

NOGUERASBLANCHARD

Nancy Spero

A Sense of Possibility

Madrid

Sep 14 - Nov 4, 2023



NoguerasBlanchard is delighted to announce *A Sense of Possibility*, a solo exhibition by Nancy Spero (1926, Cleveland, Ohio - 2009, New York), on the occasion of Apertura Madrid Gallery Weekend.

In a remarkable career that spanned over 50 years of practice, Nancy Spero is a pivotal figure in the New York scene of the rebellious '60s and '70s. Challenging the dominant aesthetic and ideological patterns, she placed the female experience at the centre of her artistic practice. She combined, fractured and reused found images and texts to capture her view of women and their historical relationship to oppression, torture, inequality, war and sexuality. She developed a pantheon of figures from joyful athletes and dancers to victims of violence, drawing on the iconography of ancient goddesses from Egypt, Greece and the Celtic world alongside media imagery. Combining these figures with raw intensity, her handprinted collages and installations stand as remorseless statements against the pervasive abuse of power and Western privilege.

A Sense of Possibility is Nancy Spero's first solo exhibition in Spain since *Disidanzas*, in 2008 at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona and Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo.



Installation view at NoguerasBlanchard Madrid



Installation view at NoguerasBlanchard Madrid



Installation view at NoguerrasBlanchard Madrid



“The Speroic women are like the verses of the Divine Comedy, they rise up, they turn away, from terror, they do not pose, they do not rest, they escape but answer each other, they are alone but pass the baton like powerful musical notes”.

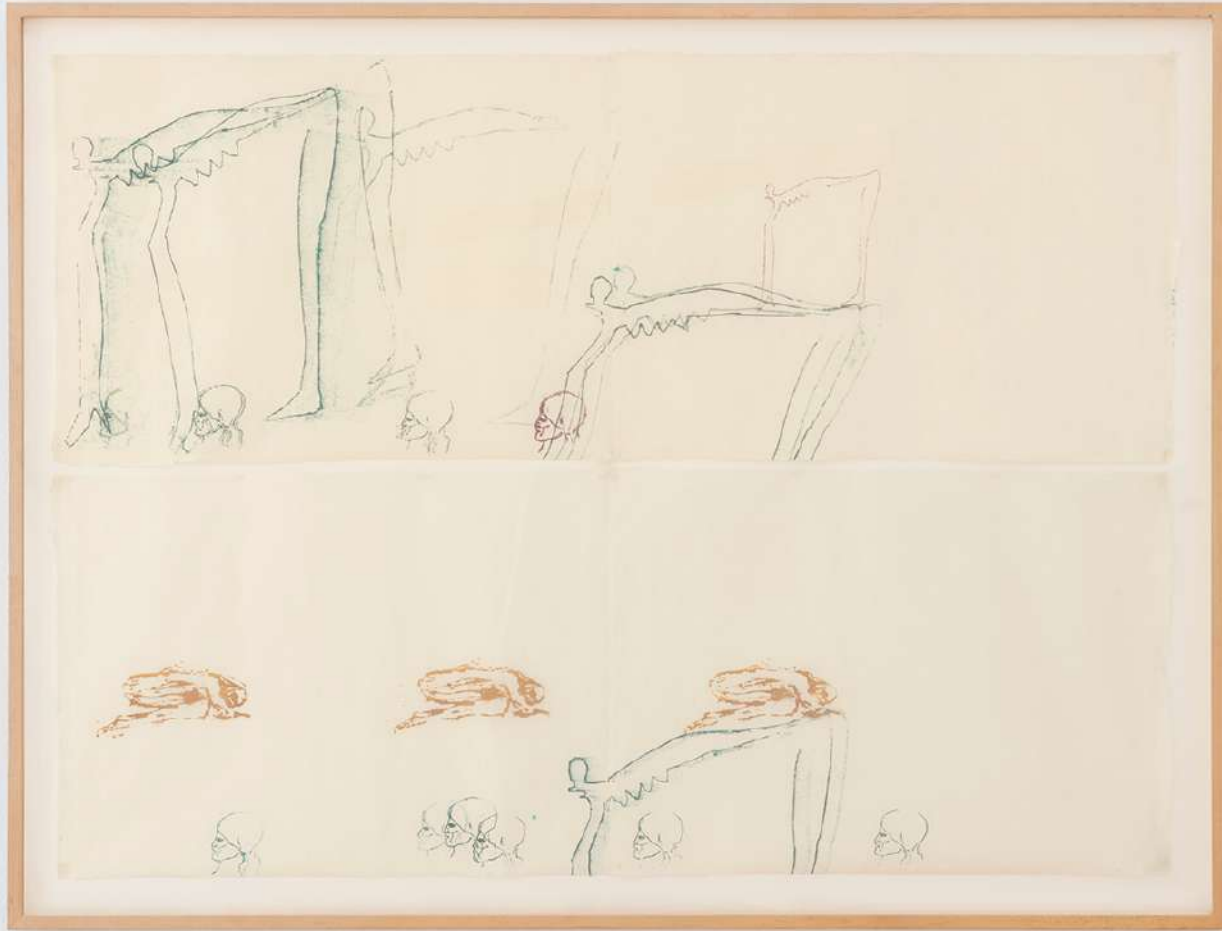
Nancy Spero
Rite, 1997
Handprinting on paper
61 x 255 x 5,1 cm



