

ROOM 5



Lacune - Pas nécessaire, 2023

Not necessary

A woman dies and her husband is called a widower, a man dies and his wife is a widow, a parent dies and the child becomes an orphan. But how do you define someone who has lost a child? There's no word for it. The expression «*mater orba*», referring to the grieving mother, has completely disappeared from the lexicon. The best I could come up with to fill the gap were the terms «*mèrepheline*» and «*pèrephelin*», associated with portraits of me as a child. But, out of superstition, I decided to wait until after my parents' death and let it linger. Wasn't it better to keep this lexical gap, this unspeakable word?



Projet mélancolique - Perte d'intérêt, 2023

Loss of interest

When Pierre left, my first intention was to ask couples who seemed happy to tell me about their encounters in detail. I'd go and stand precisely where they'd met, in the same month, on the same day of the week, at the same time, to see if the miracle would happen again. On Friday, November 11, 2005, between 10 a.m. and 10.45 a.m., on the Pont du Garigliano in Paris, I began by waiting for a smile from a handsome dark-haired man of forty-two, who wore a leather jacket, did the same job as me and had just gone to bed after a sleepless night. But the sidewalks remained deserted. In the days that followed, I waited while walking a white poodle, I waited in a laundromat in Châtillon, I waited on a bench in a public garden, I waited at Darty. No miracle, and in any case, as soon as the project was underway, I lost interest in the couple.

La vie cachée de Sophie Calle - Non résolu,
2023

Unsolved

An author offered to write my biography. I wasn't thrilled. Why not turn my life into a pulp novel? Instead, I chose a public writer on the Net to whom I told EVERYTHING, recounting tangled memories in no particular order. She visited me regularly and, two years later, sent me her manuscript. It began: «Today is Friday and, it seems, we're celebrating the Denis. Paris 16°. Year: 1953. Day: October 9, 3:15pm. Outside, the sky is gray and a low twelve degrees is making the leaves on the trees tingle. Still clinging to the branches that screen the urban sky, they will soon litter the ground with their crunching carpet. Will the little girl on the road to her destiny be as wise as her name suggests? I asked my closest friend for her opinion, and after reading it, she stopped being wise. The next four readers, however, were more measured and expressed reservations. I locked up the two hundred and fifty pages in a safe. I didn't know how to publish this story with its harmful consequences, while keeping it hidden.



Calle - Joconde - Fausse route, 2023

Wrong route

I received an invitation for a special appointment: «Dear Sophie, to see the *Mona Lisa*, it will be on the 16th at 3 p.m., if you are free...». When I entered the room where she reigns, at the far end, the *Mona Lisa*, naked, out of frame, had just undergone a health check and was turning her back to me. My heart pounded as I approached her. As they began to work on her, I was surprised to read on the back of the frame: «cale joconde». Was this a sign? Or just an egocentric stunt with a misspelling of my name?



Les jumeaux - Max est mort, 2023

Max is dead

Once a year, my friend Cathy and I organized a photo shoot with twins Emmanuel and Max Berque in Contis, in the Landes region of France. An inescapable ritual that sought its culmination. But Max died. Playtime was over.



La loi de la calle - Pour quoi faire ?, 2023

What for?

My first and last names can be translated as «Wisdom of the Street» (*Sophia* in Greek, *Calle* in Spanish). I came across a Mexican collection of comic strips, entitled *La Ley de la CALLE*: «The Law of the Street», or rather «The Law of the CALLE». And since I was on the cover, I slipped into the illustrations. But I got bored along the way. Anecdotal.



ROOM 6



Pretium doloris - Pas le temps, 2023

No time

I'm interested in the price of pain, compensation for the more or less intense physical and moral suffering experienced by an accident victim. Lawyer Emmanuel Pierrat compiled for me files entitled *Hypothetical reconstruction of victims' lives based on the notion of loss of chance or Life price scale*. A minor child received 100,000 francs for the loss of his or her father or mother, a sum increased by 50% for a minor who was already an orphan. A married adult received 50,000 francs. For a Filipino sailor lost in a shipwreck: 30,000; for a Polish student killed in the Concorde crash: 900,000. But for a German victim, 7.2 million, and for an American passenger on the EgyptAir flight, 28 million. Was it better for your husband to crash on American Airlines, Iberia or Air France? In which region did your leg earn more money? Was it better to lose it in the Vosges or in Paris? The price of pain included sophisticated notions such as static or dynamic disgraces, suffering before death... The family was better compensated if the victim had had time to see himself die. How much for a minute of terror? Abysmal.



