

PETRINE.

Sophie Kovel
Donations and Estates
Art Basel Paris
21.10.2025 — 26.10.2025

Sophie Kovel's work employs semiotics, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism as artistic and research methodologies, staging open-ended questions on the efficacy of iconoclasm as ideological critique.

For the 2025 edition of Art Basel Paris, Kovel is presenting a new series of photos and sculptures titled *Donations and Estates*, continuing her interest in iconography and its persistence across time and geography. The works document precious jewels in the Smithsonian Museum, Washington, D.C. as well as private collections, considering how collecting institutions tell stories of cultural philanthropy, cultural diplomacy, and class imaginations.

Donations and Estates pictures various donations to the museum by Marjorie Merriweather Post, as well as Post's private residence, where she hosted diplomatic gatherings. As the heir of the U.S. breakfast foods corporation Post Cereals, she became a notable collector of jewelry including those of pre-revolutionary France formerly owned by the likes of Marie Antoinette, as well as imperial British and Russian objects.

For Kovel nothing is lost to history, building on documentary photographer An-My Lê's idea that photographs seek to document a history of culture. For instance, Kovel's *Marjorie Merriweather Post, Dining room with Sèvres porcelain from the Louis XV service, Hillwood Estate, Washington, D.C.* (2025) recalls Louise Lawler's *Pollock and Tureen, Arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, Connecticut* (1984). This porcelain dining set, also featuring a tureen, is a part of the Sèvres Royal Collection, the most exorbitant service by the porcelain manufacturer during the eighteenth century.

Objects in vitrines, monuments and statutes tell multiple national histories. Kovel's new video *Uncovering/Extracting* (2025) considers these, through interweaving Muriel Rukeyser's poem "The Book of the Dead: Praise of the Committee" with archival footage of the Post estate's lion statue, which once stood in the gardens of Older Somerset House in London, a former aristocratic residence and site of numerous treaty signings. The text is a commemorative documentary poem of the worst industrial accident in U.S. history, the Gauley Tunnel tragedy. *Uncovering/Extracting*, 2025 inflects documentation of precious gems with the precarious working conditions of their extraction.

Taking France and the United States as case studies, these Hollywoodian images consider how the French and American revolutions are respectively implicated in the making of racial and liberal democratic regimes. Turning to the origins of the mass production of the U.S. food industry, Kovel's images consider the aesthetics, economics, and semiotics of political power—and the present-day persistence of oligarchy.

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Sophie Kovel (b. 1996, Los Angeles) lives and works in Paris and New York. Recent solo exhibitions include diez, Amsterdam (2025); Space n.n., Munich (2024); Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris (2024); and Petrine, Paris (2023). Kovel has been included in exhibitions at Art in General, New York (2025); NEON Art Foundation, Athens (2024); UncleBrother, Hancock (2023); Jenkins Johnson Gallery, New York (2023); and Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2020). Kovel is an alumnus of the Whitney Independent Study Program.

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