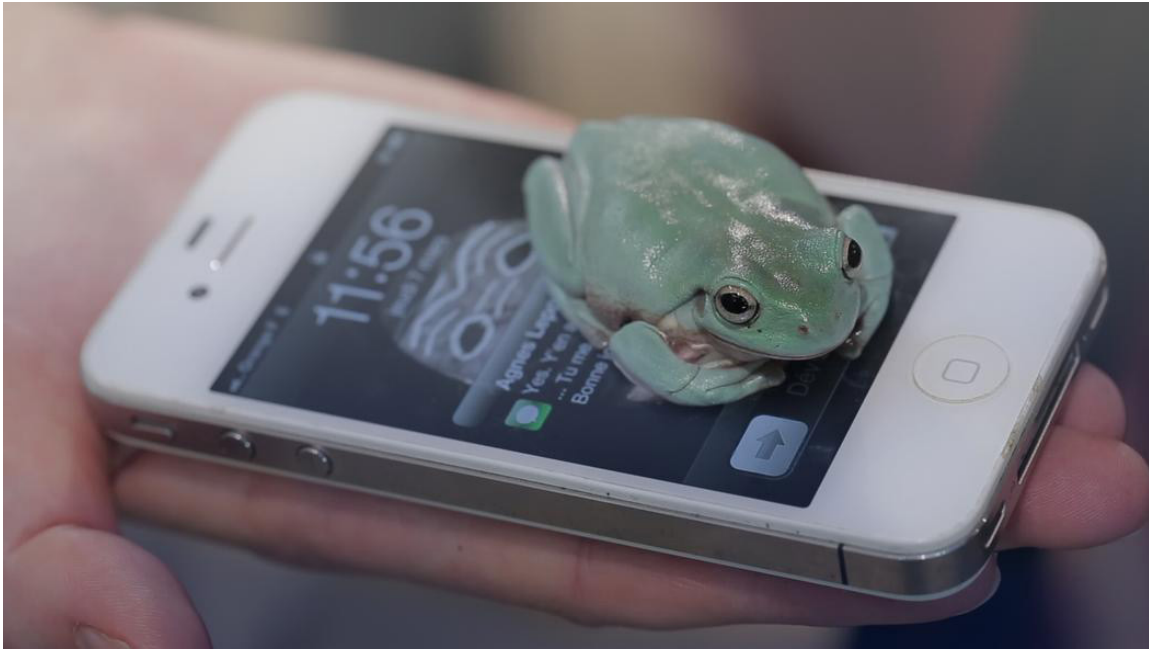


METRO PICTURES

Eastham, Ben. "Camille Henrot Writes Her Own Rules at the Palais de Tokyo," *Garage.Vice.com* (October 31, 2017).

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Crazy frog: Still from Camille Henrot, *Grosse Fatigue*, 2013.

"Is it possible to be a revolutionary and like flowers?" The work of French artist Camille Henrot, currently the subject of a major exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, might best be summarized by the title of her 2011 series of flower arrangements. Henrot's work is at once visually seductive and intellectually demanding. Working in a variety of media—from digital video to traditional frescoes, bronze sculpture to immersive installation—she challenges distinctions between decorative and conceptual art, folk knowledge and academic learning.

A rising star, Henrot's visibility enjoyed a significant boost when her hypnotic short video *Grosse Fatigue* won the Silver Lion at the 2013 Venice Biennale. Driven by a pulsating soundtrack and a hip-hop inflected narrative, *Grosse Fatigue* and its companion installation *The Pale Fox* compressed cultural histories of the world into forms at once visceral and cerebral.

Henrot's preoccupation with systems and structures, and their relationship to our emotional lives, is apparent in her Palais de Tokyo show. Henrot is the third artist, after Philippe Parreno and Tino Sehgal, to be invited to "take over" the sprawling contemporary art museum on the Seine as part of its "carte blanche" program.

Tell me about the title, *Days are Dogs*?

The phrase came from a discussion with a friend about a song he couldn't remember, it's a misheard lyric. I thought it made for a good title because I'm interested in banality, frustration, and desire, and dogs are desiring animals that also belong to the everyday world of humans. Dogs can never be totemic, like wolves or foxes, because they are so familiar. Instead they are associated with mundane struggles: in English, "dog days" signals bad luck or lethargy, in French "temps du chien" describes abject weather.

