

MASI Lugano
Museo d'arte
della Svizzera italiana,
Lugano

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Johanna Kotlaris

HUMERE

Manor Art Prize 2024 Ticino

4 October 2024 – 6 January 2025
Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano
LAC venue

Curated by Francesca Benini and Taisse Grandi Venturi

PRESS RELEASE

Lugano, 24 September 2024

MASI Lugano presents the exhibition "HUMERE" by Johanna Kotlaris (Schaffhausen, 1988), winner of the Ticino edition of the 2024 Manor Art Prize. For the occasion, the artist has created a new film and a series of installations: an evocative visual and audio journey that follows the experiences of a young, contemporary (anti)heroine, Humere. The main character of Kotlaris's film, around which the show revolves, is a zombie emotionally and physically ensnared in a vicious circle that sees her pursuing care, connections and relationships. Using a cinematographic approach inspired by musicals, the artist uses her character's (mis)adventures to explore profound issues such as the difficulties and angst involved in social interactions, and the paradoxes and extremes of the society we live in. As often characterizes Kotlaris's works, language is the medium used to subvert situations and moods.

Humere is a Latin verb that means "to be wet", but is also the root of the word "humour". And Johanna Kotlaris conveys a sense of ironic detachment towards the perpetually wet protagonist of her work - played by the artist herself. The young zombie begins her day in her cluttered Berlin apartment, looking at messages on her smartphone, a scene followed by a series of encounters with unlikely characters: Max, the man she forms an ambiguous, ambivalent relationship with, a female "pirate" she falls in love with, and her beautician Désirée, who takes care of her. All these encounters remain at the stage of merely potential relationships, highlighting evident problems in communicating authentically. And throughout the film, Humere remains wet: an embarrassing state that echoes her awkward, unresolved vulnerability, but also the trauma she carries inside her, having died from drowning.

Between everyday life and paradoxes, connections and solitude, Johanna Kotlaris's characters operate in a vaguely unsettling, ambiguous scenario, which conceals mysterious symbols and references to iconography and religious imagery. The film's soundtrack, which alternates dialogue with pop songs composed for the piece, is a central aspect and accompanies the audience throughout the exhibition, which also includes a new series of installations.

Like moments distilled from an extended screenplay, settings and atmospheres from the film have been engraved, painted or imprinted with photosensitive paint onto large plasterboard panels.

Visual fragments that are midway between sculpture and painting, these installation clusters forge a semantic continuity between the physical exhibition space and that of the film inhabited by Humere, between urban glimpses of Berlin and bodies of water obscured by lake debris. Among these images there are words too, made-up garment brands that recall stage costumes. There are also some garments on display, which the artist has treated with synthetic resins, and left permanently hung out to dry, as it were – and destined to remain wet.

Huge sails and old ropes complete the exhibition, recalling the shipwreck, both physical and emotional, that Humere experiences in her formative journey in the film.

"By letting water metaphorically seep into the exhibition space, the installations underline the importance of this element in HUMERE. The common denominator of most of the scenes in the film, it defines the main character's existential condition, highlighting the symbolic contrast between its allegorical significance, linked to birth and the flow of life, and the story of Humere, a zombie whose mysterious end viewers are invited to think about", commented the curators of the project, Francesca Benini and Taisse Grandi Venturi.

The exhibition is accompanied by the book *Jessica Jessica Jessica*, published by Jungle Books in collaboration with MASI Lugano. The publication, conceived by the artist as another work in its own right, gathers letters addressed to Jessica.

On Friday 4th October at 6 pm in the exhibition space, the artist Johanna Kotlaris will be reading selected texts from the book *Jessica Jessica Jessica*.
Free event organized in collaboration with LAC edu.

The artist

Johanna Kotlaris (*1988) lives and works in Zurich. Her work has been presented at numerous institutions, including the Bally Foundation, Lugano (2024); KIOSKO Galeria, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia (2023); the Swiss Performance Prize, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne (2022); the Prix Mobilière, Art Genève, Geneva (2022); Cantonale Berne Jura, Kunsthalle Bern, Bern (2021); Les Urbaines, Arsenic Theatre, Lausanne (2021) and Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich (2021). She has received numerous awards and accolades, including the Prix Mobilière (finalist, 2022), the Swiss Performance Prize (finalist, 2022), the UBS Culture Foundation Visual Arts Grant (2020), Patronagefonds by Kunstverein Basel (2018 & 2017) and the Gerrit Rietveld Academie Award (2013). Kotlaris has been artist-in-residence at Rupert, Vilnius; ABA-Air Berlin Alexanderplatz, Berlin; Foundation BINZ39, Zurich, and F+F Kunstatelier thanks to the support of the City of Zurich; as well as spending a period of residence in Berlin with the support of the Department of Culture of the Canton of Zurich. Johanna Kotlaris holds a BA in Design from Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam and an MFA with honours from Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam.

The Manor Cultural Award: a commitment to the new generation of Swiss artists

Johanna Kotlaris is the winner of the Ticino edition of the 2024 Manor Art Prize.

The Manor Art Prize, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2022, is one of the main prizes for the promotion of contemporary art in Switzerland. It was first awarded in 1982 by Philippe Nordmann with the aim of providing a platform for young Swiss artists. It is assigned every year by a jury of experts, in alternating locations: Aarau, Basel, Biel/Bienne, Chur, Geneva, Lausanne, Lucerne (for central Switzerland), Lugano, Schaffhausen, Zion, St. Gallen and Winterthur. A look at the list of past winners shows that the Manor Art Prize has paved the way for a huge number of artists on the international scene.

Manor congratulates all the artists who have received the Manor Art Prize and wishes them every success in their artistic careers.

www.manor.ch/it/u/kunstpreis

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Exhibition venues

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Press images

01.

Johanna Kotlaris

HUMERE, 2024.

Still, Digital Film, sound + color

Courtesy of the artist

© the artist



02.

Johanna Kotlaris

HUMERE, 2024.

Still, Digital Film, sound + color

Courtesy of the artist

© the artist



03.

Johanna Kotlaris

HUMERE, 2024.

Still, Digital Film, sound + color

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04.

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HUMERE, 2024.

Still, Digital Film, sound + color

Courtesy of the artist

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05.

Johanna Kotlaris

HUMERE, 2024.

Still, Digital Film, sound + color

Courtesy of the artist

© the artist



06.

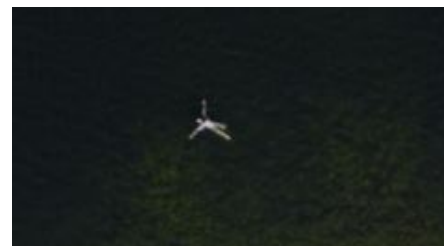
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07.

Johanna Kotlaris

Photo credit Ronja Meier

