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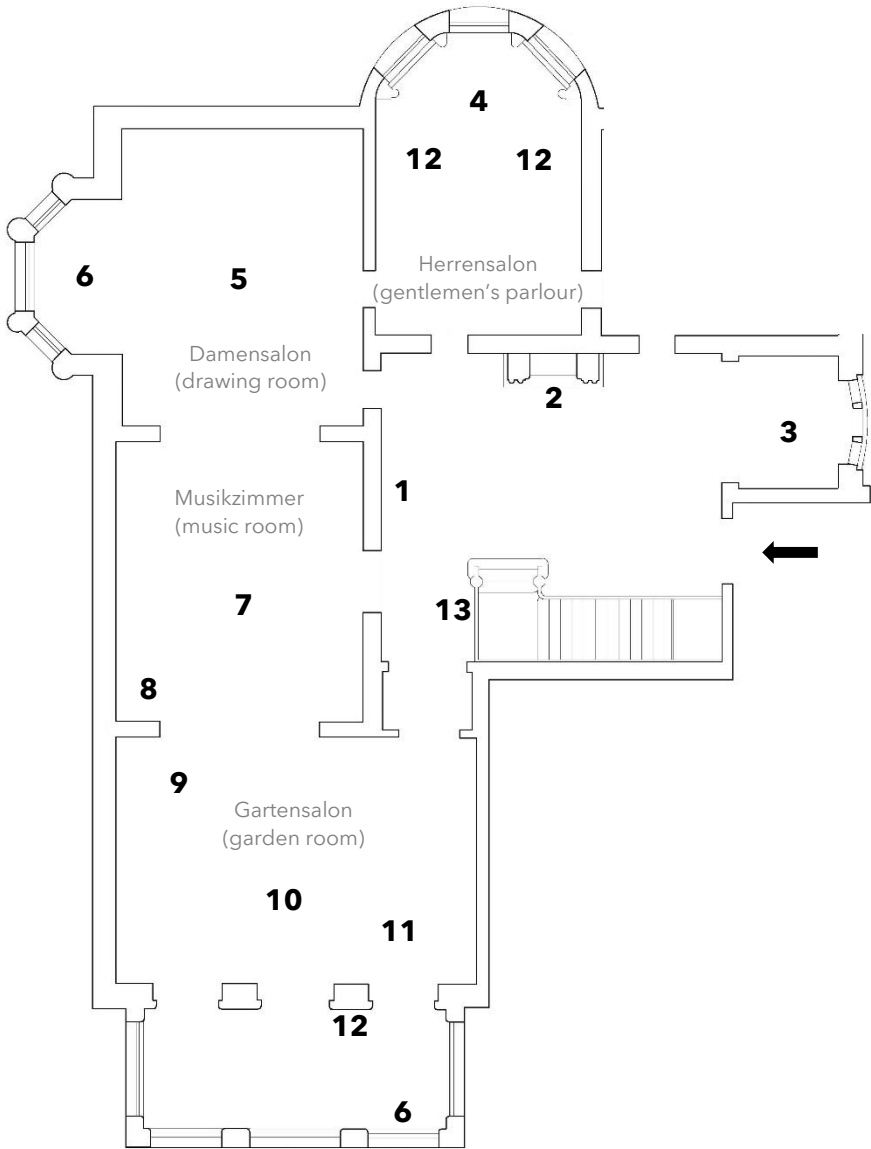
# TEMPLE OF LOVE TO HIDE

GAËLLE CHOISNE

04.05. - 09.06.2024

**KFW** STIFTUNG





## In Conversation with Gaëlle Choisne

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**The Villa 102 itself holds a complex history: Built as a family home in 1912 by the Hoffmanns, the house was sold to the Jewish Sondheimer family only a few years later, who then had to leave Germany in 1932. When the Nazis came to power, a botanical research institute was established here. After the war, the villa was confiscated by allied troops and later restituted to the Sondheimer daughters who sold it to the city of Frankfurt. After years of various use, primarily as an office building, the villa was turned into a literature house and later bought and restored by KfW. Today, it's a listed building as an architectural monument. What do you perceive when you look at the building?**

GC: This is not an easy question because the building has seen many histories. When going through its spaces, I'm profoundly aware of the weight of its past, particularly its Jewish history and the subsequent violence it endured. My father was a child during the Nazi occupation of northern France which sensitizes me to the particular history embedded within these walls. Some of my artwork speaks about this memory and, by extension, the collective traumas within this experience. With my practice I try to contribute to healing them. But of course, I also see the villa and its architecture as a monument. I did several projects about the idea of a "living monument" to question the widely accepted definition as a permanent and rigid structure of remembrance. Through my artistic practice, I try to go against this by bringing the villa to life and functionalising it as a space for people to meet and linger.

