

# Martina Simeti

Chloé Quenum

*Weary*

With a text by Fernanda Brenner

22 November 2024 – 25 January 2025

Opening 21 November, 6 – 8 pm

Martina Simeti is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition by artist Chloé Quenum with the gallery. The show features new productions including video, a group of digital collages and a site specific installation spread on the entire gallery floor hand-drawn by the artist.

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Imagine watching someone dream underwater through Windows 95. In Chloé Quenum's latest work, a digital avatar – intentionally obsolete, exquisitely weary – drifts through liquid code like a body surrendering to exhaustion. Solange's 'Weary' plays in the background, transforming into something uncanny: pop music submerged in digital undertow, black electronic dreams deconstructed until only their echoes remain. The song's original meditation on Black exhaustion metamorphoses into pixelated poetry, each distorted note bearing the weight of both cultural and computational fatigue.

Within this liquid environment, the avatar moves not as a malfunction but as what Legacy Russell terms a "glitch-as-refusal" – a digital entity choosing resistance through imperfect rendering. Here, exhaustion becomes methodology, where physical and digital fatigue merge into political stance. Drawing on Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*, Quenum reveals how weariness flows through generations, through bodies, through code – an inheritance of exhaustion translated into binary, each imperfect pixel a quiet act of defiance.

The avatar floats as if carrying the burden of every system update rejected, every demand for optimisation refused. Its deliberately dated graphics and fluid movements embody what Russell identifies as the glitch's revolutionary potential: the moment when "breaking becomes a generative act." In this digital realm, Quenum suggests that the weariness of keeping up – both online and off – might be liberation rather than defeat.

Solange's distorted lyrics "I'm gonna look for my body yeah" echo Morrison's exploration of embodied memory – of bodies harbouring histories just beyond reach. The perpetually blurred avatar navigates its environment as we do our cultural inheritance: semi-present, semi-dissolved, suspended between physical exhaustion and the relentless demands of digital presence. It enacts what Russell describes as "body-breaking": a radical rejection of digital legibility.

Quenum, born to French and Beninese parents, approaches identity as fluid rather than fixed – a constant flow demanding endless energy. In her latest work, that flow appears deliberately weighted, heavy with the exhaustion of perpetual digital performance. Her imagery spreads across gallery walls like tired eyes, bleeding light after endless screen time, creating pools of digital fatigue that manifest as perfect system errors.

At the 60<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, Quenum’s contribution to the Benin Pavilion explored similar themes of cultural transmission and loss through material translation. Working with collections from the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, she recreated Dahomey kingdom musical instruments in blown glass: flutes, bells, and xylophones transformed through necessary distortion. Like her current work’s digital avatar, these glass instruments inhabited a space of productive transformation, each piece marking gaps in transmission – those moments where memory fails, where meaning shifts or dissolves.

In Milan, this exploration of cultural fluidity evolves from glass to code, yet its essence persists. “There are always things that elude us: either because they haven’t been documented or perhaps because they were erased. This reflects our relationship with memory, which is also full of gaps, much like all processes of transmission,” Quenum explains of her process. This layered approach to image-making mirrors her broader artistic practice: whether working with blown glass or liquid pixels, Quenum continues investigating how identity resists perfect reproduction, how loss can generate new forms of creation. Her digital collages become another medium through which memory flows and transforms, each layer of superimposed imagery creating new territories of meaning.

This is transformation in the digital age: manifesting through exhausted flesh and glitching code, through pop music warped into digital spectres and literary heritage rendered in failing pixels. The avatar’s languid movement carves out something simultaneously personal and universal – a space where physical and digital fatigue become form, where exhaustion itself becomes power.

Watch long enough and you start to feel it in your own body: this isn’t about error at all. It’s about what happens when we embrace both our physical limits and our digital glitches, when we let our tired bodies dissolve into their online avatars and find, in that dissolution, what Russell calls “new ways of being.” In Quenum’s liquid world, every glitch is an opening, every distortion a door, every moment of exhaustion a potential for renewal.

– Fernanda Brenner

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Chloé Quenum’s work addresses questions of visibility, mixed-race and transmission through the prism of anthropological and historical research. The strategies she uses by moving, transforming and reshaping forms and mundane objects allow her to interrogate the idea of displacement and feeling of belonging. She questions the effect a shift in context produces and thus her artworks’ capacity to generate new stories.

The artist was representing Benin at the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024 alongside Ishola Akpo, Moufouli Bello et Romuald Hazoumè, curated by Azu Nwagbogu. Recent solo and group presentations of Quenum’s work at institutions include: Musée d’Art et de Culture Soufis, Chatou (2024), Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome (2024), Musée des Beaux-Arts, Pau (2023), Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2021, 2014), Fondation Pernod-Ricard (2021, 2014, 2013), Fondation Kadist, Paris (2021, 2018), Centre Pompidou, Paris (2019), Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2015), Collège des Bernardins, Paris (2014), Le Plateau, FRAC Île-de-France, Paris (2012).

Her works have joined the collections of Le Musée national d’art moderne – Centre Pompidou, Paris; Frac Alsace, Frac Ile de France, Frac Grand Large, Frac Nouvelle Aquitaine, Crédit municipal of Paris, Fondation Kadist, Fondation Lafayette Anticipations.