



Irgendwo:

On Linda Jasmin Mayer

□ Dove fermarsi? □

Frank Maes

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Strange creatures wander around. In all cases – albeit with one exception – their environment is a remarkable, rural landscape setting. The exception mentioned is what we could call an “urban jungle”. Each creature has a bird’s head: a beautifully crafted mask atop a human body. This combination looks strange, sometimes somewhat sad. It is not clear what these strange, spotted birds (in German there is a lovely, nice expression “ein komischer Vogel” for human beings seen as acting strange or weird) are *doing*. They seem to be searching for something, but there doesn’t seem to be any apparent intention or noticeable purpose underlying their actions. Moreover, they don’t seem to be or to feel at home in their respective contexts.

**References**  
**Two art-historical references**  
**are coming to mind.**

First: Albrecht Altdorfer’s *Saint-George in the Forest* (1510). In this strange depiction, a dragon – George’s monstrous adversary – appears wounded and neutralized but not (yet) dead. Meanwhile, the hero and his horse are in a rather passive state as they scrutinize the moribund creature. While there is no real action – nothing really happens – almost all the attention shifts towards the setting in which this “non-event” takes place. But a green wall made up of hundreds of leaves almost entirely blocks our view. With its multifarious play of muted colour tones, of light and shade, that wall of leaves is the true protagonist of this painting.

Second: in Jan Van Goyen’s mid-seventeenth-century depictions of the strip that lies between dunes and polders, some tiny human figures can usually be discerned, always in the background. These human beings are not carrying out any clearly defined activity. Moreover, there doesn’t appear to be a story in this case – and certainly not a striking one. In the meantime, historical, biblical or mythological stories cover Southern European walls and ceilings, occupying the picture’s first plan in enchanting, colourful, vibrating spectacles.

**Between quest and concept**

After Andrea Ferri crafted seven bird masks inspired by actual specimen and seven actors were found to wear them, Linda Jasmin Mayer travelled with masks and actors to various locations including the Italian Alps, the Belgian dunes, the Finnish tundra, the rocks in Gran Canaria, and to Noisy-le-Grand – a strange Parisian *banlieue* designed by Spanish architect Ricardo Bofill in a post-modern 1980s kind of “facadism”. The artist asked her actors to identify with their respective bird to a certain point, i.e., to act *in-between* bird and human being. However, as we mentioned earlier, none of the birds *fits* into the landscape in which it is placed. They are merely wandering around in a landscape where they emerge like “komische Vögel”, thus mirroring the inner lives of those strange creatures.

A clear-cut concept underlies this artwork. Simultaneously the concept *in itself* is worth – or means – *nothing*. Once the concept defined, a major quest is set in motion, made up of patient craft and of an impressive series of operations involving travel, camera work, post-production, and presentation. Filming on the spot in the middle of a landscape with the smallest possible team means letting go of much control, i.e., giving some initiative to the contingent, momentary or shambolic circumstances in which the film is shot. The same applies to the way in which the work is exhibited. According to the exhibition context, the final presentation could – at most – consist of seven films, or of one movie featuring the seven birds. In short, the dialectics between the (tiny) protagonist and the (impressive or complex) context are at play in a manner that is equally intense behind and in front of the camera.

In Linda Jasmin Mayer’s oeuvre, viewers recognise a deep longing to *feel at home*, which could be perceived as reminiscent of romanticism. A friend of Goethe who studied landscape painting under Caspar David Friedrich, Carl Gustav Carus was a physiologist and a romantic painter. Carus wrote that Caspar David Friedrich could

only paint when his inner and outer worlds were entirely reconciled, "I have to unite with what surrounds me, to unite with my clouds and rocks in order to be what I am." A hundred years later, Sigmund Freud would diagnose this kind of behaviour as the outcome of two psychic mechanisms: identification and projection. But art historian Joseph Leo Koerner has brilliantly demonstrated how many of Friedrich's landscapes contain unresolvable ambiguities, thereby expressing the impossibility of satisfying his deepest desire.

### Post-anthropocentric

In Aristotelian physics and astrology that dominated the European continent until the late Middle Ages, our world is the centre of the cosmos. On the one hand, there is a continuity between the world of our direct relations with – and inner feelings about – other living beings and things (as well as the meanings, values and stories emerging from these direct experiences). On the other hand, there are the natural laws of the cosmos. This enchanted, geocentric and anthropocentric worldview answered to our deepest need to *feel at home* in the universe.

Ever since the consensus that our globe turns around the sun at a tremendous speed (a knowledge that is in total contradiction with our direct experience and inner feelings) and that it is just a tiny dot in an endless universe (which has no sense, nor any purpose or meaning from the perspective of our daily concerns and values) spread, we live in a disenchanted, non-anthropocentric universe.

The *de-centering* of the human in the paintings of Altdorfer and Bruegel-the-Elder and in the work Van Goyen and Rembrandt are not the last remnants of a dying pre-modern culture but, on the contrary, it heralds a red thread *in* modern art (e.g., in landscapes by Constable, Turner, Courbet, Cézanne, Picasso), by reflecting and expressing a seminal feature of secular modern culture.

