

17.07.2018

## Ancient Girl Power, Mindful Utopias and Gigantic Struggles at Dio Horia Gallery in Mykonos

On the tourist-laden island of **Mykonos**, three separate exhibitions currently on display at Dio Horia gallery bring up issues of patriarchy and gender binaries and mix them with romantic projections of nature and the ancient past. A group show curated by gallery founder and art historian Marina Vranopoulou takes the history and fables of the nearby island of **Delos** as its starting point to unravel a nuanced curatorial — whereby natural landscapes untouched by humans are used as a metaphor for a society without conflict. Two smaller solo shows by artists **Matthew Palladino** and **Maja Djordjevic** echo the main exhibition's mythical and feminist themes with works that have been created specially for the gallery as part of its residency programme.

For the group show *Dancing Goddesses*, Vranopoulou has pulled together work by seventeen artists to create a fractured visual narrative of paradisiacal beauty that is marked first and foremost by the absence of humans — or more specifically, men. A video projection on the floor greets visitors with whimsical animated videos by American cartoonist **Nina Paley** that form a humorous critique of patriarchy and the way it has cemented itself through Abrahamic religions over the course of thousands of years. In the video *Paroles Paroles*, a female figure is seen wading against a flurry of words from religious scriptures in Hebrew, Arabic and Greek thrown at her by a patriarchal god-figure, as the two sing along the eponymous Dalida and Alain Delon duet. In an even funnier video titled *You Gotta Believe*, a host of prehistoric and classical female statues come to life and dance to the music of The Pointer Sisters as they admonish a bearded patriarch (possibly Moses) for not believing in them. The statues depict female figures that were worshipped as fertility deities in the distant past, like the famous Venus of Willendorf, the Snake Goddess from Minoan Crete, Astarte from the Levant, Nuth from prehistoric Egypt and many more.



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As they are projected right in front of the gallery entrance, the two videos become the threshold that visitors have to cross in order to enter the exhibition. But unlike Paley's animations, the rest of the works don't include many human figures, except from a ghostly self-portrait photogram by **Natasha Papadopoulos** (*80 inches by 60 inches*, 2011), a series of images printed on marble that are part of **Rallou Panagiotou's** sculpture *Uncanny How She* (2012) and **Katherine Bradford's** dreamlike *Night Time Swimmers* (2018). These fleeting images of women, hovering like spirits between reality and the beyond, are solemn and shaman-like — something that brings them in contrast with **Kenny Scharf's** cartoony faces floating in outer space (*Kozmobz*, 2018). Rendered in pink and blue, Scharf's painting echoes the gender binary that sets the tone in Paley's videos, only in his fluid interplay of pink and blue it's impossible to tell who's got the upper hand in this negotiation.

The play between masculine and feminine as symbolised by blue and pink can be seen throughout the exhibition. The work placement has been so meticulously curated that some aspects of the space are predominantly blue while others are bright pink or red. Rallou Panagiotou's sculpture on the floor cuts diagonally through the space like a pink-blue stream, its arched trajectory creating a protective space for the female spirits underneath it. With the exception of Paley's videos, every human figure in this exhibition is a woman; but at the same time, all of them are fleeting and evanescent. Not ethereal and delicate, but simply vanishing and retracting, as if making themselves barely visible from another dimension.

The rest of the works are vivid, bacchanalian depictions of natural landscapes or images that allude to a riotous, sensual experience of nature. The most arresting of these is **Erik Parker's** *Triple Double Falls* (2018) that shows in bright acrylic on canvas a rock formation completely drowned in exotic vegetation and surrounded by a lake. The work seems like a psychedelic version of a Minoan fresco found in the prehistoric city excavated in Akrotiri, on the island of Santorini. The fresco, also known as the [Spring Fresco](#), depicts a group of statuesque rocks crowned with luscious flowering plants and swallows mating in the sky above. Both Parker and the prehistoric Akrotiri painter capture an imaginary moment inspired by a very real world, and exalt nature with their detailed brushstrokes and a palpable sense of adoration. Both works throb with a sense of unrestrained, overflowing, brutal life, and stand as



Erik Parker, *Triple Double Falls*, 2018. Acrylic on canvas. 102 x 114 cm.  
Courtesy Dio Horia Gallery.

