

What do snails and Christianity have to do with current notions of sexuality and gender?

Paul DD Smith's exhibition at The Hague's art space 1646 explores the mysteries, anxieties, social pressure and inequalities around reproduction.

With his solo exhibition *The Chiral Gate*, Berlin-based artist Paul DD Smith transforms the space of 1646 into an on-site installation where snails, amphibians, reptiles and fish are housed between the glass walls of vivariums and terrariums. Accompanied by their own shadows, these animals live in man-made environments, where they are meant to breed and be under the control of humans who play God.

A world of vivariums and terrariums

Stepping through the space of 1646, the viewer works their way into a world of vivariums and terrariums. In the front space we see paintings of these man-made environments. Looking from the outside in, the viewer gets to be the voyeur. With these paintings, Smith refers to architectures seen in 13th century Italian paintings, that show Christian representations of holy reproduction, like the annunciation of Angel Gabriel and Virgin Mary. Continuing on, in the backspace of 1646, the viewer finds *The Chiral Gate*: a gate made of a stack of snails, forming the entrance to a life size vivarium where the viewer becomes the viewed.

Equal reproduction

Smith's exhibition introduces the viewer to a population of creeping and crawling creatures, who each carry the ability to both impregnate and bear children. Playing with the idea of 'chirality' (meaning: asymmetric in such a way that the structure and its mirror image are not superimposable) the artist proposes the idea of negotiation between binaries. Sets of hands, or a mirrored pair of snail shells, for example, can overlap but will never totally fit, as they are each other's mirror image. Hence, for them to fit together, they would have to work together, as equals. In his paintings, installations and sculptures, the artist combines ideas related to asexual reproduction and hermaphroditism to ornament and symbolism from Christian mythology. This way, Smith's work stimulates an exploration of current prevalent notions of sexuality, gender and power, with the intention to open up new ways of thinking.

About Paul DD Smith

Paul DD Smith (b. 1983, UK) lives and works in Berlin, Germany. He holds a Master degree of HFBK Hamburg (class: Jutta Koether), a Bachelor of Leeds Metropolitan University and a Bachelor of Arts and English Literature of Sussex University. In 2020, Smith received the grant from the Kulturprojekte Berlin; he was nominated for the Hiscox Kunst Preis (2017) and participated in the residency program of Künstlerhaus Vorwerkstift in Hamburg (2016) after he received the grant of HFBK Hamburg Freundeskreis. He has had exhibitions at Misc. Athens, Athens (2021); Stroboskop, Warsaw (2021); CK Offspace, Leipzig (2020); Kinderhook & Caracas, Berlin (2020); ACUD Macht Neu, Berlin (2020); ChertLüdde, Berlin (2019); Kunstverein Tiergarten, Berlin (2019); Galerie Genscher, Hamburg (2019); Real Positive, Köln (2016); Electrohaus, Hamburg (2016) and PSL (Project Space Leeds), Leeds (2012).

Note for the editor:
For more information, visit: <https://1646.nl/program/paul-dd-smith/>
Want to speak to 1646 or Paul? That's possible!
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The exhibition *The Chiral Gate!* is on view till 02/04/2023