



Jana Euler

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WIELS WIEL

Jana Euler's exhibition *Oilopa* – a contraction of the terms 'Oil' and 'Europa' – unfolds into a semi-utopian, delusionary land by reversing the flows of financial statistics whilst simultaneously exploring the cycles of surplus production, excess, recess, and vacuity.

Oilopa emphasises some of Euler's principal concerns, namely the origins and circulation of energy. She invokes the polysemy of the word 'energy' as being assigned to a communicative flow, a libidinal and vital intensity, a fuel for the ego. Therefore, the excessive features of her painting often adopt the latent, sometimes pathetic, effects of the present times, either by rolling out sceneries or by isolating elements associated with various mythologies of strength.

The term 'Oil' in *Oilopa*, says Euler, comes from oil painting (and petroleum base acryl). It refers to the viscosity and opulence of the material and the mobility of the support. Moreover, the term 'Oil' is also a nod to the German pronunciation of her name. Jana Euler's painting is acknowledged for the heterogeneity of execution, whereby the artist multiplies brushstroke effects. Some of the latter are purely hers, whilst others have been appropriated from other (celebrated) painters. Yet these variations do not seek to fulfil any 'stylistic' concerns but instead, respond to Euler's desire to identify the appropriate rendition for every subject treated. Simultaneously, the process remains sufficiently intuitive to allow for the conventions of the painting and the individualities of the other painters she has unconsciously incorporated. Euler gives shape to a vitalist, expressive figuration tinged with a singular sense of the burlesque. Seemingly ordinary motifs fuel

an iconography of opulence and phantasmatic sceneries. Fantasies that are less engaging in an escapist reflex from the real open perspectives on its perverted processes.

As Euler is cognisant, the exhibition itself is a site where the antagonisms of capitalist production methods are at risk. Her work actively relies on the role of painting in the libidinous economy of desire in capitalism, whereby the impulsive tendency of the psychic mirrors – or even loads – the speculative tendency of the economic system. Thus, painting offers a privileged site to reflect on the affect and object-relations. Consequently, Euler's critical gaze is characterised by a sometimes seductive, sometimes distasteful, powerful sense of the situation. She signifies the vulnerability of postures and protuberances as well as their paradoxical attraction.

Curator: Pauline Hatzigeorgiou

“The word *oil* is just as important as its unseen combustions, its mysterious pervasiveness that organizes things while at the same time remaining invisible to them.”

– Duncan Smith, *The Age of Oil*, 1979–1980

The exhibition provides a new spatial scenario for Jana Euler's work, conceived by the artist as 'a box within a box'. Stretched across the floor, a diagonal path spans the whole space, cutting through the walls. Entitled ***Oilopa Allee***, it functions as a vanishing point named after the *Europa Allee*, a boulevard that connects the European headquarters in Brussels to the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, two cities between which the artist divides her time.

Organised groups of older and more recent works – many of which specially produced for the exhibition – paintings and sculptures, exhibition furniture and photographic documentation all limit this diagonal. These elements are articulated according to sightlines that cast new light on various iconographies and characters, such as chimerical animals, phallic sharks and dolphins, and anthropomorphic tools, which the artist has researched over the last decade.

In one of the first sections of the exhibition, spectators encounter ***The forward but backwards running morecorn*** – an inflated unicorn that seems sucked in by a regressive, reactionary current. The backwards current could very well stem from the neoliberal policy from the *Oilopa Allee* district depicted in the adjoining work, where buildings are clad in beige-cappuccino colours.

At the centre of one of the main rooms, bricks form a **bench in the shape of a curve** – conjuring up a question mark, a dollar sign, or the line of a coffee bean – from where viewers can admire paintings from the series ***Where the Energy Comes From***, originated a decade ago. Here, Euler refers to the energising coffee economy as a multifocal symptom of extraction, dependence,

productivity, hedonism, and leisure. Indeed, strolling through Frankfort and Brussels has inspired Euler to identify a phenomenon of urban planning theorised as ‘cappuccino urbanism’ or ‘cappuccino pacification’. This model is characterised by the uniformisation of passive pleasure and lifestyles, while actively insulating itself from social realities.

Textured details of individual coffee beans presented on a monumental scale morph into ambivalent portraits. Drawing from the same series, the exhibition also showcases an earlier painting of a (female) socket, where the artist blurs the prevailing polarity between a passive/female and an active/male by considering the active verb ‘socketing’.

In Euler’s vitalist figuration, the act of painting represents a central subject, i.e, paintings are subjects of their own. Anthropomorphic paint tools, such as *Female Brushes* and *Male Spray Cans*, express their mindset. Sometimes joyful, but oftentimes indicating varying degrees of anxiety, difficulties in communication, or an ironic self-awareness as to the performativity of painting. In ***The Female Brush Painting the Female Brush with the Female Brush at the Dentist’s Office***, the brushes freeze into indomitable, self-referentiality. Paintings hold hands to achieve body capacity for self-extension on the exhibition poster, which also bears a map of the exhibition floorplan.

Jana Euler frequently takes part in the institution’s communication by creating specific visuals and by infiltrating the exhibition floorplan, reconnecting the elements with her designs. The artist calls

on the implication of the art institution on the distribution of meaning and value through these gestures highlighting or exceeding the layers of mediation. From the institution's ability to host an exhibition and convert its contents to its entanglement in a wider economic system. The monumental ***Beer Without Glass*** on show at the back of the space recalls the former function of the building, once a brewery. **A bench in the shape of a *Morecorn***, corns embedded beer glasses, seems ready to bring the drinking vessels to the painting or to collect a golden liquid. This infrastructural perspective is also accentuated by the **series of real-scale paintings reproducing the heating** convectors of the exhibition site. The objective character of the industrial products is offset by the pictorial treatment which induces a sense of depth beneath the shutters, as though someone's eyes were prowling behind.

Next to the main door, visitors come across a group of older paintings executed during Euler's 2012–2013 residency at WIELS. In three sceneries progressively out of focus, entitled ***Horses Leaving Yourself, Friends Leaving to Berlin, and Greece Leaving Europe***, all the protagonists have turned their back to the viewer, distancing themselves from reality as they are being drawn by their desire and ideals. This preoccupation with whatever lies ahead results in a sense of overwhelming fear of being left behind, creating a persistent sense of unease overshadowing the scope of the present, as we stand, captivated by the appeal of the future.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jana Euler (b. 1982, Friedberg, Germany) lives and works in Frankfurt and Brussels. Over the two last decades, she has produced a diverse albeit consistent body of work that charts the social, material and historical foundations of painting. Euler is acknowledged internationally for her uninhibited pictorial invention, appropriation, and rehabilitation. The 2024 monographic exhibition represents a renewed invitation from the WIELS to the artist in their continuing association, following Euler's earlier involvements – such as the 2012 residency programme, a thematic exhibition *Residue* in 2013, or her context-specific contribution for *The Absent Museum* in 2017.

Jana Euler is represented by and has shown on numerous occasions at dépendance, Brussels; Greene Naftali, New York; Galerie Neu, Berlin; and Cabinet gallery, London.

EVENTS

Look Who's Talking: Jana Euler ^(EN)

Look Who's Talking: Dirk Snauwaert ^(NL)

Look Who's Talking: Pauline Hatzigeorgiou ^(FR)

Dates and more info at [**WIELS.ORG**](https://wiels.org)

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Courtesy by the artist. Photo: Jens Gerber

