

Ingrid Luquet-God

‘Énergies’: a double exhibition by Judith Hopf

A major influence in Germany since the 1990s, the artist is finally getting her dues in Paris

It is all that one could hope for from an exhibition. As it happens, ‘Énergies’ is Judith Hopf’s first in France, organized by two Parisian venues: Bétonsalon and Frac Île-de-France, Le Plateau. And since this major international artist has been surprisingly absent in France, it should be made abundantly clear: Hopf is not only a significant artist due to the content of her practice, but also on account of the impact she has had over the course of her career – on the Berlin scene after the fall of the Berlin Wall through to the next generation, and into the future for those to come.



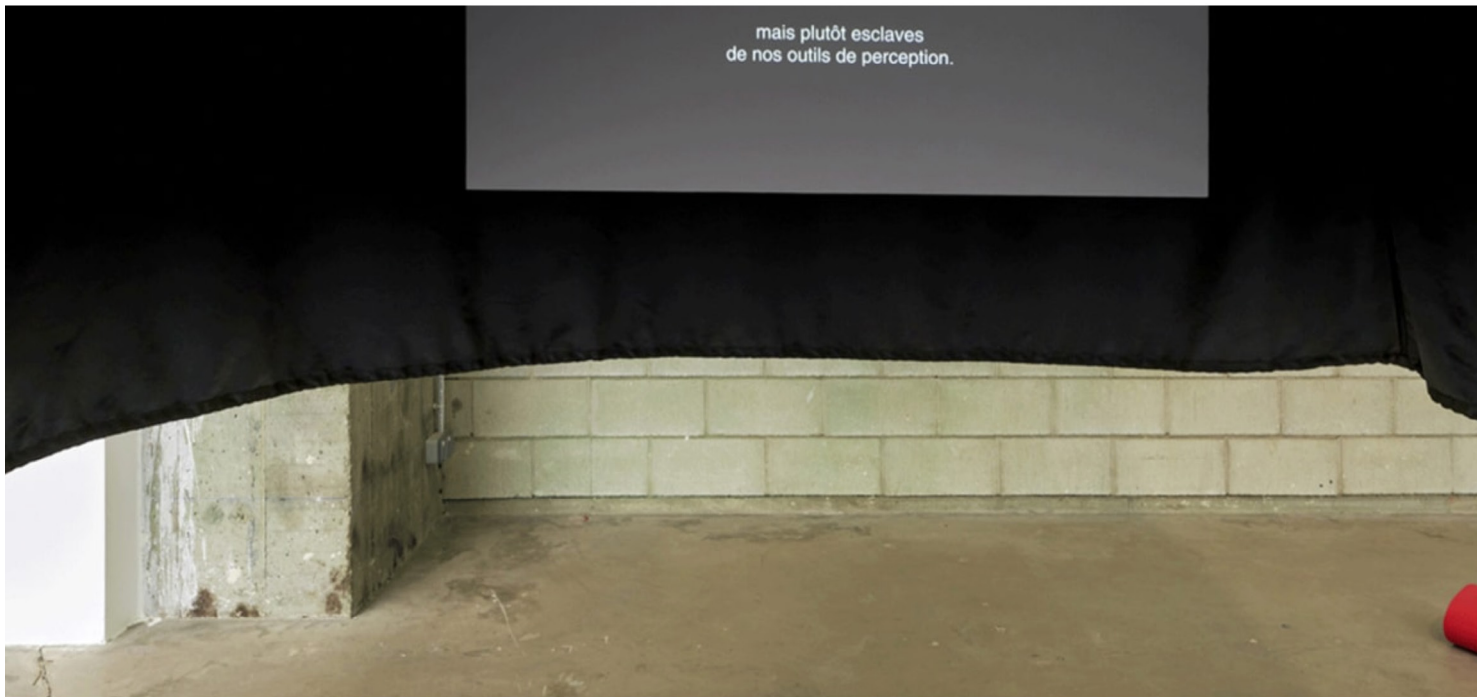
Installation view of Judith Hopf's exhibition 'Énergies' at Bétonsalon, Paris, 2022. Photograph by Pierre Antoine. Courtesy of the artist and Deborah Schamoni © Adagp, Paris, 2022.

In the 1990s and 2000s, Hopf participated in the open class at the Académie des Beaux-Arts and spent time at the bookshop and meeting place b_books, where she helped introduce German readers to post-Fordist authors of critical thought (from Judith Butler to Paolo Virno, from Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski to Avital Ronell). Since 2008, she has been Professor and Codirector of the Department of Fine Arts at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main – with its enduring reputation (be it real or memeified) as a global career-maker. Hopf is then one of those artists whose proven influence, by indirect connections or by an energy-generating effect, automatically reserves them a place in art history. And yet, this is a rare opportunity to see her work in Paris, with the fresh eyes of a first encounter.



Luckily, Hopf's work lends itself to engagement by the uninitiated. Her installations, which often feature a mixture of sculpture and video, do not presuppose any previous artistic knowledge on the viewer's part. The forms derive from our current industrial and technological environment, presenting it to us anew, rather than representing it. In so doing, Hopf enables us to take a critical distance from the conditioning of our bodies and minds. She monumentalizes simple things such as a blade of grass or a piece of apple peel and amalgamates antithetical elements – clay smartphones, metal thunderbolts, Brutalist sheep, or Swiss-cheese solar panels.

Each feature, each sculpture, is named with a pun – as though a slightly eccentric witticism has taken on a wobbly, gently grotesque, or absurdly poetic form. Perhaps owing to the fall of the Berlin Wall, disequilibrium lurks around every corner. As rain pours and rays of sunlight stream through the installation space, email-tongued snakes and apple-peel arabesques create traps for those walking around, distractedly hunched over their screens. These people could be us, but they are also clay sculptures, inhabiting both venues. And yet, no falling actually comes to pass – it is constantly deferred.



Within the ecosystem created by Hopf, everything holds together despite it all: an energy (or those 'Énergies' announced by the exhibition title) diffuses and spreads, circulating from organic roots to cosmic limits, from the individual user to the herd. But above all, the artist shows us the conflicts and frictions between these. The crux of these two exhibition-landscapes is not the universal flow of power that gave birth to abstract painting's mode of vision at the beginning of Modernity; nor is it the amniotic fluid of the digital world, which dreams of shimmering ubiquity in our Post-Internet era one century later. No – Hopf is an artist of infrastructure.



Installation view of Judith Hopf's exhibition 'Énergies' at Bétonsalon, Paris, 2022. Photograph by Pierre Antoine. Courtesy of the artist and Deborah Schamoni © Adagp, Paris, 2022.

Everything may well appear to be dematerialized these days, but Hopf momentarily freezes the undergirding mechanisms. Clouds become visible by way of pedestals assuming their form, on which the 'smartphone addicts' stand; wireless technology transforms into a hoard of concrete, metal, and paper snakes; and the exhibition team's online meetings have resulted in the video *Less/Contrat entre les hommes et l'ordinateur* (2022), whose text is modeled on the 'Contrat social de l'homme et de la femme' by Olympe de Gouges, repeated by each member of the team.

While the figurative paradigm and archive fever currently reign supreme, an exhibition that can speak to all visitors is simple and yet so rare: elements of our everyday life combined with the oblique strategy of humor.



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'Énergies'

Judith Hopf

Until December 11, 2022

Bétonsalon – centre d'art et de recherche and Frac Île-de-France, Paris

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