Personnage en quête d'auteur - Contretemps, 2023

Contretemps

In *Leviathan*, writer Paul Auster borrowed episodes from my life. I suggested reversing the process, creating a fictional character that I would try to embody by obeying the book to the letter. Instead, Paul sent me *Personal Instructions for Sophie Calle to improve life in New York*. I followed those instructions. But I wanted to become a novel heroine. After being turned down by five other writers, I read *Bartleby and Company* by Enrique Vila-Matas. It's about a book by Marcel Schwob, *Vies imaginaires*, and the character of Petronius, who conceives the project of turning the adventures he's invented from parchment into reality.

I didn't believe in it anymore, but I contacted the author anyway. «You write a story, and I live it,» I summarized. Miracle, a fortnight later I received *The Journey of Rita Malú*. Only my mother was dying, she had only three months to live, and I had just been chosen to occupy the French pavilion at the Venice Biennale the following year. Rita Malú couldn't bury my mother, nor represent France; it wasn't written in stone. I'd been looking for an accomplice for years, finally found one, and had to back out. Vila-Matas had no wish to postpone Rita's journey so far. In his book *Explorateurs de l'abîme*, published in 2007, a chapter entitled «Because she didn't ask for it» is devoted to my forfeit.



Wim Wenders - *Autocensure*, 2023

Self-censorship

I had asked writers to create a fictional character that I would try to embody in my everyday life, obeying the novel to the letter. But it didn't work out as I'd hoped, so I tried my luck with filmmakers. Lars von Trier didn't get back to me, but Wim Wenders did. He wanted me to film myself in a mirror, to which I would say everything I was feeling, every time I spent the night in a new place. To this end, he provided me with a prototype of camera glasses. I gave it a try.

On a trop déconné - Cul-de-sac, 2023

Dead end

I came across this news item: «Yesterday, a man, his wife and their two children were found hanged in their home. All they left behind was this enigmatic formula: «On a trop déconné. Pardon.» Magnétique. Pourtant, quel que soit ce quelque chose avec lequel ces quatre-là ne voulaient plus vivre, rien ne pourrait égaler le mystère qui entourait leur message d'adieu. Même si j'aurais aimé savoir, je ne le souhaitais pas.



Et maintenant, que faire ? - Pas exaltant, 2023

Not exciting

If you have an idea to offer me, a lead to suggest, a piece of advice to offer, let's talk.

On Monday November 2, 1998, the last day of my exhibition at the Centre national de la photographie in Paris, 46 strangers responded to my invitation and submitted projects. I did it again on March 28, 1999, at the Camden Art Centre in London, and received 891 offers. Then 432 at Paula Cooper Gallery in New York on March 24, 2001. I wasn't enthusiastic about any of the offers, although I did try out one from an architect measuring apartments and considered one from the daughter of a certain Anna, who wanted me to spend a week alone with her mother in Sweden. I put aside all 1 369 suggestions.



Le bruit du silence - Suspendu, 2023

Suspended

On October 3, 1995, over one hundred million television viewers worldwide stopped what they were doing to listen to the verdict in the trial of O. J. Simpson, a former professional soccer player accused of murdering his ex-wife and her partner. Long-distance telephone communications dropped by 58%, trading volume on the New York Stock Exchange fell by 41%, water consumption dropped dramatically as people avoided going to the bathroom, and all official meetings were canceled. According to Domino's Pizza, not a single pizza was ordered in the U.S. for five minutes. In *Point de lendemain*, Vivant Denon wrote: «Le silence survint, on l'entendit.» I had wanted to hear silent noises. I failed.



Le Repas noir - Incident technique, 2023

Technical incident

In November 2001, a stranger wrote to invite me to a dinner party in the dark, in Montreuil. I went, accompanied by two friends, a tape recorder in my pocket and a microphone in my buttonhole. We waited for the light to go out on the landing before ringing the bell. A dozen of us squeezed around the table. Thirty minutes later, I couldn't stand any of the diners and, as I didn't like the soup either, I pushed my plate away to put my head down. They called me out, I said I was taking a nap because I was bored, they called me an arrogant bitch. It was funny. It didn't get any better, we just kept throwing shit at each other. Without seeing each other, everything was fluid. It could have made a good boulevard play, but when I left I discovered that I'd ripped off my microphone when I took off my coat. Of those three hours in the dark, only two minutes and twenty-eight seconds of sound remained.



