



Rue Saint-Georges 14,

1050, Brussels

info@ingategallery.com,

ingategallery.com

Press Release

JULIA KISSINA, SENNE ROEKENS: TALES OF SPACE AND TIME

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Duo exhibition entitled “*Tales of Space and Time*”, on view from 23 May until 13 June 2024, *brings* together ink drawings on paper by *Julia Kissina* (b. 1966 in Kiev, UA) and sculptures by *Senne Roekens* (b. 1995 in Antwerp, BE) in a fascinating and emotional installation which creates a dialogue between two artists and engages irony, fantasy, and imagination.

Julia Kissina

Julia Kissina is an artist and writer. Born in Kiev, she studied dramatic writing in Moscow, then moved to Germany, graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and taught as a Professor of New Media and Art Photography. Currently the artist lives between Berlin and New York City.

In 2000 Julia Kissina herded an actual flock of sheep into the Museum of Modern Art in Frankfurt as part of a performance. In 2003 she curated the *Art & Crime* festival in Berlin, and performed in a German prison. In 2006 she created *The Dead Artist's Society*, which held séances to conduct *Dialogues with Classics* such as Duchamp and Malevich.

A member of the Moscow Conceptualist movement and Russian literary underground avant-garde (Samizdat), Julia Kissina is the author of several novels and story collections translated throughout Europe. Suhrkamp Verlag publishing house (DE) has published her novels *Springtime on the Moon*, *Elefantina*, and an anthology of contemporary prose «*Revolution Noir*», which she edited. In 2018 she created *Urban Dictionary* a literary festival in Berlin, that brought together writers from New York and Berlin.

Since 2020 she has been working on a group of ink drawings that develop her interest in the undercurrents of eroticism and even violence in supposedly polite society: people, half-human creatures, and strange animals populate cocktail parties whose participants are partly taken from vintage film noir and partly derived from Kissina's unusual, telling ability to describe the inherent complexities of contemporary social life.

The drawings themselves are mostly crowded scenarios of figures, not always entirely human, mingling together at what might be a high-level art opening or a toast for the preview of a big movie. If it were not for the presence of not fully human invit ees, the aristocratic air of the imagery and the black-tie attire of the party participants would be just another record of wealthy people celebrating culture. But, in fact, something else is happening: the people are arranged in an attitude of irony, in which Kissina takes her considerable drawing skills and delivers a judgment, far from benign,

on the pretensions of men and women. It is true enough that all the world is a stage, but who would have thought that the actors would be so openly possessed of unkempt desire. Still, Kissina's judgment is neither final nor absolute; she is recording the undercurrents of a need for recognition as well as human closeness in a way that stays away from judgment.

Kissina, in her art, knows the human predicament—the gap between our public self and our prejudicial desire—very well. The artist's ongoing question, "How can this gap be described?", is central to Kissina's skepticism regarding social posing, part of cultivated life for a long time now. How do we make sense of a façade that remains one, especially in the world of art, which is supposedly given to a trenchant, truthful analysis of human behavior? While Kissina's work cannot easily be compared, in stylistic terms, to the German expressionism of the first third of the 20th century, perhaps its goal, namely the interrogation of hierarchical positioning within polite society, and the themes raised by the artist, are closer to this artistic movement by their meanings than it seems.

"I talk about what I see around me, making movie on paper. This is true independent cinema without beginning or end. I have actors and characters, stars, animals, magicians, maniacs and libertines. I have castles and deserts, planets and mouse holes at my disposal. Recently, someone said that this is a movie that cannot exist. During work, I feel being in a trance and all I need for working is an isolation. So the recipe of the creation is simple." Julia Kissina



Beyond humor, the liberating attitude associated with irony, Kissina offers little in the way of a future. It doesn't mean she is acceptant of the situation, only that her visual outbursts demonstrate the hopeless anger of integrity. Despite their comic aspect, these drawings are brilliant descriptions of a world gone wrong. But we remember we are looking at art—at a version of the real. Our hope is based on the simple pursuit of art. If there is something inherently grim within Kissina's vision, there is also the human comedy softening our impulse to dismiss human motives. For example, considering the woman whose buttocks are placed so that they are facing us, and considering hybrid creatures whose imaginative existence, let alone their reality, gives us pause, our only remedy may be a tragicomic response. The question of what to do remains, but the answer is not immediately available. Indeed, it doesn't look like the quandary can be solved—even the "enlightened" pursuit of art is in doubt, although Kissina's use of that word gives us a hope we deserve to have. Her trenchant hand and skeptical eye offer us a mirror reflecting the way we are, disposed as we are to desire, power, creatures beyond imagining, and the imagination that publicly recognizes them.

Irony, to the point of sarcasm, abounds in this set of drawings, which turn a sharp eye on people determined to make a splash. Kissina is an artist whose patience for the foibles of people is more complex, though, than it would seem. She commands a sharp view of the superficial mores of her subjects, who seem stuck in a time slightly before ours. But she also finds this comic, enabling her to comment with accuracy on our projection of an inoffensive persona when our deeper desires, not always so attractive or acceptable, lurk just beneath the surface.