Nancy Spero
Sheela, Athena & Hittite, 1991
Handprinting and printed collage on paper
59.9 x 251 x 3.6 cm



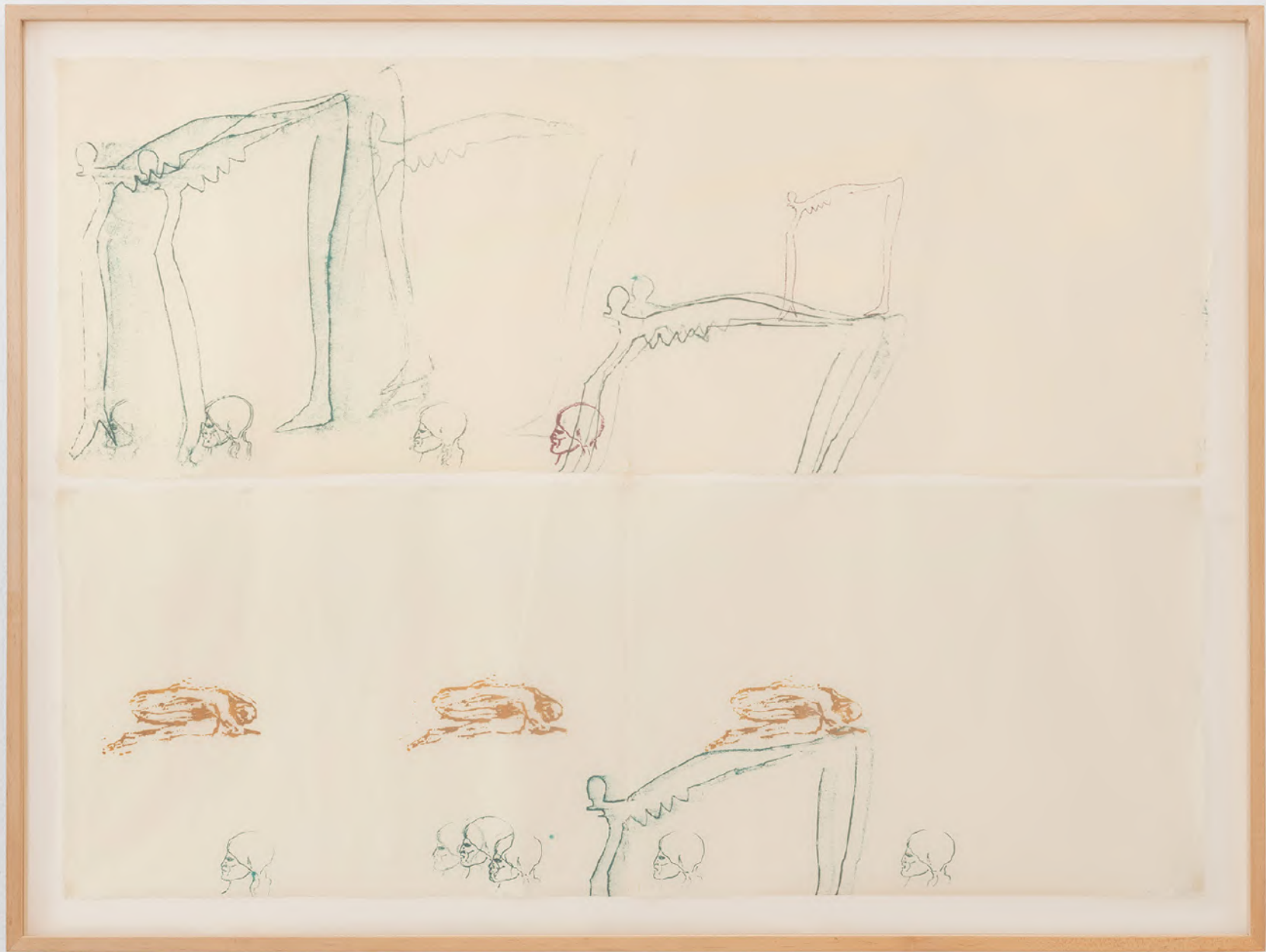
Installation view at NoguerasBlanchard Madrid



