

# CONDO 2026

## SYLVIA KOUVALI X MATTA

the back studio, Liliane Lijn

17 January - 28 February 2026

For Condo London 2026, Sylvia Kouvali is delighted to host MATTA, presenting work by the artistic duo the back studio, alongside *Lilith: Portrait of the Artist on Fire* (2001), a sculptural work by pioneer artist Liliane Lijn.

Based between Turin, Italy, and Mumbai, India, the back studio consists of artists Eugenio Rossi and Yaazd Contractor. The duo is known for a multifaceted and deliberately difficult-to-categorise practice that operates in a conceptual borderland, resisting fixed definitions and embracing ambiguity. Their work is immediately legible yet ultimately elusive, revealing itself through material tension and formal contradiction.

the back studio's production combines elements of industrial construction with hand-blown glass, resulting in seamless assemblages that blur distinctions between sculpture and functionality. Drawing inspiration from figures such as Franz West, Donald Judd, Bruno Munari, and Dan Flavin, the duo adopts an eclectic visual language shaped by West's experimental ethos, Judd's essentialism, Munari's playfulness, and Flavin's engagement with light. The result is a unique visual language that positions itself in a grey area between sculpture, conceptual art, and design.

Central to the back studio's unique practice is a sustained attention to overlooked details and the re-evaluation of common objects. By reconfiguring form and function, their works generate unexpected relationships between utility and aesthetics. This conceptual openness extends to the viewer's experience: many of the duo's installations invite physical interaction, positioning the audience as an active participant and integral component of the work, encouraging reflection, interpretation, and critical engagement.

Presented alongside the back studio is *Lilith: Portrait of the Artist on Fire* (2001) by London-based, New York born Liliane Lijn. The work is a deeply personal and mythologically charged sculptural work that draws upon the ancient figure of Lilith to explore themes of autonomy, rebellion and transformation. Lilith—demonised and rejected within both Christian and Judaic traditions—originates over 5,000 years ago in Ancient Sumerian mythology. Across cultures and centuries, Lilith has embodied a symbol of resistance to patriarchal authority. For Lijn, *Lilith* represents not a demon but a persistent presence within every woman: the original Eve, the first woman to refuse submission and assert independence.

Fire is central to the sculpture's material and symbolic language. Its heat deposits carbon shadows across the silver nitrate patinated bronze surface, leaving visible traces of combustion and change. Carbon—fundamental to all living matter—functions as both residue and essence, marking the work as a testament to survival, regeneration, and life itself. Here, the figure undergoes transformation. The body becomes a site of nurturing and self-definition, generating a persona forged through endurance and consciousness.

Following Lijn's own experience with breast cancer, *Lilith: Portrait of the Artist on Fire*, along with several other works Lijn produced in the early 2000s, stands as a powerful dedication to women who have faced the disease, honouring their strength, courage, and capacity for renewal. *Lilith*, as self-portrait, burns with passion and an unquenchable force of life.

Liliane Lijn is widely recognised as the first woman artist to work with kinetic text, beginning her pioneering experiments with light and movement in 1961. Over a career spanning more than six decades, she has exhibited internationally, with recent solo exhibitions *Liliane Lijn. Arise Alive*, Tate St Ives, St Ives (2025), *Liliane Lijn. Arise Alive*, mumok, Vienna (2024); *Liliane Lijn. Arise Alive*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2024); *Temenos*, Lewis Cubitt Square, King's Cross London (2023 ongoing); *I AM SHE*, Ordet, Milan (2020); *Spotlight*, Tate Britain, London (2018); *Look A Doll!*, The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2018); *Cosmic Dramas*, mima, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Middlesbrough (2012); *Liliane Lijn: Works 1959-80*, Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry (2005); *Poem Machines 1962-1968*, National Arts Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, London (1993); *Beyond Light*, Serpentine Gallery, London (1976).

Group exhibitions include *Radical Software: Women, Art & Computing 1960-1991*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2025); *A Living Collection*, The Hepworth Wakefield, Yorkshire, UK (2025); *Electric Dreams: Art And Technology Before The Internet*, Tate Modern, London (2024); *Contemporary Collecting: David Hockney to Cornelia Parker*, The British Museum, London (2024); *Cosmogonie*, MACRO - Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome, Rome (2024); *Americans in Paris: Artists Working in Post-war France, 1946-1962*, Grey Art Gallery, NYU, New York, (2024); *Making New Worlds: Li Yuan-chia & Friends*, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (2023); *LIGHT: Works from the Tate Collection*, The National Art Center, Tokyo (2023); *If Not Now, When? Generations of Women in Sculpture in Britain, 1960 - 2023*, The Hepworth Wakefield, Wakefield (2023); *The Miracle of all Time*, (Touring) Kunsthall Oslo, Oslo (2022); Buk-Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul (2021); *Light: Works From Tate's Collection*, ACMI - Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne (2022); *The Milk of Dreams*, 59th Venice Biennale (2022); *The Sky as Studio: Yves Klein and his Contemporaries*, Centre Pompidou-Metz, Metz (2021); *Still Undead: Popular Culture in Britain Beyond the Bauhaus*, Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham (2019); *Pushing Paper: Contemporary Drawing from 1970 to Now at the British Museum*, British Museum, London (2019); *Tate Britain Display: Sixty Years*, Tate Britain, London (2019); *Liquid Reflections: Works from the Anne-Marie and Victor Loeb Foundation*, Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern (2017); *Beat Generation*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2016); *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language*, MoMa, New York (2012); *Psychedelica*, ICA, London (2011); *60: Sixty Years of Sculpture in the Arts Council Collection*, Longside Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2006); and *Art and Science*, Venice Biennale, Venice (1986).

Lijn's work is held in prominent museum collections including: Art Institute of Chicago; Arts Council, London; British Museum, London; Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris; Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern; Musée de la Ville de Paris, Paris; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate, London and Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

the back studio is a collaborative practice between artists and designers Eugenio Rossi (b. 1996, Turin) and Yaazd Contractor (b. 1996, Mumbai). They have presented a series of solo exhibitions across Europe, Asia, and the United States. Recent solo presentations include *NO MANUAL*, Artissima VIP Lounge with MATTA Gallery and BOOTH E36, MiArt Fair, Milan (2025). Earlier projects include *OPEN DOORS*, Artissima Offsite, Turin (2023), *HANDLE WITH CARE*, Method Art Space, Mumbai (2022), *EVERYTHING CAN BE TAKEN APART*, powered by Salotto Studio at Riviera in Milan (2022), and *EMISSION LINES*, Ground Level Platform in Chicago (2020).