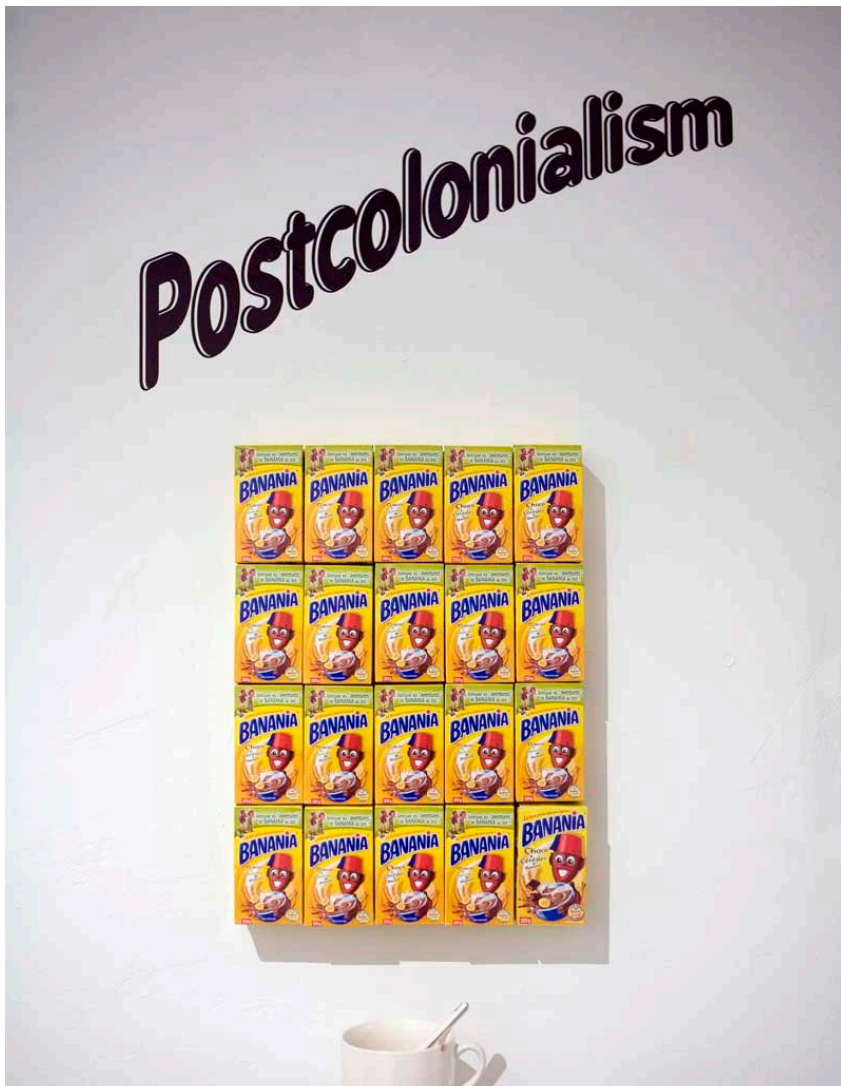
l'exprimer et partager cette expérience à travers mon travail.

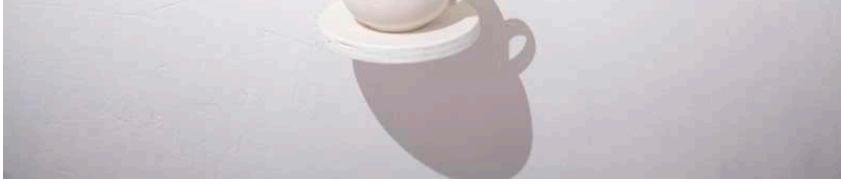
**Peux-tu nous dire ce que t'a apporté New York ? Et que veux-tu dire par "New York m'a déconstruit" ?**

NY m'a déconstruit car je suis arrivée avec de nombreux aprioris et je me suis alors pris de sacrées claques ! L'école que j'ai faite, le statut de mes parents, on n'en avait rien à faire ici. J'ai aussi trouvé les gens très gentils. Je me suis vite rendu compte de la méchanceté du peuple français. Ça m'a étonné et réveillé et ça m'a motivé à rester. New York est une ville difficile, mais je préfère ses ondes positives.

**Peux-tu me dire quel est ton cheminement créatif ?**

Ma démarche créative est centrée sur les objets emblématiques de minorités urbaines à Paris et New York. Dans mon quartier à Chinatown, nous sommes entourés de gens venus de Chine, de République Dominicaine dans le Lower East Side et d'Afrique à Brooklyn... Grâce à mon travail, j'essaie d'être objective. Même si je suis blanche, à travers mes lectures, mes recherches, j'essaie d'effacer cette couleur. J'essaie de libérer mon esprit. L'injustice me révolte, alors par le biais de mes pièces, je tente d'exprimer cela. Puis, ça leur (Ndlr: les blancs) fait du bien de se prendre des claques dans la tronches. C'est ma manière de faire évoluer les choses.





**En regardant tes œuvres, on sent ton amour pour le multiculturalisme. Ton désir de présenter un autre visage de la société. Raconte ?**

Je n'écris que sur les minorités : les transsexuels, les prostitués, les homosexuels... Il n'y a que cela qui m'intéresse. J'ai été traumatisée par le fait de vivre dans une boîte, alors j'ai souhaité découvrir la diversité qui m'entoure. La majorité, qui est la majorité numéraire, se croit forte. Ce qui m'intéresse, ce sont les minorités. Mais le problème aux USA, c'est que les minorités sont mal considérées parce que l'on pense qu'elles ne sont pas suffisamment éduquées.

