

SPURS GALLERY

Iva Lulashi: Neither in Heaven nor on Earth

Curator: Milovan Farronato

October 18, 2025–November 30, 2025

Gallery I, SPURS Gallery

D-06, 798 Art Zone, No. 2 Jiuxianqiao Road, Chaoyang District, Beijing



Iva Lulashi, *Where Are You Staying on Sunday?*, 2025. Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm.

Image courtesy of the artist and SPURS Gallery.

SPURS Gallery is pleased to present *Neither in Heaven nor on Earth*, an exhibition by Albanian artist Iva Lulashi, who recently represented Albania at the 60th Venice Biennale. Curated by Milovan Farronato, curator of the Italian Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale, the exhibition features Lulashi's latest body of paintings. This marks her first presentation with the gallery and also her solo debut in China. The exhibition opens on October 18, 2025, and will remain on view through November 30, 2025.

Neither in Heaven nor on Earth

By Milovan Farronato

Neither in Heaven nor on Earth evokes a half-conscious admonition, rooted deep in childhood memories, that parents might give when their children's expectations or demands seem excessive, disproportionate, or out of scale. When they ask for the impossible. The double negation tends to visualize that line of tension, that trembling horizon that belongs neither to the earth nor to the sky, a suspended, intermediate space without a stable position. In this ambiguous formula resonates the echo of a primordial sublime: by its very etymology, the term indicates an upward thrust that never forgets its point of departure. It is the leap that welcomes the fall as its possible destiny. It is the crossing of tempests. It is a transient state of grace. It is a disturbance and, at the same time, the uncanny: that which is familiar but has undergone a degree of removal.

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It is from this title, which sounds both like a proverb and an incantation, that Iva Lulashi's new series of paintings takes its cue. For the first time, the artist delves into the popular roots of Albania, into that mythical language of fairy tales that mothers tell their children by the hearth. If in the past her images came from photographic memories, and thus from erotic films retrieved from vintage archives, today the starting point is an archaic tale belonging to her homeland (and, in some way, to the history of humanity as a whole): the legend of the bride of the Sun. The fairy tale recounts a beautiful young woman abducted by a ray of light and taken to the golden palace of the Sun. For a moment, she lives the illusion of glory and bliss, shining like a small star beside the fiery god. But soon her condition reveals the other side of the coin: solitude, absence, the impossibility of enduring the blazing embrace of her spouse. Her mortal heart consumes itself until it dissolves into luminous dust, leaving the Sun condemned to cross the sky each day as a sorrowful hermit. It is a story of impossible love and disproportion: once again returning to the concept of measure and of the excesses of desire. The union between an immortal being and a fragile creature cannot but fail. And so comes the fall. The myth closes as a universal warning: those who fly too close to the Sun burn; those who cannot find parity in love are annihilated.

In this legend, vibrating with nostalgia and destiny, Lulashi recognizes an archetype of her own painting: eros that becomes spirituality, body that dissolves into light, desire that is transfigured into sacrifice. Each canvas in the series seems to hold back that moment of passage in which the maiden is no longer only a woman nor yet dust, but lives in a suspended tension between presence and disappearance. She exists because she desires, and in desiring, she suffers until vanishing. A feminine archetype, never a fixed prototype, that finds echoes in other figures inhabiting the memory of culture: Iphigenia, who faces sacrifice with a gaze greater than her destiny, Isolde, who chooses death as an act of total love, and Persephone, who crosses shadow to become queen of two worlds. Together they compose a powerful triad: sacrifice, desire, destiny. Alongside these mythical presences appear, in the iconographic references from which the images are drawn, the ghosts of theatre and cinema. In the canvas *Presagi di cenere* (Omens of Ash, all works in the exhibition are from 2025), figures appear almost masked, their faces covered on a stage before an invisible audience. And then echoes of Greek tragedies, of Medea, who sacrifices her humanity, becoming a witch first to please and then to spite Jason. But also images drawn from *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), Peter Weir's enigmatic film in which a group of English girls vanish before a volcanic rock formed of dense magma: disappearance, nature, colonization, loss.

