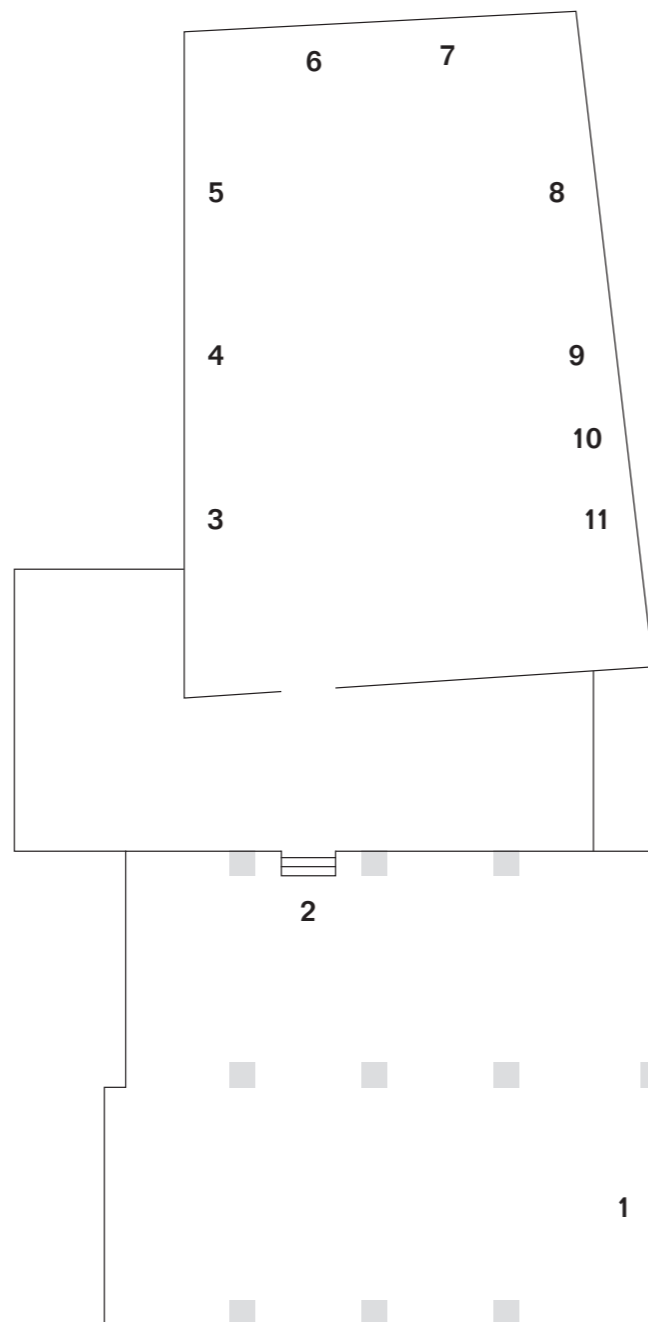


## Exhibited works

- 1 *Anche di notte, 2022*  
oil on wood,  
30 × 35 cm
- 2 *The Tao of a Bat, 2022*  
hand-hammered brass,  
38 × 36 cm
- 3 *Fiume, 2022*  
hand-hammered brass,  
95 × 68 cm
- 4 *Bagno di mare, 2022*  
hand-hammered brass,  
78 × 95 cm
- 5 *Senza gravità, 2022*  
hand-hammered brass,  
50 × 38 cm
- 6 *Anche di notte (2), 2022*  
hand-hammered brass,  
190 × 285 cm
- 7 *Anche di notte (1), 2022*  
hand-hammered brass,  
190 × 285 cm
- 8 *Filippo dei Desideri, 2022*  
hand-hammered brass,  
95 × 56 cm
- 9 *Night Embrace, 2022*  
hand-hammered brass,  
95 × 95 cm
- 10 *Standing inside a circle, 2022*  
hand-hammered brass,  
183 × 85 cm
- 11 *Filippo (Interiore), 2022*  
hand-hammered brass,  
30 × 45 cm



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# RODRIGO HERNÁNDEZ ANCHE DI NOTTE

23 September —  
12 November 2022

Tuesday – Saturday  
10.30am – 1.30pm / 3 – 7.30pm

P420 is pleased to present the solo exhibition *Anche di notte* (Also at night) by the Mexican artist Rodrigo Hernández (Mexico City, 1983) which for the third time brings newly produced works into the spaces of the gallery, pieces created precisely during his stay in Bologna, stimulated by the history and atmosphere of the city with particular reference to the collection of the Museo Civico Medievale, a place of great appeal for the artist.

*Anche di notte* is an exhibition that is intimate, luminous and nocturnal at the same time. The space of the gallery is filled by the silent world created by Hernández, whose stylized images delicately pervade the gaze of the visitor, who is immersed in a new dimension rich in imaginaries and symbols.

