

## CHECKLIST

Artist: Lui Shtini

Title: *Strange Gifts*

Venue: LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina

Dates: 26.04–29.06.2024

Photo credit: LambdaLambdaLambda

All photos: courtesy of the artist and LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina

1 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Exhibition view, *Strange Gifts*, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina, 2024.

2 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Exhibition view, *Strange Gifts*, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina, 2024.

3 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Exhibition view, *Strange Gifts*, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina, 2024.

work: Lui Shtini, Dessert Field Creature, 2023, Oil, acrylic gouache on aluminum composite panel, framed, 43 × 38 cm

4 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Lui Shtini, Dessert Field Creature, 2023, Oil, acrylic gouache on aluminum composite panel, framed, 43 × 38 cm

5 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Exhibition view, *Strange Gifts*, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina, 2024.

6 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Lui Shtini, Attempting Togetherness, 2023, Oil on aluminum composite panel, framed, 124,5 × 150 cm

7 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Exhibition view, *Strange Gifts*, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina, 2024.

8 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Exhibition view, *Strange Gifts*, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina, 2024.

9 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Lui Shtini, Found, 2023, Oil on aluminum composite panel, framed, 61 × 78,5 cm

10 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Exhibition view, *Strange Gifts*, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina, 2024.

11 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Exhibition view, *Strange Gifts*, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina, 2024.

12 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Lui Shtini, Inner Land Surveyor, 2022, Oil on aluminum composite panel, framed, 41 × 50,5 cm

13 Strange Gifts\_LS\_LLL\_2024:

Exhibition view, *Strange Gifts*, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina, 2024.

14 Strange Gifts LS LLL 2024:

Lui Shtini, *Self Excavation*, 2023, Oil on aluminum composite panel, framed, 117 × 152,5 cm

15 Strange Gifts LS LLL 2024:

Exhibition view, *Strange Gifts*, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina, 2024.

16 Strange Gifts LS LLL 2024:

Lui Shtini, *Combed From Depths*, 2023, Oil on aluminum composite panel, framed, 51 × 61 cm

17 Strange Gifts LS LLL 2024:

Exhibition view, *Strange Gifts*, LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina, 2024.

PRESS RELEASE :

In a late interview, not long before his death, the animal philosopher Jacques Derrida remarked that “the question of animality” is not “one question among others” but “the limit upon which all the great questions are formed and determined, as well as the concepts that attempt to delimit what is proper to man.” For Derrida, the animal question marks a limit to the anthropological confines and conceptual domestications of philosophy and language because it exceeds the opposition between animal and human, or rather between a multiplicity of animals, and the human, who is himself an irreducibly singular human animal. By opening up the question of animality beyond the oppositional limit between animal and man, Derrida emphasizes the great number of different structures in the animal world, “the multiplied limits between the protozoon, the fly, the bee, the dog and the horse,” revealing that there is “not one opposition between man and non-man,” but that “there are, between different organizational structures of the living being, many fractures, heterogeneities, and differential structures.”

In his second exhibition at LambdaLambdaLambda, Lui Shtini presents a new series of oil paintings on aluminum that take up the question of the animal to position it as an unruly force that crosses the many limits between wild species and artistic forms. Appropriating the traditional format and compositional structure of still life painting, Shtini reimagines the historical genre from a contemporary perspective, pushing it, through the unpredictable limits of animalistic boundlessness, beyond its conventional subject matters (vanitas images, floral arrangements, breakfast scenes) and symbolic meanings (the transient nature of life, the inevitability of death, the violence of consumption). While the still life traditionally depicts inanimate natural objects like food, flowers, or dead animals, as well as human-made goods such as books, vases, or coins, Shtini’s paintings depart from the realm of domesticity, death, and economy, animating still life painting through the multiplied limits and many fractures between animals and their multifold forms, often picturing them as the formless residue of representation – as something like a spider, as spit or the formless forms created from spilled liquid.

Set against mostly monochrome and mottled backgrounds, these formless forms or shapeless shapes of color positioned at the center of the images gradually transform through their fur-like surface textures and animalistic postures into zoomorphic figures, igniting the viewer’s fantasies about the animal and its manifold appearances. Something like a wild cat grooms itself with pleasure, its body morphing into the likeness of a sublime mountain landscape; a branched, perhaps wounded body of a bull-like entity extends into the semblance of an old, wise tree; a mass of flesh endeavors to intertwine its dots, striving towards a collective formation, attempting togetherness; an underground creature, perhaps an old mole, has combed itself from the depths utilizing human tools (a comb, or a knife and fork); a folded monstrous sack, strangely misshapen and structured at the same time, excavates itself with its sharp claws – all the while an Inner Land Surveyor flies by fleetingly. In the next instant, the creatural forms vanish and retreat into

the abstract forms whence they emerged, escaping the gaze of the human-animal observer who seeks to name and capture them, only to then resurface in the guise of another species, shape or form. Moving between the limits of figuration and abstraction, Shtini's strange subjects extend beyond the differential structures of the animal world described by Derrida, multiplying and crossing the limits we draw between living beings and inanimate matter.

Having abandoned classical canvas over a decade ago, Lui Shtini paints on thin, industrially manufactured aluminum panels, which allow for smooth surfaces and bright backlighting. By situating the question of animality against the background of industrial production and heavy labor, Shtini's paintings move away from romanticized notions of wildlife as well as the vanitas symbolism associated with deceased animals and hunting trophies. Instead, they mark the animal as a creature both domesticated by humans and as an irrepressible force spilling over the confines of social habits and tamed ways of life. As hybrids between animal figures and formal abstractions, Shtini's creatures, neither distinct bodies nor undifferentiated masses, demarcate the lines drawn by Western modernity between human and animal, nature and nurture, wild and tame, raw and cooked. With his unfamiliar still lives, which evoke both stillness and motion, form and formlessness, limits and boundlessness, Shtini invites the viewer to see through the conventional subjects of still life painting, and toward the many fractures, heterogeneities, and differential structures implied by the question of animality.

"On the scale of the centuries to come", Derrida asserts midway through the interview, "I believe there will be veritable mutations in our experience of animality and in our social bond with other animals." Lui Shtini's paintings open towards a beginning of a future of strange mutations in our experience of animality, that, like the monstrous mass of flesh trying to intertwine its dots into a collective body, attempt to forge social and artistic bonds that transcend the known limits and delimiting domestications of animality and art.

Sophia Rohwetter