FRAGMENT

CATALOGUE

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BRITTA NORESTEN

INTRODUCTION BY ALIX PARÉ

« Our joy is to sense that appearance is nothing but a lie. »

Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *La couleur éloquente*, 1989

Having graduated from the Florence Academy of Art, in Gothenburg, Britta Noresten lives surrounded by art books, plaster casts and images hanging on the walls of her studio. Since completing her studies, the painter has been hunting for images, which she reproduces in fragments or incorporates into small trompe-l'œil works.

When she focuses on a section of an image, Britta Noresten zooms in until it extends beyond the frame. *One* is a fragment of a photograph of a bas-relief by Michelangelo, *The Battle of the Centaurs* (1492, Florence, Casa Buonarroti). The artist has chosen not to depict the focal point of Michelangelo's work, opting instead for the lower part of the sculpture. By focusing very closely on the entwined bodies, she obscures our understanding of the subject. She highlights what strikes her: the abstract dimension of this Renaissance sculpture. She readily compares the fluid lines of these naked bodies to a Jackson Pollock 'dripping' painting. In *Proserpine*, Britta Noresten revisits Bernini's famous statue but focuses on the goddess: her twisted torso, her face contorted with terror, her tears, and Pluto's two imposing hands, which alone convey the violence of the abduction.

Most of the photographs of artworks that Britta Noresten selects are used in her trompe-l'œil practice. She loves this ancient pictorial genre, which dates back to Greek antiquity and constitutes the very origin of Western painting. The artist describes this practice as being entertaining, meditative and satisfying. Trompe-l'œil has the advantage of evoking a sense of wonder that is universal. Everyone can be captivated and surprised by a trompe-l'œil, whether or not they are familiar with painting. She is particularly drawn to this accessible and popular aspect of the art form.

In her trompe-l'œil works, Britta Noresten opts for a simple yet effective presentation: a small image is placed or stuck onto a cardboard or a wooden panel. Many of these images come from old art books. However, as she cares too much about her own books to cut them up, the artist buys others specifically for her creations. She often buys them at bric-a-brac shops, to play with the texture of the worn pages and their faded colours. She chooses images instinctively, often guided by the aesthetic pleasure they give her. Britta Noresten admires the fluidity, balance and softness of 16th and 17th century paintings. The joy of observing and reproducing a Renaissance or Baroque work acts as a driving force. Thus she paints the Madonnas of Giovanni Bellini and Sassoferrato. These *Virgins and Child* evoke for her the idea of motherhood rather than spirituality. In the same way, she paints *Lejonmamma*, a lioness and her cub, as their feline counterpart.

Britta Noresten, *The Rape of Proserpine by Bernini*, detail, oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

Reproducing the perfect and timeless beauty of masterpieces from art history is not, however, an end in itself. When creating a trompe-l'œil, Britta Noresten also seeks a dissonance, a contrast, a rough edge that might unsettle the viewer. It is worth remembering that the artist never directly reproduces a work of art; she stages a reproduction of the work. Britta Noresten insists that these reproductions should show signs of having been lived with: that the image should have been crumpled (*Jesus*), folded (*The Rape of Proserpine by Bernini*), torn (*David by Michelangelo*), or that its corners or edges should be damaged (*Leda and the Swan by Sodoma after Leonardo*). Placed on humble supports, these poetic fragments create a clash

between the beauty of classical art and the idea of a rushed cut-out, which has accidentally fallen beside the bin for which it was intended.

Some of her source images, on the other hand, are far from the beauty of ancient art. Britta Noresten also selects popular, childlike or kitsch images which she incorporates them into her trompe-l'œil works: *Ängel*, *Katt* and *Blomflicka*. The cut-out cherub from Raphael's Sistine Madonna, *Ängel 1*, brings these seemingly contradictory visual worlds together. Her affection for popular objects is evident, beyond her trompe-l'œil, in the small paintings of ceramic figurines, set against plain backgrounds in bright colours (*Gris*, *Konstig Keramikkatt*). The artist uses these same saturated colours to play not only with our understanding but also with our retinas, in *Equiluminance 5* and *Färg och Tejp*. In the tradition of the colour theories of Eugène Chevreul and Johannes Itten, the artist skilfully juxtaposes bright colours heightening their contrasts and vibrations. Whether the subject is abstract or figurative, it is all simply painting.

