



Hallowed Halls

Thomas Renwart

Opening reception 06.12.2023

6 pm – 8 pm

07.12.2023 - 10.02.2024

Thursday to Saturday – 3 pm to 7 pm

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Kunsthalle Lissabon is thrilled to announce *Hallowed Halls*, the first solo exhibition in Portugal by the Belgian artist Thomas Renwart.

In English the term "hallowed" not only conveys a sense of sacredness but also signifies something that has garnered enduring respect and admiration. This esteem transcends transient trends, beliefs, and historical confines, maintaining its unaltered reputation due to unequivocal abilities or qualities. Thomas Renwart opts to construct the walls of his Hallowed Halls with tapestries portraying majestic depictions of ferns. This choice bestows upon the fern the acknowledgment that persists, positioning it as one of the oldest plants on our planet that has always maintained its mystical aura of protection.

Found for the first time in Mesozoic fossil finds, the fern has come down to us, taking on different meanings and beneficial properties for each culture that encountered it. In Japan ferns are believed to grow where the spirit of a loved one passes. In medieval times in the north of Europe ferns were hung to dry at the front door to protect the house from evil. Fascinated by the mystical meaning with which ferns have been invested over the centuries, Thomas Renwart chose them as the main subjects of his new series of tapestries, created following the art of Belgian weaving tradition. However, these works are not only a tribute to the fern, but each one works also as lucky charm, bringing with it a ribbon and talisman.

Often, when we think of a talisman, our mind thinks of something small that can be kept in a pocket, Thomas Renwart leads us to rediscover the ancient environmental, almost apotropaic, function that the talisman had in the first millennium AD. when statues and architecture often depicted symbols and animals that protected the memory of the character represented in the statue or the entrance to certain places.

For this reason, the artist represents in each big tapestry a small square talisman, in the frame of which evil symbols are represented kept outside by a symbol of love, hope, freedom and so on.

Through his tapestries, adorned with petite good luck talismans, the artist invites us to transcend the commonplace individualistic aspect of talismans, encouraging a return to a more experiential and shared dimension. This sentiment is echoed by the ribbons that embellish each representation of the ferns, symbolically imparting their virtues to those who encounter them on their journey. A journey, for this occasion, especially adorned with romantic street lanterns that dive the surroundings in a gentle, nocturnal ambiance—a space in which one may either lose oneself or, perhaps, discover something essential.

Thomas Renwart aspires, through his artistic research, to delve into the nuanced meanings embedded within the textile tradition and, in doing so, unlock the potential of visual storytelling. By seamlessly intertwining tradition with references to animals and botanical elements, he endeavors to reevaluate the significance of the subjects he portrays, simultaneously illuminating an age-old manufacturing tradition typical of his homeland.

The artist wishes to dedicate this show to his Grandmother, Aunt Ninine and Mother. And to M&T.

Thomas Renwart (1995) lives and works in Ghent, Belgium. He graduated in 2019 from LUCA School of Arts, obtaining his master's degree in Textiles. Renwart has participated in several group shows in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Germany, and the USA. In 2020, he had a solo exhibition at Kunsthall Gent titled "Gilding The Lily" followed by a large installation as part of the "Endless Exhibition" project. In 2021, the artist was awarded the Dorothy Waxman Prize 2021 by Parsons (NY, USA) and also received two Henry Van De Velde awards for his work as a textile artist. In early 2022, he held a solo exhibition at Europe House (London, UK). Later that year, the Flemish government acquired one of his works for the collection of the Flemish Community, which was subsequently added to the Mu.Zee collection in Ostend. In 2023 he had his solo show "Nightfall" at the Kulturzentrum Alter Schlachthof in Belgium. The artist is represented by Barbé Gallery (Ghent, Belgium) and Thomas Rehbein Gallery (Cologne, Germany).

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