

REVERIE: THE DIVINE FEMININE

GROUP EXHIBITION
May 4 – July 4, 2021
Espinasse31
Contemporary Gallery
Viale Carlo Espinasse, 31
Milan 20156, Italy



Antonella Mellini, *LAST* (Triptych), 2020



Meg Gallagher, *SENSUAL*, 2020

Espinasse31 Contemporary Gallery is pleased to present a new group show in its Milan headquarters, on view from May 4 to July 4, 2021. The gallery celebrates the re-opening of cultural spaces across Italy this spring with '*Reverie: The Divine Feminine*'. The exhibition features works by four artists—Meg Gallagher, Silvia Berton, Oscar Estruga, and Antonella Mellini—connected by their portrayals of feminine energy, female deities, the female form, and the feminine imagination.

The Divine Feminine is a concept grounded on spirituality, commonly-represented in a variety of religions and cultures since antiquity. Whereby **energy, consciousness, and the self** exist on a binary plane, the Divine Feminine represents the female half, necessary for **spiritual equilibrium**. In theology, it conveys that there exists a feminine counterpart to the masculine deities and structures that dominate Western monotheistic religions. Goddesses were worshipped and artistically-represented across most **societies in early history**, giving this concept significant cultural weight. However, what is perhaps more interesting is the resurgence of the Divine Feminine, as a concept of study and a source of creative inspiration, in modern mainstream media within the past few years. Linked to the **New Age movement and feminism**, the Divine Feminine now goes beyond natural or religious connotations, also touching upon **physical and sexual** aspects of female existence.

Through a variety of paintings and sculptural works, *'Reverie: The Divine Feminine'* explores this concept while immersing the viewer in the **imaginative and oneiric worlds** of the four exhibited artists. Rather than presenting a linear narrative confined by gender or sex, the exhibition aims to shed light on different ways of interpreting or expressing femininity. By bringing together three female artists and one male, all of different ages and creative backgrounds, the composition is richly-varied in terms of media and style, while harmoniously depicting **reveries of the female body and portrait, Gods and pagans, metaphors and paradoxes**. The strong narrative quality of all exhibited works makes the composition feel like one same story written in different typefaces.

The concept of the Divine Feminine is firstly presented in the exhibition through a **dualistic view of womanhood**, obtained by placing Meg Gallagher's and Silvia Berton's artworks in conversation with each other. Erotic, physical, spiritual, and ethereal dimensions of the female condition contrast and build on each other; **Gallagher's abstract sexuality, paired with Berton's figurative emotion, provide two halves of a whole, unknowingly completing each other's unfinished stories**. The value of this powerful combination is enriched by the artists' different creative trajectories, which shine through their respective pictorial techniques.

Meg Gallagher is a visual artist and designer, born in New Zealand and based in Sydney, Australia. Her creative career began as a fashion trailblazer, having collaborated with some of the best industry names, becoming an expert denim designer for Ksubi, accumulating a customer base of celebrities and collectors, and being named as *One to Watch* by Vogue Italia in 2010. Gallagher, whose chosen medium of expression has now transitioned to painting, focuses her art practice on developing **contemporary nudes**. The artist references her prominent fashion know-how through the use of **denim as a canvas**; she then reflects a previous background in dance, as well as her recent experience of motherhood, in her potent yet delicate depictions of feminine subjects. Women's sensuality and sexual energy are always at the forefront of Gallagher's works, which celebrate the beauty of the female form and figure. **Works such as 'SENSUAL' or 'VIXEN' (2020) recall the Divine Feminine in more than one way—the idolised female body, the allusions to eroticism and fertility, the strong connection to earthly nature, and the dreamlike quality to Gallagher's use of colour and expressive brushstrokes, which place her works between the lifelike and the surreal.**

