

e-flux Criticism

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Paris roundup

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View of Meriem Bennani's "Sole crushing" at Lafayette Anticipations, Paris, 2025. Image courtesy of Lafayette Anticipations. Photo by Aurelien Mole.

Various locations, Paris

A thudding rhythm echoes through the walls and atrium of Lafayette Anticipations. You find Meriem Bennani's *Sole Crushing* (2024–25) by following the sound to the building's second floor, where a mechanical contraption comprising over 200 thumping flip-flops drums out a musical composition based on traditional North African and orchestral music. Created in collaboration with producer Cheb Runner (Reda Senhaji), this surprising work signals a coming together. The unworn shoes stand in for the people who would wear them, joined in a band; the pun in the title insinuates that while such a coming together might be difficult, it is also a form of resistance to the depredations of daily life.

The installation is made up of everyday materials united in sound. In Helen Marten's "30 Blizzards," a four-day project with Miu Miu at the Palais d'Iena, the everyday is also the subject, though this work is far from quotidian. Taking up the colonnaded ground floor of the Art Deco palace built for the 1937 Universal Exposition—and which now hosts the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council—Marten creates an operetta combining performance, sculpture, writing, and video. There is a stage in the middle, several monitors showing videos, and a series of industrial tracks high above the performers moving boxes reminiscent of airport security bins marked with the names of characters and places from the plot ("Mother," "The garden"). Thirty performers move around the room, as do the audience members, and when they mix together the performers are recognizable by their quiet-luxury Miu Miu outfits.

The dizzying mix of high fashion, this grand historic space, Marten’s ambiguous writing (“the noise of a rip down a smooth vanilla envelope. The noise of a rip in us”), and the heady abundance of the work mean that each viewer can make of it what they wish. At the Louvre—heavy with history and light eight crown jewels—Mohamed Bourouissa presents the video *les 4 temps* (all works 2025 unless otherwise stated) on a screen placed in front of the window of a large, carpeted room in the museum’s Sully wing. Shot over a year in the neighboring Tuileries Gardens, it comprises fifty-two weekly installments that, in tracking the changing seasons, pay special consideration to the Tuileries’ occupants, from the guards who lock the gardens up at night to the gardeners who care for them. Focusing on a butterfly on a leaf, shot from the perspective of a bird or the grass, and set to atmospheric electronic music, the work displays the everyday in an understated way. Not the royal gardens, but the gardeners receive the attention.

The art fairs in Paris take on iconic buildings and addresses that conjure power and influence—Art Basel is at the Grand Palais and Paris Internationale in a building on the Rond-point des Champs-Élysées, Offscreen is held at the chapel of the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital, and Place des Vosges sees several galleries come together in a large apartment on the historic square—but it was these exhibitions that more thoughtfully responded to the places in which they were hosted. A number of exhibitions around town also took new approaches to their white cube galleries. At Chantal Crousel, Gabriel Orozco’s “Partituras” presents works on paper and paintings that explore the meeting points of musical and visual compositions. Reverberating with staff lines, they look like something between illuminated manuscripts and early-twentieth-century abstraction. The series began with Orozco playing the keyboard, and recordings of his music transform the gallery into a space of sound as much as images and objects.

At Petrine, photographs of a fallen tree in Manhattan form part of two mixed-media works by Lenard Giller, *Corner of Suffolk and Stanton (01)* and *(02)*, along with five cardboard boxes filled with shavings of brass (*Buying brass 01–05*). But it is only when you walk down the stairs to the basement and encounter a large tree trunk (It remains where it falls, unless otherwise agreed upon with the municipality) that this exhibition, titled “sediment,” really coheres. It looks like the tree from the photographs, and the materials listed in the caption—wood, metal screws—hint at how it got here. Its presence highlights the oft-used methodology by which objects shift in meaning when moved into a gallery, but the element of surprise and the link to the other works elevates the gesture.

London gallery Tramps opened their new Paris space with an exhibition by Kai Althoff. The storefront windows have been covered with foam insulation, and the exhibition inside threatens to burst the seams of the small space. The canvases are not perfectly rectangular, making you wonder whether it’s the work or the walls that are not straight, and the middle of the space is taken up by metal structures about a person’s height displaying photographs of Althoff’s friends at previous exhibitions. The paintings, which feature people hugging, talking, and turning away from each other, are thus experienced as part of a busy crowd.

The historic architectures that make Paris’s art week so distinctive also lay bare the industry’s connection to state and economic power. At the Palais de Tokyo (also built for the 1937 Universal Exposition), Cameron Rowland’s contribution to Naomi Beckwith’s “Echo Delay Reverb” involved swapping out the French tricolor flying over the facade with the flag of Martinique, an overseas territory since it was first colonized in 1635. Replacement only hung for a day before it was removed, after the museum considered that it “could be considered illegal” according to laws regulating the display of foreign flags on public buildings.

The wall label for Replacement remains on view, along with a statement by the museum explaining its decision. It might be that the artist always intended that the flag’s removal should become part of the work. There is a precedent: in 1995 the Martinique flag was flown over the Hôtel de Ville of Sainte-Anne, Martinique, in a call for political determination; it was removed by the state. Histories repeat. At the Swedish Institute, Tarik Kiswanson shows a “transportable” Steinway Victory Vertical piano, the kind made to entertain soldiers during World War II, balanced on a white ovoid (*The Relief [Steinway Victory Vertical, 1944]*). The piano remains silent, but music is heard from the next room where a small video work titled *The Conservatory (Saint-Denis)* focuses on the hands of a child attempting to play Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy* (1824). It’s a tentative, tender, tortuous rendition. The link between the object and the performance evolves like the child’s confrontation with the symphony: history is there to be confronted. Tentatively, tortuously.