

Hannah Black
Harsh Muting

March 20th - May 3rd 2026
via Posillipo 23
Napoli

zaza' is pleased to announce Hannah Black's first solo exhibition at the gallery. Titled HARSH MUTING, an anagram of "human rights", the show consists of five circular oil on canvas paintings, based on the rotating word-play disks in Duchamp's surrealist film *Anemic Cinema*. It is a continuation of a series of works first exhibited at her 2025 show at Arcadia Missa in London, HUSH MR GIANT (also an anagram of "human rights").

The spiral text on each painting derives from five articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), contorted into nonsense poetry. "The will of the people..." becomes "Fur will over pee pulled...", and so on. This "sounds-like" process uses homophony to make associations between words. Homophonic connections that produce random meanings within a language are part of "the deposit, the alluvium, the petrification that is marked by the way a group handles its unconscious collective experience... the death of the sign it carries." (Lacan, 1974). In our era, the Declaration's liberal vision of universal humanity - never realized, but ideologically powerful - has been publicly slaughtered by the western powers that still congratulate themselves with having invented it, and replaced by a brazen, desperate doctrine of "might is right".

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was composed in 1948 - shortly after the devastations of World War II and the Nazi genocide, the same year as the colonization of Palestine, and just before the decolonization movements of the 1950s - by a committee led by the victorious Allied powers. Never legally binding and full of implicit assumptions of Western hegemony, the declaration outlined the basic rights supposedly afforded to all of humanity.

Seventy-eight years later, as the logic and actuality of genocide intensifies its grip over the combined and uneven suffering of the world, "humanitarian" values rain down as high-tech bombs and low-tech torture.

This mutilated promise of universality has its roots in the revolutions of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the radical potentials of which quickly calcified into new rationalizations of domination. Against this ruin, the paintings

invoke surrealism as, in Suzanne Césaire's words, "the tightrope of our hopes" (*Tropiques*, 1943) stretching over the abyss of fascism. The inner freedom expressed by the surreal offers an escape from colonial rationality that persists, perhaps uselessly, despite attempts to brutalize life into submission.

Each painting is penetrated with nails and thread, delineating the astrological event chart of a historical revolution whose animating concerns loosely relate to the abstraction of the article in question. (For example, Article 15, "no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality", is pierced by the First Intifada of 1987.) The revolutions/rebellions are understood as real historical symptoms of the collective psychosis of universal humanism. They act as reminders that the concept of a universal human subject is a shifting, strange horizon whose meaning is determined by the contingencies of struggle and power.