

METRO PICTURES

Press, Clayton. "Oliver Laric Celebrates the Year Of The Dog At Metro Pictures," *Forbes.com* (March 8, 2018).

Forbes



Oliver Laric. *Hundemensch*. 2018.

There is no book. There is no set. There is no music. There is only life and us. It's absolutely frightening to do a work when you have nothing to hold on to. . . In the end, it's composition. What you do with things. —Pina Bausch

Cryptozoology, the study of hidden animals, has its origins in the Greek word *kryptos*, meaning concealed or enigmatic. According to the International Cryptozoology Museum, located in Portland, Maine, cryptozoology “has moved from a shadowy world of travelogues to academic respectability and beyond.” How far beyond is uncertain, but the roster of cryptids—“the beasts who hide from men”—is international and includes the familiar (Yeti, Loch Ness and Sasquatch) and the lesser known (Aswang, Elwetritsch and Tikbalang.)

Hundemensch, the German term for dog-headed man, is another cryptid. Physically, it most resembles Anubis, the early Egyptian deity, which had many roles associated with death and the afterlife in the Early Dynastic period and the Old Kingdom. The dog- (or jackal-) headed god was an embalmer, a protector of graves and, most significantly, a guide for souls to the beyond. Anubis was also known as “guardian of the scales,” who measured the weight of a deceased person’s heart to determine whether the person was worthy of entering the realm of the dead.



Oliver Laric. *Hundemensch*. 2018.