La dernière fois - Insaisissable, 2023

Elusive

I've always been drawn to firsts, but especially to lasts. I was the last customer at La Coupole restaurant (the old one, the real one) and I left at midnight with the last bill. I was the last customer at La Hune bookshop before it closed, and I bought myself *Le Dernier Homme*. I found a birth announcement published in the death section of a daily newspaper; a beginning and an end reunited. I tried to photograph the last look of bulls before their death in the ring. I was entrusted with the last words spoken by the dying, but was it my place to reveal them? I failed to unearth the letters of suicides, I hung around the waiting room of the Curie hospital without finding the courage to ask visitors if they would let me photograph the last moments of their loved ones. But these last moments were light, foreign or inaccessible. I became attached to my mother's last breath.

Viager - Pas le temps, 2025

No time

In an investigative program, I learned that the latest fashionable investment in the United States was death. A company was offering to buy out the life insurance policies of sick senior citizens, in exchange for a sum of money and the payment of premiums. In return, the company would receive the capital upon the insured's death. It had the merit of not beating around the bush: «The risk of a miracle cure exists, but we have elderly people with a wide variety of illnesses from which you can choose to diversify your portfolio. We have diabetes, heart disease, cancer.... « The advisors' job was to choose the sick well by identifying them via Internet drug purchases, the gamble being that these retirees would die sooner than expected. On the screen appeared the message investors then received: «We are pleased to inform you that policy n°7200490 has expired more than a year before the prognosticated maturity date.» Tempting.



ROOM 7



Les deux Sophie Calle - Interrompu, 2023

Interrupted

In 2006, as part of my research into women with the first and last name Sophie Calle, I hired a detective from the Duluc agency. The result exceeded my expectations. He had found only two in the whole of France, but they had been born in the same hospital, lived a hundred kilometers from Paris, in the same town, and worked in the same factory. One was called CALLE by marriage, the other by birth. According to the private eye, the Sophie Calle by birth lived in isolation and wished to be left alone, having experienced *very serious family problems*, as he modestly described them. He didn't want to investigate any further and dissuaded me from going there. I postponed it.



La vache qui rit - Censuré ?, 2023

Censored?

In 2017, invited to create a collector's box for La Vache qui rit cheese, I proposed my portrait with Moïse, a bull who had lost his mother in floods in the Camargue and whom the gardians had fed. As my window overlooked his meadow, he sometimes visited me to beg for bread. I'd undress for him, and Moses would lick my breasts in search of the stump stuck under my armpit. This choice had the advantage of evoking dairy products and lending itself to laughter. Initially, my sponsors pulled up the bull's tongue to conceal my nipple. This was worse for me, but I agreed. However, my project was not accepted.

Le rituel d'anniversaire - Sans retour, 2023

No feedback

I suggested to my friends that we create a birthday ritual. On my birthday, I could ask them for anything I wanted, and I'd have to pay them back. Most of them agreed. On October 9, 1981, Claudine, who lived in Switzerland, came to spend the day with me, Georges, a married man who didn't want to cheat on his wife, spent the night with me, and Alexis, who had kept our friendship a secret, publicly acknowledged it. But on their birthdays, they asked me for nothing in return. The ritual hadn't taken.



Oui - Infernal, 2023

Infernal

I had just said «NO» to a proposal from Mr. Yes, a journalist, and I wondered what difference being called Yes made to one's life. I started by collecting images of «Yes», from «Yes» to the referendum to «Yes» to the fixed-price chop.... Then, at the sight of an «O» followed by a «UI» in the sky, I made the crazy decision to say «YES» to everything, for a given period known only to myself. But when I calculated that in the month that had just passed, I would have flown seven times, attended five dinners in the same evening, accepted a bad exhibition, had to satisfy the curiosity of six students, been a juror at two festivals at the same time, I preferred to postpone. And, in the meantime, I contented myself with photographing the «YESes» of Dominique and Fabio, for whom I was best man at the wedding.