Moreover, the closer our eye, initially caught out, gets to Britta Noresten's trompe-l'œil works, the more the illusion fades. Her compositions belong neither to hyperrealism nor to precisionism. The outlines of the figures are slightly blurred. The brushwork is delicate and fluid, yet visible; the blocks of colour and shadows are simplified. The painting reminds us that the artist is neither Sassoferrato, Bellini, nor Michelangelo, but Britta Noresten herself, the artist who has selected, staged and reinterpreted these fragments of art history. This contrast enhances the viewer's enjoyment.

Aside from postcards and photographs of works of art, other mediums inspire the artist: studio plaster casts. Whilst the usual academic exercise involves drawing these casts in order to observe the light and build up the tonal values, Britta Noresten chooses to paint them in oils. The uniformly white colour and matt texture of the casts present a technical challenge which the artist overcomes by imposing constraints on herself. For example, she chooses to render the shadows in green on the face of Bernini's Saint Teresa (*The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*). Britta Noresten depicts these casts, fragments of bodies or sculptures, using a very close-up framing. The proximity is mesmerising. Saint Teresa's half-open mouth, pious and sensual, commands our attention, as does the strange smile and closed eyes of *L'inconnue de la Seine*. Britta Noresten painted her from a copy of this famous plaster cast. The model's identity remains unknown, but legend has it that it was the death mask of a drowned woman, or a young woman suffering from tuberculosis, in the early 20th century. From the 1900s onwards, this mask enjoyed immense popularity. Prints of it flooded artists' studios and middle-class homes alike; it inspired writers, poets and photographers. Later, the face of the famous unknown woman was used on training manikins for first-aid workers.

Most of Britta Noresten's works feature women. The artist feels a sense of connection; the faces and emotions speak to her. Drawing on feminist literature and theories, Britta Noresten is interested in the representation of women through art. Through her works, she isolates images that appear paradoxical to our contemporary gaze. The masterpieces we admire for their grace and virtuosity also convey a history of male domination, as exemplified by the motif of the abduction (*Proserpine*) or Zeus' love conquests (*Leda and the Swan by Sodoma after Leonardo*). Over the past twenty years or so, these mythological love affairs have increasingly been redefined as rapes. In France, for example, the art historian and curator at the Louvre, Régis Michel, has been reinterpreting these mythological assaults in this light as early as 2000.

Britta Noresten's interest in the representation of bodies and, above all, female faces, extends far beyond the history of art. When she came across some *Archie* comics, the artist was struck by the great expressiveness of the heroines, sketched with just a few energetic, concise strokes. She wanted to reproduce them in a trompe-l'œil style, but was met with disappointment. Upon reading the comic, she realised that the women only opened their mouths to talk about men, particularly the eponymous hero. Whether alone or in pairs, the female characters wonder where Archie has gone, whether Archie can save them, and so on. Britta Noresten therefore chose to reproduce the panels by removing the text. She gives these women back the chance to express themselves outside a misogynistic context: faced with a blank speech bubble, our imagination opens up a world of possibilities.

Several black-and-white photographs also inspire her to create trompe-l'œil works. A series of portraits of actresses, simply titled *Actress* and numbered, reflect her desire to paint women who exude character despite conforming to the glamour of the 1950s. Britta Noresten appreciates, without nostalgia,

