

KÖLNISCHER KUNSTVEREIN

JOHN RUSSELL

Cavapool

20.8. – 16.10.2022

Press tour: Friday, 19.8.2022, 11 am

Opening of the exhibition at 7 pm

Over the past twenty years, artist, writer and performer John Russell has created an extensive body of work consisting of video works, installations and performances, which will now be made accessible to a broad audience in Germany for the first time. As part of the artist collective BANK, Russell established a collaborative practice in the 1990s. In the discourse around the Anthropocene, he takes a pioneering position that explores current questions of identity, religion, and climate. For the Kölnischer Kunstverein he produces a site-specific vinyl print from digital renderings. In terms of an anti-aesthetic, his works are influenced by the genre of science fiction and trash: apocalyptic, post-humanist worlds in which abundant natural landscapes are transformed by techno-scientific developments.

Hello ... hello ... woof woof woof!

My eyes are like watery 'pools of love', welling up, imminent to your arrival, as I stand here above you, waiting ... woof woof! Looking down the stairs at you. ... a coquettish mut.

"Heeeeello," you say as you walk up the stairs, "Ooo you are a sweetie ... what do you want us to do?"

And there is something in my gesture, implied in the half-turn of my body, in the appealing angle of my head, in the slight skewing of my stance, in the skilfully painted wetness of my nose, in the hand-tooled seduction of my curls and fur, even in the suggestion of a flirtatious smile playing at the corner of my jaw ...

Woof woof!

Oh sly coercion!

Oh finely crafted insinuation!

And then, as I trot along beside you, your spirit animal, as we enter the main exhibition space, breathing in the perfume of pine and maybe the hint of sandalwood – cleaning fluid or maybe air-freshener. *Woof woof woof!* And the succulent shine underfoot of glassy concrete.

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“O *this is amazing!*” you exclaim, as the light bursts in on you.

The ruptured gash, down through broken rock, a view of aquatic spectacle, a chasm into entangled swirls of waves, clouds, cliffs, skies, submerged architecture; baroque loops of liquid seduction, watery death and sunlit ripples. The horror of the ‘depictive’, coy perspectival fakery, the crude invitation of base representation for the sake of representation with its tricks and returns and re-animations, moving across the surface, the shine and glamour mixing desire and phantoms, as deluge or flood; ‘crafted with time-honoured technique and skill’ ... *woof woof!* A proposal for glimmering surfaces and depths, doubled down and crowded with abstractions so clearly always only ever one millimetre thick; impishly critiquing the murderous ideology of ‘*seductive surfaces and hidden depths!*’

And all the while the gloss feels so strange on my paws. I yelp slightly and you all laugh, “O you adorable pup!”

And as we tip-tap across the floor of the of the former British Council building, where previously they used to present and promote Cold-War British high-art culture. O my doggy heart! On one level, this is a similarly trivial representational spectacle ... but on another level ... no ... always this! Always *only* this!

“Ha ha ha ha,” you laugh as we make our way across the ravine. And on the far side, horizontally and vertically aligned, a row of fly sculptures spaced across the span – a row of punctuation marks, of black dots. One of them is perhaps, frozen mid-flight in front of a flower, as an ‘anti-bee’ ... not the happy, furry, orange, ecological pollinator whose buzz delights but more like the symbols of death and decay from Dutch still life, or just the vermin that cluster in the dirt. *Woof woof woof!* Or on closer inspection ... on closer inspection ... Rorschach ink blots ... maybe you can see the head of Max Wall, English music hall star, famous for his character Professor Wallofski, comedy piano routines and acting in Beckett plays.

Or maybe you can see me in the fly, can you pick out my adorable form mixed in ... *a Cavafloo?* Or perhaps a charming Cavaflooloolooloo to mimic the sound of a song bird perhaps. But anyway....

“*Cavafloolooloo...*” we cry out as we make our way out again.

As I am trotting by your feet. Eager. With a look of love when you look down. Now leaping down the stairs and at one point I stumble, a bundle of fur tumbling down. Then back on my feet. Too full of juice! Too full of life!

“Woof woof ... follow me ... down here” I cry. Such a cute docent. And downwards.

“O this is wonderful!” you cry.

And we walk down to the basement space, only partly accessible, roped off. A goat. Viewed from the

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raised foyer space. And another fly, sitting on the eyelid of the goat (an historical ecstatic fly! The same fly as sat on the eyelid of Margaret Thatcher as she died.)

