

Singing With the Wolves

2 September - 8 October, 2022

melanie bonajo

Margit Lukács & Persijn Broersen and Smári Róbertsson

Charlotte Schleiffert

One of the protagonists in *Singing with the Wolves* is a video animation of a white wolf by artist duo Margit Lukács and Persijn Broersen in collaboration with Smári Róbertsson. The animal is trotting slowly towards the viewer while humming Frank Sinatra's 'East of the Sun, West of the Moon'. In this exhibition the main characters are non-humans or partly humans like the monumental hybrid figures by Charlotte Schleiffert.



With their film *Progress vs Sunsets – re-formulating the Nature Documentary (2017)* melanie bonajo raise the question: 'Can we send 'funny' animal videos into space for aliens to discover the Earth's ecosystem?'

In fairy tales and myths it is quite common that the fate of humans and animals interact. Very often humans transform into animals and back to humans again, when the spell is broken. In the video animation *East of the Sun, West of the Moon* by Margit Lukács and Persijn Broersen, the title leads us to a Nordic fairy tale about a prince who by a curse has become a white bear and lives East of the Sun and West of the Moon. It is unknown why, but this fairy tale ended up to become a song performed by Frank Sinatra in 1940. During their stay in *Hybrida*, an artist residency in Sweden, Margit Lukács and Persijn Broersen encountered an ancient wasteland of the iron industry that had turned into wilderness and was inhabited by wolves. Triggered by the landscape and the wolves, in collaboration with Smári Róbertsson, the artist duo transformed Sinatra's song into a desperately growling plea for love, embodied by a white wolf. Spinning in circles, the hybrid wolf-man-creature is torn between the natural and the virtual, the animal and the human within him.

What seems natural in fairy tales does not happen to humans in real life. Humans do not change into animals as in fact they too belong to the same species. Seen from that point of view, humans are the most dangerous predators on the planet*.

The differentiation human and non-human, brilliantly exposed by melanie bonajo in their publication *MB – Matrix Botanica / Non-Human Persons (2015)** provides deeper understanding as it invites to turn the tables. It offers a new view on an old prejudice that only humans are persons with the ability to experience themselves as individuals. In the film *Progress vs Sunsets - re-formulating the Nature Documentary (2017)*, melanie bonajo explores in 48 minutes and 20 seconds how children reflect on non-human animal images which they encounter on internet. On a deeper level this film is a research about how close children are capable to feel related to non-human animals and what that could mean for the survival of the species.

And then there is the hybrid creature. In the mesmerizing large works on paper by Charlotte Schleiffert women dressed in richly elaborated garments often have bird heads with colourful beaks. Their non-human looks seem to be in perfect harmony with their human bodies. Actually, their non-human faces contribute to their personality. Schleiffert is fascinated by birds as well as by insects and reptiles, and she strives to create an utopian non-hierarchical world within her works. In her monumental watercolours Schleiffert depicts life-size women in a loving embrace with giant toads, reptiles or huge insects. Schleiffert concludes: 'these women have chosen to live with animals instead of a man'. One woman has a red head of a turkey. Her dress is blue and she stands as a monument leaving the war debris in the background, raising a wand as to stop the violence. The work is titled 'Save Ukraine'.

*1 Melanie Challenger, *How to Be Animal: A New History of What It Means to Be Human*, 2021, Edinburgh, UK

*2 melanie bonajo, *MB – Matrix Botanica / Non-Human Persons*, 2015, Capricorn Publishers, NY, USA

*3 Caption image: melanie bonajo, *Progress vs Sunsets (Daisy)*, 2017, Ultra chrome, canson Lustre, museum glas, 54,5x97,5 cm