

MASI Lugano
Museo d'arte
della Svizzera italiana,
Lugano

Via Canova 10
CH – 6900 Lugano

comunicazione@masilugano.ch
+41 (0)58 866 42 40
www.masilugano.ch

Shahryar Nashat

Streams of Spleen

17 March – 18 August 2024

Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano
LAC venue

Curated by Francesca Benini

PRESS RELEASE

Lugano, 14 March 2024

MASI Lugano presents "Streams of Spleen", Shahryar Nashat's biggest solo exhibition in Switzerland to date. For the show, the artist has created a site-specific project in MASI's underground space, completely altering its atmosphere. The works on display – almost all new – engage with the modified structure of the space, creating a cohesive multisensory environment, a single huge installation that visitors are invited to explore.

The human body, its perceptions and representations, play a central role in Shahryar Nashat's work. In his videos, sculptures and installations, the artist creates synesthetic experiences that evoke emotions and moods that are difficult to express in rational terms. Nashat shies away from definitive interpretations, exploring themes such as desire, mortality, animal instinct and art itself, arenas that cannot be fully and categorically comprehended. Attentive to the ways in which art is presented and engaged with in institutional settings, Nashat often intervenes more or less explicitly on the exhibition space, highlighting the mechanisms, contradictions and rhetoric that often accompany the presentation of art.

Entering MASI's underground space, the encounter with this work is unsettling yet intriguing. The entire floor is covered with vinyl tiles, and the tone of the lights has been altered. In the middle of the room, a construction with a low ceiling stands out like a sculptural volume. To proceed, visitors are obliged to enter it, accompanied by an indecipherable sound. The heart of the exhibition is the new video *Warnings* (2024). Integrated into the structure in the middle of the room, it is screened on a loop on a large wall of screens. Though the wolves - filmed in their natural habitat, drawn digitally or recreated with artificial intelligence - convey an impression of vigour and vitality, a feeling of unease remains, intensified by the soundtrack: a wheezing sound that turns into a symphony of howls and moans and then becomes electronic music with accelerated beats.

The focus of the other works on display is the human body – explored in its physical limits, potential for extension and concrete and mental perceptions. The new sculptures in the series *Bone Out*, for example, which the artist has been working on since 2019, look like real pieces of meat of unknown origin, bringing food industry processes to mind.

The fibreglass sculptures *Boyfriend_14.JPEG*, *Boyfriend_15.JPEG* and *Boyfriend_16.JPEG* appear to fuse flesh and geometric structure: the artist has added imperfections that seem to reveal muscle or bone. These mutilations convey a sense of vulnerability, but also give us the feeling of being in the presence of a living being we can relate to. The body is also the focus of two inkjet prints, *Brother_03.JPEG* and *Brother_08.JPEG*, which depict a rib cage, and are coated in acrylic gel that evokes organic secretions. "The body - the flesh - becomes an object, presented according to traditional modes of display, and represents the concrete - material - dimension of existence, in the era of digitization, when both bodies and artistic creations are often mediated by screens", explains Francesca Benini, the curator of the exhibition.

Despite his experimental approach, Nashat is a careful observer of art history and sometimes includes centuries-old techniques and materials in his work, as in the case of marble sculptures *Hustler_23.JPEG* and *Hustler_24.JPEG*. In the collective imagination, marble evokes works that range from antiquity to the modern period, and has been used more than any other material to represent the human body. In the marble works the reference to the body is reinforced by the veining and pinky-orange hue of Rosa Portugal marble.

The catalogue that accompanies the exhibition can also be viewed as an artistic operation: conceived by Shahryar Nashat in collaboration with the graphic designer Sabo Day and the writer Kristian Vistrup Madsen, at first glance it looks like an instruction manual, but it opens up into a poetic journey reflecting on human existence and what it means to be an artist. With the subtle irony and irreverence he is known for, the artist presents 17 chapters intended as 17 possibilities: 17 ways of making art, of existing, of being in the world. The book ends with a critical text by Francesca Benini and Gioia Dal Molin and is co-published by MASI Lugano, the Istituto Svizzero, Roma | Milano | Palermo and Lenz Press.

The exhibition is staged in partnership with the Istituto Svizzero, Roma | Milano | Palermo.

The artist:

Shahryar Nashat is a visual artist. He has had solo shows at the Art Institute of Chicago (2023), the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (with Bruce Hainley, 2023), the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2020); Swiss Institute, New York (2019); Kunsthalle Basel (2017); Portikus, Frankfurt (2016); Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (with Adam Linder, 2016). He shows with Rodeo Gallery, London/Piraeus, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles/New York and Gladstone Gallery, New York/Brussels.

Press contacts

MASI Lugano
Press office
+41 (0)58 866 42 40
comunicazione@masilugano.ch

Exhibition venues

LAC
Piazza Bernardino Luini 6
CH – 6900 Lugano

Palazzo Reali
Via Canova 10
CH – 6900 Lugano

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Press images

01.

Shahryar Nashat

Brother_03.JPEG

2023

Acrylic gel, ink on paper, plywood

Courtesy the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York,

David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles and

Rodeo Gallery, London/Piraeus

© the artist



02.

Shahryar Nashat

Warnings

2024

Still from HD video on LED wall: color / stereo sound

Courtesy the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York,

David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles and

Rodeo Gallery, London/Piraeus

© the artist



03.

Shahryar Nashat

Lover_03.JPEG (detail)

2022

Acrylic gel, ink on paper, plywood

Courtesy; David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles/New York. Photo: Jeff McLane

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04.

Installation view "Shahryar Nashat. Streams of Spleen", MASI Lugano, 2024
Photo © MASI Lugano, photography Luca Meneghel



05.

Installation view "Shahryar Nashat. Streams of Spleen", MASI Lugano, 2024
Photo © MASI Lugano, photography Luca Meneghel



06.

Installation view "Shahryar Nashat. Streams of Spleen", MASI Lugano, 2024
Photo © MASI Lugano, photography Luca Meneghel



07.

Installation view "Shahryar Nashat. Streams of Spleen", MASI Lugano, 2024

Photo © MASI Lugano, photography Luca Meneghel



08.

Installation view "Shahryar Nashat. Streams of Spleen", MASI Lugano, 2024

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09.

Installation view "Shahryar Nashat. Streams of Spleen", MASI Lugano, 2024

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