Installation view at NoguerasBlanchard Madrid



Nancy Spero
Licit Exp, 1974
Handprinting and gouache collage on paper
38,7 x 29 x 4,1 cm



Nancy Spero
Sky Goddess, 1981
Handprinting and printed collage on paper
116,5 x 154,9 x 5,1 cm



“The Egyptian sky goddess, Nut, has inspired me since the 1960s. Nut is immutable, transcendent, always depicted as young and beautiful, giving hope to the reality of Ancient Egyptian life, which was unpleasant, brutal and brief. Her image is athletic, graceful and delicate from the sky, powerful in its evocations, I visualise her on tiptoe, arching from the sky and touching the earth with her fingers. When combined with other figures, she becomes amorphically architectural, forming a pillar or an arch with her arms and legs. The protective spirit of nature”.

— Nancy Spero

Nancy Spero
Goddess Nut / Artemis, 1990
Handprinting and printed collage on paper
62,2 × 49,5 cm



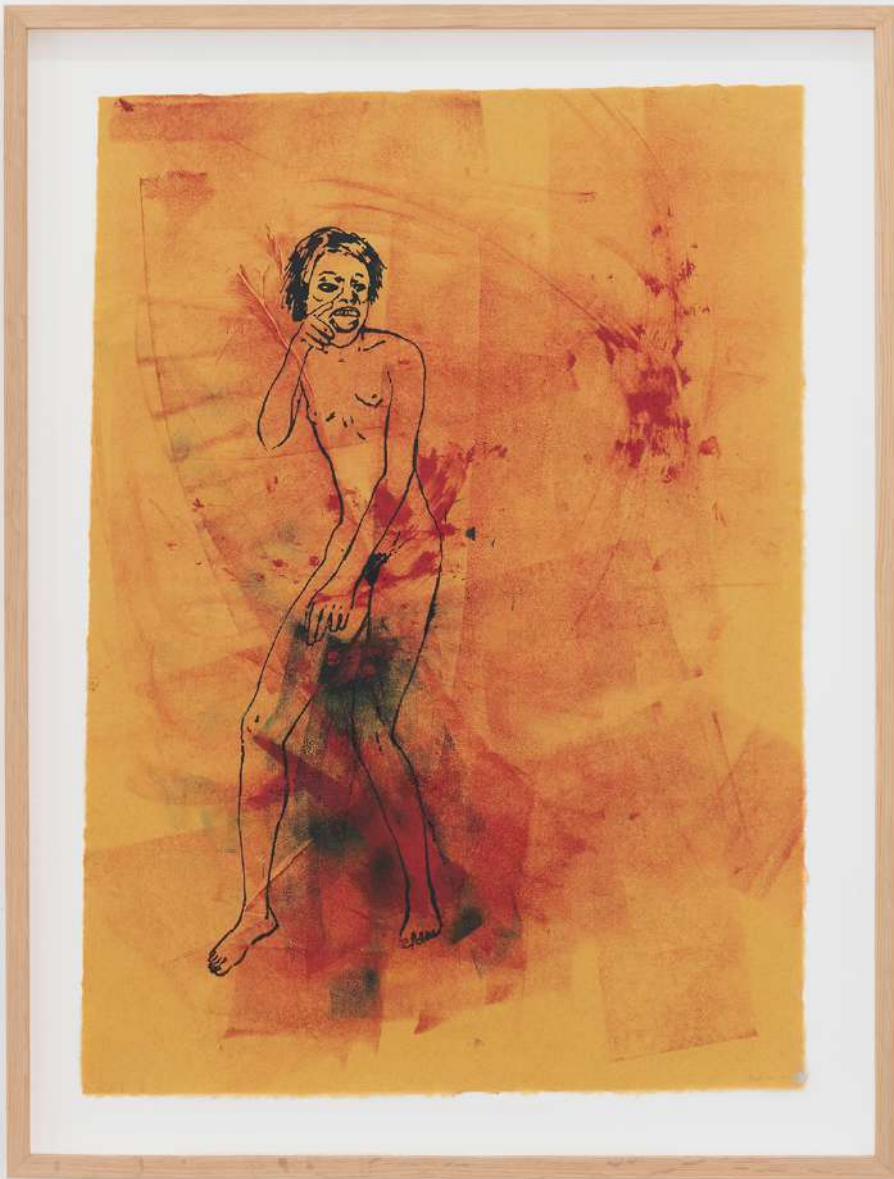
Installation view at NoguerasBlanchard Madrid