Selected solo exhibitions include among others:

Brandenburg Museum of Modern Art, Cottbus (DE), 2022; Phantom Gallery Project on Union Square, New York (USA), 2022, *Julia Kissina*, Gallery BB, Art colony Wedding, Berlin (DE), 2021, *Chicken-Party*, Kunstsalon Doelberg, Goslar (DE), 2020, *Conspiracy*, Gallery BB, Art colony Wedding, Berlin (DE), 2018, *Metaphysics vs. Politics #3*, Project by Julie August, Berlin/Buenos Aires, 2017;

Komplexraum #15, General Public, Berlin (DE), 2016; *Metaphysics versus Politics #2*, Gallery BLA, Art colony Wedding, Berlin (DE), 2015; *Animal magnetism*, Gallery Brian Herlihy, County Kerry (IRE), 2014; *Secret Rituals: Julia Kissina and Caro Suerkemper*, Hartwig Gallery Ruegen (DE), 2013;

Komplexraum #2: Julia Kissina and Lucy Powell, General Public, Berlin (DE), 2012; *Meteorites on the Sledges*, Berlin-Weekly Gallery (DE), 2011; *Metaphysics vs. Politics. Factory* (4th Moscow Biennale) (RU), 2011; *Shadows cast People*, Gallery Pobeda, Moscow (RU), 2010; *Shadows cast People*, 18M Gallery, Berlin (DE), 2010; *Conversation with Alexandra Exter*, Art-Kiev, Armor, Kiev, (UA), 2010;

I see something what you don't, Bereznitsky Gallery, Berlin (DE), 2008; *The Dead Artists Society*, Project k48, Vienna (AT), 2008; *The Phantom of the Art*, 18M Gallery, Berlin (DE), 2007; *The Serious Art*, Kassel Kunstverein (Documenta 12), 2007; *Gourmets and predators*, Vera Pogodina Gallery, Moscow (RU), 2007; *Leonardo vs. Pollock*, General Public, Berlin (DE), 2007; *Conference with Malevich*, The New Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (RU), 2007.

Senne Roekens

Senne Roekens (b. 1995) lives and works in Antwerp. He studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp, where he obtained his master's degree in Sculpture.

The sculptures by Senne Roekens transmit the feeling of truth of things, something stable and constant which goes through time and remains faithful to its spirit.

Discovering the works created by the artist is akin to the experience of traveling both historically and geographically and observing revelation of classical shapes and characters with modern materials and spirit. Some of his sculptures remind archaeological treasures, an object which accumulates both material and spiritual, being changed and reshaped by the flow of time.

Senne Roekens plays with different materials and freely moves from classical clay, ceramic, plaster, and metal to the contemporary techniques using plastic, plexiglass, isolation foam, polystyrene, epoxy, acrylic, silicone, and concrete. The choice of the matter, the initial substance is very important for the artist.

Each work requires its own material which brings the unique character and initiates specific perception of each piece. The appearance of Senne Roekens's creations turns from semi- transparency and light to the concrete interpreting stone surface, acrylic which can be perceived as a mineral, and so on.

His works vary in scale ranging from small to monumental pieces, often combining into figurative compositions which evoke a sense of tension as if they've been shaped by the passage of time, lending them a profound sense of history. He works expressively and physically, ensuring that both the sculpture and the artist himself are always in movement.

"I see myself as an artist who delves into the traditions and history of sculpture and its continuity, exploring how the past intersects with the present. I blend historic and modern materials, combining classical sculpting techniques with

contemporary mediums to craft images that feel both ancient and new. By playing with time, space, and cultural influences, I seek to create a world that feels undiscovered and rich with hidden histories. Drawing from sources beyond traditional historical boundaries, my aim is to evoke a sense of mystery and wonder, infusing my sculptures in a timeless and universal way."

Senne Roekens creates his own mythology with fantastic animals, giants, grotesque personages, crystal castles, and ritual objects. The artist's world is full of mystery, beauty, and magic.

For the exhibition, Senne Roekens gathers a collection of recent works created with different materials. These sculptures share the prevalent use of clay or ceramics, materials he frequently employs in his artistic process. By breathing new life into some of these sculptures, through the process of molding and casting them in contemporary materials, he adds layers of renewal to his work. This act of rejuvenation offers these pieces a new perception.

Some pieces are made with raw clay with a grey mat surface. The raw clay gives the works the sense of fragility, the beginning of being, as if they exist on the final step of the creation, and at the same time, we feel that it is still under the transformation and materialization, in the moment of birth.



"For creating the installation for this show, I've carefully chosen a range of artworks that reflect different stages of my artistic practice. As I looked back at images I hadn't seen in years, I discovered new qualities in older works that I hadn't noticed before. These pieces represent the beginnings of ideas and moments of reflection. You can find an image of a found object that I've transformed using various materials to give it new life and purpose. Some larger artworks were originally one piece, but I had to take them apart what gave them a new look. Some pieces have been worn down over time, so I've repaired them and added different materials to make them look fresh again. Each artwork tells a story of its own journey, blending past experiences with present interpretations.



In these works, it's not always the initial ideas that are the most important. The process of how they are created plays an equally significant role. The ideas are often just fleeting fragments, but for me, it's in the making itself where you can feel the tension." Senne Roekens

Selected exhibitions include among others:

"Friend or Foe", Life is Art Gallery, Antwerp (BE), 2021 (solo); "First Lab", independent art space, Antwerp (BE), "Collection Show", Life is Art Gallery, Antwerp (BE), 2024; "Faar & Beyond", Atelier Faar, Antwerp (BE), 2023; "Life is Art x Jesus Eloy, Casper Fredeus & Senne Roekens", Life is Art Gallery, Antwerp (BE), 2022; "Hier hebben we veel werk ingestoken", 252 CC Cultuurhuis, Ekeren (BE) 2020; "BLOOM", Galerij DAK, Utrecht (NL); "To Be Antwerpen", Engelen en Volkers, Antwerp (BE), 2019.