

Artforum, March Issue, p.140, Ela Bittencourt

## Valérie Favre Galerie Peter Kilchmann

Swiss-born painter Valérie Favre settled in Berlin in the late 1990s. There, after the Wall had gone down, rabbits still roamed empty lots. Three decades later, her oeuvre evidences an enduring bewitchment with the furry fugitives: In her solo show “*Un billet pour quatre pièces*” (A Ticket for Four Rooms), the motif of pointy bunny ears recurred with the obsessive tenacity of a fetish. Overall, the show transmitted a furtive, tenebrous energy, even in works painted with brighter palettes.

In Favre’s oil painting *Lapine univers* (Female Hare Universe), 2025, the human figure’s paddle-shaped feet, pallid flesh—captured with crusty knobs of scabby, ivory-yellow paint—and rabbit mask make her seem nearly bestial. It’s one of many works to which the artist has given this title. The French word *lapine* is feminine in gender. Favre has said in interviews that her use of this hybrid image was her way of claiming space in the male-dominated painting milieu of the ’90s—“to let my male colleagues know that I also have a paintbrush or a *pine*, which is slang for penis in French.”



Valérie Favre,  
*Petits théâtres de la  
vie* (Little Theaters of  
Life), 2025, oil on  
canvas, 55 x 70 3/4”.

Her velleity toward *becoming animal* (to use Deleuze and Guattari’s term, quoted in the press release) seems to convey a broader metaphysical fascination with the loss or surrender of subjectivity, depersonalization, and death. To this end, the harsh radiance, like a bleached-out waking dream, surrounding the rabbitlike figure in *Lapine univers*—and in another work of that title, from 2009, in the same room—is offset by edgier impersonations. One has hollow, red eyes; another sports bulky black boots; a third hangs upside down from a rope, its bunny ears faintly resembling sadomasochistic couture.

The acrylic-on-canvas *L’atelier champignons* (Mushroom Workshop), 2025, further brings out the entwining of Thanatos and fetish. A pale figure (not accoutred as a rabbit), its naked flesh painted in thin, gauzy layers, kneels submissively on all fours, its head swathed in a conical hood or plastic; a black-latex-clad bunny hovers in the dramatically backlit background. In the middle ground sits a massive, sooty heater, which emanates little to no heat, judging by the icy-blue pools of water dappling the floor and by the deathly pallor of the supplicant; the external light taunts, barely licks the dark.

Death may be the implied, unseen spectator in that work, but fatality is staged more explicitly in two oil paintings in the same room, both

titled *La cuillère* (Spoon), 2025. The works’ snouted figures reference the mythical Cerberus, ferrying the dead to the underworld. Hung on opposite walls, the two works, one bathed in fiery, Mediterranean hues, the other in sepulchral tones, together create the before and after of a descent. A similar temporal unfolding possibly binds *L’atelier champignons* and the oil *Petits théâtres de la vie* (Little Theaters of Life), 2025, which hung across from it. In the latter, children’s toys (a horse, a dog) and a small painting standing on a table, all depicted against a white flurry outside, convey an aura of childlike innocence, yet they, too, are steeped in the maudlin shadows permeating the former.

Death also haunts Favre’s macabrely witty collages, some dozen of which were shown. These remix words, scenes from classical art, geometry, and literary figures such as Macbeth, who, in Favre’s drawing, falls to his death. In contrast, the show’s final room, featuring mostly still lifes of mundane objects and food, was relatively placid. Typical was the ink-and-acrylic painting *Le grande verre (d’or et d’argent)* (The Large Glass [of Gold and Silver]), 2025, whose dappled, liquid swirls are countered by the solidity of the glass centering the composition. Yet in this room, too, an ominous eye peered from the ceramic glaze of a tipped-over teacup in the grayscale oil *L’oeil dans la théière* (The Eye in the Teapot), 2025. The yellow-tipped stubby legs of the ironing table in *Les rêves mécaniques (Bügelbrett)* (Mechanical Dreams [Ironing Board]), 2025, resemble matches, with the plugged-in cable a snake. These works reminded me of Chantal Akerman’s short film, *Saute ma ville* (Blow Up My Town, 1968), in which a young woman (played by Akerman) cleans her kitchen and eats a meal before turning on the gas and striking a match. Despite their apparent quietude, these works filled me with apprehension.

—Ela Bittencourt