

HELDENREIZER

CONTEMPORARY

Faye Formisano
Audrey Guttman
Lulù Nuti

AenigmA

Curated by Maddalena Pelù

July, 2nd – August 2nd 2025

Heldenreizer Contemporary is pleased to announce the opening of **AenigmA**, a group show featuring Faye Formisano, Audrey Guttman, and Lulù Nuti, curated by Maddalena Pelù. The concept of the exhibition arises from the discovery of the relationship between the artist Giorgio De Chirico and the Bavarian capital which, despite being far from his Greek origins, played a fundamental role in his artistic and humanistic path—presenting itself as a kind of romantic journey in reverse. De Chirico made the city an integral part of his poetic world. It was precisely during those years of German neoclassical influence that, beside one of his self-portraits, we find the question: *Et Quid amabo nisi quod aenigma est?* – *And what shall I love if not that which is enigma?*. The enigma is mystery and metaphysics, but also a tool of knowledge, research, evocation, discovery, interpretation, surprise, the unforeseen, error, an unsolvable question... and also a game.

The three artists have been invited to engage with and reflect upon this theme. Here we ask ourselves: what form does this word take today? Is the enigma a game? A dream? A blindfolded journey toward Truth? A love for ambiguity? For the unfinished, for the void, for what remains unanswered? Or perhaps it is the solution? Or rather, the question?

Faye Formisano, a French artist, researcher, and director trained in textile design, reflects on themes related to the mysterious substance of dream, memory, perception, and human connections. She navigates the universe hidden behind the psyche and explores the unconscious with a technical sensitivity embracing video, performance, choreographic installation, drawing, and the use of fabric—an essential material in her art practice.

The sculptures exhibited in the Gallery space are part of the series *They Dream in My Bones – Insempnopedy II* (2023), a fictional installation that unfolds across multiple media (a VR film, a textile installation, a series of drawings) to immerse us in the mental space of Roderick Norman, a researcher in oneirogenetics—the science he founded that allows extracting dreams from the DNA of an unknown skeleton. A liminal experience exploring the fabric between the physical and the metaphysical. For the exhibition, several glass sculptures were chosen—a recent material exploration by the artist—which, through their fragility, formal volatility, and transparency, evoke the enigmatic intersection of the physical world and the world of dreams, of gender and biology, of an individual body and a symbiotic microbiota. Faye investigates the origin of the human and the pre-human.

From outside the window, projected on the wall, is the video *Insempnopedy I: The Dream of Victor F.* (2019), an experimental film (22'51") with surrealist scenography, freely inspired by Victor Frankenstein's dream—from Mary Shelley's text—the night right after creating his creature. The artist invites the viewer to immerse themselves in this particular moment of the night, undertaking a

solitary, fantastical journey between sleep and wakefulness that transforms our relationship with time and reality. The dream gradually slides onto Frankenstein's double figure, where creator and creation merge under the same name. Indeed, the creature remains nameless, and popular myth has transformed Frankenstein into the creature itself. The dream we are immersed in blurs between the memory of a childhood love and the ghost of the dead mother, frightening both characters. The dancer Lilou Robert, a woman, performs as Victor F., with expressive-mute-cinema-style movements.

The film questions the broken and forbidden bond between creator and creature—mirrors of one another. The question arises: is creation always restorative? The fabric in front of which the short film is projected echoes the importance of this material for the artist, as well as the relationship between the artist and the ghost, as it appears in the history of visual arts and cinema. The words *fantasme* (mental image), *fantôme* (spectre), and *fantaisie* (fantasy) all stem from the Greek *phantasma*, which designates both a mental vision and a spectral apparition—that is, something that appears to the mind or senses as an image, vision, or specter and that fills the space left empty by someone or something that is gone. Fantasy, in fact, fills the spaces left free by unknown or missing reality. Faye explores the enigmatic frontiers of these losses, of the origin of life and the dream world.

Audrey Guttman is a Belgian multidisciplinary artist who favors techniques of collage, assemblage, and poetry. Her work is radical with and on the image—photographs, vintage newspapers, postcards—that are cut, dismantled, reinvented, until they take on different, subversive, and poetic roles all at once, in the theater of her imagination. The unconscious and dreams, with their entanglement of questions, find works and words to inhabit.

On this occasion, the artist presents a work conceived specifically for the Gallery space, in dialogue not only with the exhibition venue but also with the city, and with the phrase by Giorgio De Chirico that inspires both the title of the show and the work itself: *Et quid amabo nisi quod aenigma est?* — literally translated as “And what shall I love if not the Enigma?”. The idea itself began as a question, which arose during the journey to the city: for her it was the first time in Munich—and already imbued with the theme of De Chirico's mystery-of-enigma—she wonders about the geographical shape of the city, giving rise to an imaginary map. This map then turned into a great labyrinth collage of collage, cyanotypes, poetry, and enigmatic installations. Some of these works were created during her Bavarian stay. This is the case of *Time Travel*, a shadow emerging from the past of the Glyptothek, wrapped in the time that distances it from its creation and echoing the statue of one of De Chirico's early Nietzschean philosophy-infused paintings, “The Enigma of the Oracle” (1909). The theme of time, love for the past and mythology also blossom in the diptych *Kunstreal*, where a kouros shows its smiling, enigmatic profile akin to its distant relative: the Mona Lisa.

Audrey poses questions that lead to more questions, in a continuous chain that makes the concept of the exhibition itself visible. With a deeply surrealistic sensitivity, she places herself and visitors before a maze of interrogatives that become tools of knowledge—a *gnōthi seauton*. An ode to the experience of questioning. The work transforms doubt into an active chessboard, where each question generates others, like branching limbs. No answer is definitive: like a bishop moving diagonally, thought too is called to seek oblique paths to escape the inertia of the psyche. The enigma is not to be solved, but inhabited.

