

Charles HASCOËT

Moral Test

2024.03.09 - 2024.05.11

DUMONTEIL

Bldg 105, 199 Hengshan Rd. Shanghai

11 a.m. – 7 p.m., Tue. – Sat.

DUMONTEIL Shanghai is thrilled to present ***Moral Test***, showcasing the captivating works of French artist **Charles Hascoët**. This is the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery. Setting the tone with Milan Kundera's profound insights into humanity, the show features over twenty of Hascoët's latest paintings, demonstrating the artist's remarkable ability to translate his innermost thoughts and emotions into metaphorical narratives with his unique vision and style.

True human goodness, in all its purity and freedom, can come to the fore only when its recipient has no power. Mankind's true moral test, its fundamental test (which is deeply buried from view), consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animals. And in this respect mankind has suffered a fundamental débacle, a débacle so fundamental that all others stem from it.

Milan Kundera

This "moral test" is deeply embedded in Charles Hascoët's mind and in the series of works on display. Each piece, whether the artist is physically present in the image or not, depicts his very existence: the Moon Rabbit, longing to escape from the earth; the White Rabbit, defiant in the face of ferocious predators; the shrewd owls and the resilient donkey, steadfast in their scrutiny; and a host of birds gazing down on us like watchful angels ... When the artist does incorporate his own image into his work, he reinforces his stance: gazing up at us much like his feathered companions who perch on his arms and shoulders.

It's all a kind of self-portrait. Collectively, these works offer a glimpse into the artist's mindset regarding his relationship with humanity and the world at large. Hascoët opens up to us as much as to himself: his cherished encounter with a fox, his unreserved affection for pandas, as well as his inner struggle, forbearance, and yearning to escape the established moral failures of society. As viewers, we are invited to witness the artist's journey of self-discovery, traversing alongside him through the landscape of his consciousness—a realm intricately connected to his artistic creativity.

In the area of artistic expression, Hascoët's careful study of Courbet's realism reflects his commitment to portraying sincerity over idealization, while his exploration of Delacroix's romanticism emphasizes contrast rather than harmony. And his fondness for fluorescent colors and bold use of clashing colors result in worlds that are more peculiar and fantastical than dreams.

What ultimately adds intrigue to this exhibition is the artist's choice of subjects. Always following his intuitions and visions, the artist once stated "It is the subjects that impose themselves on me." Admittedly, this seems logical when depicting animals, whose distinctive appearance is an excellent prerequisite for any artist to explore colour and form. And the thought-provoking combinations in some large-scale paintings leave as much room for viewer's interpretations as they do for artistic creations.

Amidst the array of unique and unconventional subjects, however, the inclusion of Dürer's Young Hare stands out as a conscious decision. Dürer was among the first artists to recognize animals as worthy subjects for artistic exploration. It is artists like Dürer that marked a significant shift towards portraying animals with greater respect and attention to their intrinsic value. Today, it is more important than ever to revisit this cultural shift towards a more empathetic and respectful view of the natural world. Only through this recognition can we remain vigilant against our own arrogance and recognize other forms of unfairness and injustice in society.

It is not always easy to confront harsh truths, especially when they lead us into darkness. However, Charles Hascoët, with his unique blend of love, humor, and benevolence, manages to guide us closer to his melancholic dreamscapes, revealing the invisible like Minerva's owl. Though profound, they paradoxically lighten the weight of the "Moral Test," making it both poignant and approachable. His art invites us to explore deeper, fostering introspection and encouraging a shift toward kindness and away from aggression.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Charles Hascoët (b.1985) is a French artist who lives and works between New York City and Paris. He studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Paris and graduated in 2014. During his student years, and along with his teachers (J.Rielly or J.Michel Alberola among them), he had the occasion to continue and deepen his favourite medium, painting.

Since then, his pictorial creations have been the subject of several solo exhibitions including DUMONTEIL Shanghai (2024, 2021); Galerie Mighela Shama, Genève (2023, 2021); Superzoom Gallery, Paris (2022); New Galerie, Paris (2021), etc. His work has also been exhibited in art institutions including the Musée Picasso, Paris (2023), and the MO.CO., Montpellier (2023). His works have been included in the collections of several art institutions, including: X Museum, Beijing; West Ocean Art Museum, Qingdao, China, etc.

Hascoët draws from art historical tropes, iconic films, and childhood memories to paint nostalgic scenes that exist between reality and imagination. The artist fuses discordant symbols into domestic still lifes, romantic portraits, and dreamlike landscapes to create fantastical narratives. Hascoët's tableaux pay homage to reclining figures of master French painters, like Gustave Courbet and Eugène Delacroix, while also incorporating an auto-biographical dimension as the artist inserts himself into these often peculiar worlds. By combining art-historical tropes with personal iconography, Hascoët invites us to join the process of self-discovery as he uncovers various parts of himself, as well as our collective histories.

He is at the same time known for years for his DJ practice, playing his massive and eclectic Vinyl collection in clubs, bars, concert halls, in Europe and worldwide, as numerous radio broadcasts.