

# / UNTOUCHABLE – A PHILOSOPHICAL OBITUARY TO CARLOS VON DEN HÜGELN

BY SAMUEL CAMENZIND

*We had probably crossed paths often on our walks in Leopoldstadt, the second district of Vienna, but unfortunately, I never met Carlos personally. That is why I am writing about Carlos the artist, about a public figure who, because of his unique biography and his perspective on the world, deserves to not be forgotten by the public.*

*The fact that he was a gladly welcomed guest in the art scene should not be concealed here, nor should the fact that the relationship between Carlos and the public, especially state institutions, was not an unencumbered one. However, he never pursued the silent protest inherent in his sometimes destructive work out of ill will - on the contrary, even as a non-human being he was committed to a progressive humanism.*

## LIFE AND WORK: OUT OF THIS WORLD

*Carlos was fortunate enough to meet his curator and friend Lena Lieselotte Schuster. She recognized the potential of his artistic work and presented his formally reduced wood and cardboard sculptures as well as various performances at over two dozen exhibitions. Following New Materialism, he created the "striated object" with natural objects reminiscent of driftwood. For this he developed a special saliva technique, whose an-*

*tibiotic effect may be read as a trope. In addition to the visual and tactile experience, his wooden sculptures also contain an olfactory component that we humans, as dry-nosed primates (Haplorhini), can only ponder on.*

*The project Forever. A Virtual Memorial to Carlos von den Hügeln is the logical curatorial implication of making Carlos' work accessible to a national and international audience in the extended reality of cyberspace. At the same time, the expansion of the humanly perceptible exterior space makes it possible to reflect and expand the interior space of the human mind, in which it is confronted and challenged with the aesthetics and aura of Carlos' work.*

*One might venture the thought that Carlos the sculptor and performer was both an artist and artwork himself. Bred and shaped at the end of the nineteenth century on the basis of human aesthetics, Carlos as a French Bulldog (Bouledogue français) was considered a biofactual work of art<sup>1</sup>. An artificially created, yet unique and living work that could sustain and reproduce itself independently, a mortal and vulnerable creature capable of moving autonomously (puffing) through art spaces and that could interact with or ignore other artists. In addition, Carlos was not only able to create art, but also new biofacts i.e. new artists/artwork which in turn could act autonomously and creatively.*

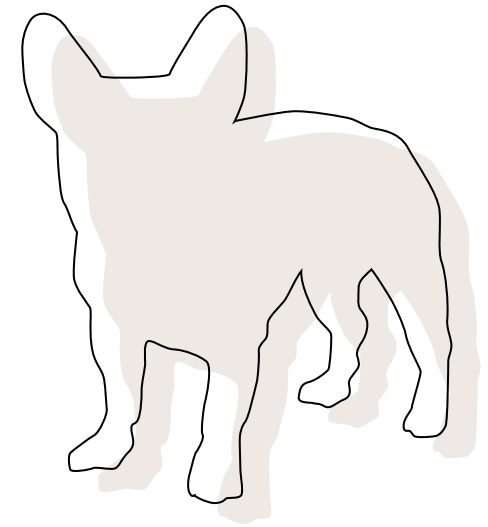
*It is obvious that hosting an artist of this caliber at a higher educational institution would pose a challenge.*

## NO DOGS ALLOWED

*But why was a highly talented as well as motivated artist like Carlos denied admission to the fine arts program at a renowned art university? There has been speculation about his lack of previous schooling or his preference for artistic practice over art theory. In any case, the exclusion was not motivated by racism; to date, neither an English Bulldog nor a German Boxer has been admitted to the university.*

*However, the charge of speciesism remains to be tested. In reference to sexism and racism, the neologism „speciesism“<sup>2</sup> denotes discrimination against an individual on the basis of his or her species. Comparable to arbitrary discrimination based on gender or skin color, speciesist discrimination is based on a biological classification, species membership. The spectrum of speciesist forms of discrimination ranges from the seemingly harmless prohibition of entering a coffee house to the violent and systematic violation of bodily integrity in the context of animal experimentation<sup>3</sup> or killing for meat consumption<sup>4</sup>.*

*Since Carlos' case was predominantly a bureaucratic bêtise reserved only for human animals, one would like to breathe a sigh of relief and exclude prejudice against non-human animals. The main reason for not admitting Carlos in 2011 was that, as a post-millennial born in 2003, he was not old enough to study art, because the „Application for Admission to the Entrance Examination“ form did not allow the indication of dog years. Through this chicanery, however, members of the species Canis lupus familiaris are practically excluded from the application pro-*



