

City SALTS (Garage)



Opening hours: Thu/Fri 12–5 pm, during Art Basel daily 1–6 pm
Reception during the City SALTS Summer Party on 19 June 2025

City SALTS, Hauptstrasse 12, down by the river, 4127 Birsfelden

Deborah-Joyce Holman: Repose – Extended Play

Curated by Samuel Leuenberger and Benedikt Wyss

Deborah-Joyce Holman (b. 1991), based between London and Basel, presents *Repose – Extended Play*, a solo exhibition in the City SALTS Garage.

Holman's multifaceted practice probes the entanglements of visibility, power, and refusal within visual culture. Across moving image, painting, and installation, their work insists on the right to opacity — challenging dominant aesthetic systems that render Black and queer bodies hyper-visible, exoticised, or entirely erased. In the film series *Close-Up*, Holman worked with actress Tia Bannon to craft a radical non-performance: a series of 16mm close-ups that deliberately withhold narrative, character, and unambiguous emotional legibility. Shot in intimate proximity but absent of conventional story arcs, the film resists being read or consumed, instead foregrounding a sovereign Black interior life — quiet, untranslatable, and inaccessible to extractive gazes.

This refusal of spectacle carried through into a subsequent series of paintings in which Holman expanded their cinematic inquiry into absence. Extracting stills from film and television scenes featuring Black lesbian characters, Holman chose moments when the figure had slipped out of frame — cutaways, pans, transitions — preserving only the residue of environment or *mise-en-scène*. These characterless frames, painted with purposeful incompleteness, resonate with a conceptual rejection of portraiture as a fixed or stable form. Here, refusal becomes material: partial gestures, blank surfaces, and atmospheric traces destabilise the authority of image-making and resist the commodifying logics of art and identity.

At City SALTS, Holman introduces a powerful new iteration of this inquiry — a site-specific installation that draws together their cinematic, painterly, and sculptural vocabularies. Three monumental freestanding concrete slabs sit on the floor and are tilted against the walls of the exhibition space. The space, painted entirely in white, transforms the rooms into an austere, disorienting environment. Affixed to these leaning walls are assemblages of A4-sized silver paper sheets, each bearing a part of a larger inkjet print of a moment from a 2024 shoot with Bannon. The image — Bannon lying on a stone floor in a moment of staged repose — is deliberately blurred through manual smudging, a process that resists permanence and embraces imperfection. The ink, unable to penetrate the paper, pools, glistens, and distorts.

The surface is both impenetrable and radically sensitive — touched, changed, contaminated by the artist's hand to give its final expression. On all three walls, the same source image is thus fragmented: once by its composition of individual sheets assembled to create a single large one, and again by the hand-painting that renders each version distinctly unique and more abstract than it might already appear fresh out of the printer.

This body of work articulates a complex meditation on surface and skin — not as racial signifier, but as bodily threshold and site of projection. The prints shimmer between legibility and abstraction, producing a sensation akin to extreme pixellation, heat haze, or mirage. There's a refusal here to reduce the image to subjecthood; a suspension of temporality and fixity. In referencing the residual materials of Close-Up — the final "Martini shot," the imperfections of leftover film stock — Holman not only revisits earlier gestures, but also reveals the limits of what representation can offer. Through seriality and rupture, the prints reject both singularity and completion. Each work is a fragment, a part of, a circumscription — resisting the capitalist logic of aesthetic resolution.

Holman's refusal of portraiture is not a negation of the figure, but a profound interrogation of its political stakes. Drawing on thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Rizvana Bradley, and Fred Moten, the installation asks: What does it mean to recompose the Black figure beyond the horizon of recognition? How might seriality operate not as repetition, but as dissonance — a vibration, a disruption, a way of slipping past the ledger of visuality imposed by racial capitalism?

In this new work, Deborah-Joyce Holman does not offer clarity or conclusion, but instead invites viewers to linger in uncertainty — where image and meaning shimmer at the edge of the visible, always in flux, always unfinished.

Repose I, 2025

Inkjet print on metallic paper, concrete, steel pins
215 x 326.70 x 4.9 cm

Repose II, 2025

Inkjet print on metallic paper, concrete, steel pins
168 x 267.30 x 4.9 cm

Repose III, 2025

Inkjet print on metallic paper, concrete, steel pins
168 x 267.30 x 4.9 cm

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