

Press release

Camille Henrot | Mother Tongue

18 April – 8 August 2021

How can we find a way to bring order to the chaos of our lives? How do we deal with our simultaneous need for attachment and self-assertion? And how do we position ourselves with regard to social and personal expectations? The exhibition *Mother Tongue* by the French artist Camille Henrot (* 1978 in Paris) revolves around existential emotions. The works in the exhibition reflect being drawn between the desire to retreat and the desire to engage – on both a personal and political level. Henrot's works navigate through a present caught between rational systems and intuitive knowledge. Kestner Gesellschaft is pleased to present the artist's first wide-ranging institutional solo exhibition of new works in drawing, painting and sculpture in Germany, accompanied by the large-scale fresco series *Monday*, and film installation *Saturday*. Henrot was awarded the Silver Lion at the Venice Biennale in 2013 for her groundbreaking piece *Grosse Fatigue*, as well as the Carte Blanche at Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2017, resulting in her monumental exhibition *Days are Dogs*.

The title *Mother Tongue* can be read in different ways: It refers to language as a means of appropriating the world and to the mouth as a site of expression, appropriation and consumption. The title may also be read as a clue of the human developmental needs for attachment and separation, which begin at infancy and continue throughout life. This tension was the starting point for the ongoing series of drawings, paintings, and bronze sculptures *System of Attachment*.

In the time of the pandemic induced lockdown, the conflict between personal needs and positioning with regard to societal demands is more palpable than ever before. The new series *Is Today Tomorrow?* took shape during the first coronavirus lockdown, while Henrot, like many others, was practicing self isolation. This resulted in daily journal like works that reflect the specific moments in which they were created. Their titles reflect a specific temporality: All of the include the word 'day' in them, for example *Blue Monday*, *Wait Another Day* and *Ruin my Day*.

Individual, intimate explorations consistently lead to wide-ranging questions about the systems in which they are embedded, such as the social demands that are made of individuals and the effects of our actions on subsequent generations. The larger-than-life-size bronze sculpture *3,2,1*, which was created for the exhibition, shows that emotional work always goes hand in hand with processes of transformation and transition. In it, a hybrid human-bird creature sheds a tear over the amount of waste at its feet. Often accompanied by extensive research, Henrot's installations combine traditional representations, items she finds in her daily life, and personal experiences. She stages these materials and found objects in the exhibition space and points to the changeable, hopeful, rebellious, melancholic, or resigned position that we can assume in the face of our personal responsibility and the overwhelming expectations of the present moment.

Henrot's work has been recognized internationally with major solo exhibitions at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2017), the Kunsthalle Wien (2017), the New Museum in New York (2014), and at Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery (2019) among others. In 2021 the artist will also have a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia and participate in the Liverpool Biennial in England.

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The exhibition will be accompanied by a wide-ranging program of events, including discussions with experts from philosophy and psychology. A comprehensive exhibition catalog will be published, including contributions from Emily LaBarge, Legacy Russell, and Marcus Steinweg, as well as an interview with the artist. The catalog will be published in German and English by Walter König.

The exhibition is generously supported by the Niedersächsische Sparkassenstiftung, Sparkasse Hannover, the VHV Stiftung, the Bureau des arts plastiques at the Institut français, and the French Ministry of Culture as well as the Förderkreis of Kestner Gesellschaft.

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