

OF THE SURFACE OF THINGS

24 February – 26 March 2022



Maria Bartuszová, *Perforated Torso*, 1986, plaster, 55 x 56 x 50 cm (21 5/8 x 22 1/8 x 19 3/4 in).
© The Archive of Maria Bartuszová, Košice

Alison Jacques is pleased to present 'Of the Surface of Things', a four-person exhibition exploring the communicative potential of raw materials and exposed surfaces. The artists in dialogue are Maria Bartuszová (b. 1936, Prague, Czechoslovakia; d. 1996, Košice, Slovakia); Sheila Hicks (b. Hastings, Nebraska, 1934), who has worked in Paris for over 40 years; Hannah Wilke (b. 1940, New York, US; d. 1993, Houston, US); and Erika Verzutti (b. 1971, São Paulo, Brazil).

The show's title is taken from Wallace Stevens's 'Of the Surface of Things' (1919), a short poem concerning a singer who, frustrated with his inability to write, walks to a nearby balcony to take in the view – 'three or four hills and a cloud'. As the singer is reacquainted with the particularities of reality, with the surface of things, his imagination is untethered once more. Stevens shifts from prose to a metrical rhythm that permits his language to flow: 'The gold tree is blue, / The singer has pulled his cloak over his head.'

The surface is a communicative space: intimate and direct; honest, exposed, exposing. When offered in its raw state, or an approximation thereof, the surface is held in suspension – or, as Marta Dziewańska writes of Bartuszová's work, 'in the moment when "the form is still being thought".' Using Stevens's nine-line poem as a starting point, this exhibition explores the methods by which artists embrace and complicate 'the surface of things' as a means to pose novel questions of non-physical things.

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Through unglazed terracotta and pastel on paper, Wilke articulates impulse, desire and sensuality; through plaster, rocks and string, Bartusová speaks to the tense fragility of life. Hicks's exposed linen demonstrates material's innate ability to enhance our experience of space and the artist's signature command of colour and light, while for Verzutti, the surface is a volatile space of collaged reference, one that, in this show, is built assembled from layers of clay, wax and *papier-mâché* newspaper. 'I can almost feel it,' writes Dorota Biczal of Verzutti's surfaces, 'the abundance barely contained'.

This exhibition anticipates and follows numerous major institutional surveys. Opening in April at The Hepworth Wakefield, curated by Andrew Bonacina, 'Sheila Hicks: Off Grid' will be the artist's first UK museum solo exhibition. Bartusová's first UK museum retrospective, curated by Juliet Bingham and Gabriela Garlatyová, opens at Tate Modern, London, in September 2022. Last year, Verzutti had her first UK museum survey at Nottingham Contemporary, curated by Nicole Yip with Kiera Blakey, which was followed by solo exhibition at Museu de arte de São Paulo, curated by Adriano Pedrosa and André Mesquita, while Wilke's major retrospective at The Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis, curated by Tamara H. Schenkenberg, closed in January 2022. The resulting monograph, *Hannah Wilke: Art for Life's Sake*, will have its UK launch on 24 February (5–7pm) at Alison Jacques.

For further information, contact info@alisonjacques.com