

Baronian

Press release

Olivia Hernaiz

Please hold the line

Rue de la Concorde 33
1050 Brussels

09.06 - 16.07.2022

Opening

Thursday 09.06.2022
6 - 9 pm

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Gallery Baronian is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition of the Belgian-Spanish artist Olivia Hernaiz, born in 1985 in Brussels. The exhibition *Please hold the line* that includes a series of new works, offers a derisive take on certain societal paradoxes, in particular the issues of ecology, consumerism, and the race for technological headway.

Olivia Hernaiz's work revolves around dialogue and narrative. She creates participatory works that are often humorous and encourage us to reflect on the fictitious elements on which our Western societies are built, such as politics, money, and language. She allows her instinct to guide her when choosing from a wide variety of media depending on the project: painting, printing, sound installation, musical performance, game boards and even pop-coloured prints. That is her hallmark.

Please hold the line is built around the concept of 'solastalgia', a neologism coined in 2003 by the Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht to describe the situation of many people in Australia. Derived from the contraction of the words 'solace' and 'nostalgia', solastalgia can be defined as a loss of the reassurance one usually finds in one's immediate environment - the feeling of being 'at home'. As our environment continues to deteriorate, an increasing number of us feel dispossessed and powerless. This loss of references generates a feeling of guilt and even anger and plunges us into a state of deep distress. This depressive state, that is closely linked to our current climate crisis, is also called eco-anxiety. In tackling this contemporary curse, Olivia Hernaiz deflects it and uses it as a tool for criticising the current system.

Visitors are asked to make a phone call by activating a QR code and to then closely observe a diorama. This meticulous little stage opens a scene: an austere call centre lost in the middle of a drought-ridden African savannah. After waiting several minutes while listening to the sound of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, the visitor is put through to a Solastalgia Screening Centre employee named Sekhmet, a reference to the Egyptian goddess of epidemics, who issues them a footprint denial safe ticket - words that sound strangely familiar - certifying their indifference to their own guilt.

Using the same note of irony, Hernaiz addresses another societal paradox: the march of consumerism. *The Solar Economy* is a video made up of old advertising posters from the 1980s set in the middle of vast landscapes featuring products for sale. The advertisements are presented by a mascot in a suit with a head in the shape of the sun, which we also see on a silk-screen print and a waiting room chair facing the screen. These suns, too numerous for our system, are in fact logos of political parties of the G20 countries that the artist had already hijacked for her video installation *Make Yourself Comfortable*. The marketing choice of showing a car on an ice floe, a young seal extolling the advantages of a seatbelt with the slogan: "(...) save our friends the humans" or comparing a computer to the strength of a family of lions seems irrelevant or even scandalous today. Although this advertising concept may seem

inappropriate, it nevertheless makes us aware of the continuing relevance of the race for overconsumption. It is encouraged by the belief in technology as an indispensable ingredient in the cake of infinite growth.

At last, we are offered a marble engraving as a reinterpretation of *A cloudburst of material possessions*, an early 16th century sketch by Leonardo Da Vinci. The original drawing shows a torrential downpour of tools and objects falling to the ground en masse. A lion lurks in the stormy clouds in the upper left corner. For Olivia Hernaiz, this sketch is surprisingly topical today and adds to her reflections on the criticism of mega-materialisation. Emptied of its content, she encourages us to stop and wait for the rain. "Come with me to the point and we'll look across at the rocks. Look, rain is coming! It falls on my sweetheart". This reflective inscription in the style of Da Vinci is actually taken from an Aboriginal song from the Oenpelli region of Australia, which has been exploited for its coal mines and whose Aborigines were the first victims of human suffering linked to the degradation of their environment. The print completes and adds to the themes raised in *The Solastalgia Screening Centre* diorama and in *The Solar Economy* film.

Thanks to her judicious choice of media - audio recording, diorama, video, prints on an office chair, silkscreen printing, marble engraving - Olivia Hernaiz offers us a mischievous take on current societal issues. Her works are full of humour and finesse, and act as an invitation to debate. So please hold the line.

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Olivia Hernaiz (b. 1985 in Brussels) received her MFA from Goldsmiths University in London. As the first winner of the 'Art Contest' prize supported by the Boghossian Foundation in 2016, she recently completed the HISK residency in Ghent. Her recent exhibitions include *(un)common values, Two corporate collections of contemporary art*, National Bank of Belgium, Brussels (2022), *La Eternal Juventud*, Enter #12', Mu. ZEE, Ostend (2021), *The Constant Glitch*, M Leuven (2021), *Beste Kunstwereld*, Lichtekooi Art Space, Antwerp (2021), *Inside Out*, Museum of Fine Arts Belgium (2020), *To Thomas*, YGREC, Paris (2020), *All About You*, The Koppel Project, London (2019), *Push Your Luck*, Island, Brussels (2019), The Moscow International Biennale of Young Art, Moscow (2018) and *As Long as the Sun Follows its Course*, Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels (2017).