

## EXHIBITION TEXT

Sophie von Hellermann | *Out of Time*  
1 – 24 September 2022  
Pilar Corrias Savile Row

by Gillian Fox, Assistant Curator, Hayward Gallery

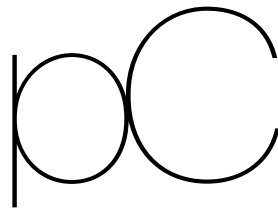


Sophie von Hellermann, *Out of Touch*, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

### **Baby, Baby, Baby, You're Out of Time or Beware! Here be Goddesses.**

In 1970, Mick Jagger asked John Pashe, a Royal College of Art design student, to create a poster for the Rolling Stones' European tour. Inspired by the image he'd seen of the Hindu goddess Kali, the trademark™ lips and tongue resulted, consciously lifted from an Eastern religion with immense countercultural traction in post swinging 60s London. This idea of appropriation, extractivism, and mankind's cognitive dissonance to our own complicity in the status quo provides the undertone to Sophie von Hellermann's new exhibition *Out of Time*. A title lifted in some kind of cultural dividend claw back from a Rolling Stones track. In this recent body of work made during the driest and hottest UK months since records began, action and consequence are abiding themes. Played out through scenes of a discordic alter-reality and possible futures, the exhibition offers varying apocalyptic scenarios; destruction, consequence and redemption, with a cast of figures drawn from fables, pop culture, art history and current events.

From art schooling in Düsseldorf and the RCA in London, von Hellermann follows her own nuanced vernacular language within painting. Stylistic anchors are provided through compositional elements of German Expressionism,



Fauvism, fabled subject matter and the romanticism of Rococo. Abidingly organic and conscious of the political power of colour, form and space, the artist's signature is a particular material chiaroscuro concerned not with contrasts of light and dark, but with the sharp differences between organic and synthetic materials. On raw, unprimed canvas she swirls pigment in its powder form atop a water base; rich earth tones are her grounds and fluorescent colours accent. It is an alchemic, instinctive process and she thinks of this as molecular motion, a collaborator in her compositions. The works are dependent on studio conditions: the warmer it is the smaller the window to move the colours around the often large canvases before they dry. The urgency and movement register in these scapes, in turn reinforcing their abiding narrative message – baby, we're out of time.

The nascent spiritual power, both creative and destructive, of female forces is writ large through *Out of Time*, transposing figures from ancient myth, religions and legends. In an opening act of kindness, von Hellermann starts the exhibition with a redemption: *Phoenix*. The mythical creature, symbol of cyclical renewal, couches us in hope and respite before the onslaught. In *Woman*, Kali, Goddess of time, doomsday and death goes full sci-fi B movie outcast as she tears through houses and habitants of a nondescript landscape. This pictorial language glitches via the colour palette of Franz Marc, here she is as homewrecker, red tongue distended. The Hindu deity steals a march again in a kaleidoscopic whirlwind for *Kali*, Medusa-like hair, strewn aside decapitated heads. Here she rides an almost unseen Shiva, reminding us that she is also the Shakti mother goddess, representative of primordial cosmic energy and dynamic forces that shape the universe – and we've really pissed her off.

Punctuating the exhibition is a series of more intimate works – *River*, *Home*, *Nature*, *Dog* – that hide much of their true intent. Cobalt narratives play out against soft peach grounds, romantically calling to 1920s Picasso; of wistful boys and boat trips, or Eurydice on River Styxx, to heavily-blurred figures of ominous intent. Like much in von Hellermann's world, they are not what they seem. The orb in the sky is not a sun but a nipple, and these are imaginative approximations for skin tattoos. The ultimate, the artist believes, a form of necromancy – dead pictures that still move.

Mick finally makes an entrance In *Out of Touch*, dancing while the disembodied, stolen artefact floats above. His Francois Boucher-esque cherubic face is defined against the excess of lifestyle; private planes navigate the globe, carbon footprints amass. He takes from the world, while a skeletal reaper awaits his quarry. This imposing sense of us getting what is coming to us features again in works that foretell a more apocalyptic, biblical future across various climate catastrophes. Crops fail for future generations in *Harvest*; and land floods to be navigated by paddleboard in *Paddling through Mark Brandenburg*, a response to the recent extreme weather events and news footage in von Hellermann's native Germany. Aqueous scenes in *Out of the Blue* hide different ominous threats. As bathers frolic unaware, they assume the dark shadows are current, not a shiver of sharks moving towards them. The dramatic seascape of *I Hated Her* watches Point Break-level waves engulf the lone protagonist, which reminded the artist of Daphne du Maurier's doomed heroine *Rebecca* – in a cross-sectional look at coastal erosion, desire and surrender.

In the exhibition's conclusion, we find our ancestral mother tearfully overseeing our downfall in *Gaia*. Matisse's dancers move across a burning earth, in scenes of James Lovelock's revenge foretold. It is a fitting epilogue to von Hellermann's modern parables, where the presence of female deities act as a totem to fertility and destruction. Symbolic of all her works in *Out of Time*, von Hellermann ends with the reminder that the world is much like feminine power; something precious, ferocious, beautiful and terrifying.

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