ALMINE RECH

Ana Karkar
Whole Cookie

May 30 — Jul 27, 2024 | London

Almine Rech London is pleased to present Ana Karkar's second solo exhibition with the gallery, *Whole Cookie*, on view from May 30 to July 27, 2024.

The exhibition unveils a new series of figurative paintings by the French-American artist, in addition to an installation piece comprised of video, sculpture and literature. Composed as a temple to eroticism, it explores and universalises the many complex paradoxes of Ishtar, the ancient Mesopotamian goddess of both love and war, as well as fertility and sensuality. As the goddess of paradox, Ishtar is the model of unity in multiplicity.

Each of us reflects some of her discordance in ourselves, and this exhibition, *Whole Cookie*, explores how we strive to gather these conflicting parts into a semblance of order. Ishtar's polarities and contradictions feed the creative spirit, but they also provoke insecurity and disruption. She represents chaos, going against order and principle, however this also opens up to possibility and potential. The destructive and harsh in balance with the empowering and transformative; society coexisting side by side with the cosmic.

Upon entering the exhibition, visitors are faced with the painted image of a sphinx, the guardian of the temple – and its riddle:

MINA (reads): 'Poor is the man whose pleasures depend on the permissions of another'?

SPHINX: It's a Madonna quote. From 'Justify My Love'... Can we call room service?

MINA: Gosh, yes, I remember the video. Rather a Helmut Newton pornographic soiree situation.

SPHINX: So sick, yeah. I think I was conceived to that, maybe? (Laughs) In the desert.

MINA: Your father was a lion and your mother was an eagle owl— correct?

[Excerpt from an accompanying text written by Charlie Fox]

In Karkar's method of seeing others in the show exploring the interaction between humans and hybrid figures. Her gestural work is imbued with colour relationships, as expressed by a vibrant palette in which her bodies are twisted and blended in a dance macabre that evoke the work of Egon Schiele.

Ana Karkar's work is influenced by cinematography and images in the collective unconscious, especially horror and erotic movies. Filmic elements are often noted in her paintings, however for this show, for the first time Karkar is exhibiting film work, in the video piece *Queen of the Night* in relation to her painting. This then takes its title from a particular terracotta relief from the Old Babylonian period, from Mesopotamia (now at the British Museum). Pervaded by ancient symbolism alongside post-Punk elements and underground culture references, the film tells the story of the divinely complex marriage of Ishtar and Dumuzi and is set to the soundtrack of Berlin-based band Noj remixed to the Witch house genre.

Like an altar, the film is presented as the backdrop to Karkar's own sculpture of a goddess, subversively titled *Queen of the Nightlife*, under whose feet is positioned a text written by Karim Massoteau, *MY ANGER, A HARROW WITH GREAT TEETH, HAS TORN THE MOUNTAIN APART*, folded and marked 'REUNIFICATION IN PROCESS'. Visitors can take a copy of this text with them as they leave the altar.

"Now clad in terror, opening her chest, she demands the destruction of the mountain but is met only with resounding silence.

Whiffs of Cypress and Cedar are smelled.

Fist clenched, she then summons all life in her body and weaves a storm, fury assembles in her heart, her folds, her veins, her very blood, and lava dribbling from her lips, unleashes the shockwaves of her orgasm all around.

She blows one blast of pitiless, pulsing, stroboscopic, energy."

[An excerpt from Karim Massoteau's text]

Ana Karkar, via Ishtar, is insisting we face our shadowy contradictions. That we acknowledge who we are, in all our painful and wonderful complexity. At the same time, she steps forward to do the same.