**Et est-ce qu'il est simple d'être une femme artiste ?**

Les chiffres sont édifiants : 98% des femmes dans les musées sont les modèles représentés nus et les 2% restant sont des artistes\*. Il est simple de compter le ratio femmes-hommes. Je vais partager une anecdote avec toi. J'ai fait un groupe show le 21 novembre 2011 avec uniquement des femmes artistes, en prenant leurs travaux les plus masculins. Les pièces n'étaient pas signées, nous n'avons indiqué que leurs initiales. Personne n'a dit que c'était une exposition de femmes. Tout le monde a uniquement parlé du travail...

Le site de [Virginie](#)

\* Source : [Guerilla Girls](#)

Sur son oeuvre [Hair](#)

*English Translation of the French interview of Virginie Sommet by Gladys Diandoki for "Gladysdit's Blog".*

*Thank you Fred-Alex Ferly to help me for the translation.*

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**Can we say that Paris was your entrance door to the world?**

In Paris, I felt that life was astounding. I always liked to learn so I let myself go through the city and its diverse Asian, Africans neighborhoods.... Then I started to do some research about different areas, cultures, religions. I immersed myself in Paris before discovering New York. When I arrived at the Big

Apple I quickly adopted this cosmopolite universe. I am a chameleon. I love to be where I am not supposed to be! I rebuilt myself in NY and I wanted to share this experience through my work.

**What did you get from New York? What do you mean by I rebuilt myself in NY?**

I say that I rebuilt myself in NY because I came here with a lot of prejudices. NY was a slap in the face and I was slapped quite often. From the school I went to, the social status of my parents etc... finding out that no-one cares here. Thus I had to exist on my own and not my past or social attributes. Deconstruction and Reconstruction . I also found out that people were very nice here. By opposition I quickly realized that there was a lot of negative and meanness within the French population. That was a wake up call for me and that gave me the motivation to stay here. New York is a very tough city but I prefer its positive vibes.

**Can you tell me more about your work?**

My work is based on “found -objects” which are the symbols of urban minorities in Paris and in New York. In my neighborhood Chinatown, people are coming from China. In the Lower East side they are coming from Dominican Republic. In Brooklyn from Africa...

I am trying to be objective with my work. Even if I am Caucasian, throughout my readings and research I try to erase this whiteness. I try to liberate my thinking. Injustice revolt me, so with my work I try to express it. And then it is good that they (Caucasians) get slapped in their face from time to time. It is my way to try to make them evolve and ask themselves questions.

**When we look at you work we feel your love for multiculturalism. Your desire to introduce another aspect of society. Can you explain?**

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It is my main interest .I have been traumatized by being confine in a social box so I long to discover diversity around me. The majority of the population think that they are always right. What is interesting to me is their opposite in number. The problem in the USA is that minorities are not well considered because the majority think that they are not educated enough.

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\*Source: Guerillas Girls

Son oeuvre: Hair.

26/12/2011

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**Art --- “Hair” by Virginie Sommet: “White people know nothing about Black hair.”**





*“Hair”, installation by Virginie Sommet (December, Miami 2011 (11feet long by 8 feet hight)*

### **“White people know nothing about Black hair.”**

*Virginie Sommet is a French artist based in New York City. She's spent over 10 years creating pieces that enable people reflecting on societal constraints such as gender and urban subcultures issues. She is one of the most inspirational artists I got a chance to meet as her pieces describes our society and its inner troubles.*

-“She realized that when it came to hair, White people were completely unaware of what really went on in Black America. Before she fell asleep that night, Amy made a mental note to add Black hair culture to her growing list of phenomena to explain to the rest of the world.” Amy Thomas (Hair Stories).

Even the Black Barbie has long straight hair, black celebrities, politicians, entrepreneurs, singers, models and actors. We see them everywhere in the magazines, on TV and on the news.

For the White majority Black people have natural straight hair floating in the air!

- No, they don't, they are using the “Relaxer” called also “Creamy Crack” and “Perm” which is Sodium Hydroxide mixed with water, mineral oil and emulsifiers to kill the proteins of the hair and make it totally straight. They are also using the “Hot Comb” to make it flat.

It is often painful, time consuming and money for adults and children.

Black hair is a \$9 Billion business. Relaxer is mainly white owned (they bought it) and waves and wigs, which are straight too, are 60% owned by Asians.



*Black hair is a \$9 Billion business*

-In 2011, we still have Black Hair Salon and White Hair Salon. They do not mix.

White salons do not know how to do Blacks hairs and white people do not go to Black salons. No scientists have ever done research on Black Hair to understand it.

"Trips to the beauty parlor for most White Women are primarily functional.

In contrast, when African American Women go to the beauty parlor- and this was especially true when so many more were "hot combing"- there is a lot of time to share problems with others." (Midge Wilson and Kathy Russell)

It is the same thing for men at the Barber Shop.

"America was built on the myth of the melting pot, but despite the efforts of the powers that be, the ingredients never fully blended. At best there is a patchwork quilt of various ethnic groups struggling to live peacefully with one another while something called "mainstream culture" is offered up as the national example." Amy Thomas (Hair Stories).

We are facing a struggle for African American identity in a mainstream White culture which has succeeded in keeping many people unaware (including themselves) of the diversity surrounding them, including the unique culture of Black hair.



Virginie Sommet by [Eva Muller](#)

If you would like to know more about Virginie Sommet's work, check out her [website](#)

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