

KÖNIG LONDON

CLAUDIA COMTE

FRUITS AND JUNGLE

2 OCTOBER – 9 NOVEMBER 2019

PREVIEW: TUESDAY, 1 OCTOBER 2019, 6–8 PM

Claudia Comte's solo exhibition 'Fruits and Jungle' consists of eight sculptures of suspended fruit and eight comic book-inspired jungle paintings set in the space of KÖNIG LONDON, a former underground car-park. Each sculpture has been carved out of a single block of marble to reveal an over-sized fruit that is seemingly held in place by four vertical columns. Rising from the corner of the plinth, these columns have a visual echo of an extension of the frame of a painting projected into three dimensions. There is a hint of a sensual undercurrent to the tension generated by the fruit and the way it languidly squeezes itself around the 'frame', which seemingly holds it in place. The sculptures are rendered in white marble, a material suggestive of stability and permanence that stands in contrast to the art historical connotations of fruit; that of mortality, decay and temporality. Yet this is a material that has undergone metamorphosis, changing from what were once seashells that over time became compressed under pressure to produce the white marble of the works. Comte's oeuvre circles back to the memory of materials reflecting on what of the passing of time can be gleaned from a piece of wood or marble.

Comte works between media, often combining sculptures or installation with wall paintings to create environments where works relate to each other with a visual rhythm that is both methodical and playful. There is the suggestion of a hidden system or sequence at work that determines the relationship of individual works to others as well as the imagery of individual elements (the spacing between lines in wall-paintings for example). In this exhibition Comte surrounds her sculptures with eight canvases. These reference the visual iconography of the Belgian comic artist André Franquin and in particular his comics *Spirou et Fantasio*, *Gaston Lagaffe* and *Le Marsupilami*. In Comte's re-imagined homage to Franquin, she removes the narrative content such as characters, signs of industry or buildings and the language the characters speak to each other in speech bubbles; all have disappeared leaving only his linear backdrops of nature.

For Comte, Franquin's depiction of nature is as animated as the characters and buildings that populate it. The environment becomes the leading character in the story that is left. These abstracted fragments are pictured interspersed with Comte's more familiar dizzying graphic patterning, both insistent on the power of visual language to communicate something to the viewer that is beyond or outside written language. The combination and variations of line against line offers structures of meaning that

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is always just out of reach of written language, where movement and rhythm take over, offering the possibility of a visceral, bodily response to the environment the viewer finds herself.

For Comte the potentiality within a line made or drawn by human hand is an area of reflection, from the layering of paint through to the way that the marble sculptures eventually have every trace of the hand and machine erased. There is a play between the specificity of a line within an individual work and the totality of an environment where works combine together and play off each other to form a greater whole. This exhibition, Comte's first solo show in London, draws on themes that the artist has consistently explored in recent years; the combination of the comic or cartoon with a systematic ordering of motifs or grouping of works; a recurring interest in the natural world and the environment, and a viewer might read bursts of red across the paintings as a warning. After all we live in a world where forest fires burn unabated as the climate continues. Other long-standing interests that are evident in the show include Comte's fascination in materiality and also in the memory of materials. Fruits appear from slabs of marble that were once sea-shells; images of an impossible jungle appear within the zig-zag of a geometrical system. There is a playful suggestion that a system is at work around the viewer, sometimes on the surface, sometimes beneath the surface, appearing and disappearing, but always just there.

Comte has a forthcoming solo exhibition at Castello di Rivoli (Turin, IT). She has recently had solo exhibitions at Gladstone Gallery, (Brussels, Belgium and New York, USA), Copenhagen Contemporary (Copenhagen, Denmark), KÖNIG Galerie (Berlin, Germany), Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (Cleveland, USA) and Kunstmuseum Luzern (Lucerne, Switzerland). She presented the large-scale installation *NOW I WON* at the Messeplatz during Art Basel in Basel (2017). Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Kunsthalle Basel (Basel, Switzerland), Skulpturen Park Köln (Cologne, Germany) and with the Public Art Fund, New York (New York, USA), among others.