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'The Invisible Hand' Toys with Representation

At Gianni Manhattan, Vienna, a group show unravels the supposed neutrality of visibility



BY SONJA TESZLER IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 17 SEP 25



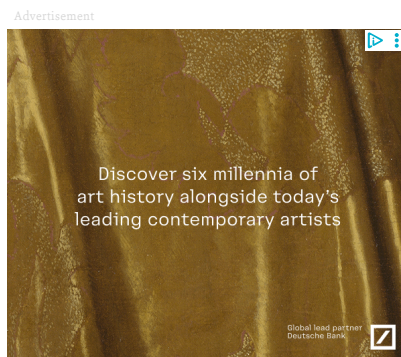
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'The Invisible Hand' is a precisely composed exhibition at Gianni Manhattan, staged as part of Vienna's Curated By festival – now in its 16th year and a fixture of the city's art calendar. In the exhibition text, the show's curator, Bianca Stoppani, draws attention to the notion of corpsing: the moment an actor breaks character on stage and starts laughing, embodying role and self at once. This recalls Sigmund Freud's essay 'Humour' (1927), where laughter is described as a mature defence mechanism: a collapse between superego and ego that allows the subject to relieve suffering while producing critical distance. Within the exhibition, this corpsing between system and subject functions as a glitch in capitalist visual technologies, interrupting the supposed neutrality of representation.



Morag Keil, *Passive Aggressive*, 2018, six screen video installation.

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Courtesy: the artist and Gianni Manhattan, Vienna; photograph: kunstdokumentation.com

The show opens with Morag Keil's video *Passive Aggressive* (2018). Its soundtrack – a dense roar of traffic – bleeds into the entrance corridor before the screens come into view. Across six channels, the artist documents motorcycles parked on Berlin streets. The handheld camera circles the bikes with almost pornographic insistence, attempting to penetrate the gleaming surfaces to no avail. Heightened by lo-fi aesthetics, the effect is at once comic and uncomfortable, implicating the viewer in an intrusive looking that cannot consummate its desire.

Passive Aggressive sits within a lineage of works that queer the motorcycle as an emblem of masculinity, from Kenneth Anger's 1963 film *Scorpio Rising* to Tom of Finland's drawings. The video exposes the increasingly co-dependent relation between commodity and identity: here, capitalist desire emerges as endlessly frustrated compulsion. Snippets of libidinal advertising clichés – a train sliding into a tunnel, a GIF of winking eyes – intercut the footage, allowing Keil to adopt the sexualized but infantile language of capitalism only to push it to its breaking point.

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Bianca Hlywa, *The Image of the Tide*, 2017, fan motor, wood, rope, plastic bag, SCOBY, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist and Gianni Manhattan, Vienna; photograph: kunstdokumentation.com

The erotic charge of Keil's video reverberates in Bianca Hlywa's *The Image of the Tide* (2017), which sharpens questions around the commodity in an art context. A zombified SCOBY (symbiotic culture of bacterial yeast) hangs in a translucent bag, mobilized by a spinning ventilator. It survives only through daily rehydration by the gallery staff, this fragile act of maintenance keeping its organic cultures alive. Refusing to stabilize into permanent object form, the SCOBY's identity remains ever-mutating; at once vulnerable and defiant, it bridges the organic and artificial, life and death. There is an element of absurd comedy in the pungent, alien substance hovering above the gallery space, unsettling the solemnity of the white cube and prompting speculation among festivalgoers as to whether it is an organ or a piece of excrement.

By contrast, Margherita Raso's *Studio* (2024) offers a more restrained gesture: a one-to-one replica of her Basel studio window, its iron grid interrupted by a pair of red 1950s Wilson shoulder pads lodged between two frames. Simultaneously protected and exposed, their form evokes an absent body, bracing for impact. Their history intensifies this latent violence: Wilson began as a meatpacking company before turning to sports gear produced from animal by-products. The grid, which invokes modernist order while also recalling the so-called kill box of contemporary military tactics, materializes a broader superstructure of capitalist-imperialist power haunted by the trace of the other: bodies excluded from regimes of visibility structured by race, gender and class. Raso underscores how categorization is never neutral: hierarchies of value are shaped by who falls inside the grid and who does not.

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Margherita Raso, *Studio*, 2024, iron, screws, football pads, 233 × 346 × 3 cm. Courtesy: the artist, Fanta, Milan and Gianni Manhattan, Vienna; photograph: kunstdokumentation.com

'The Invisible Hand' trips up the ideological choreography of representation. Each work enacts a form of collapse in which superstructure and critical self are held in tension. Within a festival premised on curatorial experimentation, the exhibition distinguishes itself through the clarity with which it draws out these contradictions, showing visibility not as a transparent condition but as a political field of struggle.

'The Invisible Hand' is on view at Gianni Manhattan, Vienna, until 4 October

Main image: 'The Invisible Hand', 2025, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and Gianni Manhattan, Vienna; photograph: kunstdokumentation.com

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SONJA TESZLER

Sonja Teszler is a writer with a primary focus on artists from the Eastern European diaspora. Her reviews, essays and interviews have been published in FlashArt, Arts of the Working Class, Something Curated, Whitehot Magazine, The Calvert Journal, thisistomorrow and Floor Magazine, among others.

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