## **Would you consider *Temple of Love* to be a monument?**

GC: No, *Temple of Love* defies the monument because it is fluid, alive and in movement as it transcends beyond the exhibition space and adapts to every new context. As a framework, it continuously allows for new sculptural forms, installations and places of encounter. It's a concept that can be anywhere at once because it is really about the question of love as a political response to the complexities of contemporary times and the world's general disorder. As a very open idea, that extends beyond intimacy or romance, it embraces love as a universal force capable of overcoming injustices like racism or violence in its various forms.

## **You are referencing a famous text by Roland Barthes - "A Lover's Discourse: Fragments" (1977). How did you find this text and what made you choose it as your artistic companion?**

GC: As a prominent French theorist and philosopher, Roland Barthes is an interesting figure. Despite his acclaim, his experience as a homosexual man, constrained by societal norms, rendered him an outsider in many respects. The intimacy and tenderness with which the text is written surprised me. Especially coming from the perspective of an individual whose societal privilege and European descent historically have been associated with violence and oppression. Ultimately, this sparked my interest. For *Temple of Love*, I've been exploring it as a pre-text and translating it into a less intimate but more social and political situation. With that being said, Barthes is not the only reference I keep returning to. The perspectives of thinkers like bell hooks, who envisions a society rooted in love, have been equally instrumental in shaping the project's trajectory and evolution.

**Your work keeps expanding and growing, never shy to approach new forms. Barthes' mentioned text is very fragmented and so is your project *Temple of Love*. It consists of individual editions all contributing to the idea of love as a form of healing. Writer and curator Wong Binghao calls your individual works in relation each other "situationships", a concept widely defined as an intimate relationship that resists clear definitions or commitments. Could we understand your works as fragments? What interests you in the nature of a fragment?**

GC: I find the concept of "situationships" intriguing because they evoke a fragility, a fleeting moment of joy and connection. Fragments, similarly fragile, represent missing pieces of a larger whole that we try to reassemble. These puzzles are something I like to figure out in my practice. Discovering one fragment invariably leads me to search for its counterpart, whether it be in another person, a book, or maybe even a fleeting encounter like a "situationship".

**For this, you combine a variety of materials, like wax, wood, metal, chains, but also found objects. What draws you to these items and how do they influence your artistic practice?**

GC: Perhaps this can be considered a "situationist" practice. I start by going for long walks and wander through the streets while gathering objects and materials that catch my eye. From there, I start to imagine the beginning of a story until I have gathered a collection of small objects that I connect and imbue with meaning. While these objects may not share a common origin, they become linked in my works, forming new stories and histories. I envision these connections mirroring the often unforeseen nature of relationships, where chance encounters give rise to profound connections. Through the synergies forged in the *Temple of Love*, these found objects become agents of transformation.

**You have Haitian roots, but you grew up in France. You mentioned that when you visited Haiti for the first time, you took a lot of photographs - snapshots of moments that interested you. It wasn't until later that you used these snapshots of moments in your work. Now, photography in its extended form is often linked within your installations. It seems, as if you collect moments and encounters in them. What did taking those photographs in Haiti mean to you? And to what extent did this influence your photographic practice?**

GC: Taking photographs in Haiti held profound significance for me. I discovered the country really late and the only connection I had was through my mother and my aunts, the Creole language spoken sometimes at home and, most of all, the food. Going there for the first time in 2012 it was more than just about capturing images; it was a political gesture, a way to authenticate the existence of the country as I perceived it. Photography, to me, is a fragment of reality, and each snapshot became proof of Haiti's existence through my eyes. I felt a compelling need to give these images substance, to embody them in physical form. This need led me to integrate photography into my installations, where I could echo the captured moments to manifest them physically.

Haiti's context added layers to this gesture. It's a country invented by colonisation and an embodiment of cultural blending, where cultures and customs interwove themselves through slaves who came from across Africa. It's also a place where people constantly repair and rebuild, with little time to recover from dangers and disasters, turning everyday objects into inadvertent sculptures. This fragility, this constant cycle of creation and repair, resonated deeply with me. Even as I continued photographing in other places, I carried this attitude with me, seeking out fragile moments and overlooked scenes that resonate with significance. Photographing in Haiti was particularly meaningful due to its lack of representation compared to more familiar places like France. There's an agency in capturing images there that doesn't occur in Europe. Despite the destruction, or perhaps because of it, Haiti's uniqueness compels me to continue documenting it. It's a place that deserves more visibility and understanding.

