

Marie Hugo

Marie Hugo is a French artist, who divides her life between London, Paris and the south of France. She has been steeped in art and literature all her life, as she comes from a large and distinguished family of artists and writers. She has worked in a variety of media but her work is predominantly black ink on paper or canvas.

Although trained in France in the Western European tradition, she has lived in Asia and has long had an affinity with the Orient: indeed, her style and inspiration has much to do with traditional Chinese art forms and her most recent work in particular can be described as a marriage of East and West.

She was born in the south of France, in the wild, rugged area known as the Camargue, where her family had settled for generations, and where she still spends a lot of time. She studied lithography and engraving at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montpellier, but she undoubtedly learned a great deal also from her father, the painter Jean Hugo, in whose studio she worked at the same time.



After completing her studies, she moved to Hong Kong, where she was much inspired by Chinese ink works on paper. Her work, which is largely monochrome or grisaille or black and white, also betrays her lithographical background. Indeed, in 1985 she produced the illustrations for the Imprimerie Nationale edition of the Fables of La Fontaine.

In the 1980s she painted in tempera a body of work which she called "inner landscape" as well as large murals for public places and hotels in the Far East.

In the late 1990s she returned to work in her father's studio, painting with pigments and Indian ink in water. This experimental way of expressing herself proved a significant new departure for her. Leaves, bamboo, insects, lotus leaves, stones, water and twigs became important motifs in her work.

Playing either with the rejection or the fusion of the ink in the water, her work gradually evolved balancing fullness with emptiness. Her expression still fluctuates between figuration and abstraction. For a time her work also took on a more sculptural, three-dimensional form, as she mounted her large canvas works as an installation in the form of square columns, forming a "forest of light" whilst a sculpture in metal mesh « Medusa » seems to play with both air and light.

In 2014 she was invited to participate in the contemporary art festival, Art in the Park, in Kuala Lumpur's Botanical Gardens, creating a bamboo structure housing her installation, 'Pantun Forest'.

In 2015 she was commissioned to design a huge painting on the sand floor of the famous Roman Arena in Arles for the 'Corrida Goyesque' (a bull-fight, which also has art and music, and where the matadors are dressed in costumes of the period of the great Spanish painter Francisco Goya (1746–1828)). In the same way as a "mandala", a complex pattern, representing the universe, with spiritual and ritual significance, is painstakingly created in coloured sand by Buddhist monks and then swept away, her lovingly created work in the sand was completely erased by the hooves of the bulls and horses, symbolising, like a mandala, the ephemerality or impermanence of life.

In 2016 Marie spent much of her time in the house of her most famous literary ancestor, Victor Hugo, on the island of Guernsey, researching Hugo's own contribution to the decoration of the house. This research resulted in a book, "Hauteville House: Victor Hugo décorateur" published by Paris/Musée.



marie hugo

the three hundred days of the lotus

2019

Warden of the invisible, alchemist of the in-between spaces, Marie Hugo, presents a new and ambitious series of photographs "The Three Hundred Days of the Lotus". The series lulls the viewer into a state of calm and serenity which allows them to fully appreciate the subtleties of the natural world. Marie Hugo takes us on a journey into the realm of plants as we follow the life of the lotus. Through her photographs, we can experience a cycle of life in its entirety, beginning with the ascent from the mud, the triumphant piercing of the surface of the pond to the jubilant bloom and eventual death and decay. For three hundred days, she scrutinised the old lotus pond of her childhood garden. Marie Hugo captures the primordial and universal momentum of life. There is both wonder and horror. One of the images reveals a whole universe inside a single drop of water on a leaf, while another evokes bodies inside a mass grave in Rwanda. In the small ecosystem of the pond, we can trace the history of humanity. As Lucy Larcom once said, "A drop of water, if it could write out its own history, would explain the universe to us."

We might wonder why Marie Hugo choose to focus on the lotus plant. In her words "Aquatic plants are closer to us than non-aquatic plants. After all, we evolved from fishes, and we all lived in water when we were in the womb...". Much like an embryo develops from a single cell into a baby

while floating in amniotic fluid inside the comfort of the womb, a lotus begins its life as a single seed curled up deep in mud and grows into a rhizome from which spring leaves and flowers. Marie is also fascinated by the lotus's unusual traits. The plant is unique because it has one stem for each flower and one for each leaf. The different parts of the plant are independent, yet they all emerge from a single heart. Their complicated roots bind them together like a family as stems grow in search of the light of the sky.

Watching the lotus, we become a spectator in the theatre of life. Bursting with innocence, the young buds resemble the tips of arrowheads shooting up to pierce the dormant surface of the pond. Adorned with a pearl of water, they unfurl into round, corpulent leaves, and together they drift like a velvet raft. The plant seeks attention by offering a wondrous fragrant flower. The heart of every flower brandishes a pistil, a purse bursting with seeds, and searches for an alliance. However, the impulse cannot last.

Autumn arrives and entropy takes the centre stage, the leaf curls up and retracts her creased brown dress, while the dark pond reflects her fragile skeleton.

We can find many parallels between a lotus and ourselves. Witnessing the three hundred days of the lotus, we can see life flash before our eyes.

Marie Hugo



300 days of the Lotus
Dye sublimation photographs



60 x 80 cm / 24 x 32 inches, £950



80 x 120 cm / 36 x 48 inches, £1,950

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Marie Hugo
mariehugo@mariehugo.com
www.mariehugo.com
Tel: +33 (0)607029685