

Herald St

Amalia Pica

While inside

18th May - 14th July 2019

(From entrance)

Yerkish
2018-2019
Plywood and paper collage
Overall: 220 x 600 x 30 cm / 86.6 x 236.2 x 11.8 in

please open hurry (in memory of Washoe)
2018
Gypsum
151 x 202 x 13 cm / 59.5 x 79.5 x 5 in
Ed. Unique

Amalia Pica (b. 1978 Neuquén, Argentina) lives and works in London. In 2020, Pica will have a solo exhibition at Brighton CCA. In 2019, she will have solo exhibitions at The New Art Gallery, Walsall, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla. Group exhibitions include: *Fly me to the Moon. The Moon landing: 50 years on*, Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich; *Iteraciones sobre lo no mismo*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires; *Concrete Contemporary*, Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich; Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki, Finland; *Animalesque / Art Across Species and Beings*, Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden; *Is This Tomorrow?*, *Whitechapel*, London and will participate in 12th Kaunas Biennial, *After Leaving | Before Arriving*, in Lithuania.

Events

The publication 'please listen hurry others speak better' will be launched on 28th May from 7pm at Herald St. Amalia Pica will be in conversation with Filipa Ramos. Volker Sommer will discuss his contribution to the publication 'Equality beyond Humanity? Demanding legal rights for our next of kin'.

Herald St

For *While inside*, Amalia Pica turns her attention to the exchange with other species. As part of her long-standing interest in processes of communication, Pica chooses to focus on the material culture that is created in labs and zoos to aid the process of observation, be it scientific or recreational. The exhibition takes place across the gallery's two venues Herald St and Museum St.

Herald St is occupied by *Yerkish*, 2018, a work originally commissioned as part of the artist's solo show at Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; Perth Institute of Contemporary Art; and shown at the latest edition of the Shanghai Biennial. The installation is based on a graphic keyboard lexicon invented by scientists to investigate the communication skills of great apes. Consisting of over 200 paper collages on wooden panels that hang from a structure that resembles an enlarged version of the books that primatologists bring to the field when taking the primates outdoors.

Professor of Evolutionary Anthropology, Volker Sommer, whose invitation to join him in Nigeria as part of the Gashaka Primate Project¹, sparked the artist's interest in great apes and the relationship we establish with our closest living relatives, has written the following caption to accompany the work. "Given that non-human primates don't speak in human ways, scientists developed panels with keys representing words. These so-called *lexigrams* are not iconic, meaning, the pictorials do not resemble objects to which they refer to, thus requiring abstract thought. The name Yerkish for the artificial language honours pioneering primatologist Robert Yerkes. Apes such as the bonobo Kanzi, studied by Sue Savage-Rumbaugh in a US research centre, employ Yerkish by typing onto computer keyboards or by pointing to lexigrams on portable boards."²

Pica presents the graphic panels without reference to their original meaning, asking us both to look at them as shapes and occupy the position of the primate who also cannot read the references their humans interlocutors have access to. While Bonobos such as Kanzi are proficient in Yerkish it would take any of us some training to navigate this system of communication.

The other work in the gallery, *please open hurry (in memory of Washoe)*, 2018, is of a more visually silent nature, both due to its monochromatic palette and modest scale. The work references experiments that utilized ASL (American Sign Language) for communication with Chimpanzees, these relied on apes' natural ability to gesture. In words of Sommer: "Non-human primates, in particular apes, seem to have cognitive abilities comparable to humans. However, they do not produce human-like speech, which renders inter-species communication difficult. Scientists therefore taught sign language to apes. A prominent pupil was the chimpanzee Washoe, raised in the household of Beatrix and Allen Gardner. Washoe signed the sequence "please, open, hurry" if she wanted to play outside. Critics maintain that apes, while they may master hundreds of signs, simply mimic linguistic rules and do neither use nor understand language. But then, even when we converse with close kin, mutual understanding is never assured."³

If you would like to see the Yerkish key to decode the message the artist left at the top right line of the work, please enquire with gallery staff.

The exhibition continues at 43 Museum St, WC1A 1LY

¹ A project developed together with curator Luiza Texeira de Freitas and Gonçalo Jesus

² please listen hurry others speak better, 2018, Sternberg Press, Berlin (p. 78)

³ please listen hurry others speak better, 2018, Sternberg Press, Berlin (p. 68)