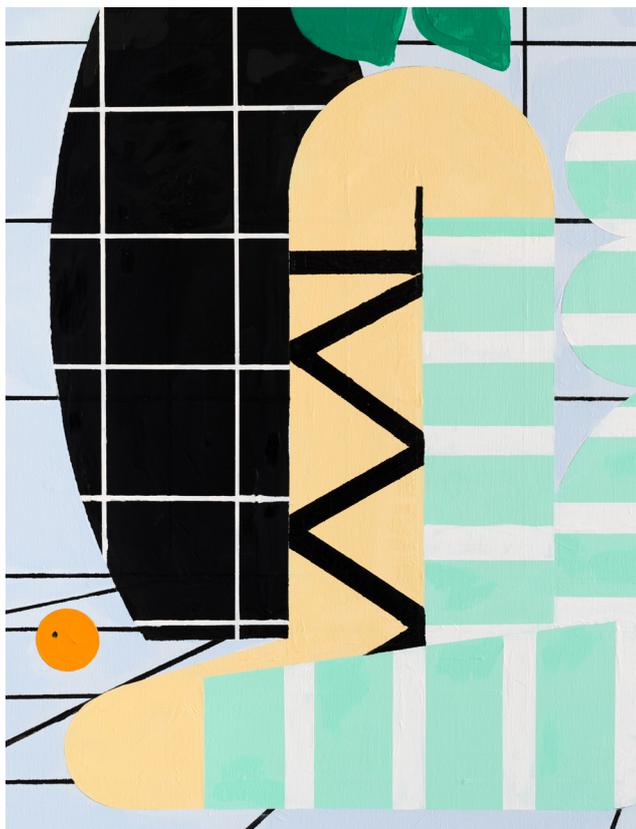


# farah atassi

## LE REPOS DES DANSEUSES

March 2<sup>nd</sup> - April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

Opening on March 1st from 5pm to 8pm



Farah Atassi, *Dancer at the Studio 2* (detail), 2021, oil and glycerol on canvas, 200 x 160 cm ©Matt Bohli

Xippas Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of the French-Belgian artist Farah Atassi. She is one of the most noticed painters of her generation. For her third exhibition in Geneva entitled *Le repos des danseuses*, the artist will unveil a set of new and unseen paintings.

Farah Atassi develops a figurative painting using the vocabulary of abstraction. Her works are based on a common mechanism where the geometric pattern induces spaces in which figures and objects evolve. On a background of systematized motifs, forms of the 20th-century European avant-gardes unfold.

« The history of modern art is full of famous images of dancers in motion and at rest – from Renoir to Degas, from Matisse to Léger. Dancers resting on stage during a performance, however, are rare. In Farah Atassi's work, the curtain is raised, yet the dancers are motionless: no arabesques, entrechats or dégagés, only languor and repose.

### Act I

The clock in *Dancer at the Studio I* reads 11:34. Time has stopped. Wearing only a striped blouse and red slippers, the dancer sits on a stage, revealing her intimacy to the spectator. Next to her, a vase covered with orthogonal lines holds a lush pilea plant, a blank canvas and a frame completing the decor. Are the painting materials waiting to be used, to be covered with a grid, like the black and pink one on the open curtain, defining the studio space that has become the stage for a spectacle? In *Dancer at the Studio II*, the palette hanging on the wall like a painting also seems to be resting. The dancer is sitting in the middle of a tiled surface, surrounded by vases, flowers, and some oranges. As in the first version, the play of lines produces a skillful perspective drawing, as if the figure, the dress, and the ribbons on the slippers were trying to merge with the decor and the background of the painting. They all want to play the same role: form becoming spectacle. The composition is reminiscent of Mallarmé's lines in *Divagations* (1897): "Which is to say that the dancer (female) is not a woman who dances, for the juxtaposed reasons that she isn't a woman, but a metaphor summing up one of the elementary aspects of our form, sword, cup, flower, etc.<sup>1</sup>" This also applies to Resting dancer in purple interior where, thanks to a subtle mise en abyme, only the dancers in the two paintings above the reclining ballerina are in motion, the curtain opening not on a choreographed spectacle, but on a spectacle of forms. The dancer languishing among a few scattered lemons has lost the lead role. Next to her and as big as her, an amphora covered with ornaments.

