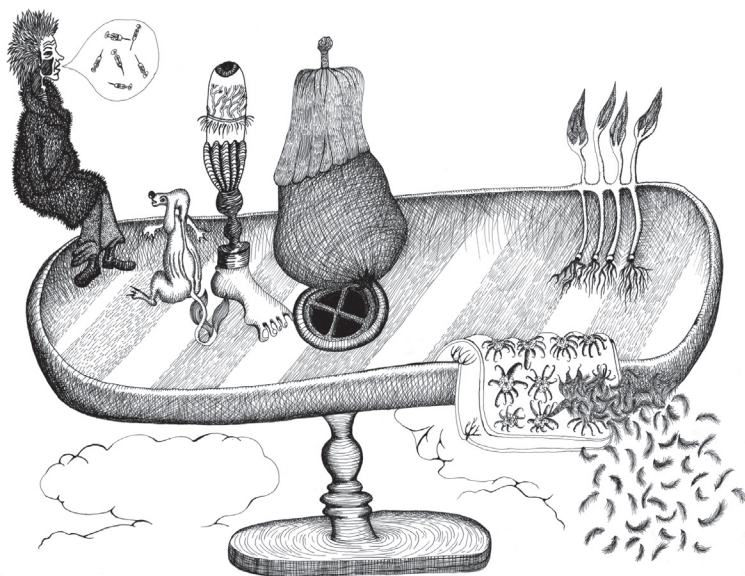


20.01 – 01.04.2018

Sophie Podolski

Le pays où tout est permis



WIELS

The very first solo exhibition of the Belgian artist Sophie Podolski (1953–1974) focuses on the remarkable graphic work that she produced between 1968 and 1974, the year she took her own life at the age of 21. Although drawing and writing were inextricable for Podolski, until now she is mainly known in literary circles thanks to the publication in 1972 of her cult book *Le pays où tout est permis* [The country where everything is permitted]. WIELS has frequently devoted exhibitions to overlooked female artists or to little known aspects of their work (for example Evelyne Axell and Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven). This approach proceeds from a desire to shed a different light on the country's art history.

The short period during which Podolski was active was characterized by far-reaching social and cultural changes that culminated in May 1968, changes that caused individuals to cast a different gaze on society. The title of her book is a nod to her generation's pursuit of self-determination and liberation. Her subjective and expressive language made her the unique voice of a counterculture that attached importance to experimentation, imagination and the exploration of consciousness.

In Podolski's work, the hierarchical distinction between high and low culture, Western and non-Western, was pushed aside. It reveals eclectic influences that range from the rock music of Jimi Hendrix and Frank Zappa to Situationism and Eastern religions. The effects of hallucinogenic drugs are also influential in her work. As in the practice of other artists and poets of her generation, such stimulants opened up a visionary visual

language that sought to re-enchant the world after the formalist abstraction of the 1950s.

The exhibition extends over three rooms and comprises more than 100 works on paper in a dense, associative display. Room 1 is devoted to her earliest works: the prints and cartoons she produced around 1968–70. This is where she developed her individual mythology – from childlike dream worlds populated by hybrid beings to comic-erotic scenarios. Room 2 centres on her wild ink drawings from 1970–72 in which the themes of psychedelic drugs and schizophrenia come prominently to the fore. Room 3 shows the original manuscript of *Le pays où tout est permis* and a film tribute to the artist by Joëlle de La Casinière, the exhibition's main lender and the book's initial publisher.