

Anna Hulačová

The Next Shift

February 4—March 31, 2021

Pedro Cera is pleased to present the exhibition of Anna Hulačová at the gallery.

The work of Czech artist Anna Hulačová is ingrained deeply in the medium of sculpture. Exploring through a wide range of traditional sculptural techniques, the intricate set of relations between the animate and the digital, evolution and mutation, the local and the global, utopia and dystopia, Hulačová forms a distinct artistic language, characteristic for its formal and thematic richness, associative symbolism, and formal ties with the past.

While early works of Hulačová disclose a deep interest in folk art, primitivism, indigenous cultures, and ethnography at large, her more recent body of work is distinctive for its links with socialist sculpture, examples of which can still be found, as a trace of the past, in the public space of many of Czech Republic's cities and towns. Despite the fact, that as a result of the attempt to suppress the nation's communist past, public art made during the era of socialist Czechoslovakia has until recently been perceived as something remotely foreign, alien, and invisible, thus separating it from the supposed ideal of the nation's cultural identity, its origins, can in fact be found closely connected with various modernist movements. Depicting subjects related to labor, industrialization, or the family have become, among other, frequent motives, which appeared in post-World War I. figuration, and were further continued in socialist sculpture produced in Czechoslovakia between the 1950's and the 1980's. Although the work of Anna Hulačová does not make the renegotiation of the socialist past a central theme to her work, her approach does surpass the brutalist aesthetic characteristic for her sculptures, where the past is on the one hand a way to understand the present, while on the other a possible source for the construction of a post-capitalist future.

The Next Shift brings together a new group of works, with the female figure as the central motive. We are faced with the theme of everyday life, old as art itself. A theme characteristic for its universality, which can be found in the art of Antiquity as much as in the art of the 20th century inter-war period, socialist realism or contemporary art for that matter. Five figures, all surrendered to their domestic tasks, each carrying a utilitarian device, and following what appears to be a theatrical sense of automatized choreography, the work, despite its domestic context, resembles industrialization themes factory labor, mechanical reproduction, and technological progress. Stripped of their identity through the absence of the face, a common feature in the artist's work, the sculptures translate a heightened sense of robotic behavior, shaping one of each sculpture's multiple identities. Identity is a crucial subject for Hulačová, namely in relation to her understanding of the contemporary man within the time of the digital, whose character remains ambiguous as re-shaped by the virtual reality distinctive for our present. The shadows, cast under each of the five figures, initiate an associative play tied to each figure's task, shaping a silent commentary on traditional role division within the family nucleus. Trapped in daily life automatization, the sculptures shape a dystopic environment absent of any social relations and interpersonal interaction. The machine, in this case, a domestic device, becomes an inseparable part of the body, rendering the role of the master and the servant ambiguous. Insinuating a sense of madness and delirium, highlighted in the absurdity of some of the sculpture's actions, the animism of their natural or utilitarian parts, may these be smiling plants or laughing pots, or by the endless repetition of anonymous silhouettes marching into a post-industrial infinity, the exhibition questions our technology-driven present through the tropes of the domestic environment.

Combining a wide range of techniques and materials, Hulačová furthers the exploration of her themes in the materiality of the work. By combining brutalist features such as concrete, a central material of the work with organic forms, Hulačová points to our time's hybrid nature, where seemingly distant or even opposed forms merge and mutate into a new reality. The greyness of the material furthered by the greyness of Hulačová's drawings heightens the apocalyptic nature of the work, initiating a play of the haptic, where the hard and the soft, the dry and the wet, the smooth and the rough, become a reminder that materiality, physical experience and encounter have yet not been rendered obsolete.

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Anna Hulačová (1984, Sušice) has exhibited her work at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, Kunstvereniging Diepenheim, NL, Baltic Triennial, Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius, Prague City Gallery, Collorado-Mansfeld Palace, Prague, Biennale Gherdeina, Ortisei, IT, National Gallery, Trade Fair Palace, Prague, K11 MUSEA, Hong Kong, MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporaine, FR, West Bohemian Gallery, Pilsen, CZ, East Slovak Regional Gallery, Košice, SK, CEAAC, Strasbourg, FR and Casino Luxembourg, Luxembourg, among other.