

Press Release

Anj Smith. The Sequin-Strewn Night

29 October 2025 – 24 January 2026
Hauser & Wirth West Hollywood



Los Angeles... For her first solo exhibition in Los Angeles in two decades, British artist Anj Smith presents a new body of painting where precarious psychological states and erotic desire intertwine to disrupt conventional depictions of motherhood and the female nude. Smith's nuanced portrayals of a female-presenting body challenge the notion of a singular interpretation. Set in the context of toxic, inhospitable ecologies, the work explores the human potential for ingenuity, growth and the ability to thrive against the odds.

Drawing on references from film and literature, Smith's luminous paintings combine intricate textures, saturated color banks and hallucinatory detail. Within these canvases' imagined terrains, enigmatic figures and rarefied flora and fauna beckon viewers toward the possibility of transcendence, where resilience persists despite environmental collapse. Dissolving the boundaries between portraiture, landscape and still life, Smith's paintings demand slow looking, revealing their details gradually and rewarding sustained attention.

The exhibition title is taken from a passage in Meret Oppenheim's poem, 'In the beginning is the end' in which the late artist and writer conjured an idiosyncratic tableau of natural and manmade phenomena. For Smith, the poem's 'sequin-strewn nightscape' recalls both star-filled skies and nocturnal revelry—life-affirming splendor



that endures even within the most hostile of landscapes. Oppenheim's refusal of convention—gendered, artistic and historical—finds kinship with Smith's new canvases, which move from vast desert icescapes split by neon horizons to ambiguous figures cocooned in diaphanous tulle.

In the artist's new Performer series, on view here for the first time, she pays tribute to Los Angeles and its many inhabitants, particularly those who disrupt expectation through both personal and theatrical performance. In three portraits of harlequins, Smith reclaims objects long coded as feminine and thus treated with frivolity. Lipstick, sheer fabrics, dyed and coiffed hair are granted an equivalency in these paintings to the cultural signifiers revered in the still lifes from the Dutch Golden Age. However, meaning refuses to settle in a singular direction. In 'Narcissus' (2025), insects, branches and strands of pearls encircle a muscular, back-turned figure, epitomizing Smith's rejection of 'coherence as usual' in her quest to depict fluid multiplicity.

Dialogue between the body and its environment continues in Smith's sweeping new landscapes, inspired by Michelangelo Antonioni's 1964 film 'Red Desert,' the director's first in color. In it, actress Monica Vitti portrays a disaffected woman struggling to exist in an industrial wasteland. Like the film, Smith's paintings claim psychological spaciousness amid repressive conditions, revealing how imagination persists at the margins.

About the Artist

Born in 1978 in Kent, UK, Anj Smith studied at Slade School of Fine Art and at Goldsmiths College in London. Smith has exhibited at institutions around the world, including Museo Stefano Bardini, Florence, Italy; The New Art Gallery Walsall, UK; Mostyn, Llandudno, UK; Sara Hildén Art Museum, Tampere, Finland; Bluecoat, Liverpool, UK; Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville TN, and La Maison Rouge, Paris, France. Smith's work is also displayed in the collections of many leading international museums including The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; MOCA The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles CA; The Roberts Institute of Art, London, and the Sara Hildén Art Museum, Tampere, Finland.

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Gallery hours:

Tuesday – Saturday, 11 am – 6 pm

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(Dawn: Everything Drips With Silver Dew)

2025

Oil on linen

2 parts, each: 225 x 151 cm / 88 3/4 x 59 1/4 in

overall: 225 x 302 cm / 88 3/4 x 118 1/2 in

Harlequin

2025

Oil on linen

64.2 x 56 cm / 25 1/4 x 22 in

Narcissus

2024

Oil on linen

119 x 99 cm / 46 7/8 x 39 in