HOŠEK CONTEMPORARY

— EST. 2016 —

MARGAUX COMPTE-MERGIER

DISCORDANT ATOME OF THINGS: BREATHING RELIEF

Opening reception: 20th November 2026, 6 - 10 pm

with a performance by Laura Eftychia Papachristos and Lea Grillis

Exhibition period: 20th - 29th November

Curated by Margaux Knight

« Before there was earth or sea or the sky that covers everything [there was] what we call Chaos: a raw, confused mass [...] discordant atoms of things. » Ovide, *Metamorphoses*, Book I

The World as an Imprint

A hand traces the bark of a tree. Further along, a deer, a bird, flowers, a fragment of a face, an animal paw, a knife, electrical sockets, a telephone and a plastic bag emerge from a shared substance. Forms overlap, intertwine and sometimes dissolve into one another, their contours becoming difficult to distinguish. For her exhibition at Hošek Contemporary, Margaux Compte-Mergier presents a monumental installation of silicone panels arranged into a circular bas-relief. As the eye wanders through this dense forest of forms, a multitude of presences, gestures and details gradually comes into view.

At the heart of her practice lies the imprint. The artist collects and casts objects and organic forms encountered through her travels, cultivating a sustained attentiveness to the material world. Sometimes spontaneous, sometimes guided by a more investigative approach, this process of gathering continuously expands her vocabulary. Through direct contact, each "thing" is captured as a negative before being reproduced as a positive, retaining remarkable precision while being detached from its original context, function and temporality. These fragments are then arranged on the floor and assembled with silicone onto domestic textiles, including old bedsheets and lace, whose softness and intimacy with the body contribute to the formation of a shared, skin-like membrane. Layers of wadding and overlapping planes give sculptural depth to the surface.

Silicone becomes the common denominator of hundreds of "*discordant atoms*," an immense saliva through which the world is digested. The artist constructs an archive of forms that resists classification and hierarchy, allowing unexpected encounters and contaminations. In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), philosopher Jane Bennett proposes that matter possesses a capacity to act beyond human intention. From this perspective, the fragments within this relief are active presences, affecting one another by its own energies.

In the opening lines of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid announces his intention to unfold "*a continuous thread of words*," tracing transformations from the origins of the world to his own time. Margaux Compte-Mergier approaches assemblage as a form of writing, extracting fragments from reality and composing new

relationships between them. The ancient text itself becomes part of the work: inscribed in Latin, French and English within the relief, it remains hidden, like a secret embedded in the body of the sculpture. Through an anthropophagic gesture, the classical inheritance is translated, and reconfigured in the present.

Ovid's Chaos: A World Before the Separation of Forms

Before recounting the transformations of gods, humans, animals and plants, Ovid describes the primordial state of the world: Chaos. An "*undifferentiated mass*" in which opposing elements coexist in discord: hot against cold, wet against dry, soft against hard, heavy against light. No element retains a stable form: all contend within a single body.

This turbulent multiplicity finds a sculptural expression in Margaux Compte-Mergier's bas-relief, where animal, vegetal, human and artificial fragments participate in a shared substance, perpetually becoming. Metamorphosis is both the subject and the operative principle of the installation. As in Ovid's poem, it signifies not simply a transition from one form to another, but a fundamental condition of existence. The poem itself advances through successive digressions and interconnected stories.

The Flood, a foundational narrative shared across numerous mythological traditions, introduces another dimension: the destruction of the world as a condition for its renewal. This cyclical temporality, in which disappearance gives way to proliferation, runs throughout the work. Fascinated by frescoes and monumental narrative compositions, Margaux Compte-Mergier draws upon a format historically associated with the transmission of myths and collective histories. Yet by arranging the relief in a circular form, she disrupts the linear progression of storytelling, opening it to repetition, return and perpetual transformation.

Situated aboard a boat moored on Berlin's River Spree, Hošek Contemporary lends this narrative a particular resonance. Surrounded by water, the installation inhabits an environment of inherent instability, where the possibility of submersion remains ever present. Water becomes a figure of transformation, dissolving boundaries and altering the states of matter.

The Formless, the Grotesque and the Boundless Body

A human hand encounters an animal, a flower extends into an industrial object, an electrical cable runs through a vegetal landscape. While the individual elements remain recognisable, their unexpected proximity produces a sense of estrangement, somewhere between humour and unease. The work inhabits an in-between territory where identities are no longer pure, self-contained or definitively assigned.

