

Lewis Hammond
While We Were Sleeping
curated by Rita Selvaggio

Digital opening | Saturday March 27, 6.30 pm

27 March - 5 June 2021
Casa Masaccio | Corso Italia, 83 | San Giovanni Valdarno



Lewis Hammond, Drowner, 2020, Oil on canvas 30 × 60 cm (11 ¾ × 23 ⅞ inches)
Courtesy L'Artista & Arcadia Missa

*Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.*

*A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.*

*Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.
T.S. Eliot, 'Death by Water' from *The Waste Land* (1922)*

Casa Masaccio | Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea is delighted to present *While We Were Sleeping*, the first solo exhibition staged in a museum by **Lewis Hammond** (1987). This project was conceived following a period of study that the artist, a guest of the Artist-in-Residence Program, spent in Tuscany last autumn exploring the history of the region's art.

An appreciation of the connections and conversations between works of art, however great the distance in time that separates the lives of their creators, is combined in Lewis Hammond's artistic practice—through an involvement with the history of painting and the ways in which this can be used to reflect on the time and space of our existence. The visitor is greeted on entering the exhibition by the image of a figure drowning in inclement waters, an allusion to motives for reflection that are expressed through the symbolism of figuration.

The lines of 'Death by Water' from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, with their variations in tone and meditative character, with their different levels of expression, act as the supporting structure for the layout of the exhibition and prompt us to remember our own mortality. It is a sort of continual textual presence that illuminates the background of the images, dissolving into an aphoristic movement, somewhere between visionary evocation and scenic iconicity. The concept of transformation, from flowering to wilting, from birth to death, from the beginning to the end, and the oscillation between these polarities, structures the unfolding of the exhibition. The representation is set in imaginary devoid landscapes, of foreboding and nostalgia, stifling interiors, dark nights and volcanic flames, pitch and fire and a land that is about to be submerged by a flood of red, as Walter Benjamin observed, defining his poetry as 'truly political'.

"Many of my paintings show characters in disorientated states where their bodies appear mutilated, multiplied or mutating. The bodies absorb the violence of a hostile and dystopian present, of homogenised and reductive spaces in which individuals find themselves in a perpetual quest for self-identification," declares the artist, alluding to a condition of deprivation on the part of humanity, which no longer knows anything of semiotics. On the walls of the 'house', among the raw materials of its architecture alternating with monochromes in green earth, as was typical of cloisters in Masaccio's day, Lewis Hammond's painting absorbs the reverberations of an intangible horizon, pointing to a subjectivity that no longer has a subject, displaced from its own and original location and thrust into ontological disorientation.

The perfection of the origin makes the fall stand out more strongly and Phlebas, the Phoenician, has forgotten the cry of gulls.

CASA MASACCIO CENTRO PER L'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA

Lewis Hammond (b. 1987) lives and works between London and Berlin. Born in Wolverhampton, UK, he completed his Post-graduate Diploma in 2017 at the Royal Academy Schools, London.

Hammond makes oil paintings that represent psychological states, using aspects of his own lived experience to inform the work. Intertwining art historical and pop-cultural references to build worlds, subjects find themselves in a perpetual quest for self-identification. Imagined landscapes and constrained architectural spaces evoke anxiety and alienation with the abjection of racialised bodies, fears and desires.

Previous solo exhibitions include *Still Life*, Lulu, Mexico City (MX), 2020, *The Keep*, Arcadia Missa, London (UK), 2019. Hammond has shown his work at group exhibitions including *Possessed*, MO.CO, Montpellier (FR), 2020, *We Shall Survive in the Memory of Others*, Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin (DE), 2019, *A House is Not a Home / A Home is Not a House*, Kunsthalle Fribourg, Fribourg (CH), 2019, *In my Room*, Antenna Space, Shanghai (CN), 2019, *Byrd Hammond Klossowski Olowaska*, Balice Hertling, Paris (FR), 2018, *In the Flesh*, Peles Empire, Berlin (DE), 2018, *Condo*, with Arcadia Missa and Lomex, New York, US (2018).

While We Were Sleeping has been realised thanks to the support of **Arcadia Missa** and in collaboration with **Black History Month Florence**.

Black History Month Florence was founded in 2016 is a cross institutional network for Black cultural production that celebrates Afro-descendent Cultures in the context of Italy. The initiative is engaged in programming, advising and co-promoting over 50 events annually within the month of February, through a network formed and supported by the Comune, foundations, institutions, cultural associations, museums, schools and venues dedicated to art and to music.

The digital opening, that will be live-streamed on Casa Masaccio | Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea website and Facebook page will see the participation, besides **Lewis Hammond**, of **Valentina Vadi**, Major of Comune di San Giovanni Valdarno, **Fabio Franchi**, Culture Assessor of San Giovanni Valdarno, **Fausto Forte**, Director of Casa Masaccio | Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea, **Rita Selvaggio**, Chief curator of Casa Masaccio | Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea and curator of the exhibition, **Justin Randolph Thompson**, co-founder and co-director of Black History Month Florence, president of the cultural association BHMf, **Janine Gaëlle Dieudji**, co-director and Vice President of the cultural association BHMf and Exhibitions director of the Museum of African contemporary art Al Maaden (MACAAL) in Marrakech.



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