

Matthieu Jacquet, 'At the Jena Palace, Helen Marten probes the fluctuations of the human soul'
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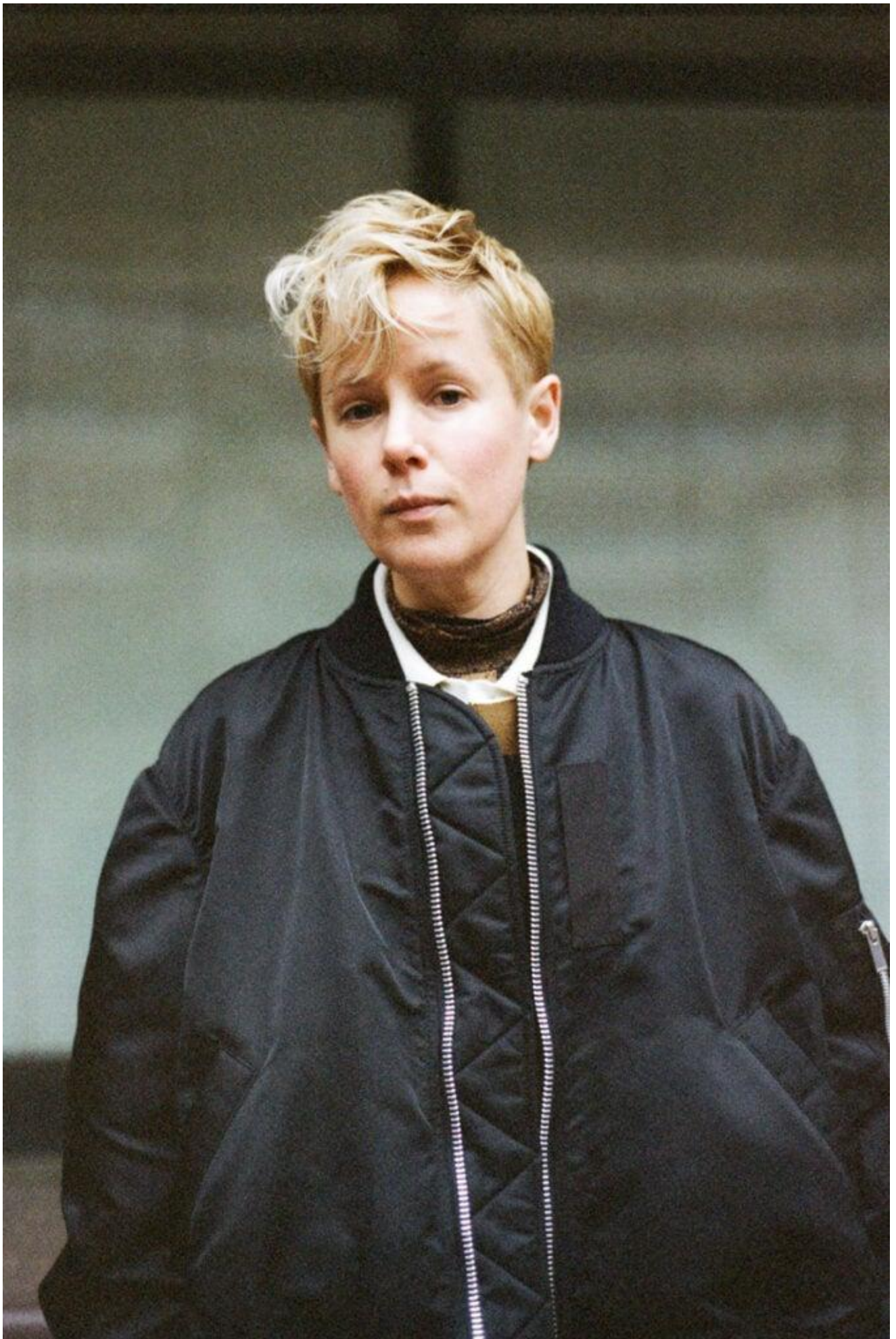


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At the Palais d'Iéna, Helen Marten probes the fluctuations of the human soul

As part of the public program of Art Basel Paris, the Miu Miu fashion house invites British artist Helen Marten to take over the Palais d'Iéna from October 22 to 26 with a unique and vibrant project, which will combine performances, videos and sculptures to relate the different stages of the human experience.

Interview by **Matthieu Jacquet** .



Helen Marten. Photo: Benedict Brink.



Helen Marten, *30 Blizzards*. (2025). Video capture.
Exhibition presented at the Palais d'Iéna with Miu
Miu during Art Basel Paris. Courtesy of Miu Miu.

