

Joanna Woś
Precious and Tender
24. 3. – 30. 4. 2022

We are pleased to present an exhibition of new works by Vienna-based, Polish painter Joanna Woś.

Woś' somber canvases probe themes of sexuality and power dynamics in a distinctively dream-like style, informed by the rich, if obscure, symbolism found in historical painting traditions. By blending numerous perspectives and spatial grounds into one, the artist depicts agonizing female protagonists caught in numerous parallel psychological realities. Each spectrally figurative scene appears rich in both affective information and narrative drama, yet lingers wistfully in aesthetic ambiguity and ambivalence.

The central inspiration of the exhibition is *The Romance of the Rose*, a medieval poem purporting to disclose the art of romantic love. Structured as a psychological allegory, the story unfolds as a courtier's dream vision attempting to woo a woman. Ripe with sexual symbolism of the rose, as well as promulgations of misogynist violence, the text has remained popular as well as controversial since its creation, constituting a prime early example of chivalric romance and the dramatization of love affairs.

Continuing the hazy allegorical logic of *The Romance of the Rose*, Woś's paintings in the exhibition depict scenes of sexual exchange that tilt uncomfortably between pleasure and pain. Here, desire and longing are bewildered by abuse, or psychologically interjected by toxic family and group dynamics. The result is a deep sense of disorientation and estrangement, a situation not to be trusted. Failing to offer any clear answers, Woś instead portrays the profound power of sex: its manipulative, dangerous, and even fatal capacities; but also, its relationship to love, to affection.

Painting in a grisaille style and employing distinctively thin layers of oil, Woś's dream-like scenes bring to mind the erotically charged paintings of the 20th-century brother-painters Pierre Klossowski and Balthus. The notable inversion is, of course, the female figure not as a fetishized sexual object but as a conflicted subject—ridden with libidinal and moral uncertainty. Created with reference to scenes from porn films, as well as religious compositions from the Catholic tradition, Woś presents these self-consciously kitsch juxtapositions with a kind of dry wittiness that borders on actual irony: sex as a hopelessly banal motif, yet one that still demands deconstruction.

- Jeppe Ugelvig

Joanna Woś (b. 1991 in Poland) lives and works in Vienna where she is currently studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in the class of Daniel Richter. Her work was recently included in *Portraiture One Century Apart* at Massimo De Carlo in Milan and *Common Nocturnes* at Simone Subal in New York (both 2021). In 2020 she held a solo exhibition at Wschód in Warsaw. Recent press includes *Five Young Painters to Follow* in Frieze Magazine Issue 222, October 2021 (by Chloe Stead). This is her first solo exhibition in Vienna.

