



Maria Positano

NOT FROM THIS PLACE

April 11th 2024 - May 29th 2024

Opening April 10th, 2024

6.00 p.m. - 9.00 p.m.

via Valpetrosa 1, Milan

THE EXHIBITION

Nashira Gallery is hosting in its new spaces located in Via Valpetrosa *Not from this place*, the first solo exhibition in Italy by **Maria Positano**, an artist of Neapolitan origin born in 1995 in London, where she lives and works.

In occasion of her solo Maria Positano presents a selection of new and recent works that have been specially reimagined for Nashira's new spaces, exemplifying the last four years of her research.

The body is the core holding the things that matter the most: life and identity. If we let ourselves be guided by an exploration of its structures we see a number of components, all layered around a central armor, the skeleton, onto which are crafted the more delicate components. The softer parts are the organs, first shielded by ribs, then by muscles, fat, and multiple layers of epidermis. This skin is our last and outer surface which along with our features, is what defines what we present to the outside world. It is with such structures in mind that Positano aims to play with outer and inner layers, reconfiguring those to form ambiguous bodies often reversing its natural order.

The body can be seen as a form of armor - protecting our essence, emotions, and perceptions - but it can also become the tool with which we alter and transform, in a negotiation to become more like ourselves. Alteration and transformation can effectively be seen as the physical bones in Positano's bodies. Maria Positano draws inspiration from ancient forms or armoury: body suits, shields and helmets from the Greco-Roman period become efigies of imperialistic warfare making visible its oppressive function as well as its protective capacities, physically and metaphorically speaking.

Historically, ceremonial and field armour was designed and produced in an exclusively male economy, while Positano's sculptures make no reference to a gender binary or a specific gendered sexuality. Shapes of bodies that are suggestive and that could belong to anyone, indiscriminately, in a complete universality, as if to challenge social and cultural logics and put forth the notion that gender is an unrestricted expression of one's actual self. Fluid body-armours like *Body Armour (with chain)* and *Body Armour (with fabric)* are presented alongside insect-like shields such as *Beetle Shield in Gold* and *Armour Shield (with legs)*, the artist's signature organic, soft and enveloping shapes are treated with intense metallic colors.



Maria Positano's works appear to have been originated from other planets where the expected order of things is reversed, sometime even physically put upside down, where everything co-exists and generates freely, for all humans but also for all other living things. Armour is requalified as a signifier of shared vulnerability and of exposed coexistence, speaking about our contemporaneity in times of global unrest.

Maria frequently builds a visual language linking different eras and multiple cultural references, inviting the observer to reevaluate what constitutes strength and resilience, challenging binary notions of vulnerability and invulnerability. The new production of low-reliefs on wooden board is one instance of this research in action. *Exoskeleton* is one of the large, somewhat abstract pieces where multicolored lines meet with geometric motifs. These textures may initially evoke Arab and African worlds or the medieval miniature works, but in reality, they come from the vast iconographic collection of Pompeian frescoes and mosaics that the artist saw on her many visits to the mythological city's lava-submerged ruins, which were rediscovered in 1599, as well as from some of the ones that are exhibited at the National Archaeological Museum in Naples (MANN).

Because everything matters in a production, even the materials employed take on a "political" and committed worth, it becomes evident that the artist's contemporary utilized paper to reference mosaic tiles, which were formerly made of hard and solid stone. In reality, Maria Positano creates all of her artwork by repurposing "poor" waste materials like paper, textiles, iron, wood, seeds, and elevating and ennobling them by expert material processing and aesthetics. By crafting armor from paper pulp and up-cycled fabrics and clay, the artist subverts expectations of strength and durability associated with conventional armor, furthermore treating the surface to age the materials, making them feel fragile. Instead of relying on physical toughness, the wearer must rely on alternative forms of resilience and adaptability. A real alchemical transformation that turns a light substance into one that looks as hard as metal or a brittle element looking as rigid as a stone or an insect's carapace.

A trick-playing game that references the skill of certain creatures' and their mimicry strategies, such as the chameleon, or the world of insects and other invertebrates, where the bright colors serve as a warning to onlookers that the creature may be poisonous.

Yet, Maria Positano's works do not instill fear or push one away. On the contrary, their shapes and colors draw the viewer to them as flowers attract bees. We would like to get close and touch them.

Our bodies would like to wear them in order to enter into a modernity and union between the parts without distinction of gender, color, race or nature anymore.

Then again, the universal laws that govern the physics of the planet apply equally to any living being. Maria Positano has caught this aspect and the artworks she shows us are evidence of that.



BIOGRAPHY

Maria Positano (London, 1995) is a multidisciplinary artist living and working in London. Neapolitan of origin, Maria has lived in Mexico City, France, US, UK and Italy, permeating her work with multiple cultural influences.

The artist completed her BA (Hons) in Sculpture at The City and Guilds of London Art School in 2018 where she awarded the C&G Sculpture Prize. In the summer of 2023 she completed her master's degree at the Royal College of Arts and at the beginning of 2024 she won the Gilbert Bayes Award at The Royal Society of Sculptors. Her work has been shown internationally and acquired in private collections in the UK and Italy. Maria Positano won the STC x RCA Air 2023, a one year artist in residence solo award at South Thames College London. In addition to this, she has participated in other residencies in the past: Mason&Fifth x Hyphastudios in London and ViaFarini.org in Milan.

Major solo exhibitions: *A perfect place*, Studio Block M74, Mexico City (2022); *Take me Somewhere Nice*, Lockbund Gallery, Oxfordshire (2020); *Making Meaning*, Subsidiary Project, London (2018).

Major group exhibitions: *Studio Responses #4*, Saatchi Gallery, London (2023); *Matter*, Flowers Gallery, London (2023); *Baggage Claim*, Staffordshire Str., (2023); *Nascosti alla luce del sole*, Nashira Gallery, Milan (2023); *Felt cute, might delete later*, Arusha Gallery, London; *Beyond the matter*, Galerie Der Kunsler Innen, Munich(2023); *Soft Monuments*, Frestonian Gallery, London (2023); *2for1*, Thorp Stavri & Haze x Hyphastudios, London (2023); *Hung Drawn Quartered*, Staffordshire St Studios, London (2023); *The Appearance Formula*, Andrea Festa Fine Art, Rome (2022); *La Camaleona*, Galeria 54, Mexico City (2022); *One By One*, Fiumano Clase, London (2022); *Discoveries 2020 – The Biting Point*, Fiumano Clase, London (2020).

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