A form among forms, the character is like a simple element in a still life.

This de-hierarchization of the components of painting brings to mind a remark by Fernand Léger: "The object in modern painting must become the main character and overthrow the subject (...) At this moment in the mind of the modern artist, a cloud, a machine, a tree are of as much interest as the characters or faces. <sup>2</sup>" On the stage of Farah Atassi's paintings, form takes the main role.

## Act II

What better way to stage form than through a background grid? "In the early part of this century (the 20th) there began to appear, first in France and then in Russia and in Holland, a structure that has remained emblematic of the modernist ambition within the visual arts ever since. <sup>3</sup>" According to Rosalind Krauss, the grid has had a triple success: "a sheerly quantitative success, involving the number of artists in this century who have used grids; a qualitative success through which the grid has become the medium for some of the greatest works of modernism; and an ideological success, in that the grid is able – in a work of whatever quality – to emblemize the Modern <sup>4</sup>". While the grid has become the symbol of an anti-narrative bias and a formal purism refusing meaning and depth, in Farah Atassi's paintings it becomes a podium of form, reminiscent of Lucinda Childs' dancers reclining on Sol LeWitt's grids in *Dance* (1979). Is this grid, this stage for form, an ironic reference to Michael Fried's famous thesis which defines modern painting as "antitheatrical", existing for itself, unlike minimalist sculpture which "performs" for an audience <sup>5</sup>? A "theatricality" reinforced by the gaze of these languorous dancers, whose pose and nudity recall Ingres' *Grande Odalisques*. If the bodies are Ingresian, the faces are Matissian, their supple black lines complemented by a wink or a lustful gaze towards the viewers.

In *Ballet II*, the curtain is almost closed, the bodies gone from view. At the center of the stage only masks remain, like ghostly faces of empty-eyed dancers, remnants of a past "theatricality". Just a few red slippers seem to be moving on the side of the stage, near idle musical instruments. The play is over, the curtain closed, the pictorial spectacle can begin ».

Marjolaine Lévy

Farah Atassi was born in 1981 in Brussels, she lives and works in Paris. Having graduated from the National School of Fine Arts in Paris (ENSBA) in 2005, Atassi burst onto the scene within the framework of the *Dynasty* exhibition at the Paris Museum of Modern Art and at the Palais de Tokyo. Her work was also shown in *the Pompidou Centre in the State Hermitage* exhibition in 2010, at the Museum of Contemporary and Modern Art of Strasbourg in 2016 and at the Museum of Art, Architecture & Technology of Lisbon in 2017. Laureate of the Jean-François Prat Prize in 2012, she was nominated in 2013 for the Marcel Duchamp Prize before attending an artist-in-residency program at the New York International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP). In 2014, Le Grand Café, The Art Contemporary Center of the city of Saint-Nazaire in France and Le Portique, The Art Contemporary Center of the city of Le Havre have both organized a solo exhibition of her work as well as the Extra City Kunsthall of Antwerp in Belgium in 2015. In 2018, The Museum of Fine Arts of Cambrai (France) dedicated her a personal exhibition, as the Consortium Museum of Dijon (France) in 2019. Exhibition which was accompanied by a book published by the Presses du Réel. In September 2022 the Picasso Museum in Paris will present a solo show by the artist.

Among others, her work has been acquired by the following collections: the Pompidou Centre, the National Contemporary Art Fund of France, the Louis Vuitton Foundation – LVMH, the Marciano Collection in Los Angeles and the Museum of Modern Art, Paris.

<sup>1</sup> Mallarmé, *Divagations*, « Ballets », Eugène Fasquelle, 1897, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Fernand Léger, *Fonctions de la peinture*, Paris, Denöel, 1965, p. 70-71.

<sup>3</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *L'originalité de l'avant-garde et autres mythes modernistes*, trad. J.-P. Criqui, Paris, Macula, 1993, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Fried, *Art and objecthood* [1967], Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

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Mardi - Vendredi : 10h-13h et 14h-18h30

Samedi : 12h-17h

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