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Otherwise, Presence

Gaia Fugazza, Paul Maheke, Anousha Payne

critical text by Elena Forin

Opening 26.11.2026, 6-9pm

From 26.11.2026 to 5.02.2027

Artopia is pleased to open, on **Thursday 26 November**, ***Otherwise, Presence***, a group show bringing together the works of **Gaia Fugazza (Milan, Italy, 1985), Paul Maheke (Brive-la-Gaillarde, France, 1985) and Anousha Payne (Southampton, UK, 1991).**

The exhibition explores the shifting conditions of presence, conceiving the body not as a predefined state, but as a site of transformation, memory, and radical becoming. What does it mean to be present? And what conditions can presence convey? Moving between material and immaterial realms, different temporalities, and cultural imaginaries, *Otherwise, Presence* explores the body as a trace of experience and a threshold between different states of being: a reflection on what remains, what endures, what returns, and what transforms.
The exhibition unfolds in a dialogue with the gallery's architecture, guiding visitors on an immersive journey through metamorphosis, historical memories and existential fluidity.

Created during his residency at Villa Medici in Rome in 2025-2026, **Paul Maheke**'s works depict ethereal bodies, painted on impalpable materials such as veils and plexiglass sheets. These figures emerged from an examination of how death was portrayed in the historical Roman setting, leading to a reflection on the violence of post-mortem imagery and on the possibility of restoring visibility to lives and stories relegated to the margins. The material of the supports and the painting technique lend the forms – suspended between apparition and fading – a floating, spectral quality, challenging the ways in which we perceive the image and, consequently, the other.

Gaia Fugazza explores corporeality through movement and metamorphosis, translating the fluidity of emotional and physical states, such as crying, environmental stimuli and landing in a dream other than one's own, into ceramics and drawings. Alongside the small porcelain fragments, the artist presents a large work on paper created specifically for the gallery. Here, stories of presences and crossings take shape within an archetypal visual imagery centred on nature. Fugazza invites us to view the world from a non-human perspective, to listen to the sounds and thoughts of the environment and its creatures, moving beyond anthropocentric constructs and categories.

The animal metamorphosis, on the other hand, serves as a narrative filter for **Anousha Payne**. In her hybrid sculptures made of ceramic, rattan and wood, accompanied by works on fabric, populated by sinuous forms and tactile references, she evokes the traces of historical and social transformations. By exploring inherited cultural imaginaries and the fluid boundaries between human and non-human identities, the artist brings to life enigmatic figures that evoke folklore and animism. Through these forms, Payne highlights interspecies porosity and the risks of cultural dispersion experienced by generations shaped by migration and colonial histories.

Never entirely defined or confined, in *Otherwise, Presence*, the body becomes a trace of experience and a threshold between different states of being. "Despite the diversity of their practices, Fugazza, Maheke and Payne seem to share a similar depth in the way they conduct their research. Historical, cultural, social, environmental, economic and political contexts of different origins and intensity are explored and used with a similar degree of responsibility and commitment. It is precisely in this gap between the body and the enlarging lens of their investigations that a specific nuance emerges, one that conceives of presence as a form of otherness, reflection, attention and awakening. Each of the works on display, in fact, seeks to depict a transition of state, an alternative identity and a form of existence that transcends conventional logic and interpretations," writes curator Elena Forin in the critical essay accompanying the exhibition.

Artopia is a contemporary art gallery that presents emerging and mid-career Italian and international artists through a programme of site-specific exhibitions. Embracing multidisciplinary practices, the gallery expresses a sensitivity to the inter-relations between geographical, cultural, and emotional ecosystems. In dialogue with the architecture of its Milanese space, Artopia's curatorial programme and artistic collaborations move fluidly between the urban context and decentralized territories, embracing the Apulian landscape through Nucré: a residency and exhibition project that animates the summer season. Here, invited artists are encouraged to engage with the local cultural and anthropological heritage, fostering encounters that extend beyond the gallery walls.

Paul Maheke (Brive-la-Gaillarde, France, 1985) lives and works in Montpellier. Working across performance, installation, sculpture, video, sound and painting, his practice explores the ways in which marginalised bodies, narratives and histories are made visible or rendered invisible.
His work has been presented at institutions including Tate Modern and Tate Britain, Centre Pompidou, Palais de Tokyo, the Renaissance Society in Chicago, Performa in New York, Chisenhale Gallery and South London Gallery. He has participated in the Venice Biennale and the Baltic Triennial, among other major international exhibitions. Maheke was a Fellow at Villa Medici in Rome in 2025–2026 and is currently an artist-in-residence at Amant in New York. His work is held in the collections of Tate, the Arts Council Collection and the Centre national des arts plastiques (CNAP).

Gaia Fugazza (Milan, Italy, 1985) lives and works between the United Kingdom and Italy. She holds an MFA from Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London (2014).
Her practice encompasses the creation of objects and performances that delve into the concept of tacit knowledge while challenging the Cartesian schism between the body and the mind and between subjects and the environment. Recent solo and duo exhibitions include *Sete* at Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples; *Making Kin* at Richard Saltoun, Rome; *A Fool with a Tool* at Case Chiuse, Milan; *Virginity Is Not a Contraceptive* at Richard Saltoun; *Antidotes and Their Counterparts* at Häusler Contemporary, Zurich; and *Ostaggi e Amici* at Galleriapiù, Bologna.
Her work has been featured in biennials and institutional exhibitions including the Orobie Biennale; Lofoten International Art Festival; the 13th Baltic Triennial, London; Premio Cairo, Milan; Glasstress, Venice; Mediterranea, Milan; The London Open at Whitechapel Gallery, London; and Hrm 199 Ltd at Tinguely Museum, Basel.
Her work is held in the institutional collections of Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, the Deutsche Bank Collection, and the Benetton Collection.

Anousha Payne (Southampton, UK, 1991) lives and works between Paris and London. Working between sculpture, painting, text and sound, Payne's work often follows a set of personal codes alongside familiar or universal images. She proposes characters that traverse the liminal space that stretches between personal experiences, fiction and folklore. Following material lead processes to build narratives, new speculative hybrid creatures are suggested through poetic material play and figurative gestures. Sculptures are often formed by assemblage, using a combination of found objects, ceramic and cast bronze objects that function as cultural signifiers while questioning material hierarchies and values.
Anousha Payne holds a BA from Camberwell School of Art. Recent exhibitions and projects include *Soft Power* festival, 11-13th September, Berlin; *Flesh and Stone* by Palour Palour 20th October-20th November in Paris; a 9 month residency at Cité des Arts, Paris (2025-26); *Triangle reshapes the O of my mouth* at Sperling Munich as part of Various Others (until June 29). *Murmurations* at Zeyrek Çinili Hamam, Istanbul (2025), curated by Anlam de Coster; a sculpture commission for York Art Gallery, UK (2025); *The Small Things / From the Lowest Land* with Sonja Ferlov Mancoba at Newchild, Antwerp (2024).
Upcoming exhibitions include a site specific project at the Zuoz chapel in Switzerland, presented by Sperling in February 2027, and *Becoming* a group exhibition at Pinakothek in Munich, September 2027