The first room contains one single painting that gives the exhibition its title, and a troupe l'oeil wall painting recreating one of Bologna's famous porticos in dialogue with a brass work portraying a bat, an animal that always suggests the nocturnal side of the world.

The second part of the show is composed of an installation of large works made with hand-hammered brass, whose figures and motifs are traced with soft lines, while the vibrant color of the brass adds luminosity and warmth: the golden background creates a devotional atmosphere that brings out the intimacy of the subjects. The result is a narrative path that wavers between references from a medieval universe and an intriguing setting suspended between dream and reality.

Hernández's research has always focused on classic and modern arts and crafts, expressed through linguistic experimentation that combines simple materials (paper, wood, metal) with original, refined content (Japanese writing, imagery of Pre-Columbian art, European Modernism), reworked and reformulated with a very personal style and unexpected lightness. Hernández has developed a poetics in which elements from literature, art history and observation of the world converge in a new continuously evolving vocabulary, spoken from the surface of things. As if left alone to gaze at each other, figurative and abstract motifs unite and dialogue with each other, generating works that remind us of the unknown, yet present themselves to us with a warm familiarity.

Visitors to the exhibition will be accompanied with a critical essay by Stella Bottai.

Rodrigo Hernández studied visual arts at the La Esmeralda National School of Painting, Sculpture and Drawing in Mexico City, and completed his education at the Akademie der bildenden Künste Karlsruhe, in Karlsruhe, Germany, in the course taught by the artist Silvia Bächli. In 2014 he completed the post-graduate program at the Jan Van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, Netherlands. He currently lives and works in Mexico City.

His work is now on view in a solo exhibition at Museo Jumex in Mexico City.

Recent solo shows include:

Swiss Institute Contemporary Art di New York, US (2022); *El espejo*, Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Medellín, CO (2022); *Petit-Music*, Kohta, Helsinki, FI (2021); *Moon Foulard*, Culturgest, Porto, PT (2021); *Nothing is Solid. Nothing can be held in my hand for long*, Parcours, Art Basel, Basel, CH (2021); *Passado*, Centro Internacional das Artes José de Guimarães, Guimarães, PT (2021); *Reação em Cadeia*, *Moon Foulard*, Fidelidade Arte, Lisbon, PT (2021); *What is it that has etched itself into you?*, Galeria

Madragoa, Lisbon, PT (2020); *Rodrigo Hernández - Dampclood*, Galerie Fons Welters - Front Space, Amsterdam, NL (2020); *A Moth to a Flame*, SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia, USA (2020); *¿Qué escuchó cuando escucho el discurrir del tiempo?*, Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, Mexico City (2019); *Who loves you?*, Kunsthalle Winterthur, Winterthur, CH (2019); *A Complete Unknown*, Midway Contemporary, Minneapolis, US (2019); *O mundo real não alça voo*, Pivô, São Paulo, BR (2018); *The gourd and the fish*, Salts, Basel, CH (2018); *Stelo*, P420, Bologna, IT (2017).

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The night is a time, a space, an interval between sunset and sunrise. The night is a behaviour. Something vanished that could be transformed back into physical reality. It surfaces in Rodrigo Hernández's research and artmaking as a mix of all the above. The artist is committed to tirelessly exploring the possibilities of colours and their juxtaposition—it was indeed Hernández who introduced me to Sanzo Wada's *A Dictionary of Colour Combinations* years ago—and frequently articulates his installations through the use of brightly-painted walls; nonetheless, he thrives in the ambiguity of a reduced palette. Lit by moonlight, the simplified contour of a figure becomes closer to being an idea. Hernández's works offer their own epistemology and web of storytelling, exploring the fleeting nature of revolving conditions and a sense of wholeness in fragmented truths. "I Am Nothing," recites the title of one of the artist's past solo projects (Heidelberger Kunstverein, 2016), quoting Patrick Modiano's 1978 novel *Missing Person*. In the conclusive pages of this detective story, the protagonist pursues a final clue at Via delle Botteghe Oscure (Street of Dark Shops) in Rome, an actual road that still carries its medieval name owed to the presence of numerous stores without windows, unlighted. Hernández's affinity to that literary text may have flavoured his interest in the Italian street-sign "*anche di notte*" ("at night too"), noticed by the artist on a garage door in Bologna earlier this year, indicating that parking was prohibited there at all times, even in the hours without light. With its few words, the statement "at night too" collapses the fundamental differences between day and night activities, declaring the same is to be expected of both. "In a time of collapse, the right to dissent rules."<sup>1</sup> What if one stretched the threshold the other way, "*anche di giorno*" ("in the day too")? I feel Hernández's work does that — it entangles the circularity of the natural day-night rhythm with the occurrences of human subjectivity, perception, desire, and imagination.

