

CHLOÉ ROYER
HEELS OVER HEAD

07.06.2024 – 20.07.2024

Opening on Thursday 6 June, 6-9pm

6, rue Jacques-Callot
75006 Paris

Three years ago, Chloé Royer held her first solo exhibition. It took place in a room with dilapidated walls, a very high ceiling and uneven parquet flooring, where it was said that Karl Marx had once been a tenant. The exhibition, for which I had written a text, was born of an action that bound us together and sealed several years of friendship: shoe prototypes found in an old family shop and given to Chloé. She worked on them for several months, trying to work out what she could do with them. Faced with all this polystyrene, plastic and imitation leather, she opted for wood. It was the first time she had sculpted with it.

Since then, Chloé has worked in other media, modelling other forms, which, for all their differences, have remained faithful to her obsessions. A public installation in a North Westphalian park (*We would survive but without touch, without skin*, 2021); a performance dyeing fabrics of fruit, juice and bark, crimson under several hours of sunlight (*Variations des cœurs*, 2021); reflections distorted by water, drowned in portraits, printed like photographs (*Magma*, 2023); these same reflections choreographed in a video (*Limb*, 2023); chromed silhouettes breathing in mid-air (*Tout ce qui tombe*, 2023); ceramic creatures, their tentacles fired in enamel (*Domna, Osmonde et Etmel*, 2023).

And yet, in the spring of 2024, it was these legs that she chose to return to. As if the sculptures had only taken their first steps, and needed to grow a little longer. The new bones were matched by new stacks, but the composition remains the same: a happy marriage of disparate materials in which silicone embraces wood, hoisted up from shoe-like pedestals. Here we find what in the meantime has become one of the artist's signatures: the meticulousness of the action mixed with the signs of wear and tear, a formal vocabulary of waves and curves meeting certain artifices of femininity. I am thinking of these false nails assembled like coral, entangled in monumental meshes (*Xenophora [kiss], Xenophora [mother]*, 2022); of Rapunzel's braid, her blond hair strewn across the floor, sticking out of the window of an old boys' school like an incitement to escape (*Xenophora, Sila*, 2022).

Perhaps these legs were also the harbingers of escape; who knows if they aren't preparing to run, to take to their heels, to throw off their blows, get rid of what has cost them. Observing them, I think of this quote from Lauren Berlant by author Aurelia Guo: "My mother died of femininity... In her late teens she took up smoking, because it was sold as a weight-reduction aid. [...] Later, she had an abortion and on the way out tripped down the stairs in those heels, hurting her back permanently. Decades later, selling dresses at Bloomingdale's, she was forced to carry, [...] 500 lbs. of clothes each day. [...] [These tasks threw her back out anew, and the result of this was an overconsumption of painkillers that ultimately blew out her kidneys. [...] more comically, she had two fingers partly amputated because her nails got infected by a 'French wrap' gone wrong [...]."¹

All this reminds me of the strange homonymy between the noun *heel* and the verb *to heal*, as if the latter necessarily called for the bandaging of the former. I'm also reminded of the various expressions that make the shoe the site of a face-to-face encounter. The saying goes that you have to walk a mile in someone else's shoes before you can judge them (*To walk a mile in someone else's shoes*). And when you fall in love, you *fall head over heels for someone*.² Chloé reverses this phrase to give the exhibition its title: "Heels over head" – an inversion of terms that plays on the ambivalence of the word *over*. Not only are the heels over the head, but they are preferred to it – in the phrase *to pick something over something else*. This is a reminder that Gina 105, Lipsia 70, Sumoh, Serena TR and Aude 90 have no faces; that their expression is all in their posture, their arrangement or in this anatomical outline, which sometimes becomes more detailed, vertebra after vertebra, and sometimes asserts itself with the clarity of the drawing. Some of the joints fit together like puppets. They are put together like Kapla building blocks, thrown together; they are like those dolls you pull apart than patch together. A few years later, these sculptures continue to speak of childhood and the world of play. Perhaps they are more open about their DIY nature, their artificiality, because now they display the secrets that hold them together, the steel plates, originally hidden by an assemblage of carpet, over which the legs appeared to float.

"Heels Over Head" has expanded the foundations more than the illusion. It has abandoned the enigma to show the tricks of the trade. If you get up close, you can see the smoothing of the wood and the precision of the cutting. There are not so many jolts in these sculptures, no splinter you would struggle to dislodge. Are these translucent plasters really hiding something? Rather, they incite us to look at the wounds we can't see, and highlight those wounds invisible to the naked eye. These bandages are more make-up than mask, more tourniquet than bandage – here to hold the limbs together along a metal wire. In their palette, I find something of the beauty ritual described by Daphné B. in her book *Maquillée*: "When I powder myself, when I cream myself, I get closer to this body that I spend my life ignoring. I give it back some importance, some dignity. I give it a smile and blush its cheeks. I take care of it, of me, of us. I split myself in two to better embrace myself."² How can we fail to see this same embracing movement in Chloé's assemblages?

