

Fragments of Paris: Jacques Villeglé and Urban Art

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Jacques Villeglé, *Seine/Jacob, septembre 1964*

Torn posters mounted on canvas

© Fonds de dotation Villeglé, Adagp, Paris, 2026. Photo DR

On the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Jacques Villeglé (27 March 1926, Quimper – 6 June 2022, Paris), the Musée Carnavalet – Histoire de Paris is proud to host an exhibition devoted to the artist, called *Fragments of Paris: Jacques Villeglé and Urban Art*.

A key figure on the French art scene, Jacques Villeglé developed a distinctive approach characterized by the practice of collecting posters from urban spaces. Through these fragments ripped from the walls of Paris, he transformed the ephemeral traces of the French capital into a unique visual language, at once poetic and documentary. His prolific body of work invites visitors to discover the history of the city through the torn posters and graphic signs he reconfigures into artworks, while also allowing the public to explore his connections to the various forms of contemporary urban art.

The exhibition is organized as a journey through groups of works structured by Jacques Villeglé's vision, as seen in his writings. His works are juxtaposed with photographs, audio archives, music, film excerpts, interviews, and personal accounts, many of which are exhibited here for the first time.

For almost seventy years, the artist made the capital his playground, field of exploration, and the primary subject of his work. The walls of Paris provided this tireless "flâneur" or stroller of the city streets with the raw material needed for his artistic practice. By collecting ripped posters, which may be considered as visual markers that are inseparable

from Parisian identity, he “captured reality,” in both its materiality and poetry. In 2003, Jacques Villeglé said: “What is important for me is that these ripped posters have a name: the name of the street and the date on which they were taken. The fascination was with the sociological aspect of the poster, and its ability to tell the history of the streets of Paris.”

The exhibition opens with Jacques Mahé de La Villeglé’s move to Paris in 1950. He frequented circles of artists and poets with whom he shared a taste for observing the streets of Paris and the types of marginal beauty they offered. At that time, posters were an integral part of the capital’s landscape and could be seen along the boulevards and on street corners. Struck by their vibrant splashes of colour against the sombre facades of post-war Paris, Villeglé—a self-proclaimed “‘flaneur’ of the hoardings”—was drawn to the layers of ripped and superimposed posters.

The exhibition focuses on a practice that is situated at the intersection of poetry and urban archaeology. For Villeglé, Paris was an open-air studio where every wall held the potential of a work in the making. Villeglé’s wanderings take visitors through four neighbourhoods of the capital, where he often sourced the materials needed for his works: Porte Maillot, Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Montparnasse, and the Marais. The exhibition also reveals the historical dimension of Villeglé’s work, which captures authentic snapshots of the urban landscape at a given moment of history. His works therefore, evoke the political context, struggles and protest movements, and elections—both local and national—mirroring a Parisian society in constant evolution. By collecting, dating, and indicating the location from which these posters were taken, Jacques Villeglé—who often describes himself as a “historian-collector”—gathered material that preserves the memory of historical changes and global upheavals.

The last section of the exhibition examines Villeglé’s connections to the contemporary urban art scene. He forged ties and collaborated with several urban artists like Lek & Sowat. Sometimes seen as a mentor figure, Jacques Villeglé nonetheless had a somewhat amused and measured response to this admiration, claiming that while street artists add elements to the streets, he spent his life removing them. “I do the exact opposite of street artists. But as they work in the street, like I do, we’ve come to an understanding. I take the finished piece from the street and bring it back to my studio, and they go out into the street to add something.” Today, Jacques Villeglé continues to inspire artists who make the street their gallery and the works of some of these artists have often been exhibited alongside his own.

This exhibition pays tribute to an artist, a stroller and recorder of the streets of Paris from the 1950s to 2020.

A catalogue featuring essays by curators, experts, and specialists is published for the occasion by Éditions Paris Musées.

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