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Press Release

Oh de Laval

I miss when people had secrets

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Galerie Marguo, 4 rue des Minimes, 75003 Paris



In the era of TikTok confessionals, Instagram oversharing, and algorithmic intimacy, the idea of a secret feels almost obsolete. Platforms reward disclosure, not discretion. The mystique of privacy has become an aesthetic more than a principle. The title of Oh de Laval's second solo exhibition at Galerie Marguo, *I miss when people had secrets*, resonates as a provocation and a lament.

In the opening of *The Transparency Society*, philosopher Byung-Chul Han argues that the contemporary obsession with openness and visibility – from financial disclosures to social media feeds – functions less as a liberating gesture and more as a subtle, coercive force. "The terror of the gaze," he writes, "destroys the soul."

Known for her erotically charged tableaux of hedonistic fantasies wherein femmes fatales, lusty men, naughty pets and impish sprites act out a panoply of primal urges, Oh de Laval works under the subterfuge of cuteness, marked by a signature illustrative style and saccharine palette. Direct and explicit, the artist's paintings explore the line where pain and pleasure, sweetness and aggression, and desires of all ilk meet.

For this exhibition, de Laval draws on the aesthetics of the Catholic Church – opulent, coded, and shrouded in ritual. In *The Sinner*, a red-cloaked woman darts across the transept of a church, two glasses in hand, while a decanter of sacramental wine bleeds out behind her. Around her: plumes of smoke, and the frantic burning of incense; the floor, polished to a mirror sheen, reflects her escape in a crimson echo: a *mise en scène* of holy confusion. This influence surfaces explicitly in *The Temptation of Saint Oh de Laval*, her reinterpretation of Michelangelo's early work *The Torment of Saint Anthony*. Here, Oh de Laval paints herself mid-air in a translucent negligee, surrounded by fevered cherubs with flushed

cheeks and raging erections. The work is displayed behind a confessional screen, and viewers must kneel to see it. Art, in this context, becomes both a private act and a minor transgression.

Elsewhere, the artist explores the notion of transparency in formal and figurative terms. Her *Secret Object* series depicts a range of illicit temptations or contraband across five candyfloss-colored, square-format vignettes, rendered in gauzy layers of paint. One snapshot reveals a charged pistol against a woman's thigh, concealed by the silk of her gown; another a dazzling whoosh of stolen jewels as a thief flashes open the lapel of his trench. Neighboring portraits depict a menacing chastity belt that displays the most forbidden and private of parts; a Barbie dream house of cuckoldry built almost entirely out of windows; and the exchange of a penis-stemmed rose, suggesting the giver's true intentions – an incarnation of Han's dictum that "actions prove transparent when they are made operational."

Each object is illustrated with uncanny cheerfulness, a tongue-in-cheek stab at the pervasive positivity that coats so much of today's social interactions. Echoing Han's warning that "transparency makes the human being glassy. Therein lies its violence", the paintings are joined by a new Murano glass sculpture, created in collaboration with a historic Venetian atelier. In *Men always want to be a woman's first love...* a fleet of miniature men and women are suspended from the ceiling in a neat row. In these fragile, unpigmented figurines, we see both the seduction and fragility of perfect visibility. Without color or opacity, they become symbols of objectification and projection.

I miss when people had secrets doesn't preach withdrawal from the digital world, nor is it nostalgic in any conventional sense. Rather, it is a seductive call to remember the power of cultivating a secret garden of one's own fantasies. In Oh de Laval's hands, taboo and desire are liberated from their associations with shame and repression, rendered as something precious. Her ribald, coquettish universe holds a mirror to our own and confronts the ways that in the digital society of control, once sacred virtues of secrecy, enigma, and discretion, have come to be treated as sins.

About the Artist

The work of Polish-Thai artist Oh de Laval is concerned with human behaviour: the decisions we make and consequences of our actions. In this spirit, each of de Laval's paintings acts as a window into our inner characters, pleasures and fantasies. Among Oh de Laval's inspirations, the most significant are human desires, secrets and our wild nature.

Many of her paintings are dominated by "Venetian pink" which became her signature colour. To de Laval, everyone's life is mix of comedy and drama. With each artwork she challenges herself to express these ideas through painting, questioning the viewer to reflect on the purpose and seriousness of life.

Oh de Laval (b.1990, Warsaw, PL) earned a degree in sociology from the University of Warsaw in 2016 before moving to London to pursue painting. Recent exhibitions include *I miss when people had secrets*, Galerie Marguo, Paris, FR (2025, solo); *Take your pleasure seriously*, Galerie Marguo, Paris, FR (2023, solo); *Wild Things Happen in Stillness*, Unit London, UK (2021, solo); *Le jardin des délices*, Galerie Claire Castaud, Paris, FR (2024, group); *Technostalgia*, Allouche Gallery, New York, NY (2024, group); *I LICKED IT, IT'S MINE*, Museum of Sex, New York, NY (2024, group); *Hajimemashite*, Bridge Mogura Gallery, Tokyo, JP (2023, group); *Chronicles 7*, Galerie Droste, Paris, FR (2022, group); *Domesticity*, Nassima Landau Art Foundation, Tel Aviv, IL (2022, group); *My Secret Garden*, Asia Art Center, Taipei, TW (2021, group); Xiao Foundation, Hong Kong, CN (2021, group); Ein Museum auf Probe, Villa Merkel, Esslingen, DE (2021, group); and *Watchlist*, Galerie Droste, Paris, FR and Unit London, UK (2020, group).

Oh de Laval collaborated with Kali Uchis on the art for her 2020 EP *To Feel Alive*. Her work is held in the collections of AMMA Foundation (Mexico City, MX); Dib Museum (Bangkok, TH); Rudin Dewoody Collection (Florida, US); Studio Berkheim Museum (Berlin, DE); Emergentes Art Collection (Lebanon); Xiao Foundation (Hong Kong); X Museum (Beijing); and the Asymmetry Foundation (London).

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Oh de Laval
The Sinner, 2025
Acrylic on canvas
100 x 80 cm (39 ⅜ x 31 ½ in)

Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Marguo