

REVIEWS PARIS

## Johan Creten

Perrotin | Paris

By Mara Hoberman



View of “Johan Creten: How to Explain the Sculptures to an Influencer?” 2024. Photo: Tanguy Beurdeley.

Influencers are the new dead hares. At least that is what’s implied by the title of Johan Creten’s recent exhibition, “How to Explain the Sculptures to an Influencer?” Invoking Joseph Beuys’s 1965 performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, Creten’s presentation of uncharacteristically small sculptures challenged gallerygoers to think and engage rather than (or at least before) snapping a photo to post on social media. Musing on the role of the artist as much as that of the viewer, Creten presented a group of new bronze and ceramic sculptures in the company of his own student works: a clay sculpture, *La langue* (The Tongue/The Language), 1986, and photographs of related performances in (and underneath) the streets of Paris in the 1980s.

In the gallery’s main space, nine tabletop-size green patinated bronzes—  
l on individual glazed ceramic slabs in bright shades of red, yellow,

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and green—were displayed on a low wooden platform. Laid out across this stagelike plinth in the center of the room, the installation of mysterious characters—a female figure cradling a fish in her arms (*The Herring*, 2022–23), a seahorse with its tail wrapped around a cross (*The Seahorse – Library version*, 2023), a prostrate fly with its legs in the air (*The Dead Fly – Library version*, 2023)—suggested a spread of three-dimensional tarot cards. To encourage viewers to linger and contemplate what fortune might be read here, Creten placed several stool-like sculptures from his “*Point d’Observation*” series, 2018–22, made of bronze or glazed stoneware, on each side of the platform. In addition to implying some ritualistic or theatrical performance, the *mise-en-scène* acted as a foil for the virtual platforms that photographs of these artworks will inevitably come to inhabit.

On view in a side room was *La langue*, a twisted clay tongue coated in brown engobe (a viscous mixture of clay and colorant that creates a rustic finish). Similar in size to Creten’s recent sculptures, it is aesthetically and conceptually quite different. Earthy and semiabstract, the serpentine protuberance was presented on a custom wall mount like a paleontological curio. *La langue* was first exhibited at Galerie Meyer, a Left Bank gallery specializing in tribal art, while Creten was still a student at the Beaux-Arts de Paris. At night, while the exhibition was closed, the young artist would take his sculpture on walks across the city, nestled in his arms like a baby. Small color and black-and-white photographs documenting these nocturnal outings showed Creten cradling the piece in the Réaumur-Sébastopol metro station and on the streets of Pigalle, near the Moulin Rouge. If these vestiges of the artist’s own Beuysian happenings hark back to art documentation as it was practiced in the predigital age, they also argue for a more introspective interpretation of the show’s title. In addition to provoking a cheeky art-historical critique of how we understand (or don’t) contemporary art, Creten’s association of his latest and oldest works suggests some deep soul-searching into his own role and responsibility as an artist who makes and shows art IRL. Like Beuys’s performance, Creten’s exhibition may have been silent, but it asked a lot of questions.

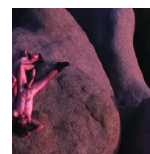
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