

## *Yearning*

Aleph Contemporary at London Art Fair (Stand P16)  
21-24 April 2022

Exhibiting artists: **Marcelle Hanselaar, Joana Galego and Cristina Ruiz Guiñazú**  
Curated by Sofia Alemagna

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*Marcelle Hanselaar, Moonlight Dancer, Oil on Canvas, 100cm x 120cm, 2020*

Featuring the work of three contemporary artists - Marcelle Hanselaar, Joana Galego and Cristina Ruiz Guiñazú - ***Yearning*** is intended as an invitation to consider how the deeply subjective can serve as a catalyst for shared passion and longing. The title of the presentation is taken from the collection of essays, also entitled *Yearning*, by cultural critic and feminist author **bell hooks**, whose writing underscores the uniting force that is to be found within our emotional universe. 'For across all differences of race, gender, class, sexuality, religion', as hooks writes, there is 'a shared realm of emotional feeling'.

At once vulnerable and bold, the works exhibited in the show can be understood as intimately personal renegotiations of reality. In line with the contemporary rise of

figurative painting, which proposes a new-found focus on the complex conditions of the self and the world we inhabit, each of the artists featured draws from a variety of cultural references and lived experience. Situated part-way somewhere between realism and fantasy, their distinct visual languages, however, offer no overt or fixed narrative, acting instead as psychologically-charged windows into profound, and often disquieting states of collective being.

Feelings of estrangement, loss and isolation, for instance, which hold particular relevance in today's world, are urgently brought forth in the artists' varied, yet thoroughly ambiguous painterly representations. We are made to intrude on intimate moments of everyday life, as well as complicit in dream-like mises-en-scène, where the viewer is left feeling both at one with, but equally separate from the interactions at play in the picture. Alienation, in turn, is consistently counterpointed with a sense of playfulness, as exhibited in the artists' individual use of colour, composition and symbolic references, which engenders a contrasting desire for joy and laughter, thereby pointing to the complexity and ambivalence of our emotional existence.

Meaning emerges as one engages with the paintings of Hanselaar, Galego and Ruiz Guiñazú, and to this end, they share a profound commitment to associative and emotional readings on the part of the viewer. Going back to **bell hooks**, who wrote that 'Thinking about shared passions and longings [she] thought about all of us who were and are committed to remain critically aware', the practices brought together here, specific yet universal, point at a concrete effort to deepen our understanding of the present human condition. Inspired by the urgency of **bell hooks**' writing and activism, this presentation now hopes to stand as a small tribute to the author's outstanding legacy, who sadly passed away on 15 December 2021.

-ENDS-

#### **Notes t Editors:**

#### **Marcelle Hanselaar**

Dutch artist Marcelle Hanselaar makes paintings that address the discrepancy between our immediate reality and what lies underneath such preliminary exterior. Her piercing imagery, replete with unruly carnivalesque motifs evocative of the Northern Renaissance tradition, is firmly grounded in personal experience, yet is by no means meant as autobiographical. In her practice, comprised of both painting and printmaking, Hanselaar sets forth to uncover deep-set emotional dichotomies, and in doing so, 'to make [herself] and others reflect, to question and to be made slightly uncomfortable'.

Hanselaar's large-scale paintings included in this presentation are part of a sequence of four works, each entitled *At the Oracle of Limbo* (2019), which the artist made in response to the death of her older sister Elena in September 2019. The first pictures to emerge following an eight-month period of not working, this series of graphically outlined processional gatherings, set against oriental-infused desert landscapes, marks the beginning of Hanselaar's internal journey to make sense of her grief. In keeping with the nomadic days of her youth, *The Oracle of Limbo 1* and *The Oracle of Limbo 2* (2019) figure a supplicant as she cautiously attempts, first with the gift of a flask and later with the amusement of a dance, to breakthrough to the presiding veiled sibyl in hope of answers.

Trepidation is at the heart of these seemingly unfathomable mythical encounters, punctuated by a rawness in line and pigment, as well as an unsettling mordant humour, characteristic of much of Hanselaar's work. While these layered compositions are meant to evolve in sequence, it is still somewhat unclear at what point the viewer is made to witness the various interactions - whether this is immediately before or after the proclamation of some prophetic judgment. Confronted with the apparent helplessness of the supplicant subject, one is left longing for more, for that much sought-after connection that would dissipate all self-doubt and uncertainties, but which all too often escapes us. For as Hanselaar explains, 'If you ask the wrong questions, the answer will be wrong for your needs. You think the situation has to change rather than you, but you have to change and find the answer in yourself'.

Hanselaar's internal quest for answers would later continue with the production of her recent *North Sea* series (2020), which harkens back to the artist's childhood in Scheveningen, a small seaside town on the western coast of the Netherlands. *Moonlight Dancer* (2020) (above) is the largest and final canvas in the series. Partly inspired by a postcard of Winslow Homer's *Summer Night* (1890), it depicts a female figure enthralled in a wild, liberating dance, her spectral scarlet silhouette piercing through the moonlit seascape. Simultaneously ethereal and fierce, she stands as a symbol of freedom from the solitude of profound grief.