Sans enfants - Péremption, 2023

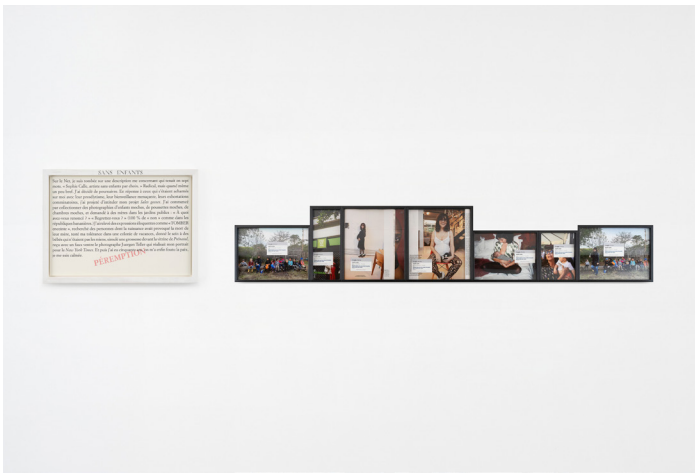
Expiry date

On the Net, I came across a description of myself that ran to seven words. «Sophie Calle, childless artist by choice.» Radical, but still a bit brief. I decided to continue. In response to the proselytizing, threatening benevolence and comminatory exhortations of those who had been lashing out at me, I decided to call my project *Dirty kids*. I began by collecting photographs of ugly children, ugly strollers, ugly bedrooms, and asking mothers in public gardens, «What have you given up?» «Do you regret it?» (100% «no» as in banana republics.) I noted eloquent expressions like «GET pregnant», sought out people whose birth had caused their mother's death, tested my tolerance at summer camp, breastfed babies that weren't mine, faked a pregnancy in front of the Prénatal window, received with a fake belly the photographer Juergen Teller who was making my portrait for the New York Times. And then I turned fifty, I was finally left in peace, I calmed down.

Premier amour - Trop tard, 2023

Too late

I could have said so much. To say that he was the first one I'd loved, the one I'd told about his mother's death, the one who'd tortured me the most... And, apart from a few letters, all I had left was this door of rupture. After all, he was my first great love, and I couldn't illustrate our story with a door. And too much time had passed.





Troublante croisière - Divergence de points de vue, 2023

Divergent points of view

My friend David Rochline and I had planned to publish a sentimental novel in the «Turquoise» collection. The publishing house's specifications were a jewel: the hero's psychology had to be basic, the heroine, ten years younger, very beautiful and pure, the rival artificial. When the story was set in wartime, an allusion to atrocities was accepted as long as it was discreet. It was advisable to respect the concordance of tenses. The rest is up to you. We wrote the synopsis and first chapter of a novel we called *Troublante croisière*, and chose Sophie de Saint-Roch as our pseudonym. Our attempt was rejected on the grounds that our main character had a sense of humor, which was reserved for secondary characters. We gave up.



Une très bonne soirée somme toute - Manque de conviction, 2023

Lack of conviction

I received a letter from a stranger asking me to invite him to dinner at his home in Pantin. He would leave his house around noon, leave his keys under the doormat and come back around the time of the news to ring his doorbell. I agreed and chose April 1, 1999. The evening went very well, but when I got home, I didn't look at the video rushes. I couldn't believe it.

ROOM 8

Sophie chérie - Comment faire ?, 2023

What to do?

My grandmother, Nechouma Krajka, was a Polish Jew who wrote French badly and was ashamed of herself. My grandmother ended almost all her letters by demanding that I throw them away. I couldn't do it. Too heartbreaking. I couldn't figure out how to obey AND show.



Stupéfiant - Divertissant, pas plus, 2023

Entertaining, no more

In a TV program devoted to him called Stupéfiant, writer Philippe Sollers held a cigarette at his fingertips, concealed by a black circle that wandered across the screen for the duration of the interview. Stunning, to say the least. I decided to continue this delicious exercise in censorship, this hilarious method that highlighted what it wanted to hide, and adapted it to the smoking film, *Diamants sur canapé*. That's as far as I went.