But just as the male gaze defines not only how the world is represented but also how it is made, the same goes for the artist's gaze when creating a work, even one celebrating the complete absence of humanity. Even in **Hulda Guzman's** warm-coloured paintings on mahogany (*Intertwined by choice*, 2018) or **Alex Ruthner's** super-detailed painting of a grassy field (*My Childhood in Circus*, 2018), the absence of human figures seems momentary and recent, as if the protagonists have just exited the frame. What we then have is not imaginary depictions of paradise, but snapshots of nature finally left at peace. **Emily Mae Smith & Adam Henry's** painting of two full glasses under an alien-looking moon (*The Explanation Replaced One Enigma by Another*, 2017) captures this fleeting moment of friendship and balance restored, but also points out the fragility and bizarreness of this event.

In her solo exhibition on the first floor, Serbian artist **Maja Djordjevic** also loves playing with the bizarre and skewed perspectives of contemporary life. Known for her pixelated painting technique and the use of white, pink and blue, Djordjevic has created a cartoony version of herself as the protagonist of her work who is then caught up in tragicomic situations. For her solo show *I Will Find You* she reflects on the concept of mindfulness and its apparent impossibility in contemporary life. A sculpture made of two wooden cutouts of a female body and a flower scene slotted together down their middle to form an X shape captures the conundrums and frustration of a demanding ideal life in late capitalism and the way our humanness is crushed in order to conform to this lifestyle. Meanwhile, an utterly poetic image of two empty chairs and a table on what looks like a pink beach at dawn (shown in the bar area on the gallery's top floor) is beautifully reminiscent of Smith & Henry's painting of two glasses and conveys a feeling of calm potential, of coming together and listening to what another person has to say.



Maja Djordjevic, *One Day I Will Find You*, 2017. Oil and enamel on canvas.  
150 x 220 cm. Courtesy Dio Horia Gallery.

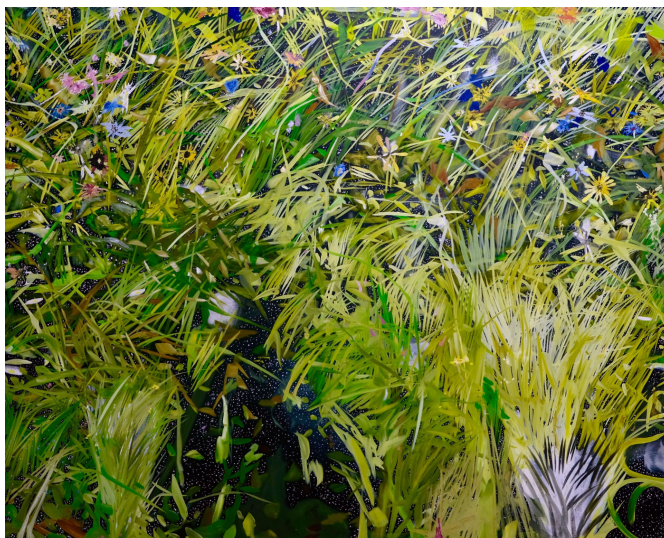
A gesture of reconciliation and healing can be seen in **Matthew Palladino's** solo show that takes up the second room on the gallery's first floor and consists of four watercolour paintings created on Mykonos during the artist's residency there. Palladino's chosen theme of the Gigantomachy references the most important chapter in Greek mythology, where the Olympian gods fought and defeated the Gigantes, ruling divine entities of the old world, in order to bring about a new world order and gain control of the cosmos. It's the moment when primal instincts and ancient pagan beliefs are brought to an end, and reason, order and of course patriarchy come to replace the worship of Mother Earth and the elements.

Palladino selects depictions of the Gigantomachy from the famed Pergamon Altar and reconstructs them with colour, as a way to complete these broken narratives set in stone with floral animosity and vividness. This story that is as old as time about the conflict between primal instinct and the rational mind is retold here with great care and attention to detail, in a technique that both follows and reinvents ancient imagery. The flower-like patterns and colours create a connection between advanced civilisation and nature, a contrast that is evident throughout the gallery's three exhibitions. Is there a battle still underway between humans and nature, male and female, consumerism and simplicity? No doubt about it. But perhaps it's more important to think of Djordjevic's two empty chairs and give room to every Other, and understand that binaries are not only about difference but more importantly about partnership, sharing and coexisting.



Matthew Palladino, *Gigantomachy*, 2018. Watercolour and ink on paper. 76 x 56 cm. Courtesy Dio Horia Gallery.

*Dancing Goddesses* participating artists: Carlos Betancourt, Katherine Bradford, Sam Friedman, Hulda Guzman, David Harrison, Nir Hod, Robert Lazzarini, Olga Migliaressi-Phoca, Nina Paley, Rallou Panagiotou, Natasha Papadopoulou, Erik Parker, Alex Ruthner, Kenny Scharf, Kristen Schiele, Emily Mae Smith & Adam Henry.

