

# Rebekka Steiger

*Horsehair takes a long time to burn*

Galerie Urs Meile, Zurich Ankerstrasse

September 10 – October 31, 2026

Opening: Thursday, September 10; 6 – 8pm

The artist will be present

Galerie Urs Meile is pleased to present *Horsehair takes a long time to burn*, a solo exhibition by Swiss artist Rebekka Steiger (b. 1993, Zurich). Developed following a seven-month residency in Beijing, which concluded this March, the exhibition brings together a new group of paintings and, for the first time, six photographs. In these works animals, landscape, memory, and mortality merge into unstable, emotionally charged scenes.

Steiger has drawn inspiration from China and its culture since her first residency there in 2018. During her most recent stay, the horse – a recurring figure throughout her practice – took on renewed significance. Inspired by the Year of the Fire Horse, which began this past February, Steiger's new works draw on its association with energy, independence, endurance, and loyalty, but also with restlessness and impulsiveness. Rather than making the horse a central point of reference, these qualities shape works in which different animals, landscapes, and remembered encounters offer ways to think about movement, vitality, and unruly force. These associations are not treated as a fixed symbolic system, instead, they remain open, mutable, and difficult to contain.

Steiger's paintings often emerge from impressions that have stayed with her and continue to resonate in her memory: an animal seen in passing, a remembered place, a photograph, an earlier canvas, or an image that has stayed with her without fully settling into language. In this exhibition, such fragments gather in scenes that are neither straightforward depictions nor entirely invented worlds. Animals, bodies of ice, weather, and terrain appear in shifting relation to one another. Their scale is unstable, and their settings are difficult to locate. A landscape may seem at the same time observed and imagined; a familiar animal may become strange through the way it is isolated, cropped, or held in suspension.

For this new body of work, Steiger has begun to sketch directly onto the canvas, adding sketchmarks in lumber crayon and, at times, coloured pencil alongside her established use of acrylic ink and tempera. She leaves parts of these initial marks visible, allowing lines to remain where they might conventionally be painted over. The resulting surfaces preserve the movement of looking and revising: outlines double back, forms are tested and adjusted, and painted passages sit beside more tentative traces. Rather than presenting an image as fixed or resolved, the works retain the uncertainty through which they came into being.

While Steiger divides her life between China and Switzerland, she travels widely and documents her encounters through photographs, which later serve as points of departure for her work, as in the *horsehair takes a long time to burn* series (2026), which depicts vultures gathered around buffalo carcasses based on a photograph she took during a safari in Kenya in 2021. The landscapes behind them range from colourful, to monochrome, to entirely abstract. The paintings become dense and shallow, offering little stable distinction between foreground and distance. In Steiger's hands, landscape is less a setting than a condition: a space in which forms emerge, disappear, and shift in meaning.

Photography has long been integral to Steiger's working process. Now, for the first time, her latest series of six photographs, *Ice and Dust* (2025), enters the exhibition space as an independent body of work. These photographs were taken during a helicopter flight over glaciers in the Bernese Alps / UNESCO Jungfrau-Aletsch region last year. Cropped closely and photographed from above, they offer no panoramic view of the Alps. Instead, ice formations, crevasses, meltwater, and tonal shifts become difficult to measure. From a distance, the images can appear almost abstract; on closer inspection, they register the physical complexity of a changing surface. The photographs were taken the day after the Blatten landslide of 28 May 2025, a natural disaster in the Lötschental valley in the Canton of Valais, Switzerland, in which a glacier collapse in the

Bietschhorn region triggered a landslide that buried and destroyed large parts of the village of Blatten. The photographs thus acquire a particular temporal charge: what appears still and enduring is rapidly changing, which the disaster nearby had made brutally visible. Their relation to the paintings is not illustrative. Rather, both bodies of work use cropping and compression to unsettle orientation, asking how much of a place - or an event - can be understood from a fragment.

The connection between the paintings and photographs lies in their attention to encounters with landscapes and living subjects at moments of transformation. The vultures gathered around buffalo carcasses and the glaciers seen from above both register processes of disappearance and renewal, in which forms are broken down and redistributed. The photograph taken in Kenya became the point of departure for a painting, translating a fleeting encounter with death into a suspended, imagined landscape. The glacier photographs, by contrast, record a landscape whose apparent permanence was already unstable. In both cases, the image holds something between presence and disappearance, preserving an encounter whose conditions have already begun to shift.

Across painting and photography, *Horsehair takes a long time to burn* considers what remains of an image after the encounter that produced it has passed. Steiger's works do not stabilise memory into a single narrative. Instead, they allow it to remain mobile - subject to revision, distortion, and return.

#### ARTIST BIO

Rebekka Steiger (b. 1993, Zurich) is a Swiss artist whose vividly coloured works move fluidly between abstraction and figuration. Working across oil, acrylic ink, and tempera, she creates psychologically charged compositions in which animals, landscapes, and human figures emerge and dissolve within dynamic fields of colour, movement, and gesture.

Institutional exhibitions include Kunstmuseum Thun, Switzerland (2025); Tank Museum, Shanghai, China (2024); Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen, Switzerland (2022); Kunst(Zeug)Haus, Rapperswil-Jona, Switzerland (2021). Her works are held in major public and private collections, including the Collection of the Canton of Lucerne (Switzerland); Collection of the Canton of Zurich (Switzerland); Keller-Wedekind-Stiftung (Switzerland); Kunstsammlung der Zürcher Kantonalbank (Switzerland); the Nguyen Art Foundation (Vietnam); Schweizerische Nationalbank (Switzerland); Sigg Collection (Switzerland); Tank Museum (China).

Rebekka Steiger lives and works between Lucerne, Switzerland and Beijing, China.