**In the first iteration of the exhibition project in Berlin, you offered healing sessions to visitors. Can you tell us a little about them? What is the connection between healing and your work? What does healing mean for you? Where does the aspect of healing come in in your work and the *Temple of Love*?**

GC: The healing sessions offered during the first iteration of *Temple of Love - to Hide* in Berlin served as a bridge between my artistic and energetic healing practice. This often led to profound encounters with individuals carrying memories related to historical traumas, particularly those stemming from the Second World War. What struck me most was the connection between personal traumas and broader historical narratives. Through these healing sessions, I found myself engaging not just with individual experiences but also with collective and national traumas deeply ingrained in the psyche. It became apparent that healing transcends the individual; it's about addressing historical and collective wounds that continue to shape our present. This aspect of healing is echoed in the exhibition project, particularly in the invitation extended to a guest, namely the ancient tree often called "Árbol del Tule" in Mexico which is shown in the video work *Ahuehuete 1111*. The tree's age and connection to the earth symbolise its ability to absorb and transmute negative energies, perhaps even cleansing the traumatic memories embedded within the villa itself. In this way, healing becomes not just a personal journey but a collective endeavor, intertwined with the spaces we inhabit and the histories they hold.

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***Luggage\_astral\_crystal*, 2023**

Recovered suitcase, deer antlers, acrylic paint, coloured wax, wood, mercury mirror, ceramic, chain, monitor, cable  
137 x 65 x 45

In our increasingly globally connected world, travel has become ever more important. For artists, it serves not only as a key to joining international residencies and exhibitions but also as a critical component of their artistic inquiry. Choisine's numerous trips to Haiti, where she explored her French-Haitian heritage, profoundly influenced her artwork. Her itinerant lifestyle is reflected in her sculpture, which features a once-lost trolley case she worked over with paint and wax. The sculpture incorporates further materials like wood, dried flowers, and a mirror. The trolley is crowned with the antlers of a stag, a common totemic animal symbolising strength and regeneration. Positioned alongside it is a figurine of the Black Madonna with Baby Jesus. While Choisine's kaleidoscopic video recordings hint that *Luggage\_astral\_crystal* might be a self-portrait, the question remains open. However, the work clearly illustrates the artist's creative approach: drawing from her own transcultural experience, Choisine juxtaposes elements from various cultures and systems of knowledge, highlighting their collective symbolic meaning.



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### ***Penelopes*, 2022**

Digital print on marble  
90 x 58

## 3

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### ***Forget the appearances 5D*, 2022**

Plaster, acrylic resin, fabric, metal bracket, chain  
168 x 128 x 3, 180 x 130 x 3

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### ***Ahuehuete 1111*, 2022**

1-channel HD video in loop, colour, sound by Pablo Altar  
06' 54"

This video work captures what is likely the oldest tree of the bald cypress genus, known as āhuēhuētl ("old man of the water"), in the indigenous Nahuatl language spoken in Mesoamerica. Believed to be over 2,000 years old, it stands in what is now a churchyard in the town of Santa María del Tule, Mexico. Long before Spanish colonisation, the indigenous Mixtec people revered this tree as sacred. Countless legends surround this tree, which plays a role in many local customs. It is considered a guardian of the local people, attributed with magical and healing powers. Choisne regards Ahuehuete as a guest at the Temple of Love, where its energetic aura radiates all the way to Villa 102 in Frankfurt. Accompanied by a sound composition by composer Pablo Altar (\*1989), the former gentlemen's lounge (Herrensalon) transforms into a contemplative space inviting meditative reflection. At the first edition of the Temple of Love - To Hide at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, Choisne offered visitors energetic healing before the video work of the ancestral tree. The artist's reference to often stigmatised indigenous healing practices reflects her decolonial perspective, which challenges established knowledge systems.