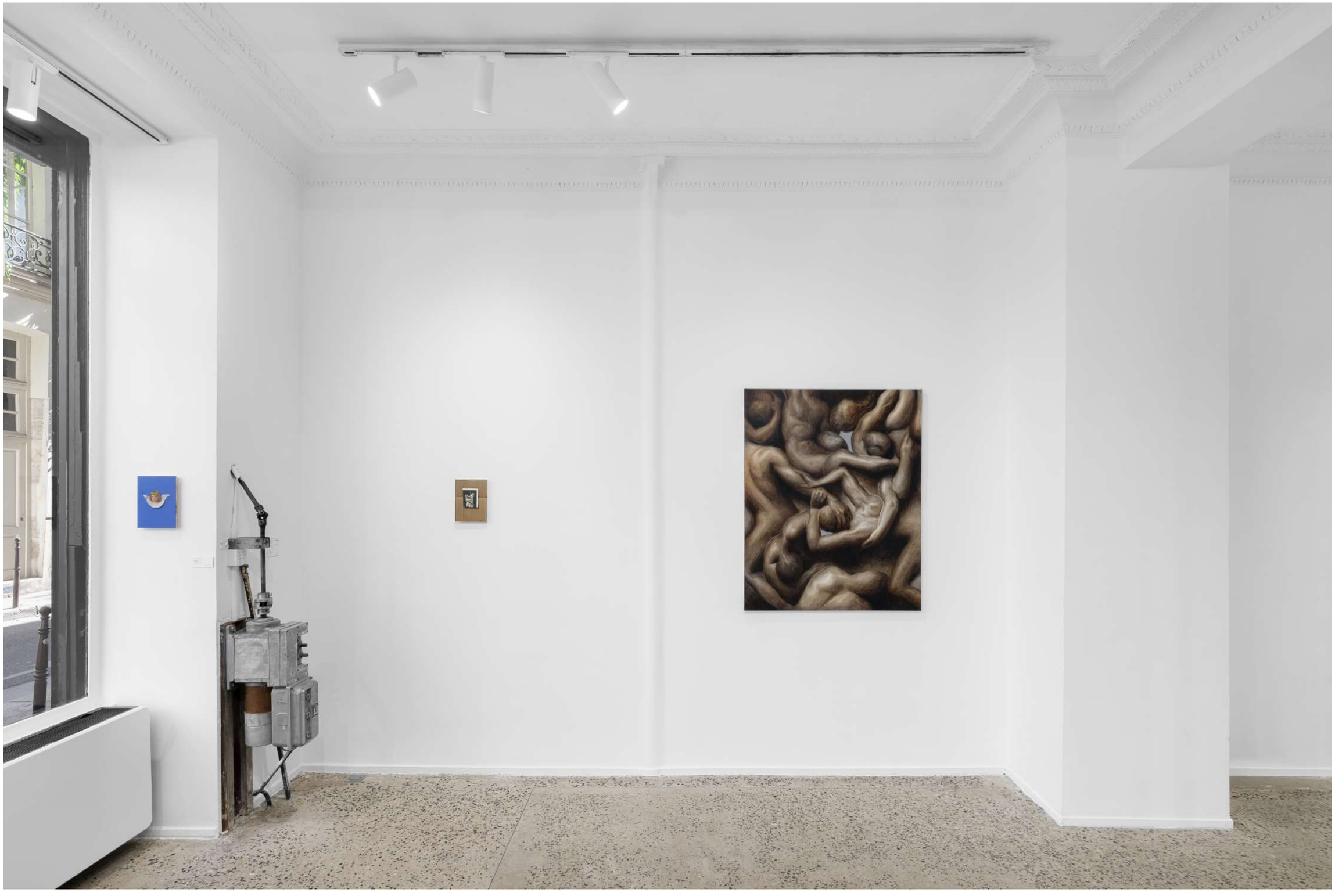
Britta Noresten, *Betty and Veronica,* detail, oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

the aesthetic quality of these photographs, their grain and the imperfections caused by ageing. The relative obscurity into which these women have fallen, unlike the iconic Marilyn Monroe, allows her to focus on what emanates from their faces.

