

Łukasz Stokłosa
'Once upon a time'
13 Sep – 25 Oct 2025

Rose Easton

Possession
by Laura Mclean-Ferris

Before the Tuileries Palace was burned down on the afternoon of the 23rd of May 1871, the site had been occupied by the Paris Commune for some months. During the Second Empire, the palace had become a prominent symbol of autocracy, monarchy and empire, as a venue for the most lavish galas, balls and receptions. Now the occupiers' posters lined the walls:

People, the gold that drips down these walls
is the sweat of your brow. Long enough have you
fed with your work and watered with your sweat
this insatiable monster, the monarchy. Today, the
revolution has made you free, you return into
possession of yourself.¹

And with these words, the gold leaf begins to ooze, the chandeliers begin to soften like wax, and now an ectoplasm is visible, everywhere leaking from the walls, the fabrics, the décor. This surplus, this substance, is expunged, drawn out, wrung from every opulent adornment for all to see, before the palace is doused in petroleum, liquid tar and turpentine and then set alight. Engulfed in flame, it burns for two days, its ruins staying intact on the site for eleven years. Charred, ashen, blackened with soot, like a void, like a velvet hole, like a carcass. Eventually it is demolished.

1 *Exposition* – Nathalie Léger,
trans. Amanda DeMarco
(St Louis, Dorothy, A Publishing
Project, 2020, originally
published as *L'exposition*,
Editions POL, 2008)

Łukasz Stokłosa paints objects that seem to leak with this same ectoplasm – golden carriages, exquisite dresses, canopied beds, armours, rooms – each pulsing with a dimmed energy that retains traces of the obscene. Though many of these accessories are the most luxuriant forms of couture, the most limitless forms of bespoke, designed for individual bodies to both protect them and confer them with auratic power, Stokłosa paints them as though they are staged in the ruins of a charred building. We see details glinting luridly in putrid shades, as though picked out by a small light in a dark space: a mirror on a slim stand, a couture corset, a theatre with an empty stage, each of them now with a void at their centre.

In addition, Stokłosa has created a pair of looping video works made with found footage from the 1976 Polish melodrama *Tredowata* (The Leper), directed by Jerzy Hoffman, in which the rigidity of social hierarchies destroys a planned marriage between a young governess and an aristocrat. The lead actress, Elżbieta Starostecka, has a pale face with deep-set, gemlike eyes that almost look black, creating the impression of a particularly beautiful skeleton, and is dressed throughout in thin, floating florals, which give her a spectral, waiflike presence. In one of Stokłosa's videos, Starostecka ascends and ascends the stone staircase of a grand house, never reaching her destination. The light is violet and the air seems to contain a fine mist, creating echoes of the same scenes that play on a loop in memory from the

Gothic stories of childhood such as *Sleeping Beauty*, who walks up a staircase, possessed by an unearthly glow, in Walt Disney's 1959 animated adaptation. The protagonist of *Tredowata*, too, is possessed, both by romance and the gravitational pull of a palatial nexus of wealth and power. In an earlier scene, she dances in an empty room under a chandelier, whirling and spinning beneath it in the same way that she used to dance under the trees before the disastrous affair began. Surrounded by the heavy-duty furnishings of the nobility – centuries of history crafted in mahogany, glass, and oil – she seems like a vapour, a moth, a ghost.

Łukasz Stokłosa (b. 1986, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Poland) lives and works in Kraków, Poland. He studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, Kraków. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Elegies*, The Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków, PL (2025); *Sol victus*, The Wawel Royal Castle, Kraków, PL (2024); *Cries & Whispers*, Tureen Gallery, Dallas, US (2024); *Perihelion*, AMITY, New York, US (2023); *Mmmelting*, Krupa Gallery, Wrocław, PL (2023) and *Ambassadors. All those moments will be lost in time like tears in rain*, Zderzak gallery, Kraków PL (2022). Recent group exhibitions include: *Nostalgia: Seekers of Fading Stars*, MOCAK, Kraków, PL (2025); *Arkadius. Powerful emotions. Confrontations*, The Central Museum of Textiles, Łódź, PL (2024); *The scent of rotting flowers*, The City Art Gallery, Łódź, PL (2024); *Beautiful Fish in a Man-Made Pond*, AMITY, Los Angeles, US (2024); *Food in Art*, MOCAK, Kraków, PL (2024); *Rococo's Madness*, National Museum, Wrocław, PL (2023) and *THE DISCOMFORT OF EVENING*, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, PL (2022). *Once upon a time* is Stokłosa's first UK solo exhibition.



Łukasz Stokłosa

Paris, Palais Galliera (the hat), 2025

Oil on canvas

50 × 40 cm

Opening, Friday 12 September, 6 – 8pm
Open, Wednesday – Saturday, 12 – 6pm

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