

Caroline Absher
Just Passing Through
March 20th - May 07th 2022

Andrea Festa Fine Art is glad to announce the first European solo show by Caroline Absher, supplemented by a critical essay by Giorgia Basili. The exhibition shows a new painting series made in the artist's studio in Brooklyn, where she lives and works.

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Critical text by Giorgia Basili

"We start our climb along a shady path where all around us yellow dandelions and purple campanula are in flower. The new grass has grown in dense clumps around the charred granite blocks, the vestiges of a palace that was consumed in flames. Min asks me to sit down on a lotus flower carved in marble, and he stands back to look at me. I find the silence uncomfortable".

(Shan Sa, *The Girl Who Played Go*, 2001)

Acid green, crimson red, magenta, burgundy, saffron: these are the ingredients of Caroline Eleanor Absher's paint palette. Flaking brush strokes follow one another, building the image and then getting lost in abstract spots, as it happens with *Natalia's* petroleum hair iridescence. The face is the real protagonist of Caroline Eleanor Absher's paintings: it conquers the space in a radical take-over. There is no foreground or background, the composition has a photographic connotation, the close-up. We can peek out the window of appearance, but we are mere "guests passing through": we can stay a few seconds, then we are pushed back into our dimension. The same artist is just passing through the Eternal City. She is American, living in Brooklyn - one of the five boroughs of New York City, in Long Island's south shore. And again, the protagonists of her paintings, all women, seem to temporarily appear, "taking a break" in the confines of the visual, and then get lost again in the maze of a parallel reality, even far from the Metaverse. A reality of pure fantasy and illusion, of prolific imagination, where their deeds are awaited, perhaps legendary, perhaps mediocre or simply as an integral part of a vital flow that does not belong to us.

Absher's female protagonists are radioactive organisms: as if mapping the body heat with a thermography, the artist absorbs and filters reality, turning it into saturated and phosphorescent colors. Heroines, Amazons, mermaids, hybrid and fairy beings. Often, the artist assigns them a protective attitude, so that they inspire calm and serenity. *"Friendly but distant, as if they could see us through a veil, but we cannot do the same"*, says the artist.

Aurora, Fairy Nap, Asleep in the flowers, Spirit Guide bring us into a world where enchantment and everyday life are indissolubly mixed. Yet, these creatures are not caught in their action, but in the moment before reality unfolds. Immersed in their thoughts, dream tunnels, captured in a deep and inaccessible REM phase. Impenetrable, because the rapacious gaze of those who are looking at them is petrified. The image expresses one's will to control, convey, manipulate, suspend any external aggression.

Fire Girl warns us, grabs the reins of the game, and we can't help but wonder, as Mitchell would do, *What do pictures want?* What they ask and entrust, while reserving the most succulent slice of the interaction for themselves, making use of their self-determination faculty. In Giuseppe Penone's portrait *Reversing One's Eyes*, reflective lenses prevent the artist from seeing the outside world, making him blind and overturning the vision, so the viewer "ideally" enters the depths of the internalized and embodied gaze. *Fire Girl*, however, shows the woman's determination becoming incendiary power. Is it the will for revenge that blinds us? Is she throwing a gauntlet or craving an

exchange of energies? Her eyes, every inch of her skin, become living and burning flame, contaminating the paint palette of the other paintings as well.

The snake and the raven shows the profile of a face, whose silhouette is doubled as if the personality of the protagonist were split, poised between the snake and the raven (at the opposite vertices of the diagonal), between two polarities that are not necessarily identified with good and evil. *Aurora* awakens Shakespearean reminiscences. The tiara adorning her forehead, reminds us the fairy court of Titania, among swings covered with ivy, garlands of primroses and daisies. In a field bathed in light, between the yellow of dandelions and the purple red of campanulas, as in the book *The Girl Who Played Go* by the Chinese author Shan Sa (naturalized French). Absher's paintings contains many references to the history of art. In a work not on display, the artist retraces Paul Gauguin's painting *The Spirit of the Dead Keep Watch* (Manao tupapau, 1892) whose protagonist is a Tahitian teenager lying on a bed – reminding Manet's Olympia. Laying belly down, with her ear on the bed sheet, she turns to the viewer. In Absher's version, however, the body of the young muse is free from the heavy condition of confinement and relegation to an object of desire, annihilated by the patriarchal gaze.

In *Asleep in the flowers* (2022) the position of the sleeping girl is reminiscent of Frederic Leighton's *Flaming June* (1895) or the young Greek maidens, supine and dreamy, typical of the work of Sir Alma Tadema. There is no shortage of distant Pre-Raphaelite suggestions, but here the point of view is overturned once again: the female figure does not appear as seductive and bewitching, set up - as in a banquet - to respond to male pleasure requests, nor in the role of ruthless predator. On the contrary, the figures of this series of paintings are alternately moved or immobilized by desire, meditative or focused towards secret goals, beyond our understanding. Sirens who have no intention of ensnaring Ulysses, sylphs who whisper their fleeting thoughts to the wind.

Caroline Absher (b. 1994 Greenville, South Carolina) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Absher holds a BFA in Painting and a BA in Art History from Pratt Institute. Absher is in the current group show "They're On to You" at Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York and has had a previous solo exhibition at The Cabin, Los Angeles, CA. Absher has participated in group exhibitions at Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas, TX; Martha's Contemporary, Austin, TX; Daniel Raphael Gallery, London, UK; Blue Shop Cottage, London, UK; The Hole, New York, NY; and Lichtundfire Gallery, New York, NY.

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Lungotevere degli Altoviti, 1, Roma 00186

andreafestafineart@gmail.com