

Élie Autin

Antichambre

Friday, April 14th 2023, 6pm (15')

Sunday, April 30th 2023, 4pm (15')

The exhibition is open by appointment from April 15th 2023 to April 30th 2023.

Roman mythology describes «Bacchus» as the god of wine, fertility and ecstasy, often surrounded by his female followers «Bachea» or «Bachantes», who adorned themselves with sheepskins and deer skins to please the god. An expression of their obsession – «bachae» were said to be seduced and entranced by the god's power, being whipped into a state of ecstatic frenzy by a combination of dancing and intoxication. Similarly, cultic rituals worshipping the Roman god of wine were characterised by a state of unbridled exhilaration in which the souls of the dancers were temporarily freed from their earthly bodies to commune with «Bacchus». The rites culminated in a performance of insane feats of strength and madness, such as the uprooting of trees, the tearing of a bull or the eating of raw flesh – a sacrament that likely resembled that of the Last Supper. In its inverse, however, the mythological term bachantes also refers to women who resisted the god's worship but were driven mad by him, being forced against their will to participate in often cruel rites.

On the day of her coronation on December 2nd 1804, Josephine Bonaparte wore a white satin dress adorned with gold embroidery and a diamond tiara. During the ceremony, Napoleon took the crown from the Pope's hands and crowned himself, and then crowned Josephine as Empress. Their coronation marked the establishment of Napoleon's imperial regime and the beginning of a new era in French politics and culture.

The waiting rooms in Versailles, also known as «Antichambres», were often highly ornate and lavishly decorated, with elaborate tapestries, paintings, and sculptures. They were designed to impress visitors and convey the wealth and power of the French monarchy. This return of supreme power also meant the return of the Palace of Versailles as a residence of the crown.

Antichambre is both past and prologue. As a shrine the installation commemorates past bacchanals but within a narrative order it plays out a new ritual of power and seduction. In the waiting room, eyes hover on and slide past an alluring yet inaccessible counterpart. In the resolution of a second and third act, the unapproachable is approached. Whether as a priestess of «Bacchus», a wife of an emperor, or as herself, Élie Autin flirts with, attacks and devours fantasies of power and subjugation.