



Vivian Greven. *Ae Tha* (2024). Oil and acrylic on canvas. 95 x 71 inch. Photographer: Ivo Faber. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



Vivian Greven. *Sphinx IV* (2024). Oil and acrylic on canvas. 95 x 71 inch. Photographer: Ivo Faber. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

VIVIAN GREVEN

WHEN THE SUN HITS THE MOON

April 13 – May 23, 2024

Perrotin is pleased to announce *When the Sun Hits the Moon*, Vivian Greven's inaugural solo exhibition with the gallery featuring a new suite of paintings. This body of work captures intimate moments of yearning, pairing Greco-Roman figures with celestial atmospheres.

For Vivian Greven, painting is a means to explore what it is to be a human, and how we form intimate relationships with other humans, their bodies and minds. Her approach is to translate representations of physical forms—whether neoclassical sculpture, images found on the internet, or sometimes her own photos—into large-scale paintings in vivid oils and acrylics. When a composition snags her attention, Greven returns to it over and over again, often working in titled and numbered series. But, while her forms are hyper-realistic, skillfully outlined and shaded to seem almost three-dimensional at times, the paintings are not direct replicas of their sources (or each other). Instead, Greven makes creative adaptations, especially to the colors and the compositions, that render each picture unique and replete with meaning.

Over the past few years especially, Greven has found herself interested in the notion of connection: the way in which at certain moments we meet and no longer feel separate from one another. The paintings in *When the Sun Hits the Moon* explore this idea through both subject matter and physicality. *Wh Ole I and II* (2024), *Ae Tha* (2024), and *Lamia VI* (2024) derive from Amor and Psyche, a famous 18th-century sculpture by the Italian neoclassicist Antonio Canova based on an ancient Roman story by Apuleius. The sculpture illustrates the moment in the mythological tale just before Cupid revives Psyche, his mortal lover who has fallen into a lifeless sleep, with a kiss. The couple go on to live happily for eternity. *Sphinx III* and *IV* (2024), meanwhile, are the first installments in a new series inspired by the winged creatures guarding the Sphinx Gate in the 1984 fantasy film *The NeverEnding Story*. The sphinxes shoot lasers at anyone they deem unworthy of passing between them—a rejection rather than an embrace. Other works in the show depict less specific scenes, such as a close-up of a kiss or the back of a woman in a skimpy gold bathing suit.



Vivian Greven. *X XIX* (2024). Oil on canvas. 95 x 71 inch. Photographer: Ivo Faber. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.



Vivian Greven. *Wh Ole I* (2024). Oil and acrylic on canvas. 95 x 71 inch. Photographer: Ivo Faber. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

While bodies, either coming together or turning away, are at the center of all these works, there is no fleshy naturalism here. What draws Greven to neoclassical sculpture is the romanticized idealism of its smooth and unblemished figures. This is no different to how bodies are depicted in contemporary digital media—airbrushed to perfection. Her paintings reproduce the artificiality of corporeal representations past and present but they also amplify it, transforming the compositions as though using editing tools available on Photoshop: crop, copy and paste, flip canvas, fill color, and so on. In *Wh Ole I* and *II*, the use of mise-en-abyme turns the tender embrace between Cupid and Psyche into what looks like a technological glitch. In *<O> IV* (2024), the vulva is cut away, revealing a starry black sky.

Idealization may already be a kind of abstraction, and yet Greven's figures often seem on the brink of dissolving into visual abstraction, their outlines becoming containers for luminous fields of color or other images. In this new body of work, the palette is drawn from the sun and moon, as gestured toward in the title of the exhibition. In *X XIX* (2024), the sunny yellow hue of leggings showing a camel toe is set against a blue backdrop; elsewhere, Cupid and Psyche are enveloped in either day or night skies. In this way Greven again plays with conventions of representation, for the sun is traditionally figured as masculine and the moon as feminine—yet here the two collide.

Looking at these artworks, particularly on a screen, you might begin to wonder if there is anything real about the bodies on display. Are they merely avatars in a virtual realm? Yet Greven's tools are not digital: she builds her pictures through the painstaking manual application of thin layers of oil or acrylic paint. Although the brushstrokes are smooth, giving the pictures a screen-like flatness, when you stand in front of her canvases you can see their fine-grained texture. They hum and glow and fill the atmosphere. They exist solidly in space and time. For Greven, a painting is itself a kind of body, and the surface of the canvas is the skin: the visible, tactile membrane between the body and the rest of the world. As viewers, everything that we can know about a painting comes from what we see and sense on that surface: the colors, the textures, the images. It's where we can choose to connect—and so breathe life into otherwise inanimate forms.

- Gabrielle Schwarz

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