

METRO PICTURES

Peltier, Elian. "At the Palais de Tokyo, Camille Henrot Finds Wonder in the Everyday," *NYTimes.com* (October 17, 2017).

The New York Times



Camille Henrot's exhibition "Days Are Dogs" at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris explores the idea of a week as "both an oppressive and reassuring structure." Photo by Aurélien Mole.

The Earth and sun led humans to structure time in days and years; the rotation of the moon gave calendars months.

But weeks? There is no astronomical or other natural reason for such a unit of time. But we have grown so familiar with the cycle of seven days, the French artist Camille Henrot said, that it has become "both an oppressive and reassuring structure."

For her first major solo exhibition in Paris, the 39-year-old artist, who was born in the French capital but has been based in New York since 2010, has divided a 6,000-square-meter, or 64,500-square-foot space in the Palais de Tokyo — France's largest contemporary art exhibition venue — into seven thematic parts, each dedicated to a day of the week.

The exhibition, "Days Are Dogs," opens on Wednesday and runs through January.

"A week is a story we tell ourselves," Ms. Henrot said in an interview at the Palais de Tokyo this week. "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday... It feels natural, like days and nights, yet it is not. But we can't picture a society that would come back to a format that differs from the seven day week."



Ms. Henrot, 39, was born in Paris but has been based in New York since 2010.

Among Ms. Henrot's new and perhaps most significant work is "Saturday," an eerie 20-minute 3-D film that opens the exhibition and immerses the visitor into the religious practices of the Seventh-day Adventists, Christians who celebrate the Sabbath on Saturdays.

Ms. Henrot has described film as her favorite medium, the one that most closely resembles life. Like "Grosse Fatigue," which earned her a Silver Lion at the Venice Biennale in 2013, "Saturday" starts with a long, mesmerizing opening. It then shows footage of baptisms in the United States, Tonga and Tahiti, in which worshipers are plunged into water, a metaphor for resurrection and spiritual change.

"With religions or throughout our daily routines, we give meaning to existing structures that would be too weighty otherwise," Ms. Henrot said.

The goal of the exhibition, she added, was to help give meaning to the patterns of everyday life.

Ms. Henrot has delved into an almost overwhelming diversity of sources for inspirations: James Joyce's "Ulysses," amateur pornography, "The Lord of the Rings," American anthropology and ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement, among others.

"My works don't shout out, they don't have a message," she told the curator of the exhibition, Daria de Beauvais, in an interview for the Palais de Tokyo magazine dedicated to the exhibition. "If anything, they're more like someone who talks very fast and articulates badly, so you can't completely follow them."



"My works don't shout out, they don't have a message," Ms. Henrot has said.

"Our lifestyle, with all its digital activities, has blurred the separation between work and leisure time, even between day and night," she said. "A seven-day week is almost not enough anymore."

Jean de Loisy, director of the Palais de Tokyo, said he had long wanted to dedicate the space to a female artist under 40. "Through existing and new works, Camille helps us read our society," he said, "whether through the social construction of the week, or through renewed forms of language."

Since Ms. Henrot moved to New York, she has tried to keep a routine for each day of the week, though some have worked better than others. Thursdays would be dedicated to sports, for example, Tuesdays to administrative paperwork. "On Mondays, I can enjoy calmness and loneliness," she said about her favorite day, when she abstains from emails, meetings and phone calls.

At least she used to. Ms. Henrot has been back in Paris more regularly this year, and recent Mondays have been full of interviews and meetings. Her social life, filled with obligations and engagements, is the opposite of the tranquillity and anonymity she said she enjoyed in New York.