The pictorial language sustaining this constellation of eclipses and vanishings, of obscured celestial bodies, remains faithful to the style the artist has long embraced:

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the images are filtered through television or digital screens, with the reflections and distortions of electronic light transforming into radiant halos and flares of spreading brightness. In *Danzai per annuire* (Dance to Nod) and *Ombelico solare* (Solar Navel), it is precisely this technique that has enabled the most convincing representation of the masculine principle within this narrative. Elsewhere, bodies become liquid, blurred, as if about to slip away. In a single canvas, *Ti palpo l'anima* (I Feel Your Soul), the pornographic repertoire that once nourished her earlier works resurfaces—a pictorial cycle that culminated in the Albanian Pavilion at the last Venice Biennale. In this painting, the desire for union between the two is literally interrupted by the profile of a mountain range. It is the final appearance of a world that never entirely disappears, but is grafted onto and transfigured within the new cycle.

The exhibition at SPURS Gallery translates the title into a physical journey, articulated in two environments that mirror the two dimensions: earthly and celestial. In the first, more intimate space, small- and medium-format canvases are present. Here reigns the melancholy of embraces, the closeness of bodies, the languid uncertainty of interrupted kisses. The figures seek one another like eclipses: one obscuring the other, never entirely together. A blonde woman seems to hold not a face but an enigmatic sphere in her hands; another appears while a figure behind her closes her eyes—perhaps to guide her to see from within, perhaps to impose silence upon her. Ambiguity feeds each canvas: intimacy or imposition, caress or constraint. It is the space of flesh, of proximity, of still-earthly relations.

In the second environment, by contrast, the dimension of the ether erupts. The large-format canvases ignite with solar radiance. In *Lampo tra le costole* (Flash Between the Ribs), the female body lies among vegetation that becomes a patch seen from above; the figure seems pushed upwards in an unnatural rotation that twists her form and lifts her away from her heavy gravity. The diffused sound of rain accompanies this space: a rain that at times resembles theatrical applause, at times the crackling of a hearth. The scene oscillates between stage and sky, between spectacle and catastrophe.

Representing the viewer is once again *Presagi di cenere* (Omens of Ash), where the theatrical dimension is most evident. Here we are in the space of burning light, of consuming passion, of flesh turning to ash.

In this journey from earth to sky, from the shadows of embraces to the fire of the star, Lulashi's female figure emerges as a sacrificial icon. Not a passive martyr, but a living presence that offers itself to the light, desiring until transfiguration. The bodies suffer, bend, dissolve, and precisely in this vulnerability reveal their strength. They are like the angels of the last circle of Dante Alighieri's *Paradiso*: suspended in proximity to God, they weep because they feel nostalgia for the flesh. Lulashi's painting recounts

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this fragile passage, this instant in which desire becomes sacrifice and matter becomes light. Each canvas holds a “before” and an “after” : a moment in which the woman is still alive, full of eros, but already ready to vanish into a greater dimension. It is within this tension that the exhibition is fulfilled, and that the title finds its full truth: *Neither in Heaven nor on Earth*, not a place of impossibility, but an intermediate horizon where painting can embody both fragility and hope.

Iva Lulashi (b. 1988, Tirana, Albania) moved to Italy in 1997 and enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice in 2007, where she began exploring painting as a space of desire, memory, and ideology. In 2024, she returned to Venice to represent Albania at the Biennale, gracefully closing the circle between education and vision. The artist now lives and works in Milan, Italy.

Lulashi's recent solo exhibitions include *Iva Lulashi*, MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique, Paris (2025); *Cold in My Mouth*, GNYP Gallery, Antwerp (2025); *Love as a glass of water*, Albanian pavilion at 60th Venice Biennale, Venice (2024); etc. Recent group exhibitions include *Twilight is a Place of Promise*, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2024); *Una Galleria: Tante Collezioni*, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergamo (2024); *Mujer, Mujer, Mujer*, Galerie Alberta Pane, Paris (2024); *Italian Painting Today*, Triennale Milano, Milan (2023); *Prey to Some Beast*, Swivel Gallery, New York (2023); etc.

Milovan Farronato is an independent curator and writer. He cofounded, with Andrea Bellini, the Archivio Chiara Fumai in Milan and Bari. His exhibition projects include the Italian Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale (2019) and *Arimortis* at the Museo del Novecento, Milan (2013), which he co-curated with Roberto Cuoghi. Farronato was also a member of the curatorial team of the 4th Dhaka Art Summit. He conceived *The Violent No!*, which was part of the public program of the 14th Istanbul Biennial in 2015, and served on the advisory board for the Turkish Pavilion at the 2022 and 2024 Venice Biennales.

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