

HUXLEY-PARLOUR

3-5 Swallow Street, London, W1B 4DE / gallery@huxleyparlour.com

Pieter Hugo
La Cucaracha

19 February - 14 March 2020



Pieter Hugo, The Wedding Gift, Juchitán de Zaragoza, 2018

La Cucaracha, new photographs by South African artist Pieter Hugo exploring death, sexuality and spirituality in Mexico, will go on display for the first time in the UK.

This latest body of work is the result of four trips to Mexico by Hugo over a period of two years. During these trips Hugo travelled to the industrialised zone of Mexico City, the desert of Hermosillo and the mountainous regions of Ixtepec and San Crisobel. The resulting photographs – a mix of individual portraits, vibrant and visceral landscapes, interior studies and still lifes – present a multifaceted study of place.

'Mexico has a particular ethos and aesthetic; there is an acceptance that life has no glorious victory, no happy ending. Humour, ritual, and a strong sense of community and an embrace of the inevitable make it possible to live with tragic and often unacceptable situations.'

There is a very different relationship with death here to what I am used to. If one looks beyond the clichés of dancing skeletons and sugar skulls, there's a deeply complicated connection with mortality. This necropolitical dynamic is most visible in contradictory expressions of honouring the afterlife, in the Day of the Dead celebrations and the brutal dismemberment of bodies by narco traffickers.'

Alongside the flamboyance and high-pitched register of this series, there is the ordinariness of the everyday. I am drawn to the fabulousness of the banal and the banality of the exotic.'

For this series, Hugo has drawn on Mexican history, as well as cultural, art historical and literary references, such as the mural *From the Dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz to the Revolution* (1957-66) by Communist artist David Alfaro Siqueiros. While referencing Mexico's rich visual culture, Hugo's work attempts to investigate how ritual, tradition and community inspire the complex reconciliation between the extremes of life and death.

The series reflects the artist's long-standing interest in how history and environment can shape a culture and those living within it. Hugo looks both to rituals of rites of passage, and their associated formal codes of conduct and dress, and also the wider rituals of religion, theatre and community. In this series, he specifically looks to the impact on the physical body, creating powerful portraits that focus on tattoos, jewellery, of sweat on skin and scars.

The title of the body of work, *La Cucaracha*, comes from the Spanish folk song, popular in Mexico, whose original meaning remains unknown. The upbeat song tells the story of a cockroach who struggles to walk with two back legs missing. The titular character can symbolise resilience in the face of hardship, becoming a metaphor for the extremes of Mexican life, where joy and tragedy coexist in the fabric of everyday existence.

Pieter Hugo (born 1976) has had solo exhibition at numerous international museums, including the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paris, and Hague Museum of Photography, The Netherlands. His work is held in collections including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the MoMA, New York; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Centre Pompidou, Paris; V&A Museum, London; and The South African National Gallery, Cape Town, amongst others.

Opening Times: Monday – Saturday, 10.00 – 17.30

Admission free | Huxley-Parlour Gallery, 3-5 Swallow Street, London, W1B 4DE

www.huxleyparlour.com

For all press enquiries, contact

Thea Gregory: 0207 434 4319 / thea@huxleyparlour.com