



# KAREN KNORR habite le château

Exposition

CHÂTEAU D'AZAY-LE-RIDEAU

13 juin - 1<sup>er</sup> novembre 2026

## **KAREN KNORR INHABITS THE CASTLE**

*Exhibition at Chateau d'Azay-le-Rideau. Curated by Claude d'Anthenaise.  
13th June - 1st November 2026*

This summer, Karen Knorr comes to live in the castle of Azay-le-Rideau.

For more than forty years, the photographer of American origin and based in London has been interested in the relationship between housing and the inhabitant.

From the 1980s, Karen Knorr planted her device in the luxurious interiors of the London bourgeoisie to make in situ portraits. In this first series (Belgravia) the decor counts as much as the character: can't he be considered as the emanation of the one who occupies it, revealing his habits, his aesthetic concerns or aimed at affirming his social status? On the other hand, the living environment conditions the one that is the host, as the pot determines the plant that takes root in it. So the representation of the decor alone, to the exclusion of any human presence, can be enough to fix a portrait: the architectural details, the arrangement of the furniture that define the personality of the person who lives there. With the series Gentlemen (1981-1983) or Country Life (1983-1985) Karen Knorr leaves a large place for interior representations. If the artist takes up the aesthetic codes of decoration magazines, the legends that accompany his views introduce a distance of humour.

Abandoning the domestic context, the photographer is now interested in how to live in institutional places and more precisely those dedicated to culture. In the series Connoisseurs (1986-1990) and Academies (1994-2005) she invests the museums. In this context whose extreme formalism is devoted to the valorisation of works of art, any manifestation of naturalness seems to be proscribed. However, Karen Knorr will highlight the clues of a presence: visitor or staff of the institution who, in his own way, lives in the place and disturbs the absolute order. Among these occupants infiltrate unusual visitors: wild animals whose unusual irruption materialises the apparent antagonism between Nature and Culture. The abandonment of the film photographic technique used in the first series, in favour of digital, favours this iconoclastic enterprise. For her shots, Karen Knorr is not content to have naturalised specimens in museum rooms. A posteriori, it also proceeds by inlaying animal motifs through a skilful manipulation of the images.

The contrast between the solemn character of cultural places and the incongruity of their occupation by animals arouses aesthetic tension. This is a new aspect of the habitat/inhabitant relationship that Karen Knorr is interested in for later series. With Fables (2003-2008) she systematises the intrusion of animals into spaces that are not intended for them, whether museums or historical monuments. Yet these beasts seem to be all their business. They seem to pursue a discussion whose meaning escapes us, with the naturalness that Aesops or La Fontaine could lend them. Do they echo the themes from mythology as already found on the museum rails: does the swan hide Leda and does the deer come for Diane or for Actéon? Did these birds fly away from the landscape framed by golden wood? Most often, however, mammals and birds have no other mission than to disturb the museum order. Whether it is consonant or dissonant with the cultural purpose of the place, their presence paradoxically affirms the quality of the decor. India Song (2008-2011) continues the experience of the Fables in the grandiose and decadent context of the palaces of Rajasthan. Karen Knorr makes the choice, this time, of visitors belonging to the local fauna: tigers, elephants, cranes and other exotic animals take possession of the place according to what could be a Hindu tale or an orientalist painting.

By coming to invest the castle of Azay-le-Rideau, Karen Knorr continues her investigation into the housing/inhabitant relationship.

In Azay, most visitors are motivated by the discovery of the architectural richness of the place. But they are also looking for a bygone lifestyle of which the castle bears the traces. To this end, the arrangement of furniture and collections satisfies the public's quest by helping it to imagine what everyday life could be. Karen Knorr is part of this approach. It does not upset the established order but rather, at the discretion of a game of resonances, facilitates its reading. Ephemeral Châtelaine, she adds her own objects, her personal universe, to the memory of the place without detracting anything from it. Thus, in the very dense weft of the works and furniture already present in the theatres, she inscribes her works resulting from forty years of work.

Like so many family photos, her portraits of ladies and gentlemen take place in the living room of the Biencourts, owners of the castle in the 19th century. Not far away and next to the mythological paintings that decorate the walls of the splendours wanted by the treasurer of France, Gilles Berthelot, Karen Knorr hangs her Fables. Confirming their vocation of hospitality, dining rooms or bedrooms welcome as guests photographs testifying to the use of the rooms through examples from other monuments.

This infiltration exercise makes it possible to account for an entire photographic career. Karen Knorr adds a new artistic dimension. She would not come on holiday to Azay without her pets: all these wild beasts that, thanks to the talent of the taxidermist, keep the appearance of life. As in his digital images where foxes, monkeys and peacocks walk with impunity in the exclusive territory of men, the animals of hair and bone come to sleep in the ceremonial beds, they appear on the armchairs filled with tapestry and frolic on the waxed parquet floors of Azay's living rooms. In a kind of abyss, this taxidermy installation continues the game undertaken in the photographs. This summer, the castle will be well inhabited.

The exhibition features some forty photographs representative of Karen Knorr's artistic work, drawn from the series Belgravia (1979–1981), Gentlemen (1981–1983), Country Life (1983–1985), Connoisseurs (1986–1990), Academies (1994–2005), Fables (2003–2008), and India Song (2008–2011). It is complemented by an installation of taxidermy specimens that relate to the photographs and the décor of the castle's rooms.

**Karen Knorr** was born in 1954 in Frankfurt, Germany. She lives in London, United Kingdom. She studied photography at Franconia College (USA), then at the American College of Paris, in London at Harrow College of Art and Design, and later at the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL), where she was a student of Victor Burgin. She has taught photography at numerous institutions, notably at the University for the Creative Arts in Farnham (United Kingdom). She has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions, and her works have been acquired by many public institutions such as The Arts Council (UK), the Centre Pompidou, the Fondation Cartier, the Kyoto Museum of Modern Art, the San Francisco Museum of Art, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Musée Carnavalet, and the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature... She is represented in France by Les Filles du Calvaire Gallery.

**Claude d'Anthenaise**, an independent curator and Honorary General Curator of Heritage, served as director of the Museum of Hunting and Nature (1998–2020), overseeing its renovation in 2007 and its expansion to include contemporary art. As an independent curator, he has organized various exhibitions on the theme of animals in contemporary art. He served as artistic director of the Monuments et Animaux event organized by the Centre des Monuments nationaux in 2010–2011, which concluded with the exhibition Bêtes off at the Conciergerie in Paris. He invited Karen Knorr to exhibit works from her Fables series at the Musée de la chasse et de la nature in 2008 and at the Villa Savoye in 2011.



*Kingfishers, Château de Chambord, Chambord, 2006*



*The King's Reception, Château de Chambord, Chambord, 2006*



*The Purple Room (Léda), Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris, 2007*



*The music room (2), Château de Chantilly, Chantilly, 2007*



*Academies/Movement of the Soul, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1994*



*Connoisseurs /Shattering an Old Dream of Symmetry, Osterley Park and House, London, 1988*



**I live in the nineteenth century  
the early nineteenth century  
I am fascinated by  
Napoleon and Metternich  
two antagonists.**

*Belgravia/I live in the nineteenth century, the early nineteenth century..., 1979 - 1981*



Those who Fear  
the Rule of Women  
but Love the Monarchy  
should reconsider their Prejudice,  
to ensure the right  
of his Firstborn to the Throne  
will create a better Climate.

*Gentlemen /Those who fear the Rule of Women..., 1981 - 1983*



*India Song/The Sound of Rain, Junagarh Fort, Bikaner, 2011*