The artist has also played with the Gallery's name: Heldenreizer—“the heroine who must arrive at something.” In this mural journey, we are all heroes when confronted with the questions the artist

poses to us: an eternal return without answers, except the enigma itself that repeats, reminding us that life is a question crystallized in the permanence of its open doubt.

Lulù Nuti, an Italian artist, often explores themes that question the relationship between nature and the individual, the individual and society. Through her sculptures and their interaction with space, the artist undertakes and proposes new readings and solutions. The aesthetic research merges with a technical proposal, sculptural gesture with political gesture.

This is the case here with *Sun Sulfur Iron* (2019), a shell of various sizes that appear as primordial finds generated from the ocean floor. These works belong to a larger project, *Calcare il mondo*: negative molds of geographical globes, created using construction materials—cement, plaster, glue—and interrogating the impact these leave on the ecosystem. With *Sun Sulfur Iron*, the artist metaphorically returns the shells to life, as a symbol of rebirth in the face of the destructive human intervention on nature. Indeed, it is from undersea sands that sand is taken to produce cement, which in turn is used for building most buildings in the world. Each of them corresponds to an amputation of the Earth organism, which, emptied, becomes an ultra-thin vessel that almost disappears. Here, Nuti seeks the gesture that can safeguard its biological memory. *Calcare il mondo* is a world imploded—deflated by the weight of the removed matter. We face the enigma of the post-world (a new Big Bang?). The shell of *Sun Sulfur Iron* (2019) are the collapsed errors of the globe molds. The internal parts are carved by phosphorescent drawings visible in the dark, outlining the borders of the five continents. The artist accentuates the accidental triumph of nature, the utopia of its preservation, by inserting within them the colors of deep-sea animals—vivid hues that evoke their vitality. The shell thus conceptually finds its habitat again. The solution here seems to lie in the unforeseen and the error, generated by dancing with the potential of the material, itself enigmatic. Starting point and destination.

This eternal return of matter that from subtraction becomes creation and vice versa, introduces the work *Danzante dormiente* (2024). In relation to her reflections on regenerative cycles, the artist has conceived and created a forged-iron sculpture in the shape of a serpent over thirteen meters long, winding around the central fountain of the garden of the Accademia Nazionale di San Luca (Rome). The cyclical form of the sculpture recalls the circle, and thus the symbol of the Ouroboros, the serpent biting its tail—linked to life and regeneration cycles, but also to autofagia (serpents devour themselves to survive). Similarly, as the blacksmith creates the hammer with the same metal he will work, tool and material merge into a single entity. This is the only material with such properties. The center of the Earth is metal—a symbol of implosion and explosion. *Danzante dormiente* is the self-generation and self-sufficiency of a universe that self-fertilizes to repeat infinitely a cycle of expansion and contraction. Within the fountain the sculpture was almost invisible, with only a few enigmatic curves emerging. The white line represents the water horizon, whose contact with the material of the work generated changes and interferences. It is also a work tied to the unconscious: water perceived as an amniotic liquid—fluid element of transformation, protection, and evolution.

Lulù Nuti works forged iron with delicacy and flexibility, pushing it to its limits. This image is connected to a personal experience the artist had on a construction site, where a gigantic drill pierces the mountain: a mechanical “creature” that destroys and spits out earth. As a result, the mountain defends itself by heating up. Thus, the sculpture becomes a metaphor for the tension between destruction and life, between machine and nature—a cyclicity in dialogue with Nietzsche’s enigma of the eternal return.

At the center of the Gallery space, *I Bagni Misteriosi*(1973) by **Giorgio de Chirico**, one of the series created in the mature phase of his artistic journey, starting in the 1930s and developed afterward into the 1970s. The painting fits into De Chirico's post-metaphysical strand, in which the artist gave space to more theatrical and dreamlike compositions. In *I Bagni Misteriosi*, De Chirico depicts pools or basins surrounded by classical architecture, populated by ambiguous figures, often mannequins, stylized bathers, mobile statues, or hybrid characters.

The idea of the mysterious baths came to me one time when the floor had been highly polished with wax. I looked at a man walking in front of me whose legs reflected on the floor. I had the impression that he could sink into that floor, as into a pool, that he could move and even swim in it. So I imagined strange pools with men immersed in that parquet-water, standing still, moving, and sometimes stopping to converse with other men who were outside the pool-floor.

The fountain in *I Bagni* surely also belongs to a childhood memory in his native Greek city of Volos. Indeed, facing the beach there were long wooden piers leading to a platform in the sea, on which cabins and ladders to the water were located—elements often found in the various versions of *I Bagni*. De Chirico may also have been inspired by Lucas Cranach the Elder's Renaissance painting *The Fountain of Youth* (1546, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin), where old women immerse themselves in the water and emerge young.

The first depiction of *I Bagni Misteriosi* dates back to 1934, within a set of ten lithographs published by De Chirico to illustrate a poetry collection by Jean Cocteau titled *Mythologie*. De Chirico continued to develop ever-different variations of this subject throughout his life, producing new paintings and lithographs. The constant element of water evokes transformation and mystery, and an enigmatic atmosphere reigns where reality and fiction merge. It evokes a place of ritual, purification, or metamorphosis. Water is often seen as a symbolic element of passage or rebirth. The works in this series have no explicit narrative—they are visual dreams, constructed as enigmas. A playful return to classical myth, a reflection on the theater of life. A veiled critique of modernity and the loss of the sense of mystery.

The enigma belongs to both worlds: the visible one that formulates it, and the invisible one that presses upon imagination and intellect to decipher it. The enigma is an *entre-deux*. The boundary between myth and reality, between legend and history.

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