

CATBOX Contemporary hosted by Mélange

# Of Cats and Crones<sup>1</sup>

curated by Lena Albers

**Thomas Hawranke**

**Philip Hinge**

**Christian Theiß**

**5.5. – 16.6.2023**

*"I've met the cat that lives behind  
The looking glass, you see.  
He's very handsome, and he looks  
For all the world like me."<sup>2</sup>*

Inspired by surrealists such as self-proclaimed Catlady Leonora Carrington, the exhibition playfully approaches the fantastical tendencies of the surrealist movement. From the bizarre and surreal to the enchanting and mystical, *Of Cats and Crones* creates magical worlds and creatures, operating in the tension between overarching themes such as transformation, metamorphosis, and the blurring of the boundaries between human life and nature. As part of CATBOX Contemporary, an exhibition space founded by Philip Hinge in 2017, Thomas Hawranke, Philip Hinge and Christian Theiß create a world that seems to defy the laws of nature – creating a unique cosmos that reveals the unfathomable depths of the human psyche, evoking associations of fantastic fairy-tale worlds, lurking beasts, or idolatrous shrines.

This glooming world is literally enclosed by large-format paintings by CATBOX founder Philip Hinge (New York). As a visual bracket, they introduce us into partially bizarre dreamscapes, in which animalistic creatures may become eerie visualizations of the artist himself. With his aesthetic rooted in absurdism, he blends humor with a sense of unease and vulnerability, delving into anthropomorphism with startling sensitivity. Extending his painterly works is a collection of amateur photographs found in the depths of the internet spanning several decades. While manifesting ephemeral moments of everyday life's intricacies they inadvertently turn us into voyeurs of fragmented traces of strange and possibly already passed lives.

Following this approach, Christian Theiß (Düsseldorf) invites us to immerse ourselves in the world of mythology and its manifold landscapes full of fantastic creatures and beings. Like the Bakeneko, a shapeshifting cat-demon from Japanese folklore, his amorphous ceramics embody just as impressively the boundless scope of human imagination as well as its subconscious potential. Lurking, his creatures nest on the floating platforms and seem familiar and alien at the same time. In their physicality they refuse any definition and yet they recall vaguely familiar deities, forgotten myths or demonic Barbie houses.

The work "Play as Animals" by Thomas Hawranke, compiled from found footage of gamers streaming Grand Theft Auto V, playfully questions the role of the animal beyond the world of gaming through alternating perspectives. By acting as random animals, the players adopt their behavioral patterns and mannerisms while desperately trying to assert themselves back into the human world. By blurring the boundaries between human and non-human, the work offers a unique perspective on humanistic power dynamics and our rank in the natural order. If you're an animal, at least this world can be yours.

Lena Albers

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from an Essay by Mariana Cruz 2022 (Mariana Cruz: Of Cats and Crones: Hope and Ecofeminist Utopianism in Leonora Carrington's 'The Hearing Trumpet', in: Anglo Saxonica Vol. 20, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Eulalie Osgood Grover: Kittens and Cats – A Book of Tales, 1911.