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***bye bye memory*, 2024**

Digital colour print on marble

90 x 58, 118 x 55, 81 x 44, 65 x 45, 65 x 30, 117 x 45

On her first trip to Haiti in 2012, the medium of photography took on a new significance for the artist. As a child of the diaspora growing up in France, Choisine had always been familiar with Haiti despite never having visited before. It was only during her travels there, accompanied by her camera, that she recognised the profound connection between her artistic work and Haiti. She describes the aesthetics of her art and the fragility of her installations as "organised chaos", a reflection of Haiti's diverse and often improvised ways of life - a form of subconscious knowledge she aimed to explore through photography. With each subsequent visit, she expanded her photographic archive, capturing similarly unexpected perspectives and fleeting moments in other locations as well. In Choisine's work *bye bye memory*, these images are printed on marble slabs and displayed in the exhibition space like archaeologically unearthed memory fragments. The artist contrasts luxurious marble, a material historically prized in Europe for its hardness and durability, used in monuments, with the fragmented memories that have shaped her understanding of Haiti and, ultimately, her own diasporic identity.

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***Stèle (Port-au-Prince), Colisée***, 2013–ongoing

142 x 76 x 3

***Stèle (Port-au-Prince), Laka***, 2013–ongoing

85 x 120 x 3

Digital print, concrete, salt, metal

Choisne views photographing Haiti as a deeply political act. Her photographs of the Caribbean nation are featured in each of her exhibitions, offering a counter-narrative to the exoticisation often present in travel imagery and representations of humanitarian crises and natural disasters. For the series *Stèle (Port-au-Prince)*, she printed images taken primarily in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, after the severe 2010 earthquakes onto concrete slabs. She then treated these prints with salt, which corroded and partly decomposed them, making them resemble fragments rescued from the debris of demolished buildings. This process also alludes to the fragility of memory in a country constantly facing upheaval. Formerly a French colony, Haiti became the first nation in Latin America to declare independence in 1804, following the only successful revolution by enslaved people in world history. However, France's demands for compensation to recognise Haiti's sovereignty significantly crippled the country's efforts to develop a self-determined republic, and its economy never fully recovered from decades of payments. The country has endured numerous foreign-led military interventions and international aid missions, all of which have been ineffective and instead perpetuated ongoing unrest. Today, Haiti remains marked by colonial continuities and is not only considered an example of failed international diplomacy but is also disproportionately impacted by earthquakes. With her series *Stèle*, Choisne adopts the stèle form, typically associated with commemorative plaques, to pay homage to the Haitian people and their resilience.

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***Lie close to your ancestors*, 2022**

Carpet, made in Ourika/Morocco, cushions, pendants, pearls, shells, keys, pins  
700 x 190 x 3

A 7-metre-long carpet, woven by women in a Berber mountain village near Marrakech, spreads across the floor. Small objects have been woven into it, including bits of plastic and metal pendants, keys and beads - found items that Choisine imbued with the status of talismans, objects that are considered to have magical powers and ritual significance as lucky charms. In Choisine's artistic practice, talismans also reference the syncretism at work in Haiti and the Caribbean - blending diverse ideas, philosophies and languages into new knowledge systems. Examples include the Creole language and the practice of voodoo in Haiti, which emerged from a mix of West African beliefs and Christian elements during the slave trade. In the exhibition, the talisman-adorned carpet serves more than a symbolic purpose. Within the Temple of Love, designed as a safe space for self-care and caring for others, *Lie close to your ancestors* turns the exhibition space into a zone for rest and relaxation.

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***Primitive Accumulation***, 2019-2022

HD video, color, sound, 50' 31"

***Primitive Amnesia***, 2019-2022

HD video, color, sound, 49' 03"

In the juxtaposition of the two video works *Primitive Accumulation* and *Primitive Amnesia*, Choisne imagines a genealogy of the Temple of Love and honours female and transfeminine persons as its pioneers. An interview with the Haitian voodoo priestess Madame Café and 'docteur-feuille' ("leaf doctor"), conversations with the artist and producer Christelle Oyiri (\*1992) and Choisne's mother, Marie-Carmen Brouard, provide insights into the experiences of racialised women in today's society. The stories are interwoven with archive footage by the artist, poetic recollections of Haiti, music videos and films, as well as various references from the internet. In parallel, Choisne combines in *Primitive Amnesia* a selection of videos of women's protests in France, Brazil and Haiti with close-ups of flowers that she recorded during the COVID-19 lockdown in Normandy.

The title of *Primitive Accumulation* refers to the concept of the same name according to Karl Marx ("Das Kapital", 1867) and describes the expropriation of the immediate producers from their means of production in capitalist modes of production. Choisne draws an analogy to the dispossession of female and racialised people from their being and free will as well as the suppression of their physical self-determination in patriarchal systems. Among other things, she refers to the exploitation of enslaved people to secure the prosperity of European colonial powers during colonialism as well as the oppression of women and their bodily autonomy. In both videos works, the artist visualises individual and collective resistance struggles and emphasises that in *Temple of Love*, the concept of healing goes far beyond physical and spiritual dimensions and includes political emancipation processes.

