

## Rachel Maclean Mama Mimi Duck

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### Curated by

Dr. Nadia Ismail

### Opening

Friday, 12.07.2024, 7 pm, Kunsthalle Giessen

### Duration

13.07.–13.10.2024



Fig.: Rachel Maclean, My first sight, 2024. Courtesy of the artist.

## Press View

Wednesday, 10.07.2024, 11 am

The artist will be present

This July, the Scottish artist Rachel Maclean (\*1987 Edinburgh, GB; lives in Glasgow, GB) will transform the Kunsthalle Giessen into a Gesamtkunstwerk (total artwork). The exhibition **Mama Mimi Duck** will showcase a walk-in diorama featuring digital paintings that are being exhibited for the first time, as well as two large-scale video installations. Maclean's two-dimensional works will be cleverly embedded within a trail of stage-like spaces that will allow the viewer to immerse themselves in different worlds.

Rachel Maclean's multimedia practice focuses on virtual realities, deepfakes, photography and film techniques, which she employs in order to bring garish, fantastical narratives to life. The artist develops satirical social parodies from politics and pop culture that address such topics as digitalisation, social media, gender and capitalism. Opulent and extravagantly staged, Maclean creates immersive environments and kitschy, grotesque paintings that blur the boundaries between two-dimensionality and fictional and real space.

Maclean's new body of work *Mama*, consisting of large-scale digital paintings embedded in an opulent landscape of curtains, forms the heart of the exhibition. *Mama* sheds light on the confusing and surreal experience of new motherhood. Furthermore, the artist will present her first fully animated film *upside mimi ιηιη ιμορ*, which addresses the pressure of social media, especially on young people. In her video work *DUCK*, Maclean explores topical trends such as reporting from unverified sources by means of deepfakes.

Recognisable motifs that recall an overly excessive gender reveal party or baby shower, such as balloons, ribbons, gift boxes and teddy bears in clichéd shades of baby blue and pink, dominate the imagery in *Mama*. Yet disturbing distortions gradually reveal themselves under closer inspection: the babies appear to be grotesquely disfigured, their bodies merging inextricably with those of their mothers. With a superficial innocence beneath which an oppressive darkness reveals itself, *Mama* reflects the complex, often ambivalent emotions of becoming a parent. By repeatedly cropping the mothers' heads out over the edge of the screen, Maclean also addresses the social invisibility of mothers. In doing so, the focus of the narrative shifts to the babies, who become the mediators of the mothers' often overlooked emotions.

The soaring compositions and cherub-like babies, partly generated and edited with AI, are derived from the playful, ornamental imagery of the Rococo period (ca. 1730 - 1780). Male artists of this period appropriated a style and subjects that had female connotations, without really providing any insight into the female experience. Thus, in order to explore motherhood, Maclean has set herself the task of reinterpreting seemingly feminine images. Elaborately

draped curtains, valances and ribbons carry this maximalist, exaggerated visual world – analogous to the setting of the video installation – into the physical exhibition space.

Subsequent to the life-size diorama, several rooms will be created in the Kunsthalle Gießen by means of extra walls, which will present the video works *DUCK* and *upside mimi* *шшшш умор*. Both of these works relate to different aspects of *Mama*. *upside mimi* *шшшш умор* also includes a critical examination of the female sphere of experience. Embedded in an installation, what initially appears to be a fairytale world in the film is increasingly turned on its head. Mimi, the main character and charming cartoon princess, appears perfect in every respect. She lives happily in an enchanted forest complete with Disney aesthetics. As a contemporary reincarnation of Snow White, Mimi has a magic mirror that looks like a smartphone with its yellow emoji face and heart shape. She never tires of asking it who the fairest in the land is. 'You,' replies the mirror, 'as long as you don't age,' and injects Mimi with a tincture. Instead of rejuvenating her, however, Mimi is confronted with her own ageing. This increasingly grotesque fairytale story is Maclean's commentary on the nightmarish and destructive consequences of our addiction to technology, its influence on the female body image and the false promises of capitalist overconsumption. Upside-down wall lights and a floor that emulates the ceiling bring the topsy-turvy world of the cartoon princess Mimi into the exhibition space.

*DUCK* also critically examines the latest technological developments. Here, Maclean has gone one step further than in *Mama* by using AI and machine learning to bring the dead back to life. By means of 'face swapping', the artist, who plays all the roles in her films herself, swaps her own face with those of Marilyn Monroe and a young Sean Connery. A surreal story unfolds that oscillates between 1960s Hollywood, splatter video game and science fiction film. The title *DUCK* refers to the saying 'If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck', meaning that something initially unknown can be easily and clearly identified by observing its behaviour and appearance. This so-called 'duck test' therefore assumes that things really are as they appear and that we can trust our perception. In an ironic inversion of this saying – what appears to be a UFO in the film turns out to be a duck – the film reflects on how deepfakes of our post-truth era are unhinging its validity. Thus Maclean questions truth and lies, as well as the reliability of information and images. In order to enhance the immersive quality, elements such as curtains, lighting and benches are transferred from the film into the real space, thereby blurring the boundary between filmic staging and physical experience.

**Rachel Maclean** lives and works in Glasgow. She studied painting and drawing at Edinburgh College of Art. Her work has been exhibited at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Tate Britain, London; Trade Gallery, Nottingham; Kunsthalle Kiel, Kiel and Kunstpalais Erlangen, Erlangen. She also represented Scotland at the 57th Biennale di Venezia 2017.

**Rachel Maclean on the exhibition:** "*Mama Mimi Duck* stands as one of my most ambitious solo exhibitions to date. Collaborating with Kunsthalle Giessen has been an extraordinary opportunity, and the generous scale of their gallery has allowed me to present distinct bodies of work developed over the past four years. My aim in designing the installation was to create an immersive and engaging experience that transports visitors into three unique worlds. I'm also especially excited to be showcasing my brand-new series of digital paintings, '*Mama*', for the first time."

**Nadia Ismail on the exhibition:** "For the first time, the Kunsthalle is transformed into a walk-in diorama in which the individual works completely suck you into the artist's world. Rachel Maclean's unique, sickly sweet visual language immediately casts a spell over you. This visual language cleverly and subtly develops a successively increasing degree of socio-critical themes, such as motherhood, the dictates of beauty and youth and finally the question of postulated truth."

A joint catalogue will be published to accompany the exhibition in cooperation with Kunstpalais Erlangen.

**With the support of**

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Fig.: Rachel Maclean, DUCK, 2023, digital film still. Courtesy of the artist.

## Visitor information

You can find further information about the opening, our accompanying programme including schedules of events as well as access information online at:

[www.kunsthalle-giessen.de](http://www.kunsthalle-giessen.de) | [www.giessen.de](http://www.giessen.de)

## Accompanying Programme

### Guided tour by the curator Dr. Nadia Ismail

Thur. 08.08., 6 pm

### Art and coffee

Wed. 04.09., 3 pm

Registration by: 02.09.

kunsthalle@giessen.de, +49 641 306 1041

Participation fee 2,50 €

### Art education in individual conversation

every Sat. 2–4 pm

(English on request)

### Sunday Guided Tour

Sun. 4 pm

14.07. + 11.08. + 08.09. + 13.10.

(German language)

### Further information:

[www.kunsthalle-giessen.de](http://www.kunsthalle-giessen.de)