

REVIEWS PARIS

## Benoît Piéron

Galerie Sultana

By Mara Hoberman 

View of "Benoît Piéron: Poudre de riz" (Rice Powder), 2024. Photo: Tadzio.

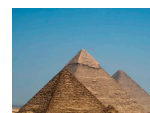
Benoît Piéron's first solo show in Paris transformed the gallery into a whimsical hospital-as-studio, complete with waiting-room chairs, IV stands draped with silk scarves featuring psychedelic patterns based on medical imaging, activities to entertain or ward off boredom, and loads of repurposed hospital bedsheets. With a mise-en-scène dominated by pastel hues, soft materials, and mellow party lighting from IV-stand sculptures *Lucie (lampadaire) I* and *II* (Lucie [Floor Lamp] I and II), both 2024, Piéron provided a glimpse into his experience as a perpetual patient—one of the "pyjama people," to use the artist's term for those who, like himself, have been regularly hospitalized since birth. The exhibition's title, "*Poudre de riz*" (Rice Powder), referred to an old-fashioned makeup used to brighten and smooth light-colored skin. It also provided an apt metaphor for Piéron's practice. As if by sprinkling fairy dust, the artist transformed the somber, sterile, solitary hospital ambience into a space that was

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stuffed animals and quilts, whose extreme cuteness is complicated by

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underling phrases such as HOSPITAL USE ONLY crisscrossing their  
 cushy surfaces. The artist's signature cuddly toy, a big-eared, wide-eyed  
 vampire bat named Monike in homage to feminist lesbian theorist and  
 activist Monique Wittig, graced the exhibition in the form of *Béquille*  
*Monike* (Monike Crutch), 2024, an oversize bat head atop a crutch leaning  
 against a wall. Nearby, on the floor, *Cairn*, 2024, a pile of rumpled yellow,  
 blue, and white sheets enlivened with two large porcelain eyeballs,  
 suggested a dirty-laundry version of the poop emoji. Delightful and  
 poignant, this and other works on view evoked Felix Gonzalez-Torres,  
 especially his candy-pile tributes to friends and lovers, many lost to AIDS.



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As an inspiration and kindred spirit, Piéron has cited Margarete Steiff, the  
 wheelchair-bound polio survivor credited with making the first stuffed  
 animal (a small elephant, originally marketed as a pincushion) in 1880.  
*Les câlins* (Hugs), 2024, a plastic basket on a wheeled stand filled with  
 odd-shaped pillows sewn from hospital sheets, epitomizes the hard-to-  
 reconcile mix of comfort and pain known and explored by Piéron and  
 Steiff. The weight and softness of the pillows, filled with millet seeds, in  
 Piéron's laundry bin suggest cushions used to treat anxiety. Their size and  
 shape, however, also evoke eviscerated organs. During his recurrent  
 hospitalizations, Piéron endured countless invasive probes, examinations,  
 and analyses. The self-portrait *Ko.u.r.ê.os*, 2024, a soft mannequin based  
 on Piéron's own measurements, describes a disconnect caused by intense  
 bodily scrutiny. Covered with stitched-together scraps of hospital sheets,  
 the headless and limbless body appears fragmented and vulnerable.

Playful interactive works—such as the collaborative wall drawing *Magic*  
*Tree*, 2023, with which Piéron invited visitors to trace a cardboard car air  
 freshener shaped like a pine tree and decorate it with colored pencils, or a  
 series of nine snow globes displayed on a pair of low tables near a set of  
 waiting-room chairs and meant to be handled by the viewer—underscored  
 the importance of community, or positive physical and emotional  
 interactions, to counter the sense of alienation experienced during medical  
 treatments. Requiring two hands to shake, each hefty glass globe encased a  
 different curio (a lighter, another pine tree air freshener, a polymer clay  
 clitoris, an origami-style fox) blanketed by slow-falling fake snow (another  
 allusion to rice powder). Spray-painted in a hazy pastel rainbow of pink,  
 blue, green, and yellow, the bases of these hermetically sealed worlds  
 mirrored the color scheme of the hospital sheets. Deceptively cheery, the  
 colors also intentionally mimicked the vivid bruising that occurs when

bodies are continually pricked and probed or simply lie still for too long.



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harsh realities of illness and hospitalization, Piéron ultimately emphasizes the importance of real tenderness.

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