

**HIPKISS
FORTUNE**

January 20 - March 18, 2023
Gaa Projects Cologne

Gaa Projects is pleased to present *Fortune*, an exhibition of recent works by the artist-duo Hipkiss. The exhibition will open with a reception on Friday, January 20, from 6 - 9 pm.

Hipkiss is the pseudonym of artist couple Alpha and Christopher Mason, who are known for their visionary drawings of vast landscapes and renderings of plants, insects, and birds. Envisioning vistas animated by a rewilded nature, the themes of their work revolve around elemental pairs- human-made versus nature, feminine forces versus masculine, democracy versus authoritarianism, abundance versus loss. Working with mixed media techniques incorporating graphite, silver ink, and metallic leaf, their predominantly monochromatic works on paper broaden the recorded histories of the natural world and chart the environmental legacies of human activity.

Synergetic and symbiotic, Hipkiss' work is produced in collaboration. The drawings are not the result of a solitary art practice but rather a shared vision that evolves over a process that takes place in and between two minds and two imaginations. Living and working on a nature reserve in the rural southwest of France, their work draws from the surroundings of their home studio as well as locales ranging from their native England, the American midwest, Western Europe, and Asia. Their work often involves detailed research into geographic regions, with specific care for the things that are often in the background- the landscape, and its floral and faunal inhabitants. Centered on non-human beings, their research is also built around geo-political histories and current events to allegorically expand a kind of naturalism into a hybrid of image, narrative, history, and speculative future.

Influenced by other amateur naturalists, including Anna Atkins, Robert Hooke, Elizabeth Blackwell, Maria Sibylla Merian, and Karl Blossfeldt, their work differs in its contemporary influences and insistence on the agency of nature. Rather than treating plants, non-human animals, and ecosystems as objects for observation, Hipkiss' work takes a more holistic and interconnected view. Their work is rooted in ideas of rewilding, a philosophy of habitat restoration that preserves, facilitates, and protects natural processes and biodiversity through reconnecting areas of wilderness. While deeply grounded in observation, Hipkiss' work relishes in imagination and envisions self-sustaining ecosystems. Through carefully considered narratives and image-making, they highlight the sovereignty of landscapes and honor ecosystems and their inhabitants.

In their exhibition *Fortune*, Hipkiss exhibits recent works, including three leporellos and new works on paper centered around the Rhine River, the first migration of a nightingale, the wild carrot, and the life cycles of fish, birds, plants, and ecosystems in the face of human intervention. In this context a fortune can be viewed as many things - a serendipitous event, a moment, a sighting, an abundance, an offering, a bounty, and also what we stand to lose.

Imagining a river journey, The Rhein Series narrates the incredible life cycles and migration of the Lamprey and the history of the Rhine. Dotted by densely populated areas, agricultural zones, barges, and systems of water management, the shoreline of the Rhine is illuminated by lampposts, lighted signs, nautical markers, and ambient city lights. Lined by roadways, bike paths, chainlink fences, buildings, docks, and points of access, these are the visible physical things, but there is much more to the image. The river is a life force, a habitat, a kind of architecture forming natural boundaries and borders of nations. In The Rhein Series, Hipkiss depicts a narrative of threatened fish populations, habitat loss, restoration, and preservation. Rendered in mass, slivery lamprey swim together upstream. Leaping out of the water, they jump into the sky, seemingly dispersing into the air, over, around, and through the water and the surrounding buildings, borders, and waterways. This pictorial and poetic leap underscores what is at stake and what is evaporating before us. Exploring the Rhine as a case study of human intervention and land management, The Rhein Series also shares a story of international cooperation and the urgency to protect species diversity by maintaining and restoring the natural functions of the river.

Similarly, in *Up North, Tall Wash, Daarn South, and Sunny/Sully*, we encounter natural geographies and artificial landscapes, this time through an anthropomorphised journey of a nightingale's first migration south. A quintessentially English mini-series taking place within England and beyond, the story follows the nightingale to unnamed and unidentified destinations. In *A Word in Saqqez*, we encounter the nightingale lost within the rewilded landscapes of the Zagros Mountains of Persia. In these works, we see the nightingale disappear and return along with the backsliding of environmental protections due to war, pandemic, and conflicts between nations/governing bodies.

Accompanying this vast journey are intricate panoramic works. In *Toddington to the Irish Sea* we see in the foreground a building covered in scaffolding. It is an old building meant to look like a new one. Suspended in time, the landscape is sparse and absent of people. Hidden along the shoreline is a Eurasian lynx. A keystone species, once intentionally eradicated and long gone from the present day Cotswolds landscape, there are proposals to reintroduce the lynx to revitalize the ecosystem and build future resilience.

Mirroring the horizontal format of these panoramas, Hipkiss delves into the book form with three leporellos: the *Field Guide to European Crows*, *Field Guide to Alauda*, and *Habicht/L'Atour/Goshawk*. Enclosed in artist-made boxes, the double-sided drawings function as a story and field guide. On one side, drawings of crows, finches, shorebirds, and skylarks are set in environments riddled with obstacles and trappings- devices, deterrents, fences, traps adorned with shiny objects, brambles and barbed-wire. On the other side are the cats and field notes, providing another kind of narrative context.

Born out of a belief in nature, Hipkiss advocates for preserving extant flora and fauna by facilitating the intrinsic processes of landscapes and ecosystems. In their work they build a new vocabulary for space and human relations with the natural world. Simultaneously forward facing and also looking back to specific moments in history, their work envisions something akin to a utopia, having not forgotten its dystopian forbearers. This future place is built on philosophies of large-scale, multisystem conservation efforts and offers hybrid and non-linear narratives that merge the past and future into one view.

HIPKISS (b. 1964, United Kingdom) is represented in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, John Michael Kohler Art Center, Cindy Sherman, Rudolf Zwirner, FRAC Picardie, FRAC Midi-Pyrénées, The Kupferstichkabinett, Antoine de Galbert, and The Whitworth, among others. A two-time recipient of aid from the DRAC Occitanie and four-time grantee of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Hipkiss has been exhibited internationally, with notable exhibitions at The Drawing Center, La Maison Rouge, David Zwirner, The Irish Museum of Modern Art, La Caixa, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Tate Britain, Whitechapel, and New Museum, among others. In 2001, they emigrated to France and settled, five years later, on a nature reserve in the rural southwest of the country, where they continue to live and work.