

*Press kit*

# DO YOU SPEAK SIGN LANGUAGE?

CONVERSATIONS WITH  
**JOSEPH GRIGELY**

LE SHED

Credit:  
Joseph Grigely, *Be Nice* v.4, 2010/2020 and *Fuck You* v.1, 2020  
watercolor on paper, frame, 28 x 38 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

BE NICE

FUCK YOU

*DO YOU SPEAK SIGN LANGUAGE?*  
*Conversations with Joseph Grigely*

**Press visit** Tuesday, May 20<sup>th</sup> from 10:30 a.m.

**Opening** Saturday, May 24<sup>th</sup> from 6:30 p.m.

**Exhibition** from May 25<sup>th</sup> to July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
at le Shed – Maromme FR

An exhibition co-curated by **Julie Faitot**, director of le Shed and **Sonja Beaudouin**, independant docent and project coordinator

in collaboration with Aymeric Auge, Cyrille Bary,

Ingrid Cann, Yannis Cossou, Charles-Louis Daigny, Maryse Diard, Sandrine Duquesnoy, Yolande Laurent, Frédéric Lottin, Sandrine Merlet, Maude Navier, Michel Rimbault, Florence Van Cauterén and Cindy Vidal

accompanied by Kamel Yaker and Laetitia Demoissy from the

François Truffaut Center (Idefhi, Canteleu, FR)

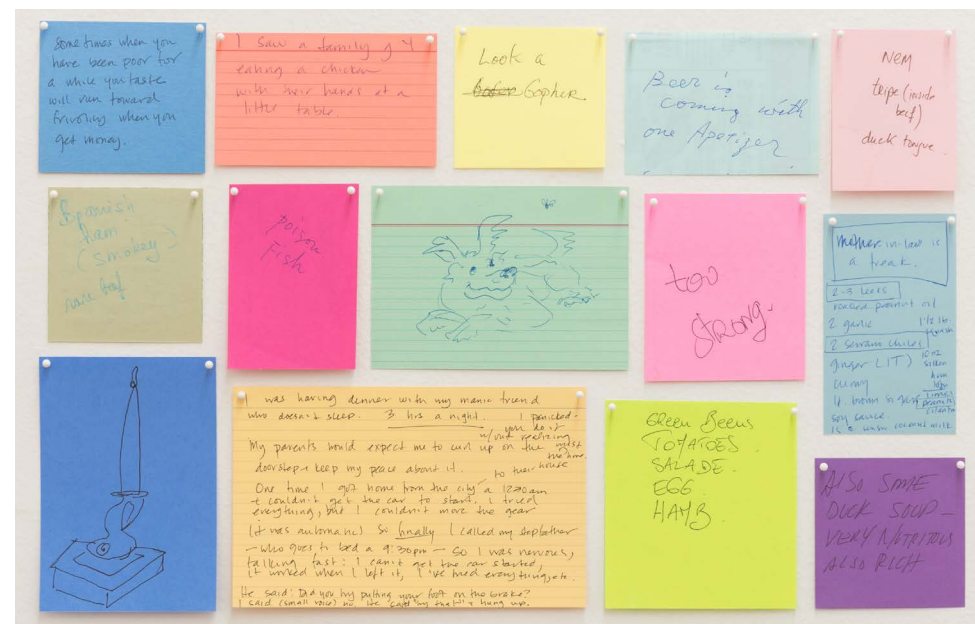
and Gaëlle Bonilla, Allan Cabedo, Céleste Coupard, Ameline Devos, Kenza Gasmi, Citlali Honoré, Manon Le Biavant, Shicheng Li, Clara Morin Leconte, Lisa Sahores, Xin-yi Sheng, Mao Shuhai, and Mengting Wang  
accompanied by Virginie Bobin (**ésadhar, Rouen, FR**).

Credit:

Joseph Grigely, *Untitled Conversations (Food)*, 2005  
fourteen handwritten sheets of paper, pins, 33 x 53 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

**Dedicated to Joseph Grigely, an American artist and theorist who became deaf at the age of 10**, this exhibition is based on conversation as matrix: it is at once the material of Joseph Grigely's works, the process we adopted for curating the show and the way we conceived the visitors' tour.

Opening le Shed's new artistic and cultural programme, this exhibition embodies our common desire to question the traditional functions of curator, viewer or docent and to experiment different ways of articulating them. It also aims at investigating different ways of encountering artworks, through body, gestures or signs as alternatives to spoken words. Based on collaboration, accessibility and direct experience, "Do you speak sign language?" explores the exhibition as a space for hospitality and collective invention. It was prepared in collaboration with the François Truffaut Center (Idefhi, FR), the socially-engaged art-practices module (ésadhar, FR) and Air de Paris gallery who has been working with Joseph Grigely for almost 30 years (Paris, FR).





Since the 1990s, Joseph Grigely has been developing a practice **questioning language** as a tool (for communication), a system (with distinctive categories) and a motif (the written word).

The “Conversation Pieces” series, for example, moves this genre from its 18th-century English tradition into conceptual art. For sure, Joseph Grigely’s “paintings” are indeed pinned on the wall and they do represent the artist’s discussions with hearing interlocutors. But where family, friends and social circles were staged, debating or conversing, in a garden or drawing room, Grigely’s speakers only appear through traces: fragments of paper featuring written words or drawings the artist has kept over the years and that he rearranges in a form that is both pictorial and poetic (*Untitled Conversations (Food)*, 2005).