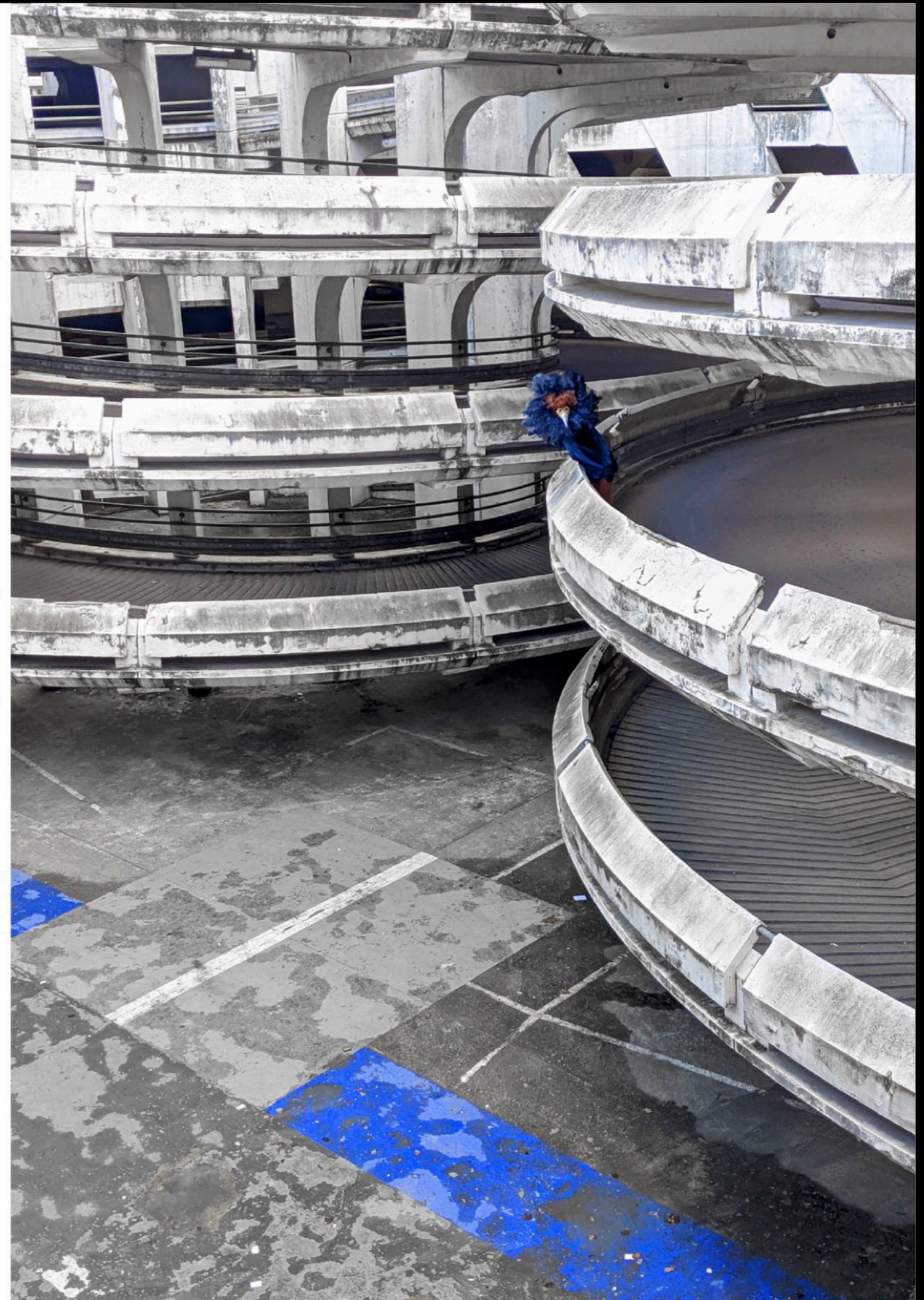
Oddly (or not so oddly) enough, in the current "post-human" or "more-than-human" discourse, this

crucial aspect of modern culture and art is entirely and systematically ignored. Indeed, it doesn't fit into the simplistic depictions and overturning of the moderns' so-called anthropocentrism.