The goat – most damned of creatures, not least in its repeated use in art. O cursed spawn how many more times must its carcass be reanimated in artistic context. Dragged out to metaphorical affect! And here we are again, observing its satirical form with initially sad expression, clambering across a rock outcrop, in the style of German medieval realism. Folds of fleece highlighted, rendered in oil and gloss varnish, possibly mocking the echo of William Holman Hunt's famous 'Scapegoat' painting of 1892, or the mascot of Cologne FC who was, on one occasion, punched by the fans of an opposing team. Doubling down its religious schtick in its gaze out to the viewer (as implicated). Bloated with sin; as a scapegoat or indexing other formats of art-goats, or cultural goats, erotic, mythological, occult etc. As well as being just a goat. This is a specific goat indicative of its own specific potentialities. And the maggots (baby flies) on the goat's legs and in the folds of its fleece.

Woof woof woof! "OK OK ! And where are we going now? Ha ha ha" We want to move on and there is a brief worry "Are we ghosts?" we all shriek. "Are we phantoms? Ha ha ha!"

Such fun! And ascending back up, spiralling back up. Upstairs past the posters; amalgamations of sales pitch, supermarket pitch and politics, where sits, on the wall, on the first floor, the painted portrait of the goat, rendered in bas relief and oil, in the style, or spirit, of 'A picture of Dorian Gray', where the subject remains youthful and beautiful and the painting deteriorates. That old goat is smiling happily at us in its whisky decay.

And close by the goat painting, the painting of a crow, standing on a stump picking off ants on the ground below. The ants labour collectively but are snatched away by a force above them, greater than them.

"Woof woof ... that old crow ... if I get my teeth into his feathers! Ha! Then he would feel my force ... if only for a few seconds as I shake him dead! Ha ha! Woof woof!"

"O darling so violent! Leave him ... leave him ... he isn't worth it!"

"Woof woof ... give me just one minute and I will stop him plucking at our collective labour! Ha ha! Woof woof!"

Woof woof! And finally, one more visit, one more leg on the trip, one more refrain, one last date, one last chapter, verse, prayer, homily, rapture, dream... Yes, to the cinema! The theatre of dreams! A sojourn in the darkness. In the shadows. Amongst the images projected on the screen. The crow features briefly and the ants ... and the fly makes a fleeting appearance, drenched in the searing heat of rural France, the melting pollen, mosquitoes and coagulating history. Yes, you can sit back in the cushioned seats. I shall maybe trot up and down in the aisle. As we watch an 'intense dialogue between two commuters, one taking the form of a Giacometti sculpture, choreographed across the platforms of a suburban train

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station'. As they search for the allusive *Egghead*.

Egghead wants his eggs back!

Egghead wants ... woof woof!

Sweltering intensity, warm to the bones, into your flesh, into your skull and teeth. Woof woof woof woof! And now in waves moving down. We flow outwards. And then lapping, flowing down the stairs and leaking out under the main doors, out into the street ... joyous new cavapools in the street, across the pavement, in visions down through the concrete, under the paving stone. Gently lapping waters.

O joy!

Woof woof!

Text: John Russell

Curator: Nikola Dietrich

John Russell (*1963 in London) studied History of Art at Goldsmiths College of Art and Fine Art at Slade School of Art and Saint Martin's School of Art. He was a co-founder of the artists' group BANK, of which he was a member for ten years. Since leaving BANK in January 2000, Russell has worked both independently and collaboratively in producing exhibitions, curatorial projects, and artist books. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions including Bridget Donahue in New York (2021 and 2018), High Art in Paris (2017), Kunsthalle Zürich (2017) and in group exhibitions at Viborg Kunsthall, DK (2018), Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow (2018), Galerie Crèvecoeur in Paris (2018), Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin (2017), Artists Space in New York (2014), The New Art Gallery Walsall, UK (2013), ICA in London (2011), Focal Point Gallery in Southend, UK (2011), The Grey Area in Brighton (2011), Kunsthalle Exnergasse in Vienna(2011), Tate Britain in London (2010), and Tate St Ives in Cornwall, UK (2009).

Please register for the press appointment at +49 (221) 21 70 21 or by e-mail via presse@koelnischerkunstverein.de

First **press material** can be found in the [press section](#) (PW: KKVpresse) on our website. Installation views will be available from 19.8. onwards.

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