

# VACANCY

## Press Release

Artist: Alessandro Fogo

Exhibition title: *Hierophany*

Duration: November 4–December 23, 2023

Venue: Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai

Gallery Vacancy is pleased to announce Alessandro Fogo's first solo exhibition with the gallery, *Hierophany*, on view from November 4 to December 23, 2023. Proposed by Mircea Eliade, a philosopher of comparative religion, the term "hierophany" addresses the manifestation of the sacred. Through a new series of allusive oil paintings, Fogo continues his interest in the mythical vision of things and offers his contemporary apprehension of the "revered" and the "aura".

Historically, myths are the explanation to matters in the science of a pre-scientific age; Fogo's practice grapples with this idea and explores how mythical reasoning still remains poignant to the revelation of our contemporary setting. He draws on mythical subjects from historical references and modern objects from the everyday to compose simple, laconic scenes in a vaguely defined pictorial space with perplexing perspectives. Accompanied by his well-versed titles, the artist seeks to capture the epiphany of "sacredness" through his mythopoetic paintings, and evokes an active re-encounter with our modern world through various forms of contemporary myth-thinking and myth-making.

In this exhibition, the artist introduces mythical characters, such as sphinx and ancient goddesses, within familiar settings to our contemporary experiences. In *No sphinx in the ocean* (2023) and *Sphinx* (2023), Fogo depicts the mythic creature, known to many for its human face and animal body, either hiding behind a tree or camouflaging itself in the painting's hallucinative landscape to evade one's recognition of its human impersonations. The imageries are mostly bathed in a nocturnal aesthetics, imbued with dark, sombre tones of jade green, ochre and purplish-blue. His characters are full of morphing identities, caught in zones of androgyny, between the man and woman, and the anthropomorphism of human and beast. Additionally, Fogo is always careful in preserving the material surface of his paintings. Despite his concentrated layering in oil, the paintings remain porous with a dilated, matted focus. They transcribe a melancholic familiarity close to the heart of life, revealing an individual's soft, self-conscious manner of coping with existential bafflement.

Fogo further channels this mythical investigation to his depiction of the religious figure madonna. As a recurring subject matter in his practice, the madonna figure is always depicted with nightly shade in earthly tones that recall the ancient colour of regeneration. Such is evident in *Black Madonna* (2023), posed as an alternative to the white madonna commonly portrayed in mainstream theology. The dark mother is a beholder of many names and splintered identities of other primordial goddesses from African, Middle Eastern, and Graeco-Roman origins. Nevertheless, names are simply agents, for their true identity, which escapes the grasp of language, remains as one: the universal figure of female divinity, nurturer of all life on earth, and all seasons of life. Besides the eponymous portrait, the artist also portrays madonna's subtle appearance in other still lifes: *Birth of the myth (oyster)* (2023) as a disembodied head in the belly of an oyster, and *Wrong offering to the Oracle* (2023) as an obscure oracle in the dark corridors of a venerated site. For Fogo, the centrality of the madonna's presence in his themed exhibition comes not only as a quiet reflection to its integral presence in his home country Italy, but also as a metaphor that recovers the suppressed cultures into our presence.

## VACANCY

The exhibited works interpenetrate between the rationale and the irrational, the real and the imaginal, the sacred and the profane. The exhibition speaks to us mythically, while giving back the imaginal to the material, the sacred to the mundane, and most importantly, feelings back to our thoughts. Here begins a saturated manifestation of ineffable dimensions beyond one factual reality—a hierophany.

Alessandro Fogo, born in 1992 in Thiene, Italy, now lives and works in San Benedetto del Tronto. In 2017, he obtained a Master in painting at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp, Belgium after graduating with BA at IUAV Visual Arts in Venice. Fogo approaches through his painting practice, how the idea of mythical reasoning remains poignant to the revelation of our contemporary reality. Sourcing the myths around Italian mythological tales and the multifarious forms of idols throughout history, Fogo weaves personal narratives with mystical symbology to conjure visionary and allegorical qualities to his paintings. Like sensate lullabies, each scene speaks a mystical idiolect of their own, a language of lamentation for mystical lost to avant-garde practises throughout the present. Fogo's solo exhibitions include: *Hierophany*, Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai, 2023; *Hang a crocodile outside for the unbelievers*, Cassina Projects, Milan, 2023; *Black Morning*, Alessandro Fogo & Paola Angelini, Lyles & King Gallery, New York, 2022; *Skins and leathers*, PM/AM Gallery, London, 2022; *Alla luce del sole, un attimo prima di spegnersi*, Galleria Annarumma, Naples, 2021. Selected group exhibitions include: *Pittura Italiana Oggi*, Triennale Milano, Milan, 2023; *Dreamcatcher*, Beacon, Munich, 2022; *Domani Qui Oggi*, Quadriennale di Roma, Rome, 2021; *If on a winter's night a traveller*, MAMOTH, London, 2020; *Immersione Libera*, Bagni Misteriosi, Galleria Continua, Milano, 2019. Fogo was the recipient of the Nordisk Kunstnarsenter Dale Residency, Dale, 2021; the Combat Prize, first painting prize, Livorno, 2019; and the Arte Laguna Prize, first painting prize, Venice, 2018.