

REBECCA CAMACHO PRESENTS



Max Jansons | *Wish You Were Here*

8 March through 20 April 2024

Opening reception: Friday 8 March, 5 to 7pm

For some years, Max Jansons has been making paintings that enthrall with their sensuous forms and alluring paint handling. In this new body of work, our engagement with those formal qualities is jump-started by an equally compelling psychological presence that seems to hover just on the other side of each picture plane. In this way, the paintings are comparable to the charged tabletop still-lives of Giorgio Morandi, an acknowledged touchstone for Jansons. But we experience the psychological jolt embedded in Janson's work as both more immediate and more joyful. Everywhere in these pictures, we find eyes connecting with our own. A movie star's eyes pop, their contours lined in dark brown, irises dappled with blues and reddish earth tones. The giant eyes of an amiable raptor gaze out at us from an owl-shaped vase containing a spray of delicate stems with thickly painted leaves that lead into the luscious, undulating brush marks filling the picture's surface. Even the paintings that do not contain faces seem to stare back, as in the variegated blue rings in *The Peacocks* whose concentric patterns draw us to their centers. The effect is, in each case, particular. We find ourselves in an exchange with this picture, whose imagery seems to offer a portrait of its own making.

The play of figuration in Jansons's paintings is reminiscent of Surrealist strategies for symbolic identification—the way those painters would array significant, if idiosyncratic, imagery along a horizon line that staked out a psychological landscape. However, Janson's affinities are not grounded in a psychoanalysis of past events rather in the potential of memory to become fertile in the present moment. The motif of flowers and verdant branches scrolling outward from the interior spaces of people, pitchers, and other vessels is only the most overt symbol of this exchange between thought and manifest creativity. Throughout Jansons's paintings, memory and making are shown to inflect each other. A perfect example is *A Moment of Illumination*, where the melting wax of a lit candle - rendered with white paint applied directly from the tube - flows with matter-of-fact certainty into a remembered passage of Clyfford Still-esque abstract expressionism. Figuration here is rich in material poetics, and Jansons allows that poetry to permeate the full physicality of each painting. Don't mistake those exposed nail heads adorning the pictures' tacking margins for mere hardware: those are grace notes echoing the brilliantly colored buds and berries that populate the pictures' scrolling, meandering, unfurling branches. These paintings invite us to look around. Plan to stay awhile.

- Kirk Nickel

Kirk Nickel, PhD is the Marc and Lillian Rojzman Curator at the Haggerty Museum of Art at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Nickel's research often focuses on Renaissance painting in northern Italy. Prior to joining the Haggerty, Nickel was Assistant Curator at the Legion of Honor, San Francisco where he organized an exhibition of early paintings by Peter Paul Rubens in 2019. Before joining the Legion of Honor, Nickel was Curatorial Fellow at the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

Gallery hours: Thursday, Friday, Saturday 12noon to 5pm