

HUNT KASTNER

PELES DUO: *portals*

11. 4. – 23. 5. 2026

curated by Hana Janečková

Hunt Kastner is pleased to present *portals* – the first presentation in the Czech Republic of Berlin-based Peles Duo, founded in 2005 in Frankfurt (originally as Peles Empire) by Katharina Stöver and Barbara Wolff. Their site-specific installation at Hunt Kastner introduces the core interest of Peles Duo's practice: photography and the copy, their material transformation, and encounters with mythology and history. Through its central character, the Goddess Cybelle, the exhibition articulates Peles Duo's concern with a more nuanced understanding of female historical figures. Cybelle's hybrid and shifting form allows for an unfolding of the work, interconnected with different parts of time, memory and space with multiple entry and exit points. In the new paintings and with the premiere of the film *ashes within you* (2026) – a collaboration with artist Rob Crosse – the exhibition questions hierarchy and authorship, where 'portals' enable its ongoing transformation.

Unfolding portals

The setting: green fields, tools, an archaeological site, markings of a field study. In *ashes within you* the artists, in matching overalls, set to work, equipped with spades. In a wheelbarrow, a bulbous ceramic structure made of hundreds of pomegranate seeds is exposed in the sun. The clay's moisture has long evaporated when fired at 1000°C, in the bright light of the day framed by 8mm film it turns pale grey. Inspired by Sergen Parajanov's *The Colour of Pomegranates* (1969), the fruit's symbolism – of sexual power, fertility and the divinity of Cybelle – transforms in Peles Duo's practice between forms and mediums: from an image to a glossy, bulbous sculpture of raw and fired clay.

The shapeshifting is also an artistic process of seeing, of encounters between hands and eyes and its subject matter. In Sandro Botticelli's painting *Madonna and the Pomegranate*, the baby Jesus holds the bulbous fruit in his hand, its interior exposed. Allegedly an accurate rendering of the anatomy of the human heart, it brings the inner architecture of the body from the divine to the world. The hands touch the heart, and in this symbolic exchange, the meaning multiplies.

In Peles Duo's new sculpture-painting *mess and memory (Ciamberlano) II*, Cybelle's eyes meet the open mouth from Luca Ciamberlano's engraving, a threshold of the body and entry point of the artwork. In *tool of tools (our hands)*, hands reach out over each other to point, fingers ready to pinch. Both artists take turns in applying layers of paint on jesmonite, and in the collaborative process of painting, they share personal intimacy offered by the individualistic medium. Folding the world into the cracks in the material, over the artist's own body fragments, and photographic prints, their hands become tools alongside the other elements of the painting: declarative but also sensual, portals to an emotional subtlety.

Using the illusionist technique of trompe-l'oeil, the surface of the floor installation in the gallery imitates depth, allowing objects such as clay pomegranate seeds and a mammoth tooth to submerge or rise as if physically present. The Phrygian goddess Cybelle is here portrayed in tin, a material with an unstable status that can be elevated with copper to bronze. In alchemy, it symbolises an incompleteness, but also a readiness for transformation. Cybelle was born of a hermaphroditic birth, with multiple breasts described as fruits or eggs, contested by a masculinist reading as sacrificed bull testicles. For Peles Duo, to recover the vital power of such an abundant female form, unfamiliar kinds of love and power are called for.

In the film *ashes within you*, Cybelle undergoes such a transmutation, the artwork is submitted to a divination ritual as a gift to the earth. In the film's climactic scene, our eyes meet Cybelle's in a long take, while the intensity of her gaze is diminishing with a growing distance from the ground. It is a show of visibility and seeing, but also of the medium itself. The drone camera's footage transitions to the frames of 8mm film, bringing to mind the processual quality of Peles's making. In what Kirsty Bell termed 'reverse archaeology', Cybelle is buried, the sculpture designed for immortality. The burial is preceded by the symbolic sacrifice - the photograph of a female torso with pomegranate is set on fire, turning ritualistically to ashes. The ceramic form is covered by soil - the hole in the ground - the portal closes under the grass.

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Something must be thought of, for things to take such a flowing form, when returning the matter to its origin. Sculpture or bodies: can we truly give ourselves back to the Earth, after being moulded, fired and burnt, exhibited and contextualised? Marked by the world, it is never the same soil, never the same body, its folds lead to a different time, space and memory. Art is not a tool to move us elsewhere – the fabric of art is the world as it is. In *portals*, it all opens to previously unseen glimpses of its transition.

Text by Hana Janečková

Exhibited works

portals, 2026

site-specific floor installation, A3 colour copies
dimensions variable

mess and memory (Ciamberlano) II, 2026

acrylic and UV print on burnt gypsum, pigments and rope in steel frame
29,7 x 21 cm

tool of tools (our hands), 2026

acrylic and UV print on burnt gypsum, pigments and rope in steel frame
29,7 x 21 cm

Fontaine/Fontana, 2026

acrylic and UV print on burnt gypsum, pigments and rope in steel frame
42 x 29.7 cm

the double world, 2026

acrylic and UV print on burnt gypsum, pigments and rope in steel frame
42 x 29,7 cm

cacodylic eye, 2026

acrylic and UV print on burnt gypsum, pigments and rope in steel frame
29,7 x 21 cm

ashes within you, 2026

in collaboration with Rob Crosse
video Super 8 plus HD video, sound
8 mins 23 secs

Special thanks to the Czech Ministry of Culture and Prague City for their ongoing support of our exhibition program.