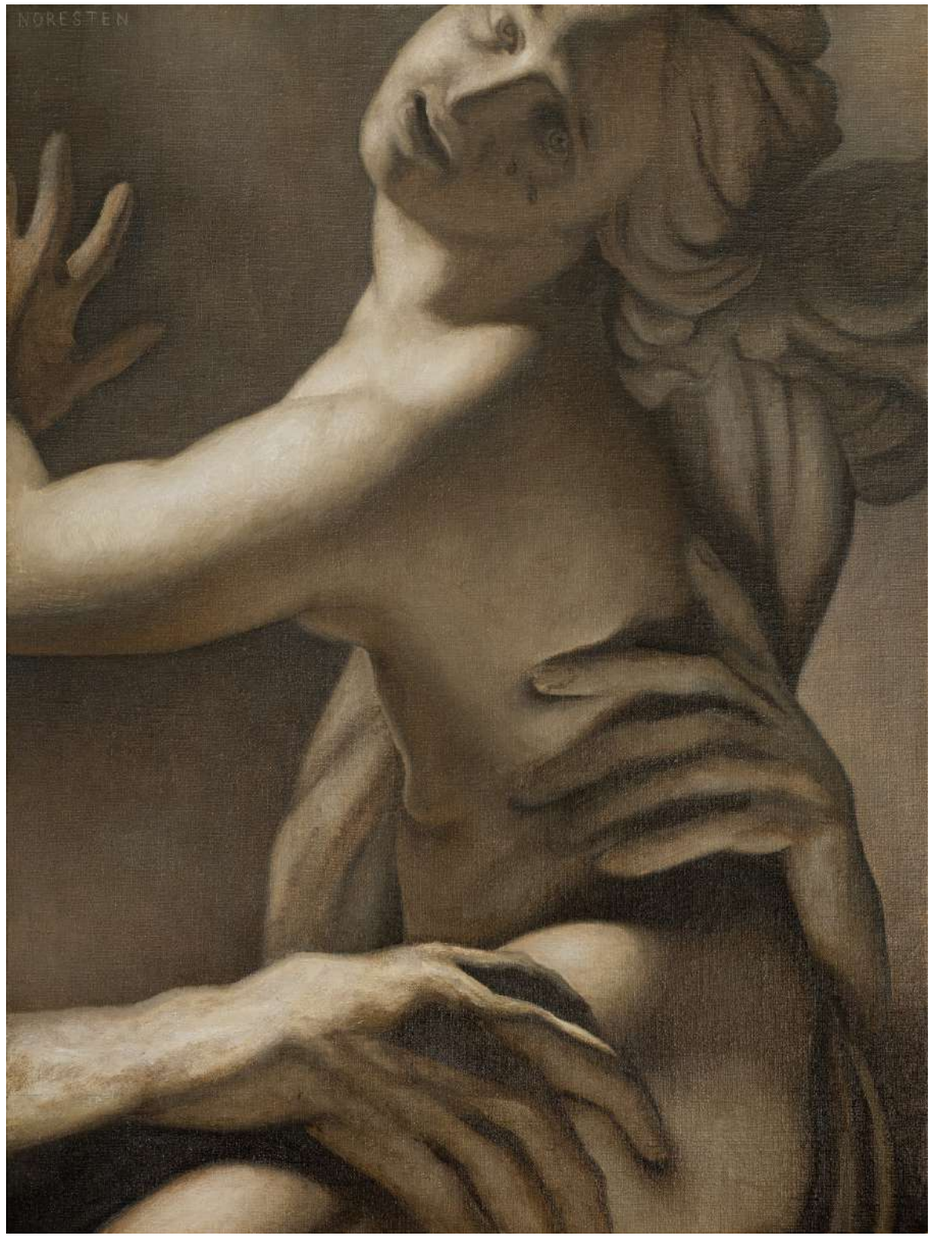
Two more radical figures are added to the list of these photographs and to the artist's feminist exploration. The first is the New Yorker Valerie Solanas. Famous for attempting to kill Andy Warhol in 1968, she is the author of the SCUM Manifesto (1967), in which she calls for women's rebellion and the eradication of men. Interpretations diverge as to the degree of satire or paranoia in this text and it has been both embraced and rejected by different strands of contemporary feminism. The second is the serial killer Aileen Wuornos. An orphan, a prostitute and a victim of multiple sexual assaults and violence. This woman killed seven men. Upon her arrest, Wuornos confessed to the murders and claimed self-defence, arguing that the men had attempted to rape her. She was sentenced to death and executed in Florida in 2002. Valerie Solanas's stern expression and Aileen Wuornos's scream, seem to respond, through their intensity and violence, to Proserpine's tears. Britta Noresten describes these works as a therapeutic practice. These women give vent to their anger. By painting them, Britta Noresten brings female anger into art. This emotion is rare in classical representations, where femininity symbolises gentleness and vulnerability, apart from a few mythological exceptions. Whilst Britta Noresten admits that she hardly ever paints men, or does so only very rarely, there are a few exceptions in her body of work: Pluto in Bernini's abduction, Christ, the muscular bodies of Michelangelo's centaurs (*One*) and her David. All are drawn from mythological or religious culture.

Whether it is a ceramic pig, Michelangelo, a comic strip panel or a serial killer, Britta Noresten selects fragments of images with equal parts care and instinct. She observes them, removes them from their original contexts and paints them with virtuosity. By isolating them, however, she does not place them on any pedestal. They all seem to be on the same level, glued onto a wooden panel or cardboard or floating against a uniform coloured background. Within Britta Noresten's body of work, art history, popular culture and feminist activism are all important exhibits in her inner museum.

Britta Noresten, *Aileen Wuornos,* detail, oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.



