

Aidan Koch

*Always put the rock back*

February 1 – March 28, 2020

Press Release

Park View/Paul Soto is proud to announce *Always put the rock back*, a solo exhibition by the Landers, California-based artist Aidan Koch, her second with the gallery. A public reception will be held on Saturday, February 1 from 4 to 6pm, and the exhibition will run through the winter until March 28. Aidan Koch is well-known for her comics that emphasize mood and tone over narrative. Utilizing storyboard formats, she combines painterly techniques and text into rhythmic sequences that generate affinities between objects, gesture, and words. Together they effect a visual synecdoche about the environment that embraces a humanist perspective that moves towards compassion for the non-human world.

The title of Koch's exhibition, *Always put the rock back*, comes from a note pinned on a board at the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve written by a child that said, "for animals that live on the beach and live under rocks always put the rock back on them." As an alternative to a supremacist, domineering view towards nature, Koch's works explore gestures of recognition filled with care towards the creatures and nature around us. Her works consider that non-human lives have motivations and desires all their own, which are nevertheless shaped by our human footprints and curiosity.

The exhibition comprises a new series of gouache and pastel works, sculptural beds, and animations. Her pastel works depict the interfacing of humans and their built forms with nature in dreamlike states, containing a spirited sense of joy, humor, and wonder. A pair of horses blend into the stream where they drink in one dense landscape. In another, trees charred in a fire, reminiscent of flora after the Woolsey fire in the Santa Monica mountains, show regrowth in the foreground in a hilly vista at dusk. Done from memory, her use of perspective and gesture in her landscapes moves beyond any observational or empirical bounds. They are instead oriented around personal history tinged with emotional affiliation, reinforced by poetic text wrapping around their edges.

Alternating with these works are spare, glyph-like gouache and graphite drawings that put animals, creatures, and human forms in schematic relationship. In one, a snake curls under a table; in another, two snakes relax above and below a woman who is investigating on the ground, down at their perspective. A suite of three works titled *Vessel with Urine III* picture Painted Lady butterflies alighting on blue vases filled with urine. Her illustration reverses their traditional status as emblems of beauty, here congregating around human waste, which in reality is an attractive force to them. Related to this is Koch's animation *In Which All Are One* that is projected onto the wall. Koch has delicately rendered the metamorphosis of a butterfly from chrysalis and set it on a loop. It appears to transform back into a cocoon, upending the idea of a life "naturally" sequenced towards a transcendent or fully formed state. Instead it projects a more fluid relationship between these two lively forms, with no beginning or ending.

Koch's themes relate to nature in trying to unwind an anthropocentric view of the world, and to treat nature and other animal species as one. Within that process, Koch's works acknowledges the potential of productive misunderstandings. Her series of sculptural beds provides this, which sit in museological display on an L-shaped platform. Each of the beds symbolizes an animal companion of Koch's from the recent past and present, scaled to their size, shape, and characteristics. They are accompanied by a hallucinatory animation projected within a lantern made by Lightsong Exchange. The animation serves as a speculation on what animal dreams could look like.

LOS ANGELES  
2271 W. Washington Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90018 USA  
+1 (213) 509 3518  
www.paulsoto.net

BRUSSELS  
23 Avenue Jef Lambeaux  
1060 Brussels, Belgium  
+32 (0)4 99 82 88 30  
www.paulsoto.net

Koch was inspired by an anecdote relayed by Temple Grandin in her book *Animals in Translation*. In it, Grandin relates an anecdote of animal behaviorist Ron Kilgour, writing, “One of his early papers told a story about a person who had a pet lion he was shipping on an airplane. Someone thought the lion might like to have a pillow for the trip, the same way people do, so they gave him one, and the lion ate it and died. The point was: don’t be anthropomorphic. It’s dangerous to the animal. But when I read this story, I said to myself, ‘Well, no, he doesn’t want a pillow, he wants something soft to lie on, like leaves and grass.’”

In Koch’s words, “Of course, a large part of reality for humans is that we can never fully disengage from our perspective and societal beliefs and values. Allowing space to be conscientious, curious, or engaged even when its anthropomorphic isn’t always bad. Perhaps a pillow may kill a lion should it chose to eat it when offered, but a dog may very much enjoy sleeping on it, a pig might like playing with it and ripping it into pieces, a mouse might like living inside it. It’s not in our power or knowledge always to know how our offers and gestures might be accepted, but important to do them when care and thought is taken. Should you pick up a rock and find a small crab underneath, it is an appropriate and polite gesture to put the rock back.”

Aidan Koch (born in 1988 in Seattle, Washington) lives and works in Landers, California, and New York, New York. She received her BFA from the Pacific Northwest College of Art in Portland, Oregon, in 2009. Her work was recently exhibited at the Whitney Museum of Art in the exhibition “Dreamlands,” curated by Chrissie Iles about the history of experimental cinema. Her works have also been exhibited at Naughton Gallery at Queens University, Belfast; South Bend Museum of Art, Indiana; 31st Biennial of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana, curated by Nicola Lees, Stella Bottai, and Laura McLean-Ferris; Galerie Patrick Seguin curated by Karma Gallery, Paris; and Signal Gallery, Picture Room, and Company Gallery, all in New York.

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