Nancy Spero
Propitiatory, 1993
Group of seven panels; handprinting and printed collage on paper
289 x 405,3 x 4,6 cm



Installation view at NoguerasBlanchard Madrid



“Spero’s body of work is an inscribed body, marked, bruised, histrionic, symbol-laden and sexed, which borrows the heroic gesture of performance and feminises it through the recovery of historical figures, thus reconquering mythological spaces on which to construct and evoke various realities”.

— Manuel J. Borja-Villel, Rosario Peiró

Nancy Spero
The Bride, 1991
Ink and handprinting on paper
61 × 48,3 cm



Installation view at NoguerasBlanchard Madrid

“The figures themselves could become hieroglyphs, extensions of a text denoting initiation rites, from birth to maturity, movement and gesture. All the images are feminine: prehistoric women, a Japanese doll, a saddened witch trapped in her horse-legged body, skaters, fertility torsos, victims, athletes, Artemis... and a long etcetera. Woman as activist: protagonist in a world without hierarchies. Women as victims of war and rape in a world controlled by men.

A stream of consciousness in which disparate elements of cultures and times coexist; recombinations-displacements, a continuous presence of figures reforming, contingent on one another, or isolated, glimpsed peripherally; the eye, like a mobile camera, explores the updated imagery of women”.

— Nancy Spero



Nancy Spero
Real Politics, 1991-92
Handprinting and printed collage on paper
49,5 x 182,9 cm (19 ½ x 72 inches)



Nancy Spero
The Goddess Nut / Le Cimetière de Varsovie..., 1995-96
Handprinting and printed collage on paper
58,4 × 61,6 cm



Death Figure/Gestapo, 1994
Handprinting and printed collage on paper
49,5 × 125,7 cm (19 ½ × 49 ½ inches)

Nancy Spero: technique as ideology
by Gloria Moure

It is difficult to understand art and its poetic essence without recognising its necessary and lucid radicality, the borderline nature of its configurative practice. Creative yearning implies seeking to appreciate reality in some way, and, of course, to sensitively interfere with it. This means being available to intervene in all territories where judgement can be exercised, which is to say, especially today, in all fields of knowledge. This understanding inevitably brings the creator into the political sphere, regardless of the context in which he or she moves.

As a woman in a blatantly and pornographically chauvinist society, Nancy Spero (Ohio 1926 – N.Y. 2009) painfully experienced the crudest expression of that seemingly inescapable and invincible modern alienation. She completed a degree at the Art Institute of Chicago and continued her training in Paris with André Lhote, who proved instrumental in facilitating the realisation of her creative yearnings.

Her time in Europe with her husband Leon Golub seems also to have been extremely important: in Italy she became interested in Etruscan sarcophagi and frescoes, while in Paris, between 1959 and 1964, she produced her *Black Paintings*, still at that time on canvas. Spero was particularly receptive to Antonin Artaud's ideas on physical and mental pain, which she later worked on when settling back in the USA.