Helen Marten's carte blanche at the Palais d'Iéna with Miu Miu

In October 2024, Miu Miu borrowed the impressive hypostyle hall of the **Palais d'Iéna** for **its first project as an** official partner of **Art Basel Paris**. This year, the Italian fashion house returns to the space to unveil a new exhibition, also conceived as a live experience featuring videos, sculptures, and performances. British artist **Helen Marten**, winner of the prestigious **Turner Prize** in 2016, designed this bespoke project, exploring different stages of the human experience over five days.

Helen Marten's interview for Numéro art

Numéro art : Your exhibition “30 Blizzards” tells the story of different stages of the human experience, from childhood to adulthood. How did you want to embody this in your sculptures, videos, and performances?

Helen Marten: Chronologically, the five sculptures are the starting point of the work. It was important for me to begin with handcrafted objects to develop the narrative thread. The five videos were developed later, each associated with a sculpture and presenting a monologue. The female voices we hear correspond to five symbolic archetypes: the child, the mother, the patient, the lover, and the widow. But these are not literal representations; rather, they establish a space of plurality. The mother, for example, speaks suggestively in an atmosphere of benevolence, but the voice is never explicit, and the implications can also be those of a chosen family or of empowerment through dialogue and conversation.

“I hope that the immensity of the physical space of the Palais d'Iéna will be juxtaposed with the immensity of the psychic space.” – Helen Marten

The child's voice conveys a naiveté, but also a violence or a sense of potential rupture that accompanies natural play or chance. The patient speaks of analytical self-reflection and humor, or the comedy of a solipsistic “diagnosis.” The widow maintains a powerful position of future rather than ultimate sorrow; and the lover is an enigmatic figure, whose subjects of intimacy are the granular quality of the material world, as well as libidinal affirmation. Drawing on these five characters, I have broadened my scope to sketch an entirely “molecular” universe: animals, time, material conditions, existential emotions, and narrative archetypes. In this way, I hope that the immensity of the physical space of the Palais d'Iéna will be juxtaposed with the immensity of psychic space.



So, how exactly does the exhibition interact with the architecture of the Palais d'Iéna?

The building is undeniably cinematic: this large rectangle, bordered by floor-to-ceiling windows like enveloping parentheses, brings its own natural drama. It allows for the unpredictable intervention of the world beyond the performance, with the traffic of Paris on one side and the verdant canopy of the palace on the other. In a literal sense there are several levels and spaces in which to discover the project.

The five sculptures are arranged on the floor in a single line, from top to bottom; each is paired, at eye level, with a video vignette; and, on a larger scale, two more elaborate installation devices further develop the performance: a kinetic industrial track, elevated by high platforms around the perimeter of the space, and an expanded diptych of walls supporting a central stage. All these elements form part of a performance conceived in close collaboration with **Fabio Cherstich** for thirty characters, each with a script in a libretto, as well as a score composed by **Beatrice Dillon**.



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“Adult feeling is a painting made of nuanced intensities, like a weather landscape of experiences.” – Helen Marten

What does the choreography of these thirty performers tell us?

The characters are a metaphor for individual temperaments, like an emotional barometer. I therefore opted for the analogy of a weather landscape, with the natural fluctuations in the temperature of feelings. The choreography was developed in collaboration with many people, including professional dancers, and others who bring their unique physicality and attitude. Several scenes will feature group choreography, one of which, for example, will be inspired by the patterns of walking and falling: common gestures that are fragmented and repeated until they become something entirely new and unfamiliar. There will be both beauty and humor.



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You usually conceive your installations methodically, starting with diagrams or mind maps to articulate your projects. Has this process changed with this more performative work?

My work always begins with a linguistic planning of movements, between the extremes of organization and chaos, and through this process, the search for an intense phenomenology of image creation. The same is true here, and I worked with texts that are both latent and vocalized, dictating the action and the symbolic sensibility.

“I love the idea that the words I’ve written will become readable in a new way: sung with operatic precision, distilled into pre-recorded monologues...” – Helen Marten

What is completely new to me, however, is understanding how bodies directed within a narratively charged space become bearers of shadows, where the allegory of possibility is essential to creative expansion. I like the idea that the words I have written will become legible in a new way: sung with operatic precision, distilled into pre-recorded monologues, fractured like improvisations or spoken voices. These texts allow a space for conceptual organization to emerge, and within this space of information or suggestion, there is subtext, translation, escalation, and collage.



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You chose to title the exhibition “30 BLIZZARDS.” What does this title mean?

“Blizzards” is, of course, a meteorological term, but we also use it more colloquially to describe a deluge or an overabundance of information. Adult feeling is a tableau made of nuanced intensities, like a meteorological landscape of experiences: movements of light, sounds, colors, textures. The thirty actors in the project form the “blizzards” in their most collective form—a composition of individual intensities and atomic forces, which move and express themselves uniquely, but within the framework of measured rules or parameters. So, perhaps the motif of “30 Blizzards” becomes a meta-model of the world as a whole. The world within the world, within the world, where each character would be like a small planet, dropping its own singular crumbs.