

# ROSA SANTOS

JACOPO MILIANI

*“AAHH” The flowers say so*

28/01/23 – 18/03/23

Galería Rosa Santos is pleased to present *AAHH*, a solo show by Jacopo Miliani in which the artist returns to his research into the language of flowers and non-binary sexualities.

As soon as we enter the gallery, we are met by a series of assemblage-like works composed from large-format prints of the rear view of a man's nude muscular body, the typical stereotyped image of a body from a fitness magazine or adult homoerotic publication. However, the aesthetic, the pose, the model's haircut, the composition and light of these images all hark back to the 1980s. The images are coupled with formal elements that create a superimposed conceptual layer: a bar and piece of metal add structure while a fresh flower, presented as is, stands for a state of natural transience, short-circuiting the images of male nudes. One might even say that, at once, they also operate like the score for a performance, where observers play and compose with their own movement.

In this series, Miliani returns to an investigation he begun in 2013 together with the curator Sara Giannini which they materialized in 2018 with the publication *Whispering Catastrophe. On the Language of Men Loving Men in Japan*. In 2013 the two had travelled to Japan to take part in a programme of performances organized by the OuUnPo research group. During a stroll around the Shinjuku Ni-chōme neighbourhood on the last night of their trip, they entered a shop and came across a vintage homoerotic magazine in which the male sexual organs were artfully covered by sea waves, creating a melancholic image of seduction. Afterwards they found more magazines from the late-seventies and eighties, which reached their peak in the period just prior to the advent of Internet. In many of these publications, flowers were used to censor the images, but, at the same time, these same flowers proved to be, in themselves, highly erotically charged, creating a kind of soft-porn content that contrasts sharply with the easily accessible porn images in the internet era.

In this way, the research and publication from 2018 turn the spotlight on the elements used to carry out an act of censorship—understood as a political and ideological act that intends to negate the expression of sexualities and identities that diverge from the norm—and reach the conclusion that these censoring elements are transformed into catalysts of desire, evocative creative gestures that not only overcome the primary obstacle but also add meaning. More specifically, flowers were frequently used in various chapters within the sanctioned history of art to unfurl imaginaries associated with human sexuality and women. However, it is often a question of translation in which a human interest is projected, given that the flower in itself is an organism without any defined sex. *“Through an abused symbol, I feel the strength of my weakness,”* as Miliani says in the text-poem the artist wrote for this exhibition.

Following the parcours, in the following room we come across some small collages in which we can identify images of the Mies Van der Rohe pavilion in Montjuic, Barcelona. This gem of modern architecture, and an example of a language that regulates and orders the movement of bodies in a space, is also a building whose surroundings have been gradually taken over by other corporeal choreographies. Cruising could be defined as loitering with erotic intent, a universal practice in the Western urban world that defends the culture of sex in public with the purpose of sustaining the pleasure of immediate carnal contact within contexts of persecution or marginalization. It ought to be understood as a collective strategy to appropriate the streets and take over the city (the public space), as a way of creating community for those who do not have a community (who have no space).

Jose Estebán Muñoz's theoretical work *Cruising Utopia* serves as a framework for many of the reflections undertaken here by Miliani: the need to open up new horizons to create other communities grounded in dissident politics; intimacy as a clearly political gesture; utopia as a projection of the future. That being said, confronted with the present continuous of the term 'cruising', we are faced with a continuous reactivation in the here and now. This makes us think of something interesting and leads us to believe that the past does not exist as a closed block, but, on the contrary, as a constellation of traces in which the key to open the door of a future of healing, where all bodies can exist, may be hidden or momentarily deactivated.

The work that gives its title to the exhibition is a textile piece, a rug of sorts handmade by the artist's parents with a multicoloured text that depicts the onomatopoeia AAHH, an expression which could express a feeling of surprise, acknowledgment, pleasure or pain depending on the situation. This space generated by an absence of context pulls us through a crack in the strict normative of language. Viewed as an anagram, AAHH also encompasses HAAA, once again embodying the same ease of turning one thing into another. It is not the first time that Miliani has played with onomatopoeia and anagrams, having already done so in the performance *oomh* (2018).

Finally, in the basement room we find three light sculptures whose inspiration is borrowed from a beekeeper's suit. This protective clothing is in itself the maximum form of censorship, with a design that only makes it possible to intuit the bodies behind it. The three lamps are bodiless suits, divested of their use function, like a language without body. The wall at the back of the room is covered with images of flowers by means of a slide projection in the dark.

In Miliani's personal text we can find the perfect coda to this narrative on his exhibition: *The flower was tired of being beautiful, tired of being fresh and pure... the flower was never beautiful, fresh and pure, but the human eye has often looked at the flower this way.*

## **This is Jackalope**

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