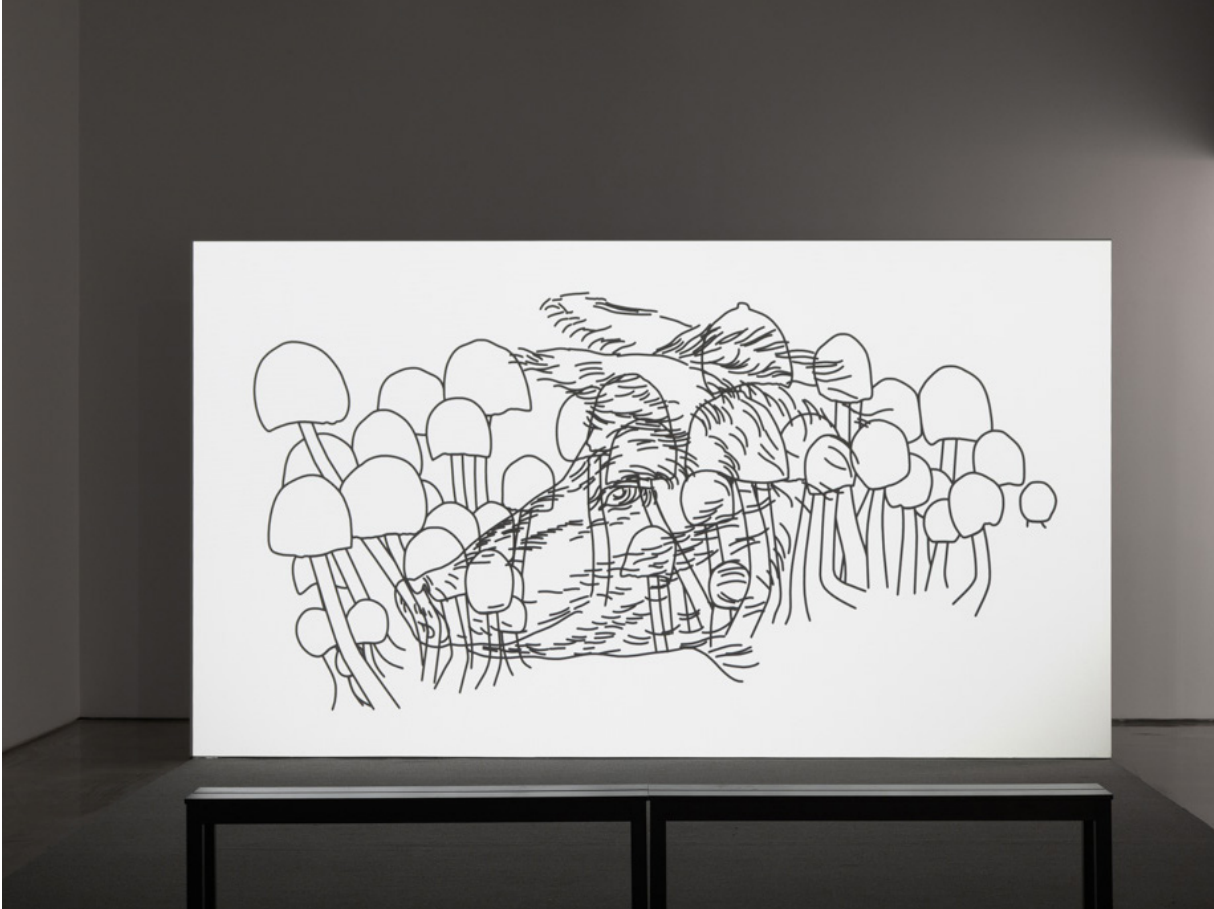


Oliver Laric. *Hundemensch*. 2018.

With the passage of time—centuries actually—*Hundemensch* were thought to be chthonic (underworld) demons, who gained considerable interest in the Middle Ages. Depictions of them appeared in architectural ornaments in Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals. There do not seem to be any documented contemporary sightings of *Hundemensch*, but there are three Polyurethane statues of a seated dog-headed man shielding an adolescent dog by Oliver Laric at Metro Pictures. Using a variety of historical sources, Laric made drawings that were translated into 3D models that were then cast. The outer surfaces have the “touch me, tempt me” sheen of silicone adult sex toys. Where the resin is transparent, outlines of a human ear, a frog, a salamander, and a crab are visible. The meaning is elusive. The choice of *Hundemensch* aligns well with Laric’s interest in glyptothèques (collections of sculptures) and plaster cast reproductions. He has extensively mined both sources to inspire and produce his work.

These three works are a marked contrast to Laric’s previous adaptations and recasts of existing sculpture, like those seen at Vienna’s Secession (2016). His artistic maneuvers of changing and recombining elements are visible in earlier sculptures. In Vienna, Laric worked with materials from the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the Albertina, the University of Vienna’s Institut für Klassische Archäologie. He collected historical and contemporary elements before manipulating data, modeling it for a 3D process, and preparing it for printing. This sounds like a rather simple idea—like an act of appropriation manipulated through technology. You have to look deeper, if not beyond. Laric plays with art history, history and technology, reassembling ideas.

Metamorphosis—but perhaps evolution and transmogrification—is a defining thing for Laric. It is also a significant element in his video work. A 4:35 minute untitled 2018 video is front and center at Metro Pictures. The lines of Laric’s animation, which mix anime and illustration, progress serially, transforming human and nonhuman life forms. The evolution is lyrical, almost musical. It begins with a cryptid figure that transforms into a hominid; it concludes with a small army of leaf cutter ants on a march. Laric has made numerous videos. His research has always tested conventional, contemporary and highly accessible visual culture and its relationship to the Internet. His Instagram account (@oliverlaric) is exceptionally rewarding, revealing concept and process, person and artist.



Oliver Laric. Yet to Be Titled. 2018.

Laric's work has had minimal exposure in the United States. This is his first solo commercial exhibition in New York. Elsewhere, he is one of those exceptional artists who had drawn significant curatorial recognition for both his video and sculptures, but also for a significant amount of solo and collaborative Internet-based works. There is VVORK, a nearly seven-year long curatorial collaboration with Oliver Laric, Christoph Priglinger, Georg Schnitzer and Aleksandra Domanovic. The premise was simple, as described in *Frieze* (March 2014):

an art work or two [was] posted daily, either by one of the four founders or (usually) by another artist. VVORK would 'curate' not only images of contemporary works but also historical ones, predating that now-orthodox usage of Tumblr, and still contrasting with exhibition-based blogs like Contemporary Art Daily.

Underlying *work.com* was the premise of free distribution of intellectual and creative capital. Laric has said that "for many artists, distributing images of their works online happens secondary to physical exhibition. For me, the online distribution happened first." Dispersion and distribution is an artistic activity seen in the work of Felix Gonzales-Torres, Seth Price, and Damon Zucconi and, more historically, in Marcel Broodthaers.

In a 2013 interview, Laric named five artistic influences: Bach, Bakhtin, Bausch, Beckett and Borges. Together they result in a potent combination that percolates through Laric's work: the mathematical seriality of Johann Sebastian Bach's compositions; the unitized utterances of Mikhail Bakhtin; the improvisational nature of Pina Bausch's dance works; the maddening repetition of a Samuel Beckett teleplay and the magical realism of Jorge Luis Borges. This cocktail of B's—authentic creators—makes sense for Laric. Of course, until he changes or morphs into a cryptid of his own making.