Silvia Berton is an Italian artist, best known for her unique approach to portraiture. While her creative focus is now on oil painting, Berton's extensive background in photography—behind and in front of the lens—is greatly reflected in her technique and vision. Although **minimalist in nature**, Berton's style is full of character and strength, conveyed through the arresting gaze that characterises her **'Teens' (2020) portrait series**, or the vigorous movements in her **'Dancer' (2019) and 'Memories' (2021) freeze-frame scenes**. The compositional imagery of her works creates a seductive atmosphere of reverie and introspection; with strong narrative elements and enigmatic portrayals, the viewer is drawn into the artist's inner emotional world. Critics have described the experience of viewing her works as *"slipping into someone else's dream."* **Berton's female subjects evoke an aura of mystery, passion, and intimacy, while existing at a crossroads between the vulnerable mortal and the ethereal divine.**

Berton's portrayal of the most abstract aspects of femininity through figurative works, complemented by Gallagher's candid and carnal depictions of the female body with elements of abstraction, represent two sides of the **paradoxical and complex** coin that is womanhood.

Moreover, *'Reverie: The Divine Feminine'* places strong emphasis on the different **religious, spiritual, and mythological** conceptions of femininity. The exhibition is created under the notion that, by tying diverse artistic representations of womanhood to diverse belief systems, the potential for interpretation of the works and the concept is magnified, and the viewing experience becomes richer and more reflective. It is for this reason that Oscar Estruga's and Antonella Mellini's artworks form an essential component of the exhibition, through more **concrete ties to spirituality**, as well as a common **imaginative and oneiric approach**.

Oscar Estruga is a Spanish painter and sculptor. Born in 1933, he borrows from Greek and Cycladic mythology to recreate and reinvent Ancient Worlds; his work touches upon themes such as beauty, nature, and the human experience, while reflecting a calligraphic form of the artist's imagination. This can be seen through Estruga's **two exhibited serigraphy series, 'Erotica' and 'Mistica' (1987)**. With imagery and themes that range from the sacred to the obscure, Estruga explores the ways in which Ancient cultures viewed eroticism, and **offers an alternative vision of women's sexual representation in art**. Incorporating both figurative and abstract forms, the illustrations appear as dream scenes, while proposing multiple views of the physical, metaphysical, and spiritual power of feminine and masculine energies. The same is true for Estruga's bronze sculptures, which spread out throughout the exhibition, coexisting with the contemporary artworks on the gallery's walls. **Masked figures, myths, goddesses** such as *'Oscura Deméter'* (1980) or common women such as *'Cariatide'* reflect the sculptor's dreamlike portrayal of the feminine, divine in both its idolatry and humanity.

Antonella Mellini is an Italian contemporary artist with a strong focus on the examination of modern society and its changes. The artist addresses this complexity through a creative style that is visually simple, with her works existing on a two-dimensional plane and within the confines of a sharp black outline. However, Mellini's works harbour a **multidisciplinary approach** and are thematically-complex, with conceptual links drawn by her **use of recurring metaphors**. The eye is the absolute protagonist on the stylistic and narrative levels; for the artist, it represents our relationship with the world and with ourselves, as can be understood with *'UNIVERSE'* (2020). Moreover, hands represent an intimate extension of the soul; this element is featured in her *'GAME OVER'* (2020) diptych, which intends to portray the yin-yang, win-lose duality of what she imagines to be the game of life. A highlighted work by Mellini that strongly anchors her artistic vision to *'Reverie: The Divine Feminine'* is *'LAST'* (2020), a re-imagined Last Supper scene. The triptych brings together an Aztec Goddess of fertility, Jesus Christ, and a Sumerian fish-man sage—different cultural and religious conceptions of divinity eat and talk at the same table.

Estruga's and Mellini's representations of female idols reflect the historical weight of the Divine Feminine as an alternative to patriarchal worship structures. All in all, the exhibition aims to extend the reach of this concept, by **encouraging dialogue** and interchange of perspectives.

***Reverie: The Divine Feminine* is now open at Espinasse31 Contemporary Gallery:
Viale Carlo Espinasse 31, Milan 20156, Italy.**

INQUIRIES

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