

## The ring of art in school

BY ISABELLE RODRIGUEZ

On La Gomera island, in the Canary archipelago, endures a remarkable language: Silbo Gomero. Taught today on the island's schools, the language is actually a whistled language, still used today, that reproduces Spanish (or Castilian, to be precise) through whistling—and is now on Unesco's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Far, far away, in the 19th district of Paris, students at La Goutte d'Or are looking with interest at this practically unknown language, accompanied by two artists, Stéphanie Rollin and David Brognon. The artist duo, which formed in 2006, works with students on transforming one of the most important emblems of school life: the bell, which, up to 17 times a day, divides and accentuates life at school. It has now turned into musical phrases sung by the loudspeakers that follow students and the pedagogical staff; phrases selected by the school children and whistled in Silbo, which a professor from the Canaries recorded for the project. "The schoolyard is the ultimate creative place where children invent words, expressions and codes to avoid being understood by adults. The whistling, on the other hand, is a secret between children and teachers. And it is also an ironic wink to the notion that *we are not parrots*", explain David Brognon and Stéphanie Rollin about this in-situ piece entitled *Train Your Bird To Talk* and created through the platform SOCIETIES as part of the Nouveaux Commanditaires ("New Commissioners") action by Fondation de France.

Accompanied by these partners, the school La Goutte d'Or chose to embark on an audacious and successful adventure: to allow art to enter the daily lives of students and set up ambitious projects with them and their families. A vacant business apartment is turned into an artist studio, which the artists occupied and used freely for the duration of one school year each, punctuated by shared moments with the students who are busy with their own projects in their classrooms and, in parallel, discover art museums and art centers in the region. "We do not require the artists to be teachers or educators. The important thing is for them to be there. And for the students to participate in the creative process," says Pierre Perrin, the director who initiated the project. Next came the projects 2012 Seasons in the abyss by Claude Levêque, Fréquence casserole by Malachi Farrell and residencies with Chourouk Hriech and Bertrand Lamarche. Some productions have taken a life of their own outside of school, like Flow612 by Daniel Larrieu, presented in many festivals and platforms. Through art, La Goutte d'Or can reinvent itself and reinvent what it means to go to school.