

# ANDREA FESTA

not too far, not too close

Mary DeVincentis, Şolá Olúlòde, Valdrin Thaqi, Elias Njima, Lisa Ivory, Zhang Shangfeng, and Ralf Kokke

Curated by Zhimin Zhang × Willow Art Space

Andrea Festa is pleased to present the group exhibition Not too far, not too close, curated by Zhimin Zhang, founder of Willow Art Space. The exhibition brings together six international artists — Mary DeVincentis, Şolá Olúlòde, Valdrin Thaqi, Elias Njima, Lisa Ivory, Zhang Shangfeng, and Ralf Kokke— whose practices probe the intersections of daily life, myth, imagination, gender, and personal growth. Each work creates a physical and psychological distance that is close enough to perceive nuance, yet far enough to preserve autonomy.

The opening reception will take place on Friday, September 19, from 6 to 9 p.m., and the exhibition will run through October 30, 2025, at Andrea Festa, Lungotevere degli Altoviti 1, Rome, Italy.

Not too far, not too close draws on the widely known Goldilocks principle: the idea that optimal outcomes arise from a state of precise balance. The principle resonates across many domains of life — in astrobiology, economics, and developmental psychology. Standing before a painting is much the same: each scene appears poised on the edge of revelation, as if something is about to unfold, yet time still lingers. It becomes a way of perceiving and moving through time — where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going. It is an invitation to linger, to sense, to understand, to feel, to encounter life in its quiet moments, suspended in the grace of measured distance. Not too far, not too close — always just about to happen.

## The Artists

Mary DeVincentis (1951, USA)

Painter Mary DeVincentis Herzog employs her deeply personal iconography to investigate the universal dilemmas and mysteries of existence. While influenced by Buddhism and psychotherapy, her paintings also draw from Western modernism, post-modernism, and decades of study in South Asian and Tibetan art. She is currently working on Dark Matters, exploring the shadow side of human experience, and Sin Eaters, portraying society's saints, martyrs, scapegoats, and outcasts. Her work has been shown at Life on Mars Gallery, the International Print Center, the New York Public Library, White Columns, and the Brooklyn Museum. It is held in numerous public and private collections. She received her BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art and a Postgraduate Diploma in Advanced Printmaking from St. Martin's College of Art, London. She lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

Şolá Olúlòde (1996, UK)

Şolá Olúlòde is based in London and received her BA in Fine Art Painting from the University of Brighton in 2018. Her dreamy queer visions explore embodiments of British Black Womxn and Non-Binary Folx. Working with natural dyeing, batik, wax, ink, pastel, oil bar, and impasto, she creates textural canvases that examine fluid identities. Drawing from lived experiences and cultural references, she centers Black queer womxn, underscoring the importance of representation and celebration of queer intimacies

Valdrin Thaqi (1994, Kosovo)

Valdrin Thaqi lives and works between Prishtina and Berlin. A graduate of the Academy of Arts in Prishtina, his multidisciplinary practice spans painting and installation. Recent solo exhibitions include *Short Poems and Other Tales / A Play* by Valdrin Thaqi (Hajde Foundation / Grand Hotel, Prishtina, 2024); *I think I see it now* (Bazament Art Space, Tirana, 2024); *You do realize, there is a place where the sidewalk ends* (East Contemporary Gallery, Milan, 2023); and *It's been a while since I saw a cloud in the sky* (Motrat Gallery, Prishtina, 2019). Selected group shows include *Silent Threads* (Continua Gallery, Paris, 2025); *Artists of Tomorrow* (Stacion – Center for Contemporary Art, Prishtina, 2022); *Kosovo Art Collection* (Kosovo National Gallery of Arts, 2022); *Manifesta 14* (2022); and *Nothing Like Home* (LambdaLambdaLambda Gallery, Prishtina, 2021). He received the Muslim Mulliqi Award (2018) and the Young Artists Award (2019) from the Kosovo National Gallery of Arts, and was nominated for the Stacion Centre for Contemporary Art Award (2022).

Elias Njima (1994, Switzerland)

Elias Njima lives and works in Geneva. After training as a graphic designer at CFPA Geneva, he moved to Amsterdam in 2014, earning a BA in Fine Arts from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in 2018. In the Netherlands, he developed a pictorial language blending contemporary and local influences with references to his country of origin. Since returning to Switzerland in 2020, he has expanded his practice to include etching and sculpture, particularly ceramics.

Lisa Ivory (1966, UK)

Lisa Ivory lives and works in London. She graduated in Fine Art Painting from St Martins School of Art in 1988. Her practice explores otherness and its dual nature of fear and attraction. She creates fantastical worlds populated by mythical creatures — wild men, chimeras, hybrids, spectres — drawing from classical archetypes. Recent exhibitions include *Yusto/Giner* (Madrid), *Veta* (Madrid), Fabian Lang Gallery (Zurich), and solo shows at Nino Mier Gallery (Brussels), CZA (Milan), Charlie Smith London, and Pamela Salisbury (New York).

Zhang Shangfeng (1998, China)

Zhang Shangfeng lives and works in Xi'an. His paintings depict the darkest moment of adventure: the trance, the impassivity before choice. Often masculine, his figures embody the adventurer — both myth and loner, powerful yet suspended in moments before victory or defeat. Zhang values the spirit of adventure but highlights its loneliness: an indifference before action.

Ralf Kokke (1989, Netherlands)

Ralf Kokke (b. 1989, Netherlands) lives and works in Dordrecht. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Kokke creates paintings that merge memory and storytelling, blending layered textures and handmade pigments to evoke intimate yet universal narratives inspired by childhood dreams, naïve and folk art, and early Renaissance masters. He has held solo exhibitions at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery (London, Berlin) and Hans Alf Gallery (Copenhagen), participated in major group exhibitions including *Where the Wild Roses Grow* (Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London, 2023) and *LIAISON | THE PAPER SHOW* (Better Go South, Copenhagen, 2024), and presented his work at international art fairs such as Enter Art Fair (Copenhagen) and Contemporary Art Now (Ibiza). His paintings are represented in significant collections including the Dordrechts Museum, the Van Gogh Huis Collection, and the Vietnam Art Collection, and in 2024 he was nominated for the Dutch Royal Painting Award.

Zhimin Zhang x Willow Art Space:

Zhimin Zhang (b. 1997) is a Wuhan-born, London-based curator, gallerist, and cultural entrepreneur whose interdisciplinary practice spans art, human science (specifically sociology, psychiatry, health and fitness & wellbeing), business innovation, and community engagement.

She is the founder of Willow Art Space (WAS), established in London in 2022, a socially conscious art enterprise committed to discovering, championing, and advocating for young, emerging, and underrepresented artists. Through WAS, Zhang fosters cross-industry collaborations that transcend traditional boundaries, making artistic expression more accessible, impactful, and socially resonant.

Zhang's curatorial research explores how art intersects with social science and human sciences — not only as a means of aesthetic experience, but also as a tool for knowledge-sharing, cultural reflection, and social awareness. She seeks to design innovative and inclusive methodologies that bridge these disciplines, using art both to illuminate pressing social issues and to expand visibility and recognition for artists who challenge conventional narratives. Zhang positions herself at the forefront of a new, holistic model of cultural engagement — one that insists art is not distant or isolated, but deeply entangled with the ways we live, think, and grow.

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19 September — 30 October 2025

Andrea Festa

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