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DESIRE

Desire Path
Karla Marchesi

8 - 26 June



Desire Path reflects upon a dissonance between subjective hedonic desire and modalities of pleasure in contemporary social life. The exhibition strides this rocky terrain taking the ancient Greek goddess of mirth, Baubo, as a guide, tragically exploring the pitfalls of modern dating and relationships.

Known for her liberated sexuality and bawdy humour, the Baubo empowers female agency, the ability of the vagina to critique power, identity and relationships. Marchesi employs the 'impossible bouquet' as a genre through which to theatrically critique the complexity of human experience and deconstruct ideological systems which envelope this contemporaneity.

Within a playground of Rococo excess, arrangements of succulents and flora colourfully brim with innuendo. Situated atop pastoral landscapes and set inside modern heterotopic interiors, the exhibition stages anthropomorphised cacti and flora as vessels for psycho-sexual projection.

Symbolic of violence, danger, and self-protective vulnerability, these great asinine masses of succulents drive Marchesi's post-modern collage using autobiographical references, ancient myth, folklore, art history, sci-fi landscapes and cyber aesthetics, in a spirited Baroque-punk upending of Romanticism.



Bleached, 2022
Oil on linen
60 x 50cm

\$3,100



Bright eyes, 2022

Oil on linen
60 x 50cm

\$3,100



Double Header, 2022

Oil on linen
50 x 40cm

\$2,900



Flayed, 2022
Oil on linen
30 x 24cm

\$1,800



Head to tail, 2022

Oil on linen
50 x 40cm

\$2,900



Is this desire, 2022

Oil on linen
110 x 100cm

\$5,300



Lace up, 2022
Oil on canvas
39 x 30cm

\$1,900



Lickedysplit, 2022

Oil on linen
60 x 50cm

\$3,100



Mall Soft Love Hotel, 2022

Oil on linen
180 x 150cm

\$9,200



Medusa Side-eye, 2022

Oil on linen
150 x 150cm

\$6,400



Morning Glory, 2022

Oil on linen
180 x 150cm

\$9,200



Nipple Ring, 2022
Oil on linen
30 x 24cm

\$1,800



Passion fruits, 2022

Oil on linen
50 x 40cm

\$2,900



Pleasure Garden, 2022

Oil on linen
180 x 150cm

\$9,200



Red zone, 2022
Oil on linen
50 x 40cm

\$2,900



Skylight, 2022
Oil on canvas
50 x 40cm

\$2,900



Swingers, 2022
Oil on canvas
89 x 74cm

\$3,800



The Crane Wife, 2022

Oil on linen
180 x 150cm

\$9,200



The look of love, 2022

Oil on canvas
50 x 40cm

\$2,900



The rape (after Magritte), 2022

Oil on linen
30 x 24cm

\$1,800



The Wedding Party, 2022

Oil on linen
145 x 135cm

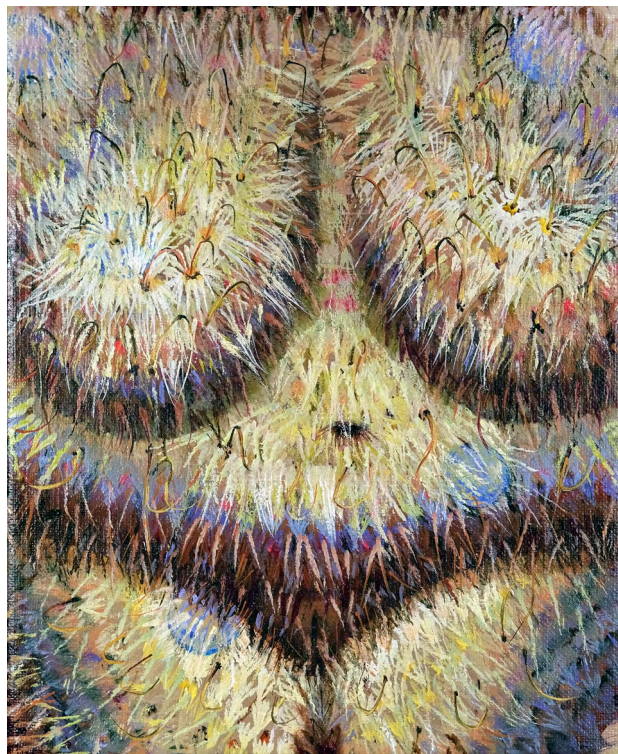