This is also a show about the rhythms of the days and the weeks as we experience them. I have a dog, I walk her, that's part of my daily life. The title combines those elements.



Camille Henrot's exhibition *The Pale Fox*, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, 2014-15.

The exhibition is divided into seven zones, each of which represents a day of the week. Why that theme?

I was interested in the relationship between change and repetition, and the week as an emotional and psychological cycle. On a practical level, the Palais de Tokyo is so gigantic that I realized I would need a clear organizing structure to keep everything under control.

The structure of the week is so familiar and banal to us that we forget it is a human invention, a narrative, rather than a natural cycle. The days are named after mythology and the cosmos—Monday is the Moon, Tuesday is Mars, Saturday is Saturn.

Our experience of the week is changing—fewer of us work five days a week—yet we still experience Mondays as melancholy and Friday as a release. We have internalized those rhythms, and continue to observe their rituals .

In an age of permanent connectivity, we experience time differently, and with less structure. The definition between work and leisure time, day and night has blurred. It's when traditions disappear that we as humans start to become more attached to them, to transform them.

You mentioned mishearing a lyric earlier, and nonetheless incorporating it as a title. That seems to acknowledge misinterpretation as creative and suggest an openness to unexpected meanings.

As a French person living in New York, speaking a foreign language, I'm very aware of the distance between words and things. It's like being a child again; it is frustrating to be unable to express yourself precisely, to be misinterpreted. But like a child, you can reinvent words and give them a new constellation of meanings.

Your work explores those gaps and disruptions, when the familiar suddenly becomes strange.

Some things escape understanding. This does not mean we can't appreciate them. I still respond emotionally to works of art I don't understand, and I like that. I enjoy watching films in languages I don't speak; it doesn't prevent me from taking pleasure in them.

For the show at Palais de Tokyo, I collaborated with the poet Jacob Bromberg on a series of wall texts that respond to the individual days of the show. The French texts are not direct translations of the English, and instead offer alternative readings of the work. This was in part an allusion to the idea that experiences and things are not always translatable.

Your ikebana series ["Is it possible to be a revolutionary and like flowers?"] consists of minimalist flower arrangements in the Japanese tradition, each inspired by a book from your library. There are two acts of translation here. You translate the tradition into your own aesthetic idiom, while also translating books into bouquets of flowers.

I was attracted to the aesthetics of ikebana; as I learned about its complex codes, I realized it was a language I could never master. I felt encouraged in the project by the principles of the Sogestu School, the school of ikebana most open to outsiders, and to improvisation. I didn't have my books in New York and I missed them. Each arrangement was an attempt to express a writer's personality, to conjure their spirit. Arranged together, the ikebana are like a library, a polyphony of voices, a heterotopia. They create an environment protected from the outside world.



Camille Henrot's exhibition *Monday*, Fondazione Memmo, Rome, 2016.

How important is literature to you as an artist?

I was always very interested in anthropology, which was a great inspiration for my earlier work, but now literature plays an even greater part. I take from literature the principle that structure creates freedom.

Some artists explore a single subject or form in depth, while others have a more restless spirit. I belong to the second category. As an artist, I like to transform myself. You need always to defend the right to go beyond what you are expected to do. James Joyce, for example, creates a structure that allows him to switch from one style to another.

Ulysses was very important to the structure of "Days Are Dogs." There are other influences: a passage in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—in which Stephen describes the artist as "transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life"—influenced the film *Saturday*. I liked the idea of religion as a digestive process in relation to the Seventh Day Adventists [the subject of the work] and their dietary habits, and the cultural obsession with health more generally. It's like a new moral code.

Roland Barthes' lectures "How To Live Together" were a big influence on *The Office of Unreplied Emails*. His reflection on the violence of polarized opinion felt very relevant at the time I started this project, during the American election.



Camille Henrot, *Is he cheating*, 2017.

Barthes wrote that "each of us has his own rhythm of suffering," and *Days Are Dogs* suggests you can apply that formula to our broader emotional experience. The key is to find the rhythm.

Living without structure is not freedom. The only way to gain freedom is to imagine your own structures, however simple and personal, even if that's not answering your phone or emails on Monday. You have to create your own principles to resist the external structures to which you are expected to conform. There are so many pressures on our generation. We have to protect ourselves by creating our own rules and rhythms.



Camille Henrot, *Tug of War*, 2017.