

Future Species | Axel Rios

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An accelerated future is upon us, but we are not sure why we are spinning so fast. This solo presentation by artist Axel Rios at Isabel Croxatto Galería, gives us a glimpse of contemporary issues pertaining to human relations to animals, agriculture, and the changing perceptions on these relationship.

Rios, who is currently based on west coast of Norway, is exposed to a new reality in the pastoral landscapes of Haugalandet. The region is scarcely populated, with small town and villages located in the fjords of Norway. Farming and fishing have been very important to the people who inhabit the dramatic landscapes of western Norway, and it has been necessary to develop methods to keep up with the acceleration of society. A small farm that was sustainable some decades ago, either has to expand or disappear. What this means for the livestock and the environment is dire. In his large scale paintings, Rios does not make any direct reference to the environmental issues or the changes in agriculture, but focuses instead on representing an individual, in this case a cow or a group of birds. Rios' highly skilled painting technique produces a realistic and natural reproduction of an animal, but he uses the paint to question the information we have about an animal and its status. Each painting has an echo painting on another canvas, where the animals seem to be stuck in some sort of transformative status.

The contemporary stories and challenges of Norwegian agriculture has mythological parallels, and Rios has been inspired by the myth of Icarus. Icarus' father, Daedalus, fashioned wings out of feathers and wax for himself and his son to escape Crete. Daedalus warned his son not to fly too high or too low. We all know Icarus flew too close to the sun, and he fell into the ocean. The idea of progress within industrialized agriculture is definitely flying too close to the sun, and recently a warning was given by over 15.000 scientists about man's hubris and its devastating effects on the our ecosystem. The art world has also been concerned with the environmental changes, especially the theory of anthropocene, a proposed term for geological era noting humanity's impact on the earth. Another corresponding theory in the art world is anti-anthropomorphism, where the seemingly innate tendency to attribute human traits to non-human entities, not just animals, but plants, minerals, and almost anything. Rios is in the middle of this investigation, through a medium which offers up almost any possibility. Rios is making his choices in the paintings, telling his impression of these challenging moments. What the future holds, no one knows, but it is up to us, and artists, to offer alternative ways of seeing the world, and our status as future species. Otherwise we will be extinct.