The same shift occurs in the “Portraits” series. The photographs do not show faces, but close-ups of particular hands holding pen and paper, writing on their knees or the corner of a restaurant table, in a particular place, at a particular time: portraits of an encounter, so to say (*Aletta de J., Rotterdam, June 1996*, 1996). In these, as in “Songs without Words”, Joseph Grigely uses ordinary (almost trivial) materials. Here, newspaper clippings about concerts feature press photographs. As silent as images can be, they visually translate the singers’ voice but also evoke the importance of facial expressions when using Sign Language. An activist, J. Grigely also reminds us, in his work, the cultural biases that condition communication and questions what it means to “hear”, “speak” and “understand” in a society largely constructed by hearing norms. But they also assert the creative power of Deaf people – and, more generally, disabled persons.

<sup>1</sup> To learn more about conversation pieces here:  
[wikipedia.org/wiki/Conversation\\_piece\\_\(peinture\)](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Conversation_piece_(peinture)) (accessed on 04/17/2025 at 11:48)

Credit:

Joseph Grigely, *Aletta De J., Rotterdam, June 1996*, 1996

black and white photograph (silver print), picture mount, wooden and glass frame, 8 x 12 cm, 32 x 25 cm framed. Courtesy the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

The exhibition for Le Shed was built through conversations with and about Joseph Grigely.

**Rather than simply “translating” the exhibition into “accessible” terms, we chose to co-curate it with a group of adults who are deaf, hard-of-hearing and/or have other disabilities** and regularly come to visit the art centre with social-workers Kamel Yaker and Laetitia Demoissy. During this eight-month collaboration, we discussed and redefined what we would show and how, with what signs, texts or medium, so as to address different categories of visitors. It felt essential that our working process should be inclusive from the start, rather than as an afterthought.

**Also, four groups of art-students with their professor, Virginie Bobin, imagined interactive installations**, combining art, pedagogy, care and anti-validist theory. Their propositions result from a collective process driven by close research on the artist's practice, attention to others and conviction that norms should be questioned. They propose workshops fed by the diversity of languages they speak and the sensorial diversity they perceive the world with, inviting us in turn to experiment with trace, sign and silence as materials.

**Throughout the exhibition, other artists** will be invited to offer alternative readings of this conversation with Joseph Grigely, exploring different means and senses for relating to artworks: a silent gesture tour with Levent Beskardès, a Deaf poet, actor and stage director, an audio-description tour with Enora Rivière, French dancer and choreographer, or a collective translation workshop of Joseph Grigely's seminal text, *Postcards to Sophie Calle* (1991-1996).

Perhaps, on these occasions, we can make up new signs or new ways of seeing, understanding or speaking?

Sonja Beaudouin and Julie Faitot  
April 2025



Credit:  
Joseph Grigely, *Collapsed Speech Bubbles*, 2003  
blown glass, 18 x 30 x 30 cm  
Courtesy GANDY Gallery



## *Le Shed, contemporary art center*



Le Shed is a contemporary art center located in the working-class suburbs of Rouen (Normandy, France). As they experiment alternative creative processes that re-consider the roles of authors, viewers, and docents, its team aims at questioning the power relations that can be observed in its own field as in society at large. Le Shed's approach is based on praxis rather than theory, favoring action-research. Its team supports artists at work, from creating forms to exposing them to visitors' gaze and bodies — exhibitions, in a literal sense, being only one of these modes of exposure. Acting in and from a specific situation, Le Shed team engages in its social environment and offers hospitable contexts for sharing, learning by doing and collective creation with guest artists and other contributors in society.

**In Maromme**, le Shed has settled in a seventeen-century house, provided by the City. Here, are organized most of its public activities: exhibitions, meetings, screenings, workshops and collective practices and more specifically those developed in the context of two of its project's axes:

- "Conversations": a program of 3 to 6 exhibitions each year, with regular public events crossing disciplines and practices;

- "Potential Spaces": a program of 2 to 3 off-site artistic projects, based on British pediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's concept. It refers to art's ability to generate hybrid spaces of sociability and creation, where alternative ways of making art can be experimented.

**In Notre-Dame de Bondeville**, a former factory, where Le Shed was born, hosts a vast workspace (580 sq. m, 4 to 6,5 m high) allowing for the development of its project's other two axes:

- "Companionships": a program dedicated to supporting artists (providing workspace, professional training, research-funding, ...);

- "Works": an action-research program focusing on art and art-centers' economics, through art-production and collaborations that contribute to Le Shed's financial autonomy.

Credit:

View of le Shed from the square Colette Privat, Maromme FR  
© Laurent Lachèvre

**Le Shed team** includes Julie Faitot (director), Adèle Hermier (head of artistic projects territory related), Alexandre Delabrière (general technical manager), and David Germain-Barilt (head of external productions).

**It is supported by** the Ministry of Culture (DRAC Normandie), the Normandy Region, the Seine-Maritime Department, Métropole Rouen Normandie, and the City of Maromme.

## **Le Shed Contemporary Art Center**

Non-profit organization

SIRET No.: 804 292 993 00024

### **Headquarters, Maromme site:**

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