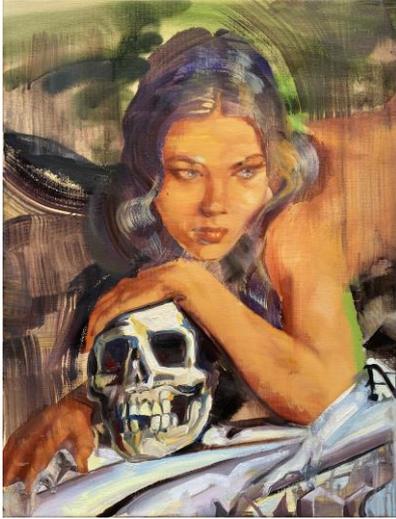


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PAULINA OLOWSKA: 30 MINUTES BEFORE MIDNIGHT



19 MAY – 19 JUNE 2021

PRIVATE VIEW: TUESDAY 18 MAY 2021, 6–8PM

SIMON LEE GALLERY, HONG KONG

'The half hour before midnight is for doin' good. The half hour after midnight is for doin' evil – seems like we need a little of both tonight', Minerva in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1997).

'Our culture is replete with religious and symbolic images of women that are either subservient or sacrificial and that do not hold and reflect the multiplicities of women's creative powers', Juliet Miller, *The Creative Feminine and her Discontents* (2008).

Simon Lee Gallery Hong Kong is pleased to announce an exhibition of new paintings by Paulina Olowaska. Olowaska's oeuvre has long been informed by her examination of the restrictive stereotypes that underpin representations of womanhood in the history of art. Seeking to depict femininity in all its guises, Olowaska's visual language asserts and redefines the capacity of the female gaze in painting, encoding each work with symbols and narrative cues that embolden her subject's physical and psychological presence.

For her second solo exhibition in Hong Kong, Olowaska has created a body of works depicting muses and heroines in various scenarios at different times of the day and night. The title of the show alludes to John Berendt's novel *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* and the subsequent film adaptation. Drawing on the hoodoo notion of midnight, the passage of time in the book and film defines the period for good magic – the thirty minutes prior to midnight – and the period for bad magic – the thirty minutes after midnight. Olowaska extends this notion of time and the passing of day to night as both a visual and narrative device to contextualise the subjects of her portraits. Colours – and the time of day they indicate – fortify the viewer's initial engagement with Olowaska's protagonists. Shifting from soft to vibrant tones, the works in the exhibition fluctuate in mood throughout the exhibition as day turns to night.

Olowaska promotes the duality of the image in her practice, layering multiple meanings into her works to subvert and twist the viewer's expectations and create space for an array of narratives to emerge. Idealistic compositions of gentil figures painted in pastel hues possess a distinct, threatening undertone. Elsewhere in the exhibition, the bold darkness of night and all its negative connotations becomes a source of innate strength for the figures within the paintings.

Many of the heroines in Olowaska's latest paintings refer to films and the actors and characters within them. Works in the exhibition allude to the avant-garde spiritual guru Vali Myers and the film about her life, 'The Witch of Positano' (1965), as well as to the magical powers that define the roles of Samantha Robinson in 'The Love Witch' (2016) and

Valerie Leon in 'Blood from the Mummy's Tomb' (1971). Olowska celebrates the Polish actor Grazyna Szapolowska in another work as a standard-bearer for modern political activism. Hollywood icons Jodie Foster and Susan Sarandon also make an appearance, selected by Olowska for the subversive qualities they represent to the artist. Drawing on the world of film, Olowska brings together her own cast of distinct and commanding protagonists.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Paulina Olowska

Born in 1976 in Gdansk, Poland, Paulina Olowska lives and works between Rabka-Zdroj and Krakow, Poland. She received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; an MFA from The Academy of Fine Arts, Gdansk, Poland and was awarded The Aachen Art Prize (2014). Internationally renowned, Olowska's work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions and projects, including SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA (2021); Simon Lee Gallery, London, UK (2019); Fondazione Furla, Museo del Novecento, Milan, Italy (2018); The Kitchen, New York, NY (2017); Tate Modern, London, UK (2015); Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany (2015); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2013); Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland (2013), CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, CA (2010) and Camden Arts Centre, London, UK (2009). Major group exhibitions include National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland (2019); Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool, UK (2018); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA (2016), Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2016); Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2015); Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, UK (2014); Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, Portugal (2014); Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2012) and the New Museum, New York, NY (2011). Her work belongs to major private and public collections including Tate, London, UK; Sammlung Boros, Berlin, Germany; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, Poland; Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, Portugal; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA and Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY.

About Simon Lee Gallery

Founded in London in 2002, Simon Lee Gallery represents artists of diverse generations whose practices explore a wide range of media, from sculpture and painting to video and photography, and who share a broad interest in an exploration of the conceptual. Aiming to provide a significant international audience for its artists, the gallery also regularly punctuates its programme with historical exhibitions and curated group shows, which present shifts in contemporary art practice and thought, whilst broadening the dialogue with artists outside of the gallery's core programme. In addition to its UK activity, in 2012 the gallery opened a space in Hong Kong, which introduced its artists to a wider public in Asia, with a fully independent programme.

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www.simonleegallery.com

Image: Paulina Olowska, *30 Minutes Before Midnight*, 2021. Oil on canvas, 65 x 50 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery.

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