

*The Escape* by Ana Mazzei by Lusin Reinsch

Ana Mazzei's solo exhibition *The Escape* at Nina Horvitz Galerie unfolds at the intersection of sculpture, painting, installation and video, yet resists settling into any one of these categories. The word „escape“ has its roots in the Old Northern French „eschaper“, which means „to get away, to leave behind.“ This, in turn, comes from the Vulgar Latin „excapare“, a compound of ex- („out of“) and cappa („cloak“ or „cape“). The original sense was literal: to slip out of one's cloak, to evade capture or confinement. Over time, the meaning expanded to include other forms of liberation, whether physical, social. The title *The Escape* hints at both, a promise and an inquiry. What are we escaping from? And what might we find on the other side?

These questions are experienced rather than answered through the spatial composition of the exhibition. Here, modes of image production—how images are made, unmade, and remade— are just as much a theme as they are a method. Drawing on theatrical thinking while moving beyond its conventions, Mazzei creates situations in which images emerge through spatial relations and motion. Within these arrangements, positions shift, roles are destabilized, and meaning is continuously negotiated. The viewer moves through them, not as an external observer, but as a body among other bodies, a participant implicated in the performance of the works. These demand to be encountered from different angles to reveal their layers, inviting the viewer to lean in, step back, and become aware of their own body in space. Take, for example, the four wall-mounted sculptures, anchored by wooden platforms and outlined by metal structures suggesting frames or thresholds, echoing the architecture of the theater. Within these carefully composed settings, patinated bronze figures hover between abstraction and figuration, between actor and prop, as if inhabiting roles which never fully resolve into narrative. In the sculpture, *The Escape*, a slender figure wearing a mask raises its arms in a pose that suggests dance or performance. The mask, with its avian beak, recalls traditions of theatrical disguise, from ritual to the stock characters of commedia dell'arte. Beside it stands a fragile chair-like structure, while behind them a small painting of geometric forms in vivid colors hangs like a suspended backdrop. Drawing subtly on the visual language of Brazilian Concretism and Neo-Concretism, this painted element introduces a moment of order within the scene, contrasting with the dynamics of its surroundings. The plateau acts as a rule, a constraint; but Mazzei seems to defy it. An opening interrupts the wooden floor, a metal structure fractures the stage and the figures spill beyond its edges. What emerges is a spatial paradox: a stage that is both fixed and

fluid, a scene that is at once scripted and improvisational. Through this interplay, escape emerges as a destabilization of the structures that seek to contain it.

If the sculptures embody this instability in space, through the tension between frame and rupture, the paintings internalize it. Across six oil paintings on linen, narrative is not enacted but anticipated, held in a state of quiet expectancy. Portrayed through minimal shapes and contours the protagonists of these paintings linger between representation and symbol, echoing the ambiguity of the sculptural figures. Several of them migrate between sculpture and painting: what stands as an object in one work returns in another as a silhouette or trace. In *Shadow*, the warm peach background and the deep black of the figures create a tension, as if the scene is lit by an unseen sun, casting shadows that stretch beyond the frame. Unstable spatial relations and bold colors—velvet red, luminous gold and radiant orange, soft peach and dense green—evoke the dreamlike atmosphere reminiscent of Pittura Metafisica.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to these early 20th-century practices, Mazzei uses abstraction and reduced formal language: brushstrokes remain visible and edges deliberately raw, as though the scenes are still emerging. In this way, the paintings do not frame the space, they fragment it. They carry the sculptural approach into the realm of perception, creating a visual rhythm that resonates with the viewer's movement through the exhibition. What was previously organized in space now takes place within, as a friction between seeing and imagining.

While the paintings hold action in a state of anticipation, the video work *The ESCAPE*, allows this tension to extend across time. Images of fire frame the work suggesting a cyclical sense of time, as if hovering in a suspended loop. The video's uneven pacing underscores time's instability, revealing it as shaped rather than fixed, and reminding us that escape is not just spatial but also temporal. Filmed in black and white, it directs the attention toward movement, sound, and gesture. Two masked performers travel through shifting environments—first a natural landscape, then the interior of what appears to be a stage—their actions oscillating between ritual and improvisation. At times they move slowly as if entranced, at others their images multiply, creating a sense of déjà vu. They climb abandoned cars and scan the horizon as if in search of something (or someone) just out of reach. Occasionally, their gazes meet ours, pulling us into the scene and implicating us in this search, while a lone bird perched in a tree watches the scene unfold. A goat appears first as a fleeting memory, then as a tangible presence, amplifying the video's surreal layering. The soundtrack deepens this feeling: It begins with the electric twang of a guitar, a

sound that feels placeless. Drums join in, adding a pulse that builds tension, until the güiro's scrape arrives, alluding to the soundscape of Latin America. Moving between close, handheld shots and more distant views, the video establishes a shared field of perception, where performer, viewer, and scenery dissolve into one another. Within this liminal space, distinctions between arrival and departure, presence and absence, begin to blur, until they feel less like opposites and more like turning tides of the same experience.

The short tale *The Escape* translates these ideas into textual form, offering a poetic thread that ponders what it means to slip beyond the given. In her walk toward the ocean, undertaken without intention of return, the protagonist does not vanish, but rather redefines her relation to the world, she „deterritorializes“. Bringing to mind the thoughts of Deleuze and Guattari, where deterritorialization does not imply disappearance but a reconfiguration of position, becoming less a fixed identity than a verb „to flow, to carve, to imagine.“<sup>2</sup> The exhibition renders the possibility of escaping visible in the spaces in-between, in the shifts of perception happening, when we allow ourselves to be unsettled. In the end, what we escape is not the world, but our habitual ways of seeing it.

<sup>1</sup> Pittura Metafisica was a movement created by Giorgio de Chirico and the former futurist, Carlo Carra, in the north Italian city of Ferrara. Using a realist style, they painted the squares typical of such Italian cities but the squares are unnaturally empty, and in them objects and statues are brought together in strange juxtapositions. The artists thus created a visionary world of the mind, beyond physical reality. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/metaphysical-art>

<sup>2</sup> “They used [deterritorialization] to indicate the fracturing of and freeing from repressive fixations and despotic arrangements of a certain milieu, be it conceptual, social, affective or linguistic. The [...] concept of freeing oneself, escape, or in their words, lines of flight, should not be understood, however, as a movement toward an a-territorial situation. The stress is on the movement itself, the process, hence the prefix de- and the use of the active form -ing, as in deterritorializing.”

In “Deterritorialization,” in *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, ed. Mark Bevir (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2010), Vol.3, p. 377.