



Sebastian Thomas

BALLAD OVER THE OCEAN

October 4th 2024 – November 15th 2024

curated by Edoardo Durante e Samuele Menin

Opening October 3rd 2024

6.00 – 9.00 p.m.

via Valpetrosa I, Milan

THE EXHIBITION

The artistic practice of Sebastian Thomas (1994) denotes a particular skill in the study and analysis of late medieval formal and symbolic composition, which is subsequently reinterpreted according to an innovative pictorial approach and language. The aesthetic canons that have characterised centuries of art history are reinterpreted by the artist, questioning established narratives and suggesting new critical perspectives through a process of visual decomposition. Thomas deconstructs Christian iconography and chivalric mythology by creating works that evoke the fascination of Proto-Renaissance style and formal structures, attempting to address issues that are reflected in the contemporary. Episodes from the lives of martyrs, epic ballads and battles between Christian saints and mythical creatures constitute narrative elements - punctually reinterpreted and sometimes combined with one another - that open a dialogue between the sacredness of tradition and the fragility of the condition in which we live. Thus, a reflection on spirituality and its consequent evolution emerges, according to which art becomes a means to deal with the complexity of the present. The artist creates alternative narratives - often the protagonists of the works are female subjects who replace a patriarchal hierarchical-symbolic setting - introducing a reflection on identity, social roles and cultural constructs. The heroines painted by Thomas are figures charged with the power capable of reinterpreting the role of the medieval woman: through an inversion of meaning, woman is no longer a passive figure relegated to the domestic dimension, but the protagonist of epic narratives, myths and sacred stories.

The figures depicted are essential, concise and at the same time far removed from the hieraticism characteristic of ancient sacred representations. The faces, moving bodies and gestures that Thomas depicts suggest an emotional complexity that goes beyond the concept of historical imitation. The inner conflict of the characters plays a central role in the analysis of the composition, revealing a particular attention to the tensions that govern contemporary society. The colours mainly used by the artist - red, gold, blue and green - were frequently employed in religious frescoes or medieval tapestries, and Thomas' own painting technique shares and partly emulates the aesthetics of mural or panel painting.

The choice of colour, however, does not have a merely decorative function; on the contrary, it conveys the symbolic content of the works, combining traditional aesthetics with contemporary language.

Through the intersection of the sacred and the profane, spiritual and mythological elements play a



fundamental role in the creation of reflections and metaphors concerning contemporaneity.

Sebastian Thomas' practice - according to a careful dialogue between the epic and the contemporary - insists on the concept of time and traces a thin red line connecting past and present.

The works - frozen in a timeless dimension - live in a liminal condition between narration and allegory, underlining how the mythical traditions of antiquity can offer reflections and new keys to interpretations that are useful for addressing contemporary issues. Thomas's work takes the form of an attempt to deepen those connections that exist between myth, memory and identity, suggesting a quest that investigates the modern human condition through history.

The exhibition set-up, thanks to the collaboration of Czerny's International Auction House in Sarzana, will also feature a series of rare original helmets and armor in dialogue with the artist's works.

A bridge between the past and the contemporary testifies to the accurate iconographic research carried out by Sebastian Thomas.



BIOGRAPHY

Sebastian Thomas (Fayetteville, Arkansas - 1994). Lives and works in Chicago.

Sebastian Thomas, an Anglo-American artist, has received a Bachelors of Fine Arts double majoring in Painting and Creative Writing from the Kansas City Art Institute in 2017 and holds a Masters degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago having graduated in 2023.

He has attended the Studio Arts College International in Florence Italy, the AICAD Studio Residency in Brooklyn NY, and Ox-Bow Art and Artist Residency in Saugatuck Michigan.

Sebastian is a Teaching Fellow in the Painting and Drawing Department for the 2023/2024 academic year at The School of the Art institute of Chicago. He is a recipient of the 2023 Municipal Art League Fellowship Award, the Joseph & Emily Gidwitz Scholarship, and the Presidential Scholar Award from KCAI.

His works have been featured nationally and internationally in galleries and exhibition spaces such as Leedy-Voulkos Art Center in Kansas City, Studio Arts College International in Florence, the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design in New York City, and Zolla Lieberman Gallery in Chicago Illinois. He has been featured in Kawsmouth Publications, Sprung Formal Literary Magazine, and interviewed on KKFI and KXUA radio stations.

Major solo exhibitions: *Under the Sun*, Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago (2023); *Tiny Apartment Show*, 308 Gallery, Chicago (2022); *Pop-Up Exhibition*, Michigan Space, Chicago (2021); *Attach Files*, 50/50 Gallery, Kansas (2017).

Major group exhibitions: *Nascosti alla luce del sole*, Nashira Gallery, Milan (2023); *Last Call Alumni Exhibition*, Color Club, Chicago (2023); *Contemporary Painting Exhibition*; The Brick Lane Gallery, London (2022); *Open Studios Maclean Center*, Chicago Institute of Arts (2021); *Thesis Exhibition*, Dodge Painting Gallery, Kansas (2017); *B.F.A. Exhibition*, H & R Block Artspace, Kansas (2017); *DAYGLO*, Dodge Painting Gallery KCAI; *Infinite Pleasure*, Dodge Painting Gallery, KCAI; *End of Semester*, Dodge Painting Gallery, KCAI; *SACI Open Studios*, SACI Studios, Florence, Italy; *Stranger Than Kindness*, Dodge Painting Gallery, KCAI; *Immaculate Immersion in the City of Florence*: KCAI at Studio Arts College International, Leedy-Voulkos Art Center, Kansas MO; *Height x Length = Width x Intent*, Dodge Painting Gallery, KCAI; *The Unnamable*, Dodge Painting Gallery, KCAI (2016); *Drawing Marathon*, Dodge Painting Gallery, KCAI; *Kansas City Art Institute New York Residency 2015*, Open Studios AICAD Studios, Brooklyn, New York; *Eastern Standard Time: NY Summer Studio Intensive*, Dodge Painting Gallery, KCAI; *End of Semester*, Dodge Painting Gallery, KCAI (2015).

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