

BAERT GALLERY

ANA KARKAR BOX OF EARTH

MAY 20 JUNE 23
2023

Baert Gallery is delighted to present *Box of Earth*, Ana Karkar's first solo exhibition with the gallery and in her native California, on view from May 20 to June 24, 2023. In this new series of oil paintings on linen, the artist finds personal expression along the fault lines of rich cultural and historic sources.

The show's title alludes to the boxes of consecrated dirt in which – according to the vampiric lore of Bram Stoker's epistolary novel 'Dracula' – a vampire must sleep in to regenerate his powers. Resolving to arrange multiple lairs around the perimeters of London, Dracula leaves his castle, taking with him 50 boxes of Transylvanian soil; fragments of his mortality, to distribute across the city. In this, her latest body of work, Karkar consolidates the contents of her own 'box of earth'; a personal collection of found images, film and music drawing from the aesthetics of tantra, 1970s avant-garde cinema, and ancient Egyptian death rituals.

Dealing imagistically with the transcendental experience of the fragmented self, Karkar paints scenes where lives – both past and present – can exist concomitantly. Presented as a series of cult rituals, her paintings engage in the sanctification of untethered emotions, confronting and digesting the haunting darkness of the human soul in all its guises. Taking inspiration from Butoh, a form of Japanese dance theatre (also referred to as the 'Dance of Darkness'), Karkar seeks beauty and harmony in the shadows, occupying the liminal space between the binaries of good and evil, light and dark to reflect an altogether truer nature.

Box of Earth renders the impulses of carnal desire within this very space, teasing out the uncanny and bitter intimations that dilate in the pregnant pauses of morality. The physical act of sex; chaotic yet fluid becomes a conduit for deeper expressionism. An umbra of self-acceptance hangs over the exhibition, inviting the festering sensations of greed, doubt and disappointment to observe the sensual performance of life at its core. In the painting 'Opening Ceremony', hooded spectres lunge at the supple flesh of two figures melting together in lubricious embrace. Despite their best attempts, they fail to lure the pair into the shame of their deed and when our eyes move across the wall, the relationship to darkness has altered. Embracing

its presence, the soul transcends, exploding in spasms of passion as a climax is reached in the mirror painting 'Cult of Ecstasy'.

The psychological interrogation and narrative essence of Karkar's work is inspired by film directors such as Stanley Kubrick, Brian De Palma and Dario Argento, whose works brushes up against the principles of pleasure and danger contained within the scandalous imagery of erotic cinema. The 1972 film, 'Behind the Green Door', a cult-classic of the genre, was used as a reference point for the occult painting 'First Ritual', and original source of inspiration for Kubrick's film 'Eyes Wide Shut' (1999), whereby a nude figure engages in something akin to a psychedelic, spiritual orgy in front of a masked audience.

Ana Karkar was born and raised in San Francisco and resides in Paris. She studied at the San Francisco Art Institute, the Sorbonne and the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In 2013 she was mentored in the TURPS Correspondence program based in London. Recent solo exhibitions include Villains Vault at Nosbaum Reding, Luxembourg; Return From Exile at Marguo, Paris and We value your privacy at DZIALDOV, Berlin among others and her work has been included in group exhibitions worldwide.