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Paul Alzugaray, Charline Von Heyl and the Emblematic Form, *Celeste*, June 17, 2026.

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→ REVIEW

ART CRITICISM



View of the Charline von Heyl exhibition at Auroras (photo: Ding Musa)

CHARLINE VON HEYL AND THE EMBLEMATIC FORM

On display at Auroras, an artist exhibiting for the first time in Brazil presents a layered painting constructed using a method of appropriation and montage.

PAULA ALZUGARAY

In the year that auroras celebrates ten years of activity, the realization of three solo exhibitions by international artists, never before shown in Brazil, is symptomatic and representative of the program of this project space that prides itself on not following models, but opening paths. For those who are not yet familiar, auroras, located in a modernist house in Morumbi, São Paulo, has been operating since 2016, under the direction of Ricardo Kugelmas. After Suzanne Jackson and before Jacqueline Humphries, the artist Charline von Heyl exhibits in São Paulo for the first time. Residing between New York and Marfa (Texas) since 1996, Charline von Heyl was born in Mainz (Germany), studied painting in Hamburg and Düsseldorf, and participated in the Cologne art scene in the 1980s. With research in painting and drawing, Von Heyl belongs to a generation of artists who are returning to painting after decades of experimentation in the conceptual field.

The emphasis on pictorial gesture in the 1980s is a worldwide phenomenon. In Brazil, an "80s generation" is identified in the exhibition *How Are You, Generation 80?* (Visual Arts School of Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro), in 1984, which brought together 123 artists of different ages and backgrounds, united by their exploration of new painting materials and critical dialogue with modern art movements. The clash of this postmodern painting with pop art, the Transavantgarde, new figuration, neo-expressionism, abstract expressionism, and other abstract postwar trends, through appropriation procedures, gives it an allegorical character.

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View of Charline von Heyl's exhibition at Auroras (Photo: Ding Musa)

Born within this *zeitgeist*, Charline von Heyl's painting is layered. The artist uses allegorical methods of appropriation and montage by superimposing and fragmenting information. It is in this sense that, although created in acrylic paint on linen, the 14 recent works exhibited at auroras, until September 19th, implode the limits of painting. In their restless and transient quality of juxtaposing techniques, languages, aesthetics, and references, the works are composed according to the dialectical rules of montage.

ASSEMBLY AND SABOTAGE Charline von Heyl has declared herself "an ahistorical person," uninterested in the idea of linear development. This means that allusions to canons of art history and pop iconography can be discerned in a fragmentary way among the layers of her painting. Picasso's bullfighting, or the colors of Soviet graphic arts – red, black, and white – for example, are appropriations that are placed directly or subtly in works such as *Bull TV* (2000) and the *Sabotagerie series* (2026). *Less obvious, but equally suggestive, is the way in which a certain memory of the American flag, explored by Jasper Johns in the Flags series (1967-68), seems to vibrate in the subtext in Von Heyl's paintings Stash (2026), All the Shy (2026), and Sabotagerie #4 (blue) (2026).*

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Sabotagerie #2 (green), 2026, by Charline von Heyl (Photo: Jason Mandella / courtesy of the artist and gallery Petzel, New York)

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The idea of sabotage, which names the set of small-format canvases installed in the rooms on the second floor of Auroras, is a principle that seems to order an entire pictorial research organized through the allegorical method of confiscation, subtracting the original meaning of the appropriated objects or symbols. However emblematic the way stripes and characters are organized within a circle in the canvas *Anger Diary* (2026) may seem, the insignia presented here is not at the service of representing a clear idea.

The emblem that does not define an identity or the text that remains restricted to the spaces between the lines of the painting. These are conditions that make Von Heyl's work resolutely abstract and non-narrative. This allows the viewer to experience paradoxical sensations between uniqueness and reproducibility, sensuality and rigor, pleasure and discomfort.

Even regarding abstraction, to which she has dedicated herself since the early 1990s, Von Heyl is ambiguous: "I want to take abstraction to a point where it screams that it is something: a representation and a thing." This phrase, recorded in the catalog of the exhibition *Abstract Generation: Now in Print* at MoMA in 2013, attests to a method of sabotaging not only historical references. The artist practices self-sabotage in each of her paintings, reinventing her own rules and making the interpretation of her work a permanent exercise in relearning.

Charline von Heyl

exhibition in collaboration with Petzel Gallery, NY

auroras, av. São Valério 426, São Paulo

Until September 19, 2026

https://celeste.art.br/revistaceleste_charline-von-hey-l-e-a-forma-emblematica/