The artist is fascinated with the phenomenology of oppositional—yet complementary—realms such as day/night, light/dark. One predicts the other, yet they can only exist by exclusion. In *Filippo dei Desideri*, a

<sup>1</sup> Chus Martinez, essay in *I Am Nothing*, exh. cat., ed. Susanne Weiss and Jasmin Meinold (Berlin: Bom Dia Boa Tarde Boa Noite, and Heidelberger: Heidelberger Kunstverein, 2017), 99.

standing figure among enclosed surroundings wears an armature and stares, indecipherably, ahead. The arms are busy holding up a book—a source of knowledge—and keeping a pocket watch — symbol of time — firmly pressed down onto a table. At the root of this composition is the fourteenth-century engraved tombstone of Filippo de Desideri, in the collections of Bologna's Museo Civico Medievale, which the artist visited during one of his trips to Bologna. In the original gravestone, the defunct warrior—whose heroic gestures had been engraved and later erased — is seen with his hands joined in Christian prayer whilst defeating a dragon, demonic symbol of sin and darkness, under his feet. Behind Hernández's armoured knight may well be the timeless character that has populated the artist's work ever since his sculpture *Figure 1* (2013). Its simplified generic silhouette stars also in the new series of brass works. Floating in boundless waters under a full moon, sitting in a corner reading whilst lost in the infinity of outer space, abandoned to a loving farewell embrace, this being seems endowed with what Daniel Garza Usabiaga has called a "metaphysical loneliness"<sup>2</sup> in silent and time-less scenes that recall art historical precedents, such as the mannequins of Giorgio De Chirico's metaphysical paintings, or the Surrealist subjects of René Magritte's works.

From the point of view of their craft, Hernández's ongoing series of hand-hammered brass pieces sits interestingly alongside his body of paintings. Deceivably simple in their compositions, painterly in their nature, these objects begin as drawings and develop through a meticulous process during which the original image cannot be modified—in contrast with the fluidity of painting and the changes of heart it accommodates. Each part of the final brass arrangement is cut and treated individually, all the elements reconvene in flat figurative compositions which recall aspects of different media, such as drawing, cut-out collage, and sculptural reliefs. Keeping company to the generic human figure in these works is often an equally generic moon — always full, round, pretending there was not a dark side if one cannot see it. "*What Is the Moon?*" is the title of Hernández's artist's book from 2014. I would

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Garza Usabiaga, essay in *I Am Nothing*, exh. cat., ed. Susanne Weiss and Jasmin Meinold (Berlin: Bom Dia Boa Tarde Boa Noite, and Heidelberger: Heidelberger Kunstverein, 2017), 82.

answer that the moon is the epistemic circularity of Hernández's cosmos: a perpetual rotation of alternative states, unstable because always changing, yet solid as defined by wholeness. The moon is love, it is loneliness, it is a familiar sense of unknown that we may step into, via the artist's trompe-l'œil painting of a traditional Bolognese medieval portico. This deceptive architecture is adorned by a bat, mentor of the night, its wings spread wide over the sea, a perfect full moon shines in the background. The symbolic use of animals is not uncommon in Gothic Artart—a stylistic underpinning to much of this exhibition—especially in connection with the portrayal of human values and destiny. Much of Western culture has historically cast the bat in a negative, fear-inducing role, with medieval witchcraft texts describing them as familiars for witches, and the old European lore associating bats with vampires. For the traditional Navajo Indians, in the American southwest, the bat is an intermediary to the divine, bridging the supernatural distance between humans and gods. In Chinese culture, bats are a symbol of good fortune. I feel Hernández's brass bat may belong to these latter interpretations, a good omen in our visit. It is possible that bats couldn't shake off their negative connotation in the West due to their primarily nocturnal activity, associated with a sense of unfamiliarity and distrust. What is unfamiliar is too often misunderstood.

The repetition of subjects and motifs within Hernández's brass works and paintings—such as bats, moons, sparse compositions, and vast horizons—has a twofold effect: dramatic as they are, these images wish to seem ordinary and humble, they seek empathy and familiarity. Yet, the very strangeness of their familiar appearance makes them exceptionally uncanny. Expanding on Sigmund Freud's theories, Jacques Lacan wrote that the *uncanny* places us in the field where we do not know how to distinguish bad and good, pleasure from displeasure.<sup>3</sup> Hernández's image-making process belongs to this pocket of unknown: whether directly referencing the night or not, his works are staged on a territory where the night and its darkness are the backside of the visible world—a world that, as such, may seem stable but is never complete.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar*, Book X: *Anxiety* (1962-63).