Salomé Burstein

1 Lauren Berlant, "For Example", *Supervalent Thought*, 2012, quoted by Aurelia Guo in *World of Interiors*, Brussels and London, Divided Publishing, 2022, p. 13.

2 Daphné B., *Maquillée. Essai sur le monde et ses fards*, Paris: Grasset, 2021, p. 120.



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“There is a thing whose voice is one; whose feet are four and two and three”

Solo exhibition by Chloé Royer

Karl Marx Studio Space

23, rue de Lille – 75007 Paris

24 April-2 May 2021

Some treasures lie forgotten and buried in cellars. Others, fortunately, are eventually unearthed.

It happened a few months ago, in the basement of an old clothes shop that had belonged to my grandmother. Through the trapdoor, amongst the dust and old account books, three huge boxes lay dormant. Ah, I thought, novels, letters yellowed by time, maybe a few photos. What I found was hundreds of shoelaces, soles and heels. Feet too, without their mannequins. It looked like a crime scene.

This was the remains of my childhood, exhumed and put in boxes. I remembered the afternoons I spent with the seamstresses in their workshops after school. The feet went from hand to hand, measurements were taken, sweet words were exchanged and sometimes gossip. These ones in the boxes still bore the marks of the felt-tip pen. Here, the address of the Milanese supplier; there, an abandoned date or first name; a phone number too, on the edge of an ankle – scattered like clues. In this basement, below this trapdoor, it all looked like one big enigma. It made you want to piece it all back together.

Chloé has a thing about repairing. She shatters her forms the better to mend them. Her works look at the body's envelope, the flesh, the bones – and probe these layers in order to heal them. Chloé wields sculpture like a scalpel: she examines the curves she has created, then peels back the skin in layers. From underneath, from above, she reconnoitres and punctures. It's as if she's asking each piece for its own remedy. You, what would you need? A few centimetres more or a broken tendon? A little less volume, or deeper furrows? More lift, or more weight?

I gave her my tatters. From these odds and ends and pieces of string, Chloé made legs grow. On the ground, the feet took root; beams sprang from the plastic, and the shoes became pedestals. These sculptures stand on the tips of their toes. They even seem to fly over the carpets. Suspended, they perform a balancing act – like this patchwork of a femur and a hip, now hanging by a bone. It was patched it up so that nothing would wobble; floors and shoes were superimposed, knots tightened – but already the plasters are coming away. There's a rainbow of hues in these dressings, a whole palette played out on these bandages. Silicone, as a suture, embraces the wood. Infused with pigment, it blurs bruises and conceals scratches. The occlusion, however, will remain imperfect. The pieces don't fit together like a jigsaw puzzle; they're not made for each other. Nothing here is *meant to be*.

This is the Achilles heel of these grimacing assemblages: they prefer to be in bad company rather than lonesome. These creatures want a snug fit. They are constantly looking for contact. With each other, to start with. But they also have a soft spot for us. Maybe that's what makes them so tender: these convalescing forms need us in order to heal. From high up in their uncertainty, they seek to seduce us. They even seem to be inviting us in. And they know full well that their invitation is dubious.

So let's venture into their arena and cross the threshold of these stacked carpets. Suddenly, it's these feet that are leading the dance. Twiggy 30, Pharaon, Helmut 95 strut in step and guide our strides. These totems tangle and undulate. They look like snakes, rising from their baskets under the spell of the flutes. Their movement resonates, whispering in our ears.

Because Chloé makes surfaces talk. With her, roughness has moods. The nakedness of these legs is chatty, and each cut speaks volumes. Faced with them, our own wounds reopen. We find the scratches of childhood, the sorrows of the past; the shattered bones and patched hearts; the techniques too, that serve to mend. Like feet bound in youth to keep them small; stiletto heels we try to master; the pain of blisters and twisted ankles. How much does it hurt to be so (well) raised?

These silhouettes mingle the wounds of youth, the accidents of life and the injuries of old age. They also tell archaic legends, stories whose end we can guess. Because their anatomy sums up the trajectory: the calves stretch into crutches at the end, the knee becomes the cane that will be used to hold it up, the muscle and the splint marry in the same curve. It's as if these skeletons were predicting their own downfall. In the same swaying motion, they revive past fractures and foretell the ones to come. These oracles also resurrect a whole horde of characters: the tightrope walker, the fetishes, the mummies all merge in these split obelisks. Between the beams and the prostheses, another hybrid emerges: the composite Sphinx shakes the statues and lets its enigma float above the carpets. “*There is a thing whose voice is one; whose feet are four and two and three.*”¹

Salomé Burstein

1. The commonest form of this riddle of the Sphinx is no doubt: “What goes on four feet in the morning, two feet at noon, and three feet in the evening?” The answer is the human being, who walks on all fours in childhood, stands upright in adulthood and uses a walking stick in old age.