

GOWITHYAMO

Review by Aoife Allen
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Spotlight

Power and Decline: Siobhan Hapaska's Medici Lion at the Douglas Hyde

The Douglas Hyde Gallery opens 2024 with sculptor Siobhán Hapaska's latest solo exhibition, *Medici Lion*, a new array of sculptural pieces developed over the past three years.

By Aoife Allen January 30, 2024

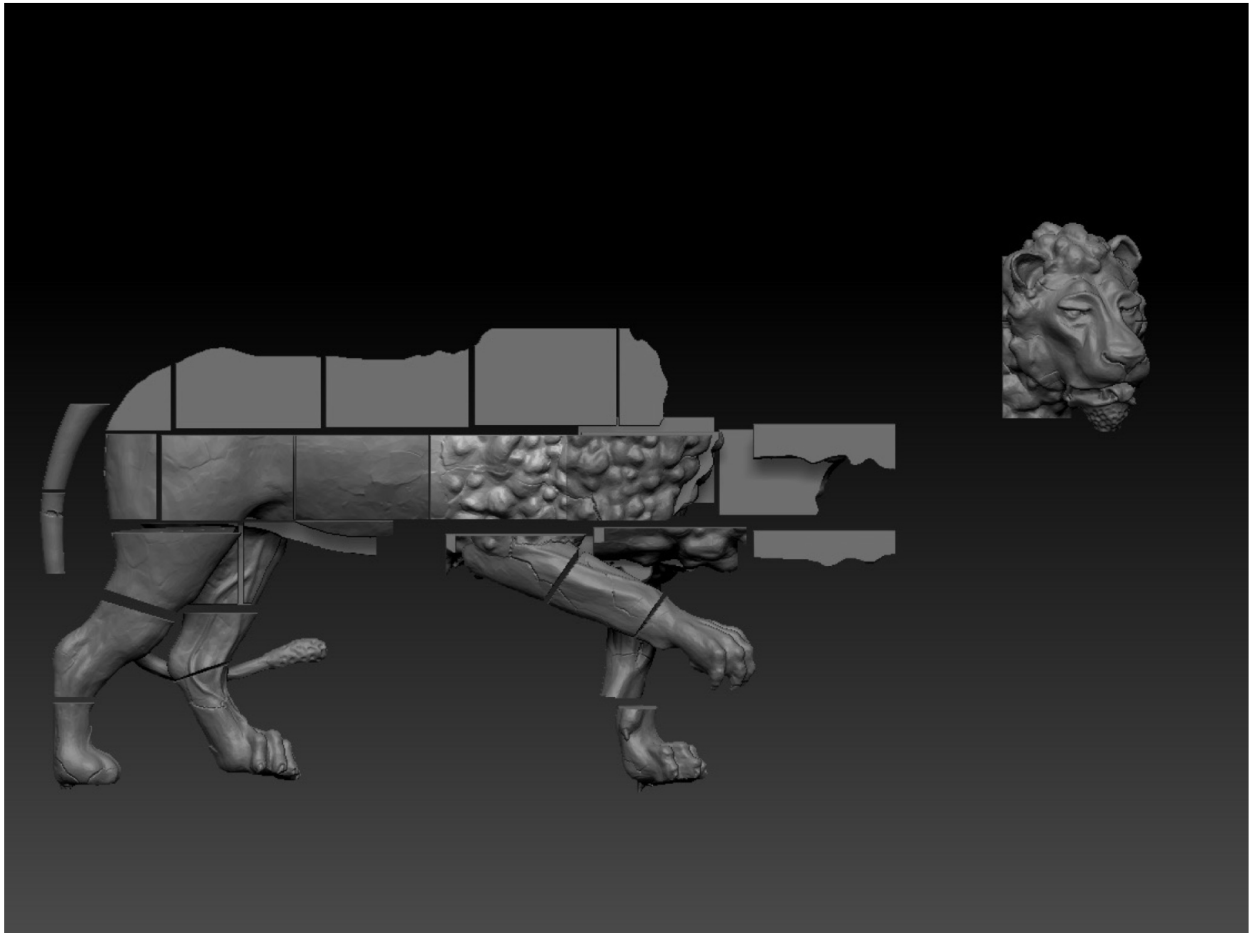
The Douglas Hyde Gallery

Sculpture

Siobhan Hapaska



An Irish-Parsee sculptor, Siobhán Hapaska completed her Bachelor's in art at Middlesex Polytechnic and later completed a Master's degree at Goldsmiths College. Hapaska boasts a long list of achievements, notably representing Ireland at the Venice Biennale in 2001, and her work is housed in many collections including the Tate Modern, IMMA and the British Council. As the artist's first institutional solo exhibition in the Republic of Ireland, Medici Lion stands out as another landmark in a career filled with achievements.