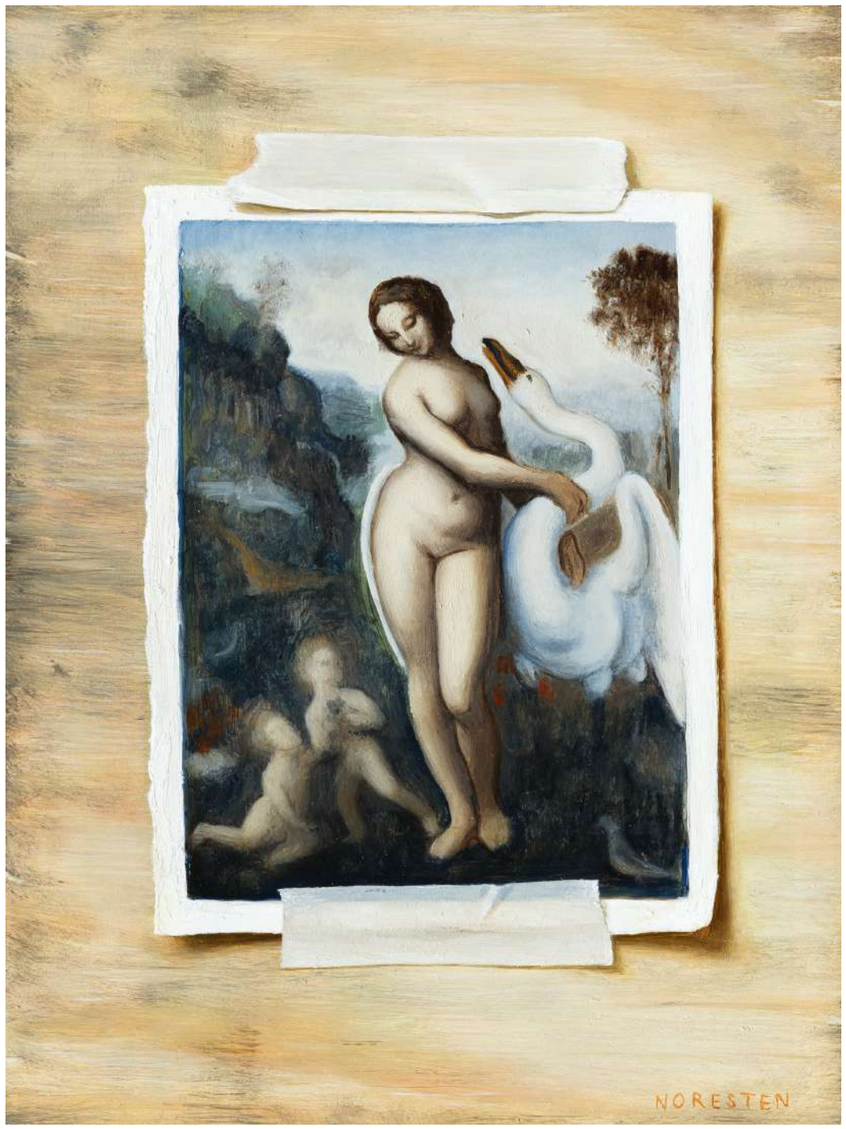
Britta Noresten, *One,* oil on canvas, 49.4 x 39.4 in, 2026.



Britta Noresten, *Proserpine,* oil on canvas, 23.6 x 17.7 in, 2026.

Britta Noresten, *The Rape of Proserpine by Bernini,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

Britta Noresten, *Virgin and Child by Sassoferrato,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2026.



