

Hugo Canoilas: Fables

Opening: Thursday, 5th December 2024, 7–9pm

Duration: 6th December 2024 until 18th January 2025

Galerie Martin Janda is showing *Fables*, **Hugo Canoilas's** second solo exhibition from 6th December 2024 until 18th January 2025. The show presents a compendium of the artist's latest works, including large-scale paintings, drawings, and sculptures produced within the last two years.

The etymology of the word fable traces back to Old French, meaning "falsehood, fictitious narrative; a lie, pretense." The word is derived from the Latin *fabula*, "story with a lesson, tale," and from *fari*, "to speak, tell, say." The later meaning "animal story" comes from the popularity of the Greek Aesop's tales, which defined it as a short, comic tale making a moral point about human nature, usually through animal characters behaving in human ways.

Promptly, its meaning shifted from serving the purpose of speaking to others, communicating a shared reality, to storytelling and later on to the creation of fictitious or speculative realities. In other words, a fable is a literary form able to contain in itself both reality and fiction, human and non-human, natural and artificial, physical and immaterial, figurative and abstract.

While writing this text, I learned about an online library called Fable that can generate unique and random passwords. As far back as Ancient Mesopotamia, the Akkadian word for "password" was the same as for "omen." Not only did the word celebrate the almost mythical difficulty of deciphering, but it also connotes a shared community responsibility.

An omen was a sign from the gods that indicated future events. It was believed to be a message from the gods about a complex system of correspondences that related all beings and events to one another. Omens can be found in many places, including animal entrails, observed in the sky through eclipses, or in everyday life occurrences, such as a spider spinning a web at a window.

Hugo Canoilas's artistic practice, particularly known for its intersectional interest in ecofeminism and the interaction between natural and artificial environments, explores the physical and oneiric landscapes in this exhibition. Reflecting on the current political and social affairs, the artist was driven by impulses and intimate gestures deeply rooted in the influences of Fantastic Realism, German Magic Realism, Surrealists like Leonora Carrington, as well as Vinciane Despret's speculative writing.

These influences are vividly depicted in the most recent fluid paintings, in which images as dreamlike visions are painted figuratively, strongly influenced by Kubin's oeuvre. They are installed in direct relation to *Who Killed Cock Robin?*¹, a series of handmade headwear, first presented as part of the opera *Hold Your Breath* that premiered this summer at Bregenzer Festspielhaus in Bregenz. This dark, see-through, layered set of hats functions almost like masks, disguising humans into shapes of animals such as a fly, a dove, a sparrow, a fish, and a beetle.

¹ an old English nursery rhyme in which a group of animals talks about the death of a robin (a small bird) and offers to help at his funeral.

This year I started using Duolingo to learn and practice German. One of its most distinctive aspects is its eccentric sentences, which I've been collecting via screenshots:

"The witch is bringing her date along, he is a bear."

"My horse collects teeth."

"I am crying and the onion is laughing."

"My dog is unemployed and only has one eye."

"Is she picking the horse up from the train station?"

"We are inviting a snail to the barbecue?"

"My horse is not an artist but an architect."

The app website explains that these sentences are memorable examples helping learners remember vocabulary and grammar rules more effectively. One cannot help comparing this sentence-building operation with early Surrealist writings, animism—the belief in the “animation of all nature,” that non-human beings, such as animals, plants, mountains, and forces of nature like the ocean, winds, sun, or moon can be maintained social relationships with—and naturally, the act of “speaking” and “fantasizing” present in the etymology of the word *Fable* itself.

Crawling over History (2022) is part of a series of eerie graphite drawings on debris shells. These appear as if they were texts—almost beyond language—evoking and interweaving the historicity of those phantasms and self-made human projections. Canoilas's animal-human landscapes, captured by delicate and lyrical graphite lines, lend themselves, as in Goya's work, to exploring the boundaries and mutual overlaps between dream and reality

In *Fables*, Canoilas presents an oneiric ecosystem of new potentially narrative works that suggest and unfold relational and multiple visions of uncertain futures in a world of the most uncanny visions, where primordial crustacean animals and embryonic-looking hybrid creatures co-exist and interconnect. But by no means can dreams be considered a mere escape from reality, it's rather about bringing forth the real from its potentiality through imagination.

Andreia Santana

Hugo Canoilas, born 1977 in Lisbon (PT), lives and works in Vienna (AT).