

PRESS RELEASE

Sofia Mitsola
Psyche of Fae O

January 16 – April 10, 2026
Opening on Thursday, January 15, 6 – 9 pm
Artist talk with Sofia Mitsola & Vanessa Joan Müller, 6.30 pm
Lichtenfelsgasse 5, A-1010 Vienna

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Psyche of Fae O*, its second solo exhibition with the London-based, Greek artist Sofia Mitsola.

The boudoir is literally a room for sulking, a female retreat and refuge for dressing, undressing, and transformation. The Marquis de Sade transformed it into a libertarian cabinet for his fantasies, while Anaïs Nin made it the setting for her erotic stories. Today, the term primarily refers to a genre of photography that commercializes posing in lingerie as an act of self-empowerment. Sofia Mitsola, by contrast, turns it into the atmospheric backdrop for her images and thus a linchpin of a reflection on how (nude) painting, with its myriad art-historical references, can be given a contemporary perspective once again.

In her new oil paintings, reincarnations of Klimt's female characters – long a source of inspiration for her – merge with vintage porn to create a neo-Art Deco style, dominated by porcelain-white skin and cascades of red hair. Ultra-slim, naked bodies, as if levelled to the surface, stand out brightly against a golden or smoky, diffuse background, some decadently framed by fur. They push their spread legs towards the audience or pose coquettishly with a ponytail. A woman's face emerges melancholically from a diffuse black color space, while another seems to merge with its glazed, painted surroundings. These are fleeting apparitions, slowly fading away, yet brought to the canvas with rapid brushstrokes. They intuitively recall their role models, but reduce their canonized visual language to poses and ciphers. Impressionistic backgrounds reminiscent of Bonnard's paintings or glazed color backdrops eliminate any overly obvious historical context in favor of an open pictorial space in which an equally artificial and affecting physicality takes shape.

These figures are sexualized, but also deformed, reminiscent of the severed limbs in Schiele's nude drawings or the torsions in Hans Bellmer's dolls. Large eyes and pouting lips link these fin de siècle creatures to the camp version of courtesans from the 1970s, but also bring them closer to the present with its manga-inspired Instagram filters. Mitsola's female beings consist of curves and lines, opaque surfaces and expressive brushstrokes; they are fiction made image through and through, and perhaps for this very reason they are projection surfaces for a perception that is aware of the numbing effects of a media-saturated present saturated with sex. They are not modelled on real-life, but are pictorial fantasies on a meta-level, so to speak, aware of the voyeurism once evoked by their art-historical predecessors and the transgressions that are mostly no longer transgressions today. Above all, however, they are aware of the latent irritation of being the creations of a female painter who has brought them to the canvas with supreme self-assurance and freed them from potential resentments.

In contrast to the Arcadian carefreeness of the sirens that populate Mitsola's earlier paintings, however, an atmosphere of emotional dissonance prevails here. *Psyche of Fae O*, a psychological introspection of an unknown protagonist dislocated from time or place, focuses rather on the dualism of glamour and gloom. Freud's theory of Eros and Thanatos flashes up in post-coital female figures somewhere between sleep and apathy in a state of disappearance. They seem to merge with each other as couples or encounter their twin like a figure of light and shadow. In *La Petite Mort*, 2025, the lonely climax – 'jouissance is the path towards death' (Lacan) – even becomes an encounter with a skeleton.

The stylized boudoir, which Mitsola stages like a setting for someone absent, emphasizes their tonality. It seems to ask who was there and what might have happened. Music composed especially for the exhibition wafts through the gallery, also contrasting melody and atonality. Immersed in suggestive darkness, a dressing table, a 'Psyche' as it is

called in Austria, is presented in the center, with the repertoire that makes worldly metamorphosis possible in the first place. However, the mirror as an instrument of self-reflection and transformation triggered by the image reflects at most us, the viewers. The furniture that supports it is made of steel, and the utensils on it are less plush than the ambience historically demands. One might find them subtle, like the objects in Marina Abramovic's performance *Rhythm 01*, which are surgically placed on a table so that the audience can perform all kinds of actions on the artist.

This set design – every detail a piece of a larger puzzle and encoded in multiple ways – relies on contrasts, appearing hard or soft, warm or cold. The overall theatrical atmosphere is also reminiscent of intimate, self-contained spaces of pent-up emotion, where euphoria can quickly turn to despair. Mitsola cites the *horror vacui* of the apartment from Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* as a source of inspiration, as well as the lavish sets of the ballet film *The Tales of Hoffmann*. The dissected staging of visual opulence and dramatic, even affected sentiment, the interplay of love, desire, submission and downfall, seems to shine through here and there in every part of the décor, in every painted emotion.

And yet Fae O, whose psyche seems to be explored in this series of paintings, with her conscious and unconscious feelings, her emotional outbursts and her *jouissance*, is ultimately above all a linguistic creature. Fae is derived from the Greek word Φαῖω (to shine brightly) – Sofia Mitsola loves etymology. Fae O sounds like a name that can achieve fame even in its incompleteness, like Anna or Jackie O. And yet it remains more of a phonetic paraphrase, an initial sound as in *fancy*, *phantasm* or *fantasy* – something that materializes in speech only to disappear again.

Vanessa Joan Müller

Sofia Mitsola was born in 1992 in Thessaloniki, GR, and lives and works in London, UK. In 2018, she received her MFA in painting from the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, UK. She has had solo exhibitions at 1690 Art Collection Space, Shanghai, CN (2025); Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich, CH (2023); The Portland Collection at the Harley Gallery, Welbeck, Nottinghamshire, UK (2022); Pilar Corrias, London, UK (2024; 2021; 2020; 2019); and Jerwood Space, London, UK (2019). She has participated in group exhibitions at L'Appartement, Geneva, CH (2025); HiFlow, Geneva, CH (2025); El Espacio 23, Pérez Art Museum, Miami, FL (2024); Fondation Carmignac, Hyères, FR (2024); Sixi Museum, Nanjing, CN (2024); Pilar Corrias, London, UK (2023); Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich, CH (2022); Jerwood Collection at the Harley Gallery, Welbeck, Nottinghamshire, UK (2021); 125 Charing Cross, London, UK (2019); Clifford Chance, London, UK (2018); Tiffany & Co, London, UK (2018); The Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, London, UK (2018); Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK (2018); Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, GR (2017); and The Refugees Museum, Thessaloniki, GR (2016). Her work is included in the collections of institutions including the Elie Khouri Foundation, Dubai, UAE; Emergentes Foundation, Beirut, LB; Jerwood Collection, London, UK; K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong, HK; Longlati Foundation, Shanghai, CN; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL, US; Samil Foundation, Seoul, KR; Sixi Museum, Nanjing, CN; Start Museum, Shanghai, CN; UCL Art Museum Collection, London, UK; X Museum, Beijing, CN; and Zabłudowicz Collection, London, UK.

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