Digital rendering of *Medici Lion*

Medici Lion focuses on - as the title suggests - the motif of the lion, finding its centrepiece with a four-meter suspended sculpture depicting the animal in a fractured form dangling from the ceiling and attached to the walls of the Douglas Hyde Gallery. As was often the case in sculptural representations of the lion throughout art history, Hapaska's lion is positioned with its foot extended, echoing the Albani Lion, a 1st-century Roman green basalt statue which holds a yellow marble sphere under one paw and also holds this pose. The Medici Lions, a pair of marble statues that sat guarding the steps to the Villa Medici in Rome in the late sixteenth century, also hold this pose - and lend the exhibition its title. One of the Medici pairs dates back to the 2nd century CE, while the other was commissioned to match its predecessor by Ferdinando I de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. These animals rest one of their



front paws on a globe, a stance intended to represent world domination, and stand as highly recognisable and recurring figures, with their copies located all across the European continent and the wider world. The lion depicted in this manner became a common motif in the history of art, one that Medici Lion dissects and analyses through its modern representation of the trope. In Hapaska's piece, instead of placing the lion's foot upon a sphere, the lion hovers its paw above a pile of stone fragments; perhaps an attempt to suggest what became of the once smooth and polished surface of the harmonious figure of the globe.

The lion in and of itself has almost universally and continually represented power, strength and control, and is also commonly associated with military might, justice and other moral constructs. Yet the lion that Hapaska presents to the visitors of Medici Lion is a very different one. This lion does not emanate the traditional qualities that are almost automatically associated with its image. Instead, the artist uses the image of the lion to explore current global crises, including war, the failings of democracy and the climate crisis. The lion in its precariously suspended position with the fractures

that cover its body - alluding to its declining physical state - successfully portrays the concepts of dwindling and shifting power as well as the loss of what once was. The structure is accompanied by an audio clip of ambient noise recorded at Westminster Abbey while Queen Elizabeth II lay in State: another aspect of the artwork connecting it to the concept of the decline of power through the death of one of the world's longest reigning monarchic leaders. The physical artworks present in the Douglas Hyde are accompanied by graphic renderings of Medici Lion; visible in the images above and on the gallery's Instagram page: @dhg_dublin.

Medici Lion is accompanied by another much smaller sculptural piece that is visible on the ground floor of the Douglas Hyde Gallery when entering through the front doors. The work entitled Salvatore Mundi - sharing the name of the famed Leonardo DaVinci painting - depicts another animal figure, most likely a dog, encapsulated by an extraordinary number of bandages and wearing a World War II-style gas mask. The back legs of the creature are rendered useless, illustrated by the wheels, connected to the body via a harness, that stabilize the animal. Salvatore Mundi wears an LED light-up collar and angles its foot towards a crystal ball that rests on the floor. The two pieces of the exhibition are connected not only through the uniform coat of white paint that they wear but also in their vulnerability and instability. The lion is vulnerable and unstable due to the fractures in its structure, while the dog shows the same characteristics via its bandages, makeshift wheelchair and its low form of protection, an outdated gasmask. Perhaps the dog acts as a foreshadowing, representing what may become of the lion in time if the negative state of politics, environmental crisis and military conflict continues to become more and more extreme. Yet, this theory is counteracted by the dog's possession of the crystal ball, symbolic of the earth, while the lion only has a destroyed globe to show for itself. Perhaps, the artist wishes to show that the weakest among us still possess some power and that they can too be influential over these critical earthwide matters.

Through this exhibition Siobhán Hapaska maintains her usual artistic devices such as the prevalence of hope, the centrality of material and the use of wit and humour to present the viewer with something fresh and contemplative - and that engages with the world outside the gallery.

Medici Lion is on display until 10th March 2024.