## **Joana Galego**

A similar sense of displacement is found in the richly layered mixed media practice of Portuguese artist Joana Galego. Her painterly work is distinguished by an evocative handling of form and colour that is very much on par with that of Post-Impressionist painters, and yet remains distinctly contemporary. Painting from memory, often aided by observational studies and photographs, Galego renegotiates imprinted personal experience to lay bare the emotional paradoxes within relationships. In these seductive new pictures, which graciously stumble at the edges of representation and abstraction, the artist specifically reflects upon 'what is to care, to let go, to grow, to return home'.

Galego's painting process begins with the application of a first layer of acrylics upon stretched paper or canvas, which she subsequently compounds with oil paint, pastels,

and charcoal. The result are deeply sensuous superimpositions of tones and textures, suggestive of the multiplicity and obscurity of lived experience. In *Override Remains* (2022), dense, luscious impastos alternate with bright patches of translucent colour and rough outlines, making way for an enigmatic moment of intimacy amongst three subjects to emerge. Charged with an ethereal sense of stillness, this fractured composition, where none of the figures are readily available to the viewer's gaze, is indicative of the feelings of affection and abandonment that may overlap in life.

Indeed, for Galego painting is at once a surprise and a mystery, acting as 'the stage in which one's offered time to confront and eventually accept the amount of blurriness and ambiguity that runs through our interactions with others'. Images such as *Catch of the Day* (2022) (above), unfold as though portals into the spirit. Drawing from the traditionally idyllic subject matter of the bather landscape, the work features three semi-clad figures gathered in front of a body of water, where another is seemingly emerging. A recurrent motif in Galego's imagery, water shares an affinity with the density of emotions - reflective and fluid, it both conceals and obscures hidden depths. As the flanking figures faintly gesture towards intimacy, we are reminded of our concurrent willingness and inability to communicate, connect and ultimately care for others.

### **Cristina Ruiz Guiñazú**

If Galego's practice sheds light on the fractures within relationships, one is transported to those decisive moments of awakening, typical of early adolescence, in the arresting painterly figurations of Argentinean artist Cristina Ruiz Guiñazú. Infused with a luminous sense of strangeness, Guiñazú's deeply personal approach to realism, what the artist describes as minimalist realism, is characterised by a perfection in pigment and control in composition starkly juxtaposed with hyper-realist imagery. Scenes appear as though Freudian dreamworlds, abundant in symbolism and allegory, their meaning somehow potent yet intangible.

Of the myriad of references informing Guiñazú's compelling imagery, which vary from recollections of her upbringing in Argentina to Theology, Psychoanalysis, as well as, of course, Art History, the artist notes a longstanding interest in Western Philosophy, particularly in Baruch Spinoza. A central influence in Guiñazú's life and practice, the paintings here featured belong to a series of works entitled *À la Recherche du Bonheur* (In pursuit of happiness), all of which were inspired by the thought of the seventeenth-century rationalist philosopher.

Paintings such as *À la Recherche du Bonheur* (Homage to Mariana Bellotto) (2019) masterfully mediate formal restraint with wondrous subject matter, as though mirroring the perennial philosophical dichotomy of reason versus passion. Set against a meticulously rendered acrylic grey landscape, defined only by an improbable horizon line, this mystical tableau portrays a young woman carefully looking through what appears to be a violin case. The truth seems to perpetually escape her as she somehow

misses the puppet-like figure hidden within the hollow underside of the case's lid. Bestowed with both hardship and possibility, the young woman stands as though at the precipice of adulthood. In *Le Manteau de Spinoza* (Spinoza's overcoat) (2017) we are likewise confronted with the loss of innocence. Arresting in its existential simplicity, this jarring scene of a child covering her eyes before the sight of a woman undressing makes one yearn for that wonder and freedom of childhood, unencumbered by the pressures and restrictions of the real world.

A testament to Guiñazú's profound relationship with Philosophy, her *À la Recherche du Bonheur* series features as a prominent reference in the forthcoming new publication by Diego Tatián, *Spinoza y el arte* (Spinoza and Art)

### **Sofia Alemagna**

*Yearning* is curated by Sofia Alemagna. Sofia has a Masters degree (with distinction) in History of Art from the Courtauld Institute of Art where she specialised in 1960s American art, with a particular interest in questions of materiality, abstraction, feminism and subjectivity. She has worked with White Cube and Victoria Miro Gallery.

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Stand P16  
Art Projects  
Business Design Centre  
52 Upper Street  
London N1 0QH  
[www.londonartfair.co.uk](http://www.londonartfair.co.uk)

### **Aleph Contemporary**

Aleph Contemporary is a roving London-based contemporary art gallery with an international roster of emerging and mid-career artists and a forward-looking programme of curated exhibitions and events as well as collections, publications and virtual exhibitions. The name Aleph is inspired by Jorge Luis Borges' story of the same name and expresses a commitment to the importance of dialogue, invention, and the value of experiencing and understanding art today.

[www.alephcontemporary.com](http://www.alephcontemporary.com) [info@alephcontemporary.com](mailto:info@alephcontemporary.com)

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Press Contact: Jessica Wood, [aleph@artsmediacontacts.co.uk](mailto:aleph@artsmediacontacts.co.uk) Tel: 07939 226988