In the preface to *The Order of Things* (1966), Michel Foucault reflects on an imaginary classification borrowed from Jorge Luis Borges, in which animals are divided into seemingly incompatible categories. What unsettles Foucault is not simply the strangeness of this enumeration, but the impossibility of imagining a common space in which such categories might coexist. The monstrosity lies in the disappearance of the very site of their encounter. This bas-relief seems to invent precisely such a site, a material surface upon which otherwise incompatible things can meet. Silicone becomes the medium of these unlikely proximities, accommodating organic matter, manufactured objects, chemical substances

and fragments of everyday life without imposing a hierarchy upon them. Biological and electrical currents appear to circulate within the same network, giving rise to a composite, hybrid body.

The Baroque as a Theatre of Metamorphosis

This tendency towards excess finds an echo in Margaux Compte-Mergier's fascination with Baroque art, particularly Bernini's sculptures and the sculptural decorations of Palermo, with their ornamental abundance, theatrical compositions, dramatic chiaroscuro and interwoven vegetal, animal and architectural motifs. Here, the Baroque is not merely an aesthetic of excess, but a way of conceiving matter as a movement that continuously exceeds its own limits.

In *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988), Gilles Deleuze approaches the Baroque through the operation of folding, unfolding and multiplying forms towards infinity. Matter bends, expands and generates new configurations without ever reaching a definitive closure. In this relief, elements follow one another in a swirling movement: shapes overlap, surfaces rise, volumes emerge and disappear into the mass. The softness of silicone and the elasticity of the composition evoke a fluid world in constant transformation, while repetitions, variations and interruptions establish a distinct visual rhythm. The circular structure further intensifies this sense of infinity. The work cannot be grasped at a single glance; the viewer must move, shift perspective and alternate between the overall mass and the details of an imprint, from an anatomical fragment to a familiar object.

The Archaeology of a World Yet to Come

Driven by a process of constant transformation, the work is, paradoxically, based on a method of preservation in which silicone serves as a vessel for a paradoxical memory. The casting process brings a disruption of temporality: each fragment belongs simultaneously to the moment of its collection, to that of its reproduction, and to the present moment of its assembly. An ordinary object becomes a fragment available for other narratives and other worlds. This anachronistic dimension is reinforced by the use of bas-relief, ancient medium associated with memory and transmission, in between an archaeological artefact and a futuristic organism.

One might imagine it as an anthropological museum of the future, preserving the traces of a world in which familiar classifications have ceased to operate. Industrial objects coexist with human bodies, plants and animals like remnants of a civilization estranged from itself. In the age of the Anthropocene, as human activity profoundly alters the planet's biological and geological systems, this blurring of categories takes on particular significance. Silicone bears witness to a world in which nature can no longer be separated from the technical and chemical transformations that shape it.

Yet Margaux Compte-Mergier offers neither a nostalgic vision of a lost natural world nor an image of harmonious reconciliation. Her assemblages remain marked by discordance, bringing differences into relation within a precarious equilibrium. Are we looking at the remains of a vanished world, or the first forms of one yet to emerge? The work becomes a retrospective cosmogony: the relic of a world that has not yet existed.

Text © Margaux Knight

Hošek Contemporary

Established by Petr Hošek in 2016, Hošek Contemporary is a gallery and art residency located on a historical cargo ship anchored near Märkisches Ufer in Mitte, Berlin. The gallery focuses primarily on site-specific pieces, performing arts and experimental sound works co-curated by Linda Toivio. During the spring and summer months, the gallery is hosting weekly improvised and experimental music installations, with local and international musicians.

MS Heimatland

Built in 1910 in Fürstenberg an der Oder, MS Heimatland was initially operating under the name Ida and used for transporting coal to Charlottenburg. After the Second World War, the 58-meter long cargo ship was renamed Heimatland, meaning "homeland". Until the 90s, the ship was sailing on Elbe and Havel, moving other boats, sand and chipping. It served for artistic and cultural purposes for the first time in 2002, when German sculptor Christiane Möbus chose it for her Nackte Tatsache Tatsache project. Finally, in March 2018, Heimatland became the main exhibition space and artist residency of Hošek Contemporary. The boat is permanently anchored in the historical harbour of Berlin.

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