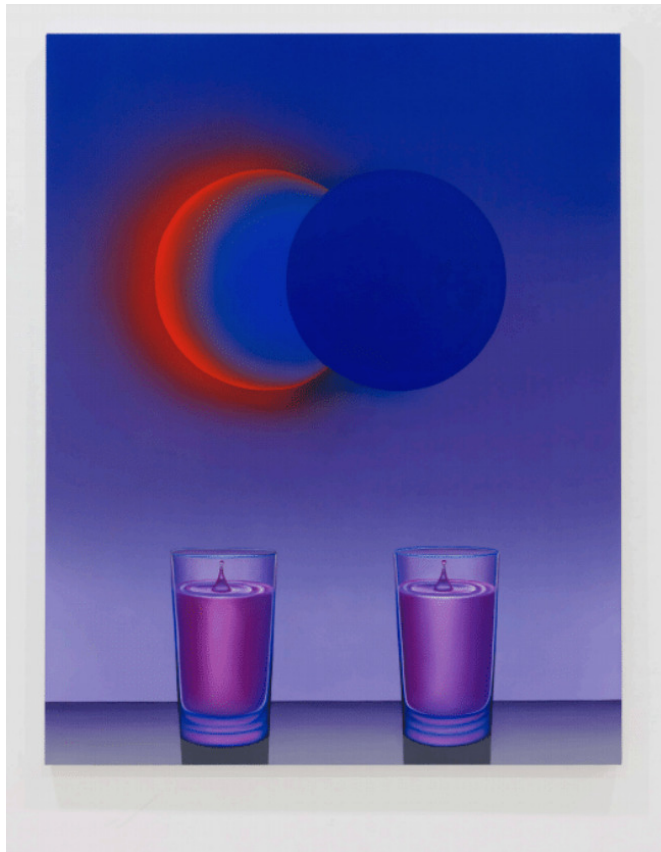


Alex Ruthner, *My Childhood in Circus*, 2018. Oil on canvas. 190 x 240 cm. Courtesy Dio Horia Gallery.

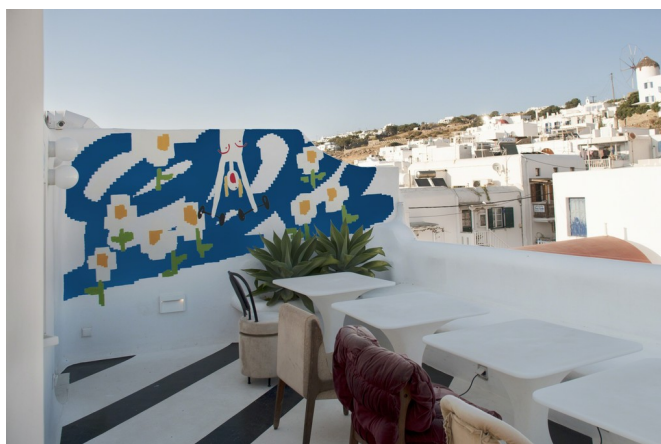




Dancing Goddesses, installation view.



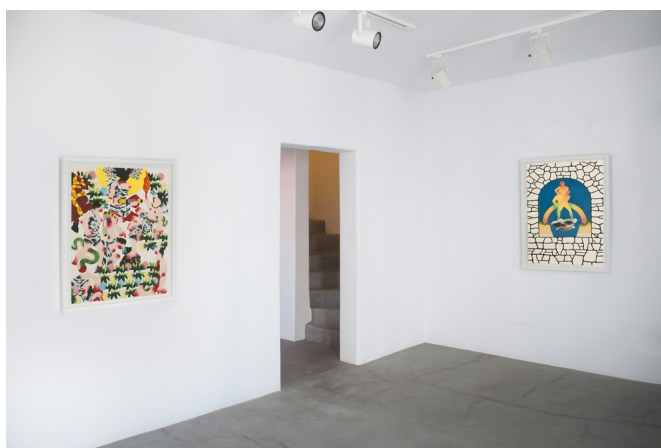
Emily Mae Smith & Adam Henry, *The Explanation Replaced One Enigma by Another*, 2017. Synthetic polymer oils on linen. 96.5 x 76 cm. Courtesy Dio Horia Gallery.



Maja Djordjevic mural at the rooftop terrace of Dio Horia Gallery.



Maja Djordjevic installation view.



Matthew Palladino, installation view.

**Info**

*Dancing Goddesses*

27 May - 20 Jul 2018

*Matthew Palladino: Gigantomachy*

06 Jul - 01 Aug 2018

*Maja Djordjevic: I Will Find You*

06 Jul - 01 Aug

[Dio Horia Art Gallery](#)

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