

## Ça commence souvent par des problèmes

06.03 — 26.04.2025

Carole Roussopoulos

It all began with a severance check handed over for a Sony Portapak camera, holding the promise of a life “without a boss.” That is how Carole Roussopoulos described the start of her adventure behind the camera to document individual commitment and political movements driven by the hope of a more just world. In the ferment of the 1970s, she immediately saw the possibilities contained within this small piece of equipment as far as recording the words of those who had not been allowed to speak up or who had gone unheard and ignored, especially women. With Roussopoulos, video recording became a tool of militant feminism which, when backed by the collective, offered independence in terms of production and distribution.

In Lyon, on 2 June 1975, a hundred or so organized prostitutes began to occupy the Church of Saint-Nizier in order to raise public awareness of the police harassment they faced and demand the same rights that all other workers enjoyed. Even before militant feminists, the prostitutes received the support of leftist Catholics in the Nid movement (who were nevertheless abolitionists vis-à-vis prostitution) and Father Louis Blanc, who opened the doors of the church to these women and invited the press to cover the event. Soon the bold initiative of these women despised by society was being covered by the media worldwide. The second of June would become International Sex Workers Day.

The women who decreed their sex strike in the church only wish to talk to journalists. Rushing down from Paris to meet with them, Carole and Paul Roussopoulos were among the rare group of people the prostitutes allowed into the church – they feared the police would use force to expel them (which the police did, and brutally, after eight days of the women occupying the site). After several hours of discussion, a way was found for them to be heard outside the church while remaining protected inside. Small monitors placed on the façade of Saint-Nizier broadcast edited video sequences featuring the sex workers. It was clear structured speech that nobody had heard until then. Carole Roussopoulos left the church to film the intrigued looks of passersby who, in a clever reversal, are seen lingering on the sidewalk.

Fifty years after the occupation of Saint-Nizier and Roussopoulos’s film *Les prostituées de Lyon parlent* [The Prostitutes of Lyon Speak], the present exhibition invites us to think about the emancipating uses of new image technologies and more generally what the tools of art can do in social and political movements. With her discreet Portapak, Roussopoulos slipped into the general assemblies of the Front Homosexuel d’Action Révolutionnaire [the Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action] when it was taking place in the city’s School of Fine Arts. She put together on the spot a speech-oriented cinema and forged interior (where the militants were organizing their initiatives) / exterior (where they demonstrated) relationship.

On screen, that relationship redraws the dividing line between the majority and “others” (*Le F.H.A.R.*, 1971). But starting with *Les prostituées de Lyon parlent*, Roussopoulos’s inventiveness begins to stand out in true observer-observed scenes, loop motifs that effectively undermine the authority of media imagery, even a performative approach that the activists take up themselves. We see this particularly with Monique, a Lip worker, and her mythical story of the power relations within the company on strike, which resonates like a plea, one ahead of its time, for the intersectionality of the various movements, all of that with a good dose of humor.

This points us to the video experiments being done at the same time in the field of the visual arts, whereas in the work of Roussopoulos or her comrades from the feminist video collective Insoumuses, none of that is theorized. Everything happened by intuition or through the energy of collective art, which had to involve fun to overcome anger. Thus was born the video-performance called *SCUM Manifesto* (1976), in which Carole Roussopoulos and Delphine Seyrig place themselves between the camera and a TV screen at a moment when the news would normally be on, to read aloud Valerie Solanas’s radical feminist text, the French edition of which was sold out at the time, and to loudly type it out, making of each letter a hammer blow.

The exhibition at La Salle de bains would like to pay homage to these inventive artistic initiatives by using things on hand to switch around points of view and put the reverse angle, the counter shot, on display. On this point, we wanted to recombine the mobilization of the Saint-Nizier prostitutes with the other mobilization that was speaking out on the other side of the street on the protest signs done by Michel Chomarat, a prominent figure in Lyon’s gay activist movement. The signs announced, “Fags, too.” Today the Saint-Nizier occupation archives are conserved in his personal collection, which he has placed in Lyon’s Municipal Library. We are pleased to present several items from Chomarat’s collection.

Choosing a title that speaks of issues on a poster that features the ludicrously easy user’s manual of a video camera is yet another sign that stories are more complex than they appear to be. The title was found among the words spoken by the Saint-Nizier occupiers as they were spoken in front of Roussopoulos’s camera 50 years ago. The program of events that will take place during the show at our neighbors’ or at La Salle de bains (where the works are set up in a corner to leave space enough for people to meet and interact) makes it possible to actualize our reading of history and locate it in a dialogue with current realities and struggles.

Julie Portier and Camille Richert

*La Salle de bains and Camille Richert thank :*  
*Blanche Blouin, Peggy Préau, Nicole Fernández Ferrer and Barbara Alves Rangel of Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Chomarat, Stéphane Emptaz of IAC-Villeurbanne, Francis Ehrhardt, Jean-Marc Guillot, Laida Lertxundi, Nicolas Romarie, Sonja Dicquemare and Morgan Labar of ENSBA Lyon, Jean-Paul Laroche*

1. Carole Roussopoulos - Delphine Seyrig,  
**SCUM manifesto**, 1976.  
(film excerpts) all rights reserved, Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir
2. Carole Roussopoulos,  
**Les prostituées de Lyon parlent**, 1975.  
(film excerpts) all rights reserved, Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir
3. Callisto McNulty,  
**Delphine et Carole, insoumuses**, 2019.  
(film excerpts) courtesy Callisto McNulty and Les films de la Butte
4. Carole Roussopoulos,  
**Monique LIPV**, 1973.  
(film excerpts) all rights reserved, Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir
5. Carole Roussopoulos,  
**Le FHAR (Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire)**, 1971.  
(film excerpts) all rights reserved, Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir

**Carole Roussopoulos** was born in Lausanne in 1945 and died in Sion in 2009. She was a committed Swiss-French feminist film-maker. A pioneer of video, she made over 120 documentaries. She is also a key figure in Swiss LGBT history. In 1971, together with her husband, the painter Paul Roussopoulos, she founded the first militant video collective, Vidéo Out: Vidéo Out. Through her videos, she gave a voice to those who were silenced in the newspapers or on television, such as women, workers, immigrants, homosexuals and prostitutes. In 1974, with Seyrig and Ioana Wieder she set up an association Les Muses s'amuse, which soon became Les Insoumuses, dedicated to militant video creation. From 1973 to 1976, Carole Roussopoulos taught video at the University of Vincennes, and in 1982 she founded the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir with Delphine Seyrig and Ioana Wieder.

