

BDPD

11.06 — 10.10.2026

Francesc Ruiz

Mona Chevalier is the coordinator of La Salle de bains, which is open to the public Wednesdays to Saturdays. When I explained the *BDPD*¹ project to Mona, I asked her if she would be comfortable with the idea of talking about the explicit images from the homoerotic graphic novels found in the show's temporary library. She offered me this simple answer, "It's always been clear to me that we would show letters that are loved and love in return."

Bringing up this exchange which surprised me and made me smile leads me to address two preliminary points. *BDPD* is a work of fiction and I am steeped in a very French cultural trait that the Catalan artist Francesc Ruiz is poking fun at, that is the pervasiveness and impact of censorship in the history of French publishing and graphic novels in particular.

I'll begin with the second point by recalling here that France figures among the countries that publish the greatest number of bound comic books – the term "graphic novels" doesn't really cover every aspect of these publications, the best-selling literary genre in French bookshops. Yet the French Republic is also the country where censorship still applies to publications by virtue of a law dating back to 1949. Ruiz's project then is grounded in the paradox of a monitored profusion. A former bookseller and connoisseur of the French gay comic book scene, Ruiz has been collecting these publications for over twenty years. To them are addressed the many allusions in his mutant letters and the adventure they experience thanks to the pornotypographic plot he has dreamed up. Public institutions have rarely collected these kinds of publications. For the artist though this "erotic junk" reveals the dynamics of power and morality surrounding images of desire.

But *BDPD* is above all a fiction about a world of letters drawn from Ruiz's artistic and graphic pantheon. They change and swap places, flip around, bend, and form in lowercase – alone or stuck together – an assembly of characters (in two senses of the term) and their fleshy voluptuous forms. Once the curtain has come down, their inventiveness is given free rein and builds to a climax that seems stopped for a time by the font's intervention. Soon enough the font is shown to be even more whimsical than the letters it is inspecting. The whole scenario appears to be drawn from the erotic dream of a bibliophile madly fantasizing about the private lives of print typefaces. At the very top of this pantheon are the *mail artists* Ray Johnson and Ulises Carrión. The latter published a manifesto in 1975 asserting that the artist's book is indeed an art form in its own right. The following year in New York, the art critic Lucy Lippard cofounded Printed Matter, a bookstore dedicated to artists' books. To bring this up here is to underscore the transgressiveness of certain artistic practices that today seem widely accepted whereas hardly half a century ago they upended the

artistic conformity that reigned at the time.

What do we conform to? That is one of the questions addressed by this show held in Lyon – one of the capitals of European printing beginning in the 15th century – in the Bas des Pentes (the "bottom of the slopes") section of the city, the lower, southern part of the Pentes de la Croix-Rousse neighborhood. It was there in 1975 that sex workers organized to demand protections for their profession. Gay activists rallied to their movement several streets away from Sathonay Square, joining forces with these female sex workers whom society was reluctant to recognize as a professional class. Like them, the gay activists also faced violent forms of repression. *BDPD* then is part of the dual legacy of the typographic history of Lyon and the struggle against the normativity of intimate relations, while rethinking today's issues in this regard by "queering" references to Tom of Finland, Ralf König, and the tradition of *Tijuana bibles*. Other ways of being, living one's sexuality, and loving – between individuals and letters – come to light in this bookshop-work of art, Ruiz's fourth after those mounted in London (Gasworks, 2010), Moss (Momentum Biennial, 2019) and Busan (Busan Biennale, 2020).

Camille Richert

Translation : John O'Toole

¹In this title the letters BD form a bilingual French-English pun; BD in French stands for *bande dessinée*, or graphic novel, a wide-spread and very respected genre of publication. In English, the letters, written B&D, are of course short for "bondage and discipline." PD, on the other hand, is a homophone in French for *pédé*, short for *pédéraste*, or pedophile. It is the common slang term for *fag(got)*, *poof(ter)*, *homo*. Finally, in the French *bande* of *bande dessinée* there is a possible distant echo of the verb *bander*, which can mean a number of things but, given the hint of the erotic in the context, suggests the familiar French term for having /getting a boner (US) and having a stiffy (UK) – trans. note.

BDPD, Francesc Ruiz, 2026
installation

Digital prints, 2000 copies, 17 × 24 cm (closed),
shelves.

At La Salle de bains we pride ourselves on welcoming one and all to our events and exhibitions, and are committed to making everyone's visit enjoyable and, we hope, interesting, challenging, and enriching. We wish to point out then that some images shown in the *BDPD* exhibition are not suitable for young visitors.

Francesc Ruiz (*1971, Barcelona)

Francesc Ruiz lives and works in Barcelona. His work explores how the world is designed, composed, published, and distributed, critically occupying spaces related to print and capitalism. His research focuses on expanded comics, the informational architecture of newsstands, erotic manga universes, and contemporary logistics. He represented Spain at the 2015 Venice Biennale. Numerous international institutions, including Gasworks (London), Fundació Miró (Barcelona), IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Moderne (Valencia), FRAC Corse (Corsica), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, and Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (Madrid), have dedicated solo exhibitions to his work. He is one of the founders of the Institute of Porn Studies.

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Camille Richert (*1990, Verdun)

Camille Richert, an art historian and PhD from Sciences Po Paris, is a researcher, lecturer at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (ENSBA) in Lyon, curator, and independent art critic. She trained in contemporary history at the ENS in Lyon and wrote her dissertation on representations of work in the Western world since 1968. She continued her research on the British collective Hackney Flashers, culminating in **Parents Must Unite + Fight**, the first monograph dedicated to them. An associate curator at La Salle de Bains in Lyon, she curated "Hope for Change" at the CEAAC in Strasbourg, the "+1" program at Aware, co-curated the 2nd Art & Industry Triennial in Dunkirk, is in charge of publications at Lafayette Anticipations, and is responsible for the Sciences Po Prize for Contemporary Art.

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Graphic design: current matters

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