

Good or Trash
Galerie d'art
91 quai de Valmy

Sarah Benslimane
La mort du cygne
17.10.2026 - 05.12.2026

La Mort du Cygne (The Death of the Swan) is French-Algerian-Swiss artist Sarah Benslimane's first solo exhibition in France, comprising a newly commissioned installation that takes hold of the gallery Good or Trash, Paris. The tragic image of an animal in its final throes of agony, evoked by the exhibition's title, carries a potent double meaning. In the French language, *cygne* (swan) is homophonous with *signe* (sign), an object or entity that points beyond itself. As Jacques Derrida suggests, 'the possibility of the sign is its relation to death'.¹ The sign operates as a trace, producing meaning precisely because it can be repeated and interpreted in the absence of its origin. This capacity for meaning to emerge through absence, displacement and repetition finds a material expression in Benslimane's practice.

Working across painting, sculpture and installation, Benslimane develops a visual language in which familiar objects and forms become signs in their own right. From found objects to serial motifs borrowed from the histories of Minimalism and abstract painting, various elements are removed from their original contexts, reconfigured and invested with new meaning. Central to this process is the grid, which serves as both an aesthetic device and an organising principle throughout Benslimane's practice. In *La Mort du Cygne*, it provides the framework for an intricate constellation of domestic and everyday objects, collected or purchased by the artist and members of her family.

Cutlery, cables, cosmetics, toys and tools are assembled into carefully orchestrated arrangements that blur the boundaries between sculpture and painting. Feathers and spent light bulbs punctuate the surface, evoking the scattered remains of the dying swan from which the installation takes its title. A fan and a table lamp affixed to the structure introduce a subtle sense of uncanny theatricality, as though the scene were suspended between the anticipation of an event and its aftermath.

Mirrors, mounted onto the frame, extend the installation beyond its physical boundaries, reflecting the surrounding architecture and drawing the wandering viewer into its composition. Through this process of *mise en abyme*, the spectator becomes both observer and participant, implicated in an endlessly shifting field of reflections.

What first appears as an aesthetic exploration of form, gradually develops into a more complex meditation on the instability of meaning. Removed from their original contexts and stripped of their prescribed functions, these familiar objects acquire new symbolic possibilities. Their meanings emerge through their relationships to one another, to the surrounding space and to the viewer.

¹ 'La possibilité du signe est ce rapport à la mort' cited in *La voix et le phénomène – Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, PUF, 1967, p. 60

Within this constellation, the death of the swan takes on a broader allegorical significance. Its demise becomes a metaphor for the gradual collapse of the systems that sustain contemporary life, and for the collective complicity through which such processes are perpetuated. The tragedy is no longer only that of a solitary creature, but of a society confronting the accelerating disappearance of the natural world. The swan's death becomes an image of ecological fragility inseparable from the structures of consumption and power that shape our present.

The figure of the swan also opens onto questions of gender. In French, *cygne* is a grammatically masculine noun, a linguistic detail that offers a wider interrogation of patriarchal structures and their persistence. Objects associated with DIY culture, traditionally coded as masculine, are appropriated and reconfigured within Benslimane's assemblages. Divested of their conventional functions and cultural associations, these objects become instruments of subversion. Through acts of displacement and re-composition, Benslimane challenges the gendered hierarchies embedded in everyday materials, suggesting the possibility of dismantling the very systems they have come to represent.

Across literary and mythological traditions, the swan has long been associated with prophecy and the passage between life and death. In his poem *The Death of a Swan* (1954) Iranian poet Mehdi Hamidi Shirazi uses the image of a swan 'singing songs, until (it) dies'.² Evoking the mythical *swan song*, a final refrain believed to be voiced by swans at the threshold of death, this last cry becomes an act of defiance, a final assertion of presence in the face of inevitable extinction.

Against the backdrop of today's political climate, marked by the emergence of what Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor term *End Times Fascism*, this notion acquires a particular resonance.³ Opening amid a wave of student mobilisation in France on a scale unseen since May '68, the exhibition recasts the mythical swan song as an expression of collective dissent. It becomes a cry of defiance, a *cri de guerre* against the forces of destruction and domination.

Far from a passive elegy, the exhibition marks a moment of rupture. Even in the face of collapse, the possibility of transformation endures, opening the way to dismantling the white patriarchal capitalist structures that sustain our existing order and to forging new alternative futures.

Juliette Desorgues

This exhibition has received the support of La Fondation des artistes.

² Mehdi Hamidi Shirazi, *The Death of a Swan*, 1954

³ Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor, *End Times Fascism: And the Fight for the Living World* (London: Allen Lane, 2026)