

This Soft Life

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Jessy Razafimandimby, Hanna Rochereau,
Vincent Scheers, Nils Alix-Tabeling

curated by Christina Gigliotti

"I'm absolutely exhausted. I danced eight hours last night, practicing the marching song. My God, my muscles ! I can't do it, I'm telling you. What am I gonna do? They're gone... with this soft life." - Little Edie, Grey Gardens, 1975

The process of making this exhibition, the labor of which intensified most during these past summer months, has enriched the end result beyond what I ever could have imagined. Instead of sticking with a rigid framework and selecting artists to fit into it accordingly, *This Soft Life* is a result of the many conversations that took place between myself and Paulina Caspari, Jessy Razafimandimby, Hanna Rochereau, Vincent Scheers, and Nils Alix-Tabeling. What I wanted at first was to expand upon a scene in Honoré de Balzac's *The Wrong Side of Paris* and get as close to making it come to life in the gallery as permitted. In the book, a father who has fallen on hard times lives in a threadbare apartment with his son and bedridden daughter. He can't bear the idea of his daughter suffering more than she already is, so he decorates her room with fresh flowers, luxurious tapestries and finery. Because of his efforts, she is completely unaware of their reality and therefore lives quite comfortably, as her father meanwhile falls deeper into debt. The daughter's artificial room was both fascinating and horrifying to me. This was the starting point for the exhibition and the source material I presented to the artists when I first reached out to them.

This Soft Life contains traces of elements of this scene from *The Wrong Side of Paris*, because I believe that the way late-capitalism operates forces many of us to become both the father and the daughter in the lengths we go to feel a sense of stability during difficult times. What's more important, however, is each of the artist's contributions to or exploration of their own version of this tale. Our conversations often included sharing personal stories of adversity, current anxieties, unhealthy vs. healthy coping mechanisms, books and films we love, and methods of survival. In *This Soft Life*, the imaginary serves as a common thread which, while at times can be unhelpful and even dangerous (escapism, delusion), is also a powerful force that can motivate us to keep going and contribute to our own personal growth.

A re-imaging of personal histories often takes place in works by Nils Alix-Tabeling. In *Precatory Key; second planet, in wood* (2025) and *Precatory Key; second planet, in steel* (2025), notions of daydreaming and fantasy come to the fore. Embodying the shape of oversized keys, the works call back to childhood imagery of unlocking doors to hidden rooms and secret gardens waiting to be discovered. Unlike children, what we often seem to miss is that a way out, or possible solutions to impossible problems are entirely accessible to us if we allow ourselves to consider them.

Much of Jessy Razafimandimby's work has an almost dream-like filmic quality in the way its figures seem to move and transform. In *Bath-Ology* (2023) human, animal, and bubbly pieces of furniture merge to form an arrangement of soft permeable bodies. For Razafimandimby, the bodies may be self-portraits, or exercises in self-actualization and becoming. In *To become an imitation* (2023) two figures embrace on the surface of a wooden pizza holder. *L'écarlate emplissait ses narines* (2022), a semi-transparent set of clothes with entirely non-human proportions, hangs like a curtain, awaiting its imagined owner to return home.

Within his practice, Vincent Scheers recurrently challenges the many agreed upon norms and hierarchies that make up the structure of our lives. In *Happy hour at the faculty* (2025), Scheers imagines a scenario where fiction and fact become enmeshed and muddled, namely in the field of science. *Broken Delay* (2025) introduces a different way to look at what we may consider defunct or broken objects of our past. Just like living beings, objects contain their own histories and futures.

Hanna Rochereau's works make a point to display what is often meant to be concealed. At first viewing, empty boxes and bare jewelry stands may appear to be at the end stage of their life-cycle, and therefore immediately mentally discarded. Lingering upon their forms in *Boxes in boxes* (2025), however, lends the possibility to envision what they once were—containers of our perhaps most prized possessions. As part of a new panoramic series, Rochereau presents her subjects from various angles or what she calls sequences in *Carmel by the Sea 1* and *Carmel by the Sea 2* (both 2025), which adds a cinematic layer and complexity to her compositions.

Christina Gigliotti