

“The lettrists’ oldest member, Wolman is 24 years old”

By Gil J Wolman¹

Born in Paris on 7 September 1929, Gil J Wolman has successively been, in all haste: a journalist for *Combat*, a member of the Jeunesses Communistes, the captain of the *Rose Bayadère*, a knitter, an African hunter in Occupied Germany, a poet at the C.N.E.,² a trafficker in the Kasbah of Algiers, a trucker in the vicinity of the North Cape [in Norway], and a bartender in Pompeii.

In 1950, his encounter with Isidore Isou, who had published *Introduction à une nouvelle poésie et à une nouvelle musique* in 1947, determined the [direction of the] lettrist movement: performances at Tabou and the Maison des Lettres; passage to direct action (the scandal at the orphanage at Auteuil).³

Wolman created MÉGAPNEUMIE, which is poetry founded on the sonic disintegration of the Letter, and launched its manifesto in the magazine *Ur* in December 1950, under the title “Introduction à Wolman”: *Le dépassement de soi (fumisterie) germe toutes les créations* [Introduction to Wolman: Self-Transcendence (sham) is the germ of all creations].

He worked with [Jean-Louis] Brau in the attempt to create an Integral Art “for a synthetic death.”

Composer of a part of the lettrist music in Isou’s film *Traité de Bave et d’Éternité*, Wolman repeatedly interrupted the Cannes Film Festival of April 1951 to draw attention to Isou and his work.

In September 1951, Wolman completed *L’Anticoncept*, the screening of which at the Avant-Garde Film Club led to incidents between the lettrist security service and reactionary members of the audience, then to its ban by the film board censor.

March 1952 saw the publication of “Cinématochrone, nouvelle amplitude,” in which Wolman explained his film.⁴

In April 1952, he participated in the systematic sabotage of the Fifth Cannes Film Festival, which continued under police protection after the arrest of 11 lettrists.

In May and June 1952, Gil J Wolman and Guy Ernest-Debord were in Belgium, where they founded the Lettrist International.

In Paris on 30 June, an outraged crowd interrupted the screening of G.-E. Debord’s film *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*, which is dedicated Gil J Wolman.

¹ Gil J Wolman, “Doyen des lettristes, Wolman a 24 ans,” written in 1953 and published in *Wolman Résumé des Chapitres précédents* (Paris: éditions Spiess, 1981). Translated and annotated by Bill Brown on 23 January 2025.

² The Comité national des écrivains (The National Writers’ Committee) was an organ of literary resistance, created in 1941 in answer to an appeal by the French Communist Party.

³ See “Le scandale d’Auteuil” in *Serge Berna: Écrits et Documents*, edited and annotated by Jean-Louis Rançon (Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2024) and “The Auteuil Scandal” in *Lettrist, Provocateur, Writer, Thief: An Anthology of Writings by and Documents about Serge Berna*, translated by Bill Brown (unpublished manuscript).

⁴ Gil J Wolman, “Le Cinématochrone – Nouvelle amplitude,” *Ur: La dictature lettriste*, no. 2 (Paris, 1952).

On 29 October, Wolman and Brau were the only ones among us who succeeded in getting through the barriers set up by the police around the Ritz Hotel, in order to throw insulting tracts (*Finis les pieds plats*,⁵ *Go home Chaplin*) at Charles Chaplin. The varied repercussions of the “Chaplin Affair,” and the aesthetic and moral positions that it implied, set the signatories of the Lettrist International’s tracts in opposition to the backwards faction of the movement.

On 2 November 1952, Wolman and G.-E. Debord drafted “Position de l’Internationale lettriste,”⁶ which, three days later, led to the exclusion of Isou.

Working in parallel with Brau’s research into the use of plastic, Wolman invented a new form of painting, a canvas of which titled *HHHHHH* was reproduced in the first issue of *Internationale lettriste* (December 1952).

In January 1953, Wolman supported the idea, presented by Debord, of an attack on the prison for girls in Chevilly-Larue – an idea that was eventually rejected.

In Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the youth, devoted to the comforts-of-the-last-evenings-before-committing-suicide, are drunk every day.

But Wolman and Brau traveled to Algeria, which was closer to revolt. The Lettrist International found courageous supporters there.⁷

In May 1953, Gil J Wolman returned to Paris and, in June, collaborated on the writing of “Acte Additionnel à la Constitution d’une Internationale lettriste.”⁸

He is currently finishing two new films, *Oraisons funèbres* and *Faut m’avoir ce mec*.

A new critique will have to take us as its sole subject. It will impose itself through this choice, against the aging generation of established critics who will die confined in their old hierarchies of values.

Many of the myths and powers of the unprecedented era that we beginning are signified in the work of Wolman, the future prestige of which some of us are estimating: *the characters in this work are real, some already exist, the others will not be long in coming*.

⁵ “No More Flat Feet,” which concludes with the line “Go home Mister Chaplin” (English in original). Wolman’s consistent use of the plural “tracts” suggests that both French and English versions were produced and used by the lettrists on this occasion.

⁶ Published in *Internationale lettriste*, No. 1 (December 1952).

⁷ Including Midhou Dahou, who signed the LI’s “Manifesto,” which was published in *Internationale lettriste* No. 2 (February 1953).

⁸ Co-signed by Bull-D. (Bull Dog) Brau, Guy-Ernest Debord, Gaëtan M. Langlais and Gil J Wolman, and published in *Internationale lettriste* No. 3 (August 1953).