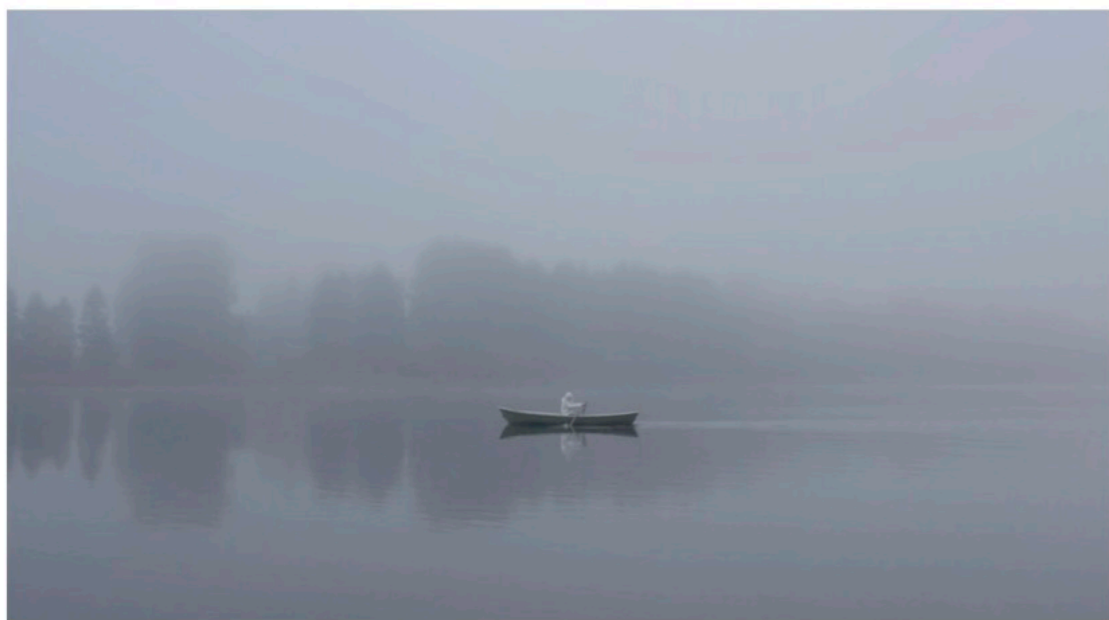
We find a pleading for a *re-enchantment* of the world in many "post-human" thinking and exhibiting. Simultaneously, modern technology – e.g., in the guise of smartphones functioning via the deeply abstract laws of quantum computing – governs our daily lives more than ever. When we try to feel like a whale, think like a mushroom, behave like bacteria, speak in terms of trees, or fly like birds, we are unmistakably projecting human feelings, thoughts, values and meanings on these creatures.

This is not to say that such attempts at inclusion of the non-human, at empathy with the worlds that we are part of – e.g., through putting a tremendous amount of skill and creativity, time and energy into the creation of a series of impressive bird masks and the making of a series of films featuring these – could not be very valuable and meaningful.

Linda Jasmin Mayer's films clearly and beautifully express the unsurmountable ambiguity resulting from any such attempt. Playing as if you were a bird obviously doesn't take you into some holistic, enchanted universe, as *Dove fermarsi?* seems to suggest. Instead, it is putting the player into a very limited, undefined, ironic situation. Somewhere; in-between.



pp. 214–219  
Linda Jasmin Mayer  
*Dove fermarsi*, 2022  
Single channel video installation, 17'01"  
Set photographs







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opening

December 2, 18:00

A glittering ruin sucked upwards\*

# A Glittering Ruin Sucked Upwards

Wim De Pauw, Ian De Weerdt, Manu Engelen,  
Antoine Goossens, Zhixin Angus Liao, Linda Jasmin Mayer,  
Felipe Muhr, Noemi Osselaer, Edouard Pagant,  
Juan Pablo Plazas, Stephanie Rizaj, Pei-Hsuan Wang

Curated by Yann Chateigné Tytelman

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and when given in the calendar

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– January 29, 2023

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HISK laureates  
exhibition 2022

\* The title of the exhibition is excerpted from *Early Education*, a poem from Lisa Robertson's *Magenta Soul Whip*, first published by Coach House Books, Toronto, 2009. Used with the kind permission of the author.



## Colophon

This book is published on the occasion of the exhibition

*A Glittering Ruin Sucked Upwards*

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2 December 2022 – 29  
January 2023

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Linda Jasmin Mayer, Felipe Muhr, Noemi Osselaer, Edouard Pagant, Juan Pablo Plazas, Stephanie Rizaj, Pei-Hsuan Wang

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Editor  
Yann Chateigné Tytelman

Texts  
Roel Arkesteijn  
Yann Chateigné Tytelman  
Claire Contamine  
Simon Delobel  
Ory Dessau  
Adrian Gouet  
Antoinette Jattiot  
Franck Maes  
Vanessa Joan Müller  
Julie Van der Wielen  
Joanna Zielinska

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Paula Cook

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Barbara Strzeżek

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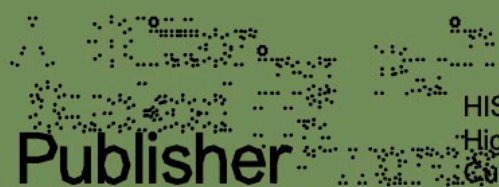
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Joanna Zielinska  
Lola Pertsowsky

Yann Chateigné Tytelman (Ed.)

What if we worked to produce an exhibition  
not based on the sharing of space between artists,  
but rather, the allocation of time?



HISK laureates exhibition 2022  
Higher Institute for Fine Arts  
Curated by Yann Chateigné Tytelman

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