\$6,200



Tree of Life, 2022

Oil on linen
50 x 40cm

\$2,900



Venus fly trap, 2022

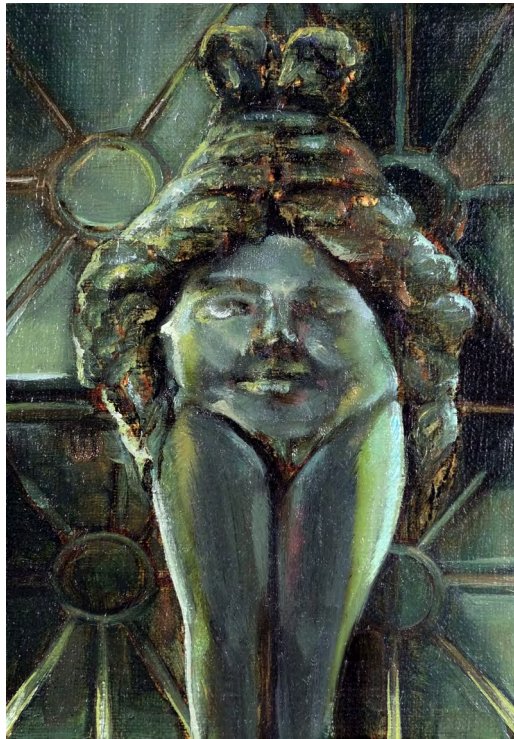
Oil on linen
30 x 24cm

\$1,800



Venus idol, 2022
Oil on aluminum
28 x 21cm

\$1,750



Baubo codex 1, 2022

Oil on linen
23 x 15cm

\$1,100



Baubo codex 2, 2022

Oil on canvas
23 x 15cm

\$1,100

The problem with desire: Bursting the bubble of Romanticism

Is that all there is?

If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing

Let's break out the booze and have a ball

If that's all there is

Peggy Lee - Is That All There Is? 1969, written and composed by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller

The last years have been disruptive. The isolation and alienation of the pandemic upended our understanding as to how the life we knew would foreseeably unfold. At least for a short moment there was a glimmer of hope and possibility this calamity could lead to increased humanity, empathy and connection. For those living alone, far from the front lines of crisis response, Cyberintimacy filled some gaps of need. Online content stood in for company, providing an eclectic, rhizomatic array of subjects to draw on and investigate. For privileged individuals it was a time of externally imposed self-reflection, to pause and measure what is working and what needs change in our lives. The bodily stasis and disruption of routine gave space to re-evaluate core desires and unchallenged personal beliefs.

With tangible existential threats framing our contemporary lives, be it global pandemic, climate disaster, economic, racial and gendered injustice, It's hard not to be disillusioned. Resulting anxieties accumulate in the body, diminishing desire in response. Where is desire situated when futures we once imagined reveal their illusion?

No doubt it's time to reread some Camus and Sartre, and learn to lean into the absurdity of not knowing.

Personally, during this time reassessing social and cultural relationships, I was particularly moved by the outpouring of fury expressed by women and allies in Australia's belated #Metoo moment, culminating in mass *March 4 Justice* demonstrations. Across the ocean a quiet rage, long tampered, started gestating in my work. Redirecting the pathology of patriarchy and its effect on the body, the exhibition *Desire Path* (2022, Jan Manton Gallery, Brisbane) reflects upon dissonances between hedonic desire and modalities of pleasure in contemporary life, tragicomically exploring the pitfalls of modern dating and relationships, and finding agency in female pleasure.

