

KÖNIG GALERIE

ZSÓFIA KERESZTES | IN ETHYLENE ARMS

KÖNIG GALERIE | 13 SEPTEMBER – 11 NOVEMBER 2023

KÖNIG GALERIE is pleased to present Zsófia Keresztes' solo exhibition IN ETHYLENE ARMS in the Nave of St. Agnes. The exhibition is the artist's first show with the gallery and marks the beginning of her representation with KÖNIG GALERIE.

Zsófia Keresztes is a leading figure in contemporary Hungarian art, where her sculptural style is characterized by amorphous, anthropomorphic forms, reminiscent of both surrealist flesh and post-human, virtual bodies. Significant for her work in recent years is the use of glass mosaics within her sculptures. Keresztes manages to free the rigid lines and grid inherent in the mosaic structure, subordinating them to her fluid forms, which appear to be in constant flux. In particular, one of the primary motivations for incorporating mosaic into her works was the glossy sheen of the glass, which reminded the artist of the shiny, smooth surface of internal organs. Indeed, her sculptures are almost painfully reminiscent of flesh, organs, and fantastical, brutalized bodies, often bound in a suffocating embrace between tenderness and cannibalism. Although loaded with multiple meanings and references to mythological images and theoretical texts, her works are distinguished by a certain levity and elusiveness.

For IN ETHYLENE ARMS, Keresztes transforms the former nave of St. Agnes into a garden of earthly delights and suffering, where it is somehow both spring and autumn – apples bloom and rot, pain and joy are one and the same. We cannot be sure what is a beginning and what is an end. Which comes first, the apple blossom or the rotting of the fruit? The apple, in its various states of metamorphosis – from blossom to fruit – is the central image in Keresztes' latest work, deftly employing biblical, semantic, and cultural-historical associations with the fruit. Above all, though, the apple becomes a sweetly painful metaphor for femininity, maturity, and motherhood, which are invariably linked to the search for balance between pleasure and pain, self and other.

The sweet smell of rotting apples is something our nose picks up in the first moment, but in the next is repelled by the haunting smell of death. This is the smell of ethylene, a poisonous gas that is released when fruit rots. But more resonant for Keresztes is the fact that this gas is actually «contagious», such that if an apple begins to rot among healthy ones, the ethylene it releases will infect others. It is this notion of sweet-morbid closeness and togetherness that underlies the entire exhibition.

At the entrance to the exhibition, we are greeted by the god Janus in an apple incarnation. Janus is the Roman god of beginnings and endings, entrances and exits, and gates. He is a god who guards the thresholds between worlds. In this placement at the entrance to the "garden," Janus marks the transition from the everyday into a new, surreal dimension.

A second transition follows – this time through a portal formed by the stamens of apple blossoms – where passing through the portal enacts a symbolic process of fertilisation and procreation, viewers becoming active participants who drive the dramaturgy of the exhibition.

This dramaturgical approach is also evident in the figure of the anti-hero: the worm (*Pandemis cerasana*), which can be found in the exhibition in states from larva to moth. It eats from the living flesh and painfully works its way through the fruit. One of the sculptures in the show represents an anthropomorphic apple blossom that steps on a worm

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LEIKO IKEMURA
Soul Scape Seoul
KÖNIG SEOUL
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Tue – Sat 11 AM – 6 PM

with its foot. The gesture is borrowed from the traditional depiction of the Virgin Mary trampling the serpent, though here, the confrontation between apple and worm is devoid of the usual. Instead, life and death, joy, and pain take on greater symbolic character, part of a singular whole, much like the two faces of Janus. Keresztes' work has always been restless, woven by inner conflicts and tension, especially when it comes to femininity and the relation to others. But this new body of work puts the notion of maturity and motherhood in focus and creates profound moments of reconciliation.

Another piece in the form of a fantastical creature with legs spread like a woman's thighs, represents a mother breastfeeding her children. But here again, Keresztes switches the roles and changes the natural logic by putting the green apple as the mother figure and the ripe apples as the children. We are no longer sure who is feeding whom. Finally, the central piece in the show, positioned at the altar of the former St. Agnes church, can be seen as both a climax and denouement of the drama unfolding elsewhere, as two apples, entrapped in a web of worms, return to the impending threat of entrapment and suffocation. But above it all, there is tenderness and pleasure, if only for a moment, before we fall back into the arms of Ethylene.

Zsófia Keresztes (b. 1985 in Budapest) lives and works in Budapest. She studied at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts. Keresztes creates large sculptural works and installations out of a combination of materials that straddle identities both virtual and real. These are often finished in pastel hues of light blue, beige, coral, and pink, adding to their appropriation of actual and imagined bodies. Keresztes was chosen to represent her native Hungary at the 2022 Venice Biennale.

Solo exhibitions have taken place at the Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Hungary (2022); Venice Biennale, Italy (2022), among many others. Her works have also been included in group exhibitions at the Centre Pompidou-Metz, France (2022); the Baltic Triennial 14, Lithuania (2022); the 34th Ljubljana Biennale, Slovenia (2021); 15th Lyon Biennale, France (2019), among others.

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