

Salomé Engel  
*From Cowboy to Cobaye*  
03.05–07.06.2025

EN

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# Salomé Engel

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marytwo is over the moon to open the first Swiss solo exhibition by Salomé Engel. Engel (\*1999 in Paris, FR) completed her BA in Visual Arts at ECAL in Lausanne and her MA in Fine Arts at HEAD in Geneva in 2024. The following is a text on the exhibition by Charly Mirambeau, a long-time friend of the artist.

From my very first encounter with Salomé Engel in September 2019, I have always dreaded the moment when we would sit down together to take stock. I can affirm, after several years of friendship and artistic closeness, that the path of evasions has always been a means of personal emancipation for the artist, incisively rejecting any form of recuperation. The shapes, gestures, proposals, and colours that unfold within Salomé Engel's artistic practice never allow viewers to anticipate *ce qui arrive*<sup>1</sup>. It is impossible to rely on one's own assumptions, and that is precisely where the excitement lies for me when approaching a new exhibition of hers. I often receive it as an invitation to step aside and reconsider some of our personal knowledge or habits in relation to artistic forms. By skirting around subjects, she finds ways to engage with them – one way, then another. In doing so, Salomé Engel introduces us to new stances, sometimes with a dry sense of humour.

From the outset, it's a matter of language: *From Cowboy to Cobaye* encapsulates, in my view, the main propositions of this exhibition. Like a linguistic precept lost in translation, it is the almost etymological relationships we have with appearances that interest Salomé Engel. Through the stumbling blocks of double meanings, a sense of a disturbed relationship to reality emerges. *From Cowboy to Cobaye* stems from this transformative state, linked to the original professions of astronauts on space missions. Initially fighter pilots, the space cowboys were tasked with exploring the unknown. The point of interest arises when the expedition gradually transforms, and the object of study is no longer the conquest of an unknown elsewhere but rather an interpersonal observation, as beings in transit. A new situation of self-contained study thus appears, through a paradigm shift in the register of enquiry. It is precisely this transfer that interests the artist: a study of studies, where forms take place within an almost meta, self-referential relationship.

[1] «what will happen», Paul Virilio, *Ce qui arrive*, Actes Sud, 2002

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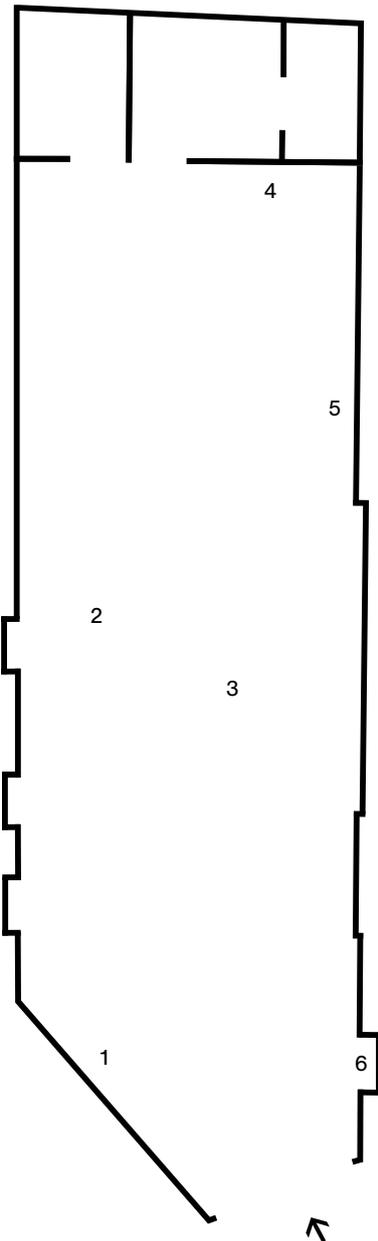
These moments of shifting states and methods of adaptation are at the heart of Salomé Engel's concerns. The artist takes the example of protective booties made for dogs' paws. Here, these boot-like shapes are enlarged on the wall through shaped canvases, covered with materials that sidestep tradition. Through blends of tar, reflective paint, and lacquer, it is within the artifice of representing natures that Salomé Engel explores the flaws in reality. I am reminded of the suit worn by Laïka, the dog who died in space after seven hours aboard Sputnik 2, launched by the USSR in 1957. The spacecraft has since disintegrated in the upper atmosphere, and Laïka remains a pseudo-star. The slippages operated by the artist throughout this exhibition allow her to demystify many relationships to so-called beliefs and established systems, even adopting an anti-conspiracist stance. Indeed, it is within absurd speculations and convoluted tales that the artist often finds a source of production, liberating forms from a traditionalist straitjacket and riding a wave of emancipation. Bales of metal swarf litter the floor, as if remnants of metallurgical production, wedged between pseudo-rails covered of gradations imitating fine core samples. Where nature becomes a backdrop, it is through these so-called conquests of space that Salomé Engel unsettles the problematic of the unknown. Certain codes of science fiction are reworked here; the fake core samples no longer bear witness to a discursive past but instead reflect the determination not to look away from an obsolete reality.

Here, or in the sky, below the ground or through a window, the artist induces confusion – not to locate us, but to focus us. Underground or on the moon, a tormented relationship with the present time is implied. Once again, it is difficult to anchor her practice in any given era; Salomé Engel's work eludes categorisation. Refusing reality as it presents itself has become an act of resistance in itself. Judith Butler even implores us to maintain our stance when accused of being fools<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, we might be fools when faced with a reality full of destruction, a reality that has become unacceptable. Judith Butler thus invites us to become wise fools and encourages us to reject any form of shame when refusing this reality. In this sense, we must constantly remind ourselves that we have the capacity to imagine a different world, and that this requires the production of massive movements of resistance. As if merely saying or imagining this made us fools, simply because it implies that we are out of step with the so-called reality. In other words, it is not about believing that the world before our eyes represents all possible worlds, nor all acceptable or imaginable transformations of the world.

Charly Mirambeau  
Translated from French

[2] Judith Butler, conference *New political imaginaries*, CCCB, Barcelone, February 10, 2025

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1. *Hearts Crushed Pretty Early Tonight (HCPET), 2025*  
Acrylic, bitumen, reflective road marking paint, glitter on canvas  
181 × 202cm
2. *Needles: Insinuation of Sailing Motes I, 2025*  
Metal debris, wood, laquer, coloured sand  
1028 × 60 × 23cm
3. *Needles: Insinuation of Sailing Motes II, 2025*  
Metal debris, wood, laquer, coloured sand  
834 × 66 × 26cm
4. *Heroic Conspiracies Promised Epic Tales (HCPET), 2025*  
Acrylic, bitumen, reflective road marking paint, glitter on canvas  
174 × 131cm
5. *Hot Comedy Per Every Task (HCPET), 2025*  
Acrylic, bitumen, reflective road marking paint, glitter on canvas  
135 × 90cm
6. *Substantive Revolutions, 2025*  
Sand paper, quartz stone disk, window  
137 × 99 × 53cm