

# Introduction

Saâdane Afif describes himself as a “talkative conceptual artist.” His diverse practice – shot through with humour – calls upon the savoir-faire of others, whether artisans, musicians, or writers. He creates projects that question the very concept of the unique artwork or individual creator. Instead, he simultaneously collapses and expands notions of authorship by chains of collaborations that function as feedback loops or echo chambers. In fact, since 2004, he regularly commissions writers and artists to create lyrics inspired by his artworks. These texts have become key material, verbalizing what happens in the mind of the beholder, the process of interpretation that underpins the relationship between art and its audience.

Through a *mise-en-scène* that creates two levels of reading, the exhibition *Paroles* illustrates this question of interpretation, which is so essential to Afif’s practice. A retrospective part includes 10 installations made over the past 15 years, all of which have generated lyrics.

At eye-height a second exhibition updates the work: the lyrics on the wall (and gathered in a new songbook) and the red, white and blue posters punctuate the route through the exhibition which leads – on the 3rd floor – to a music studio, *Studio Paroles*. Here the visitor is invited to make his/her own interpretation of Afif’s work. *Studio Paroles* is fully equipped, open to all upon registration, under the guidance of studio master Valentin Noiret. The only rule to follow: sing or declaim the lyrics contained in Afif’s songbook.

*Paroles (Songbook)* is an artwork in the form of a book, published for this

occasion. A first catalogue raisonné of the lyrics, it brings together 191 texts written by over 100 authors in the past 15 years. They are published with minimal editorial intervention, in their language of origin, without any commentary, explanation or – perhaps surprisingly for a book by a visual artist – illustration. Structured chronologically by exhibition, the book ends with 38 new texts. The book is thus a summary of previous interpretations of Afif’s work, and a springboard to new ones.