

Hugo Canoilas. On the extremes of good and evil Kapsch Contemporary Art Prize 2020/2021

Exhibition duration:
Through June 20, 2021



Elise Lammer and Julie Monot, with
Hugo Canoilas
BECOMING DOG, 2020
Photo: Klaus Pichler
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Elise Lammer



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Hugo Canoilas uses the tradition and history of painting and object art to redefine and expand the connection between installation and performance strategies. Along with art history, he also references sociopolitical developments and the philosophical and art-theoretical discourses it involves. The departure points are interconnected topics such as the climate crisis, environmental degradation, and the ever-widening gap between poor and rich countries, whose virulence is spurred on by the coronavirus pandemic. The artist ties his work in with these developments and their effects first and foremost in posthumanist schools of thought that call a rigid anthropocentric, hierarchical worldview into question and call for a careful and egalitarian human treatment of nature and its creatures.

In the context of this new empathetic worldview, Canoilas gives painting an altered form and function: In this exhibition he tilts it to the horizontal plane and constructs it as a walk-on floor work. Spread out across the textile ground is a painterly scenario of confluent forms with insular centers. The blue ground and the colorful, prehistoric-looking, jellyfish-like tentacular creatures made of wool and glass remind viewers of densely populated maritime landscapes of unfathomable depths. In a time when keeping one's distance is the survival principle du jour, viewers find themselves immersed in an inescapable biosphere where temptation and menace, the organic and the technoid coexist. Viewing the paintings below one's feet from above also reminds one of digital landscape scenarios like the ones photographed by drones. The change of perspective may be understood metaphorically as a departure and distancing from trained social perceptions and behaviors to approach things with a different mindset and perhaps indeed get closer to the heart of the matter.

The exhibition is also the venue for a performance Elise Lammer and Julie Monot have developed on the artist's invitation, entitled BECOMING DOG, which questions the hierarchical relationship between humans and animals, replacing it with the principle of empathy in an institutional space. Actors dressed as dogs intermittently use the painting as a stage. As creatures that usually sniff their way across the ground, they embody the intent to qualify the upright gait and stereoscopic vision as the measure of all things. Human and animal traits seem blended like in a drag show to put ostensible certainties about identity and uniqueness up for discussion.

Curated by Rainer Fuchs

Born 1977 in Lisbon, Hugo Canoilas has been living and working in Vienna since 2010. He studied at ESAD (Escola Superior de Artes e Design) in Caldas da Rainha and at the Royal College of Art in London.

Exhibitions (selection): Museu do Chiado, Lisbon; Cooper Gallery, Dundee; Centro de Arte Contemporâneo de Huarte; Frankfurter Kunstverein; Kunsthalle Wien; De Appel, Amsterdam; Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon; 30th São Paulo Biennial; 4th Ural Industrial Biennial.

Kapsch Contemporary Art Prize 2020/2021

The Kapsch Contemporary Art Prize is an award that promotes young artists based in Austria and was initiated by the Kapsch Group and mumok in 2016.

After Anna-Sophie Berger (2016), Julian Turner (2017), Ute Müller (2018), and Anita Leisz (2019), Hugo Canoilas is its fifth recipient. Honored with a prize money of 10,000 euros, the prize includes a solo exhibition at mumok and a catalog published in conjunction with it. Additionally, one of the recipient's works or work groups is purchased by the Kapsch Group for the mumok collection.

Jury

Each year, art experts are asked to nominate two artists each for the Kapsch Contemporary Art Prize. In 2019, this group of experts included Anne Faucheret, curator at Kunsthalle Wien, Cosima Rainer, Head of the Art Collection and Archive at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, and Thomas D. Trummer, Director of Kunsthaus Bregenz. An international jury composed of Brigitte Huck, art historian, curator, and art critic; Susanne Titz, Director of Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach; Vitus Weh, dramaturg and scenographer; Georg Kapsch, CEO of Kapsch Group; and mumok Director Karola Kraus selected the winner.

Jury Motivation

"From the numerous submissions distinguished by their high quality, the jury reached the unanimous decision to award Hugo Canoilas with the Kapsch Contemporary Art Prize 2020/2021. Canoilas's oeuvre is highly energizing: In his hands, old pictorial techniques are reinvigorated, obsolete artificial languages saved by reenactment, and spaces turned into stages as they begin to breathe. His unusual installations and images, videos, and performances are all characterized by a laid-back opulence yet no stylistic definition. Canoilas's things are in constant flux.

At the same time, he has an inimitable knack for connecting people: The Viennese exhibition space Guimarães, which is run by him, is an important hub for the young local art scene as well as transients," the jury stated.