ALLÉ ALLÉ!

Frankfurt, New York, Paris, Berlin, Oslo, Vestfossen
The exhibition takes its title from the *Sonnenkreuz*, one of the earliest known works (1947–48) by the German artist Joseph Beuys: a bronze relief, and one of only a handful of works Beuys ever cast in metal – each cast and reworked by his own hand. In Beuys's own take on the crucifix, the beams of the cross are stripped, and the figure is caught as if in an act of "self-embrace," its arms prolonged so as to both reach out and caress. With the cross absent, the viewer's gaze is forced to complete the form, and with it the posture of the crucified body. If Beuys marks one pole – sacred, mythical, vertical – Robert Rauschenberg supplies the other – raw, profane, pop. His tire works – such as the inked *Automobile Tire Print* (1953) – drag the industrial bodily into art, and it is between these two that Henke's practice moves: myth and machine, flesh and metal, surface and support, the fine cast and ad-hoc montage.

At the heart of the show stands its title work, *Sun Cross* (2026), in which Henke takes up Beuys's motif and turns it to her own ends – an assemblage of a leather-covered wooden structure holding a car tire that is itself sheathed in leather – one of the oldest of materials. Nested within is a small, amorphous, androgynous figure: a plaster cast molded into the inner curve of the tire. The work makes a reference to Rauschenberg's *Hog Heaven (Scale)* (1978), with its solvent-transfer imagery on wood panels and a collaged car tire – one tire answering another, an image that runs as a feedback loop throughout the show.

Unforced Error (2025) is an amorphous, 2.5-metre body in which human and animal forms merge into one. Held by two dark-brown leather reins, it floats horizontally, cutting across the room and laying a low horizon line that pulls against the vertical rise of the architecture around it. Carved from Styrofoam and other leftover packing materials from Henke's studio, the meticulously chased finish of the cast aluminum belies the cheapness of its original material – typically associated with mass production.

A new ceramic work, *Joey* (2026), hangs high on the wall – an abstract, ghostlike sculpture that interweaves a long, segmented joint with the bust and face of Saint Barbara, martyr and patron of miners and architects. The hybrid blends the sacred and the profane: a modern-day Haraway cyborg, Barbara is reimagined as a prosthetic, deconstructed and reassembled, her parts like artefacts of some forgotten architectural trauma. As Haraway herself writes, "We polish an animal mirror to look for ourselves."[1]

Combustions 19 [The belly of my car] and *Combustions 21 [Tyre bulge]* (2024) – take a nod in their title to Alberto Burri's *Combustione*, the scorched plastic works the Italian artist made using fire. The image of a car's inner workings, photographed from below, is laser-etched onto unprocessed leather and stuffed from underneath with carved material, so that it takes on a three-dimensional depth, an illusion of tangibility that recalls veins, or a map. Henke, who once worked as a car photographer, crawls beneath the machine – a sensual act of submission – to portray her own car with a frontal gaze;

1 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, "The Past Is the Contested Zone: Human Nature and Theories of Production and Reproduction in Primate Behaviour Studies," 1991, p. 21.

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elsewhere her source images are digitally reworked pictures of compressed blocks of car tires, wired together and framed on their way to the recycling plant. Manual and mechanized processes meet photography, an image set within an image.

Alongside Henke, the exhibition presents two recent works by Fredrik Værslev – bronze cast stones, patinated to a trompe-l'oeil finish and modeled on the stones used to cap chimneys against heavy wind, though here as lighter-than-life replicas of a sight that recurs across the Scandinavian outback. A single photograph by Emil Sandström depicts a late-nineteenth-century carousel temporarily installed at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris, its nocturnal machinery turning over the futile circulation of an archaic entertainment, while picturing one of Henke's most frequently recurring motifs – a horse's hoof. It serves as a prelude to Sandström's solo presentation at Van Bau, the project space at Værslev's Vestfossen studio, running parallel to the show at Allé Allé.

Fredrik and Lena met as students at the Städelschule in Frankfurt in 2009, in Michael Krebber's class. Emil was a student of Værslev's at the academy in Malmö. It was Fredrik who brought the three together, Emil joining Lena in her New York studio in 2023. Placed directly on the floor, the faux stones read as markers of how relationships in the art world take shape – and, for all their bronze, they are far too light to hold down any chimney, which feels about right for a network that runs less on weight than on who once shared a classroom, or a studio.

Lena Henke (b. 1982 in Warburg, Germany) lives and works in New York and Berlin.
Henke has béen the subject of solo exhibitions at the Aspen Art Museum; Marta Herford Museum; Belvedere Museum, Vienna; Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen (MGK Siegen); Kunsthalle Zürich; Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt; Kunstverein Braunschweig; and White Flag Projects, among others. Her work has also been shown at numerous institutions including the Whitney Museum of American Art, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Kunsthalle Bern, the Hessel Museum of Art, the Sprengel Museum Hannover, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit. Her work has featured in major international exhibitions including the Timişoara Contemporary Art Biennale, Romania (2017); Manifesta 11, Zurich, Switzerland (2016); the 9th Berlin Biennale, Germany (2016); La Biennale de Montréal, Canada (2016); the Triennial of Small-Scale Sculpture, Fellbach, Germany (2016); and the New Museum Triennial, New York (2015).

Henke's work is held in the collections of ICA Miami, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Hessel Museum of Art, MGK Siegen, MAMCO Geneva, Kunsthalle Bern, and Kunsthalle Bielefeld, among others.

In 2022, Henke received the Marta Herford Award of the Wemhöner Foundation, and in 2024 she was named artist honoree of the year by the arts organization Topical Cream, New York.

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