

Sophie T. Lvoff
Crazy boots II
25.07 - 06.09.2026

Treignac Projet

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“Use your imagination.” Printed atop the Blue Book—the small stapled exam booklet long used for handwritten exams in the U.S.—the phrase was meant to encourage critical thinking. Introduced in the early-20th century, the booklet faded with the digital shift and has recently returned as a hedge against AI-assisted cheating. Yet the imagination line feels oddly placed on an exam, which is meant to test knowledge, not invention. Years after filling those pages—hand cramping over essays decrypting the symbolism of grapes present in Caravaggio’s *Bacchus* for an art history class in Florida/New York—“Use your imagination” reads less as inspiration than permission to bullshit: a slogan that quietly trained generations to admire elaborate displays of nothingness.

Display, transmission, tricks, secrets, symbols—these are themes we discussed with Sophie T. Lvoff while she prepared her solo presentation *Crazy Boots* that first took place at In extenso (Clermont-Ferrand) in the Spring of 2026. The work stems from reading forty-seven books during her pregnancy and postpartum period, as well as reflecting on containment—the gestating body, a book and its content, a bottle filled with liquid. A riff on the monochrome and a situation-installation shake these themes into an ambiguous cocktail, served from the blue book-bottles themselves. And if Sophie is trained as a photographer—although today her work also expresses itself through language, objects and spaces—her photographic practice should be understood broadly: as a gesture of framing a non-reality within reality, of display, and of unsettling the banal, be it on a photographic surface or in space.

Peeking into the storefront at 8 rue Eugène Daubech in Treignac, one finds a bar-cum-bookcase (or bookcase-cum-bar?), behind which bartenders occasionally serve Pepsi and white wine spritzers accompanied by horses, cardgames and gingham prints. It’s a tip of the hat to the nineteenth-century Western saloon: the American watering hole par excellence, where boozing and schmoozing unfolded under one roof. The saloon’s demise came with the Anti-Saloon League’s campaign for Prohibition (1920–1933), when public bars gave way to clandestine speakeasies, their liquor concealed often behind “bookcases” and inside “books”. The line between knowledge and intoxication grew pleasantly porous as drinks were reserved for those in the know.

In *Crazy Boots II*, the bar and its decor—a found photograph of horses (*Found Wild Horses*, 2026) and a sun-bleached playing card mat (*Playing Cards*, 2018-2026)—collapses these histories into a small cause-and-effect loop, revealing how Lvoff’s engagement with Americana is less nostalgic than material. On a television in the corner—a compulsory fixture of any respectable bar, especially when muted—a trailer produced with Treignac Projet echoes the 1980s sitcom *Cheers*, relocating its familiar promise of conviviality, complete with a laugh track.

Like grapes on their vine, the regulars of a bar carry the stories, rituals and secrets that slowly accumulate around a place. They know what is poured, what is concealed and where to look. Behind the counter, the drawers hold their own collection of secrets: a photograph from the Weeki Wachee mermaid show in Florida, a jewelry display in Miami, an image of Treignac—home, perhaps, of the best water—and a cowgirl. Such discoveries, perhaps, are reserved for those who have earned their place and quenched their thirst at the bar.

This looping is not only felt in the repeated motifs—let’s call them the regulars—but also in certain gestures, ticks inherent to the artist’s practice—let’s call her the bartender. Ticks, and also tricks (don’t forget to tip!). Placed in a large wine glass—a novelty format from the U.S., also recalling bar decor—an enigmatic business card offers a cheatsheet, along with a phone number, similar to a work she presented in our first collaboration in 2019, in which a bronze business card emerged from a wall with only a name and phone number, enticing visitors to dial. The fruit trompe l’oeil also makes a comeback, making the text she wrote for *fruits & légumes* applicable here as well: “there’s at least two other secrets in this [...] one private, one public.”

As for the title of the exhibition, it refers to a nickname given to the artist unbeknownst to her—before she heard it through the grapevine—prolonging the reflection on what is presented (said) and what is hidden (kept secret). The lyrics of the theme song from *Cheers* ring out a little differently.

*Sometimes you wanna go
Where everybody knows your name
And they're always glad you came
You wanna be where you can see (ah-ah)
Our troubles are all the same (ah-ah)
You wanna be where everybody knows your name*

Crazy Boots II is the perfect name for the bar.

Katia Porro

Image list

- 1 Found Wild Horses, 2026 ink on paper
- 2 Exhibition view
- 3 The Bar, wood, paint, collections of the artist including: photographs, glasses, lucky Irish horseshoe, bridge championship trophy, postcards, newspapers, 2026
- 4 The Bar, collections of the artist
- 5 The Bar, wood, paint, collections of the artist
- 6 Playing Cards, 2018-2026 Sun-bleached carpet
- 7 The Ghost of Louise Hartwig, watercolor on cold-pressed cotton paper, artist's frame, 2023
- 8 Book bottles (1-47), glazed stoneware, 2022-2026
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- 18 The Bar, wood, paint, collections of the artist, detail
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- 20 The Bar, wood, paint, collections of the artist, detail