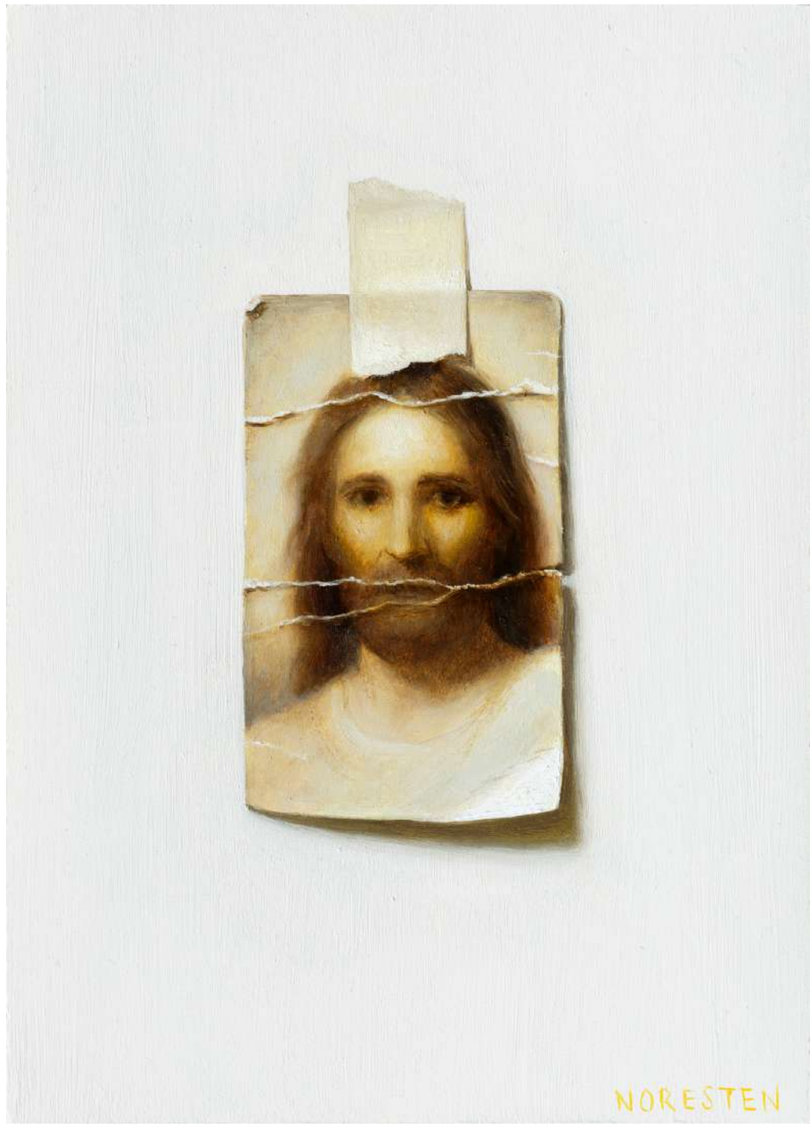
Britta Noresten, *Leda and the Swan by Sodoma after Leonardo,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2026.

Britta Noresten, *David by Michelangelo,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2026.

Britta Noresten, *Virgin and Child by Bellini,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

Britta Noresten, *Lejonmamma,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

Britta Noresten, *Aileen Wuornos,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.



Britta Noresten, *Jesus,* oil on wooden panel, 7 x 5 in, 2026.

Britta Noresten, *Actress 1,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

Britta Noresten, *Actress 2,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2026.

Britta Noresten, *Actress 3,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2026.

Britta Noresten, *Valerie Solanas,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2021.

Britta Noresten, *Betty and Veronica,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

Britta Noresten, *Betty,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

Britta Noresten, *Veronica and Cheryl,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

Britta Noresten, *Ängel 1,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

Britta Noresten, *Ängel 2,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

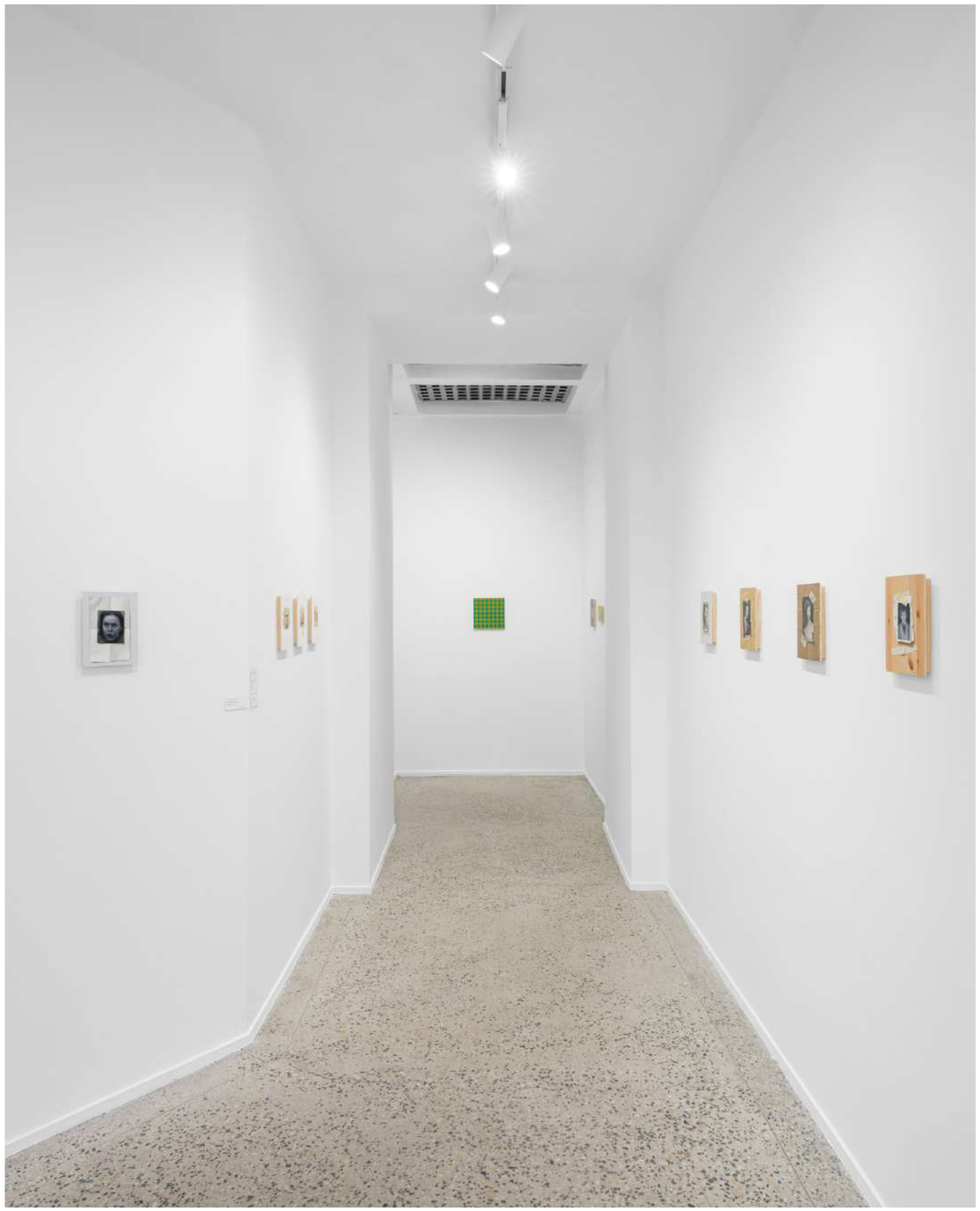
Britta Noresten, *Ängel 3,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