*cess. So, in the end, it was human standards and an indirect speciesism that prevented a study admission.*

*The potential fellow students of the Ludwigshafen four-legged friend naturally regretted this decision, because the positive effects that the presence of an animal in the lecture hall has on the environment of the class, stress regulation, social and cognitive development and the motivation to learn have been scientifically proven.<sup>5</sup> Critical voices, however, will object, what would have been the point of Carlos studying art? In fact, a look at contemporary university curricula reveals that the courses offered to canidae students are unsatisfactory. Even in the university course for "Applied Cynology" at the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna there is neither a module "artis-*

tic design" for quadrupeds, nor a well-founded art didactic training for future dog trainers. For this reason, one may assume that professors would have reached their pedagogical limits even with highly gifted animal students.

## ARTIST IN RÉSISTANCE

Carlos was thus forced to continue working in private. However, he met these circumstances with a productive casual ease. In any case, the luxurious working conditions had a positive influence on his artistic work. In a lifelong residence, he was guaranteed not only room and board, but also leisure activities and medical care. The last aspect is vital for a brachycephalic breed, which often suffers from respiratory distress, edema and other breeding-related diseases. With blind trust, he left communication with institutions, exhibition setup and documentation, and financial business entirely up to his personal curator and friend. It was quite possible for Carlos to become rather boisterous on his walks, throwing himself on the ground and demanding a belly rub in public. These were working conditions that many art students could only dream of.

## BITES AND PIECES

However, the best human-animal relationship is put to the test by current legislation. Because even though Carlos, like many other animals, was no longer a thing (in the legal sense), he had to be handled like a thing<sup>6</sup>. That means, until today dogs would have been lent and sold like tools or bicycles. Since animals are not legal subjects under current law, their interests cannot be represented in court, they cannot inherit anything, and similarly they cannot own anything. This naturally raises the question, even if Carlos was clearly the creator

of his art, who owned his cardboard objects, his floor installation or his collection of sticks?

Revered Carlos von den Hügeln, if we are guided by your biography and your aesthetic work, then you lead us to fundamental questions of the human-animal relationship. Your work and your interspecies art are opportunities to develop and reflect on these questions.<sup>7</sup> They should neither be fleetingly brushed aside nor lightly answered. The themes and complexity of questions raised by art with animals as artists, collaborators or performers in animal-made and interspecies art are still difficult for many people to grasp and sometimes almost incomprehensible. However, visitors in Vienna and Kassel, at the College of Fine Arts Saar and at the Museum of Modern Arts in New York will confirm that your art is untouchable.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the term "biofact" by philosopher and biologist Nicole C Karafyllis. Cf. „The Essence of Biofacts.“ In Karafyllis, Nicole C. (ed.) (2003): Biofacts. Attempt on the Human Being Between Artifact and Living Being. Paderborn: mentis, pp.11-26.

<sup>2</sup> The term "speciesism" became popular through the work of Singer. Originally it was coined by the psychologist Richard Ryder. Cf. Singer, Peter (2002 [1975]): Animal Liberation, New York: Harper Collins and Ryder, Richard (1971): Experiments on Animals. In: Godlovitch, Stanley/Godlovitch, Rosalind/Harris, John (eds.) (1971): Animals, Men and Morals. An Enquiry into the Maltreatment of Non-Humans, London: Victor Gollancz, pp.41-82.

<sup>3</sup> According to the current "Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council" (5.2.2020), there were 13688 dogs that were used in animal experiments in the EU in 2017. See "Report 2019" on the statistical data on the use of animals for scientific purposes in the member states of the European Union in the years 2015-2017.

<sup>4</sup> How many dogs are eaten each year is difficult to determine. If one takes into account different cultural or historical contexts, dog meat consumption can be described as a worldwide phenomenon.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Olbrich, Erhard/Otterstedt, Carola (eds.). (2003): People Need Animals: Basics and Practice of Animal-assisted Education and Therapy, Stuttgart: Kosmos

<sup>6</sup> For Austria, the relevant articles of law have been included in the Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch since 1988 (cf. ABGB § 285a), for Germany since 1990 in the Civil Code (cf. § 90a BGB) and for Switzerland since 2003 in the Civil Code (cf. Art. 641a para. 1 ZGB).

<sup>7</sup> Insights into the diverse functions of and with animals in contemporary art can be found, for example, in: Ullrich, Jessica (2016): Art from a Bird's Eye View. On the role of living birds in Contemporary Art. In: Journal of Aesthetic Education, 8 (1), pp. 1-26. Online at: <http://zaeb.net/wordpress/> (viewed 8/25/2021).

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