

Kati Heck
Heimlich Manoeuvre

23 November 2017 – 10 February 2018
62 Kingly Street, London W1
Tuesday – Saturday, 11 – 6 pm

In her first exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, Kati Heck presents a group of six new paintings, alongside two smaller portraits and a video sculpture. The exhibition is Heck's first solo presentation in London. Throughout her work, she pursues art's capacity to affront sensibilities and jolt the senses – acting as a Heimlich manoeuvre within society.

Heck's six large-scale paintings, installed in a hexagonal space, form an interrelated cycle on the themes of revelry, loneliness, youth, beauty, drunkenness and separation. The works are loosely based on Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (1909), a six-part symphony in which Chinese poems from the Tang dynasty (known to Mahler in German translation) are set to music. Heck transfers the shifting, bittersweet mood of Mahler's folk songs – and the antique poems behind them – into a group of dramatic scenes, peopled by expressive yet enigmatic characters. Music, drinking, exaltation and sorrow pervade the pictures, engendering a parallel world in which crystalline reality can seem to unravel – as if on a whim – into a fable, cartoon or dream.



Heck's group of six canvases is displayed in an enclosed, carpeted gallery – a theatrical space akin to the compressed settings of the pictures themselves. The command *Horch!* ('Listen!' – from Mahler's fifth song, 'The Drunkard in Spring'), extends across the carpet, drawing visitors into the imaginative otherworld of the paintings and (through them) the poems. The paintings draw upon multiple sources, including living models and photographic collages. Human characters – often based on the artist's friends – are deployed in elaborate, febrile scenes. One shows a band (guitarists and a drummer) playing and posing against a torrent of paint. The art-historical formula of musicians in a nondescript setting gives way to a sense of dislocation and unreality, spilling at points into caricature. The lolling figure in the foreground suggests a Rabelaisian 'reclining nude'. The words *Kehl' und Seele voll* ('throat and soul are full') float across the top of the picture – a quotation from a poem about blissful inebriation. Real life is submerged in history and fiction.

Mahler's complex layering of elements – Chinese poems, German translations, musical interpretations – finds a parallel in Heck's densely layered references and styles. Reality and allegory, performance and unvarnished experience, are competing elements throughout her works. Precise surface detail – a sensuous rendering of flesh, fabric or furniture, reminiscent of Dutch genre painting – is countered by an openness of mood, or by abrupt stylistic transition. One painting suggests an episode from a fairytale: a girl with two heads, brandishing a lute, pauses in a dark wood: shades of Dürer, Disney and the Brothers Grimm overlap to create a dark, elusive comedy. Elsewhere, crisp figuration morphs into the sparing linearity of a cartoon or the flat artifice of a stage set.

The exhibition also features a new video, *Der Springende Punkt Case II:0*, the latest instalment in a series of video works connected with her Babydetektivclub (an evolving club of friends and collaborators, including historical figures). The video is presented within a sculptural frame – giant arms gesturing in a suggestion of the Heimlich manoeuvre (a gesture that is also performed in a photographic edition drawn from the video). Acted by the artist and her friends, this imagines an exuberant and absurdist world of music and melodrama – holding up a comedic mirror to the swirling moods and meanings of the paintings.

Tuesday 19 December: To coincide with Heck's exhibition, a musical performance will take place in the gallery – a free interpretation of *Der Abschied* ('The Farewell'), the last song in Mahler's cycle. The performance will feature Simon Lenski (cello), Buni Lenski (violin), Nicolas Rombouts (contrabass) and Maarten Seghers (voice).

Kati Heck (b. 1979, Düsseldorf) lives and works in Pulle, Belgium. She has exhibited internationally, with solo shows including those at the Museum of Modern Art, Antwerp (2015); CAC Malaga, Spain (2013); Atelierschiff der Stadt, Frankfurt (2010); Museum Het Domein, Sittard, Netherlands (2008). A monograph was published on her work in 2016 by Hatje Cantz.

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