

# SOCIÉTÉ SECRÈTE

*“Following up on some ideas brought forth in the past about a video and publication marking the 10th anniversary of Clark, Patrice [Duhamel] suggests it might be good to take advantage of this moment in Clark’s history, to [...] attempt to identify, through these celebrations, a specific theme that goes beyond [...] the framework of a simple retrospective. The group agrees that this could be interesting if it allows us [...] to clearly mark Clark’s presence and its defining character.”*

Excerpt from the minutes of the Annual General Meeting, held June 18, 1998

In 1985, eleven artists sharing studio spaces on rue Clark felt the need to show their work. The result was a group exhibition titled *Le Musée temporaire*. Three years after this initial public presentation, the Centre d’art et de diffusion CLARK was born.

The year 2015 marks the 30th anniversary of CLARK’s community of artists (the “secret” society) and the 27th anniversary of the Centre d’art et de diffusion itself (the society that “secretes”). To celebrate this dual anniversary, CLARK presents a group exhibition that, to restate the words of the late Patrice Duhamel, “goes beyond the framework of a simple retrospective” in order to “clearly mark the presence and defining character” of the Centre. This is all the more relevant given its current context. CLARK is now surrounded by several artist-run centres since the establishment of the cultural hub known as the *Pôle de création et de diffusion de Gaspé*.

*Société secrète* renews the founding spirit of the Centre by reuniting nearly all of its founding members around a collective project. The exhibition’s title is a knowing wink to CLARK’s reputation as a closed circle, with its ‘by invitation only’ membership. It also refers to the year 2000-2001, when all communications from the Centre were based on occult imagery. While the Centre’s member recruitment strategies might seem obscure, it does allow closer ties between those who have been co-opted. The Clarkian collective counts as many founding members as it does new ones, some having joined within the last six months. Beyond providing stability to the Centre, this mode of operation facilitates exchange, initiates dialogue and reinforces a sense of belonging amongst its members. After 27 years of existence as an organization, CLARK celebrates the collective, the clan, the pack that gathers around a theme that remains open to new ways of seeing.

*Société secrète* unfolds primarily within two distinct spaces. In Salle 1, themes of the occult, secrecy, and magic are explored, namely through the presence of a tree house that acts as an observatory for this mysterious theatre, where objects, images and texts are displayed. Salle 2 is accessed through a pivoting bookcase. In this gallery, the installation recalls a kind of conspiracy room where politics or current events are discussed. A black board is inscribed with various phrases and quotes on subjects pertaining to social or political thought, while initiating discussions and knowledge sharing. This space reveals the ways in which CLARK’s members discuss issues that go beyond artistic concerns and engage themselves in both art and life, like a true society that “secretes” ideas, objects and actions.

The spirit of art-in-the-making, the transmission of speech, one-off actions and performances, have always been central to CLARK’s interests and help keep this proposition alive, breaking the immutability of the work. This is also achieved by playing secret society games such as word of mouth, spreading rumours, passing cards from hand to hand, or distributing them throughout the city or while travelling, inventing secret signs, unannounced events, leaving random traces that mystify the visitor or passerby. Members occupy the entire gallery space and beyond: through spoken anecdotes in the audio station, in the space between the two gallery walls, in fanzines, in one-off interventions held in public or in secret, through the creation of objects, and the writing of texts or phrases spread through social media.

Evidently, creating a work of art through a group effort is a colossal challenge. Viewers may sometimes recognize an artist’s individual style within this collective piece, but like an exquisite corpse, setting a common ground allows each individual part to create a whole.

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Key words: *studio, art-in-the-making, founders, artists, risk-taking, generations, exchanges, scotch, unification, eviction, gentrification, pizza, August 25, dissemination, Coca-Cola fridge, demonstration, dysfunctional family, a sense of belonging, urgency, yellow, godmothers, production, fire, the sound of saws, membership, non-hierarchical structure, committees, godfathers, parties, friends, 1591, engagement, emulation, The Fashion Plaza, bagel time, the smell of wood, community, network, welcome, Petula.*

Manon Tourigny

*SOCIÉTÉ SECRÈTE would like to thank the artists and cultural workers who have made CLARK a community that continues to evolve, endure and secrete. Very special thanks to the exhibiting artists who played the secret society game with much enthusiasm and generosity.*

*SOCIÉTÉ SECRÈTE would also like to acknowledge the contribution of individuals who helped out during the installation of the show, especially Atelier CLARK, without whom the tree house, the pivoting wall and other magical feats could not have occurred.*

*SOCIÉTÉ SECRÈTE salutes the friends, visitors, donors, and funders who contribute to the success of our celebrations and artistic conspiracies.*

## Poste audio

Each centre has its own written and oral history. Much of CLARK’s history has been built through oral narratives, weaving its reputation through 27 years of existence. To mark this anniversary on the theme of secret society, two of CLARK’s staff members, Claudine Khelil and Roxanne Arsenault, came up with the idea to collect stories from its members in a space that lends itself well to the confiding of secrets: the space between the gallery’s walls.

These are the Centre’s secrets, the sometimes anecdotal, sometimes compromising revelations that are partially revealed here in the Poste Audio. Voices have been modified and names have been censored to keep the mystery alive. Played randomly, these excerpts tell a continually reconstructed history of CLARK, with all its contradictions, lack of objectivity, and just a bit of mythology.

*C.K. and R.A. would like thank the members who confided their secrets, and especially Pascal Desjardins for his countless hours of audio editing that helps preserve (in part) the identity of these witnesses.*

### CENTRE CLARK

5455 avenue de Gaspé, local 114  
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514-288-4972 / info@clarkplaza.org  
Tuesday to Saturday, 12pm to 5pm

### ATELIER CLARK

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S \ C I E T E  
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27<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
 EXHIBITION /  
 MAY 14 TO JUNE 20, 2015

OPENING /  
 THURSDAY, MAY 14, 8PM

ART, LITERATURE &  
 COMMUNITY /  
 SUNDAY MAY 24, 2PM  
 at Bibliothèque du Mile End

TRIANGULAR ROUND TABLE  
 (members discussion) /  
 THURSDAY JUNE 11, 6 - 8PM

CLOSING NIGHT  
 & PERFORMANCES /  
 THURSDAY, 18 JUNE, 9PM

MORE INFO ON [CLARKPLAZA.ORG](http://CLARKPLAZA.ORG)