

YOSSI MILO GALLERY



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Pieter Hugo ***La Cucaracha***

January 10 – February 29, 2020

Artist's Reception and Book Signing: Friday, January 10, 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Yossi Milo Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new photographs taken in Mexico by South African artist Pieter Hugo. *La Cucaracha* will open on Friday, January 10 with a reception for the artist and book signing from 6:00-8:00pm and will be on view through February 29. This is the artist's sixth exhibition at the gallery.

Known for photographing communities on the periphery of society in Africa, Hugo similarly immersed himself in Mexico City and in regions of Mexico including Hermosillo, Oaxaca de Juárez and Juchitán, during several month-long trips in 2018-19. Prompted to make work in Mexico for an exhibition on the theme of sex and death, the resulting photographs embody Mexican attitudes on the subjects in both deliberately staged vignettes and in raw, vibrantly colored images of everyday people, landscapes and objects. As the artist describes his obsession with the country, "Mexico's anarchic, visceral energy got under my skin and sucked me in".

Intimate, powerful portraits of diverse subjects, including a young bride posing with an iguana, a dwarf couple dressed as revolutionaries Emiliano Zapata and Adelita, a police officer disguised as a sex-worker, a local amateur theater troupe, and an older generation of Muxes (Zapotec culture's "third gender", who are male by birth but dress as and fulfill roles more associated with women) are depicted in the candid and direct manner that is Hugo's signature style. Often drawing on Mexican history, cultural icons, 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, the literary figure Don Quixote and stories from the Bible, the artist and his subjects collaborate to investigate the culture's complex reconciliation of the celebration of life with the realities of violence and death. Hugo has observed of the Mexican people, "...humor, ritual, a strong sense of community and an embrace of the inevitable make it possible to live with tragic and often unacceptable situations".

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As a metaphor for the ethos in which the extremes of life and death reside comfortably, Hugo chose to title his series after the Spanish folk song, *La Cucaracha*, about a cockroach struggling to walk with its two hind legs missing. While the origin of the upbeat song is unknown, it has, over time, been coopted and embellished since the 1800s by groups as diverse as rebels and dictators, marijuana users and Looney Tunes cartoons. The heroic creature ideally symbolizes perseverance in spite of hardship and, along with the many nude portraits in Hugo's new series, reflects the artist's long-standing interest in how history, the environment, and the passage of time inscribe themselves on a culture, and on a physical body via tan lines, scars, tattoos and wrinkles.

A book of *La Cucaracha*, with essays by Ashraf Jamal and Mario Bellatin, will be released by Editorial RM (Mexico and Spain) in March 2020. Hugo's solo exhibition, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, traveled from 2016 to 2018 to Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany; Coleção Berardo, Lisbon, Portugal and the Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Dortmund, Germany. Prior solo exhibitions include the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; National Gallery of Art, London; Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paris; Ludwig Museum, Budapest; Fotografiska, Stockholm; Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon; Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne, Switzerland; Hague Museum of Photography, The Netherlands; and MAXXI, Rome. His work is held in the collections of museums worldwide, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Huis Marseille, Amsterdam; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; and the South African National Gallery, Cape Town, among others. The artist's previous books include *Looking Aside: South African Studio Portraits 2003-2006* (2006), *Messina/Musina* (2007) both published by Punctum; *The Hyena & Other Men* (2007), *Nollywood* (2009), *Permanent Error* (2011) and *This Must Be the Place* (2012) and *1994* (2016) all published by Prestel; *There's a Place in Hell for Me and My Friends* (2012) published by oodee, London; *Kin* (2015) by Aperture Foundation. Pieter Hugo was born in South Africa in 1976 and currently lives in Cape Town.

For more information, please contact Alissa Schoenfeld at 212.414.0370 or alissa@yossimilo.com, or visit the gallery's website at www.yossimilo.com