

Lena Henke
Saltus Sinafisi Artist Residency Exhibition
Curated by Clara Pohl
11 April - 1 June 2026

A new cultural chapter unfolds high above the city of Bolzano, where the ancient Salten plateau stretches between forest and sky, and where time itself seems to inhale more slowly. Hotel Saltus—more than a place of rest, a locus of philosophical hospitality—launches its first Artist-in-Residence program with acclaimed sculptor Lena Henke, who last year spent a period immersed in Saltus's singular ecology.

Her practice, informed by questions of female agency, haptic architectures, and equine symbolism, meets here a landscape already charged with deep metaphors: the Haflinger horse—a symbol of resilience and alpine heritage—is poised to be recognized by UNESCO in 2026 as intangible cultural heritage. This potentiality forms the conceptual horizon for Henke's residency, one she approaches not as static commemoration, but as a living process. Leather, terrain, and the knowledge of the body become both material and method. Her artistic response to the mountain, the team of women shaping Saltus, and the traditions of Jenesien is less an "intervention" than an act of co-presence.

The exhibition consists of four groups of works, one of them produced during the course of the residency. The cross – a prominent motif recurring throughout the surrounding landscape – forms the basis both for a suite of watercolors and a wall-hung sculpture. In a nod to Martin Kippenberger's infamous *Zuerst die Füße*, presented at the Museion, Bolzano in 2007, Henke transforms the martyr into a female figure subtracted from its bounding architecture. Proposed as a healing gesture, the figure of Saint Barbara, the patron saint of miners, metalworkers and architects, is installed on the lobby windows facing the vista of the Dolomites. Themes of body and memory, nature and human-equine relations recur across three works in soldered leather, as well as three new ceramic works which suggest a merger between the anatomy of the horse and that of its rider – resulting in an anthropomorphic figure that holds both within a single form.

"The Saltus is not a neutral space. It holds stories in its soil—of women, of animals, of thresholds. My work here will try to listen to what's already speaking: the rhythm of hooves, the patience of the mountain, the intelligence of hands that make. I'm interested in leadership that is not loud, but deeply rooted."

What emerges is a model of leadership grounded not in hierarchies, but in intuition, strength, and deep listening — an ethos shared by Saltus itself, where ecological responsibility and aesthetic excellence form a deliberate, everyday ritual. The hotel, perched at 1,100 meters above sea level, is guided by three women whose vision of quality defies trends and returns instead to essence: silence, space, and encounter.

In welcoming Henke, the hotel affirms its role not only as a custodian of South Tyrolean tradition, but as a platform for critical re-imagination. Here, art is not exhibited but cultivated—not consumed, but lived with. Henke's presence will produce not just works, but relationships: between guest and landscape, between myth and material, between memory and future.