

METRO PICTURES

Larmon, Annie Godfrey. "Oliver Laric," *Artforum* (May 2018): 236.

ARTFORUM

Oliver Laric

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Oliver Laric's iterative video treatise "Versions," 2009–12, defined a certain moment of "post-internet" discourse during which the status of the image seemed bleak. It was as though the digital world and its posse of copies, avatars, and remixes were hunting down the conventions of originals and authors. Sutured together from uncredited fragments of texts by Gilles Deleuze, Heraclitus, and RZA—and read by an actress who seems to be imitating Siri—the voice-over narration for 2010's *Versions* begins: "Degradation followed display; reified and emptied, the image was treated like the lowliest of things. Images were broken, burned, toppled, beheaded, and hanged." Laric's project was an ode to iconoclasm, and the video countered alarmist cultural theories with evidence of the ways in which processes of mutation and versioning have always been an aspect of visual culture, touching on, for example, Shinto shrines that are destroyed and rebuilt every twenty years and Roman copies of Greek sculptures. The artist has been working in this spirit since 2012 on a copyright-free, three-dimensional scanning project that makes historical artworks available to be infinitely appropriated.

Even with what has been made possible by net neutrality, open-source software, and social media—in terms of who is producing images and who is being represented—the events of 2016 revealed the underbelly of the internet's utopic accessibility. In Laric's 2018 video animation *Yet to Be Titled*—the keynote of "Year of the Dog," his first exhibition with Metro Pictures—his previous riffs on morphology mature to a meditation on evolution, scale, and gestalt. The artist seems to collapse eternity into a scant four and a half minutes within the economy of a black line, drawn on white ground, that he reuses in every sequence instead of drawing it anew in each frame, as is done in traditional animation. A series of discrete vignettes, in a style that variously references both the aesthetics of anime and of cartoons, shifts in scale and history from images of cell mitosis to the wilting of leaves, and from dinosaur to domesticated pet. These sometimes disjointed scenes are held together by their exaggerated pace; each seems to unfold in a disinterested crawl, helped along by Ville Haimala's tender ambient score of plucked bass notes. In some ways, the piece feels like a paean to interconnectedness, like Terrence Malick's 2011 film *The Tree of Life* without the piousness. But moments of surrealism

hijack any sincerity: a chorus line of nodding fungi; a teapot that sprouts an ostrich; and the face of a man slowly elongating to become that of a pig, then a boar. With this video, Laric expands the scope of his image-oriented project: *Our* ways of seeing may be moving in a direction that levels the real and its representation, he seems to say, but that doesn't change nature. What becomes of this discrepancy?

Three figures crouched in the gallery's second room like misplaced sentries, with their backs to the approaching viewer. Each titled *Hundemensch* (all 2018), these 3-D-printed sculptures were identical save for their color. Made of resin that looked more like Murano glass, each had a vertical gradient that transitioned from opaque at the bottom to translucent at the top. These works reimagine Jean-Joseph Carriès's 1891 sculpture *Frog-Man* as a half-man half-Doberman pinscher guarding a smaller, "natural" dog. The silhouettes of a human ear, a frog, and a crab appear in relief below the surface of each genetically modified creature's back. Laric seemed to be signaling to the indivisibility of this mythological species from the various ideas that made its conception possible. Or perhaps he was teasing the viewer's impulse to read anything at all into the dog-man's symbolism. Like the duck-rabbit of gestalt theory, these chimeras addle the viewer to take into account just what goes into seeing something as something.



Oliver Laric, *Hundemensch*, 2018, polyurethane, pigment, 20 1/4 x 20 1/2 x 22 3/4".

—Annie Godfrey Larmon