

The Story Behind the Name

ATSA, When Art Takes Action

In December 1997, Annie Roy and Pierre Allard birthed their first work together, *La Banque à Bas* (The Sock Bank). Its deployment in Montreal's public space was both illegal and unannounced. The work expressed anger over the inequitable distribution of wealth in society, and it garnered considerable media coverage. This inspired the artists to distill the formal aspects of the terrorist act and to appropriate the topical term 'terrorist act' to their ends of creating topical art that channeled their anger in the face of the world's aberrations. But because their primary aim was to provoke thought and promote pacifism, they tagged on the words 'Socialement Acceptable' (socially acceptable), and the collective found its name: Action Terroriste Socialement Acceptable (socially acceptable terrorist action), or ATSA. Their core mission was to take jolting political actions in the public space, creating works that, while expressing anger, were non-violent. Art would be their weapon. Back in what was still a carefree era in America, art still had a certain revolutionary romanticism about it.

The name ATSA was effective and caused a sensation among the press. It became the couple's artistic credo, as they took on the attributes of violence while denouncing it. The duo of lovable rogues subverted the tools of the oppressors and used them as arms to fight for a fairer, better world.

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the artists asked the Canada Council for the Arts, through the intermediary of its jury, whether a change in the collective's name might be appropriate. The jury advised against it. Annie and Pierre nonetheless decided then and there to cease putting the word 'terrorist' out there and removed it from their Web site. In the 15 years since, the rules of the game have changed, with hypermediatization, global conflicts and previously unimaginable acts of inhumanity now the norm. Sweeping across the five continents, aimed at all of us and our fundamental freedoms, over and beyond the mere symbols of power, this new brutality has taken horror to a new level. The artists, who are regarded as pacifists, decided to recontextualize their acronym by adding to it their slogan, and so became **ATSA, or When Art Takes Action.**

Almost 20 years after their initial action, Annie and Pierre's aim remains to hold a mirror up to the world in which we live and to reiterate the pacifistic approach that is theirs. For the biggest revolution shall be that of selflessness and empathy. Let us hope the world will come to that watershed moment in a radical way! Let us truly embrace the Other.

Traduit du français par Nazzareno Bulette