

Ophelia

Jean-Marie Appriou

MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to present an exhibition of new works by French artist Jean-Marie Appriou, inaugurating the gallery's new London space, an eighteenth-century building at 16 Clifford Street in Mayfair. *Ophelia* is Appriou's first solo presentation with the gallery, and his debut exhibition in the UK.

"If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."

- William Blake

Crafted using an experimental approach to working with metal, clay and other materials alongside great technical skill, Appriou's works evoke archaic forms that intertwine contemporary, mythological and futuristic worlds.

An ode to the passing of time and to the possibility of otherworldly dimensions, his current exhibition finds its inspiration in Victorian artist Sir John Everett Millais' painting of *Ophelia* (1851-52, Tate; London), a character from William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, who tragically drowns in a river. A ghostly figure, Ophelia appears hauntingly calm, singing as she is submerged by the water's surface. Barely afloat, she seems cradled by the stream, her languid, graceful body surrounded by nature: a weeping willow and a constellation of jewel-like flowers uphold and crush her all at once as she surrenders, palms facing the sky, in an ultimate act of love and abandonment.

Fascinated by the painting's morose mysticism, Appriou elaborates on its hypnotic ambiguity. More than a representation of death, he sees Ophelia as the allegory of passing, from one state to the next, perhaps from life to death, or from reality towards a parallel dimension. Just like English poet William Blake's 'doors of perception' behind which infinity is concealed, Appriou's exhibition is an invitation to peer through those doors, guiding the viewer into a space where time and consciousness are suspended mid-air, or barely afloat, like Ophelia.

Upheld by the undulating water, Appriou's hand-moulded sculptures of Ophelia capture both fluidity

and stillness. He plays with liquidity, turning the water's ripples into solid, concentric circles. Reinterpreting the mystery of Ophelia's destiny by refusing to see it as a tragic event, he reveals the poetry of her gesture.

A clear departure from romanticized Pre-Raphaelite renderings of femininity, Appriou's versions of Ophelia harbour exaggerated noses, ears and eyes to resemble animal-like, amphibian creatures. Just like Queen Gertrude's description of Ophelia as a "new mermaid" when she announces her death in *Hamlet* Act IV: Scene 7, Ophelia becomes hybrid, oscillating between the animal and human kingdoms.

As much as Ophelia is the centre of the exhibition, nature is its beating heart. Bursting with life, an enormous dragonfly hovers on the floor, aluminium waterlilies on mirror-like waterbeds float in their frames; and a weeping willow stands gracefully alone, overtly referencing Sir John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* painting.

Deeply experimental, Appriou's work is a constant search for new formal possibilities, which he explores through relentless experimentation. By creating uncanny familiar forms, whether animal or human, Appriou has developed a unique, almost alchemical approach to creation, to give life to his very own mythology.

Jean-Marie Appriou

Jean-Marie Appriou (b. 1986 in Brest, France) is based in Paris, where he currently lives and works. He graduated from École régionale des beaux-arts de Rennes, France in 2010. Recent solo shows include: *Jean-Marie Appriou – Art Club* curated by Pier Paolo Pancotto, Villa Medici, Rome, Italy, (2022); *Surface Horizon*, Lafayette Anticipations, Paris, FR (2021); *Jean-Marie Appriou: The Horses*, organized by Public Art Fund, Doris C. Freedman Plaza, New York, NY, US (2019–2020); *Seabed*, Le Consortium, Dijon, FR (2019–2020); and *Open Space #1*, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, FR (2018). Appriou participated in *Là où les eaux se mêlent*, Biennale de Lyon, Lyon, FR (2019) with a major installation titled *Roncier*. Selected institutional group exhibitions include *Souffleer de son Souffle*, Fondation Vincent Van Gogh, Arles, FR (2021); *Imaginary Sea*, Fondation Carmignac, Ile de Porquerolles, Hyères, FR (2021); *Childhood: Another banana for the dream-fish*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR (2018); *Neuer Norden Zürich*, KiÖR Kunst im öffentlichen Raum, Zurich, CH (2018); *Deux sens du décoratif*, Centre d'art Contemporain, Brest, FR (2018); *Voyage d'Hiver*, Château de Versailles, Versailles, FR (2017); *Robots. Work. Our Future*, Vienna Biennale, Vienna, AT (2017); *MEDUSA*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, FR (2017); *L'Usage des Formes*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR (2015); and *La solitude*, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, NO (2014).

Jean-Marie Appriou will participate in a group show from November 5th, 2022 till April 10th, 2023 entitled *Les portes du possible*, at Centre Pompidou Metz, France.