Cue an early PJ Harvey and Riot Grrrl soundtrack.

Welcoming the disruption and re-evaluation of socio-cultural constructs of gender and sexuality, *Desire Path* strides this rocky terrain, breaking out the paper-bagged booze and having some fun along the way. The Baubo, Ancient Greek goddess of mirth, will be your guide on this journey. Take her as a codex for this exhibition. A crone-like figure known for her liberated sexuality and bawdy humour, the Baubo empowers female agency, the ability of the vagina to critique power, identity and relationships. It is said Baubo jested with the goddess of Agriculture, Demeter, to break her long depression that followed the land following her daughter Persephone's running off with the bad-boy of the underworld, Hades, by lifting her skirt impulsively revealing her vulva.

Good on you Baubo.

Desire Path continues an exploration of the ‘impossible bouquet’ reinterpreting the genre popularised in 17th century Dutch painting. Here I theatrically critique the complexity and anxieties of human experience when met with established socio-cultural systems. Examined under glaring fluorescent lights these multi-genus still lifes depict naturally occurring flora and cactuses that resemble human anatomy, such as genitalia, lips, eyes, brains, breasts and orifices. Within a playground of Rococo excess, arrangements of succulents and flora colourfully brim with innuendo. Situated atop pastoral landscapes and set inside modern heterotopic interiors, the exhibition stages flora as central character, symbolic of violence, danger, and self-protective vulnerability.

In a Baroque-punk upending of Romanticism autobiographical references weave through ancient myth, folklore, art history, sci-fi landscapes and cyber aesthetics. In fields of frivolity and visual pleasure, contemporary reinterpretations of Fête Galante painting depict scenes of characters celebrating in amorous play in pastoral settings. Here, however, protagonists are anthropomorphic in lieu of young 18th century nobles.

In *Swingers* (2022) an appropriated figure from Jean-Honoré Fragonard’s *The Swing* (c. 1767) is propelled mischievously forward full frontal and pantless, echoing the open legs of the Baubo goddess. The figure ascends arrangements of towering priapic cactuses which rise architecturally from a floral base as if emerging from a sci-fi dystopian tale. Hooker’s lips, cunt-like and self-penetrating monstera flowers sit amongst puddles of soft serve ice cream and breast like gumnuts that secrete human hair.

Fertility idols are depicted as spiked succulents, alluding to the pleasures and pain of womanhood; Human hair forms curtains with invitations to unknown spaces; fecund forbidden fruits wink at you like Adam and Eve, or offer you Persephone’s bargain with the underworld through the ingestion of pomegranate seeds. Unions of folkloric sacrifice and weddings of unfulfilled desire offer nuanced iterations of romantic attachment styles and the social expectations to couple.

Voyaging inside *The Crane Wife* (2022) and *Mall Soft Love Hotel* (2022) present bouquets in coolly detached Heterotopic spaces, referencing lobby interiors, shopping malls, brothels or other places of commerce, softly echoing vaporwave soundscapes. Digital gradations, artificially saturated forms and diaphanous curtains hide and entice. Here desire and pleasure are to be traded, in a hyper capitalist dream world, *or nightmare*, depending on your persuasion.

There is a distance between desire and beliefs, desire and reality, desire and opportunity. Socially constructed myths of hedonic desire and pleasure pose as propositional attitudes; that fulfilment of action tends to bring pleasure. In a Lacanian sense the result of transgressing the pleasure principle is not more pleasure, but instead pain. I’d add disappointment to the list. Slavoj Žižek puts it “desire’s *raison d’être* is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire.” At the very least we’ve all recently experienced the complicated relationship between desires, needs unmet and a reevaluation of where authentic satisfaction resides – even if often unobtainable.

The joke is on us, but at least we can laugh together and try to find some fun on the way.



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Back Cover Image: *Mall Soft Love Hotel*, 2022, Karla Marchesi, oil on linen, 180 x 150cm.

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