

A tooth-shaped structure above the cavity from which it was excavated can't fail to bring to mind unpleasant dental experiences, an impression reinforced by the fleshy pink of the surrounding walls. Moreover, the untimely removal of a bodily element perceived to be 'permanent' highlights the temporality of the flesh and, ultimately, our mortality. Yet, while the tooth's scale comically exaggerates the image of pain and decay, it also makes it outlandish and alien, introducing an element of body-horror into the display.

This is perhaps demonstrative of Hendry's overall attitude: a pick-and-mix colour scheme lures the viewer into an examination of morbid themes in which geology meets biology, and death and decay are ever-present, yet comically insignificant.

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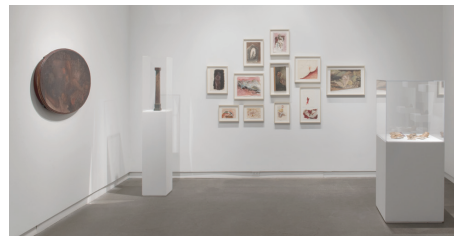
IRIS HÄUSSLER Daniel Faria Gallery, Toronto, Canada

One enduring theory of art's extrinsic value celebrates its ability to assuage psychical trauma. Affirming this concept, if more colloquially, is the videotaped psychiatrist featured in an earlier instalment of conceptual artist Iris Häussler's 'The Sophie La Rosière Project': 'If you can't get laid, sublimate.' In 2009, Häussler fashioned a doppelgänger: the imaginary early 20th-century French expressionist artist, Sophie La Rosière. This development of a past fake persona initiated a complex, evolutionary series that intertwines fact and fiction.

Not the first of Häussler's invented characters, La Rosière was 'born' into a family of other figures who, according to texts written by the artist and posted on the project's website, obsessively and secretly made 'outsider art' to maintain their psychological well-being. Posing as historian, Häussler fabricates, archives and displays their collected belongings and artworks in immersive, domestic installations; she even gives tours of her characters' 'homes' in a white lab coat.

Unlike past characters – the reclusive Joseph Wagenbach or the Irish maid Mary O'Shea, for instance – La Rosière is a painter, sharing an artistic bond with Häussler that seems to have a tenacious hold on her imagination. La Rosière's life story, detailed on a website created for the project, is interwoven with historical facts and figures. Born in 1867 in a village near Paris, La Rosière learned about art and gained access to materials through Madeleine Smith, a real historical figure. Besides being an artist of little means in a male-dominated art world, La Rosière's greatest difficulties originated with her intense love for Florence, a young artists' model. During their romantic cohabitation, lacking funds for art supplies, they dismantled furniture for canvas and crushed flower petals for pigment. Following La Rosière's frenzied production of expressive and erotic paintings, Florence mysteriously disappeared. Emotionally distraught, La Rosière covered her paintings with blackened beeswax. After languishing in obscurity until well after her death, two of her pieces, mistaken for encaustic formalist monochromes, were purchased by Toronto collectors – establishing a pretext for Häussler's tripartite exhibition staged across the city.

In the autumn of 2016, at the Art Gallery of York University, 'Chapter I' re-created the interior of La Rosière's studio and displayed 'her' works, some with wax removed; 'Chapter II', at Scrap Metal Gallery, exhibited forensic analysis,



Above
Iris Häussler,
'The Sophie La
Rosière Project:
Chapter III', 2017,
installation views

Left
Holly Hendry,
'Wrot', 2017,
exhibition views

including X-rays and video interviews with art historians and curators, of La Rosière's art and life. 'Chapter I' also included a video that Häussler staged of her discovering and transporting a small cloth-bound package to France, where real conservators from the Louvre examine its contents – a small black canvas – and discover an under-painting of two embracing figures.

Now, in 'Chapter III', most of La Rosière's paintings have been cleaned of their dark shrouds. A rich palette of deep burgundies and soft rose mixed from crushed flower petals, ladybugs, eggshells, wine and blood has been applied in thickly patterned textures onto mirror backs, piano panels, a table top and doors. Lush scenes of embracing female bodies and flowering genitalia woven into fields of vegetal, cellular, floral and microbial motifs – all seemingly growing out of the wooden surfaces – are redolent of Gustav Klimt's sensual decoration, Frida Kahlo's flowering vulvae and Gustave Courbet's erotic 1866 paintings *Le Sommeil* (The Sleepers) and *L'Origine du monde* (The Origin of the World). Accompanying these are paintings still obscured by wax or cloth, alongside their X-rays displayed in light-boxes; also on view are small oil and watercolour sketches and sculptural moulds of vulvae arranged like flower petals.

There are multiple interpretive layers to Häussler's complex performative project. In addition to expanding the terrain of conceptual art, her use of fiction and forgery enable her to escape the limitations of her own personal narrative, tapping what Gilles Deleuze called 'the powers of the false' and creating an imaginary space for subjects who, like so many women artists, have been mostly ignored or forgotten by art history.

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