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**Paul Gilroy my bro, 2022**

Sports jersey, chains, keys, dried flowers  
240 x 50 x 15

As a tribute to the theorist and cultural critic Paul Gilroy (\*1956), a sports jersey bearing his name hangs from a gold chain adorned with keys and dried flowers. Gilroy is renowned for his incisive analysis of racism and his studies of the Black diaspora that was shaped by the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. His concept of the "Black Atlantic" (1993) proposes a transnational Black identity. He investigated how the vast movements of enslaved people across the Atlantic along various trade routes - connecting Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas - forged a dynamic intercultural identity that transcended national and ethnic lines. Gilroy detailed how diverse cultural influences, shaped by enslaved individuals under racist oppression and exclusion from dominant cultures, blended to create new hybrid cultures. Choisine draws on this concept to suggest that in every society, nothing emerges in isolation; everything is mixed, combined, infused and hybridised. In a playful act of juxtaposition, she uses a T-shirt made in China and printed with Paul Gilroy's name in Mexico to include the theorist within the canon she references in her *Temple of Love*.

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**L'Eveil du cosmos, 2022**

Glazed ceramic, olives, foam  
60 x 50 x 40

11

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***Purple water-wishes and more forever (1111 unlimited love.)  
period.***, 2022

Copper fountain with pump, flowers, tattoos, rhinestones, stickers  
80 x 35 x 27

12

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***My devotion for you***, 2022

Soy wax, talismans, natural pigments, ylang-ylang, dried flowers  
70 x 25 x 25

13

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***Fucking strong pyramid power***, 2022

Blessed Himalayan salt  
Dimensions variable

Salt is a recurring symbolic material in Choisine's artistic work. It is an essential mineral and an integral part of our diet, yet its significance extends well beyond its culinary roles as a seasoning and preservative. Its antibacterial properties and wound-disinfecting capabilities make salt a valued naturopathic remedy. Salt is also employed in occult practices to cleanse negative energies and ward off evil spirits. Choisine often references Haitian voodoo in her work, where salt plays a unique role in protecting against zombies - individuals placed by a priest in a trance-like state who can only be revived and freed from their subjugation by consuming salt. In the historical context of colonised Haiti, enslaved people were metaphorically likened to zombies, trapped in a state of physical and mental bondage. In addition to these cultural references, Choisine's interest in salt extends to its symbolic association with seawater, recalling the transatlantic slave trade that facilitated Haiti's colonisation.

## Public Programme

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### Guided tour with the artist

- Sunday, 05.05., 15.00 - 15.45

### Guided tours (in German)

- Tuesday, 07.05., 14.05., 28.05., 18.00 - 18.45
- Sunday, 09.06., 15.00 - 15.45

### Curator's tour with an aperitif (in German)

- Thursday, 23.05., 18.00 - 19.00

Capacity is limited for the guided tours.

Please register via [www.kfw-stiftung.de/en/events](http://www.kfw-stiftung.de/en/events)

Guided tours upon request:

[veranstaltungen@kfw-stiftung.de](mailto:veranstaltungen@kfw-stiftung.de)

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### Opening hours

Tue-Fri 13.00 - 19.00

Sat-Son 12.00 - 18.00

Mon closed



## **About KfW Stiftung**

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KfW Stiftung is an independent, non-profit foundation established in October 2012. Its main areas of activity include the promotion of cultural diversity in the field of art and culture as well as engagement in the areas of responsible entrepreneurship, society and ecology. In the area of art and culture, KfW Stiftung creates platforms together with partner organisations for the international contemporary arts to strengthen creativity, freedom of expression and discursive capacity and thus promote cultural diversity. Villa 102 in Frankfurt's Westend is the platform for culture and dialogue of KfW and its foundation.

Curators: Daniela Leykam & Rose Field

Curatorial assistance: Alica Sanger

Exhibition production: Rose Field

Event coordination: Marie Schaarschmidt

Texts: Alica Sanger

English translation of the texts: Alisa Kotmair

Programme Manager Arts & Culture at KfW Stiftung:

Daniela Leykam

The exhibition is a partner project of the international photography Triennial RAY ECHOES.

KfW Stiftung would like to thank the artist Gaelle Choisne and all those who contributed to the exhibition. Special thanks to Decomarbre - Atelier de Marbrerie.

All artworks courtesy the artist and Air de Paris.