

BARBARA HAINZ

In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

April 25 - May 05, 2025

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almost seen

In Buddhist tradition, the Realm of Hungry Ghosts is one of the six realms of existence within the Wheel of Life, each inhabited by beings shaped by the echoes of their accumulated actions in former turnings of the wheel — in lives that came before. This realm is characterised by spirits endlessly troubled by insatiable desires — hungers that can never be fulfilled. In his book *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*, Dr. Gabor Maté uses the concept of the Hungry Ghosts from Buddhist tradition as a metaphor to deeply explore the nature of addiction. Drawing parallels between the inhabitants of the fifth realm and our constant human search for something outside ourselves to fulfill our desire and relief, Gabor Maté suggests that the Realm of Hungry Ghosts is a place we slip into often, some of us unable to ever leave.

I find myself returning to this thought of the Realm of Hungry Ghosts, not as a distant underworld haunted by shadowed creatures, but as a reflection of the human condition itself — of the way we sometimes linger in our own lives, craving without arrival. A mirror for a kind of hunger we all know. A persistence of desire, longing that refuses to vanish. A presence made of absence, a ghost born of longing.

Ghosts — neither fully alive nor fully gone. Creatures of the liminal. Trapped between two worlds, visible and invisible at once. Translucent, floating in a mist of shifting silhouettes. Lacking clear features — only outlines and the uncanny sense of presence. Small, glowing blurs drifting among formless shadows. Shapeshifters, beyond the tactile and the sensory, melting and morphing like cloudy water, like dimmed light from afar, like softening wax.

In The Realm of Hungry Ghosts, Barbara Hainz creates a world that hovers between the haunted and the known. Moving through the exhibition space, seemingly calm and idyllic scenes shift in an instant, beginning to swallow us like a vortex, spiralling from the centre, trembling at the edges. Inside an old tv translucent textiles are hung to dry inside a room. The light is gloomy, the window closed. Almost closed. There is no movement, no sound, only the curtain suggests a gentle stirring of air, barely noticeable behind the stillness. A powerful exhale from outside tears the window open, and the hung pieces begin to sway. Unreadable sounds flood the room. Moments of subtle movement trade places with complete stillness. An invisible force slams the window shut — then opens it again — impossible to resist. A fierceburst of presence makes the hanging textiles convulse, violently clashing against each other. We realise they don't have the soft, comforting texture of freshly washed clothes hung neatly in the sun. Instead, they feel lifeless, crystallised in their suspended gesture — like garments forgotten outside in winter. Chased by invisible whispers, they seem to desperately try to escape the drying line, trapped in their own fragility.

Wax, it seems, often serves as the material of the uncanny, the transitional. Death masks, wax figures, preserved body parts in anatomical museums — each a manifestation of the borderline, of the in-between. The wax that surrounds us in Hainz's works is also here to preserve. It preserves echoes and whispers from past moments, captured forever and hidden in the layers of paraffin. Protected, invisible to the eye. Not fully satisfying our desire to know, to see, Hainz offers us only a shadow, a silhouette, a backside. We catch ourselves wondering — are the fragments we encounter throughout the exhibition ghost-notes of something personal and vanished, or sterile gestures of accident? We won't know. The artist keeps us hungry.

In a polished aluminium frame, supported by a thick, crisp passepartout, Barbara Hainz places an offering before us — an offering to us, the Hungry Ghosts, in an attempt to calm our endless desire to uncover the hidden. *we have been here before* brings the underneath to the surface. Precisely cut in its verticality, it reminds of a portal, giving us a voyeuristic glimpse into a situation the artist tells us we have encountered before. And it's precisely this feeling we are led to — the sensation of being on the verge of remembering or understanding something, but not quite able to grasp it. Like the feeling of having a memory or thought just out of reach. *A presque vu*, almost seen. Teetering on the edge of memory, swaying back and forth. Like the ghost of a thought.

Monika Georgieva