

# ART MONTHLY

Review by Michaële Cutaya  
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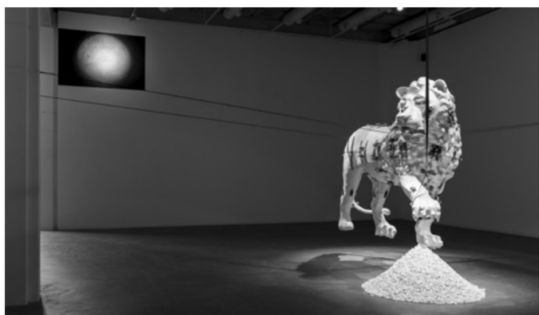
## Siobhán Hapaska: Medici Lion

Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin  
1 December to 10 March

Even in places where there were none, lions have long symbolised power and authority. They have been painted and sculpted in styles that have crossed time and cultures. The Medici lions, named after a pair that once guarded the Villa Medici in Rome, have become their own genre and have inspired many variants: the grand feline standing with one front leg extended forward, its paw grasping an orb.

Siobhán Hapaska's *Medici Lion* is a 3D-printed sculpture that has been scanned from a model the artist made in clay at scale. It is composed of neatly aligned blocks of polylactic acid harnessed together by an ostentatious arrangement of military-grade straps and buckles: varying lengths of straps are riveted into the material to form their own pattern over the curves of the muscles. The grey of the plastic is a shade lighter than that of the Douglas Hyde Gallery's concrete structure. Two large straps fastened on opposite walls pass through upper parts of the body, keeping it suspended a couple of feet above the floor. A third strap comes straight down from the ceiling to support the extended paw, as if a sling for a broken arm, a little black cushion absorbing the pressure.

On the ground, just under the paw, where the traditional orb was, there is a pile of white marble stones. The orb itself is covered in a photograph of the planet



Siobhán Hapaska, *Medici Lion*, 2023, installation view

Mars, and has moved high up to a corner of the back wall. The exhibition space echoes with the ambient sounds of the changing of the guards the artist recorded during the lying-in-state of Elizabeth II in the hall of Westminster Abbey. Above the whispering crowd, we can hear the loud crash of a sword, marking a succession of sequences that the guards had to follow.

Describing Hapaska's work is not an easy task, holding back the urge to interpret. The artist has the uncanny capacity to stimulate simultaneously the historical, metaphorical, political as well as personal layers of the materials and forms with which she engages. Yet the many lines of inquiry do not create confusion but rather an exhilarating sense of possibilities.

One trajectory is initiated by the change of material: Roman emperors and Renaissance bankers embedded their power in marble, this 3D-printed plastic lion suggests our new rulers come from technology and programming. Yet this new power looks fragile; this Medici lion lacks footing, a paper tiger relying on precarious and easily withdrawn supports, whether the straps that keep it afloat or the buckles that hold it together. The military look of the apparatus adds a twist to our reading: new technologies and their infrastructures are first developed through massive military budgets for defensive and offensive purposes. Yet the straps and buckles also have a more personal dimension because they feature regularly in Hapaska's work (her work *Intifada*, 2015-16, comes to mind); they may have different roles in different works, but they clearly signal how constructed the symbolic is and how easily the parts can be rearranged.

Likewise, the visible making process - traces of the printer at work can be followed like a topographic map on the body and in several places there are solid blocks of plastic - can point at the fragility of the figure. But these traces of making are intriguing when referred back to Hapaska's fibreglass pieces from the 1990s (*Land*, 1998, or *Delirious*, 1996, for instance), which looked machine-made. In an interview with Hester R Westley (*AM311*), Hapaska commented on 'how laborious it was to eradicate any trace of their making' because she 'didn't want to leave any traces of [herself] in those works'. Conversely, would the traces of the computer-programmed 3D-printing process suppose the subjectivity of the machine?

Now the pile of marble stone might point to the passing from one material type of power to another, but equally to our crumbling world. Does the photograph of Mars then suggest a SpaceX future for humanity à la Elon Musk or, in resonance with the words with which Hapaska concluded her accompanying gallery interview, a projection of a 'residual longing to be somewhere else'.

There is a pendant work to the *Medici Lion* in the entrance to the gallery, a 3D-printed sculpture of a Jack Russell Terrier carrying the lofty title of *Salvatore Mundi* (Saviour of the World). The title is usually assigned to images of Christ, and this saviour does share some of his attributes: it has a halo in the form of an LED collar and a crystal ball for an orb, but the dog's body is covered in bandages, its head ensconced in a gasmask and its hind legs supported by a wheelchair. Yet there is a sense of resilience in its helplessness, an appropriate saviour figure for the current state of our world.

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