Britta Noresten, *Gris,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2022.

Britta Noresten, *Konstig Keramikkatt,* oil on wooden panel, 5.1 x 7 in, 2022.

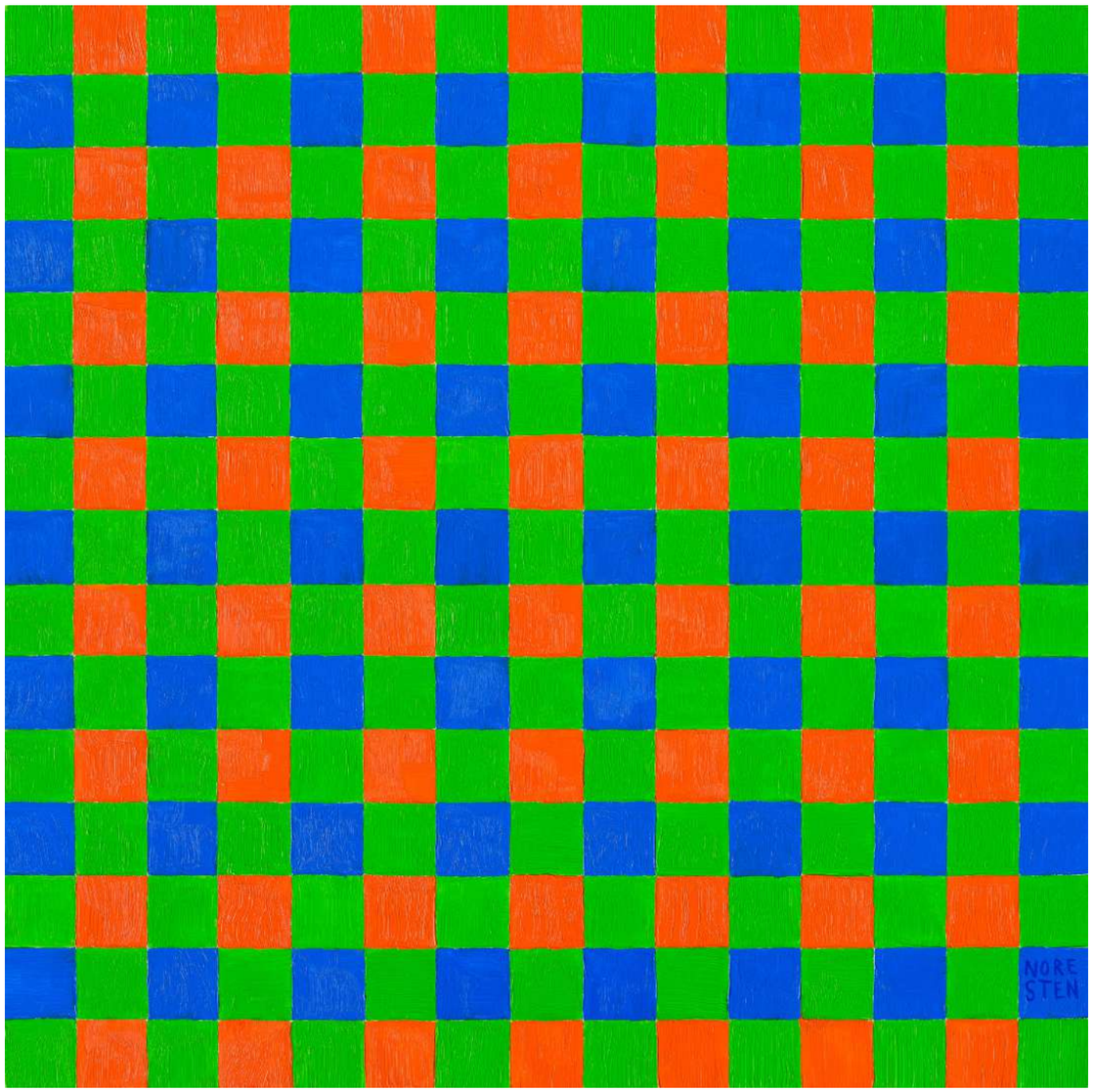
Britta Noresten, *Blomflicka,* oil on wooden panel, 7 x 5 in, 2026.

