

Pilar Corrias

Press Release

Sofia Mitsola
Villa Venus: The Garden
5 June–20 July 2024

Pilar Corrias
2 Savile Row
London W1S 3PA



Sofia Mitsola, *Russet Venus*, 2024. Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London

+44 (0)20 7323 7000
info@pilarcorrias.com

51 Conduit Street
London W1S 2YT

2 Savile Row
London W1S 3PA

For all press enquiries,
please contact:
Katrina Millar
+44 (0)7769 775 651
katrina@pilarcorrias.com

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Pilar Corrias is pleased to present *Villa Venus: The Garden*, an exhibition of new paintings, sculpture and animation by Sofia Mitsola – the latest chapter in the artist's ongoing series depicting a utopian, Cycladic island ruled by her female characters.

Using a saturated palette, Mitsola layers washes of vivid, unadulterated colour with large, immediate brushstrokes and thick impasto. In various states of repose, her protagonists inhabit palatial spaces with self-possession and ease, in turn demanding that the viewer reckon with their own gaze. Do these figures pose for our gratification or their own? Are their brazen stares invitations or predatory?

The exhibition takes 'Villa Venus', the chain of brothels described in Vladimir Nabokov's novel, *Invitation of a Small Evening* (1969), as its point of departure to explore the staging of fantasy and eroticism, and broader questions of autonomy, freedom, artifice and fetishism. In Nabokov's novel, an architect builds a chain of decadent, temple-inspired brothels across the world, realising the fantasies drafted in his late grandson's erotic journals. The architect's 'parodies of paradise' soon crumble into nefarious dens of squalor and, like the garden mazes through which patrons would access Villa Venus, this staging of another's Eden becomes a wasteland of weeds.

In her paintings, Mitsola also acts as an architect of fantasy, constructing opulent temples reminiscent of seraglios, bath houses or boudoirs for her siren-like figures. Employing the spatial logic of set design from the 1960s, Mitsola's environments share the flatness of the stage, where a whole world can be built upon the surface of things. Up close, the onlooker, becoming aware of the performance, must accept their complicity in the suspension of disbelief, upon which all modes of fantasy rely. In the small room at the back of the gallery, Mitsola extends this element of set-building, constructing a draped, temple-like setting to house a new animation. Softened by hanging chiffon, the painted columns and caryatids from her paintings extend into this space, inviting the viewer into the imagined architecture.

A rose is present in several works on display; most evidently in Mitsola's sculpture, her nod to a scene in *Invitation of a Small Evening*, where the young narrator visits a shop specialising in the reproduction of antiques and *objets d'art*. The narrator is perturbed by the unexpected sensation of a real flower hiding among a

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bunch of imitation crimson roses. In this emporium of artifice and counterfeit, the outlier is the genuine object. In Mitsola's paintings, the viewer is led through a similar hall of mirages and double images. Interrogating the concept of utopia and its inherent contradictions, the artist builds a seductive world that situates scenes of her protagonist's liberation within constrictive frameworks.

Sofia Mitsola (b. 1992) lives and works in London. She received an MFA from Slade School of Fine Art, UCL in 2018, and holds a BA from the School of Visual and Applied Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Mitsola will have a solo exhibition at the Longlati Foundation, Shanghai in September 2024. Her work has been exhibited at Fondation Carmignac, Porquerolles Island (2024); Sixi Museum, Nanjing (2024); The Harley Gallery, Portland Collection Museum, Worksop (2022); Jerwood Space, London (2019). Mitsola was awarded the Tiffany & Co x outset Studiomakers Prize (2018) and the British Institution Student Award by the Royal Academy of Arts, London (2018).

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