Her return to New York landed her in a turbulent climate, with the civil rights movements exploding at the height of the Vietnam War, circumstances which brought about a radical shift in her work. She began to work on paper, turning technique into an ideology, with the desire to distinguish her work from that of her male contemporaries.

While marked by her condition as a female, her discourse was much broader and sought to take on a more ambitious act of communion. Spero thus expanded naturalistic connotations with superimposed formalisations drawn from anthropology, history and the world around her. In this respect we should emphasise, with a view to differentiating her, that these recurring symbols laid a cultured and learned foundation for her work, manifesting a solid cultural and intellectual substratum in the use of these magical connotations, which relate to marginal or forgotten cultures. In so doing, she laid bare her shortcomings, ghosts and hopes, while at the same time shining a light on our own.

The situation in America in the 1960s and the Vietnam War led Spero to clash with the cognitive conventions of the individual and social order; far from treating these conflictive contacts as just another residue, she took an active stance on the matter. Her *War Series* (1966-1970) was a cry against the conflict and should be recognised for its courageous visual and humane expression. Yet the impact of this work was more far-reaching, insofar as the immediacy of its plastic creation is imbued with the requisite experience. This physics of poetry acts on both the linguistic fabric and on how things are understood. Given these two territories serve to articulate power, plastic creation can thus also be assimilated to a poetics of power, which would be the sphere in which Spero sought to act, with her appropriation of violence during the 1970s being the most obvious manifestation of this desire. In this respect, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty was a clear reference.

Her feminist activism led her to co-found AIR Gallery in 1972, a platform for exhibiting the work of women artists. She realised that the plight of women was above ideology and that it was indeed a general rule in American society.

She always regarded her circumstance as a marginal excrescence, as both a real and symbolic manifestation of a much larger phenomenon that was at once historical and contemporary. It appears she came to the early conclusion that progress did not exist, that history, in a linear sense, did not exist either, and that it was necessary to fight for difference from within a natural becoming that was dubiously deterministic. In this sense, her awareness of her female condition reinforced a clearly vitalist attitude.

Even the most radical of her works reflected a careful and consistent balance between formalisation and presentation. In Spero's case, this was not a question of discovering the optimum format from an aesthetic point of view, understood as one in which form, perception and the configurative idea coincide inseparably, delimiting as far as possible the frontier between linguistic and sensory spaces, but of bringing together signs, symbols, language, landscape, nature and artifice from an absolutely plastic and blended poetic perspective, thus coinciding with her creative and political yearnings.

Her later works responded to a nuanced reflection on art and its history, considering art not as a producer of autonomous objects, but as a configurative activity in the broadest sense. Spero delved deeply into this nuance, mining it with authenticity. While she accepted objectuality, at the same time she made a critical foray into the complex intricacies of configuration and perception.

While this practice straddling the linguistic and the ideological was already evident in Spero's early work, from the 1980s onwards the configurative idea somehow became the artist's action itself, which in any case took place in spaces that can hardly be described as scenographic, insofar as they featured acerbic violence.

It behoves us to recognise her courage and the way she expressed this as an artist and as a human. Her commitment was radical, as her work attests, but we should not confine it to a particular era or generation; rather, this is a commitment that should be undertaken by anyone who seeks to be an artist.

Nancy Spero was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1926. She died in New York City in 2009. Her work is held in over 50 prominent public collections worldwide including the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; Centre Pompidou, France; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Spain; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Tate Gallery, England; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Massachusetts; and Dallas Museum of Art, Texas. Major monographic exhibitions of Spero's work have been shown at renowned museums including the Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico; Centre Pompidou, France; Serpentine Galleries, England; Museo d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, and Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Spain. Between 2019 and 2021, a major retrospective exhibition travelled to the Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany; Nordic Watercolour Museum, Skärhamn, Sweden; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk; and the Lillehammer Art Museum, Lillehammer, Norway. Spero's installation *Maypole: Take No Prisoners* was presented in 2007 at the 52nd Venice Biennale, and later at MoMA PS1 as part of the retrospective exhibition *Paper Mirror* (2019).



Exhibition in cooperation with Galerie Lelong and Co and the Golub Spero Foundation and with many thanks to Frith Street Gallery, London.

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