Britta Noresten, *Katt 3,* oil on wooden panel, 5.8 x 3.9 in, 2026.
Britta Noresten, *Katt 4,* oil on wooden panel, 3.9 x 5.8 in, 2026.

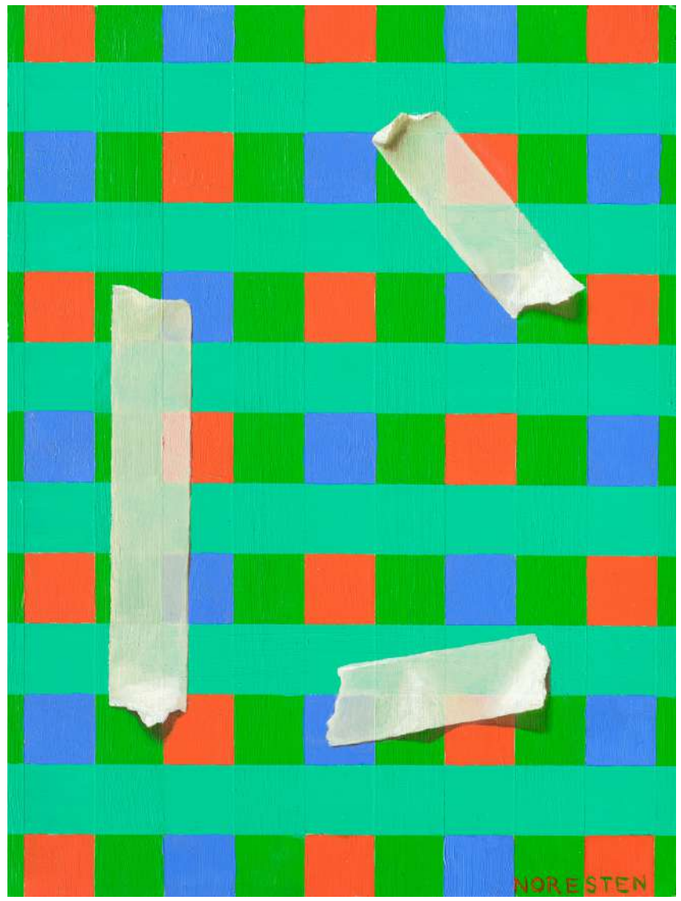


Britta Noresten, *Teddy,* oil on wooden panel, 7 x 5 in, 2026.

Britta Noresten, *Blue Aileen,* oil on wooden panel, 5.8 x 3.9 in, 2026.



Britta Noresten, *Equiluminance 5,* oil on wooden panel, 11.8 x 11.8 in, 2026.



Britta Noresten, *Färg och Tejp,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2021.

Britta Noresten, *L'inconnue de la Seine,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

Britta Noresten, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa,* oil on wooden panel, 9½ x 7 in, 2025.

More info on the gallery and the artists :

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