

KÖNIG GALERIE

CLAUDIA COMTE AN IMPENDING DISASTER (HAHAHA)

27 APRIL – 22 JUNE 2022
KÖNIG GALERIE IM KHK

"It is important, it is true, it is happening, and it is an impending disaster.", David Attenborough

"This is not about carving out a space for humour but about the insincerity of expressing the desire to help while simultaneously exploiting the Earth's resources through capitalist ventures. HAHAHA embodies the nonsensical affirmation of knowing exactly what harm is being made and of not doing anything to prevent it.", Claudia Comte

KÖNIG GALERIE is pleased to present AN IMPENDING DISASTER (HAHAHA), a solo exhibition by Claudia Comte in the Vienna gallery.

A trash-strewn beach; a sea of plastic; a damaged pipeline; a kangaroo and joey escaping a wildfire; monkeys bred for laboratory testing; cows raised for livestock in cramped conditions: the HAHAHAs that dance across the canvas and amass on the ceiling form a quieting presence in this tableau of difficult images. What does it mean to evoke laughter when there is no humour to be found?

The HAHAHAs in AN IMPENDING DISASTER (HAHAHA) are lifted from French, American and Belgian comics and individually convey the characteristics of their original sources. Scrawled or thickly outlined, some snake across the canvas while others obscure the image beneath. For Claudia Comte, HAHAHA enters this exhibition as a loaded utterance. In the aesthetic language of comics, protagonists are often personified as evil by the glee they outwardly express at the misfortune or distress of others: 'HAHAHA' to explosions, disappearances and pratfalls. HAHAHA affirms a tragedy at the same time as articulating a pleasure derived from harm. In bringing this comic language to bear on these images of anthropogenic destruction, Comte explores the ways in which humans arrive at an ethics through a visual language, asking whether the ubiquity of these images mobilises or desensitises us.

With this new body of work, Comte combines traditional printing and painting techniques with the aesthetics of mass production to foreground a pervasive cultural affect of our times in the sensation of ecological anxiety. Where typographic balloons typically mark special occasions and milestones, the cloud of helium H- and A-lettered balloons that fill the ceiling evokes a dark cloud or oil spill. The balloons will slowly deflate and shrink over the course of the exhibition, inserting into this Gesamtkunstwerk a contemporary ecological perspective.

Comte has combined the balloons with a classical presentation of mounting the paintings on easels placed through the exhibition space, an arrangement redolent of a Paris salon where the criterion of aesthetic value for European art was first formalized. Yet these images emerge from the visuality of image-sharing platforms and not the hallowed halls of genre painting. This visuality – and its inherent ethical tension – is integral to the exhibition, not only for exposing and bringing awareness to the subject, but for gesturing to the affective politics of digital activism. While the work features images of anthropogenic disaster found from a variety of internet sources, all of the animal-related images are taken from We Animals Media, a photojournalist agency focused on documenting animals in the human environment, which the artist has followed for a number of years. In drawing on a selection of images from this agency, Comte blurs the value systems that have coalesced around the distinct 'worlds' of the visual arts and photojournalism. In so doing, the exhibition creates a temporary space in which to encounter and potentially transform patterns of spectatorship.

Text: Gabriella Beckhurst



EXHIBITIONS

XENIA HAUSNER
Unintended Beauty
ST. AGNES | NAVÉ
29.04 – 19.06.2022

ZHANNA KADYROVA
Palianytia
ST. AGNES | CHAPEL
29.04 – 20.05.2022

AUSTYN WEINER
Honey High
KÖNIG SEOUL
15.04. – 22.05.2022

KÖNIG GALERIE IM KHK
Friedrichstraße 7
1010 WIEN

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koeniggalerie.com

Opening Hours
Wed – Sun 11 PM – 6 PM

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Claudia Comte (b. 1983 in Grancy, Switzerland) is based in the countryside outside of Basel, Switzerland. The artist has recently presented her work in solo exhibitions at Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid (2021); Kunstraum Dornbirn, Dornbirn (2020); Castello di Rivoli - Museo D'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli (2019); Copenhagen Contemporary, Copenhagen (2019); Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, USA (2018); Kunstmuseum Luzern, Luzern (2017); Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2014); amongst many others. The artist participated in international group exhibitions, such as Desert X, Al Ula, Saudi Arabia (2022); the 58th October Salon – Belgrade Biennale, Belgrade, Serbia (2021), and many more. Comte's works are part of renowned collections such as those of the Baltimore Museum, Baltimore; Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich; or the MoMA – Museum of Modern Art, New York. She won the Kulturförderpreis from the Alexander Clavel Stiftung (Riehen, Switzerland) in 2018, and was awarded the Swiss Art Award in 2014 and the Kiefer Hablitzel Award in 2012. She was also honoured by the UBS Foundation for Contemporary Art (Switzerland) in 2012.



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