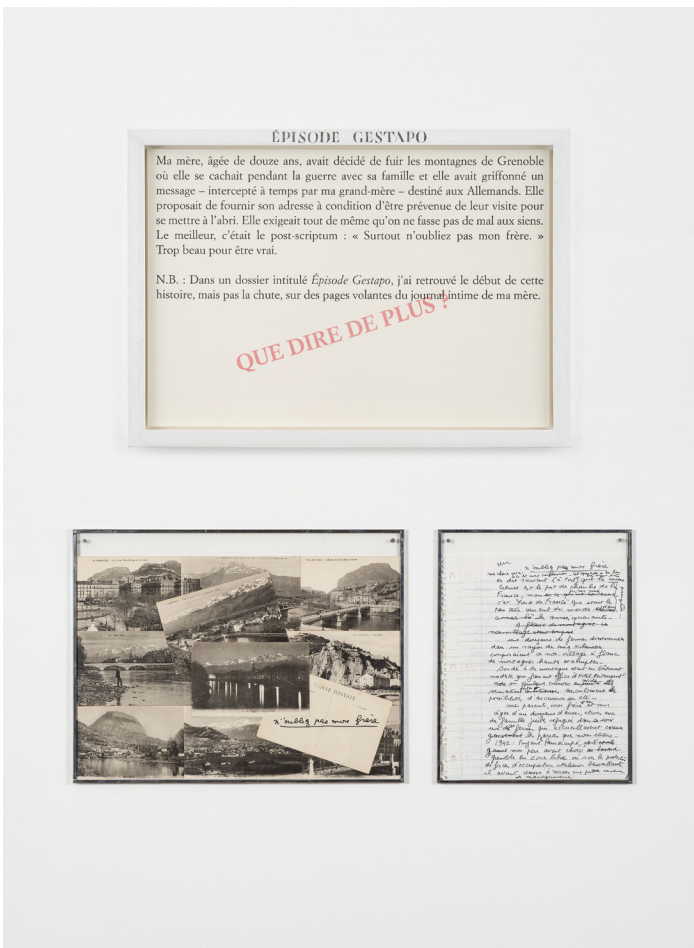


Épisode gestapo - Que dire de plus ?, 2023

What more can I say?

My mother, aged twelve, had decided to flee the mountains around Grenoble, where she had been hiding with her family during the war, and she had scribbled a message - intercepted in time by my grandmother - intended for the Germans. She offered to give them her address on condition that they let her know when they came to take cover. She did, however, demand that we do no harm to her people. The best part was the postscript: «Please don't forget my brother.» Too good to be true.

N.B. In a file entitled Gestapo Episode, I found the beginning of this story, but not the punch line, on loose pages of my mother's diary.



Le prix du secret - Pas rassurant, 2023

Not reassuring

I wanted to buy their secrets from strangers. F. was to choose them at random, give them a tape recorder, pay whatever price they thought fair, and get the recording back. He wouldn't know their secrets. For my part, I would listen to them without knowing the authors. On the first day, F. came back with two secrets. The woman's secret dated back to when he was twelve and concerned his sick mother. When he was ten, the man had martyred his brother, ripped off a little girl's underpants despite her cries, and experienced both pleasure and vertigo. He concluded his tale fifty-two minutes later by addressing the person who wanted to buy his secret, specifying that, if necessary, he would deny it because he had a mission on earth. It chilled me. Not to mention the fact that neither the woman nor the man wanted to monetize their secret.

Plaquée en aout - Souffrance éphémère, 2023

Ephemeral suffering

Pierre dumped me in August. Quickly and by phone. He needed a week of solitude to think things over. So I made an inventory of those words that announce the end, the words to go away, and searched the Net for break-up text messages. It looked good, but I stopped suffering too soon.



in my hut, but their stories took a back seat. In the end, the only thing that mattered was having spent the night up there, and that vertigo overwhelmed everything else.

La table - Comment raconter ça ?, 2023

How to tell this?

Every week, in my studio at Boulevard Edgar-Quinet, two women would lie down on my long solid wood table. It was 1973, and abortion was forbidden. Thanks to a few doctors and the emergence of a simple, low-aggression method, we organized ourselves to perform abortions, initially in our own homes. Abortion was legalized, but it was unthinkable to abandon the table. It followed me to the Midi, enjoyed a new, more peaceful existence, and gradually became an uneventful table.



Censuré - Manque de persévérance, 2023

Lack of perseverance

Leafing through the Korean translation of my book True Stories, I discovered that the photographs showing my breasts and Greg's penis-exhibited, then hidden between his thighs-had been censored. I inverted the images concerned, reproducing what was missing and hiding the rest, and asked a number of Koreans - a gynecologist, a morality judge, a painter, a publisher... - to describe these body parts to me. Only the gynecologist's reply reached me. I didn't insist.